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**Investigating the Difficulties Adult Learners Face
When Learning English from Teachers and Learners
Point of View in Zawia Language Center**

**A Dissertation Submitted in partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
of Master's Degree of Art in Applied Linguistics**

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Abstract

This study investigates the effect of age on learning English among adult students at Azawia Language Center. It aims to examine how age influences learners' speed of progress, proficiency level, learning strategies, and overall learning experience. The research uses a mixed-method approach, relying on a survey of 39 adult learners of different age groups and five teachers. Descriptive statistics and chi-square tests were used to analyze the data. The findings show that although many learners believe age affects their ability to learn English, age does not have a statistically significant relationship with either learning speed or proficiency. However, older learners often report challenges such as difficulty remembering new vocabulary, limited time, and adapting to new methods. At the same time, adults identify strengths—including life experience, clear goals, and strong motivation—which help support their learning. The study also finds that learning preferences, such as choosing classroom lectures or group discussions, do not differ significantly across age groups. Overall, the results suggest that age influences learners' perceptions and confidence more than their actual performance. The study recommends providing more practice opportunities, flexible teaching methods, and motivational support to help adult learners overcome age-related challenges and build confidence in using English.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my beloved family and my friends for their support and endless encouragement throughout my study journey.

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List of Abbreviations

No.	Abbreviation	Full Form
1	SLA	Second Language Acquisition
2	ESL	English as a Second Language
3	EFL	English as a Foreign Language
4	CPH	Critical Period Hypothesis
5	L1	First Language (Native Language)
6	L2	Second Language
7	SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the study including a general background about the topic of investigation and the objectives that the researcher would achieve. It also introduces the statement of the problem along with the research questions that would be answered through the methodology adopted for the sake of carrying out this study. The chapter also views the scope and limitation with an emphasis on the significance of the study, finally, the chapter is ended with an outline of all the thesis structures or chapters and a summary.

1.1 Background of the study

Adult second language acquisition is a topic of ongoing interest in the field of second language acquisition. Researchers have been arguing about adults' ability to acquire second language fluency. A number of scholars such as (Coppieters 1987, Scovel 1988 and Jonhson & Newpart 1989) claim that the earlier a second language is learned, the better it is acquired believing that as a person gets older, his/her ability to acquire a second language becomes weaker. Krashen et al. (1979) indicate that the older is faster, but the young are better. These researchers interested in the age-related effects in the ultimate attainment of a second language claim that the effects are due to the existence of a critical period for a language acquisition. This notion led to the emergence of critical period hypothesis as a theory whose adherents take it as a reason to argue against adults, language acquisition ability. Some adolescents or adults who start to learn second language would fail to achieve language fluency, while children who were exposed to second language at their early age seem to be proficient like native speaker (Lenneberg 1967). In addition, language environments play an important role when language learners start foreign language acquisition. This hypothesis can be supported by saying that children seem to be involved in an efficient way to acquire the new language when set in the foreign language (Singleton and Ryan 2004).

On the other hand, the adolescents or adults would experience some great difficulties in acquiring a new language and maintaining the trace of foreignness (ibid). Accordingly,

by given the discussion from the theory, it is accepted that young learners probably have great potential to acquire second languages rapidly, efficiently and proficiently, whereas adults or adolescents are at an inferior position in second language acquisition because of the age factor proposed by many linguists showed above.

This study is an attempt to investigate the specific challenges faced by adult learners and explore effective strategies for overcoming these obstacles. The focus of this study is adult learners who are learning English in the Zawia Language Center at University of Zawia.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The study also aimed to achieve these goals;

1. To explore the effects of age on adults who learn English at Zawia language center.
2. To investigate the factors that contribute to the difficulties related to age in learning English at Zawia language center.
3. To reveal the learning strategies and preferences employed by the learners in Zawia language center.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing demand for language learning, adult learners often face significant challenges in acquiring a new language, including limited time, language learning anxiety, and difficulty with vocabulary acquisition and grammar (Dekeyser, 1995; Krashen, 1982; Oxford, 1990). Additionally, research has shown that adults may experience cognitive decline, reduced neuroplasticity, and fixed language patterns that can hinder language acquisition (Bialystok, 2001). Other challenges include lack of immersion, fear of making mistakes, and difficulty adapting to new learning styles (Al-Thubaiti, 2014; Gawi, 2012). Based on this evidence from literature, and according the researcher own experience as a teacher assistant in Zawia Language Center; the researcher witnessed all the students struggles in learning English as adults. These adult learners are compelled to learn English at this age because of job requirements. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the specific challenges faced by adult learners and explore effective strategies for overcoming these obstacles.

1.4 Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following questions;

1. Does age affect adults learning English at Zawia language Center?
2. What are the factors that hinder adults learning English at Zawia Language Center?
3. What specific learning strategies and preferences do adult learners employ at Zawia Language Center to overcome their obstacles in learning English?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it spots the light on a controversial issue which is adults learning of English after the age of 15 or more. The study can provide valuable insights for language teachers, helping them tailor their teaching methods to meet the unique needs of adult learners. By identifying effective strategies for overcoming language learning challenges, this study can contribute to better language learning outcomes for adults. It also highlights the benefits and challenges of language learning for adults, encouraging more adults to pursue language learning and promoting lifelong learning. This study would uncover the specific challenges faced by adult learners, including age-related decline, and inform the development of targeted interventions. For practical applications; this study can inform the development of language teaching methodologies tailored to adult learners and can guide the creation of language learning materials and resources that cater to the needs of adult learners. For policy terms, this study can inform language policy decisions, particularly those related to adult language education and lifelong learning. Finally; by exploring the challenges and opportunities of adult language learning, this study can make a meaningful contribution to the field of language acquisition and education.

1.6 Methodology

To carry out the study, a mixed-methods approach was adopted, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The participant who took part in the study were 39 adult learners at the Zawia Language Center and (5) teachers who teach English at the center as well. The data collection instruments include a structured questionnaire for students and semi-structured interviews for teachers. The procedures of data collection and analysis are . Furthermore, this chapter highlights the ethical

considerations taken into account during the research process, such as informed consent, confidentiality, and participant anonymity. Finally, potential limitations of the study are discussed to acknowledge challenges that may arise during data collection and analysis.

1.7 Scope of the Study

The study was conducted in Zawia Language Center which is an independent branch of the British Council and it was established in 2007 in the University of Zawia where they offer language learning services for either trainee teachers and post graduates who pursuing their higher studies in different fields and majors. For the increasing demands on English use in academic and non-academic settings, those learners were required to take language courses to fulfill the needs of their jobs. For the time of the study, it was carried out during the academic year 2023-2024 with 39 adult learners and (5) teachers. The study was limited to older or adults learners only to investigate the impact of age on their learning of English.

1.8 The Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is composed of six chapters and they are organized as follows:

Chapter one is devoted for the introduction with all the elements including the objectives of the study, statement of the problem with the research questions, significance of the study, the methodology, scope and limitation and the structure of the thesis. Chapter two includes a review of all the topics related to age and its influence of adults learning, adult learners and their characteristics, the factors that impact SLA and the critical period. It also presents strategies of teaching adults. The chapter ends with a summary of previous studies. Chapter three presents the research design of the study and a description of the participants and the data collection tools. This chapter also explains the procedures of data analysis techniques and ethical consideration. Chapter four is devoted for data analysis procedures and listing the final findings. Chapter five presents a discussion of the results that had been obtained from the questionnaire and the interview. Finally, chapter six includes the conclusion with some recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0. Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of literature related to the effect of age on second language acquisition (SLA), learning challenges across different age groups, motivational factors, and effective learning strategies for adult learners. The review integrates theoretical frameworks, empirical studies, and recent findings to establish a foundation for understanding how age influences English language learning. The key themes explored include the Critical Period Hypothesis, cognitive and neurological factors in SLA, motivation and affective variables, and instructional strategies tailored to different age groups.

2.1. Adult Learners

Adults are characterized as being independent and self-directed learners, possessing a wealth of life experiences and knowledge. Furthermore, they are goal-oriented, value relevance, practical, and demand respect (Lieb, 1991). However, the precise definition of adulthood varies across societies and cultural groups. Likewise, adult learners are perceived in diverse contexts. They constitute a varied group with distinct educational backgrounds and diverse learning needs, characterized by maturity and understanding (Svetina & Perme, 2004). Adult learners, participants in adult learning opportunities, encompass individuals with varying educational histories and needs. They are mature and seek additional skills and knowledge to enhance their personal and professional lives (Hudson, 2002; Tight, 1996). Described as more autonomous, adult learners can independently develop their knowledge and experiences in learning a second language. Krashen (1988) defines adult learners as formal thinkers capable of employing conscious grammar, meta-awareness, and general abstract language rules. While defining adult learners of English as a foreign language remains challenging, it is apparent that these learners juggle multiple roles in their lives and often opt for part-time rather than full time courses.

Extensive research has been conducted to investigate the challenges adult learners encounter acquiring the English language. In particular, Mali (2017) posits that adults face a multitude of non-academic responsibilities, such as tending to their families, participating in family-related gatherings, and managing financial obligations. These demands can significantly divert their attention from their studies. This perspective aligns with the findings of Ruijuan, Ruiting, and Tai (2014), who demonstrated that the "family factor" exerts a detrimental impact on adults' English as a Second Language (ESL) learning. The challenge of learning English for adults is explored by Cozma (2015), who contends that, due to their lower energy levels and a plethora of responsibilities, adults often arrive in English classrooms fatigued. Mei (2022) delves into the psychological aspects, noting that adults tend to possess stronger self-esteem and emotional sensitivity. While this can make them less hesitant to communicate and share their ideas, it also renders them particularly averse to potential ridicule stemming from mistakes. This lack of self-confidence and courage hampers their ability to seize valuable opportunities to practice their second language and enhance their overall language skills. In a comprehensive study, Ruijuan Wu and colleagues (2014) explored how adults often experience stress when they struggle to articulate themselves clearly and accurately in a second language. Cozma (2015) emphasizes that anxiety among adult learners can arise from a variety of factors, including a perceived lack of progress, reluctance to speak during English classes, and a fear of making errors. These anxieties are closely linked to concerns about losing face, which become more pronounced with advancing age. Although, there is a notable study conducted within of the Arabic context aimed at identifying the specific challenges adult learners face in their pursuit of language learning, particularly in the case of English such as (Gawi 2012; Thubaiti 2014, Kimmel et al. 2016 and Knowles 2020); such research is crucial in Libya context.

2.2. The Characteristics of Adult Learning

Due to the physical and psychological development, roles and environment of adults are strikingly different from those of school students, adult learners have some unique characteristics that belong to them. They are as follows:

1. Independence of Personality

The psychological and physical development of adults is more mature. Lu finds that adults have transitioned from dependent and heteronomous youth to independent and

self-regulated adulthood (Liu 2003). Adults have strong autonomous learning abilities. As adult learners' dependence on teachers is reduced, they have a strong sense of personal awareness and personal responsibility in most cases; Also, they have the ability to choose their own learning content and make their learning plan. Therefore, most adult learners wish that teachers can make any decisions about teaching after consultation with them, such as evaluating learning needs and objectives, choosing teaching activities, and deciding how to evaluate their learning. When they encounter problems in learning, they also hope that teachers can organize, guide and help their learning in an equal, respectful and friendly way, rather than appear as an authority (Liu, 2003).

