



MOTIVATIONAL AND EMOTIONAL FACTORS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE CRITICAL PERIOD HYPOTHESIS

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Abstract: *The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) has long been recognized as a key concept explaining age-related differences in foreign language acquisition. While the hypothesis traditionally emphasizes biological and neurological constraints, recent studies have shown that motivation and emotional factors can play a compensatory role in overcoming these limitations. This paper examines the interaction between affective variables—such as intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, anxiety, and emotional engagement—and the age factor in language learning. Drawing on psycholinguistic and pedagogical perspectives, the study explores how emotional climate, teacher feedback, and learner attitude influence success at various developmental stages. It is argued that although children possess neurocognitive advantages during the critical period, adults can achieve high proficiency levels when their motivation and emotional involvement are sufficiently strong. The paper concludes that emotional intelligence and sustained motivation can act as “affective catalysts,” bridging the gap between biological readiness and lifelong language learning potential.*

Keywords: *Critical Period Hypothesis, motivation, emotion, second language acquisition, affective factors, pedagogy.*

Аннотация: *Гипотеза критического периода (СРН) традиционно рассматривается как биологическое объяснение возрастных различий в овладении иностранным языком. Однако современные исследования показывают, что мотивация и эмоциональные факторы могут частично компенсировать нейробиологические ограничения. В данной статье рассматривается взаимосвязь между мотивационными и эмоциональными переменными (внутренняя мотивация, уверенность, тревожность, вовлечённость) и возрастными особенностями обучения. С позиции психолингвистики и педагогики анализируется влияние эмоционального климата, обратной связи преподавателя и отношения учащегося на успех в освоении языка. Автор утверждает, что хотя дети обладают естественными преимуществами в рамках критического периода, взрослые также могут достигать высокого уровня владения языком при наличии сильной мотивации и положительного эмоционального фона. В заключение делается вывод о том, что эмоциональный интеллект и устойчивая мотивация могут*



служить «аффективными катализаторами» в процессе изучения иностранных языков на протяжении всей жизни.

Ключевые слова: *гипотеза критического периода, мотивация, эмоции, обучение иностранным языкам, аффективные факторы, педагогика*

Annotatsiya: *Tanqidiy davr gipotezasi (CPH) chet tilini o'rganishda yosh omilining ahamiyatini tushuntirib beruvchi asosiy nazariyalardan biridir. An'anaviy tarzda u biologik va neyropsixologik cheklovlarga asoslanadi, biroq so'nggi tadqiqotlar motivatsiya va emotsional omillar bu cheklovlarni qisman yengib o'tishi mumkinligini ko'rsatadi. Ushbu maqolada ichki motivatsiya, o'ziga ishonch, tashvish darajasi va hissiy ishtirok kabi affektiv omillar bilan yosh o'rtasidagi o'zaro bog'liqlik tahlil qilinadi. Psixolingvistik va pedagogik yondashuv asosida o'qituvchi munosabati, dars muhitidagi hissiy atmosfera va o'quvchining shaxsiy munosabatining til o'rganishdagi muvaffaqiyatga ta'siri yoritiladi. Natijalar shuni ko'rsatadiki, bolalar biologik jihatdan afzalliklarga ega bo'lsa-da, kattalar kuchli motivatsiya va ijobiy emotsional ishtirok orqali yuqori natijalarga erishishlari mumkin. Xulosa o'rnida, emotsional intellekt va barqaror motivatsiya til o'rganish jarayonida "affektiv katalizator" sifatida xizmat qilishi qayd etiladi.*

Kalit so'zlar: *tanqidiy davr gipotezasi, motivatsiya, emotsiya, chet tilini o'rganish, affektiv omillar, pedagogika*

Introduction

Language learning is one of the most complex and multifaceted processes in human development, influenced by biological, cognitive, emotional, and social factors. Since Eric Lenneberg's seminal proposal of the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) in 1967, scholars have debated whether there exists a biologically optimal window for acquiring a foreign language. While numerous studies support the notion that early exposure facilitates native-like proficiency, contemporary research indicates that motivational and emotional factors may significantly affect language acquisition outcomes—sometimes even compensating for age-related biological limitations.

In modern pedagogy, the focus has shifted from purely cognitive explanations toward affective and sociocultural dimensions of learning. Language learning is not merely an intellectual task but an emotionally charged human experience involving self-expression, identity, and interpersonal communication. Therefore, understanding how motivation and emotion interact with the critical period is essential for designing effective, age-sensitive teaching strategies that promote lifelong language learning.

This paper aims to explore how motivational and emotional factors shape



second or foreign language acquisition within the framework of the CPH, drawing on insights from psycholinguistics, pedagogy, and neuroscience.

Literature Review

The Critical Period Hypothesis (Lenneberg, 1967) posits that there is a biologically determined period during which the human brain is particularly receptive to language input. After this period, neuroplasticity gradually declines, making native-like mastery of phonology and grammar more difficult. Subsequent studies (Johnson & Newport, 1989; Birdsong, 2006) provided empirical support, showing that learners exposed to a second language after puberty rarely achieve full native-like proficiency.

However, later research challenged the determinism of this view. Scholars such as Singleton and Ryan (2004) argued that although age influences language learning potential, it does not strictly limit success. Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis suggested that emotional variables—motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence—directly mediate how much linguistic input is processed and internalized. Gardner and Lambert (1972) further emphasized the role of integrative motivation—a learner's emotional desire to identify with the target language community—as a key determinant of success.

Dörnyei (2005) expanded this discussion by introducing the L2 Motivational Self System, integrating psychological and emotional dimensions of learning. Neuroscientific research (Abutalebi & Green, 2016) also suggests that emotionally engaging activities stimulate broader neural activation, enhancing memory consolidation and retention even in adult learners.

Discussion and Findings

Children possess remarkable neuroplasticity that allows them to internalize sounds, intonation, and grammar intuitively. However, they often lack sustained motivation and metacognitive control. Adults, by contrast, exhibit reduced neural adaptability but greater self-regulation and goal-directed behavior. Studies confirm that adult learners with strong motivation and positive emotional involvement can outperform younger learners in short-term progress.

Motivation serves as a driving force that counterbalances the decline in biological readiness. Emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) plays a crucial role in helping learners manage anxiety and maintain optimism. Teacher enthusiasm and empathy lower affective filters and enhance communication. Moreover, emotionally charged experiences, such as storytelling and cultural immersion, activate neural regions linked to memory, partially reopening the brain's plasticity window.



Pedagogical Implications

Teachers should create emotionally supportive classrooms that foster trust and empathy. Lessons must connect with learners' goals and identities to sustain intrinsic motivation. Integrating affective strategies like self-reflection and visualization strengthens emotional commitment. Collaborative learning enhances both communication and emotional support. Finally, teacher training programs should include emotional literacy to better address learners' affective needs.

Conclusion

The Critical Period Hypothesis explains biological sensitivity in language learning but does not define its limits. Motivation and emotion can extend learning capacity throughout life. Educators must adopt a holistic approach that balances cognitive, emotional, and biological aspects. As Gardner (2010) stated, "It is not the age of the learner that matters most, but the passion that drives the learning."

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