

Study: There Is a Critical Period for Language Learning

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Category : Education/Family

Unlocking Word Meanings

Read the following words/expressions found in today’s article.

- 1. **optimum** / **ˈ****ɒ****p****t****ɪ****m****ə****m** / (adj) – most favorable or effective
Example: They say that the **optimum** age to give birth is from 20 to 35.
- 2. **learning curve** / **ˈ****l****ɜː****n****ɪ****ŋ** **k****ɜː****r****v** / (n) – the length of time during which a person develops a skill
Example: I have a very slow **learning curve** when it comes to scientific concepts.
- 3. **deteriorate** / **dɪ** **ˈ****tɪ****r****i****ə** **r****eɪ****t** / (v) – to decrease in quality
Example: My performance is **deteriorating** because of stress.
- 4. **eloquence** / **ˈ****ɛ****l****ə****k****w****ə****n****s** / (n) – the ability to speak effectively
Example: I admire her because she always speaks with **eloquence**.
- 5. **rule out** / **ˈ****r****u****l** **ə****ʊ****t** / (phrasal) – to exclude something
Example: Our team decided to **rule out** the plan because we know that it will not be effective.

Article

Read the text below.

A new study suggests that the **optimum** language-learning period takes place by age 10.

Published in the journal *Cognition*, the study analyzed the relationship between age and language learning ability. To do this, lead researcher Joshua Hartshorne posted an English grammar quiz on Facebook. Roughly 670,000 native and non-native English speakers took the quiz.

The quiz items required the takers to identify whether or not the given statements were grammatically correct. The respondents were also asked about their previous places of residence, the languages they spoke, their age when they started learning English, and how long they had stayed in an English-speaking country.

Results of the quiz implied that those who started learning English at a young age had a speedier **learning curve** than adults. Findings also suggested that one’s language learning ability starts to **deteriorate** at age 17 or 18. However, the researchers were not able to determine the factors behind this decline due to insufficient data.

According to the findings, late learners also have a smaller chance of developing the same level of **eloquence** as the early learners. Nevertheless, the researchers have not completely **ruled out** the possibility of late learners becoming proficient in a new language.

On another note, Hartshorne is currently looking into conducting a similar study in the context of the Spanish language. Aside from identifying the best period for language learning, he also wants to know if learning periods vary for every grammar aspect. The future study will also determine whether or not language skill elements like accent have an optimum period.

Viewpoint Discussion

Enjoy a discussion with your tutor.

Discussion A

• Do you think that other languages (aside from English and Spanish) should also be included in the new research? Explain.

• Do the study’s findings encourage you to learn another language? Why or why not?

Discussion B

• In your opinion, what are the advantages of learning a second language? Discuss.

• What factors do you think affect one’s ability to learn a language? Share your ideas.