2. Richness of Experience

With the growth of age, the mechanical memory of adults is inferior to that of teenagers, but they have accumulated a considerable degree of experience in social and professional life. Adults have generally understood and master more knowledge through their experience, which is not only the basis of adult learning but also a very valuable resource in learning activities. The organic combination of adults' existing experience with new knowledge tends to make adults' learning more effective and meaningful. However, Liu (2003) argues that the experience of adults sometimes forms a certain learning set and has an adverse impact on learning. Maturity and rich and profound life experiences usually make people more stubborn and more resistant to change, which is the enemy of second language learning. Thus, when proposing changes and new concepts, teachers had better clarify the **why** and connect them with existing concepts to promote adult learners' further exploration. In addition, the thinking of adults is closely related to social practice. He adds that adults' comprehensive abilities concerning meaning recognition ability, understanding ability, analysis, comparison, judgment, and reasoning are strengthened with the increase of age. They are easier to have a comprehensive and profound understanding of objective things than teenagers and can quickly connect the internal relationship of objective things (Hu, 2004)

3. Clarity of Purpose and the Intensity of Motivation

As Adults are more rational and responsible for their own lives, they have clearer goals and stronger motivation to do everything than minors. Hu (2004) shows that adults' learning intention and motivation are generated and changed according to the actual needs of work and life. Keeping oneself in balance with the developing society is an intrinsic motivation for adult learning. Cao regards that material rewards are often

extrinsic motivations for most people to continue learning (Cao, 2006). To be more specifically, adult learners are practical and hate theory. They need information that instantly satisfies the needs of the job. They ordinarily prefer practical knowledge that improves their skills, helps their job, and facilitate their confidence. Also, intrinsic motivation or extrinsic motivation will help adult learners to learn better.

4. Time and energy limits

Lu (2004) argues that unlike children, who have a future-oriented view of time, adults have a present-oriented view of time. Adults hold the view that time is as valuable as money and effort. They attach great importance to learning efficiency and always hope that they can quickly apply what they have learned to practical work and life to address the difficulties they face. Additionally, on account of the diversity of adult roles, they are not allowed to devote more energy to study. Therefore, adults have a sense of urgency to apply what they have learned in second language acquisition and pursue instant results. In general, adult learners are objectively lifelong, professional and practical, and subjectively have specific and practical goals, autonomy and selectivity in learning, and flexibility and diversity of methods.

2.3. Factors Contributing to SLA

The basic factors of SLA, which include many detailed individual variations such as language aptitude, strategy use, anxiety, age, affective factors, personality factors, and motivation as presented by Riding & Rayner (2001) will now be discussed:

Language aptitude has to do with intelligence as it applies to languages. Strategy use involves the methods, or ways (how) one learns and communicates.

Anxiety negatively affects language acquisition.

Low self-esteem produces feelings of worthlessness through a combination of learning blocks, little progress and low confidence. This causes limited personal growth and even disinterest in the subject matter.

A lack of self-esteem may cause a person to give up something before one has even started.

Age is an interesting factor.

Generally speaking, according to David Singleton (1995), the younger the age of the learner, the better are the chances over the long-term for successful SLA. Lenneberg's (1967) Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) claims that there is a critical period during which the human mind is able to learn language; after this period language cannot be acquired in a natural fashion. If it is not accomplished in this set amount of time, then it is no longer possible. Although this particular critical period hypothesis is disputed by some researchers, the theory of an advantage for early learners is generally recognized as true. After examining published findings, Bialystok and Hakuta (1994) decided that SLA is not necessarily reliant on biologically important times, but rather the ability to learn seems to continuously decline over time as people age.

Strategy use is sometimes divided into learning strategies and communicative strategies.

- Learning strategies concentrate on learning the language. They may focus on areas such as grammar, vocabulary, and how to speak the language.
- Communicative strategies, however, assist in developing the ability to communicate. This may be cognitively recognizing that in a specific situation a certain response or answer is expected. As an adult may be more aware of these circumstances, it was not uncommon for participants claiming to commonly use communicative strategies (Oxford, 1994).

Affective factors address the learner's emotional state and feelings towards the target language. Researchers, such as Krashen (1982), believe that learners have something which acts as an affective filter. That is, a learner who has a low level of anxiety, combined with good self-esteem, self-confidence, and a high level of motivation has a low affective filter and is likely to have an easier time trying to learn the language. Krashen believes that, low motivation, low self-esteem, and debilitating anxiety can combine to 'raise' the affective filter and form a 'mental block' that prevents comprehensible input from being used for acquisition. Thus, anxiety, self-esteem, self-confidence, and motivation can all have an effect on SLA.

Personality factors can also affect success in learning an L2. In this area extroverts report achieving higher grades in language studies, whereas introverts, who are more prone to shyness, may sometimes fail to even practice the language, and therefore may never achieve a level that allows them to communicate effectively (Krashen, 1982).

Motivation is a highly studied and controversial topic, due partly to its relationship with psychology. In fact, Dornyei (2001, p. 129) writes "strictly speaking, there is no such thing as motivation." Commonly, motivation is divided into extrinsic and intrinsic areas. Intrinsic motivation is often more effective in the long term than extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation has internal goals, for the inherent value, because it is the right thing to do, or for the fun involved. Extrinsic motivation deals with external factors such as money, pressure, passing exams, or tangible rewards. Extrinsic motivation could be positively-based, such as providing rewards for certain actions. It could also be negatively-based, such as using threats against someone (Deci, 1971). There is a range of possible learning strategies, and many factors (including language aptitude, anxiety, age, affective factors, personality factors, and motivation) which affect the acquisition of a second language. Johnstone (1999) considers motivation as a stimulant for achieving a specific target. Similarly, according to Ryan & Deci (2000), to be motivated means to progress or to be in motion to do something. Crump (1995) believes that excitement, interest, keenness, and enthusiasm towards learning are the main constituents of motivation.

The levels and kinds of motivation in any individual are different from others. In other words, not only levels and amounts of motivation in individuals are different, their kinds of motivation can be also different. Cook (2000) comes across that language acquisition is not the same in learners. Moreover, it has been proposed and recommended that there are three main factors, which concern and influence the second language acquisition; These three factors are age, personality, and motivation. He further claims that among the above three issues motivation is the most significant one in second language acquisition.

Motivation is a crucial factor in SLA, often outweighing age-related cognitive differences. Dornyei and Ushioda (2021) propose that motivation can drive learners to persist despite difficulties, with intrinsic motivation (personal interest and self-improvement) often leading to better outcomes than extrinsic motivation (external rewards or pressure). Studies show that while older learners may struggle with memory retention, they tend to be more disciplined and goal-driven. Oxford (2017) found that adult learners who set clear language learning goals and engage in structured practice achieve higher proficiency levels. Dörnyei (2013) also emphasizes the need for language programs to integrate motivational elements, such as real-world application,

interactive learning, and self-assessment tools, to keep learners engaged. 2.4 Motivation and Affective Factors in Language Learning Beyond cognitive abilities, motivation and psychological factors play a crucial role in SLA. Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis suggests that anxiety, confidence, and motivation levels directly influence language acquisition. Research by MacIntyre (2017) highlights that older learners often experience higher anxiety levels, particularly in speaking tasks, which can inhibit fluency.

2.4. The Critical Period Hypothesis

The Critical Period Hypothesis for second language acquisition originated from studies in biology, which was first put forward by two neurobiologists, Penfield and Roberts (in Wang, 2015). They believed that at some particular stage in people's lives they could acquire a language faster and easier in a natural environment where there is no exterior intervention and there are no people to teach (Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams, 1983). In the 1960s, this view was accepted and applied in the research area of second language acquisition by Lenneberg, which led to the influential theory: the Critical Period Hypothesis. He supposed that language was the product of the brain so the development of language ability was strictly restricted by the physiological basis of an individual (Lenneberg, 1967). Children who are older than two years old and younger than adolescence (10–12 years old) and whose brains are malleable are in the critical period for language acquisition. Johnson and Newport's findings (1989) have been accepted as the best evidence supporting the critical period in second language learning. In their study of critical period effects in learning a second language, Johnson and Newport admitted that a critical period for second language learning indeed exists. At that stage, learning language is an easy and natural process. When a child enters adolescence, his or her brain has fully matured and the nervous system is no longer flexible, which makes it be more and more difficult to learn a language. Therefore, there are more and more researchers at home and abroad further studying this problem using different subjects and all aspects of different point of views in various ways and experiment. These studies focus on whether or not there exists a critical period for second language acquisition. In other words, whether second language acquisition onset age is directly associated with the last results of language learning.

2.4.1. Opinions Opposing the Critical Period Hypothesis

Since the hypothesis was put forward, there have been many people who oppose it in the linguistics area. Ellis (2013) makes it clear that the view “the younger the children who start acquisition are, the easier language acquisition will be” (p. 22) is not totally correct. At best, it is partially correct. In fact, the advantage of language acquisition in a younger age simply exists in phonetics. However, some studies indicate that it has not yet formed a united conclusion in the problem when cerebral lateralization exactly happens and how much time on earth it needs to finish the process. On this account, the physiological neural basis of the Critical Period Hypothesis for language acquisition has been questioned. In 1975, a study done by Seliger, Krashen, and Ladefoged shows that adolescence may be a turning point of language learning.

However; Lenneberg’s (1967) research results of the Critical Period Hypothesis for language acquisition neither proves that the critical period is based on brain development nor proves that second language learners in adulthood are certainly worse than children or cannot reach the level of native language in phonological acquisition. Snow and Hoefagel-hohle (1978) conducted a comprehensive research to the Critical Period Hypothesis for language acquisition. According to this hypothesis, first language acquisition has finished before brain lateralization and second language acquisition is relevantly faster and easier to succeed before adolescence. The subjects of the experiment are Dutch learners of different ages who speak British English. This research result is contrasted to the Critical Period Hypothesis for language acquisition. The problem is that the critical period for language acquisition remains to have no consistent study results. One of the most principal reasons is that there exists a difficulty in not being able to simply compare or contrast the results from different research methods.

After a comprehensive analysis towards the studies, it is possible for people starting to learn a foreign language in any age to be successful (Shu, 2004). If an individual is learning a foreign language beginning at 12 years old, such learners could also reach or approach to the level of speaking native language on the condition of a good language environment and scientific teaching methods. Another scholar Dai Wei-dong (2003) also indicates that the language learning onset age nearly has no impact on the acquisition process. Beginners at all ages are capable to learn a foreign language well. In his opinion, the best stage for Chinese to learn a foreign language is between 12 and 15 years old. After a composite analyzing of the past decades’ studies of the Critical

Period Hypothesis, Wang (2015) supposes that the problems of whether there exists the critical period for second language acquisition and whether there exist different critical periods for different language skills need deeper and further study.

Although there are a large number of studies based on different methods, aims, and theoretical bases, it lacks enough proof to confirm that the hypothesis exists, even in phonological acquisition. Although the learners starting at an early age are better than those starting late, the results are from combined factors of many others rather the unilateral factor which is the age. The research of Chen Bao-guo (2001) also shows that even though there exists the critical period, the impact on second language acquisition should not be exaggerated.

