

KINDERGARTEN MANAGERS AND PARENTS' AWARENESS TOWARDS CHILDREN'S SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AT A VERY YOUNG AGE

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ABSTRACT

Everyday activities in kindergartens are supposed to be vital for the children's development and learning, including social skills (Meland, Kaltvedt, & Reikerås, 2016). Learning English as a second language has turned into a must for preschoolers in Iran. Parents insist on enrolling in those kindergartens where they can make sure there is an opportunity for their young children to learn English even before starting to speak in their mother tongue. This paper is to examine the extent to which Iranian kindergarten managers and preschoolers' parents are familiar with the appropriate age of learning a second language. To this end, data were elicited from 120 parents and 6 kindergarten managers at kindergartens. Instrumentation included a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The result of the interview revealed that managers agreed on the implementation of second language acquisition programs under the supervision of educated experts in Iranian kindergartens. The findings of the questionnaire revealed that it is better for children to begin learning a second language like English after they have mastered their mother tongue. Besides, our findings revealed that it is better if children start learning a language at an early age (5/6). However, not all research suggests that younger children do necessarily have an advantage over older children.

KEYWORDS: second language acquisition, preschoolers, kindergarten, mother tongue

INTRODUCTION

With the advent of early childhood education programs, people are making huge investments on helping young children to learn a language other than their home language. Every interaction within an early childhood program either encourages the community or prevents it (Comer & Ben-Avie, 2010). "Therefore, excellent early childhood programs have in place a process that pulls the energies and abilities of all the members of the school community together so that everyone children, educators, parents, and community members develop well" (Comer & Ben-Avie, 2010, p.87). For instance,

the race to the Top-Early Challenge was designed to support systems in order to improve the quality of early learning and development programs and increase access to high-quality programs for children to meet their needs and help them enter kindergarten ready to succeed (Early, Maxwell, Ponder, & Pan, 2017). Various aspects of child development and learning including both cognitive abilities and language skills are closely tied to later school achievement (Pearce, Scalzi, Lynch, & Smithers, 2016). Accordingly, Espinosa (2010) postulated that bilingualism or the state of learning two languages presses cognitive, cultural, and economic advantages.

Ellis (2008) used the term SLA to refer to the acquisition of any language after the acquisition of mother tongue. He postulated, “there are two aspects of L2 acquisition; the universal aspects and the variable aspects” (p.19). Variations in the rate of L2 development and in what learners show development is evident among both adults and children (Ellis, 2008). There is great evidence that age, motivation and attitude, learning style/strategy and intelligence are among constituent factors in this area (Ellis, 2008; Ellis, 1985; Skehan, 2002).

Consistent discussions on the role of age and the existence of a critical period hypothesis (CPH) have always attracted the attention of researchers since the inception of second language acquisition (SLA) as a field of study. It is commonly thought that younger language learners achieve more success and indeed researchers have found a significant relationship between age of acquisition and ultimate attainment in at least some aspects of the second language, with age showing itself to be the strongest predictor (Nejadansari, & Nasrollahzadeh, 2011). The Critical Period Hypothesis supports this. The age issue is an important theme for theory building in second language acquisition research, for educational policy-making, and for language pedagogy (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). Krashen, Long, and Scarcella (1979, p.161) as pioneers in studying the role of age in L2 acquisition reviewed a number of studies and came to three main conclusions as follows,

- (1) Adults proceed through the early stages of syntactic and morphological development faster than children.
- (2) Older children acquire faster than younger children
- (3) Acquirers who begin natural exposure to second language during childhood achieve higher L2 proficiency than those beginning as adults.

Originally discussed in the late 1960s by Eric Lenneberg, according to this hypothesis in order for the speaker to reach the native-like fluency, language acquisition must take place before puberty. “Critical period hypothesis (CPH) claims that there is a fixed span of years during which language can take place naturally and effortlessly, and after which it is not possible to be completely successful” (Ellis, 2009, p.24). In other words, after a certain age, the pattern of learning changes and this proves the notion of discontinuity in learning (Ellis, 2009). “Initially, this period was equated with the period taken for lateralization of the language function to the left side of the brain to be completed”

(Nejadansari & Nasrollahzadeh, 2011, p.19). “Overall then, the available evidence speaks against CPH. There is no clear end point beyond which L2 learners will fail to achieve native-speaker proficiency. Rather there is a gradual decline in the ability to learn an L2 with age starting from early childhood” (Ellis, 2009, p.26). Moreover, the CPH postulates that younger learners are better at language learning than the older ones, and this is considered as a well-known argument based on the CPH as the version of younger-is-better (Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson, 2003).

