

CONSEQUENCES OF LATE ENGLISH LEARNERS

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Abstract

This study investigates the consequences experienced by late learners and explores how these learners perceive the challenges and benefits throughout their language acquisition journey. Utilizing a sequential explanatory mixed-method approach, quantitative data were gathered from 50 participants via a structured questionnaire and followed by qualitative interviews with four individuals representing early and late English learners. The quantitative findings revealed that late learners frequently face difficulties in grammar, pronunciation, and fluency accompanied by lower self-confidence and declining motivation. These challenges are aligned with the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) and Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which attribute age and emotional factors as key barriers in second language acquisition. However, qualitative data suggest that strong instrumental motivation, self-directed learning strategies, and the use of digital tools help late learners overcome these limitations. Despite cognitive constraints, age was not the sole determinant of success. Learning outcomes were influenced by learner ability, technological engagement, and environmental support. The study concludes that pedagogical strategies should address both the technical and emotional needs of late learners and suggest policy reform that includes flexible start times, digital resources, and age-appropriate support systems.

Keywords: Late Learners, Second Language Acquisition, Critical Period Hypothesis

INTRODUCTION

Currently, English focusing on EIL (English as International Language) is expanding internationally according to Global Englishes research and affecting international business and education (Rosa et al., 2024). The existence of English is a necessity of global mobility which makes everyone implicitly a learner of English. It requires active participation in various activities and communication along with successful engagement and collaboration on a worldwide scale (Bakhodirkhonova & Ziyadullayeva, 2024). Unfortunately, the qualities of learners are highly variable due to differences in environment, motivation, and learning style, so quite a few learners have difficulties in speaking English (Hidayat & Devi, 2024). Also, not all of us have the opportunity to learn English at a young age, which benefits from a home literacy environment (Setiawan & Agustina, 2022). Hence, several challenges may influence the ability and confidence to use the language by those who start learning in adulthood (Baumert et al., 2020).

These challenges stem from neurocognitive factors that constrain the flexibility of the adult brain when it comes to learning new language features. In other words, as people age, their brains become less adaptable to learning certain parts of a new language (Heidlmayr et al., 2021). Moreover, the Critical Period

Hypothesis (CPH) also states that linguistics is difficult for the brain to absorb as an adult and the most successful language learners are those who are optimal from an early age (Lenneberg, 1967 in Prela et al., 2024). Nonetheless, English learning in Indonesia has various accesses and approaches to education. In the national school, English learning has been emphasized at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels (Alfarisy, 2021; Faridatuunnisa, 2020). Meanwhile, in international schools, English learning starts at an early age. The term international school itself means a school that utilizes English in all of its delivery and learning activities (Ariin, 2024). Furthermore, they also utilize a different curriculum from the general national school, which utilizes the *International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum, Cambridge International Examinations (CIE), ABEKA, ACE, Western Association Schools and Colleges (WASC)*, and others (Mardalena et al., 2022).

Thus, there is a high difference in English language proficiency between children who are taught English at an early age and those who are taught English at an older age. The term early childhood refers to children aged 0 to 6 years old. At this age, children need encouragement to optimize their developmental aspects. Which includes religious and moral values, cognitive, social-emotional, physical motoric, and art and language (Dra et al., 2013 in Yulia & Eliza, 2021). Other than that, there is a theory that states that since humans are still in the mother's womb until they reach a few years of early age, it can be referred to as the "Golden Age" due to the fact that it is identical to the conception period. Some researchers also mention that when the fetus is still in the mother's womb, the brain growth takes over at a high speed and reaches almost the total number of normal brain cells. Later on, the process will be slowed down when the baby is born and up to 24 months old. However, the process is still able to continue until the baby reaches the age of 4 or 5 years. Which at this age refers to a very important and critical period of child development (Bonita et al., 2022).

This is related to the theory of neurophysiology that suggests the important role of neuroplasticity in the process of learning the pronunciation of a new language and this ability is also interconnected with how we understand the meaning of the word (Heidlmayr et al., 2021). Besides, it can support rapid vocabulary acquisition, native-like pronunciation, and overall language acquisition. This makes it possible for learners to absorb and sustain a new language with significantly little cognitive impediment when compared with those who start learning after this age. Then, what are the consequences experienced by individuals who began learning English as Late Learners? Late learners will have more difficulties due to decreased brain flexibility, which often results in challenges in pronunciation, grammar, and fluency (Tuyen, 2021). Not only that, but children who learn English at an older age often experience difficulties in adjusting learning methods, differences in learning speed, and an uncomfortable learning environment (Baumert et al., 2020).

