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The Importance of Foreign Language Education at the Elementary Level

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Abstract

This literature review looks at the benefits of teaching foreign language at the elementary level versus at the secondary level. The review examines the linguistic and cognitive benefits of learning a foreign language at different levels. Young children are slower at learning languages than adolescent learners, in all aspects of language. However, young children gain many cognitive advantages from learning a foreign language and are more likely to become indistinguishable from native speakers. Foreign languages should be taught at the elementary level because it helps with literacy in English, it enhances problem solving, attentional control and the ability to switch tasks, but most importantly, young children are intrinsically better language learners, and will, therefore, become more proficient and retain more as early exposure will increase the amount of input.

Keywords: Foreign Language, Acquisition, Retention, Learning a Foreign Language, Middle School.

The Importance or Foreign Languages Education at the Elementary Level

Foreign languages should be taught at the elementary level because the benefits extend beyond language acquisition and retention. It is analyzed that current trends of foreign languages spoken and taught in the United States may not be supported by the current structure of our school system. This literature review will analyze the effectiveness of teaching foreign languages at the elementary level versus at the secondary level. The United States is becoming more and more diverse. With a diverse population comes diversity of spoken languages and the need for foreign language programs in our schools. According to the U.S. census bureau the Hispanic population in the United States was less than one fifth, this number is predicted to increase to drastically by 2060. In 2011 the U.S. census bureau published that almost a quarter of our population spoke a language other than English at home. After English, Spanish is the most common language, spoken by approximately 38 million people (United States Census Bureau, 2011). Although other languages are taught in public and private U.S. schools, Spanish has been the most widely offered foreign/second language for quite some time now.

The Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) conducts a survey every 10 years that provides detailed information on current patterns, trends and shifts in languages and programs offered. The survey conducted in 2008 revealed that less than a quarter of all elementary schools offered foreign language instruction. In contrast, the majority of all high schools offered a foreign language (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2010).

Research has continuously shown that learning a foreign language at a younger age is more beneficial for students, versus waiting until high school (Marian & Shook 2012). However, the benefits are based on cognitive advantages not on faster linguistic progress. The research

evidence tells us that older children outperform younger children because of their greater cognitive maturity (Barac, Bialystok, Castro, & Sanchez, 2014). While Most schools only offer Spanish at the secondary level, foreign languages should be taught at the elementary level because it helps with literacy in English, it enhances problem solving, attentional control and the ability to switch tasks, but most importantly, young children are intrinsically better language learners, and will, therefore, become more proficient and retain more as early exposure will increase the amount of input.

Review of the Literature

Foreign Language & Literacy

Literacy development is recognized as one of the most important and significant skills in order to achieve academic success. For this reason, it is imperative to analyze possible advantages that students receiving dual language instruction might have on literacy proficiency. A study was conducted to examine the effects of foreign language study on the verbal achievement of middle school students. The results concluded that the group receiving the foreign language studies performed significantly higher in reading comprehension, language mechanics, and language expression (Carr, 1994). However, a recent study on literacy skills examined English speaking and ELL students that were receiving dual language instruction from first through fifth grade and found that the native English-speaking students receiving English-Spanish dual language instruction performed similarly to those on a traditional instruction setting (Dickson, 2013). Although this particular research did not find significant variance between the two groups it did outline the fact that students in dual language instruction were likely making similar progress in the second language, thus providing potential advantages in academic achievement and future employment.

Immersion programs have been developed throughout the globe and many have provided data in order to analyze proficiency levels amongst students in the immersion programs and traditional English programs students. Turnbull, Hart, & Lapkin (2003) analyzed data from Ontario's provincial testing program to verify if proficiency levels in reading, math, and writing skills were comparable to traditional students by 6th grade. This particular program taught these subjects in French until 3rd grade at which point English was introduced. They found that the

absence of English instruction created a gap in proficiency for the immersion students. However, by 6th grade the immersion students closed the gap and were at the same level of performance as the traditional students. Although the results did not confirm a higher level of proficiency, the students in the immersion program gain a second language and maintain proficiency while the non-immersion group did not outperform the immersion group and did not acquire a second language.