2.4.2. Opinions Supporting the Critical Period Hypothesis

Acquisition Some scholars who support the Critical Period Hypothesis for second language acquisition such as Oyama, Coppieters, and Patkowski (1978) have drawn relatively specific conclusions toward the age factor. They believe the hypothesis that the children who start to learn second language early will finally reach higher levels than the adults who start late has some supporting evidence but does not have any empirical disproof. Krashen (1982) also gives the same conclusion after summarizing plenty of experiment report related to foreign language learning. The research done by Johnson and Newport in 1989 is regarded as the best proof that supports the Critical Period Hypothesis in the area of second language acquisition.

In their research, Johnson and Newport acknowledges that the critical period for second language acquisition really exists. They consider that people's ability begins to decay after six years old. The research result is from comparing Chinese and Koreans who start to learn English, which is regarded as second language by them from different age groups. As a result, Johnson and Newport found that the age is a decisive factor that makes the test takers succeed.

Later, Johnson (1992) experimented in the forms of writing, which found that the English level of the test takers who immigrate into America before seven years old shows no significant difference with the natives while the level of those who immigrate after seven shows decreasing trend as they grow older. The researcher attributes the differences of learning English before and after seven years old to physiological factor. However, it is worth noting that this experiment also found the degenerating stage of

language learning begins at seven years old rather than what Lenneberg said at adolescence. This indicates that even though the critical period exists, when it begins is an inconclusive issue. Through his own study, Patkowsky (1980) found that it is possible for the critical period for second language acquisition to exist. He found that in the syntax, the learners who are younger than 15 years old are better than those who are exposed to language after 15. Among all the factors Patkowsky has tested in his research, the age is the most remarkable factor that influences the success of second language learning in his final conclusion. This study result is almost completely consistent with the Critical Period Hypothesis. Christine Weber et al., (1999) applied the approach of combined behaviorism and event-related potentials to record and contrast the brain electrical activities of Chinese-English bilinguals whose native tongue is Chinese when they comprehend English sentences. Through the experiment, they think that the critical period for some language knowledge acquisition is before adolescence while others may be at other stages. It can thus be seen that there not only exists the critical period for language acquisition but also many kinds of critical periods. The previous studies indicate that there exists a critical period for second language acquisition. Language learning after the critical period is relevantly difficult. The adults that lack some learning advantages can also learn second language well.

Empirical studies have examined the validity of CPH in adult language learning. Long (1990) suggested that younger learners have an advantage in achieving near-native fluency, particularly in phonology and accent acquisition. However, research by DeKeyser (2013) and Muñoz & Singleton (2011) challenges the strict interpretation of CPH, arguing that while younger learners may excel in implicit learning, adults can achieve high proficiency through explicit learning and structured instruction. Their studies indicate that older learners may require different learning approaches but are still capable of mastering a second language given the right instructional support.

Research on cognitive and neurological influences on SLA suggests that age-related cognitive decline may impact memory retention, processing speed, and adaptability. Bialystok (2017) examined how aging affects working memory and executive functioning, finding that older learners struggle with memorization and processing complex linguistic structures but compensate with strong analytical and problem-solving skills.

Similarly, Gass and Selinker (2020) argue that adults may experience difficulties in learning new phonetic distinctions due to cognitive constraints. However, Lightbown and Spada (2019) assert that older learners develop metalinguistic awareness, which helps them understand grammar rules more effectively than younger learners. Snow and Hoefnagel-Höhle (1978) conducted a study on Dutch learners of English and found that adults initially learned faster than children in formal settings, although younger learners eventually surpassed them in fluency and pronunciation. While age-related cognitive decline has been cited as a barrier to SLA (Bialystok, 2017), recent research suggests that older learners possess advantages in structured learning settings due to discipline, study habits, and analytical reasoning (Gass & Selinker, 2020). Explicit instruction in grammar and structured writing tasks benefits adult learners, as noted by Oxford (2017), who found that older students excel in rule-based learning environments. Memory retention is a key concern for older learners. Research indicates that working memory, phonological awareness, and auditory processing speed decline with age, affecting vocabulary recall and listening comprehension (Lightbown & Spada, 2019). However, structured repetition-based exercises and mnemonic techniques can help mitigate these challenges (Nation & Macalister, 2020).

Research also suggests that explicit learning strategies can help mitigate cognitive challenges in older learners. Nation and Macalister (2020) emphasize the importance of structured, step-by-step instruction, repetition, and mnemonic techniques in supporting older language learners. Bialystok and Hakuta (1999) further argue that adult learners' life experiences can be leveraged to enhance retention and comprehension through contextual learning approaches.

Beyond cognitive abilities, psychological factors such as anxiety, confidence, and motivation play a significant role in language learning success. Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis proposes that learners with high anxiety or low confidence may struggle to acquire a second language, as negative emotions create a barrier to language input processing. Studies by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) found that foreign language anxiety negatively impacts speaking fluency and classroom participation, particularly in adult learners who fear making mistakes. MacIntyre (2017) further explored the relationship between self-confidence and language fluency, concluding that older learners often experience higher anxiety levels compared to younger learners, which can hinder their speaking proficiency. To address these

challenges, researchers recommend confidence-building exercises and structured speaking practice. Gregersen and MacIntyre (2014) advocate for low-pressure speaking environments, guided conversation practice, and positive reinforcement techniques to help reduce anxiety in adult learners. Ryan and Deci (2020) suggest that self-determination and goal-setting strategies help learners stay motivated and engaged, regardless of age.

2.5 Learning Strategies Employed by Adult Learners

The importance of classifying learning strategies emerged from the principle that it would help researchers and teachers to understand and recognize what sort of strategies language learners use to solve language learning tasks. In Rubin's (1975) study, for instance, the results exposed that learners' variables include learner psychological characteristics, learner cognitive strategies, learner communication strategies and learner social strategies. Later, in her subsequent study, Rubin (1981) elaborated on her research by proposing a category of two main strategies: strategies that directly affect learning and strategies that indirectly affect learning. Beside these two main categories Rubin (1981) proposed eight secondary strategies. Language strategies that directly affect learning involve six secondary strategies: classification/verification, monitoring, guessing/inductive, differencing, deductive reasoning, and practice.

On the other hand, strategies that indirectly affect learning involve creating opportunities for practice and production tricks strategies (see Table 1). Following Rubin (1981), Wenden and Rubin (1987) suggest that there are three kinds of strategies which have been identified and contribute directly or indirectly to language learning: learning strategies, communication strategies and social strategies. Bialystok (1979) grouped strategies into four types according to linguistic features. These strategies are grouped as follows: first, strategies which focus on language form such as strategies used in situations for practising pronunciation and memorizing vocabulary. This category includes formal practising strategies, monitoring strategies and inferencing strategies. The second category, on the other hand, is concerned with functional practising strategies. This category includes strategies for language use that are often used by learners to communicate meaning in L2. The conclusion Bialystok (Bialystok, 1979) drew from her research was that implementation of the four strategies had revealed a positive effect on success in the performing only a particular type of test. She

argued that the kind of knowledge required in a given task could play a crucial role in determining the type of strategies learners would use.

Table 1: Rubin's (1981) classification of second language learning strategies

Primary strategy classification	Representative secondary Strategies	Representative examples
Strategies that directly affect learning	Classification/ verification	Ask for an example of how to use a word or expression, repeat words to confirm understanding Correct errors own/others' pronunciation, vocabulary, spelling, grammar, style
	Monitoring	Takes note of new items, pronounces out loud, finds a mnemonic, writes items repeatedly
	Memorization	Guessing meaning from key words, structures, pictures, context
	Guessing/ Inductive	Compares native/other languages to target language, groups words, looks for rules of co-occurrence
	Inferencing	Experiments with new sounds, repeat sentences until pronounce easily, listens carefully and try to imitate
	Deductive reasoning	Creates situation with native speaker, initiates conversation with fellow students, spends time in language lab, listening to TV
	Practice	Use circumlocutions, synonyms, or cognates, use formulaic interaction, contextualizes to clarify meaning
	Creates opportunities for practice	
Processes that contribute	Production tricks	
Indirectly to learning		

The major contribution to the field of learning strategies was the work of O'Malley and Chamot (1990) which offered a clear distinction between cognitive and metacognitive

strategies. In their classification of learning strategies, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) have differentiated learning strategies into three main types: cognitive strategies (e.g., note-taking, resourcing, elaboration), meta cognitive strategies (e.g. planning learning, self-evaluation) and social strategies (e.g. working with fellow students or asking the teacher's help).

Given the distinct learning preferences of younger and older learners, research highlights the importance of tailoring instructional approaches. Nation (2013) found that explicit grammar instruction and structured writing tasks benefit older learners, whereas interactive, technology-enhanced learning methods are more effective for younger students. Similarly, Reinders and Benson (2017) advocate for digital learning tools and gamification techniques to engage younger learners, while Stockwell (2022) highlights the advantages of blended learning approaches that combine face-to-face instruction with digital resources. Skehan (2014) suggests that task-based learning and role-playing activities work well for younger learners, while rule-based learning is more effective for older students. In teacher education, Oxford (2017) and Nation and Macalister (2020) emphasize the need for teacher training programs to equip educators with strategies for addressing age-related learning differences. These strategies include differentiated instruction, scaffolding techniques, and personalized feedback to ensure all learners regardless of age can achieve success in language learning.

Since different age groups have distinct learning styles and preferences, tailored instructional strategies are essential. Older learners prefer structured, rule-based learning, whereas younger learners thrive in interactive, technology-enhanced environments (Brown, 2007). In addition, Nation (2013) argues that explicit grammar instruction benefits older learners, and Stockwell (2022) emphasizes the effectiveness of digital learning tools for younger students. A blended learning approach, which combines structured classroom instruction with digital learning tools, has been recommended as an optimal method for catering to both age groups (Oxford, 2017). Furthermore, task-based language learning approaches, such as role-playing exercises and real-world communication tasks, have been shown to benefit younger learners who prefer exploratory learning (Skehan, 2014). Meanwhile, older learners benefit from structured exercises, repetition, and confidence-building activities, which align with research by Gregersen & MacIntyre (2014) on reducing language anxiety in older students.

2.6. Previous Studies

A Study on Adult Learners of English as A Foreign Language in Vietnam: Motivations, Advantages, and Challenges conducted by Nguyen Le An Phuong and Nguyen Thi Hoang Bau (2014). They explored the obstacles Vietnamese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners face, providing practical solutions for both learners and educators. A comprehensive study involving 70 adult learners studying EFL at the University of Danang - University of Foreign Language Studies (UD UFLS) utilized questionnaires and interviews, employing qualitative and quantitative analyses. The research revealed that despite high motivation driven by job and career goals, learners struggle due to time constraints, limited English literacy skills, and financial burdens, diminishing the effectiveness of their learning. In response to these difficulties, constructive recommendations are offered to enhance the learning experience and address the prevalent issues.

