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The Effect of Age on Second Language Acquisition (B2) in Children Aged 9-12 Years

Muzamil R Pawi[1*], Wahdah Wulidatus Sofrotun Nadzifah[2], Shofil Fikri[3], Fiqi Rihadatul Aisy[4]

[1] Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia; muzamilrpawi79@gmail.com
[2] Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia; wahdahwulidatussn@gmail.com
[3] Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia; h_anada@uin-malang.ac.id
[4] Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia; fiqirihadatul@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Childhood is considered the optimal period due to the brain's flexibility, which enhances the ability to learn new languages. This study specifically focuses on the age factor in second language learning and aims to prove the assumption that a child's critical age correlates with their language acquisition ability. This is a quantitative study with a descriptive approach, using data processing software, SPSS, and subsequently described verbally. The sampling technique employed was purposive sampling, resulting in a sample of 21 students from Ulya classes 1 and 2 at TPQ Darut Tarbiyah As-Sa'adah, comprising 17 female students and four male students. The results of the product-moment calculation showed that the calculated r-value was lower than the table r-value, specifically 0.433 < 0.829. This indicates no influence between the variables of age and language acquisition. Therefore, age does not affect a child's ability to acquire a second language among students in Ulya classes 1 and 2 at TPQ Darut Tarbiyah As-Sa'adah for the 2024/2025 academic year.

Keywords: *Age, Correlation, Language Acquisition*

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INTRODUCTION

Language is a human communication system consisting of sounds and written forms, which are organized into units such as morphemes, words, and sentences (Nabilah et al., 2024). It serves not only as a means of conveying messages but also as a reflection of the speaker's identity (Noermanzah, 2019). Furthermore, language functions as a medium through which humans express intentions, emotions, and messages to others (Mailani et al., 2022).

A child's first language is acquired at an early age through imitation of what is heard in their environment (Setyorini & Kurnaedi, 2018). The linguistic input received from the surrounding environment is processed by the brain, which in turn affects the child's language acquisition and overall communicative

competence (Mustofa et al., 2024). Several factors influence this acquisition, including age, motivation, intelligence, physical condition, gender, and environment (Kapoh, 2010). Among these, the family environment plays a crucial role in shaping a child's first language (Kartini et al., 2023). Environmental factors are even considered the most dominant in influencing language acquisition (Puspita et al., 2022).

Elements such as family, peers, and the broader community influence not only the acquisition of language but also the formation of personality, which is reflected in language use (Abdullah, 2020). A responsive family environment fosters language development through stimulation and education, as well as the introduction of proper greetings and expressions (Nurainun & Futri, 2024). Children who grow up in educated families with access to entertainment and learning resources tend to develop a richer vocabulary and better language habits. In contrast, those raised in underprivileged environments often experience delayed language development despite having similar intellectual potential (Kapoh, 2010).

Once the first language (L1) is acquired, children typically begin learning a second language (L2) through deliberate instruction (Maharani & Astuti, 2018). While the first language is acquired naturally, the second language is gained through conscious learning (Irwandi, 2020). The first language has a significant influence on second language acquisition, particularly in terms of speaking style and grammatical structures (Syaprizal, 2019). This influence can be observed in pronunciation differences and structural deviations when using the second language (Anggit Aruwiyantoko, 2023). Motivation is another key factor in successful second language acquisition; learners with strong motivation tend to achieve better results (Abdusshomad, 2012). Motivational factors vary, including personal satisfaction, social recognition, economic improvement, political competition, and demands of the modern era (Norliani et al., 2023).

The language environment also plays a major role. Effective language acquisition occurs in both formal settings (like classrooms) and informal contexts (such as daily interactions) (Révész et al., 2024). Formal environments provide structured exposure and expand learners' use of language in diverse contexts (Permanamiarta, 2021). Meanwhile, informal environments allow more frequent and natural language use, often yielding strong language habits through repeated exposure.

This study focuses specifically on the age factor in second language acquisition. Early childhood is considered an optimal period due to the brain's flexibility, which enhances the ability to acquire a new language (Bitu, 2020). However, some studies suggest that age does not commonly determine acquisition speed. For instance, adults may learn linguistic structures more quickly, while

children tend to excel in pronunciation (Shafa, 2020). Although children may not commonly acquire language more quickly, they often experience more effective long-term growth in their second language proficiency. Based on the findings of prior studies, age is a relatively underexplored factor compared to environment, motivation, or L1 interference (Mislikhah, 2019). Therefore, this research aims to address that gap by investigating how age impacts the success of second language acquisition in children.