In Taiwan they have been implementing English language curriculum but are still failing to have their kids speak fluent English (Tsou, 2011). In this study the researcher Tsou (2011) incorporated the Reading Theater curriculum. This program is an activity were readers take turns acting out and reading lines from a script on the target language. It is like the students are doing a play but they are actually learning a second language. This curriculum is also used when children are just learning how to read. It is a fun way to incorporate reading into the curriculum without the students losing interest in what they are doing. The results revealed that Reading Theater increased reading accuracy, reading fluency and writing in both languages (Tsou, 2011). This is yet another indication that literacy could be affected by age, input frequency, culture and implementation process. Students with dual language abilities, are able to recognize more cognitive words which also allows them to transition and make connections with these cognitive words. Researchers found that phonological awareness derives from their ability to recognize cognitive words and transition between them. (Comeau, Crmier, Grandmaison & Lacroix, 1999) In their study, Comeau, et al., (1999) found that these dual language abilities were beneficial to their reading and comprehension skills. Their findings identify these advantages were true with English-French students and English-Spanish students. Students are able to make these connections and identifications because the origin and connectedness between the languages.

Early start language programs have been studied in order to establish proficiency levels between students that began their foreign language instruction in kindergarten versus students that did not start until they were in fifth grade. Dominguez & Pessoa (2005) studied the linguistic performance of both groups to determine proficiency levels and advantages of an early start. The students that began their instruction in kindergarten out performed their peers that did not begin their instructions until they were in the fifth grade. The early start group reached levels of Novice Low to Intermediate High. The late start group did not surpass a score of Novice High. Overall the early start group reached higher proficiency and outperformed their late start peers on oral communication tasks (Dominguez & Pessoa, 2005).

Additionally, a study was conducted at the preschool level to identify the effects of bilingual instruction on the growth of English phonological awareness and literacy (Durán, Roseth, Hoffman & Robertshaw, 2013). A three-year longitudinal, experimental-control study involving 31 Spanish-speaking preschoolers was conducted by Durán, et al., (2013) in order to measure their receptive and expressive language and phonological awareness skills. The group was randomly assigned, one group received instruction in a transitional bilingual education classroom while the other was in a traditional English classroom. After the two-year study was concluded, results revealed that the experimental group in the transitional bilingual education classroom increased their Spanish language, literacy in their vocabulary, and letter word recognition. These students also tested significantly higher on the letter word identification test. There was no significant improvement in the group that was assigned to the traditional English only classroom. Additionally, a Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment was administered at the end of the year in order to measure these student's growth in mathematics and reading. Almost half of the experimental group receiving transitional bilingual education

scored above the proficient level, while only a small percentage of the English only preschool group scored above proficiency level (Durán, Roseth, Hoffman & Robertshaw, 2013).

Cognitive Advantages

Previous work has shown that bilingual children, compared to their monolingual peers, had better problem-solving and critical thinking skills, more creativity, improved memory, better multi-tasking abilities, and better flexibility of mind (Barac & Bialystok, 2011). A study on bilingual children between the ages of 5 and 8 revealed that 2 languages forces the child to develop particular coping strategies which in some ways accelerate cognitive development (Ben-Zeev, 1977). This study also showed that bilinguals showed more advanced processing of verbal material, more discriminating perceptual distinctions, more propensity to search for structure in perceptual situations, and more capacity to reorganize their perceptions in response to feedback. Based on the constant need to process two languages, bilinguals gain an advantage on non-verbal executive control tasks compared to their monolingual counterparts. Due to the constant manage of which language to engage, it requires them to use attentional processes to operate on linguistic forms. When the brain solicits higher control processes to execute metalinguistic tasks the superior non-verbal executive control allows bilingual children to compensate for their weaker linguistic knowledge (Friesen & Bialystok 2012).

