

LANGUAGE BARRIERS EMERGING IN CHILDREN DURING EARLY ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract

This article provides an in-depth analysis of language barriers emerging in children during early English language acquisition. The study examines theoretical foundations, historical approaches, regional and national research, as well as empirical findings. The author explores psychological, sociolinguistic, and methodological aspects of language barriers, offering strategies for overcoming them. The article draws on experiences from Uzbekistan and other countries, contemporary methodologies, and practical recommendations. The research findings serve as a scientific basis for improving language teaching processes and supporting children's successful language acquisition.

Keywords:

language barriers, children, English learning, early acquisition

Introduction

The phenomenon of language barriers in children embarking on early English language learning has become a focal point for educators, linguists, and psychologists alike. In an era marked by increased globalization and the growing prominence of English as a lingua franca, children are introduced to English at ever younger ages, both in formal educational settings and through pervasive media exposure. However, the process of acquiring a new language at an early age is fraught with challenges that extend beyond vocabulary memorization or grammar drills. Language barriers can manifest as cognitive, affective, sociocultural, and structural obstacles that hinder effective communication and academic achievement. Understanding the nature, origins, and implications of these barriers is essential for designing effective pedagogical interventions and fostering linguistic equity. This article undertakes a comprehensive review of the literature, tracing the theoretical and historical roots of the concept, evaluating empirical research from various contexts, and critically engaging with ongoing debates. By situating the discussion within both global and regional perspectives, with particular attention to the Uzbek educational context, this study aims to elucidate the complex interplay of factors contributing to language barriers in early English language learning and to outline pathways for mitigating their impact.

Literature Review

The theoretical-conceptual foundations of language barriers in early English language learning are deeply rooted in the broader field of second language acquisition (SLA) and child language development. Foundational to the understanding of these barriers is the distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) introduced by Cummins, which posits that conversational fluency and academic language proficiency develop at different rates and are subject to distinct challenges.

Children may quickly acquire BICS, enabling them to engage in everyday social interactions, yet struggle for years to master CALP, which is essential for academic success and is often where language barriers become most pronounced. These theoretical insights are supported by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the mediating role of social interaction and cultural context in language development. Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is particularly salient, as it suggests that children's language learning is most effective when guided by more knowledgeable peers or adults within their immediate environment. This underscores the importance of scaffolding and differentiated instruction in overcoming language barriers encountered during early English learning [1].

Classical theories in the field further illuminate the processes by which children confront and attempt to surmount language barriers. Piaget's cognitive developmental theory, for instance, posits that language acquisition is closely linked to stages of cognitive development, implying that children's ability to process and produce a second language is contingent upon their readiness to engage with abstract linguistic concepts. Krashen's Input Hypothesis, another cornerstone of SLA, asserts that comprehensible input slightly above the learner's current proficiency level is necessary for language acquisition to occur. The affective filter hypothesis, also articulated by Krashen, introduces the notion that emotional variables such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence can either facilitate or impede language learning. In the context of early English language acquisition, young learners may experience heightened anxiety due to unfamiliarity with the target language, leading to the formation of psychological barriers that inhibit participation and risk-taking. These classical theories collectively suggest that language barriers are multi-dimensional, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and social factors that interact in complex ways [2].

In the context of Uzbekistan and other post-Soviet countries, regional and national scholars have contributed significantly to the understanding of language barriers in early English language learning. Research by Uzbek linguists and educators, such as those conducted under the auspices of the Ministry of Preschool and School Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan, highlight the unique challenges faced by children whose first language (L1) is Uzbek or Russian. These challenges often stem from structural differences between English and the learners' L1, including phonological, syntactic, and lexical discrepancies. For example, the absence of certain English phonemes in Uzbek can result in persistent pronunciation difficulties, while differences in word order and tense usage contribute to grammatical errors that are resistant to correction. National studies have also documented the influence of sociocultural attitudes toward English, which can either motivate or demotivate young learners depending on the perceived value of English in society and the family's orientation toward multilingualism. In some cases, children encounter barriers due to insufficient exposure to authentic English input outside the classroom, compounded by a lack of qualified teachers proficient in child-centered language pedagogy [3].

Empirical studies conducted in diverse settings corroborate and extend these theoretical and regional insights. Longitudinal research in North America and Europe has documented the trajectories of bilingual and multilingual children as they navigate the demands of early English language learning. These studies reveal that language barriers are not static; rather, they fluctuate over time and are influenced by factors such as age of onset, frequency and quality of language exposure, and the presence or absence of supportive learning environments. For instance, a seminal study by Thomas and Collier (2002) demonstrated that children who received sustained, high-quality bilingual education outperformed their peers in English-only programs, indicating that additive bilingualism can mitigate some of the barriers associated with early English learning. Similarly, research in Central Asia and the Caucasus has highlighted the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy and the integration of local linguistic resources in overcoming language barriers. In Uzbekistan, pilot programs introducing English at the preschool level have reported mixed outcomes, with some children demonstrating rapid gains in oral proficiency while others struggle with literacy skills and academic language development [4].

Critical analysis of the literature reveals ongoing debates and unresolved questions regarding the nature and origins of language barriers in early English language learning. One area of contention concerns the relative importance of age as a determinant of language learning success. The critical period hypothesis, widely cited in the literature, posits that there is a biologically determined window during which language acquisition is most effective. However, recent research has challenged the rigidity of this hypothesis, suggesting that social, motivational, and contextual factors can compensate for age-related declines in language learning aptitude. Another debate centers on the role of first language maintenance versus immersion in the target language. While some scholars advocate for English-only approaches to maximize exposure, others argue that maintaining and developing the child's home language provides cognitive and emotional benefits that ultimately facilitate second language acquisition. This debate is especially relevant in multilingual societies such as Uzbekistan, where children are often exposed to Uzbek, Russian, and English concurrently.