Yet, there is a different view about Late Learners. They suggest that Late Learners perform slightly better at thinking about and analyzing language as a system known as metalinguistic which develops through learning a second language in a learning environment (Peal & Lambert, 1962; Clark, 1978; Tunmer & Myhill, 1984 in Prela et al., 2024). In previous studies, there are various views that support

the idea that the ideal age in providing a lesson to a child about language is at an early age. This was due to the fact that this period is a time when the child is still in the stage of growth. From that point on, educational support is highly needed in order to optimize all aspects of development. These potentials include religious and moral values, cognitive, socio-emotional, physical abilities, art and language, and so on (Susfenti, 2021; Yulia & Eliza, 2021). It is also supported by the idea of the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) which states that the idea has a specific time frame in development regarding human sensitivity to linguistic input (Lenneberg, 1967 in Prela et al., 2024). However, some researchers state that there are benefits when it comes to learning English at an older age. One of them is having a slightly better performance regarding developing metalinguistic awareness (Peal & Lambert, 1962; Clark, 1978; Tunmer & Myhill, 1984 in Prela et al., 2024).

Although previous research has largely emphasized the advantages of learning English at an early age, especially within the framework of the Critical Period Hypothesis, there is still a lack of systematic attention to the experiences of learners who start learning English at an older age. Most research has focused on cognitive outcomes and differences by age, but has not sufficiently explored the emotional challenges, motivational factors and adaptive strategies used by late learners in their language learning journey. Moreover, the studies that highlight the potential benefits of late learning, such as increased metalinguistic awareness, are still limited in scope and rarely contextualized in the Indonesian educational landscape. In particular, the integration of digital tools and flexible learning strategies as compensatory resources for late learners remains underexplored.

In this study, the novelty lies in trying to fill these gaps by combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate the consequences faced by English language learners who start learning at an older age. In contrast with previous studies that mostly compare proficiency outcomes between early and late learners, it highlights learners' own perspectives regarding the challenges and benefits, situating them in cognitive, emotional and technological dimensions. By doing so, it provides new insights into how late learners navigate their language learning journey and offers some practical implications for designing inclusive English language learning policies and methodologies in Indonesia.

By incorporating some of the findings from previous studies, it can be concluded that English learning is recommended from an early age in order to optimize its developmental aspects as well as its learning potential. However, it is also important to develop appropriate strategies for late learners. In establishing a strategy, many things must be considered including, the unique needs, challenges, and advantages of each age. Thus, this research proposes the main question, how do these learners perceive the challenges and benefits of their language acquisition journey?

This research aims at distributing an exploration of a result that the optimal time to start learning and also how learning facilities and infrastructure affect learning outcomes. On the other hand, it is to present a language learning policy, especially English, which should be designed comprehensively, including learning start times, strategies for late learners, as well as supporting facilities and

infrastructure such as teacher training, learning technology, and interactive learning environments. By having a structured policy, English learning can be optimized for all ages, bring an end to the gap, and also allow the next generation to participate in the global community actively.

METHOD

This research offers a mixed-method approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data within a single study. This method allows research to address complex questions such as to provide a more comprehensive insight into the impact of age on English language learning (Olaghere, 2022). A mixed-method explanatory is the choice of the researcher in completing this article. Since, it indicates that the data to be collected and analysed first is quantitative data and followed by the collection of qualitative data to explain and strengthen the first findings. In addition, the method includes a research design that is used sequentially with two different phases (Widmer, 2021). The researcher chose a mixed-method approach because the quantitative phase identifies general patterns of challenges faced by late learners, while the qualitative phase explores their personal experiences and coping strategies in more depth. Each method complements the other, where quantitative data provides measurable evidence and qualitative data adds contextual richness, resulting in more comprehensive findings.

For the first step, the researcher would collect quantitative data through questionnaires using Google Form. Approximately 50 participants will fill in the questionnaires, in particular for people who are learning English, whether they learning English at an early age or at an older age. The survey data will collect from children aged 17 years and above. The questionnaire includes the age at which they started learning English. Whether it starts at an early age with an age range of 0-6 years or starts from late learners with an age range above 12 years. It also supports previous findings that age 12 is already considered the end point of the critical period in language learning (Singleton and Lengyel, 1995 in Palupi et al., 2021). The data collection would measure language proficiency, fluency, and challenges experienced in language acquisition according to their respective levels. In the second step, the researcher would collect qualitative data through in-depth interviews by face-to-face. During the interview, the survey data that will be taken to support more concrete results will come from the participants who have filled out the questionnaire. There are four participants who were interviewed. Two of them are participants who learned English at an early age and the other two are participants who learned English at an older age.

Table 1. Description of the participant

No	Participant Initial	Types of learners
1	NNF	Early Learners (Under 7 Years Old)
2	NLACN	Early Learners (Under 7 Years Old)
3	NRA	Late Learners (Above 12 Years Old)
4	MDK	Late Learners (Above 12 Years Old)

These data would provide real insight into English language learners' experiences, perceptions, and strategies at their respective levels. Interviews provide a platform for participants to share their unique challenges and successes, adding depth and context to the numerical data.