More simply stated, bilingual children may possess some advantages with metalinguistic skills and awareness. Metalinguistic skills start to develop at an early age, some suggest that children as young as 3 years old have the ability to develop strong metalinguistic skills (Finestack, 2014). Bilingual children may learn to monitor their own utterances and begin to repair their breakdowns in communication better and faster than monolingual children in parts

due to their superior non-verbal executive controls. These are the same advantages that allow bilingual children or children that are exposed to multiple languages the ability to process communication beyond the content.

In a study conducted by psychologists Bialystok and Martin-Rhee (2004) bilingual and monolingual students were asked to take part in a sorting puzzle. There were several blue circles and red squares displayed on a computer. The preschoolers were asked to sort them into corresponding baskets. First, they were asked to sort by color and then by shapes. The first task was relatively simple as matching the colors did not required as much executive function. Both groups performed this task at a similar pace with similar results. However, the second task required more critical thinking because the shapes had to be match with conflicting colors. In this task the bilingual students outperformed the monolingual students. The results combined with previous studies and brain scans showed that the bilingual students had more gray matter in the region of the brain that involved executive function (Li, Legault, & Litcofsky, 2014) The brains constant movement between languages increase executive functions which allow for better multi-tasking, and attention focusing. In the case of bilingual children, the brain has the ability to identify words from a larger pool and then assign it to a specific language, this function increases their ability to pay attention, focus and bounce between activities better then monolingual students. Their auditory system activates regardless of which language is heard. This constant process of switching back and forth allow Bilingual people to perform better on tasks that require conflict management (Marian & Shook, 2012).

Brain health. Recent technological advances have ignited the interest of researchers on the neuroplasticity as a function of second language learning and how the anatomy of the human brain changes as a result of this learning. The more you learn the more that the brain works and processes the information that you are taking in. When you are learning a new language, your brain is working to understand what you are processing. Once the language has been learned then it will not only process the language in your first language but it will also process it in the second language. A study conducted by Li, Legault & Litcofsky (2014) reviewed evidence that was consistent with structural neuroplasticity, the changes observed included increased gray matter (GM) density and white matter (WM) integrity.

In addition to neuroplastic, the concept of cognitive reserve was also researched. Research showed that bilingualism can protect against cognitive decline, which led to the discussion of recent evidence that bilingualism is associated with a delay in the onset of symptoms of dementia (Bialystok, Craik & Luk, 2012) Lateralization of the brain was also researched by Scovel (2000) it was suggested that additional cognitive advantages are prevalent in early language learners. Lateralization of the brain concludes around the same time as puberty, this reverts back to the critical period hypothesis (CPH). No linguistic research would be complete without the mention of CPH. This research revealed additional evidence that adult language learners are at a disadvantage when it comes to learning a second language. This is especially true when talking about proper pronunciation once the brain has lateralized. Reinforcing the argument that younger learners (prior to puberty) have a linguistic advantage in regards to their oral communication skills in the target language.

Recent studies suggest that bilingualism benefits extend beyond communication and cultural intelligence (Bak, Nissan, Allerhand, & Deary, 2014). In this study the researchers

tested 1,091 participants in the first part of this study. Their first test was conducted in 1947 when the participants were 11 years old. Between 2008 and 2010 they conducted a second test, this time only 866 participants returned. In the questionnaire, one of the questions was weather or not they learned a second language, at what age, and how much they utilized it. The participants classified as bilinguals were does that could communicate in the second language. Out of the 866 that returned for the second assessment, 262 reported that they learned a language other than English. The results suggest that bilingualism has a positive effect against age related cognitive decline. Although, there were no significant differences amongst those who learned it at an earlier age, the majority of the participants learned the second language before the age of 18. The positive effects, included higher baseline cognitive abilities, most significantly their general intelligence and reading. In addition to improving later-life cognition, the results also suggest possible delays on the onset of dementia (Bak, Nissan, Allerhand, & Deary, 2014).

