Education will not save your memory

**Kat Lay, Health Correspondent**

February 22 2017, 12:01am, The Times

Being better educated might improve your memory but it does not protect against brain power declining as you age.

A study of more than 11,000 European pensioners from ten countries found that their ability to remember things deteriorated at the same rate, regardless of education levels.

Researchers at University College London measured how good the memory of participants was at the start of the study. They retested them every two years for eight years.

People with higher levels of education tended to score better in initial tests. However, there was no difference in the rate at which memory declined over the eight years between those with high or low education levels.

The study asked participants to repeat a ten-word list to test their ability to recall information immediately. They then had to recall the information again after five minutes. The scores accounted for other factors that could affect performance such as income, health, gender, smoking and age.

Dorina Cadar, the study’s lead author, said: “Despite significant differences in educational systems across countries, education remains a strong indicator of cognitive function in later life, but this study shows we are less clear on whether education can stop the declines in cognition that come naturally with ageing. What we do not know is whether those with lower education had poorer memory at baseline because they have had poorer memories their whole lives, or because they have already experienced some declines in their memory performance.”

The study, published in the journal *Neuroepidemiology*, was funded by the Medical Research Council and the Alzheimer’s Society.

Germany and the Netherlands had the best performance of memory recall at study entry, while Spain had the lowest performance. Women performed better on the memory tests than men but no gender difference was found in the rate of cognitive decline.

While previous studies have found that people with a higher level of education tend to have lower rates of dementia, studies examining the link between education and rates of cognitive decline have produced mixed results.

James Pickett, head of research and development at the Alzheimer’s Society, said: “[These] findings reinforce that dementia is not a natural part of ageing and the factors that may delay the onset of dementia might not have the same effect on the forgetfulness that is common as we grow older.

“As we continue to live longer, it’s important to find ways to help us preserve our memory and thinking skills as well as [reducing] our risk of dementia by eating a healthy, balanced diet and exercising regularly.”