“Quite different from initial rate of acquisition, ultimate level of attainment, namely the stage at which the learner achieves native-speaker competence (Felix, 1985) favors children, not adults” (Dong & Ren, 2013, p.1). Accordingly, research in support of Krashen, et al. reveals that those learners who start acquiring an L2 in adolescence or as adults learn more rapidly than those who start in childhood. The increasing number of preschoolers learning English as a second language reveals that English language learning is a great fascination for both parents and their preschool aged children (Farzaneh & Movahed, 2015). “There is certainly some reasoning supporting this increasing attention to English language learning throughout the preschool years, including the point that the child's brain is like a sponge, it will absorb everything that they hear” (Farzaneh & Movahed, 2015, p.858). The research to date proposes that the effect may be a minimal one in the case of grammar, but possibly more eminent in the case of pronunciation (Nejadansari & Nasrollahzadeh, 2011). Besides, some researchers believe that teaching English to preschool children could potentially interfere with their future performance in learning their first language in elementary school (Farzaneh & Movahed, 2015). However, considering a number of studies which took whether for or against position toward the CPH, what finally makes learning easy at one age or difficult at another is still under long debate (Twyford, 1987).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this section is to review the literature, which is related to the current study.

Critical Period Hypothesis

“The Critical Period Hypothesis refers to a particular time of human life that allows people to acquire a language in a natural environment faster and easier without any outside intervention and formal instruction. Later, a theory called, Biological Foundations of Language, developed by Lenneberg (1967), suggested that natural language acquisition “by mere exposure” could only take place during a critical period, lasting from about age two to puberty” (Rahman, Pandian, Karim, & Shahed, 2017, p.2). In the existing literature on Second Language Acquisition (SLA), the effect of age and the capacity of second language acquisition by humans in relation to the critical period hypothesis was highly appreciated to find out whether there is any association of Critical Period (CP) ending due to the acquisitions of an additional language, or if there are any qualitative differences with late language acquisition (Rahman et al, 2017).

A common belief was hold among EFL practitioners that younger language learners are more successful as they found a relationship between age of acquisition and ultimate achievement of the learners in at least some aspects of the second language, with age showing itself to be the strongest predictor of success (Nejadansari & Nasrollahzadeh, 2011). The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) supports this. The current CP Hypothesis holds that humans have a maximum capacity for acquiring languages early in life, if not on the exposure of language during the early time, the capacity will disappear or decline with maturation (Dong & Ren, 2013). Besides, CPH helps us to observe the effects of age on L2 acquisition.

As far as Critical Period Hypothesis is concerned, there is no agreement whether there is such a period or not but they believe that after a certain age, the pattern of learning changes and there are maturational effects evident in L2 acquisition (Ellis, 2008). There is no discontinuity because of age. Sounds like the best age to learn a second language is primary school age. The relationship between gender and L2 acquisition is highly context-sensitive.

Second Language Acquisition and Age

SLA researchers have faced various problems in investigating L2 acquisition and this was a great action taken to explain the enormous variation in the success of individual learners. Variation is evident in both adult and children acquisition both in terms of speed of learning and different aspects of L2 development (Ellis, 2008). While children achieve higher levels of proficiency, adults are better learners in the earlier stages of development especially where knowledge of grammar is taken into consideration (Ellis, 2008). “There are many differences among second language learners and such diversities may have a direct effect on second language learning. Most authors state that age, motivation and attitude, learning style/strategy and intelligence are among determinative factors in this area (Ellis, 1985; Skehan, 2002), with age showing to be the strongest predictor of success” (Farzaneh & Movahed, 2015, p.858).