Although the above study did not find a significant difference on the effects between those who learned the language at an early age versus the ones that did. The participants were only categorized as bilinguals if they were able to sustain a conversation in the second language. As reflected on previous studies, individuals are more likely to achieve bilingualism if they are exposed to the language at an earlier age. Thus, the recommendation for early exposure and instruction of foreign language at the elementary level.

Linguistic Progress

Age based language acquisition studies date back to the 1950's when Penfield suggested that the best time to learn a second language was between the ages of 4 and 10. Puberty also became a cutoff for learning a second language as Lenneberg (1967), linked language

acquisition and the rapid growth of nerve connections, which ceases at puberty. In the following years many more studies were conducted on the process of language acquisition. There was a lot of controversy about whether or not language acquisition was possible after puberty and if the age influences the ability to reach native-like levels of proficiency. Many of the research during the 1970's led to the realization that adults proceed through early stages of syntactic and morphological development faster than children as long as the time and exposure are held constant. In early stages of syntactic and morphological development were time and exposure are held constant, older children acquire faster than younger children. Individuals who are exposed to a second language during childhood, achieve higher second language proficiency and native like mastery than those individuals that start during their adolescence and adulthood years. (Krashen et al., 1979/1982, reprint: 161)

A very important distinction was made by Krashen et al., (1979) about the difference between language attainment and rate. This is important to understand as we examine the benefits of learning a second language at an earlier age. We have to determine what do we want to get out of teaching a second language at an early age. If it is to make faster linguistic progress, then we know that research evidence tells us that older children outperformed younger children. (Barac, Bialystok, Castro, & Sanchez, 2014). This is due to their greater cognitive maturity which helps them with limited input and of explicit instruction. However, if the goal is higher levels of attainment and proficiency. Research shows that older learners are able to learn at a faster rate but although younger learners take a little longer to get going eventually, they get caught up and show higher levels of attainment and proficiency (Krashen et al., 1979/1982, reprint: 161).

In a more recent study by Foster, Bolibaugh, & Kotula (2014) the researchers examined the second language skills of students in the United Kingdom and in Poland who were English learners. It was said that the earlier you learn a language the better because oral communication and comprehension in their second language is better than children who started learning a language in middle school. Also, it was shown that if children learned a second language before the age of twelve years old, they were more familiar with speech patterns than those who started after that age. Normally children who start at an older age are able to become as fluent in the language as those who start at a younger age but they will not understand the language the way the younger learners do (Barac, Bialystok, Castro, & Sanchez, 2014). Not being able to comprehend the reading in writing in the ways that their peers who have started at a younger age do puts the older children at a disadvantage to continue to use the language. They may also not retain as much because they have stopped using the language.

Earlier research (Burstall et al., 1974) has shown that learning a language at an earlier age does not equate to any advantages. A more recent empirical study, reviewed and synthesized 43 studies published in the past 50 years in order to examine the effects of learning a foreign language at an earlier age. The results revealed that there was not sufficient evidence that learning a foreign language at an early age draws any advantages on linguistic proficiency. However, these results were drawn from past experiments. Due to the curriculum of the past it is hard for this study to hold true. The techniques that were used to teach these students the target language were not as efficient as they are now. This is true with not only language but many subjects. It is debated if the implementation of new curriculum, strategies, access to resources, and instruction methods has had an impact on the results drawn from some more recent studies on this subject that have discovered different results. Limitations in many of the past studies have

led to further examination on the suggested proficiency related benefits of teaching a foreign language at an earlier age.

Researchers Kissau, Adams, & Algozzine (2015) found that there are in fact linguistic advantages to early exposure to a foreign language. In their study quantitative data was collected using ACTFL Assessment of Performance Toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL) in order to measure oral proficiency. Additionally, they used an online survey to measure student motivation to learn a foreign language. The study was conducted in a K- 12 Level II private high school. There was a total of 117 students that participated all which were enrolled in a foreign language class including Spanish, Mandarin, French, and/or German. Out of the 117 students a little over half reported that they had completed Level I foreign language instruction in the middle school while the remainder waited until high school to begin their studies. The data collected from the AAPPL combined with the online survey and the interviews were analyzed to address the relationship between oral proficiency and motivation of students who began foreign language instruction at the middle school verses students who began at the high school. The results revealed that students who started their foreign language studies in the middle school had significantly higher levels of motivation to engage in foreign language studies and to continue their studies compared to their peers that started in high school. Furthermore, the students that started earlier were more instrumentally oriented than those who waited until high school to start. The study also revealed that the students who began at an earlier age had higher confidence and less anxiety than those who started later in high school (Kissau, Adams & Algozzine, 2015).