The outcome data from these methods will be systematized to offer a comprehensive understanding of the impact of age on English learning. The quantitative data collected through questionnaires was analyzed using statistical software such as SPSS. The analysis included descriptive statistics to summarize participants' language proficiency, fluency, and the challenges they experienced. Additionally, a normality test was performed to determine whether the data met the assumptions for further analysis. To explore the relationship between learning age and language learning outcomes, a correlation analysis was conducted. These tests helped reveal patterns between the age of acquisition and various aspects of English learning performance. Meanwhile, for the qualitative data, the interview data will be transcribed and then subjected to thematic analysis. Which involves identifying learning strategies, motivation, obstacles, and also participants' experiences in the English learning process. These are then categorized to offer an in-depth insight into the factors that can influence learning outcomes in different ages. In order to ensure validity between these two data. Thus, there were several steps taken. For the quantitative data, questionnaires were designed to comprehensively measure key components such as proficiency, fluency, and challenges, with the questions that have been reviewed by the language education experts to determine content validity. Result from the quantitative data also will be triangulated with qualitative findings to increase overall credibility. For the qualitative data, triangulation will be applied by comparing the themes identified in the interviews with the patterns observed in the quantitative phase. Member checking will ensure that participants can review the summaries of their responses to ensure accuracy and interpretation. In addition, a complete description of the participants' responses will increase the trustability of the findings to similar contexts.

By integrating the results from both data, the study achieved a strong level of triangulation, strengthening its validity and reliability. Quantitative findings offer a wide-patterns, while qualitative data adds depth, offering a rich and comprehensive perspective. Through this approach, the researcher will not only obtain general results about the impact of learning English at different ages, but also be able to offer recommendations for policies and learning strategies which are more effective for early and late learners through the real results experienced by the participant.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research design is conducted through an explanatory mixed-method approach, which requires the researcher to collect quantitative data followed by qualitative data to provide and also prove the research findings. The quantitative data findings will analyse the statement about "What are the consequences experienced by individuals who began learning English as Late Learners?". Meanwhile, the qualitative data findings will explain the statement "How do these learners perceive the challenges and benefits of their language acquisition journey?". These findings will be critically

discussed by associating the real experiences of the participants with academic theory and also with the results of previous research to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

Quantitative Findings on Late Learners Consequences

This section will provide and discuss the collected data from approximately 50 participants through structured questionnaires, all of whom are early or late learners of English. Using SPSS, this data is analyzed using descriptive statistics, normality tests, and correlation analysis. The aim is to determine the pattern of challenge, level of confidence, motivational factors, and the effect of age on English language acquisition. By examining numerical data across variables such as grammar difficulties, pronunciation, learning obstacles, and learner motivation, this study will provide a comprehensive overview of the consequences faced by learners who start learning English at an age after 12.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2. The comparison of descriptive statistics

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
X1	50	1	2	1.42	.499
A1.1	50	1	4	3.24	.657
A1.2	50	1	4	2.54	.813
A1.3	50	1	4	2.34	.823
A1.4	50	1	5	2.82	1.335
B1.1_Kurangnya_Waktu	50	0	1	.28	.454
B1.2_Kurangnya_Sumber_Daya	50	0	1	.32	.471
B1.3_Kesulitan_Memahami_Grammar	50	0	1	.48	.505
B1.4_Kesulitan_Dengan_Pengucapan	50	0	1	.24	.431
B1.5_Kurang_Percaya_Diri	50	0	1	.48	.505
C1.1	50	1	4	2.02	.769
C1.2	50	1	5	3.28	1.691
Valid N (listwise)	50				

The descriptive statistics provided an overview of the participants' experiences as early and late learners of English, as categorized by variable X1. It indicates the time when participants started learning English, 1 is coded as early learner (before 7 years old) and 2 is coded as late learner (after 12 years old). The mean score for X1 is 1.42 ($SD = 0.499$), which indicates that most participants started learning English after the age of 12 and are therefore classified as late learners. The table presents some of the main language learning challenges faced by both groups, but with different levels of difficulty. The highest difficulty is found in learning grammar (A1.1) with an overall mean of 3.24 ($SD = 0.657$), which proves that grammar is still a relevant challenge, especially for late learners. Then, difficulty in pronunciation (A1.2) can also be said to be quite difficult (Mean = 2.54, $SD =$

0.813) which shows that many participants, especially late learners, have difficulties in pronouncing English words correctly.