“The two contradictory implications for age effect role in L2 acquisition are resolved when observing initial rate of acquisition and ultimate level of attainment in the learner of different age, as well as acquisition capacity loss in a critical and a sensitive period evidenced with investigations on age-related decline in acquiring for different area of linguistic domains” (Dong & Ren, 2013, p.2). According to Krashen, Long, and Scarcella (1979), adults gain an advantage over children when it comes to rate of acquisition and older children learn more rapidly than younger children. Unlike the initial rate of acquisition, in terms of ultimate level of attainment, namely the stage at which the learner achieves native-speaker competence, childrens’ performance is proved to be significantly better than adults (Dong & Ren, 2013). However, L2 acquisition, whether observed from initial rate of acquisition or ultimate attainment is dependent on the age at which learning begins.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. To what extent are preschooler's parent's familiar with the right age to start the acquisition of a second Language?
2. What viewpoints do Iranian kindergarten managers hold toward the acquisition of English as a second language at a very young age?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Two groups of stakeholders including 120 parents of preschool children and 6 kindergarten managers (1 MA holder in Early Childhood Education, 4 BA holders in General Psychology, and 1 BA holder in Educational Planning and Management) at Iranian child centers participated in this study.

Instrumentation

Two data elicitation techniques were used in this study: a questionnaire (see Appendix A by Gawi, 2012) and a semi-structured interview (see Appendix B). More specifically, the questionnaire which was administered to the parents, consisted of 11 Likert-type items (Gawi, 2012). It provided information on age related factors affecting the acquisition of L2. Each item provided a 4-point ranking scale, which denoted either the level of agreement (A: strongly agree, and B: agree), neutrality (not sure), or disagreement (D: disagree, and E: strongly disagree). The questionnaire was piloted with representative samples of the corresponding participants and the items were further improved. The language of the questionnaire was English and it was then translated into Persian by one of the researchers. An exemplar of the questionnaire is enclosed in Appendix A. The content validity indicators of the questionnaires including relevance and clarity of the items were checked by the researchers.

The semi-structured interviews were intended to elicit information from kindergarten managers to find out what their perception is toward learning a second language at a very young age (English). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six managers at Iranian child centers. Two core questions served as the basis for the interviews: "What do you think about second language acquisition programs for preschoolers in Iranian Kindergartens?", and "What is the best age to start to learn a second language? Why?"; however, other supportive questions were asked when the need arose. The interviews were conducted in Persian and lasted approximately 15 minutes.

Procedure

The data collection started with the administration of the questionnaires to the corresponding participants. The questionnaire was piloted with representative samples of the participants including at least thirty members. Then, the Cronbach's alpha reliability index for the questionnaire piloted on a group of 30 participants was calculated. After ensuring the internal consistency of the items in the scale the questionnaire was

administered and a total of one hundred and twenty participants filled in it. Then, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The data was elicited from kindergarten managers to find out what their perception was toward young children's learning a second language (English). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six managers at Iranian child centers. The interview findings will be described in the result section.

Data Analysis

A mixed-methods approach, which integrates both quantitative and qualitative data in a single investigation (Dornyei, 2007) was utilized in this study. The results of the questionnaires were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS.

The elicited qualitative data through the interviews were then collected to provide triangulation with the quantitative data (Friedman, 2012). Content analysis and descriptive analysis were applied to the results of the interviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Questionnaire Results

The first research question targeted the extent to which preschooler's parents were familiar with the right age to start the acquisition of a second Language. Table 1 and 2 displays the reliability index both for the questionnaire piloted and the main question.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics (Pilot data)

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.816	11

The Cronbach's alpha reliability index for the questionnaire piloted on a group of 30 participants was .816 (Table 1)

Table 2: Reliability Statistics (Main data)

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.903	11

The Cronbach's alpha for the main question administered to 120 parents was .903 (Table 2).

Table 3 displays the frequencies and percentages of the responses given to the items of the questionnaire. Based on these results it can be concluded that;

Question 1: Majority of the respondents believed that adult learners are better than young learners in reading skills (30.8 % strongly agree + 22.5 % agree). More than 21 percent did not agree with this idea and another 25 percent held a neutral position.

Question 2: More than 73 percent of the respondents believed that the younger the learners are, the better they learn English (37.5 % strongly agree + 35.8 % agree). On the other hand, 11.7 percent held a negative attitude and another 15 percent were neutral.

Question 3: More than 61 percent of the respondents believed that the younger the learners are, the more fluent they speak (22.5 % strongly agree + 39.2 % agree). On the other hand; 24.2 percent held a negative attitude and another 14.2 percent held neutral position.

