



UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH PROJECT

Assessment of Undergraduate Research Project

(Second-Language Acquisition

**Trauma and Inability among Children in Acquiring Language Successfully)**

at Salahaddin University College of Education-

English Department

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# Certification

I certify that this study was prepared by students (Sumaya Rauf, Shajwan Kamaran) under my supervision at College of Education/ Salahaddin University- Erbil in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor in English Language.



Signature

Assistant professor.

Zheen Hamad Amin Abdullah

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# Abstract

Acquiring another language especially a second language apart from your mother tongue becomes an important part of your life. When you live in a country, except for your mother tongue there is another domain language you must learn for staying in contact with your surrounded people likewise there are many purposes for acquiring the second language. The issue of inability and trauma among children has been widely researched and examined in many countries. However, there have been a small number of studies conducted in Iraqi Kurdistan about them in learning a language. This research paper, therefore, aims to estimate traumatic learners among Kurdistan-Iraq. The present study also seeks cultural and individual treatments toward them as well as the role of the families in helping them to improve in their language learning process.

The participants in this research are undergraduate students as well as physiotherapists, teachers, and pharmacists. Mixed methods were used for the data collection in this study. The survey questionnaire is 2 sections, including 4 questions. 5 questions are for their background information including nationality, age, level of education, and occupation in the first section. The second one asks 3 questions for participants suggestions for some learning strategies and their information about it.

The result of this paper illustrates the problems of these kinds of children in learning a new language and the difficulties that they face during these disturbing mental and emotional processes.

It may help the families who have traumatic children in coping with them for meliorating their language skills, also what individuals should treat them to keep them connected to their society and some strategies which maybe help them for learning.

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# Chapter One: Introduction

## **Introduction**

## Language is a master technique of human communication. Consisting of many rules for producing words. It is the cognitive process, involved in creating and acquiring linguistic communication. There are many differences in human language, even oral communication of the same country. Likewise, language is what sets us isolated from the animal kingdom (Bohren, 2018). An ability for learning a language is uniquely human behavior. Language acquisition is the mental process by which we are able to evolve and instruct a language.

## The term second-language acquisition means the ability of humans especially children and adults in developing an additional language, aside from their native one. It is often acquired by an outnumbered group members or settlers who speak another language natively (Saville-Trioke, 2010). ‘‘Bad things happen in life as children grow up. Some are obvious, like a natural disaster that destroys a home, physical abuse or death of a parent. Others can also rock a child’s sense of safety and well-being, like community violence or substance abuse in a parent. Something as simple as being in a car accident or a child overhearing frequent, intense arguments between his or her parents can be traumatic for some children.

## Learning how to understand, process and cope with difficulties – even tragedies – is a natural part of a child’s development process. But sometimes children get stuck. An experience, or repeated experiences, may leave a child with an overwhelming sense of fear and loss, making them feel that they have no safety or control over their lives. For some children, these feelings become so intense that they get in the way of their continued physical, emotional, social or intellectual development.

## Many issues and challenges face children in acquiring languages successfully, trauma and inability are some of these argumentative subjects which estimate children’s abilities to acquire the second language. Trauma causes a lack of ability to attend classroom tasks, as well it delays the capacity of creative play, which is one of the important methods that teach children how to deal and manage with the problems of everyday life.

## **The problem**

## There may not have been enough inquiry addressed in Kurdistan region, to explore whether traumatic children are able to acquire a second language or not during their whole life with this disturbing experience.

## **The Aim of the Research**

## Therefore, to expound on this memory, and perception disorder of acquiring a second language this study seeks to explore the language learning process, additionally lack of acquiring language among traumatic experiences, and how parents help their children to meliorate language acquisition during the distressing experience.

## **Significance** **of the Research**

## The outcome of this investigation will be considered crucial for the teachers, families, as well as SLA students who are traumatized. It will help the teachers to be aware of their attitudes toward them furthermore to change their methods if they have weaknesses during teaching them, to discover appropriate techniques of teaching after scanning for the outcome of this study. Moreover, it will diagnose that what should families do with their traumatized child.

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# Chapter Two: Literature Review

## **2.1.** **Subsection 1**

## **Second Language Acquisition**

## There have been numerous studies to investigate the process of language acquisition by humans to apprehend and realize a language. Additionally, the importance of Language Acquisition. The term ‘acquisition of language’ according to Lyons, J. is based on the process by which children attain fluent control of their native communication also he points out that the term of acquisition is different from learning (1970). Learners acquire a language by a subconscious process throughout which they are unknowing of grammatical rules, acquiring language is an unconscious process as well as it does not require teaching and, in this process the child authority the pace (Hoque and Bamgladesh, n.d.).