Several previous studies have explored second language acquisition in children; however, they still exhibit limitations in terms of focus, methodology, and the age range studied. One study provided only a general theoretical perspective on age and acquisition, without presenting specific empirical data (Cahyanti & Ananda, 2021). Another study employed a qualitative method to investigate vocabulary acquisition in relation to age, but the results revealed no statistically significant effect (Sirutama & Hudiyono, 2023). Research on younger children, aged 4–5 years, focused more on the processes of receptive and productive skills, without making age comparisons (Annas, 2019). Meanwhile, another study examined the influence of first and second language acquisition on phonological errors, but did not highlight age as a core variable (Apriliana et al., 2024). This present study offers a novelty by specifically investigating the correlation between age and second language acquisition in children aged 9–12 using a quantitative approach (product-moment analysis), providing a more targeted and statistically supported contribution to the field.

With reference to the research data mentioned above, the critical age of a child is closely correlated with their language acquisition ability. However, initial observations conducted on October 7, 2024, at TPQ Darut Tarbiyah As-Sa'adah revealed that many students still use First Language (B1) during the teaching and learning process. Students' ability to use the Second Language (B2) is still considered low. This phenomenon is due to the dominance of First Language B1, which makes students less accustomed to Second Language (B2). However, students with an average age between 9-12 years old are still included in the category of children's age, so they are still relatively easy to acquire a second language (B2). Based on the previously mentioned problems, research can be conducted with the title "The Effect of Age on Second Language Acquisition (B2) in Children aged 9-12 Years". The primary goal of this study is to determine whether age and TPQ Darut Tarbiyah As-Sa'adah students' proficiency in Second Language (B2) comprehension are related. Future researchers and education organizers are expected to use the study's findings as a benchmark and reference to raise the quality of instruction, particularly in Arabic language courses.

METHOD

This research employs a descriptive approach, which involves processing data in numerical form and then describing the results verbally to explain the findings. The data from this study were collected in numerical form and analyzed using the data processing software SPSS. The population at TPQ Darut Tarbiyah As-Sa'adah consists of seven classes: Ula 1 with 17 students, Ula 2 with 16 students, Ula 3 with 17 students, Wustho 1 with 14 students, Ulya 1 with 11 students, and Ulya 2 with 10 students. Therefore, the total research population amounts to 85 students. The sampling technique employed in this study utilized a purposive sampling method, a research approach that selects individuals or groups meeting specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. In this method, researchers actively select samples based on certain considerations, such as demographic characteristics, experience, or specific knowledge (Arikunto Suharsimi, 2014). The samples in this study consisted of students from Ulya 1 and 2 classes at TPQ Darut Tarbiyah As-Sa'adah, totaling 21 students (17 girls and four boys).

The questionnaire is a set of questions used by researchers to gather data or information from respondents, both about themselves and their knowledge of a particular topic. (Arikunto Suharsimi, 2014). The questionnaire is written in simple and concrete language, presenting questions directly without ambiguity. This effort aims to enable children to respond according to their understanding and increase the validity of the data obtained. (Lu & Li, 2024) The data collection technique used is the distribution of questionnaires to obtain data on second language comprehension skills (B2) in Ulya Class 1 and 2 students at TPQ Darut Tarbiyah As-Sa'adah. Establishing the validity and reliability of the research equipment is crucial to guaranteeing the accuracy of the data gathered. Validity, as determined by content and construct validity, is the degree to which the questionnaire assesses the desired constructs accurately. The consistency of the instrument is referred to as reliability, and it is frequently evaluated using test-retest techniques or internal consistency measures, such as Cronbach's alpha. By establishing both, the study's overall accuracy and the validity of its conclusions are guaranteed.