The most significant finding in this study relates to the level of oral proficiency. The finding indicates that and early start in foreign language instruction leads to superior oral proficiency. The data collected provided empirical evidence that to support this claim. The

students who began in middle school displayed higher confidence in oral communication, higher motivation to further their studies, and they were also more proficient in the target language compared to their peers who started in high school (Kissau, Adams, & Algozzine, 2015). The results for elementary school students are even higher. Elementary students feel even more confidence when they have started a foreign language at such a young age. They feel like they can speak it fluently and they fully understand the language. These finding have confirmed results from prior research conducted by Burstall et al., (1974) and Bolster et al., (2004) which found similar evidence on the benefits of an early-start in foreign language studies resulting in higher motivation and oral proficiency. The evidence and results collected from this study support the hypothesis that students would benefit more from starting foreign language studies at the middle school level verses waiting until high school.

The critical period hypothesis. The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) is based on the theory that there is a limited period in which one can acquire language at native like proficiency. The theory was first introduced by Penfield & Roberts (1959) this hypothesis claims that after this ideal period of linguistic acquisition is past, it becomes more difficult to learn a language. Lenneberg (1967) further explored this theory as he studied the neuroplasticity of the brain during this critical period of language acquisition. This same theory was applied to second language acquisition. Since, age constrains on the outcome of language acquisition have been studied and debated.

One study specifically tested the critical period hypothesis on first and second language acquisition and how age affected one compared to the other (Mayberry & Lock, 2003). In this study they tested the English grammatical abilities of deaf and hearing adults who were exposed to linguistic experience at an early age and another group that did not have linguistic experience

at an early age. The findings showed that the adults who were exposed to or acquired a language at an early age performed much higher. They demonstrated native like proficiency on a second language. The adults that had no experience or early exposure to language performed much lower (Mayberry & Lock, 2003). These results indicate that exposure to language during the early stages of development can have a significant effect on the ability to learn a language.

An important aspect of The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) to keep in mind is outlined by Gürsoy (2011) is the implication of current foreign language practices. Previous research has been mainly focused on the introduction of L1 and L2 at an early age as well as comparing early learners and adult learners. Very little attention has been given to the implication of age content specific instruction in the language acquisition process. In this study Gürsoy (2011) reconsidered the *Critical Period Hypotheis* by analyzing neurolinguistic, cognitive and effective arguments that focused on children and adults. Special consideration was taken on the implications of CPH and current teaching practices. The results cumulated to different factors, motivation, and purpose as key influences in the language acquisition process. As it relates to early exposure Gürsoy (2011) recognizes that it develops positive feelings toward different people and their cultures. This prompts opportunities to gain a better understanding, awareness, and acceptance of differences. Ultimately leading to a positive attitude toward learning the language.

Purpose became a big determining factor in the process of acquiring a new language. Gürsoy (2011) argues that aside from cognitive abilities the difference between children, adolescents and adults learning a language comes down to purpose. Younger children and adolescents typically do not have a specific purpose to learn a second language other than school requirements. Since children do not develop abstract thinking until at a later age it is important to develop teaching strategies that emphasize the importance of learning a language and how it

relates to them and their age while keeping the lessons within their cognitive abilities (Ellis, 1989) Furthermore, Piaget's theory states that children attain knowledge while working in an environment that facilitates the target language. The child's ability to learn and make sense of things hinge on their overall life experiences (Cameron, 2001). Gürsoy, (2011) recognizes the insights that CPH studies have provided in the process of language acquisition and the implications of age. However, he also emphasized that the relevance of learning context, affective factors, and reasons for learning languages have a significant influence on the success of acquiring a language.