Another study was conducted in Libya by Sumaya Ramadan Abdalla Aoghala (2021) on age effect on Second Language Acquisition: A Critical Review and Implications for Education in Libya. The study discusses the influence of age in second language acquisition. It critically attempts to investigate whether the common view of '*the younger the better*' is reasonable in different learning contexts. Based on literature research on this topic for over past sixty years, this paper disputes that '*the younger the better*' is a reasonable belief in abroad contexts where children are exposed intensively and daily to the target language. This rich input helps to activate the work of their implicit mechanism leading to gaining close native-like norms and accent. Yet, "the younger the better" ineffectively works in foreign settings with a limited exposure of the target language. Thus, "*the older the better*" is more reasonable in foreign contexts. Therefore, for a better students' linguistics competence in English in our schools in Libya, the government has to consider some favorable circumstances in particular YL teachers and it has to work urgently to raise their efficiency in teaching English to younger learners, and that can be achieved via well- planned training programs to ensure effective and valuable results.

A paper was written D.Abdallah Elmahjoub Sleem by Evaluating the Role of Age in Language Acquisition in (2019) in Libya. This paper is concerned mainly with investigating the role which age plays in mastering syntax/morphology and phonology in the process of language learning. It also pays some attention to the effects of age on

the route or the way and the rate or the amount of learning. Studies carried out earlier on the effects of age are reviewed in this paper. It reviews how age affects learning and what aspects of language it affects focusing on syntax/ morphology and phonology. It is concluded that age mainly affects phonology. That is, starting to learn a language early leads to native-like pronunciation. However, it is found that an early start is not an advantage for learning syntax and morphology. It is recommended that language be introduced early in curriculums so learners make more benefit from early start to master the target language.

Liang Xu in (2022) wrote a paper on the age effect in Second Language Acquisition and its study design method. The focus of this paper was the effect of age on second language acquisition. The effect of the critical stage of second language acquisition is introduced. A retrospective discussion on the influence of age on second language acquisition, this paper tackles the conventional empirical methods of age-effect studies and analyses and summarizes some of the key questions in related research. The different testing methods used in these studies are the main reason for the research's contradictory results on the effects of age in second languages, including subject selection, content study content and time for comparison. Because of these issues, reference principles for research design on the influence of second language acquisition age are proposed: appropriate criteria for selecting subjects and number of subjects. Extensively sampled subjects, tools for testing and uniform implementation of assessment criteria, and a dynamic and comprehensive examination of the effects of age. The implication of the study on the influence of age on second language teaching and learning is that different teaching methods for students of different ages and different language characteristics should be applied in second language teaching.

A case study of learning English in an online Chinese school in (2021) focused in the effects of age factor on learning English. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of age on EFL learning in an Online English school based in China for the students of Chinese nationality. The importance of the early start is larger especially when the structure and the origin of their native language greatly differ from the foreign language they aim to learn. The populations of the study are primary and middle school Chinese students and English language teachers of different background and nations. This study found that the age factor has an important effect on the learner's acquisition. The results confirm that the early start of learning L2/FL intensifies the process of

developing the learner's language skills. The aim of this study is to encourage parents and students to start learning English, or other foreign language, as early as possible, as this will enhance their chances of high level of fluency and proficiency in the target language.

2.6 Summary of the Chapter

Chapter Two reviews previous studies on the effect of age on second language acquisition, with a focus on adult learners, motivation, learning strategies, and the Critical Period Hypothesis. The chapter combines theoretical views and empirical research to explain how age, psychological factors, and instructional methods influence learning English as a second or foreign language.

The chapter begins by describing adult learners as independent, self-directed, and goal-oriented. Adults usually bring rich life and work experiences to the classroom, which can support learning. However, they also face many challenges, such as family responsibilities, work pressure, limited time, and fatigue. Psychological factors like anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and low self-confidence can negatively affect adults' participation and progress in learning English, especially in speaking activities.

Adult learning is characterized by several key features: independence, rich experience, clear goals and strong motivation, and limited time and energy. Adults prefer practical and relevant learning that can be applied directly to their work and daily life. While their experience can help learning, it can sometimes make them resistant to change. Adults are usually highly motivated, either intrinsically (personal development) or extrinsically (jobs, exams, rewards), but their multiple responsibilities often limit the time they can devote to learning.

The chapter also discusses major factors that influence SLA, such as age, motivation, anxiety, personality, language aptitude, and learning strategies. Age is presented as an important but controversial factor. Some studies support the Critical Period Hypothesis, suggesting that younger learners have advantages, especially in pronunciation. Other studies argue that adults can also achieve high levels of proficiency, particularly through explicit instruction and structured learning. Motivation is highlighted as one of the most important factors, often more influential than age itself.

A large section of the chapter examines the Critical Period Hypothesis, presenting both supporting and opposing views. While some researchers argue that there is a

biologically determined period for successful language acquisition, others believe that age alone does not determine success. Instead, factors such as learning environment, teaching methods, motivation, and exposure play a major role. Many scholars agree that the existence and timing of a critical period remain unclear and require further research.

The chapter also reviews learning strategies used by adult learners. These include cognitive, metacognitive, social, and communicative strategies. Research shows that adults benefit from explicit grammar instruction, structured practice, repetition, and goal setting. Tailored instructional approaches, such as blended learning and confidence-building activities, are recommended to meet the needs of different age groups.

Finally, the chapter reviews previous studies from different contexts, including Vietnam, Libya, China, and online learning environments. These studies show mixed results about age effects but generally agree that adults can successfully learn a second language when appropriate teaching methods, motivation, and learning conditions are provided.

Overall, Chapter Two concludes that age influences second language acquisition, but it is not the only or decisive factor. Motivation, affective factors, learning strategies, and instructional quality play a crucial role in determining success in learning English.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology used to investigate the effect of the age factor on learning English for adult students at Zawia Language Center during the academic year 2024. The study aims to explore how age influences language learning processes, challenges, and outcomes among adult learners. To achieve this, a mixed-methods approach is adopted, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The chapter begins by detailing the research design, including the rationale for selecting a mixed-methods approach. It then describes the research setting, participant selection criteria, and data collection instruments, which include a structured questionnaire for students and semi-structured interviews for teachers. The procedures for data collection and analysis are also explained, ensuring that the chosen methods align with the research objectives. Furthermore, this chapter highlights the ethical considerations taken into account during the research process. This methodological framework ensures that the study provides reliable and valid insights into the impact of age on English language acquisition among adult learners at Zawia Language Center.

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, which integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of how age affects adult learners' English language acquisition at Zawia Language Center. A mixed-methods approach is appropriate as it allows for triangulation, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative component consists of a structured questionnaire administered to students, while the qualitative component includes semi-structured interviews with teachers. The quantitative research aspect is designed to collect numerical data on students' experiences, challenges, and progress in English learning. The questionnaire comprises closed-ended and Likert scale questions to measure students' perceptions of their language learning abilities, motivation, and difficulties. Quantitative research is useful for identifying trends and patterns in data, making it a valuable tool for studying language acquisition (Dörnyei, 2007). The qualitative research component involves

semi-structured interviews with teachers, providing deeper insights into how instructors perceive the impact of age on adult language learners. This method allows for flexibility in responses while maintaining a structured set of key themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative data help explore the social and cognitive dimensions of language learning that might not be captured through a questionnaire alone.

For the setting, this study is conducted at Zawia Language Center, a well-established institution that provides English language instruction to adult learners in Libya. The center offers English courses at different proficiency levels, catering to learners from diverse educational and professional backgrounds. The learning environment includes structured classroom instruction, interactive activities, and language practice sessions aimed at improving students' speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. Zawia Language Center serves as ideal research setting due to its focus on adult education and its diverse student population. The center employs experienced English language instructors who utilize various teaching methodologies to support learners of different ages. This environment allows for an in-depth examination of how age influences language acquisition, learning strategies, and overall proficiency. The study was carried out during the academic year 2023/2024.

3.2. The Participants

This study involves two key groups of participants: adult students enrolled in English courses and English language instructors at Zawia Language Center. The student participants in this study consist of adult learners who are currently enrolled in English language courses at the center. The (39) participants were over 18 years or older, ensuring a focus on adult learners and were enrolled in English courses at different proficiency levels. The study included also English language instructors at Zawia Language Center to provide expert insights into how age affects language learning. The selection criteria for teacher participants include professional experience Must have at least three years of teaching experience in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). A purposive sampling technique is used to select (5) instructors, ensuring a diverse representation of teaching experiences, perspectives, and methodologies. Purposive sampling is effective in qualitative research as it allows for the selection of participants who can provide rich and relevant data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The selection of both students and teachers enables a comprehensive investigation of the impact of age

on English language acquisition. While students provide direct insights into their learning experiences, teachers offer expert observations on age-related challenges and strategies. This multi-perspective approach strengthens the validity of the study's findings (Creswell, 2014).

3.3 Data Collection Tools

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to gather both quantitative and qualitative data on the effect of age on acquiring English for adult students at Zawia Language Center. Data were collected using two primary instruments: a questionnaire for students and semi-structured interviews with teachers. This combination allows for a more comprehensive analysis, ensuring both numerical trends and in-depth insights (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

3.3.1 Students' Structured Questionnaire

The student questionnaire is designed to collect quantitative data on learners' experiences, challenges, and perceptions regarding age and English language acquisition. Questionnaires are commonly used in educational research as they allow for the collection of large amounts of data efficiently (Dornyei & Taguchi, 2010 and Cohen, et al, 2018). The questionnaire consists of three main sections see appendix (1). The questionnaire was pilot-tested with a small group of 10 students to assess clarity and reliability before full distribution.

3.3.2 Teachers' Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews are conducted with English instructors to obtain qualitative data regarding their perspectives on how age influences students' language learning abilities. Semi-structured interviews provide flexibility while ensuring key themes are covered (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). See appendix (2) to see the structure of the interview. Each interview lasts approximately 30–45 minutes and is audio-recorded with participants' consent for accurate transcription and thematic analysis.

Generally speaking; the combination of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews provides both quantitative data on student experiences and qualitative insights from teachers. This triangulation of data strengthens the validity and reliability of the study

(Creswell, 2014). The questionnaire captures broad trends, while interviews allow for in-depth exploration of teachers' observations and strategies.

3.4 Data Analysis Methods

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques to ensure a comprehensive understanding of how age influences English language acquisition for adult learners at Zawia Language Center. The analysis consists of statistical methods for the student questionnaire data and thematic analysis for the teacher interview data. Using both methods strengthens the validity of the findings through triangulation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative data collected from the student questionnaire is analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. To ensure data reliability and validity, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is used to test the internal consistency of Likert-scale questionnaire items (Pallant, 2020). The data is analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for accuracy and efficiency. The semi-structured interviews with English instructors are analyzed using thematic analysis, which allows for the identification of key themes and patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations play a crucial role in ensuring the integrity and credibility of this research study. This study follows ethical guidelines related to informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and data protection to uphold the rights and welfare of all participants (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Prior to participation, all students and teachers are provided with detailed information about the research, including its purpose, objectives, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. For students, the consent form ensures that they are aware that their responses in the questionnaire will be used for research purposes only. For teachers, the form explains that their interview responses will be anonymized and used for analysis. Participants have the right to withdraw at any time without any consequences (Bryman, 2016). To protect participants' privacy, all personal identifiers are removed from the dataset (Wiles, 2013). The collected data were stored securely and access was restricted to the researcher and authorized personnel only.