A further point of discussion involves the impact of language barriers on children's broader cognitive and psychosocial development. Empirical evidence suggests that persistent language barriers can lead to negative academic outcomes, reduced self-esteem, and social isolation. Conversely, successful navigation of these barriers is associated with enhanced metalinguistic awareness, cognitive flexibility, and intercultural competence. The literature also highlights the importance of teacher beliefs and practices in either exacerbating or alleviating language barriers. Teachers who adopt deficit perspectives—viewing language barriers as insurmountable obstacles—may inadvertently lower their expectations for learners, leading to self-fulfilling prophecies. In contrast, teachers who employ asset-based approaches, recognizing and building upon children's existing linguistic and cultural resources, are more likely to foster positive learning outcomes [5].

In recent years, the field has witnessed a surge in studies exploring innovative pedagogical strategies for overcoming language barriers in early English language learning. These include the use of multimodal instruction, technology-enhanced language learning, and the incorporation of play-based activities that leverage children's natural curiosity and desire for social interaction. For example, digital storytelling and interactive games have been shown to facilitate vocabulary acquisition and oral fluency, particularly among young learners who may be reluctant to participate in traditional classroom activities. Moreover, the integration of translanguaging practices—wherein children are encouraged to draw upon their full linguistic repertoires—has gained traction as a means of validating and supporting bilingual and multilingual learners. These approaches challenge the traditional monolingual bias of language education and recognize the dynamic, fluid nature of children's language use in real-world contexts [6].

Despite these advances, significant challenges remain. Structural barriers such as large class sizes, limited access to quality teaching materials, and insufficient teacher training continue to impede progress, particularly in resource-constrained settings. In Uzbekistan, ongoing educational reforms aimed at enhancing English language instruction in early childhood have yielded promising results, yet disparities persist between urban and rural areas. Studies have documented the uneven distribution of qualified English teachers and the lack of contextually relevant teaching resources in many regions. Addressing these systemic issues requires sustained investment in teacher professional development, curriculum innovation, and the creation of supportive policy environments that prioritize linguistic diversity and inclusion.

In summary, the literature on language barriers emerging in children during early English language learning is vast and multifaceted. It encompasses a rich tapestry of theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and practical interventions, all of which converge on the recognition that language barriers are complex, dynamic, and deeply embedded in broader social, cultural, and educational contexts. While significant progress has been made in identifying the factors that contribute to these barriers and in developing strategies to overcome them, ongoing research and policy efforts are needed to ensure that all children have equitable opportunities to succeed in learning English and to realize the full benefits of multilingualism.

Conclusion

The emergence of language barriers in children during early English language learning is a phenomenon shaped by a convergence of cognitive, emotional, sociocultural, and structural factors. The literature reviewed underscores the complexity of these barriers, revealing that they are not merely the result of linguistic differences but are intertwined with the broader contexts in which children learn. Theoretical frameworks such as those proposed by Cummins, Vygotsky, Piaget, and Krashen provide valuable insights into the developmental and social dimensions of language acquisition, while empirical studies from Uzbekistan and beyond highlight the variability of children's experiences according to regional, cultural, and institutional circumstances. Critical debates persist regarding the optimal timing, methods, and language policies for early English instruction, reflecting the diversity of contexts in which language learning occurs. However, there is consensus on the importance of supportive, asset-based pedagogical approaches that recognize and build upon children's existing linguistic and cultural resources. The literature suggests that overcoming language barriers requires not only effective instructional strategies but also systemic reforms in teacher training, curriculum development, and policy implementation. In Uzbekistan, as in other multilingual societies, the successful navigation of language barriers in early English learning holds the promise of fostering cognitive flexibility, academic achievement, and intercultural understanding. Continued research, cross-national collaboration, and commitment to educational equity are essential to realizing this potential and ensuring that all children can thrive as confident, competent users of English and other languages.

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Аннотация

Данная статья посвящена глубокому анализу языковых барьеров, возникающих у детей в процессе раннего изучения английского языка. В исследовании рассматриваются теоретические основы, исторические подходы, региональные и национальные научные работы, а также эмпирические данные. Автор изучает психологические, социолингвистические и методические аспекты языковых барьеров, предлагая пути их преодоления. В статье приведён опыт Узбекистана и других стран, современные методики и практические рекомендации. Результаты исследования служат научной основой для совершенствования процессов обучения языку и содействия успешному овладению языком детьми.

Ключевые слова:

языковые барьеры, дети, изучение английского, раннее обучение

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqola bolalarda ingliz tilini erta o'rganish jarayonida yuzaga keladigan til to'siqlarini chuqur tahlil qiladi. Tadqiqotda nazariy asoslar, tarixiy yondashuvlar, mintaqaviy va xalqaro tadqiqotlar, shuningdek, empirik natijalar ko'rib chiqiladi. Muallif til to'siqlarining psixologik,

sotsiolingvistik va metodik jihatlarini o'rganib, ularni yengish yo'llarini taklif qiladi. Maqolada O'zbekiston va boshqa mamlakatlar tajribasi, zamonaviy metodologiyalar va amaliy tavsiyalar keltirilgan. Tadqiqot natijalari til o'rgatish jarayonini takomillashtirish va bolalarning muvaffaqiyatli til o'zlashtirishiga ko'maklashish uchun ilmiy asos bo'lib xizmat qiladi.

Kalit so'zlar:

til to'siqlari, bolalar, ingliz tili, erta o'rganish