Penfield & Robert (1959) along with Lenneberg (1967) established theories that have stood the test of time as they remain the most reductionist amongst SLA. Based on their research children who suffered impairment before puberty where able to fully recover in comparison with adults who suffer impairment during adulthood and were not able to fully regain verbal abilities (Penfield & Roberts, 1959). These researchers both believe that children have a neurological advantage when it comes to learning a language and the cutoff age or period to learn a language without an accent and at is highest proficiency is before puberty. This is mainly based on the fact that the brain loses plasticity around the age of puberty. At this point the brain becomes rigid and the ability of adaptation and reorganization drastically diminish. These findings along with current findings reinforce the idea that foreign language should be at the elementary level in order to increase proficiency and language attainment.

Age Implications on Grammar Attainment

Native language speakers generally acquire language in a natural cultural setting in a rich linguistic input environment. According to ZhonggangGao (2001) adolescent or adults cannot learn a second language as they do their native language because of the environment in which

their native language is learned. In addition to the ideal environment and high levels of natural input, native languages are learned at an early age. It has been established that the process of learning a first language and a second language are very similar, however, the brain changes drastically as we measure making acquisition and retainment less likely. Native-like mastery is very difficult and very unlikely to happen after we have reached puberty because by this point the brain has lost its plasticity and the functions of various parts of the brain cannot be rearranged (ZhonggangGao, 2001)**.**

The effects of late second language acquisition on speech comprehension by Germans who migrated to the US and Americans that migrated to Germany were analyzed in a study conducted by researchers Scherag, Demuth, Rösler, Neville, & Röder (2004). They concluded that syntactic processing functions and lexical access may be limited by maturation. These results correspond with earlier critical period hypothesis. In their study they found that the American English speakers who learned German as adults were disadvantaged on certain grammatical tasks. However, their lexical tasks were comparable to native levels. (Scherag et al., 2004)

Cultural and Social Enrichment

Diversity assimilation. With an ever-growing diverse population and as a multicultural nation it is imperative for our students to learn about cultural differences, languages, religions, ethnicities, and for them to welcome these differences. Children will be more knowledgeable of the children and who they are working with in school if they can better understand their cultures. This will help our school grow a stronger bond with one another. Understanding more cultures than just their own is significant in building relationship and learning to empathize with another person. According to Brown (1994) children who started studying a foreign language in fourth

grade did significantly better in reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills then students that started taking a foreign language in seventh grade. More importantly, these students were exposed to language, history, culture and diversity at an earlier age which according to Brown can help reduce the chance of racism, prejudice, and injustice. Students that are exposed to foreign language and cultural differences at an early age are able to have a better understanding and value for different cultures, customs and be more accepting of the overall differences amongst people. In this article Brown discusses some of the historical events that have led to a slower implementation of foreign language programs in the United States. He discussed that in early civilization it was believed that immigrants would use their language to gain power. As a result, language restrictions were enforced in boarding schools were children were not able to speak in their native language. Instead they were force to only speak in English.

Empathy. Beyond the common noticeable advantages of being bilingual are hidden social abilities as outlined by Kinsler (2016) on her article in the New York Times. In this article she talks about social experiences that enhance the ability to take the perspective of other. Bilingual children or children that have been exposed to a second language demonstrate an advantage in understanding and taking others perspective (Fan, Liberman, Keysar, & Kinzler, 2015). In their research they found that even if the children did not become proficient in the language the exposure alone developed communicative advantages. As children may learn to monitor their own utterances, they also learn to interpret others utterance beyond the content of the conversation which allows them to consider perspective and feelings, thus boosting empathy. Furthermore, in there finding Fan, Liberman, Keysar and Kinzler (2015) found that multilingual exposure developed communication skills. Effective communication requires perspective-taking skills which bilingual children or children exposed to multiple languages possess. If these

children are able to effectively communicate this will help them be more successful in life. Communication is a skill that you need in everything you do and bilingual children are able to communicate with one another by truly understanding and empathizing with each other.

