

The Myth of Language Learning as an Adult

Are children really better at learning languages than adults?

MIAMI, January 27, 2022 - Everyone's heard at least once in their life that it's best to learn a new language when you're young. To become completely fluent like a native speaker, especially when it comes to mastering grammar and accents, some people even say that you should start learning at a very early age. In linguistics, those in favor of this hypothesis call this period the "[critical period](#)" and claim that learning a language is much more difficult at an adult age.

But the idea that children are better at learning languages might actually be a myth: There are [many studies](#) that claim age isn't really a relevant factor when learning languages. Many late learners can really become completely fluent, speaking a new language with little trace of a foreign accent.

"Adults tend to be more judgemental than children and there is a widely spread social perception of linguistic ability as a general measure of one's intelligence. As adults, we might hold ourselves to higher standards and become frustrated when we can't express our complex thoughts in our new language," says Javier Santana, Head of Digital Education at [Lingoda](#), the leading online language school in Europe. "Therefore, the fear of being judged for our linguistic mistakes is typically more present in older age groups. Overcoming this fear is a key step in the language learning process."

One of the reasons children learn languages so well is the incredible amount of time they are exposed to the language. In a sense, children are full time immersionists; they are in contact with their "target" language at all times and they have virtually unlimited chances to practice and speak it. On top of that, children usually live in a protected environment where making linguistic mistakes comes at low or zero cost. This is ideal for learning, not only languages but anything.

On the flip side, what we have on our side as adults is agency. In other words, we can create an environment that allows us to improve ourselves. And we have the ability to actively and consciously take steps to build habits that can help us master a language – whether it's engaging in the right kind of practice or using the right kinds of tools.

In addition, learning a second language as an adult isn't only just about mastering the language like a native speaker does, it's much more than that. In fact, [recent revisions of international language learning frameworks](#) are moving away from the idea of an "idealized native speaker" as a reference point. Instead, they bring to the forefront aspects such as intercultural awareness, cross-linguistic mediation and the ability to build on the plurilingual repertoire. At the end of the day, learning a new language as an adult also means becoming a social agent across different cultures, which is something beyond the mere "native-like" linguistic competence. Moreover, scientists have discovered that learning a new language also helps making [more rational and objective decisions](#).

However, what about the so-called "critical period"? Well, as the authors of the concept argue, it's possible that this period only marks the part of our lives where our societies and cultures allow us to devote more time, resources and attention to learning and is therefore not a biological predetermination, but rather [an "epiphenomenon"](#).

At Lingoda, our learning method caters to the [adult needs of learning a language](#). When you want to learn a language very quickly, you can take as many classes per week as you wish in order to maximize your opportunities to speak. If you want to learn at a more leisurely pace, you can also do that. In addition, you're constantly learning with our expert teachers that give you ample opportunities

for you to practice your speaking skills in a safe judgment-free environment and get exposure to many different dialects and accents.

“Our curriculum at Lingoda is designed to improve your language skills in areas that are important in everyday life,” adds Santana. “For example, you start out with learning how to introduce yourself, talk about your family or how to order coffee at a restaurant. And this only accelerates your motivation as you move towards more advanced topics. For instance, one of our most popular advanced lessons is ‘admitting fault and apologizing’, a skill that’s arguably difficult in itself, so we provide you with the linguistic support to do so in your desired target language. And there are many lessons like this: negotiating, dealing with misunderstandings, and making an advanced presentation.”

Learning a new language takes time and consistency. But [you can get there even as an adult learner](#).

To talk in-depth about learning languages as an adult, Javier Santana, Head of Digital Education at Lingoda, is available for interviews.

ABOUT LINGODA

Lingoda is one of the top online language schools. Founded in Berlin, Germany in 2013, we provide convenient and accessible online language courses in German, English, Business English, Spanish and French to over 80,000 students worldwide. Our private and small group classes are taught by over 1,500 qualified, native-speaking teachers. With almost 550,000 classes available per year and accessible 24/7, our mission is to empower even the busiest people to master a language and unlock their potential — at any time, from anywhere.

We believe in a communicative approach to language learning: mastering a language means being able to speak it with confidence. Our CEFR-focused learning materials are designed by linguistic experts and focus on meaningful topics that are applicable to our students’ interests, careers and everyday lives. Thanks to our extensive rotating roster of teachers and our small group classes, students are exposed to a variety of regional accents and expressions within the same language and have the time and space to practice speaking in every lesson.

Our diverse team includes over 200 international professionals from 30 countries speaking 40 languages. In 2021, Crunchbase listed Lingoda among the top 3 language learning companies globally. We have a score of 4.5 on Trustpilot and 75% of our reviews are rated as ‘excellent’ because we offer a high-quality and authentic learning experience that helps students achieve their learning goals and transform their lives. Visit www.lingoda.com for additional information.

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