- For questionnaire responses, numerical codes replace names to ensure anonymity.
- For interviews, transcripts are anonymized by removing names, institutional references, and any identifiable details.

Confidentiality measures are crucial to ensuring that participants feel comfortable sharing their genuine opinions and experiences (Flick, 2018). All participation is entirely voluntary, and participants have the right to withdraw at any stage without providing a reason. No coercion or pressure is applied, and students are assured that their academic standing at Zawia Language Center will not be affected by their participation or withdrawal (Diener & Crandall, 1978). Additionally, teachers participating in interviews are informed that their professional status or employment will not be influenced by their responses. Ensuring voluntary participation upholds the ethical principle of autonomy (Beauchamp & Childress, 2019).

3.6 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter outlined the research methodology employed in the study investigating the effect of age on English language acquisition among adult learners at Zawia Language Center. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining quantitative data from student questionnaires and qualitative insights from teacher interviews to provide a comprehensive analysis. The research design was justified based on its ability to capture both numerical trends and in-depth perspectives. The research setting and participant selection criteria were described, ensuring the inclusion of diverse age groups and experienced English instructors. In terms of data collection, structured questionnaires were designed to assess students' motivation, challenges, and perceptions, while semi-structured interviews with teachers provided expert insights into age-related learning difficulties. The data analysis procedures incorporated statistical methods for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data, ensuring a robust and valid interpretation of the findings. Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the study, including informed consent, confidentiality and voluntary participation. Overall, the methodology outlined in this chapter establishes a strong foundation for the next stage of the research, where the results and analysis will be presented in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the study investigating the effect of age on acquiring English for adult students at Zawia Language Center. The findings are derived from two primary data sources: quantitative data collected through a structured questionnaire administered to adult learners, and qualitative data gathered from semi-structured interviews with English instructors. By combining both approaches, the study provides a comprehensive analysis of how age influences English language acquisition, including education history, learners' perceptions, learning strategies, and challenges, as well as teachers' insights on age-related differences in language learning. The chapter is organized into two main sections. The first section presents the quantitative results, including learning motivations, challenges, and self-reported proficiency levels. It also includes statistical analyses examining the relationship between age and various learning factors. The second section focuses on the qualitative findings, summarizing teachers' responses regarding differences between younger and older adult learners, challenges faced by older students, and the strategies used to support them.

4.1. Students' Questionnaire Analysis

This section presents the quantitative results obtained from the student questionnaire, which was administered to adult learners at Zawia Language Center. The questionnaire includes education history, learning motivations, challenges, learning strategies, and self-perceptions regarding the impact of age on language acquisition. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistical tests (chi-square and frequency analysis) using SPSS V27 to determine relationships between age and various learning factors. To evaluate the responses of the study sample, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS V27), which includes: frequency tables, arithmetic mean, standard deviation chi square test for independence.

Section1: Education History

Table 2: How long have you been studying English at Zawia Language Center

Answer	Count	%
Less than 6 months	20	51.3
6 months to 1 year	10	25.6
1–2 years	6	15.4
More than 2 years	3	7.7
Total	39	100.0

The distribution of participants based on the length of time they have been studying English at Zawia Language Center is presented in Table 3. Over half of the participants (51.3%) reported studying English for less than six months. A quarter of the participants (25.6%) had been studying for six months to one year, while 15.4% had studied for one to two years. Only 7.7% of participants had been studying English for more than two years. These results suggest that the majority of participants are relatively new learners of English at the center.

Table 3: What is your current level of English Proficiency?

Answer	Count	%
Beginner	24	61.5
Intermediate	15	38.5
Advanced	0	0.0
Total	39	100.0

The distribution of participants based on their current level of English proficiency is shown in Table 4. A majority of the participants (61.5%) identified as beginners, while 38.5% reported being at the intermediate level. None of the participants indicated an advanced level of proficiency (0.0%). These findings suggest that the sample primarily consists of learners in the early stages of English language acquisition.

Section 2: Learning Motivation and Challenges

Table 4: Why did you decide to learn English.

Answer	Count	%
For career advancement	5	12.8
For academic purposes	25	64.1
To travel	0	0.0
For personal interest	9	23.1
Total	39	100.0

Center. The motivations for learning English among participants are outlined in Table 5. The majority of participants (64.1%) reported learning English for academic purposes, making this the most common reason. A smaller proportion (23.1%) indicated learning English for personal interest, while 12.8% cited career advancement as their motivation. Notably, none of the participants (0.0%) reported learning English for travel purposes. These results highlight the academic focus as the primary driver for English language learning among participants at the Zawia Language

Table 5: How motivated do you feel to learn English

Answer	Count	%
Not motivated at all	1	2.6
Slightly motivated	10	25.6
Slightly motivated	7	17.9
Motivated	19	48.7
Very motivated	2	5.1
Total	39	100.0

The participants' levels of motivation to learn English are presented in Table 5. Nearly half of the participants (48.7%) reported feeling "motivated," while 5.1% indicated being "very motivated." A combined 43.5% of participants expressed lower levels of motivation, with 25.6% identifying as "slightly motivated" and 17.9% selecting the same option, possibly due to a duplication in the response category. Only 2.6% reported feeling "not motivated at all." These results suggest that while most participants exhibit moderate to high levels of motivation, a subset displays lower enthusiasm for learning English, warranting further exploration of their specific challenges.

Table 6: What challenges do you face while learning English?

Answer	Count	%
Time constraints	10	25.6
Difficulty remembering new vocabulary	10	25.6
Difficulty understanding grammar	8	20.5
Lack of practice opportunities	11	28.2
Total	39	100.0

The challenges encountered by participants while learning English are summarized in Table 7. The most commonly reported challenge was a lack of practice opportunities, cited by 28.2% of participants. Time constraints and difficulty remembering new vocabulary were each identified by 25.6% of participants. Additionally, 20.5% reported difficulty understanding grammar. These findings highlight a range of obstacles faced by learners, with limited opportunities for practice emerging as the most significant barrier.

Section 3: Learning Strategies and Preferences

Table 7: What type of learning activities do you find most helpful

Answer	Count	%
Classroom lectures	13	33.3
Group discussions	12	30.8
Role-playing and simulations	2	5.1
Reading and writing exercises	4	10.3
Listening to audio materials	3	7.7
Watching videos	5	12.8
Total	39	100.0

Participants' preferences for learning activities are outlined in Table 8. The most frequently selected activity was classroom lectures, preferred by 33.3% of participants. Group discussions were the second most popular choice, selected by 30.8%. Other activities, such as role-playing and simulations (5.1%), reading and writing exercises (10.3%), listening to audio materials (7.7%), and watching videos (12.8%), were less commonly preferred. These results suggest a strong preference for structured,

interactive classroom activities, with less emphasis on individual or multimedia-based learning strategies.

Table 8: How often do you practice English outside of class

Answer	Count	%
Daily	6	15.4
Several times a week	9	23.1
Once a week	11	28.2
Rarely	13	33.3
Total	39	100.0

The frequency of practicing English outside of class among participants is presented in Table 9. The largest proportion of participants (33.3%) reported practicing English "rarely." Additionally, 28.2% indicated practicing "once a week," while 23.1% practiced "several times a week." Only 15.4% practiced English daily. These findings suggest that a significant number of participants engage in limited practice outside of class, potentially impacting their language acquisition progress.

Table 9: What type of learning environment do you find most comfortable

Answer	Count	%
A class with peers of a similar age	14	35.9
A mixed-age class	15	38.5
Individual learning (self-study)	1	2.6
No preference	9	23.1
Total	39	100.0

Participants' preferences for the learning environment are shown in Table 10. The majority of participants preferred a mixed-age class (38.5%), followed closely by a class with peers of a similar age (35.9%). A smaller proportion (2.6%) favored individual learning (self-study), while 23.1% expressed no preference. These results indicate that most participants value the opportunity to interact with a diverse group of learners, but there is also a substantial preference for learning with peers of a similar age.

Section 4: Perception of Age in Language Learning

Table 10: Do you believe your age has an impact on your ability to learn English

Answer	Count	%
Yes	39	100.0
No	0	0.0
Unsure	0	0.0
Total	39	100.0

As shown in Table 11, all participants (100%) believed that their age has an impact on their ability to learn English. None of the participants disagreed or expressed uncertainty about this belief, with 0% indicating that age does not affect their language learning. These results suggest that the participants perceive their age as a significant factor influencing their ability to acquire English.

Table 11: If yes, in what ways does your age affect your learning

Answer	Count	%
Learning speed	5	12.8
Memory retention	15	38.5
Adaptability to new methods	10	25.6
Motivation and confidence	5	12.8
Time management	1	2.6
Communication and interaction	1	2.6
Physical and mental energy	2	5.1
Total	39	100.0

The ways in which age affects participants' learning are summarized in Table 11. The most commonly reported impact was on memory retention, with 38.5% of participants indicating that age affects their ability to remember information. A quarter of the participants (25.6%) believed that age influences their adaptability to new learning methods. Learning speed and motivation/confidence were each mentioned by 12.8% of participants. Other factors, including time management (2.6%), communication and interaction (2.6%), and physical and mental energy (5.1%), were less frequently cited as ways in which age affects learning. These findings highlight that age-related challenges in memory retention and adaptability to new methods are among the most significant barriers for learners.

Table 12: Do you think younger learners have an advantage in learning English compared to older learners?

Answer	Count	%
Yes	38	97.4
No	1	2.6
Total	39	100.0

As shown in Table 12, the majority of participants (97.4%) believed that younger learners have an advantage in learning English compared to older learners. Only 2.6% of participants disagreed with this belief. These results suggest that the vast majority of participants perceive age as a factor that gives younger learners an edge in language acquisition.

Table 13: What are the strengths of being an adult learner when acquiring English?

Answer	Count	%
Clear Goals and Motivation	9	23.1
Life Experience	14	35.9
Discipline and Commitment	6	15.4
Critical Thinking Skills	1	2.6
Problem-Solving Ability	4	10.3
Ability to Self-Reflect	5	12.8
Total	39	100.0

The strengths of being an adult learner when acquiring English are outlined in Table 13. The most frequently reported strength was life experience, mentioned by 35.9% of participants. Clear goals and motivation were also highlighted by 23.1% of participants as key strengths. Other strengths included discipline and commitment (15.4%), the ability to self-reflect (12.8%), problem-solving ability (10.3%, $n = 4$), and critical thinking skills (2.6%). These results indicate that adult learners perceive their life experience and clear goals as the most significant advantages in their language learning process.

Table 14: What are the challenges of being an adult learner when acquiring English?

Answer	Count	%
Lack of Time	12	30.8
Difficulty Retaining Information	12	30.8
Fear of Making Mistakes	6	15.4
High Expectations and Pressure	3	7.7
Adapting to Learning Methods	4	10.3
Limited Practice Opportunities	2	5.1
Total	39	100.0

The challenges of being an adult learner when acquiring English are summarized in Table 14. The most commonly reported challenges were lack of time and difficulty retaining information, both cited by 30.8% of participants. Other challenges included fear of making mistakes (15.4%) and high expectations and pressure (7.7%). Adapting to learning methods was mentioned by 10.3% of participants, while limited practice opportunities were noted by 5.1%. These results highlight time-related issues and memory retention as the primary barriers adult learners face in their language acquisition journey.