## SLA is concerned with the character of the hypotheses even if it is conscious or unconscious that learners come about regarding the rules of a second language (Gass, Behney, and Plonsky, 2020). In the SLA process, children acquire to create and comprehend speech (Safitri, 1981). Language competency is determined as the ability to utilize a language effectively as well as suitably throughout the range of personal, social, also in academic fields or daily life communications in a given society (Khasinah, 2014).

## According to Eddy (n.d.) second language is acquired by those who live in a place where two or more languages are spoken and this language is necessary to be acquired to stay in contact with the rest of population who do not speak their first language. L2 acquisition is considered as one of the complex processes by Ellis in many ways even more than L1 acquisition as the elements involved are more numerous (2015). There are some differences among L2 learners and one of the most obvious ones is the term of their opening age. Some learners learn L2 from their early childhood while many others are waiting till they go to school.

## One of the common assumptions is that children are better acquirers of a language than adults, as a result, younger acquirers will be more successful in learning a second language than adults (Ellis, 2015). Looking more closely at children in their middle childhood they turn out to be more logical in their thinking and also, they are able to classify and arrange objects, but still, they are not abstract in thinking (Philp, Oliver and Mackey, 2008). Besides Singleton in his study cited by Ellis points out that older acquirers outperform younger ones in vocabulary progression (1999).

## But still, the effects of age on second language acquisition are difficult to analyse or complicated (Ellis, 2015). Furthermore, Cook and Singleton in their book indicate that L2 users have some unique characeristics one of them is they think differently as well as they mark that teaching another language is a traditional reason for training children’s brains (2014).

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## **2.2. Subsection 2**

## **Trauma and Inability among Children**

## The term ‘trauma’ according to (Margaritis, 2016) is an event that affects the emotions of those who experienced it. As well as SAMHSA indicates that trauma is a public health issue, it exists as a consequence of violence, neglect, disaster, mislaying, war, and many other emotionally detrimental experiences. Moreover, SAMHSA points out that this event has no boundaries regarding gender, age, and race it is an approximately universal experience of humans with the mentality and substance use confusion. The impacts of trauma place an excessive burden on a person, families together with communities.

## Besides many of those who experience this event will remain with their lives without a lasting negative response while others who have more difficulties with it also experience traumatic stress reactions (2014). Children can be more emotionally affected than other ages like adults (Anon, n.d.). Childhood traumatic events are common and are more expected to be psychologically overwhelming because they probably bluster a child’s sense of safety and guarantee and lead to abstract feelings of anxiety, fear, shame, anger, and uselessness (Cohen, Mannarino, and Deblinger, 2012). Malizia, N. argued that if trauma occurs in certain phases of development there is a real danger that the recently acquired skills and capabilities could be placed in danger.

## Additionally, he stated that in times past it was thought that children were kept out from traumatic circumstances, conversely, now, very young children respond to trauma and resultant misery (2017). The brain starts to develop before birth with the most significant and fast development occurring during early childhood. The event of trauma in childhood has a great impact on the development of the brain and how the structures in the brain work. The brain gets sensitized through which new information is authorized (Kirouac and Mcbride, 2009). Lavine and Kline indicated that the most universal causes of the possible traumatic reaction include accidents, falls, and invasive surgical processes.

## Besides, they announced that often these circumstances have no lasting ill effects (2006). Traumatic experiences can set physical reactions and strong emotions that can remain long after the event, or they may feel physiological reactions just like heart pounding, fear, as well as helplessness. Even though adults try to keep children safe, but dangerous incidents still happen, this danger may come from community violence or from within the family, and school shooting (Peterson, 2018).

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# Chapter Three: Methods

This section provides an analysis of the chosen research questions and their answers to the study. Furthermore, this section will describe how the data have been collected. In light of the lack of knowledge of how traumatic children can acquire L2, we sought to expand some understandings about their situations as well as their ability for acquiring a second language among Kurdistan-Iraq children. As a consequence, to present more clues about their capacity for learning new skills and also the role of their family to improve their second language moreover the treatment of individuals and culture toward them we conducted a survey we chose to focus on a variety of participants to collect more about traumatic children in our society. We are interested in finding out how traumatic children can be better at learning L2 as well as the strategies that they use with children during their experience with trauma.