Documentation

The documentation needed in this study includes individual data on Ulya Class 1 and 2 students. The data was taken to determine the age of students in Ulya Class 1 and 2 at TPQ Darut Tarbiyah As-Sa'adah. To calculate both variables, the score on each item was determined as follows:

a. To calculate variable X (age) with the following provisions: (a) Age 9 scored 4, (b) Age 10 scored 3, (c) Age 11 scored 2, (d) Age 12 scored 1. The scoring for each age was modified from Patkowsky. (Zhou Li, 2015)

b. To calculate variable Y (ability to understand B2), a questionnaire containing several statements was distributed to respondents. Furthermore, a score is assigned to each statement (Sugiyono, 2010). This determination is calculated based on the answer options (SS, S, RG, TS, STS), with the following scoring: (a.) SS answers are given a score of 5 (b.) S's answers are given a score of 4 (c.) RG answers are given a score of 3 (d.) TS answers are given a score of 2 (e.) STS answers are given a score of 1.

Hypothesis Analysis

a. Null hypothesis (H0): There is no effect of age on the ability of Ulya Class 1 and 2 TPQ Darut Tarbiyah As-Sa'adah students in understanding the second language in the 2024/2025 school year.
b. Alternative hypothesis (H1): There is an effect of age on the ability of Ulya Class 1 and 2 TPQ Darut Tarbiyah As-Sa'adah students in understanding the second language in the 2024/2025 academic year.
c. Hypothesis proposed: There is an effect of age on the ability of Ulya Class 1 and 2 TPQ Darut Tarbiyah As-Sa'adah students in understanding the second language in the 2024/2025 academic year, with a 5% confidence level.

This study employed a quantitative design to investigate the relationship between age and second language comprehension skills (B2). The sample was purposively selected from first and second-grade students at TPQ Darut Tarbiyah As-Sa'adah. Data were collected through a language comprehension questionnaire, after a trial run to ensure its clarity and reliability. Demographic data, including gender, socioeconomic status, and second language (B2) learning experience, were also collected to control for confounding variables. Data analysis was performed using SPSS, which included both descriptive and inferential statistics. The research results were interpreted in light of the research questions, hypotheses, and relevant literature, and conclusions were drawn, along with recommendations for the development of second language (B2) learning strategies. By following these steps, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between age and second language comprehension skills.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESLUTS

The research results are presented in tabular form and then explained in detail in the discussion section as follows: This study involved 21 students from grades Ulya 1 and 2 at TPQ Darut Tarbiyah As-Sa'adah. Before further analysis, student age data were classified to identify possible relationships between age and second language acquisition levels. In psycholinguistic studies, age is a critical variable closely related to neurological sensitivity to a second language. The collected data indicate that the students are aged between 9 and 12 years. Second

language acquisition was measured through language proficiency scores based on specific linguistic competence indicators established in the research instrument. The following table provides a complete overview of the ages and scores of each student:

Student Age Data (X)

Table 1. Age Data of Ulya Class Students

No.	Student Name	Age	Score
1	FN	9	4
2	SM	9	4
3	NE	9	4
4	ZN	10	3
5	AH	10	3
6	SA	10	3
7	PI	10	3
8	NS	10	3
9	RH	10	3
10	SA	10	3
11	HB	10	3
12	NA	11	2
13	CA	11	2
14	ZA	11	2
15	FI	12	1
16	SI	12	1
17	NA	12	1
18	MS	12	1
19	EA	12	1
20	ZA	12	1
21	VA	12	1
	Total		**49**

From Table 1, it can be concluded that the score obtained from Ulya Class 1 and 2 students at TPQ Darut Tarbiyah As-Sa'adah for the 2024/2025 learning year is 49, with a total of 21 students of various ages. The age details are as follows: the lowest age is 9 years, represented by three individuals; eight individuals represent the age of 10 years; three individuals represent the age of 11 years; and the highest age is 12 years, represented by seven individuals. A preliminary analysis of this table shows a downward trend in second language acquisition scores as students age. Nine-year-old students obtained the highest score (4), followed by 10-year-olds (score 3), then 11-year-olds (score 2), and 12-year-olds (score 1). This pattern provides an initial indication of a negative relationship between age and second

language acquisition levels in the context of non-formal learning. This finding is consistent with several studies that state that the earlier a person learns a second language, the greater their chances of achieving linguistic competence close to that of a native speaker (Birdsong, 2006)

Proficiency Data of Second Language Understanding (B2)