Question 4: Majority of the respondents believed that younger learners cannot acquire English vocabulary better than the adults (9.2 % strongly disagree + 31.7 % disagree), while more than 32 percent (9.2 % strongly agree + 23.3 % agree) held the opposite view; and another 26.7 percent held a neutral position.

Question 5: More than 65 percent of the respondents believed that 5-6 is a suitable age to start learning English (31.7 % strongly agree + 32.5 % agree). On the other hand; 18.3 percent held a negative attitude and another 17.5 percent were neutral.

Question 6: More than 76 percent of the respondents believed that the 12-13 is the best age to start learning English (50 % strongly agree + 26.7 % agree). On the other hand; less than ten percent of them (.8 strongly disagree + 13.3 disagree) percent held a negative attitude and about 13 percent were neutral.

Question 7: More than 80 percent of the respondents believed learning English in kindergarten may confuse students with their L1 (30.8 % strongly agree + 50 % agree). On the other hand; less than ten percent of them (1.7 strongly disagree + 6.7 disagree) believed that learning a foreign language in kindergarten will not confuse learners with their mother language. More than ten percent of respondents were neutral.

Question 8: More than 55 percent of the respondents believed learning English should be started after mastering L1 (27.5 % strongly agree + 28.3 % agree). On the other hand; about 16 percent of them (6.2 strongly disagree + 10 disagree) held the opposite view. More than 27 percent of respondents were undecided.

Question 9: More than 50 percent of the respondents believed that the performance of the students who started learning English in 12-13 is not weak (13.3 % strongly disagree + 37.5 % disagree). On the other hand; more than 24 percent of them (7.5 % strongly agree + 16.7 % agree) believed that those who started English in 12-13 had a weak performance and 25 percent were neutral.

Table 3: Frequencies and Percentages of Parents' Attitude towards Right Age of L2 Learning

		Choices					Total
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Idea	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Adult learners are better than younger ones in reading skills	N	5	21	30	27	37	120
	%	4.2%	17.5%	25.0%	22.5%	30.8%	100.0%
The younger students they are, the better they will learn English.	N	0	14	18	43	45	120
	%	0.0%	11.7%	15.0%	35.8%	37.5%	100.0%
Young learners speak English more fluently than adult learners.	N	2	27	17	47	27	120
	%	1.7%	22.5%	14.2%	39.2%	22.5%	100.0%
The young students are much better than the adult ones in acquiring vocabulary.	N	11	38	32	28	11	120
	%	9.2%	31.7%	26.7%	23.3%	9.2%	100.0%
The suitable age to start learning EFL is the age of 5-6.	N	4	18	21	38	39	120
	%	3.3%	15.0%	17.5%	31.7%	32.5%	100.0%
The best age to start learning EFL is 12-13.	N	1	11	16	32	60	120
	%	0.8%	9.2%	13.3%	26.7%	50.0%	100.0%
Learning a foreign language in Kindergarten may confuse students with L1.	N	2	8	13	60	37	120
	%	1.7%	6.7%	10.8%	50.0%	30.8%	100.0%
It is better for students to start L2 after mastering L1.	N	8	12	33	34	33	120
	%	6.7%	10.0%	27.5%	28.3%	27.5%	100.0%
The performance of students who start learning EFL at the age of 12/13 and have studied the language for four years is weak.	N	16	45	30	20	9	120
	%	13.3%	37.5%	25.0%	16.7%	7.5%	100.0%
The performance of students who begin learning a foreign language at an earlier age (5/6) is better than those who start later (12/ 13).	N	21	48	27	10	14	120
	%	17.5%	40.0%	22.5%	8.3%	11.7%	100.0%
Students who start learning English at the ages of (12-13) are better in grammatical rules than younger ones (5-6 years).	N	2	12	12	32	62	120
	%	1.7%	10.0%	10.0%	26.7%	51.7%	100.0%
Total	N	72	254	249	371	374	1320
	%	5.5%	19.2%	18.9%	28.1%	28.3%	100.0%

Question 10: More than 57 percent of the respondents believed that the performance of students who begin learning a foreign language at an earlier age (5/6) is not better than those who start later (12/ 13) (17.5 % strongly disagree + 40 % disagree). On the other hand; 19 percent of the respondents (11.7 % strongly agree + 8.3 % agree) believed that those who started English at an early age (5-6) have a better performance than those who start English at 12-13; while and 22.5 percent were neutral.