A study investigated the link between bilingualism, Theory of Mind and empathy among 240 monolingual and bilingual. This researcher Javor (2016) believed that early exposure to a second language combined with greater inhibitory control gave bilinguals better theory of mind capabilities as well as better empathic skills. The results from the study confirmed their hypothesis. The exposure to a second language generates better empathic skills. (Javor, 2016). If a child has better empathy skills this can improve schools by helping children understand where their peers are coming from when they have an argument or disagreement. Empathy is also a life skill that is sometimes not learned by all, and it can take years to master. Having empathy for a child at such a young age will help these students be more successful.

Our society is influenced and dominated by differences of socioeconomic standing, race, and religion. Our schools are also affected by these differences, socially, academically and emotionally. Now more than ever is the skill of empathy desperately needed. As affirmed by Javor (2016) early exposure to second language combined with greater inhibitory control gave bilinguals better theory of mind capabilities as well as better empathic skills. These skills have a significant effect in the learning process throughout all phases of education. Its relationship to motivation and achievement has a great impact on the culture of our schools and the future of societal norms. If any, this should be motivation enough to implement foreign language programs at an early age.

Consciousness and egocentrism. As children get older, they become more aware of their surroundings and how these surroundings assimilate to who they are (Enright, Shukla, & Lapsley, 1980). This is important to know when you are working with different cultures and communities. When you are young you may not be aware of your surroundings as much as someone who has been exposed to different cultures and different languages. Acceptance becomes a prevalent issue in adolescence, and as they get older, they become more egocentric (Bester, 2013).

A study conducted by Bester (2013) found that egocentrism increased as children got older specifically coming into adolescence. They also found that egocentrism had a significant effect on academic achievement. A high school student is more likely going to be concerned with his/her image and how he/she will be perceived. If they are in a foreign language class, they might be worried about how they will be judge by their peers. This can also go the other way because if they have a friend who is from the culture of the foreign language that they are taking, they may take this class to fit in with that friend. If students in high school want to fit in with their peers they will do what it takes. If taking a foreign language so they can look cool around their friends will help them that would be a reason to take the class. The effects of peer pressure and trying to fit in in middle school and high school can be tough. This level of pressure can have a negative effect in the motivation behind wanting to learn a second language and how far the student is willing to pursue learning a new language. In his study Bester (2013) analyzed 319 students that range form grades 8-12. A questionnaire was utilized to measure egocentrism in a learning context. The findings revealed that Grade 12 learners are more inclined to egocentric behavior in a learning context compared to learners in Grade 8 and 9 (Bester, 2013).

Based on the findings it could be argue that younger learners are more likely to stay motivated, push themselves, and have a positive attitude towards learning a new language. While high school students might be less motivated, and distracted as they are much more self-conscious and are affected by outside influences and perceptions of other peers (Bester, 2013). High school students are some times less motivated because of the life stage that they are going through. They don't feel like school truly matters at that point in time because of all the pressures that they are facing. It is better for learners to be at a younger age because they are not facing the pressures of adolescence. Younger learners are not trying to fit in with their peers so they will be more motivated to learn new languages. They may also feel more connected to the peers that are around them and in their class. This will also help students whose first language is not English because other students will be able to learn more about her culture. They will feel like they are more of a part of that school because they feel like they can be themselves when it comes to their culture. Many times, people who come from different backgrounds feel like they have to turn their difference or culture off. They want to fit in with their peers so they try to be someone they are not. If children are learning about the culture of those students, they will be able to embrace their differences and help other students learn more about the culture.