Section 5: Self-Perception and Progress

Table 15: How satisfied are you with your progress in learning English so far.

Answer	Count	%
Not satisfied at all	11	28.2
Very satisfied	28	71.8
Total	39	100.0

Participants' satisfaction with their progress in learning English is presented in Table 15. The majority of participants (71.8%) reported being very satisfied with their progress, while 28.2% expressed dissatisfaction, indicating that they were not satisfied at all with their learning progress. These results suggest that most participants feel positively about their progress in learning English, although a notable minority are not satisfied with their current achievements.

Table 16: Do you feel that you are progressing more slowly or more quickly compared to others in your class

Answer	Count	%
More slowly	11	28.2
At the same pace	19	48.7
More quickly	9	23.1
Total	39	100.0

As shown in Table 16, participants' perceptions of their progress relative to others in their class are varied. The largest proportion of participants (48.7%) felt that they were progressing at the same pace as their peers. A smaller percentage of participants reported feeling they were progressing more slowly (28.2%), while 23.1% believed they were advancing more quickly. These results suggest that most participants perceive themselves as making progress at a similar rate to their classmates, with a smaller proportion either lagging behind or advancing faster.

Table 17: How confident are you in your ability to use English in real-life situations?

Answer	Count	%
Not confident at all	20	51.3
Very confident	19	48.7
Total	39	100.0

Table 17 presents participants' confidence in their ability to use English in real-life situations. A slight majority of participants (51.3%) reported not being confident at all in their ability to use English outside of the classroom. However, nearly half of the participants (48.7%) expressed being very confident in their ability to use English in real-life contexts. These results suggest that while a significant proportion of participants feel uncertain about applying their English skills in everyday situations, almost half possess a strong sense of confidence in their language abilities.

4.2 Teacher Interview Analysis

This section presents the qualitative findings from the semi-structured interviews conducted with five English language instructors at Zawia Language Center. The interviews aimed to explore teachers' observations regarding the effect of age on adult learners' English acquisition, the challenges older learners face, and the strategies used

to support different age groups. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key recurring patterns and themes in the interview responses. The results are presented in the following categories: teachers' observations on age and learning, learning speed and retention, challenges faced by older learners, adaptations in teaching strategies, effective learning activities, and recommendations for improving instruction.

Theme 1: Teachers' Observations on Age and Language Learning

Teachers consistently observed notable differences between younger (18–30 years) and older (30+ years) adult learners in terms of learning approach, confidence, and adaptability. Teachers highlighted that while younger learners are faster at picking up conversational English, older learners often demonstrate stronger long-term retention and a deeper understanding of language structures. T1 said that younger learners are more open to interactive and are technology-based learning whereas older learners are more disciplined and structured in their learning approach. In addition; T2 said young learners take more risks in speaking and experimenting with new language structures while older learners learn informal English and pronunciation faster. Moreover, T3 stated that younger learners are more willing to engage in peer discussions and role-play whereas older learners are more disciplined and structured in their learning approach.

T4 said that older learners are hesitate to speak due to fear of making mistakes while young learners are too risky and like to take chance especially in games activities. Regarding older learners, T5 said they prefer detailed explanations, step-by-step instruction, and structured grammar lessons and to retain knowledge better over time, especially in grammar and writing.

Theme 2: The Effect of Age on Learning Speed and Retention

All teachers agreed that age affects learning speed and retention but emphasized that motivation and study habits play a more significant role than age alone.

T1 said that younger learners acquire pronunciation and listening comprehension faster, as they are more exposed to digital content and informal learning. Whereas T2 said older learners are more patient and methodical, which helps them grasp complex grammar rules better than younger learners. T3 and T4 said that older learners may take longer to learn, but they tend to retain knowledge well, especially if they have structured study habits. T 5 said that younger learners are faster in learning especially pronunciation and memorization rather than older learners who tend to forget quickly.

Theme 3: Challenges Faced by Older Learners

Teachers identified several key challenges that older adult learners experience:

T1 said Many older learners struggle with remembering vocabulary and grammar rules so repetition and structured practice are essential for overcoming this challenge. In addition, T2 said that older learners have difficulty in understanding fast, native-like speech so they need for slower, clear speech and structured listening exercises. Moreover; T3 said that older learners have speaking anxiety and fear of making mistakes whereas T4 saw that older learners tend to hesitate when speaking due to fear of errors. T5 believed that his older learners require safe, low-pressure environments for practice. The teachers in this study believed that older learners often have work and family responsibilities, limiting their study time and that they benefit from flexible learning schedules and self-paced activities. On the other hand, they think that younger learners are more comfortable with technology-based learning, while older learners may struggle with digital tools while older learners prefer printed materials and structured classroom lessons.

Theme 4: Teaching Strategies Adapted for Different Age Groups

All five teachers reported that they are adapting their teaching methods based on the age of their students.

For Younger Learners (18–30 years)' teacher 1 and 5 said that they use interactive and technology-based methods (videos, apps, and online quizzes). Whereas, T3 said that he uses role-playing and group discussions to encourage participation. In other vein, teachers 2 and 4 said that they use fast-paced lessons with shorter explanations and more application-based learning.

For Older Learners (30+ years), T1 said step-by-step grammar explanations and structured lessons are good strategies in learning. T3 and 4 think that more repetition and practice exercises to reinforce learning are effective. Teacher s 2 and 5 on the other hand; stated that they encourage speaking confidence through structured drills and guided practice. They also Provide real-world scenarios and business English applications for professional learners.

Theme5: Effective Learning Activities for Older Learners

Teachers identified several learning activities that are particularly beneficial for older students: Teacher 2 and 3 said that in terms of teaching grammar and writing-focused tasks; older learners excel in structured sentence-building and writing exercises and that they prefer explicit grammar instruction over discovery-based learning. In addition, teacher 5 said that when teaching older learners, she uses listening exercises with transcripts because this helps them follow along and improve comprehension it reduces frustration with fast, unclear speech. Teacher 4 stated that he uses role-playing and structured conversation practice because these activities help build confidence in speaking while maintaining structure. Finally; teacher 1 said that he uses mock exams and timed writing tasks because they are beneficial for learners preparing for IELTS and academic English tests.

Theme 6: Teacher Recommendations for Enhancing Adult Learning

The interviewed teachers provided key recommendations for improving English instruction for different age groups. For example; teacher 1 suggested that using technology and interactive tools for younger learners and provide printed materials and structured lessons for older learners. Whereas; teachers 2 and 3 recommended that teachers may separate classes Based on Learning style rather than age. Instead of dividing students strictly by age, group them based on learning preferences and pace because this allows older learners to progress at a slower, structured pace while younger learners engage in faster, interactive lessons. Teachers 4 and 5 agreed on using More practice-based activities to Improve confidence and encourage more speaking and listening practice for older learners to build confidence.

4.3 Summary of Qualitative Findings

The qualitative analysis of teacher interviews highlights key insights into the role of age in language learning at Zawia Language Center:

1. Younger learners are faster at adapting to new methods, more willing to take risks, and excel in speaking and listening.
2. Older learners are more disciplined, retain information well, but struggle with memory, speaking anxiety, and fast-paced listening tasks.

3. Teachers adapt their methods based on learner age, providing interactive methods for younger students and structured explanations for older learners.
4. Older learners benefit most from structured grammar lessons, listening transcripts, and real-world applications.
5. Teachers recommend blended learning, flexible schedules, and tailored class structures to support both age groups effectively.

These findings complement the quantitative data, reinforcing that while age influences learning approaches and preferences, motivation and learning style may be more important determinants of success.

4.4 Summary of the Quantitative Findings

The questionnaire results from the participants at Zawia Language Center revealed key insights into their education history, learning motivations, challenges, strategies, and self-perception of their progress in learning English.

1. Most learners were beginners, with a primary motivation for learning English being academic purposes.
2. Time constraints, difficulty retaining information, and a lack of practice opportunities were identified as the most significant challenges.
3. Regarding learning preferences, classroom lectures and group discussions were favored, while a large portion of participants felt they practiced English rarely outside of class. Despite these challenges, most participants felt motivated, with life experience and clear goals identified as strengths. However, there was a general belief that younger learners have an advantage in language learning.
4. In terms of self-perception, participants were generally satisfied with their progress, but a notable portion did not feel confident in using English in real-life situations. While there are slight trends in learning strategy and environment preferences across different age groups, the statistical tests suggest that age does not have a significant impact on the choice of learning strategies or preferences for learning environments.

The findings suggest that Zawia Language Center's adult learners, regardless of age, tend to favor a combination of traditional and interactive learning methods.

4.5. Summary of the Chapter

This chapter presented the methods of data analysis procedures and how the findings were statistically analyzed and labelled. The types of the obtained data are mixed between qualitative and quantitative. All the findings were presented in this chapter and will be discussed in chapter five.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the study on the effect of age on acquiring English for adult students at Zawia Language Center. The discussion integrates quantitative results from student questionnaires and qualitative insights from teacher interviews to interpret how age influences language learning experiences, challenges, and strategies. The findings are also compared with existing theories and research in second language acquisition (SLA) to provide a deeper understanding of the role of age in adult language learning. By analyzing the results in a broader academic context, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how age affects English language learning and what strategies can be employed to enhance learning outcomes for adult students of different age groups.

5.1. The Role of Age in English Language Acquisition

One of the most significant findings was that 100% of students believed that age affects their ability to learn English, with memory retention (38.5%) and adaptability to new learning methods (25.6%) being the most commonly cited challenges. Teachers also confirmed that older learners (30+ years) struggle more with vocabulary recall and pronunciation, while younger learners (18–30 years) adapt more easily to new linguistic structures. This suggests that while learners perceive age as a limiting factor, other variables such as motivation, study habits, and exposure to English play a greater role in learning success. This finding aligns with research by DeKeyser (2013), who argues that age influences learning styles but does not necessarily determine ultimate language proficiency. Older learners may require structured repetition-based learning strategies to enhance retention. Younger learners benefit from more interactive and exploratory learning experiences. Perceived limitations due to age may be more psychological than actual cognitive barriers (Lightbown & Spada, 2019).

5.2 Learning Challenges Across learners

The study revealed distinct learning challenges faced by different age groups: Older learners in the study experienced memory retention difficulties, listening

comprehension struggles, and lack of time for practice due to work and family responsibilities. These findings align with Gass and Selinker (2020), who noted that younger learners excel in phonological acquisition, while older learners develop stronger metalinguistic awareness, making them better at explicit grammar learning. Older learners may benefit from structured, repetition-based exercises and confidence-building activities to improve speaking fluency (Ellis, 2008). Younger learners may require more structured writing and grammar instruction to ensure balanced proficiency across skills. Time constraints in older learners necessitate flexible learning schedules, such as self-paced lessons or evening classes (Dörnyei, 2013).