Question 11: More than 78 percent of the respondents believed that the students who begin learning a foreign language at (12/13) master grammatical rules better than those who start English at an early age (5-6) (51.7 % strongly agree + 26.7 % agree). On the other hand; about 11 percent held the opposite view; while and 10 percent were neutral.

Interview Findings

To answer the second research question, "What viewpoints do Iranian kindergarten managers hold toward acquisition of a second language at a very young age?", six

kindergarten managers were interviewed to express their opinions about the viewpoints they hold toward appropriateness of implementing second language acquisition programs in Iranian kindergartens. Thus, six interviews were conducted each taking at least 15 minutes and they were recorded so that the researcher would be capable of analyzing and transcribing the managers' viewpoints. The main findings are presented as follows:

Question 1: What do you think about second language acquisition programs for preschoolers in Iranian Kindergartens?

Altogether, the interviewees agreed on the implementation of second language acquisition with the supervision and presence of educated experts in Iranian kindergartens provided that it is rule-governed, systematic, principled, and charming enough to meet the urgent needs of young children. Accordingly, they believed that there is an absence of the right methodology and equipment to teach English to preschoolers in Iranian kindergartens. Most of them claimed that such teaching programs will be to the benefits of the learners if and only if they are accompanied by audio and video tutorials. Some of them highlighted the importance of playing games in any kind of teaching.

Participant 1: "Primarily, kindergartens in Iran cannot play a vital role in language learning because most managers lack the necessary knowledge in the field. Besides, the appropriate scientific tools, including computer hardware and educational software are not available."

Participant 2: "We cannot implement second language acquisition programs in our own kindergartens and the reason is the absence of a single program on behalf of the Organization of Welfare and Education. Unfortunately, we do not have child specialists in Iran since the related field of study does not exist in our country. Before running any program, we need to contact educated people and experts in the field."

Participant 3: "I agree with learning English in kindergartens, of course, if education is accompanied by playing games in order to create the necessary charm."

Participant 4: "In most daycare child centers English language is taught incorrectly and it is more like a taste work. Language-learning system must be performed by standard methods and principles. In our center we can only teach English to children by means of videos and educational books."

▲ *Participant 5:* "Acquisition of English in kindergartens must be accompanied by video and audio tutorials objectively. In other words, the right tools to be institutionalized in the child's mind must accompany it. This requires active cooperation and involvement of the parents."

Participant 6: "Acquisition of English in kindergartens must be accompanied by audio tutorials. Simple concepts should be taught by playing games. However, other concepts should be taught after the acquisition of mother tongue."

Question 2: What is the best age to start to learn a second language? Why?

Generally, asked about the right age to start learning a second language, one of the interviewees believed that second language acquisition should take place simultaneously with the acquisition of the mother tongue. One of them mentioned that it should be started after the acquisition of mother tongue. Others however, claimed that the best age to start learning English is when the child is 1-year-old and a half, 3 years old, and 4 years old. However, one of them further mentioned that it depends on the teaching methods.

Participant 1: “English is best learnt from birth with the acquisition of mother tongue. Children without any special rule, can become fluent in a second language whether English or any other languages.”

Participant 2: “First class in the elementary school. Because the child is has acquired the mother tongue and at the same time he or she has learned how to sit in the classroom”

Participant 3: “In my opinion, at any time a child is interested, learning English can be started. Pressure and coercion only impedes the child from learning.”

Participant 4: “One and a half years of age is the best age to learn English.”

Participant 5: “According to psychologists and those who have a saying in early childhood education the best age to start second language acquisition is at the age of four. Since the child’s mind is active and ready to learn. I highly welcome the implementation of such programs since learning English is a human need in today’s world. Our main purpose here is to help our children to be prepared for the upcoming school years of education namely, English or any other languages and subjects.”

Participant 6: “If English is taught using auditory and visual tutorials, it would be best to start at the age of 3. But if the teaching style is direct from age 9 onwards.”