## 3.1. Context

The current research took a place in the 2021-22 academic year, and it has been accomplished in Iraqi Kurdistan and 14 of the selected participants were at Salahaddin University, College of Education, 3 at Erbil Polytechnic University, and 2 of them were at Tishk University. The purpose of choosing these contexts is to collect valid and dependable data.

## 3.2. Participants

Overall, 21 undergraduates with graduate students participated in a survey questionnaire to collect reliable data for this research, participants had a variety of backgrounds including, age, level of education as well as occupation. Of those who reported their nationality all were (100%) Kurdish. Their age ranged between (15-25), 5 participants (28.3%) were between (15-20), and 16 of them (76.2%) were between (20-25). The participants had different levels of education, 3 participants (14.3%) were graduate students, and 18 (85.7%) were undergraduate students. According to their responses about their occupation, 14 participants (66.8%) were just students at college, 3 of them (14.3%) were teachers, 1 of the participants (4.8%) was a student at college and at the same time works as a teacher, and 3 of them (14.4%) still had no job.

## 3.3. Instrument/Tool

The tool that has been used for this research paper is an online survey questionnaire, and it consists of two sections the first section includes 4 questions which seek the participant’s information about the traumatic children, whereas the other section consisting 3 questions, attempts to figure out of the role of the family in developing their skills especially acquiring a second language. Additionally, the treatment of individuals as well as their culture toward them.

# Chapter Four: Results

We assembled the data for our research paper using an online survey questionnaire and, in this section, the answers will be discussed and presented. Moreover, only the important ideas which were collected by the survey questionnaire will be presented to achieve useful information about the inquiry. There were two sections in a survey questionnaire: in the first three questions (Illustration 1) unipolar Likert scale was used, four different options for the first question and the options of the second and third questions were the same and they were yes, no, and I haven't a clue. In the second section, we asked some special questions as presented in (Illustration 2).

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **ITEMS** | | **TOTAL** | | **in my family** | **in children’s hospital** | | | **in other places** | | **No** |
| **1. have you ever made a connection with traumatic children?** | | 21 | | 4.80% | 28.60% | | | None | | 61.90% |
|  |  | | **Table 1: the participants of the study who deal with traumatic children** | | |  |  | |
|  |  | |  | | |  |  | |
|  | |  | |  |  | | |  | |  |
| **4.1. Connection with Traumatic Children**  Above which is table 1 is based on the collected data from an online survey questionnaire nearly (4.8%) of the participants made a connection with traumatic children in their families, and (28.6%) of them saw them in children’s hospital, and (61.9%) which is about 13 of them did not make a connection with them anywhere. | |  | |  |  | | |  | |  |
| **ITEMS** | | **TOTAL** | | **Yes** | **No** | | | **I haven't clue** | |  |
| **2. Are traumatic children able to learn a second language without going to school?** | | 21 | | 42.90% | 9.50% | | | 47.60% | |  |

**Table 2: traumatic children and second language learning**

**4.2 Traumatic Children’s Ability for Acquiring a Second Language without going to School**

Above which is table 2 is about the second question and it consists of 2 parts in the first part, the participants were asked about the ability to learn a second language without going to any school or private centers. About (42.9%) which nearly means 9 of them said yes, they can, and (9.5%) chose no, and the rest of the participants (47.6%) which is about 10 of them haven’t a clue about this question which means they have no knowledge about it, they do not know about it at all.

The second part was asked why they chose yes/no what are their ideas about it and how traumatic children can acquire a second language without going to school. They shared different ideas about this question, some of them believed that they cannot learn without going to school, as one of their comments *‘‘They need a specific system for learning’’* a partner believes that they have to go to the school which is specialized for these children, that is because they thought their minds work slowly as one of them said *‘‘Traumatic children can learn the second language just like normal students but somehow harder because their mind works slowly’’*. One of their responses pointed out something else for her/his answer he/she said *‘‘because even if our family have it do not let anybody knows that, they keep it as a secret’’* it means that some of the families keep their child away from the public sphere. Besides some of them agreed that they can learn without going to school because there are many ways for teaching them one of them suggested that *‘‘they can use social media such as YouTube for learning it’’*, and many others said that traumatic children have many abilities and they can learn easily, so they can do it.