5.3. The Influence of Motivation on Learning Outcomes

The study found that while 48.7% of students reported feeling motivated, 33.3% admitted rarely practicing English outside of class. This discrepancy suggests that motivation alone is not enough to drive consistent learning engagement. Teachers also observed that older learners were more goal-driven but lacked time to engage in regular practice, while younger learners were more experimental but less consistent. These findings are supported by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2021), who emphasize that motivation must be supported by self-regulated learning behaviors for effective language acquisition. Older learners may have intrinsic motivation, but without practice, their progress remains slow. Older learners may need structured learning plans to maintain engagement despite time constraints. Younger learners should be encouraged to develop self-discipline in language practice. Language programs should integrate accountability measures, such as self-assessment tools and progress tracking, to enhance motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

5.4. The Effectiveness of Different Learning Strategies

Both students and teachers agreed that structured classroom-based learning was the most effective method, with 33.3% of students preferring lectures and 30.8% favoring group discussions. However, preferences varied based on age: Older learners preferred structured, grammar-focused lessons with explicit explanations and guided practice. Younger learners responded better to interactive and technology-enhanced learning, such as video-based instruction and role-playing exercises. These findings align with Brown (2007), who suggests that older learners benefit from metacognitive strategies, while younger learners thrive in exploratory, communicative environments. Instructors

should tailor their teaching strategies to different age groups to optimize learning outcomes (Nation & Macalister, 2020). Blended learning approaches, combining traditional instruction with digital tools, can bridge generational learning differences (Stockwell, 2022). Encouraging personalized learning strategies, such as goal-setting for older learners and exploratory learning for younger students, can enhance engagement (Oxford, 2017).

The interpretation of key findings suggests that age does impact learning style but does not necessarily determine language proficiency. The main challenges faced by older learners such as memory retention and time constraints can be addressed through structured learning strategies, flexible schedules, and confidence-building activities. Meanwhile, younger learners, while more adaptable, require discipline and structured writing-focused instruction to ensure balanced proficiency. The findings support previous research in second language acquisition (SLA) that highlights the importance of motivation, self-regulated learning, and teaching strategies tailored to different age groups (DeKeyser, 2013; Lightbown & Spada, 2019). Moving forward, a blended learning approach that integrates both structured and interactive methods can enhance learning outcomes across all age groups.

5.5. The Critical Period Hypothesis vs. Adult Learning Advantages

One of the most debated topics in SLA research is the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), which suggests that younger learners have a biological advantage in acquiring a second language, particularly in pronunciation and fluency (Lenneberg, 1967; Long, 1990). According to CPH, language acquisition becomes more difficult after puberty due to decreased neural plasticity (Scovel, 1988). Findings from This Study vs. CPH revealed that student and teacher perceptions aligned with CPH, as 97.4% of students believed younger learners had an advantage in learning English, particularly in pronunciation and listening skills. Teachers also observed that younger learners adapted more quickly to new vocabulary and pronunciation, supporting claims by Singleton & Ryan (2004) that younger learners outperform adults in implicit learning contexts (e.g., acquiring phonetics naturally). However, statistical analysis in this study did not show a significant relationship between age and English proficiency, indicating that age alone does not determine language learning success. This supports findings from DeKeyser (2013) and Muñoz & Singleton (2011), who argue that older learners can achieve high

proficiency, especially in grammar and writing, when exposed to structured learning environments.

5.6. The Role of Experience and Learning Strategies in Adult Learners

Older learners are often thought to struggle with second language acquisition due to cognitive decline (Bialystok, 2017). However, recent research suggests that adults benefit from their life experiences, structured learning approaches, and discipline in study habits (Gass & Selinker, 2020). Findings from this study vs. previous research revealed that teachers noted that older learners were more disciplined, goal-oriented, and capable of structured learning, supporting Oxford (2017), who found that adults excel in explicit learning, such as grammar-focused instruction and structured writing tasks. Older learners in this study reported challenges in memory retention (38.5%) and adaptability to new learning methods (25.6%), similar to findings by Lightbown & Spada (2019), who argue that cognitive decline may slow memory-based learning but does not prevent mastery of a second language. Statistical results showed no significant correlation between age and learning proficiency, supporting Snow & Hoefnagel-Höhle (1978), who demonstrated that adults often outperform younger learners in formal learning environments where explicit instruction is provided.

5.7. Age and Second Language Acquisition: The Role of Psychological Factors

Beyond cognitive differences, affective and psychological factors such as motivation, confidence, and anxiety play a significant role in second language acquisition (MacIntyre, 2017). Findings from this study vs. Affective Filter Hypothesis Teachers in this study observed that older learners often experience speaking anxiety and fear of making mistakes, aligning with Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which suggests that anxiety and lack of confidence can act as a barrier to language acquisition. Students who reported higher motivation levels (48.7%) did not always practice English consistently, indicating a gap between motivation and active language use, a phenomenon also observed by Dörnyei & Ushioda (2021). Older learners benefited from structured conversation practice, which supports Horwitz et al. (1986), who argue that reducing speaking anxiety through structured drills improves fluency.

5.8 The Effectiveness of Different Teaching Strategies

The study found that both younger and older learners preferred structured classroom-based learning, but their preferred teaching methods differed. These findings align with Stockwell (2022), who emphasized the need for blended learning approaches to cater to different learner preferences. Findings from this study vs. existing research older learners preferred structured, grammar-based instruction, similar to findings by Nation (2013), who argues that explicit grammar teaching benefits older learners due to their analytical skills. Younger learners engaged more with technology-enhanced learning, supporting Reinders & Benson (2017), who found that interactive, and digital-based learning benefits younger L2 learners. Teachers emphasized confidence-building activities for older learners and interactive role-play for younger students, which aligns with Skehan (2014), who suggests that task-based learning benefits younger learners, while rule-based learning supports older students. The findings of this study align with contemporary SLA research, demonstrating that age influences learning style and perceived challenges but does not necessarily predict learning success. The study highlights the need for tailored instructional approaches, recognizing that motivation, structured practice, and psychological factors play a greater role in language acquisition than age alone.

5.9 Summary of the Chapter

Chapter Five discusses the results of the study on the effect of age on learning English among adult students at Zawia Language Center. The chapter combines data from student questionnaires and teacher interviews to explain how age influences learning experiences, challenges, motivation, and learning strategies. The findings are also compared with major theories and previous research in second language acquisition.

The results show that all students believed age affects English learning. The most common difficulties reported were memory retention and adapting to new learning methods. Teachers confirmed that older learners often face challenges in remembering vocabulary and improving pronunciation, while younger learners adapt more quickly to new language forms. However, the findings suggest that age itself does not determine success in learning English. Instead, factors such as motivation, study habits, and exposure to the language play a more important role.

Different age groups experienced different learning challenges. Older learners struggled mainly with memory, listening comprehension, and lack of time due to work and family responsibilities. Younger learners were more flexible and confident but sometimes lacked consistency and discipline in practice. These findings support earlier research showing that older learners are stronger in explicit grammar learning, while younger learners have advantages in pronunciation and implicit learning.

Motivation was found to be an important but complex factor. Although many students reported being motivated, a large number did not practice English regularly outside the classroom. Teachers observed that older learners were more goal-oriented but limited by time, while younger learners were more experimental but less consistent. This shows that motivation needs to be supported by self-regulated learning and structured practice in order to lead to real progress.

The study also examined the effectiveness of different learning strategies. Both students and teachers agreed that structured classroom learning was effective, but preferences differed by age. Older learners preferred grammar-focused lessons with clear explanations and guided practice, while younger learners benefited more from interactive and technology-based activities. A blended learning approach was identified as the most suitable way to meet the needs of both groups.

The findings related to the Critical Period Hypothesis showed mixed results. While most participants believed that younger learners have an advantage, especially in pronunciation, statistical analysis did not show a significant relationship between age and overall English proficiency. This suggests that adults can achieve high levels of language ability when learning conditions are supportive and well structured.

Finally, the chapter highlights the importance of psychological factors such as anxiety, confidence, and motivation. Older learners often experienced speaking anxiety, which affected their fluency. Confidence-building activities and structured speaking practice were found to be helpful in reducing anxiety. Overall, the chapter concludes that age influences learning styles and perceived difficulties, but successful language learning depends more on motivation, teaching strategies, and learning environment than on age alone.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6.0. Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusion of the study investigating the effect of age on English language acquisition among adult learners at Zawia Language Center. It provides a summary of key findings, discusses their implications for language teaching and learning, highlights the study's contributions, acknowledges its limitations, and offers recommendations for future research. The study aimed to determine whether age significantly influences English learning proficiency, challenges, and learning strategies among adult learners. By analyzing both quantitative data (student questionnaires) and qualitative insights (teacher interviews), the research identified key differences in learning styles, motivation levels, and challenges faced by different age groups. While the study found that age impacts learning style and preferences, statistical analysis revealed that age alone does not determine language proficiency. Instead, factors such as motivation, study habits, and structured learning strategies play a more critical role in language learning success. This chapter concludes by reflecting on the study's significance, outlining its contributions to second language acquisition (SLA) research, and suggesting avenues for future exploration to enhance language education for adult learners.

6.1 General Conclusion

This study examined the impact of age on English language acquisition among adult learners at Zawia Language Center, integrating insights from quantitative (student questionnaires) and qualitative (teacher interviews) data. The findings provided a comprehensive understanding of how age affects learning styles, motivation, challenges, and instructional preferences, while also highlighting the role of external factors such as time constraints and confidence levels in shaping learning outcomes.

One of the key findings was that while 100% of students believed that age influences their ability to learn English, statistical analysis revealed no significant correlation between age and overall proficiency levels. This suggests that age does not inherently determine language learning success; rather, factors such as motivation, study habits, and exposure to English are more critical. Older learners (30+ years) were found to be

more disciplined and goal-oriented but struggled with memory retention, speaking confidence, and adapting to new learning methods. In contrast, younger learners (18–30 years) adapted more quickly to pronunciation and vocabulary acquisition but lacked consistency and structure in their learning habits.

Another significant finding was that teaching strategies need to be adapted based on learners' age and preferences. Older learners preferred structured, grammar-focused instruction, repetition-based exercises, and explicit learning methods, whereas younger learners benefited more from interactive, exploratory, and technology-enhanced learning approaches. Both groups, however, favored structured classroom-based learning, with classroom lectures (33.3%) and group discussions (30.8%) being the most preferred teaching methods. Despite reporting high motivation levels (48.7% of students felt motivated), 33.3% admitted they rarely practiced English outside of class, indicating a gap between motivation and actual language engagement. Teachers observed that older learners hesitated to speak due to fear of making mistakes, reinforcing the need for confidence-building activities and structured speaking exercises to improve fluency.

In summary, the findings suggest that while age affects learning style and confidence levels, it does not determine language learning ability. Motivation, learning strategies, and consistent practice are far more influential in achieving proficiency. The study emphasizes the importance of tailored teaching approaches, blended learning methods, and flexible study schedules to support adult learners in overcoming age-related challenges and achieving their language learning goals.

6.2 Implications for Language Learning and Teaching

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into how age influences language learning styles, challenges, and instructional preferences among adult learners at Zawia Language Center. The results highlight that while age affects learning approaches, it does not determine proficiency, reinforcing the need for age-sensitive teaching strategies that cater to diverse learning needs. This section outlines the key implications for curriculum design, instructional strategies, student engagement, and teacher training to optimize English language teaching for adult learners.

