

Age Factor in SLA

Second language acquisition (SLA) is influenced by the age of the learner. Children, who already have solid literacy skills in their own language, seem to be in the best position to acquire a new language efficiently. Motivated, older learners can be very successful too, but usually struggle to achieve native-speaker-equivalent pronunciation and intonation.

The best time for SLA to begin is when a child is between the ages of 5-9. At this time their L1 has already had a foundation and they are still within the critical learning period. Adults learn faster than children, and this is more applicable to grammar than pronunciation, although in the case of formal learning situations adults seem to do better even in the pronunciation area.

As age plays an important role, the ways of teaching must be different. Teaching children it is a good idea to use children's communicative needs to provide language and play games; use real tasks; introduce narratives; foster their imagination and creativity; foster interaction and talk; organize teaching around themes. Using gesture, intonation, demonstration, actions and facial expressions; using tasks, either real or invented; playing games (without provoking embarrassment); introducing narratives and other types of discourse; foster diverse groupings – are clues for teaching adults.