**4.3 Assessment of Their Abilities by Tests**

**Q3. Are there any tests for assessing traumatic children to show their ability for learning a second language?**

According to this chart, (52.4%) of the participants said yes there are tests for assessing traumatic children’s ability for acquiring a second language, while (14.3%) of them said no there is no test. The rest of the participants (33.3%) chose I haven’t a clue because of the lack of knowledge about it.

**4.4 Some Learning Strategies for Traumatic Children**

Question (4) is asked for some learning strategies for these children, and participants’ recommendations were different. Some of them recommended that watching videos may be useful for them. Another suggestion *is ‘‘Attempting with them and trying to teach them in the best way and using pictures and videos while we are explaining subjects’’*. Moreover, some of them preferred that they should communicate with counselors and social workers, Training daily, make them feel safe, drawing pictures, using some tools like data shows as well as using different and colorful images, telling stories or children’s book, film cartoons, they can learn by listening and repeating and writing, and patience is the most important thing with them.

**The Role of the Family as well as Individual, and Cultural Treatment toward them.**

The questions that I included for the second section in the questionnaire were three open-ended questions, about how families cope with them during their language learning process, and what do they do to meliorate their language acquisition. Furthermore, individuals' treatments toward them as well as if they can be healed and starting to live their common life.

**4.5 ‘‘How families help their traumatic children to meliorate language learning?’’**

According to the participants’ recommendations for this question, families can help their children by teaching them themselves, as one of them stated that *‘‘Many families help their traumatic children by teaching their children themselves or send them to private centers’’*. Also, one said families should treat them just like a normal child even in the learning processes. One of the participants suggested that they should bring them to the training centers, *‘‘They should bring them to the training center or if they do not have enough money, they can train them at home’’*. One of the responses was *‘‘By supporting and encouraging their traumatic child, the family can help them by supporting them when they make any mistakes and let them feel comfortable’’*. Likewise, three of the responses were about family communications, they said that families should talk to them daily, and families are the best ones to communicate with them because they thought emotions are very important for these children.

**4.6 ‘‘How should individuals treat them to keep these children connected to their society?’’**

Participants indicated that the role of individuals is very important, they have to be sociable and use treat them kindly by *‘‘Using soft words and encouraging them’’*. One of the participants pointed out that *‘‘Speaking too much with them and bringing them to outside will make them be connected with surroundings’’*. Another one’s answer was *‘‘Be non-judgmental, and Giving positive attention’’*. *‘‘It depends on their parents first, and secondly themselves; they should do everything that makes them better without the scare of anything, and society should help them to whatever that makes them better’’* that was another response of the participants.

**4.7.1. ‘‘Does childhood trauma can be healed?’’**

This question consists of two parts the first one asked if they could be healed or not, according to their response to this question, about 76.2% of them said yes, they can be healed. Besides, 23.8% of them said no they cannot be healed which means they spend their whole life with trauma. See the chart below.

**4.7.1 Participants explanation for the current question**

Some of the participants agreed that they can be healed by having ‘‘a professional system and education’’. Also, another participant stated that *‘‘Yes, childhood trauma can be healed. Seek out therapy with someone psychoanalytically or psychodynamically trained. A therapist who understands the impact of childhood experiences’’*. Some of them stated that it depends on the degree of trauma *‘‘No Because they have one more chromosome but some of them yes can be healed it depends on the degree of the traumatic’’*.

# Chapter Five: Discussion

The result of this paper illustrates the problems of these kinds of children the traumatized one while learning the new language and the difficulties that they faced disturbing this process. According to our findings and based on the collected data nearly half of our participants agreed that traumatized children can learn second language even without going to school or private centers and according to our chart again nearly half of the participants agreed that there are tests for assessing traumatic children’s ability for acquiring a second language. Family treatments as Figley and Kiser pointed out that when it occurs some families will have difficulty adapting in healthy and sustainable ways, they either struggle or fail to adapt successfully (2013).

# Chapter Six: Conclusions and Recommendations

As traumatic children are everywhere it is important to understand and know how to deal with them and how to make them connected to society besides guiding and helping them to improve their learning skill therefore the current study seeks for the traumatic children’s abilities for acquiring a second language and the findings for this study shows some strategies for learning as well as the importance of the role of families in improving their language skills. By asking the effects of the families this study established the significance of the family by teaching their traumatic children by themselves as for showing their emotions and make these children feel safe among them. Encouraging these children by their families makes them feel comfortable and not feel shame upon themselves so that it gives them a chance of making mistakes which they can learn daily words while communicating with their families. Likewise, individuals and cultural treatment affect them.