Analysis

In the process of analyzing if efforts towards teaching a foreign language should be placed at the middle school level, additional data from the General Social Survey (GSS) was reviewed. As stated in the introduction, less than a quarter of all elementary schools offered foreign language instruction. In contrast, the majority of all high schools offered a foreign language (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2010). With this being the case the rate of success of current practices is evaluated utilizing level of proficiency through a survey conducted between 2000 and 2006 by the GSS. Over 4000 respondents participated in a three-question survey. The survey consisted of three questions about if a second language was spoken, how well they spoke the language, and where was the language learned. The results revealed that less than one in one hundred acquired fluency from their foreign language experience in high school.

The effectiveness of teaching a foreign language at the high school level are less than favorable. As previous literature was reviewed several categories were identify as key indicators of why it is more beneficial to implement foreign language instruction at an earlier age. The main categories reviewed were: literacy, cognitive advantages, linguistic progress, age implication on grammar attainment, and cultural and social enrichment. It was established that students that are exposed to bilingual education instruction are likely to increased their language attainment, increase literacy in their vocabulary, and increase letter word recognition. Additionally, they experienced growth in mathematics and reading skills.

Cognitively, it was recognized that bilingual children, compared to their monolingual peers, had better problem-solving and critical thinking skills, more creativity, improved memory, better multi-tasking abilities, and better flexibility of mind. Additionally, bilinguals showed more

advanced processing of verbal material, more discriminating perceptual distinctions, more propensity to search for structure in perceptual situations, and more capacity to reorganize their perceptions in response to feedback.

Linguistic progress was a topic of much debate and research that resulted in conflicting findings. However, the conflicting findings were addressed by results revealed by Kissau, Adams & Algozzine (2015) in their study on middle school foreign language instruction. Where they demonstrated that students who started their foreign language studies in the middle school had significantly higher levels of motivation to engage in foreign language studies and to continue their studies compared to their peers that started in high school. Furthermore, the students that started earlier were more instrumentally oriented than those who waited until high school to start. The study also revealed that the students who began at an earlier age had higher confidence and less anxiety than those who started later in high school. The most significant finding in this study relates to the level of oral proficiency. The finding indicates that and early start in foreign language instruction leads to superior oral proficiency (Kissau, Adams & Algozzine, 2015).

In the topic of age implication on grammar attainment we have learned that the process of learning a first language and a second language are very similar, however, the brain changes drastically as we mature making acquisition and retainment less likely. Native-like mastery is very difficult and very unlikely to happen after we have reached puberty because by this point the brain has lost its plasticity and the functions of various parts of the brain cannot be rearranged (ZhonggangGao, 2001)**.**

One that is often not considered in the advantages of early exposure to multiple languages is cultural and social enrichment. Children that are exposed to language, history, culture and

diversity at an earlier age are able to have a better understanding and value for different cultures, customs and be more accepting of the overall differences amongst people. Students that are exposed to foreign language and cultural differences at an early age are also less likely to engage in racism, prejudice, and injustice. Additionally, early exposure to a second language combined with greater inhibitory control gave bilinguals better theory of mind capabilities as well as better empathic skills (Javor, 2016). The overall social, emotional, and cultural enrichment are significant advantages on their own to grant rationale for why we should place our focus and resources on teaching foreign language at the elementary level.

Conclusion

In an ever-growing diverse society, it is imperative that students are supported and provided opportunities to thrive in this complex world. As analyzed, the current trends of foreign languages spoken and taught in the United States we realized that our current foreign language education structure does not support this growth. With a majority of our districts in our nation only offering foreign language opportunities at the high school level our students are missing a valuable opportunity. As previews literature was reviewed, it is understood that students who began in middle school displayed higher confidence in oral communication, higher motivation to further their studies, and they were also more proficient in the target language compared to their peers who started in high school (Kissau, Adams & Algozzine, 2015). Beyond the academic advantages it is confirmed that it helps with literacy in English and the target language, it enhances problem solving, attentional control and the ability to switch tasks, but most importantly, young children are intrinsically better language learners, and will, therefore, become more proficient and retain more as early exposure will increase the amount of input (Marian & Shook 2012). The results from this literature review support the believe that foreign languages should be taught at the elementary level because the benefits extend beyond language acquisition and retention.

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