Next, the confidence of using English in social interactions (A1.3) has a mean score of 2.34 (SD = 0.823), which indicates that there are a lot of participants who felt not confident to speak English in daily life. Meanwhile, participants' perceptions of the influence of age on learning ability (A1.4) showed a mean score of 2.82 (SD = 1.335). This shows that many participants believe if age has a real influence on their ability to acquire a language, especially English. This is perceived by late learners as a consequence they receive when learning English. However, the descriptive data also included binary-coded items, otherwise known as the data representation system in section B, which focuses on external challenges. Approximately 48% of the participants reported difficulties in understanding grammar (B1.3) and lack of confidence (B1.5). Meanwhile, participants who experienced lack of time (B1.1, Mean = 0.28) and resources (B1.2, Mean = 0.32) were at a lower percentage.

In terms of pronunciation difficulties, only 24% of participants reported it as a direct barrier, although pronunciation was generally rated as quite difficult in the previous section. Also, the last part of the descriptive data emphasizes motivation and the use of participant strategies in learning. The mean score for motivation (C1.1) to keep learning was 2.02 (SD = 0.769). This suggests that while some participants are motivated, overall, it is at a moderate level and quite likely affected by the challenges they face. However, the learning strategy (C1.2) received more positive ratings, with an average of 3.28 (SD = 1.691). This suggests that in spite of the difficulties the participants experienced, they still tried to improve their learning outcomes. This outcome proves that late learners face greater consequences in grammar mastery, self-confidence, and motivation compared to early learners. But many of them keep trying by using learning strategies that they find effective.

Normality Tests

Table 3. The comparison of normality tests

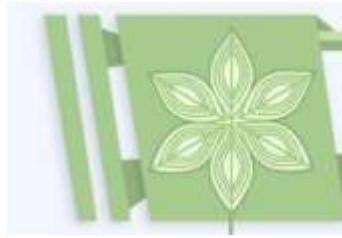
One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

		Unstandardized Residual
N		50
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}		.0000000
	Mean	.0000000
	Std. Deviation	1.33340035
Most Extreme Differences		
	Absolute	.155
	Positive	.155
	Negative	-.114
Test Statistic		.155
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.004 ^c

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

c. Lilliefors Significance Correction.



The One-Sample Kolmogrov-Smirnov (K-S) test was used to examine the normality of the data in this study. This test helps to establish whether participants' responses are spread out in a balanced and predictable pattern (normal distribution). The test involved 50 data points, with the residuals having a mean of 0.000 and a standard deviation of 1.333. The K-S test results proved that the test statistic was 0.155 and the significant value (Asymp. Sig/ 2-tailed) was 0.004, indicating that the distribution of residuals significantly does not conform to a normal distribution. Since this value is smaller than 0.05, the results reveal that the data is not normally distributed at the 95% confidence level.

These results indicate that the responses received from participants varied more than the expected situation of perfect or "normal". This could be due to participants having different ages, experiences, learning environments, or challenges, essentially including early learners and late learners. In spite of the non-normalized data, this data analysis can still be conducted by considering the varied nature of the data.

Correlations

Table 4. The comparison of correlations

Correlations													
	X1	A1.1	A1.2	A1.3	A1.4	BT_1_Pronunciation	BT_2_Kemampuan_Baca_Berpaham	BT_3_Kemampuan_Memahami_Grammar	BT_4_Kemampuan_Dengan_Peraturan	BT_5_Kemampuan_Pe	GT.1	GT.2	
X1	Pearson Correlation	1	.060	.184	-.166	.056	.011	-.063	-.290	.188	.075	-.322	-.048
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.660	.299	.462	.707	.940	.698	.093	.193	.607	.878	.754
	t		.00	.50	.53	.10	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50
A1.1	Pearson Correlation	.000	1	-.098	-.192	.120	.044	-.187	.261	.081	.015	-.171	-.069
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.660	.539	.182	.406	.762	.193	.067	.577	.919	.234	.496
	t		.00	.50	.53	.10	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50
A1.2	Pearson Correlation	.164	.098	1	.513 ^{**}	.168	-.031	-.194	.201	.263	.201	-.442 ^{**}	-.053
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.266	.506	.200	.248	.031	.177	.162	.055	.162	.381	.716
	t		.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50
A1.3	Pearson Correlation	-.166	-.162	.513 ^{**}	1	.070	-.042	-.388 ^{**}	.090	.183 [*]	.041	-.339 ^{**}	-.011
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.462	.162	.033	.892	.775	.044	.533	.047	.779	.318	.839
	t		.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50
A1.4	Pearson Correlation	.000	.120	.188	.030	1	.119	-.101	.101	.136	.060	-.218	-.040
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.767	.406	.248	.882	.412	.484	.487	.345	.783	.311	.780
	t		.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50
BT_1_Pronunciation	Pearson Correlation	.211	.048	-.031	-.642	.119	1	.050	-.153	-.038	-.243	-.275	-.194
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.846	.762	.831	.775	.412	.732	.288	.798	.093	.815	.200
	t		.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50
BT_2_Kemampuan_Baca_Berpaham	Pearson Correlation	-.883	-.187	-.194	-.206 ^{**}	-.101	.050	1	.199	-.185	-.144	-.131	.060
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.666	.193	.177	.844	.484	.732	.166	.199	.318	.366	.533
	t		.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50
BT_3_Kemampuan_Memahami_Grammar	Pearson Correlation	-.250	.261	.201	.880	.101	-.153	.199	1	.118	-.042	-.400 ^{**}	-.041
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.886	.067	.162	.333	.487	.299	.168	.422	.778	.888	.777
	t		.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50
BT_4_Kemampuan_Dengan_Peraturan	Pearson Correlation	.000	.081	.293	.282 [*]	-.136	-.038	-.186	.116	1	.116	-.138	-.010
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.666	.577	.081	.847	.346	.790	.198	.422	.340	.845	
	t		.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50
BT_5_Kemampuan_Pe	Pearson Correlation	.075	.016	.291	.641	.040	-.243	-.144	-.042	.116	1	.886	.174
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.867	.919	.162	.776	.783	.090	.318	.774	.422	.381	.227
	t		.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50
C1.1	Pearson Correlation	-.022	-.171	-.442 ^{**}	-.339 ^{**}	-.016	-.079	-.131	-.486 ^{**}	-.138	.090	1	.011
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.878	.234	.031	.816	.311	.605	.368	.340	.581	.938	
	t		.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50
C1.2	Pearson Correlation	-.046	-.090	-.053	-.011	-.040	-.184	.090	-.041	-.010	.174	.211	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.754	.496	.718	.839	.780	.200	.533	.777	.945	.227	.836
	t		.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50