` Also, the results of assessing the abilities of these children have indicated that acquiring a second language among traumatic children is less useful without sending them to schools or private centers because as many participants stated that their brain works slowly so they need special systems to help them to learn a language successfully during this distressing process. This information could later lead the families as well as individuals and culture in dealing with them moreover guiding them to encourage and support them wherever and whenever they make a mistake in order to learn better.

Researchers recommend to give a chance to the traumatic children to participate in a public sphere either by giving normal speeches to the others or participating in different communities or groups. As well as, publishing many studies and guidance for the families about the process of healing or about treating them properly. Furthermore, attempting to create a good environment for them to be able to show their abilities in different fields, so as to be connected with the society and surroundings.

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Appendix**: Questionnaire**

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1ldqgBKwlGtM\_AE6uIRRMpBacJ9KNtE8z4HAggWtBmEY/edit?usp=sharing

# Abstract in Kurdish language

بەدەستهێنانی زمانێکی تر بەتایبەتی زمانی دووەم جگە لەزمانی دایکت دەبێتە بەشێکی گرنگی ژیانت کاتێک لە وڵاتێکدا دەژی گە لە زمانی دایکت زمانی تر هەیە کە پێویستە فێربیت بۆ مانەوە لە پەیوەندی لەگەڵ خەڵکی دەورەدراوت بە هەمان شێوە مەبەستێکی زۆر هەیە بۆ بەدەستهێنانی زمانی دووەم. کێشەی ڕاتەکانی دەروونی لە نێوان منداڵاندا لە زۆربەی وڵاتان بە شێوەیەکی فراوان لێکۆڵینەوەی لەسەر کراوە و لێکۆڵینەوەی لەسەر کراوە هەرچەندە لە کوردستانی عێراق ژمارەیەکی کەمی لێکۆڵینەوە لە بارەیان لە فێربوونی زمانێک ئەنجام دراو لەبەر ئەمە ئەم توێژینەوەیە ئامانجی خەمڵاندنی فێرخوازانی نەخۆشیی ڕاتەکانی دەروونیە لە نێوان هەرێمی کوردستان و عێراق توێژینەوەکەی ئێستا هەروەها بەدوای چارەسەری کلتوری و تاکەکەسیی بەرامبەریان دەگەڕێت هەروەها ڕۆڵی خێزانەکان لە یارمەتیدانیان بۆ باشترکردنی پرۆسەی فێربوونی زمانەکەیان.

بەشداربووانی ئەم توێژینەوەیە خوێندکاری دەرچوون و هەروەها چارەسەری سروشتی و مامۆستا و دەرمانسازن شێوازی تێکەڵ بەکارهاتووە بۆ کۆکردنەوەی داتا لەم توێژینەوەیەدا ڕاپرسییەکە 2 بڕگەیە، کە 4 پرسیار و 5 بۆ زانیاری پاشبنەمایی تێدایە لەوانە نەتەوەو تەمەن و ئاستی خوێندن و پیشەیی لە بەشی یەکەمدا و دووەمیشیان 3 پرسیاری بۆ بەشداربووان کرد بۆ پێشنیاری هەندێک ستراتیژی فێربوون و زانیارییان لەبارەیەوە.

دەرەنجامی ئەم پەڕەیە کێشەکانی ئەو جۆرە منداڵانە لە فێربوونی زمانێکی نوێ و ئەو زەحمەتەی کە لە ماوەی ئەم پرۆسە دەروونی و سۆزدارییە بێزارکەرانەدا ڕووبەڕوویان دەبێتەوە دەردەخات.

لەوانەیە یارمەتی ئەو خێزانانە بدات کە منداڵی نەخۆشی ڕاچڵەکانی دەروونیان هەیە لە گونجان لەگەڵیان بۆ کارامەیی زمانیان هەروەها ئەو شتانەی کە پێویستە تاکەکان مامەڵەیان لەگەڵ بکەن بۆ ئەوەی بەستراونەتەوە لەگەڵ کۆمەڵگاکەیان و چەند ستراتیجێک کە لەوانەیە یارمەتیان بدات بۆ فێربوون.