After mapping the age distribution of students, this study continued by measuring their proficiency level in understanding the second language (B2). This data was obtained through a questionnaire designed based on B2 comprehension competency indicators, including vocabulary comprehension, sentence structure, and simple conversation context. Assessments were given in the form of cumulative scores from students' responses to several validated closed-ended Likert scale items. This measurement is important in a psycholinguistic context because receptive second language comprehension skills are one of the early indicators of effective language acquisition (Gass & Selinker, 2008). Additionally, these results can indicate the extent to which exposure to B2 has contributed to the formation of students' internal linguistic systems, which are still in the developmental stage during childhood. The following are the scores from the second language comprehension proficiency questionnaire obtained from each student:

Table 2. Questionnaire Score List of B2 Learning

No.	Student Name	Score
1	FN	49
2	SM	47
3	NE	56
4	ZN	43
5	AH	39
6	SA	44
7	PI	59
8	NS	51
9	RH	58
10	SA	36
11	HB	48
12	NA	57
13	CA	39
14	ZA	56
15	FI	48
16	SI	45
17	NA	52
18	MS	55
19	EA	39
20	ZA	50
21	VA	58
Total		**1029**

According to Table 2, the questionnaire analysis reveals that the total score for students' responses to B2 comprehension skills is 1029, with a highest score of 59 and a lowest score of 36. Students coded as FN scored 49, SM 47, NE 56, ZN 43, AH 39, SA 44, PI 59, NS 51, RH 58, SA 36, HB 48, NA 57, CA 39, ZA 56, FI 48, SI 45, NA 52, MS 55, EA 39, ZA 50, and VA scored 58. These results indicate that second language acquisition among children aged 9–12 years still shows diversity, which is potentially influenced by factors such as age, frequency of exposure, motivation, and learning environment. When linked to the findings in Table 1 above, a pattern emerges that younger students tend to have higher B2 scores, supporting the hypothesis that younger age is positively correlated with ease in second language acquisition.

These results underscore the importance of initiating second language instruction early, particularly during the critical stage of language acquisition, from an educational practice perspective. Bilingual curriculum or second language enrichment programs should therefore be considered by academic institutions and policymakers starting with elementary school. Additionally, these results have implications for the development of teaching methods that are responsive to students' age and learning styles. Teachers and educators must implement instructional strategies, such as communicative approaches, language games, and the integration of cultural context, that optimize children's meaningful and active engagement with language.

Analyze the data using the product-moment correlation formula as follows:

$$r_{xy} = \frac{\mathrm{N}\sum\mathrm{XY} - (\sum\mathrm{X})(\sum\mathrm{Y})}{\sqrt{\{\mathrm{N}\sum\mathrm{X}^2 - (\sum\mathrm{X})^2\}\{\mathrm{N}\sum\mathrm{Y}^2 - (\sum\mathrm{Y})^2}}$$

In calculating the correlation coefficient (r), from the table above, it is known that: (1) The number of subjects in variable X is the same as the number of subjects in variable Y, namely N; (2) The number of variables X or ΣX; (3) The sum of the squares of the variables X or ΣX^2; (4) The number of variables Y or ΣY; (5) The sum of the squares of the variables Y or ΣY^2; and (6) The sum of the products of variables X and Y or $\sum XY$.

Data Analysis for Correlation Test of Age Variable (X) and Second Language Comprehension Ability Variable (Y)

To test the relationship between student age and second language proficiency, a correlation analysis was conducted using the latest version of SPSS. This analysis aimed to test whether a statistically significant relationship existed between the two variables, thereby supporting the descriptive findings presented earlier. The statistical test used was Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, as both variables are interval-scaled. Additionally, ANOVA testing was also conducted to

assess the overall significance of the model. The following are the complete results of the data analysis:

Table 3. Results of ANOVA Test for Regression Model

	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	2.595	2.595	.048	.829[b]
Residual	1023.405	53.863		
Total	1026.000			

Table 4. Results of Pearson Correlation between Age and Second Language Comprehension Ability

	Age	Second Language Comprehension Ability
Pearson Correlation	1	-.050
Sig. (2-tailed)		.829
N	21	21
Pearson Correlation	-.050	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.829	

The correlation test results show that the significance value (p) is 0.829. Thus, there is no statistically significant relationship between student age and second language comprehension ability in this sample. Similarly, the ANOVA results, with a significance value of 0.829, also reinforce the conclusion that this predictive model is not statistically significant overall. Although the descriptive data in the previous table shows a tendency for B2 scores to decrease with age, this statistical analysis is unable to confirm this relationship significantly. This indicates a discrepancy between the narrative findings and the statistical results, which needs to be further explained in the context of the study's limitations.