^{*}Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

^{**}Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlation analysis was implemented to obtain information on how different learning factors relate to each other, particularly in relation to late learners. A significant result was the strong positive correlation between pronunciation difficulties (A1.2) and lack of confidence in speaking English (A1.3), with a

correlation value of $r = 0.513$ and $p < 0.01$. It means that those participants who had difficulties in pronouncing English words clearly often also felt a lack of confidence when speaking English. Another key result was the negative correlation between self-confidence (A1.3) and limited learning resources (B1.2) ($r = -0.286$, $p < 0.05$), which suggests that learners who have limited access to English learning materials are potentially less confident in using the language.

In addition, there was a negative correlation between self-confidence (A1.3) and self-reported lack of confidence (B1.5) ($r = -0.333$, $p < 0.05$), which suggests that participants who already experience a lack of confidence tend to have greater difficulty speaking English in real-life situations. The results also showed that pronunciation difficulties (A1.2) were highly relevant to lower motivation (C1.1) ($r = -0.442$, $p < 0.01$), and grammar difficulties (B1.3) were also negatively correlated with motivation (C1.1) ($r = -0.498$, $p < 0.01$). In simple terms, the more a learner faces pronunciation and grammar difficulties, the more chance they might lose their motivation to keep learning.

Moreover, this finding proves that the consequences of late English learners are not only technical (such as grammar and pronunciation), but also emotional and psychological. Late learners usually feel less confident, particularly if they receive less support or face difficulties in pronunciation. These challenges can decrease their motivation, which ultimately makes it harder for them to stay consistent and enjoy the learning process.

Qualitative Findings on Late Learners Consequences

This section provides and discusses the experiences of the four participants, which consist of two early learners (NNF and NLACN) and two late learners (NRA and MDK). The interviews are thematically analyzed and categorized into five main points: (1) Learning Motivation and Initial Exposure, (2) Challenges in Language Learning, (3) Effective Strategies and Learning Environment, (4) Impact on Proficiency, Confidence, and Real-Life Use, and (5) Reflection and Suggestions for Improvement. Each section integrates learners' practical experiences with academic theory and previous research to provide a thorough understanding of the consequences of learning English at different ages.

Learning Motivation and Initial Exposure

The early learners (NNF and NLACN) said that they were exposed to English from a very young age, which happened before formal education started. NLACN, said that:

I was introduced to English really from a very young age, maybe before the age of two. I had already gained exposure to English by the way of songs played at home and also the TV I watched... like Disney Channel.

It shows that early exposure through creating a natural and fun environment creates a positive impact on children. NNF also added that:

When I was a child, my teacher always taught me about shapes, colours in English, animals in English. Well, that made me interested in learning English more deeply

This is how NNF became interested in studying English.

In contrast, the late learners (NRA and MDK) were introduced to English at a relatively late age. NRA started learning English around the 6th grade, she said that: "I learned English starting from the 6th grade of elementary school, maybe over the age of 12." NRA also added that she was motivated to learn more English because of her ambition to study abroad:

I have always wanted to study abroad and I have to learn English because it is one of the international languages spoken in any country so it is very important.

