HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

THE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC BENEFITS OF LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES BEFORE THE AGE OF 15

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Abstract. Learning foreign languages before the age of 15 provides both communication and academic benefits. Research highlights that early language acquisition supports communication skills, cognitive development, academic achievement, and cultural understanding. This study uses a mixed methodology including language tests, academic records, student questionnaires, and teacher interviews to explore these advantages. The results show that early foreign language learning improves students' communication skills, school performance, confidence in social interaction, and overall personal growth. Early language learning should be encouraged in educational settings to support student development.

Keywords: early foreign language learning, personal growth, social development, academic achievement, strong cognitive skills, education , pedagogy.

Introduction. Foreign language learning is becoming increasingly important in education worldwide. Many education systems introduce foreign languages before the age of 15 because research shows clear benefits from early learning [2, 622–624]. Bibliometric analyses indicate that early language learning research has expanded significantly over the past decade, highlighting its growing educational importance [4, 43–71]. Early learners demonstrate stronger cognitive skills, better attention, and more flexibility in thinking compared to students who start language learning later.

Learning foreign languages before the age of 15 helps students build communication confidence, interact with peers, foster their knowledge in different fields, and understand cultural differences [10, 546–548]. This study examines both social and academic advantages of early foreign language learning.

Academic and cognitive benefits. Research shows that early foreign language learning boosts cognitive development, enhancing attention, memory, problem-solving, and reasoning skills [2, 622–624]. Shamiddinova notes that bilingual education improves academic performance and cultural understanding by strengthening cognitive functions across subjects [6, 1621–1623]. Early learners also develop greater creativity, problem-solving skills, and academic thinking due to the mental flexibility required to switch between languages. Nazirova also emphasizes that early foreign language learning promotes overall youth development, enhancing cognitive, social, and emotional skills [5, 107–112]. Nguyen found that young language learners perform better in reading comprehension and logical reasoning, and global studies confirm that early second language acquisition supports cognitive performance and academic success [3, 10–15].

Social and communication benefits. Learning a foreign language early also enhances social interaction, dialogue, and confidence. Ziyayeva reports that early learners have stronger interpersonal skills and are less anxious about speaking [10, 546–548]. Studies also indicate that foreign language proficiency improves social skills and emotional intelligence, fostering empathy, collaboration, leadership, and broader career opportunities [7, 930–946].

Pedagogical approaches. Effective early language teaching uses engaging, interactive, and culturally relevant methods. Uroqova emphasizes play-based learning, immersion, and authentic communication to make learning enjoyable and support positive attitudes [8, 19–23]. Strategies

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incorporating interactive and culturally rich content enhance educational quality and social skill development through peer interaction and cooperative tasks [9, 208–227].

Methodology. This study used both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative measures included language proficiency tests and academic performance data, while qualitative insights were gathered through questionnaires and interviews. 180 students aged 11–15 and 25 foreign language teachers, with at least five years of teaching experience, from multiple secondary schools in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, specifically, from School No 41, 33, and 45, participated in this study. All students began learning a foreign language before the age of 15 and speak more than 2 languages.

Several activities were carried out in order to collect data, which are:

1. Standardized foreign language proficiency tests. Students completed a structured foreign language test including reading, writing, listening, and speaking sections. Tests were administered in a controlled classroom environment over two one hour sessions, with scores assessing grammar, fluency, comprehension, and pronunciation. The results offered an objective measure of students' language proficiency and allowed comparison between early learners and peers who started later.

2. Academic records from core subjects. Academic data were collected from school records in mathematics, English lessons, and the native language over the past year. This allowed examination of correlations between early foreign language learning and overall academic performance. All data were anonymized to ensure student confidentiality.

3. Student questionnaire on communication confidence and social participation. A structured questionnaire with 20 Likert-scale items measured students' confidence in speaking, participation in classroom activities, and collaboration with peers. It was completed during class and took approximately 20 minutes. Responses were analyzed to identify patterns in communication confidence and social engagement. The questionnaire included statements like:

- ❖ I feel comfortable sharing my opinions in class discussions.
- ❖ I help my peers when they have difficulties in learning.
- ❖ I enjoy working in teams with students from different backgrounds.
- ❖ I try to use foreign language phrases I have learned in daily life.

These statemenst were assessed by students under the following 5 scales:

Scale	Meaning
1	Strongly Disagree
2	Disagree
3	Neutral
4	Agree
5	Strongly Agree

4. Group Session with Teachers. A single 90-minute session was held with all 25 teachers to discuss observations of students' academic performance and classroom engagement. Teachers shared insights on the effectiveness of early language learning and social interactions among students. The discussion was recorded, transcribed, and thematically grouped to extract qualitative patterns in students' academic and social development.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. Qualitative responses were grouped under themes such as communication confidence, classroom participation, and cultural awareness.

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Results. Academic outcomes. 80% of students who started learning a foreign language before age 15 showed higher literacy scores, compared to 60% of later learners. More precisely, the study found that students who started foreign language learning before age 15:

- ✓ Showed higher academic performance in literacy and comprehension tasks;
- ✓ Demonstrated better critical thinking and problem-solving abilities;
- ✓ Displayed improved performance in subjects requiring reading and analytical skills;

These results support findings from Shamiddinova, which show bilingual education enhances cognitive and academic development [6, 1621–1623].

Social outcomes. 85% of early learners reported greater confidence in speaking in groups, while only 55% of later learners did. More specifically, students who began early foreign language learning also demonstrated:

- ✓ Increased confidence when speaking in groups;
- ✓ Greater willingness to participate in class discussions;
- ✓ Enhanced understanding of cultural practices associated with language learning;

Teachers reported that students were more socially engaged and showed better teamwork skills. This aligns with research showing that early language learning supports emotional regulation and social competence [7, 930–946].

Discussion. The results indicate that early foreign language learning contributes significantly to both academic achievement and social development. Findings from Collins suggest that early language acquisition supports cognitive and social growth, which enhances overall academic outcomes [1, 1–10]. These outcomes are the result of increased language exposure and interactive learning methods that engage both cognitive and social processes.

In addition, studies highlight the importance of supportive teaching methodologies, such as immersive and play-based approaches, which promote communicative skills alongside academic development, allowing children interact with each other and exchanging ideas [8, 19–23]. These methods help young learners practise language skills while building confidence in real-world communication.

Conclusion. This study concludes that learning foreign languages before the age of 15 offers clear academic and social benefits. Early language learning improves students' cognitive skills, academic performance, and social communication abilities. Educators are encouraged to include interactive and culturally rich language activities in curricula to support holistic student development.

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