Several factors that can affect the validity and reliability of data in this context include various methodological aspects. First, the small sample size (n = 21) can result in low statistical power, making the results obtained less convincing or less representative of the population as a whole. Second, the narrow age range of participants, which spans only four years (ages 9–12), limits the diversity of the data and makes generalization difficult. Third, the use of self-report questionnaires may be influenced by motivational factors and individuals' understanding of the questions, which may introduce bias in data collection. Additionally, several important control variables, including socioeconomic background, frequency of exposure to the second language outside the classroom, and teaching methods, were not included in the research model. The absence of these variables may lead

to less accurate analysis results, as they do not account for factors that could contribute to data differences.

Due to these limitations, the results should not be used to establish causality; instead, they should be used as a foundation for future studies that utilize larger samples and more stringent control variables to track changes in second language acquisition over time.

DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the product moment correlation analysis using manual calculations and SPSS, the calculated r value is smaller than the r table 0.433, <0.829, which indicates that there is no influence between age and the ability to understand the second language in Ulya 1 and 2 class students at TPQ Darut Tarbiyah As-Sa'adah in the 2024/2025 school year at the 5% confidence level. Next, the product-moment correlation results are used to determine whether the proposed hypothesis is accepted or rejected. Based on the results of data analysis of variables X and Y, the alternative hypothesis (Ha) is rejected, while the null hypothesis (Ho) is accepted.

Based on the data analysis table of the age of students in Ulya Classes 1 and 2 of TPQ Darut Tarbiyah As-Sa'adah in the 2024/2025 school year above, it can be concluded that the total score based on student age is 49 with a total number of 21 students, consisting of various age groups, namely the youngest age of 9 years as many as three students, age 10 years as many as eight students, age 11 years as many as three students, and the oldest age of 12 years as many as seven students. Meanwhile, the results of the questionnaire analysis of students' responses regarding the ability to understand B2 showed a total score of 1029, with the highest score of 59 and the lowest score of 36. The details of the scores per student are as follows: FN scored 49, SM scored 47, NE scored 56, ZN scored 43, AH scored 39, SA scored 44, PI scored 59, NS scored 51, RH scored 58, SA scored 36, HB scored 48, NA scored 57, CA scored 39, ZA scored 56, FI scored 48, SI scored 45, NA scored 52, MS scored 55, EA scored 39, ZA scored 50, and VA scored 58.

The results of the product-moment calculation yield a value of 0.829, indicating that there is no significant influence between variable X, namely age, and variable Y, namely the ability to understand a second language. This is because the value of r is lower than the r table, which is 0.433, <0.829. The conclusion is that age does not affect the second language acquisition ability of a child in Ulya 1 and 2 classes of TPQ Darut Tarbiyah As-Sa'adah for the 2024/2025 school year.

CONCLUSION

The results of the research and data analysis, conducted using the product-moment correlation method, indicate a significant relationship between variable X (age) and variable Y (ability to understand a second language). However, the calculated r-value of 0.433 is lower than the r-value in the table, which is 0.829. This indicates that age does not affect the ability to understand a second language in Ulya Class 1 and 2 students at TPQ Darut Tarbiyah As-Sa'adah for the 2024/2025 academic year. Therefore, it can be concluded that the alternative hypothesis (Ha), which states that there is an effect of age on the ability to understand the second language in Ulya Class 1 and 2 students at TPQ Darut Tarbiyah As-Sa'adah in the 2024/2025 school year, is rejected. Conversely, the null hypothesis (Ho), which states that there is no effect of age on the ability to understand the second language in these students, is accepted.

This research is expected to enhance the quality of education, particularly at TPQ Darut Tarbiyah As-Sa'adah, by encouraging teachers to continue providing students with stimulation, thereby familiarizing them with the proper use of B2, especially in the TPQ environment. Teachers are expected to encourage students to use B2 appropriately, especially during the learning process. Second language acquisition is expected to be achieved by students at an early age to yield maximum results. Then, for further research. Building on these findings, future studies should consider additional factors, such as socioeconomic background, early exposure to foreign languages, and various teaching methods, that may also impact second language understanding. Additionally, follow-up studies may reveal how comprehension abilities evolve with age and cognitive development. Therefore, it will enhance our understanding of the crucial elements involved in learning a second language and aid in the development of more effective teaching methods.

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