Similar to NRA, MDK also started learning English in junior high school. She said that: "So the first time I learned English; it was actually a little late. because I only learned it when I was in junior high school." MDK also mentioned that she became interested in learning English because she did not understand English at all and because of her motivation for her future life.

At that time when there was learning English, I couldn't do it at all, I didn't understand it at all. In the end, I have to learn, even though it's really difficult, because it's too late.

In order to provide more evidence, MDK also stated: "The only motivation when I'm already at this age is because we cannot deny that English can make your career grow faster."

Based on this, it can be concluded that those who are exposed to English early, frequently occur in immersive and informal environments or otherwise are exposed naturally through something fun (such as media and games). While for late learners, they have a tendency to have motivation in learning English (such as education or employment).

Challenges in Language Learning

Types of challenges were found to be highly contrasting in each category. Early learners said that they faced less challenges in vocabulary acquisition but they slightly struggled with grammar. NLACN says that:

When I was a child, there were no challenges because the learning we get at school is still relatively easy, if kindergarten, elementary school children may only have vocabulary of animals and others. But, to get more and more time, it was during my elementary school time that I had difficulty in grammar. Because all this time I have answered based on the feeling.

However, NLACN also mentioned that she found a solution by watching YouTube. She did this because she said that: To overcome it itself is because it is easier for me to learn through videos, I happen to search on YouTube to learn through YouTube for grammar.

NNF also felt this challenge, saying that:

Because if you used to be a child, sometimes you forget to remember. Sometimes if you are given a new vocabulary, sometimes what is it? Sometimes I forget.

NNF also frequently asks her teacher for help and to repeat the material again to ensure she remembers the vocabulary.

In contrast to the challenges experienced by early learners, late learners face many challenges, such as cognitive challenges and emotional challenges. For cognitive challenges, late learners have difficulty remembering grammar and vocabulary. The NRA says that: "My biggest challenge I faced in learning English was the difficulty in memorizing vocabulary". MDK also had the same statement as NRA: "The biggest challenge was probably from memorizing the vocabulary". It suggests that there is a decreasing ability of the brain as it grows older to absorb new information. For emotional challenges, late learners have a fear of making a mistake and a lack of self-confidence that makes them feel embarrassed to try. The NRA says that: "In the past, I was not confident in speaking English because of my Indonesian accent." In addition, MDK also mentioned that:

When I went to high school, my high school was in a boarding school and had 24 hours of English. Well, that's a little worry is because my English is clumsy, sometimes people don't understand, sometimes I also don't understand what I'm saying.

Both NRA and MDK looked for ways to overcome this. NRA said that:

"I once read that the accent is not important, what is important in English is as long as we understand each other what our partners say it is enough."

MDK also said that in facing these challenges by: "Continue to study independently and also get a supportive environment". Hence, these types of challenges delay a late learner's progress and also make it more difficult for a late learner to master the language when compared to an early learner.

Effective Strategies and Learning Environment

For the participants, early learners in particular, highlighted that the most crucial aspects are a supportive environment and continuous practice. In the view of early learner, NLACN, she said that she received the advantages of both school and home:

At home it definitely needs support from Mama Papa to learn English, it indeed needs a modern environment that thinks modern if for example English is necessary to learn for today's children and school, which is certainly a school with adequate facilities for learning English, teachers who can teach English well and also the books provide a lot of books that English is also very important in my opinion for school.

NNF also mentioned that:

Home and school, for me, at school we have to look at the environment first, if the school is supportive automatically, we will also be like confident. So, if at home it's more about practice. so, like even though there are no friends at home but I believe that it is very significant to develop. so, a supportive environment is very important

On the other hand, Late learners emphasize independent learning strategies by utilizing existing digital resources. NRA said: I keep practicing, maybe with YouTube and other media." She utilizes these media to improve her knowledge and understanding of vocabulary. Moreover, she also utilizes various apps with their own functions, such as Elsa and Stimuler:

There are two apps that I often use until now, the first is Elsa to improve my pronunciation and the second is Stimuler to improve my speaking fluency.

The same with NRA, MDK also suggests independent learning while utilizing digital resources, such as AI and websites:

Independent learning should be developed again because nowadays technology is sophisticated, we can use some AI to help create an independent learning schedule and also websites that can support learning.

Furthermore, it is evident that early learners naturally develop in an environment where English is integrated. On the other hand, late learners have to create self-encouragement about learning and then develop a structured strategy. Also, with digital resources, they can easily utilize them while learning independently.

Impact on Proficiency, Confidence, and Real-Life Use

In the opinion of Early learners, they feel better in terms of fluency as well as confidence due to early and consistent exposure to English through songs, cartoons, school activities and a supportive environment. NLACN says:

For confidence, for instance, if we are good at it from a young age, we will feel like I can do it. So, we don't need to be afraid to speak up because we are used to having conversations from a young age.