Discussion

The current research paper offers a contribution to ongoing discussions about the age related factors as far as the acquisition of English as a second language is concerned at a very young age. The results show, as indicated by both questionnaire and interview findings, that managers agreed on the implementation of second language acquisition with the supervision and presence of educated experts in kindergartens provided that it is rule-governed, systematic, principled, and charming enough to meet the urgent needs of young children. According to Farzaneh and Movahed (2015), learning a foreign language like English may seem vital and necessary to many school kids in a non-English-speaking country like Iran. Accordingly, managers believed that there is an absence of the right methodology and equipment to teach English to preschoolers in Iranian kindergartens. Most of them claimed that such teaching programs would be to the benefits of the learners if and only if they are accompanied by audio and video tutorials. Some of them

highlighted the importance of playing games in any kind of teaching. According to Mohabbatsafa and Hüttner (2015), in game lessons, children are more actively involved in the learning process and thus react more to the teacher's instructions.

Besides, asked about the right age to start learning a second language, one of the interviewees believed that second language acquisition should take place simultaneously with the acquisition of the mother tongue. Similarly and in accordance with what McLaughlin (1992) claimed, the best way to learn a second language is to begin at birth and learn two languages simultaneously.

Another interviewee mentioned that language acquisition should take place after the acquisition of mother tongue. However, most of the parents highly welcomed the acquisition of a second language simultaneously, before, or even after the acquisition of mother tongue provided that English is taught using auditory and visual tutorials. Similarly, and in line with J. Piaget's theory of cognitive development stages, children process languages generally through sensory experience, and intelligence develops in the form of motor actions, young learners receive input that is more concrete (Zhao & Morgan, 2004). As Li (2014) observed "... L2 learners, educators, and parents should not conceive the assumption that only the early L2 learning will be effective and thus try to arrange children to learn L2 as early as possible regardless of children's own willing" (p.36). However, our results conflicted the findings of Marinova-Todd, Marshall, and Snow (2000), which observed that we cannot simply assume that the early the better, especially in the case of classroom instruction.

Majority of the respondents believed that adult learners are better than young learners in reading skills. Similarly, Krashen, Long, and Scarcella (1979), proved that adults proceed through early stages of morphological and syntactic development faster than children do, where the amount of time and exposure to the language are held constant.

More than 73 percent of the respondents believed that the younger the learners are, the better they learn English. In line with our findings, Li (2014) observed that younger learners can outperform older learners with respect to ultimate attainment regardless of some older learners who do perform better initially in some aspects of L2. The findings of a study by Gawi (2012), tended to support the common belief that the earlier the better in language learning.

More than 61 percent of the respondents believed that the younger the learners are, the more fluent they speak. According to Farzaneh and Movahed (2015), children are superior in learning to speak a second language with a good accent than adults. In similar terms, Li (2014) claimed that this is largely dependent not only on more amount of exposure but also on more opportunities for communication (Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994; Singleton, 2001). According to Nejadansari and Nasrollahzadeh (2011), only child learners are capable of acquiring a native accent in informal learning contexts. Similarly, Nejadansari and Nasrollahzadeh (2011) found that process differences might occur in second language pronunciation especially in the case of learners beginning after 12 years.

Majority of the respondents believed that younger learners cannot acquire English vocabulary better than the adults can, while more than 32 percent held the opposite view; and another 26.7 percent held a neutral position. However, the findings of the students' tests in a study by Gawi (2012) concerning English skills like conversation, vocabulary learning, reading, writing and grammar revealed that the performance of students who started learning English at age 5-6 is significantly better than those who did it at the age of 12-13.

More than 65 percent of the respondents believed that 5-6 is a suitable age to start learning English. This was in line with the findings of a study by Long (1990) which puts the critical age at 6 years, but Scovel (1981) proves that there is no evidence to support this and argues for a pre-puberty start.

More than 80 percent of the respondents believed learning English in kindergartens may confuse students with their L1 and therefore it should be mastered after L1. According to Farzaneh and Movahed (2015), the reason is largely dependent on the truth that children who start learning a new language early in life will have a "foreign" accent; this can cause mispronunciation and misunderstandings, and impede future opportunities in using their mother languages professionally. In a similar way, Harley (1986) claimed that there might be negative transfer of age-related L1 production strategies as far as young language learners are concerned. Farzaneh and Movahed (2015) which observed that children might manifest interference or transfer from L2 to their mother tongue (L), especially at those points in L1, which are more similar to L2, significantly proved our findings.