One of the most significant implications is the need for a blended learning approach that integrates both structured instruction and interactive methods. The study found that

older learners (30+ years) prefer explicit grammar instruction, structured exercises, and repetition-based learning, while younger learners (18–30 years) thrive in interactive, technology-enhanced environments. Therefore, language programs should incorporate a mix of structured grammar lessons, communicative activities, and digital learning tools to accommodate the needs of all learners. Additionally, curriculum flexibility is essential for older learners who often face time constraints due to work and family responsibilities. Offering self-paced online courses, evening classes, and alternative learning formats would help adult students stay engaged despite their external commitments.

Another important implication is the role of confidence-building and anxiety reduction in language learning. The study revealed that older learners struggle with speaking fluency due to fear of making mistakes, a finding supported by Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis. Teachers should focus on low-pressure speaking environments, structured conversation practice, and positive reinforcement techniques to help older students build confidence. Additionally, younger learners, despite being more adaptive, need greater discipline in structured learning areas such as writing and grammar development. Implementing goal-setting exercises and self-assessment tools could help younger learners maintain consistency and track their progress over time. Teachers also need to adapt their instructional methods based on learners' needs. Interactive task-based learning, role-playing, and discussion-based activities should be prioritized for younger learners, while step-by-step grammar explanations and guided practice sessions should be emphasized for older students. Furthermore, teachers should receive training on age-sensitive pedagogical approaches to ensure that they can effectively engage both younger and older learners in the classroom. Finally, increasing opportunities for practical language use is necessary. The study found that despite high motivation levels, a significant portion of learners did not practice English outside the classroom. Establishing language practice groups, conversation clubs, and real-world learning applications can bridge this gap, ensuring that students have continuous exposure to English beyond the classroom setting.

In summary, the study underscores the importance of personalized and flexible learning approaches that cater to different age groups. By integrating structured lessons for older learners, interactive methods for younger students, and blended learning techniques for all, educators can create a more inclusive and effective language learning environment.

Additionally, teacher training programs should emphasize strategies for addressing age-related learning challenges, while institutions should offer flexible learning options and confidence-building activities to enhance student success.

6.3 Recommendations

The study provides practical recommendations for learners and teachers in adult language education.

For learners

The findings suggest that a blended learning approach combining structured instruction for older learners and interactive, technology-enhanced activities for younger learners is the most effective strategy. Additionally, curriculum flexibility, confidence-building techniques, and personalized learning plans are essential for maximizing student engagement and overcoming age-related challenges.

For teachers

Teachers should also receive specialized training on age-sensitive pedagogical strategies, ensuring that classroom instruction accommodates both structured learners and interactive learners effectively.

By integrating both quantitative (student questionnaires) and qualitative (teacher interviews) methods, this study provides a more holistic perspective on age-related differences in SLA. The mixed-methods approach ensures that both learner perceptions and teacher observations are considered, offering a balanced analysis of language learning experiences across different age groups. The study also highlights the importance of longitudinal research in SLA, as language learning is a progressive process that requires time-tracking to fully understand how age-related differences evolve.

In summary, this study makes valuable contributions to second language acquisition research, practical language teaching applications, and methodological approaches in studying adult learners. By emphasizing learning strategies, motivation, and instructional design over age as the primary determinant of language learning success, the findings provide actionable insights for educators and researchers seeking to enhance English language instruction for adult learners.

6.4 Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into the effect of age on English language acquisition among adult learners at Zawia Language Center, several methodological and contextual limitations must be acknowledged. These limitations highlight areas where further research could enhance the validity, reliability, and generalizability of findings.

One of the main limitations of this study is the sample size and representation. The research was conducted with 39 adult learners and a limited number of teachers from a single language center in Libya, making it difficult to generalize the findings to a broader population. Additionally, the majority of participants were female (87.2%), leading to potential gender bias in learning preferences and challenges.

Furthermore, the study did not explore cognitive and neurological factors in depth. While older learners reported memory retention difficulties, and teachers observed differences in learning strategies, the study did not include cognitive assessments to measure working memory, processing speed, or phonological awareness. Future research should integrate cognitive testing, neurological studies (e.g., brain imaging), and experimental studies to examine how age-related cognitive differences impact second language learning. Additionally, psychological and affective factors such as anxiety, motivation fluctuations, and confidence levels were acknowledged but not systematically measured. Since older learners often experience greater language anxiety and fear of making mistakes, it would be beneficial to conduct in-depth studies on how psychological factors impact speaking fluency and engagement. Future research could use language anxiety scales and motivation tracking to analyze how learners' emotional states influence their language learning over time.

Finally, the study focused primarily on formal classroom learning and did not assess how informal and technology-based learning environments impact different age groups. Many adult learners engage in self-directed learning through mobile apps, online courses, and workplace interactions, which were not included in the study's scope. Future research should examine how digital learning tools, immersion experiences, and social interactions contribute to language acquisition across different age groups.

6.5 Suggestion for Future Research

This study has provided valuable insights into the effect of age on English language acquisition among adult learners at Zawia Language Center. However, several unexplored areas and methodological limitations suggest the need for further research. Future studies should aim to expand the scope, improve methodology, and explore additional cognitive, psychological, and technological factors that influence adult language learning. One major recommendation is to conduct longitudinal studies to track language acquisition over time. Since this study used a cross-sectional design, it only captured a snapshot of learners' experiences. A long-term study tracking progress over months or years would provide deeper insights into whether older learners eventually "catch up" with younger learners and how age-related differences in learning speed evolve over time. Future research should also assess whether motivation levels fluctuate and how sustained engagement affects proficiency.

Additionally, future studies should expand the sample size and demographic diversity to enhance the generalizability of findings. This study was conducted in a single language center with a relatively small sample (N=39), and the majority of participants were female (87.2%), potentially introducing gender bias. Future research should include a more balanced gender distribution and learners from different educational, professional, and cultural backgrounds to determine whether the findings apply across different learning contexts (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Another important area for future exploration is cognitive and neurological factors in language learning. This study relied on self-reported memory retention challenges, but no cognitive testing was conducted to objectively measure working memory capacity, phonological processing, or brain plasticity.

Future research should also investigate the psychological and affective factors that influence learning success, such as language anxiety, confidence, motivation fluctuations, and self-efficacy. This study found that older learners struggled with speaking confidence due to fear of making mistakes, but no systematic psychological assessments were conducted. Future studies should use language anxiety scales and motivation tracking tools to measure how psychological barriers affect language acquisition and how learners' self-perceptions influence their learning engagement. Another recommendation is to explore the role of digital learning tools and informal learning environments. This study focused primarily on classroom-based instruction,

but many adult learners now engage in self-directed learning using mobile apps, online courses, and workplace interactions. Future research should examine how different age groups utilize digital resources and whether technology-based learning can help mitigate memory retention issues in older learners. Future research should include a larger and more diverse sample across multiple language centers and regions, ensuring greater representativeness in terms of age, gender, and educational background.

Lastly, future research should evaluate teacher training and pedagogical adaptations for different age groups. While this study explored teachers' perspectives on age-related learning differences, it did not assess how well teacher training programs prepare educators to work with older vs. younger adult learners. Future studies should investigate whether tailored teacher training improves instructional effectiveness and what pedagogical models work best for mixed-age classrooms.

6.6 Final Conclusion

This study investigated the effect of age on English language acquisition among adult learners at Zawia Language Center, focusing on differences in learning styles, challenges, and instructional preferences. By analyzing quantitative data (student questionnaires) and qualitative insights (teacher interviews), the study examined whether age significantly influences language learning outcomes. The findings revealed that while age affects learning styles and confidence levels, it does not inherently determine language proficiency. Instead, factors such as motivation, structured practice, exposure to English, and instructional strategies play a more crucial role in language learning success. The study found that younger learners (18–30 years) were more adaptable to new vocabulary and pronunciation, while older learners (30+ years) excelled in structured, grammar-focused learning but faced challenges in memory retention, speaking confidence, and adaptability to new learning methods. Despite these differences, both groups favored structured classroom-based learning, with younger learners engaging more in interactive, technology-based methods, and older learners preferring explicit grammar instruction and repetition-based exercises. One of the most significant findings was that motivation alone is not enough for language learning success, as many learners reported being motivated but did not practice English consistently outside the classroom. Teachers also emphasized the importance of

confidence-building activities for older learners and structured discipline for younger learners to maximize learning outcomes.

These findings have important implications for language teaching and curriculum development. The study highlights the need for a blended learning approach that integrates structured instruction for older learners and interactive, technology-enhanced learning for younger students. Additionally, flexible learning schedules, confidence-building strategies, and practical language application are essential for improving adult language learning. Teachers should also receive specialized training to address age-related learning differences and create inclusive classroom environments that support learners of all ages.

While this study provides valuable insights, it also has limitations, such as its small sample size, reliance on self-reported data, and cross-sectional design. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to track language learning progress over time, cognitive and neurological assessments to examine memory and processing speed, and psychological studies on motivation and learning anxiety. Additionally, further research should explore how digital learning tools and informal learning environments contribute to English language acquisition across different age groups.

Ultimately, this study reinforces the idea that age is not a barrier to language learning but rather a factor that shapes learning styles and instructional needs. The success of adult learners in acquiring English depends more on personalized teaching approaches, structured practice, and a supportive learning environment than on age alone. By adapting instructional methods, fostering motivation, and addressing psychological barriers, educators can help adult learners overcome challenges and achieve fluency in English. These findings provide valuable contributions to second language acquisition research and practical applications for improving adult language education, ensuring that learners of all ages can successfully acquire English in a way that aligns with their unique needs and capabilities.

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Appendix

Interview Questions and Participant Answers (Example from Participant 1)

1. Can you tell me about your experience in teaching adult students at the Azawia Language Center?

I have taught adult students with different levels and backgrounds. Many are motivated because they need English for work or study. Teaching adults is interesting because they bring real life experience to class.

2. What differences, if any, do you notice in the way younger adult learners (e.g., 18–30) and older adult learners (e.g., above 30 years) approach learning English?

Younger adults usually learn faster and enjoy games and group work. Older adults are more serious and patient. They prefer clear explanations and practical examples.

3. Do you find that age affects how quickly or effectively adult students acquire English? If yes, in what ways?

Yes, sometimes. Younger adults often remember new words faster. Older adults may learn more slowly, but they understand grammar and meaning more deeply.

4. Can you describe any challenges older adult learners face compared to younger ones when learning English?

Older learners may feel less confident speaking. Some have limited time because of work or family. They may also need more practice to remember vocabulary.

5. Do you adapt your teaching strategies based on the age of the students? If yes, how?

Yes. For younger adults, I use interactive activities and technology. For older adults, I give clear explanations, more practice time, and real life examples.

6. In your experience, do older adult students benefit more from specific types of activities or resources compared to younger adults?

Yes. They benefit from practical tasks like daily conversations, useful reading texts, and step by step exercises. They also like repetition and review.

7. Do you have any recommendations for improving English language teaching for adult learners of different age groups?

Teachers should be flexible and understand learners' needs. Use different activities,

give support and encouragement, and connect lessons to real life. This helps all age groups learn better.