NLACN also states:

The benefit that I feel is that learning earlier makes me more fluent and also more confident. Sometimes if our friends at school are late learners, they are reluctant to speak English because they are afraid of being wrong or something.

NNF echoes with this statement by adding:

If I already know the vocab, I'm sure I know this. So, it's like my confidence increases, so I feel more comfortable. So, the point is that if we already know some vocab, we become confident with what we know.

It indicates how early exposure can build comfort and confidence in speaking.

In contrast to early learners, late learners said that their English skills develop a slightly late and create a lack of confidence, especially when speaking. They often hesitate in speaking and avoid being criticized for making mistakes. MDK said that:

I think the older I get, the more I'm afraid of being wrong. Which is difficult, because the older I get, the more considerations I have, because I'm afraid of saying the wrong thing.

In addition, NRA also added that focusing on learning can also affect her ability:

Well because I used to focus more on grammar or grammatical structure so my speaking skills are far behind, therefore maybe if I could just repeat my learning experience, I would prioritize speaking skills first instead of grammar.

NRA realized that when it comes to real life, the ability to communicate effectively becomes more important.

It is shown that early learners and late learners encounter distinct impacts. The early learners' impact is relatively positive in terms of higher proficiency and stronger self-confidence as they are used to being exposed to English from an early age. Also, they feel more comfortable in using English actively without the fear of making mistakes. But, for late learners, they encounter various challenges, such as the fear of making mistakes when speaking and lower self-confidence. These fears can hamper their active participation in the daily use of English. Hence, the distinct age of starting to learn English not only impacts technical linguistic skills, but also emotional aspects and daily communication skills in language use

Reflection and Suggestions for Improvement

Considering the reflections of both early and late learners of English, it shows a deeper understanding of language learning and offers valuable insights into improving progress. Although, the early learners are mostly quite satisfied with their learning experience and results, they realize that there are some aspects of their learning that they could still improve on. For example, NNF said: "I have to practice speaking more, because if we learn English without practicing it, it's not enough, so maybe it's practice for me." It shows that despite early learners' exposure to English at an early age, which allows them to acquire vocabulary and build confidence, opportunities for consistent speaking practice are essential for developing their overall communication skills. In the same way, NLACN stated how limited her vocabulary was through children's media:

Because I learned it through TV and it was from kids TV and usually the vocabulary used is not too varied, so maybe the way to improve it is by watching movies that have a wider vocabulary instead of just for kids, it can be in the form of movies, or like that. Because if TV shows, the average vocabulary is used for everyday life, not advanced ones.

This suggests that the environment of early learning still needs to add more diverse and slightly challenging inputs but still gradually in order to optimize learning development.

Instead, the late learners gave more critical reflections on the opportunities they had missed by starting English language learning at an older age. MDK expressed her intention if she had the opportunity to assess earlier:

Maybe if I could go back in time I would start earlier because learning English a little late like when I was in junior high school grade 9, well it's more difficult than starting from elementary school which is still in grade 3 elementary school or grade 2 elementary school. If I could do it again, I would start from grade 2.

This demonstrates the barrier felt by late learners. In addition, NRA also acknowledged the impact of inappropriate learning focus at the beginning, by saying:

Because in the past I focused more on grammar or grammatical structure so I left my speaking skills far behind, maybe if I could restart my learning experience, I would prioritize speaking skills first instead of grammar.

This emphasizes the significance of a learning approach that emphasizes communication for late learners.

Furthermore, the results show that both categories of English language learners are able to critically evaluate their learning experiences and determine ways to improve their learning outcomes. The early learners indicated having more practice and receiving more challenging materials. Whereas, the late learners emphasized the importance of starting earlier and focusing more on communication skills. Also, the comparison of these two categories leads to the adjustment of learning stages according to the learners' goals.

DISCUSSION

This research investigates the consequences faced by late learners and investigates the kind of challenges and benefits these learners experience during their learning process. The research determined the ongoing challenges in terms of grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, confidence, and motivation using both quantitative and qualitative data.

The findings suggest that participants who studied English later in life experienced difficulties with grammar, fluency in pronunciation, and confidence when speaking English. This is supported by the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) and Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis which are two very popular Second Language Acquisition (SLA) frameworks. In this study, the challenges experienced by late learners can be interpreted through these two frameworks. Lenneberg or the "father" of CPH reported that the critical period has a great influence on all aspects of language and will end when they enter puberty. The reason why Lenneberg stated this is because of the process of "laterization". This is how language functions in the left hemisphere of the brain, which is thought to be the most influential brain for language skills (Singleton & Leśniewska, 2021). In this study, the participants mostly pointed out grammatical errors and reported their anxiety about pronunciation. This supports the neurological and developmental logic espoused by CPH.