More than 50 percent of the respondents believed that the performance of the students who started learning English in 12-13 is not weak. Accordingly, Krashen, Long, and Scarcella (1979), highlighted that adults are superior to children in both the rate and speed of the acquisition. However, according to Zhao and Morgan (2004), the affective and social factors may act as intervening variables that hinder L2 acquisition in adulthood. In the same way, since learning language involves a certain amount of risk-taking and as learners avoid making mistakes in their language, then the risk-aversion tendency will stop active experimentation with language use.

More than 57 percent of the respondents believed that the performance of students who begin learning a foreign language at an earlier age (5/6) is not better than those who start later (12/ 13). In the same line Stern, Burstall, and Harley (1975), observed that children who had begun language instruction at age eleven performed better on second language proficiency than children who had begun at eight years of age. As one of the age-dependent factors, fossilization affects learners' performance in that, the older second language learners the more likely they tend to fossilize (Palea, 2015). The results of a study by Ghenghesh (2010) revealed that that L2 motivation decreases with age.

More than 78 percent of the respondents believed that the students who begin learning a foreign language at twelve or thirteen master grammatical rules better than those who start English at an early age (5-6). According to Major (2014) “the acquisition of grammar in a second language seems to require that a late learner be unusually interested in and devoted to language structure, and must be consciously aware of grammatical form” (p.12). Similarly, and in accordance with what Ellis (2008) postulated, adults are better learners in the earlier stages of development especially where knowledge of grammar is concerned.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

To deal with the first research question the findings were interesting as they revealed that the younger the learners are, the better they learn English. This is largely because in such cases children become more proficient and fluent in terms of speaking, accent and pronunciation. Majority of the respondents believed that younger learners couldn't acquire English vocabulary better than adults can. Most of the respondents approved that five or six is the appropriate age to start learning a second language. Majority of the respondents believed that adult learners are better than young learners in mastering grammar and reading skills.

As regards the second research question of the study, findings revealed that managers agreed on the implementation of second language acquisition with the supervision and presence of educated experts in kindergartens provided that it is rule-governed, systematic, principled, and charming enough to meet the urgent needs of young children. Concerning the appropriate age to start learning second language kindergarten managers each held a different position. It was concluded that it is good to start learning before, simultaneously, or even after learning a second language. However, the majority believed that learning a second language after the acquisition of L1 is preferred.

Considering the size and scope of the study, any conclusion drawn from the findings will require further research and investigation. As with any other studies, ours is limited and as a result, there is considerable potential for future research in this area. Other studies can be conducted to find out about the viewpoints of EFL practitioners toward second language acquisition programs in Iran. A needs analysis should be involved and further applied in designing the right syllabus. Furthermore, we hope the findings of our study make a positive contribution to kindergarten managers, teachers, teacher trainers, material developers, syllabus designers, and psychologists.

Although this study can promise a great deal in terms of teaching implications and valuable results, it has certain limitations. First, only a few members of the participants were willing to take part in the interview process. Second, lack of cooperation from some of kindergartens was another limitation in the current research agenda.

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APPENDIX A

This questionnaire helps in the research to evaluate "Age Variable" in learning EFL at Iranian Kindergartens

Childs Age and Gender: (a) Male [] (b) Female []
Parents age: (a) 20-30 [] (b) 30-40 [] (c) More than 40 yrs []
Qualifications: (a) Bachelor [] (b) Master [] (c) PhD [] (d) Diploma []

Can you, please, give your input by answering the following questions to contribute to this study? Choose A, B, C, D or E. Answer according to how far you agree with each of them and write it in the box.

A: strongly agree B: agree C: not sure D: disagree E: strongly disagree

Adult learners are better than younger ones in reading skills

The younger students they are, the better they will learn English.

Young learners speak English more fluently than adult learners.

The young students are much better than the adult ones in acquiring vocabulary.

The suitable age to start learning EFL is the age of 5-6.

The best age to start learning EFL is 12-13.

Learning a foreign language in Kindergarten may confuse students with L1

It is better for students to start L2 after mastering L1.

The performance of students who start learning EFL at the age of 12/13 and have studied the language for four years is weak.

The performance of students who begin learning a foreign language at an earlier age (5/6) is better than those who start later (12/ 13).

Students who start learning English at the ages of (12-13) are better in grammatical rules than younger ones (5-6 years).

Appendix B

Name:

Qualifications:

1. What do you think about second language acquisition programs for preschoolers in Iranian Kindergartens?
2. What is the best age in order to start to learn a second language? Why?

WWW.IJLLALW