However, this theory is disputed by Krashen, who believes that late learners can still master a second language effectively, provided that the input is appropriate and easy to understand (Krashen, 1981 in Bailey & Kadhum Fahad, 2021). In addition, the Affective Filter Hypothesis says, when students experience challenges, such as fear or fatigue in acquiring a second language, their abilities will be limited, even though these factors support the learning process (Bailey & Kadhum Fahad, 2021). It is supported by the addition of Lightbown & Spada which state that they (the students) wouldn't be able to acquire a second language if they feel tense, anxious, or bored, because it can cause "filtering" of the input (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 37 in Bailey & Kadhum Fahad, 2021). The data and theoretical perspectives both emphasize that late learners require clear goals in order to stay motivated otherwise, they may struggle to keep up with early learners. Additionally, building and strengthening basic vocabulary can be quite an important first step towards developing other skills, such as grammar and fluent speaking (Andanty et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, the use of technology as a learning tool such as Elsa, YouTube, AI, and other tools is not only a complement to learning, but an important part of students' learning strategies and builds confidence in doing their best in learning

(Ang & Md Yunus, 2021). It supports research which indicates that technology-based learning, particularly AI, can increase student motivation and engagement (Ahmad, 2012 in Agustina & Cahyono, 2017; Hertiki et al., 2024). The increasing motivation of students can also be due to the presentation of learning materials that can be adapted to their individual learning styles, allowing the learning platform to adjust the psychological aspects of students. This is equivalent to Self-Determination Theory (SDT) which states that increased motivation tends to occur when basic psychological needs such as independence in learning and opportunities to develop learners' abilities are met (Chen & Huang, 2024).

On the other hand, there is research that argues while technology supports learners' improvement in pronunciation and vocabulary, in the context of pragmatics, it is not enough to guarantee the improvement of learners' pragmatics competence (Qi & Chen, 2025). This is due to the fact that the improvement of pragmatics competence through technology is highly dependent on the teaching design and methods as well as the individual characteristics of the learners. Pragmatics competence is considered quite important in language learning, especially English, because it is a skill that involves understanding how language is used in real situations, including the interpretation of implied meanings and the adjustment of speech based on social context (Mezia Kemala Sari et al., 2025). However, it can still be done by using technology which can provide feedback through real-life events and opportunities for interaction that can enable learners to better understand the meaning of the material being taught (Sari & Yoni, 2021 in Mezia Kemala Sari et al., 2025).

Despite late learners experiencing many obstacles in facing linguistic and emotional challenges, the research findings provide and support a new perspective that age may not be the main barrier in learning a language. It can be seen through the researchers' findings that the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) predictions are not entirely accurate, as factors such as motivation, learning strategies, and learning environment also influence the success of language acquisition. This finding is also consistent with several studies which argues that a lot of late learners are able to achieve high language proficiency when they are consistently exposed to language materials, practice them regularly, and use appropriate learning techniques (Ellis, 2002). Furthermore, the utilization of multimodal input (images, text, audio) can significantly support the formation of meaning and the language learning experience (Montero Perez, 2020). Thus, the interaction between effective learning strategies and the utilization of multimodal media creates an optimal learning environment for late learners to overcome challenges in language acquisition. This is regardless of linguistic diversity, considering that practically every language learned has the same purpose, which is to communicate (Wibowo & Agustina, 2024).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study concludes that late learners experience linguistic and emotional challenges quite consistently during their language acquisition experience, especially in the aspects of grammar, pronunciation, and speaking fluency. The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) and Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis support the fact that

emotional factors such as low self-confidence and anxiety can hinder their speaking performance. However, the findings also suggest that these difficulties are unpredictable. In addition, the use of adaptive strategy support and digital learning tools with a strong academic or professional purpose showed significant ability and progress. This includes vocabulary development which serves as both a support and a foundation for improving grammar and speaking fluency. While the benefits of contextual engagement were felt by early learners, late learners expressed a passion for learning through their motivation in creating their own learning strategies. The findings highlight that the key determinant of successful language learning is not age, but rather learner independence, clear goals, consistent practice, and the additional support of technology that could play an important role in achieving such success.

Nevertheless, this study is not devoid of limitations. The relatively small qualitative component may affect the generalizability of the findings to a wider population. In addition, this study has not examined long-term growth in language skills. Therefore, future researchers are expected to conduct longitudinal studies to investigate how late learners develop over time with consistent exposure. Researchers should also focus on the role of pragmatic competence in understanding and using language in social contexts. Furthermore, experimental studies that expand participants across different age ranges, backgrounds, cultures, or educational systems will provide a more contextualized understanding of the outcomes that affect late language learning. Additionally, it is important for future studies to consider pedagogical interventions such as flexible start times, the integration of digital resources, and age-appropriate support systems, as these may provide practical pathways to reduce barriers and improve language acquisition among late learners.

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