

# TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TO YOUNG LEARNERS

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**Abstract:** *this scientific research is dedicated to help readers to make teaching more effective, by attending to learning and the inner mental world of the learner, and by then understanding how classroom activities and teacher decisions can create, or limit, children's opportunities for learning. In this article the aim of teaching English language to young learners, the development of Uzbekistan education system were discussed. This article also deals with young children's foreign language acquisition and learning within the scope of the very early stages of the school system. Although there are many unorganized theories, opinions, models, and proposals about how to teach modern languages to young children, we will be focusing on the work of researches who have significantly contributed to this area of investigation.*

**Keywords:** *foreign language; language teaching; early foreign language education, young learners.*

Ever since I am a student myself, the Uzbekistan education system has been promoting foreign language studies. Back then, students started learning the first foreign language in the 5th grade (at the age of 11). Nowadays, the national curriculum introduces the first compulsory foreign language in the 1st grade (at the age of 7). All the teachers of English in state schools have to follow the common national program designed by the Ministry of Education. They are free to use any of the ministry-approved textbooks which they find suitable for their needs or their students' profile. Students are assessed according to the common criteria; therefore, at the end of each year of study they have to be assessed according to the competencies mentioned in the national program. According to the Common European Frame of Reference for Language (CEFR, 2001), by the end of high school students should have reached the B2 level.

Most Uzbekistan schools choose English either as the first or the second compulsory foreign language. If students start learning English in primary school, they usually have the same specialist teacher from the 1st grade until they are in the 5th grade, when they finish secondary school first level. During primary and secondary school years, foreign language studies are allotted 2, maximum 3 hours a week for expanding or improving linguistic competencies [1. 88-89].

Some classrooms have individual desks; others have desks for two or three children. Each of them has a chalkboard and a teacher's desk in front of it. Every classroom is shared by two classes of children, as primary school children have lessons in the morning, and secondary school learners study in the afternoon. All teachers have at their disposal a CD player, a whiteboard, a laptop. The school management team has decided to have English as the first foreign language. Languages is taught as separate school subjects in a FLES program, with 2 or 3 lessons a week. All through the school year the committee has special activities such as open lessons and presentations of new teaching materials. It also organizes language contests and celebrations (such as the Foreign Languages Day, Halloween, Christmas, or Europe's Day). Every semester we have meetings with all teachers of English in the region where matters such as effective planning or teaching methods and materials are discussed. The children's environment is favorable to learning English. Their families encourage them to learn the language, either because they consider it useful to be proficient in a global language, or because they have older relatives who study English. They also listen to modern international and English music extensively, and these days dancing songs are in English, so children are curious about what the lyrics mean. In addition, most pupils in this class have personal computers and Internet connection at home. Thus, they are exposed to lots of information or games in English [2. 105-106].

Thanks to the technological developments, people are able to reach every people around the world, get knowledge about the events in the world easily, and they expose foreign languages much more than ever via TV, games, social networks etc. This makes foreign language teaching and learning inevitable for us. English language has been inarguably accepted as the lingua franca, and also it has become one of the symbols of our time, like globalization, economic integration, networking, and the Internet.

There are many reasons for starting with the teaching of English at an early age. As the concept "teaching English to young learners" suggests, age plays a crucial role in what we teach and how we teach it, since a young learner class is different from an adult and/or a teenager class in terms of the learners' language learning needs, the language

competences emphasized, and the cognitive skills addressed. Specialists have in mind and expect that gaining some additional years for the learning of English as the most important international language will take learners to higher levels of competence in its use. Language researchers and educationalists point out that the younger children are the less difficulty they have with the second language acquisition because of the greater plasticity of their neuronal circuits. Early learning of a second language is also hoped to pave the way for more intercultural understanding and facilitate the later learning of a third or fourth language. Studies have proved that learning English at an early age helps students grasp their mother tongue better, simultaneously enabling them to acquire remarkable proficiency in their second language. The implementation of English teaching in kindergarten may also become a useful means for the younger generation to understand a deeper knowledge of religions and cultures in the world [3. 136-139].

Young children are not like other students. Their needs are unique and teacher must be aware of this. It is important to understand that instructor could be one of the first adults a young child has interacted with outside of his or her own family. The separation from their parents in the beginning can be difficult, and a teacher must help them through this transition. A child can become very attached to you as a “substitute” for their parents, or they may shun you completely. Great teachers are adaptable to the emotional reactions of their students. And when it comes to your students’ interactions with other children, this can be one of the first times they interact with children their age. A teacher’s role often becomes that of mediator when children have problems sharing or learning how to get along. Furthermore, teachers in early education need to be creative and adaptive. They must think outside their own mature perspective and be able to place themselves in their students’ shoes. Lessons in early education classrooms are very hands-on. They involve arts and crafts, storytelling, exercise, educational games and more. You need to be fast on your feet and highly adaptable to continuously come up with new ways to guide children through their early learning stages. According to Mur (1998: 5), a child arrives to school full of instincts and skills which he has already begun to use and he will continue to use them for learning his own language as well as a foreign language like in the case of English:

- Children have the ability for indirect learning.
- They have a lively imagination.
- By nature they are creative in different communication situations.
- They are able to grasp the gist of a message.
- Children love speaking.

David Singleton states that in learning a foreign language, “younger - better in the long run,” but points out that there are many exceptions, noting that five percent of adult bilinguals master a foreign language even though they begin learning it when they are well into adulthood, but it is generally agreed that younger people learning a foreign language typically achieve fluency more often than older learners. Older learners may be able to speak the language but will lack the native fluidity of younger learners [4].

Children receive short sessions in which they learn basic words or phrases in one or more languages, sometimes in a before- or after-school program. Through music, songs, and stories, they may learn the numbers, colors, and greetings in a foreign language, but the major goal of a FLEX (foreign language exploratory or experience) program is to increase children’s awareness of other languages and cultures and thus of their own. The focus is on exploring or experiencing languages, rather than developing proficiency in these languages (Met, 1991). FLEX programs can also create a high level of interest and motivate children to want to study a language. In FLES (foreign language in the elementary school) programs, children study one language as a regular school subject for up to 45 minutes a day, several times a week. The goal of a FLES program is to help children develop listening and speaking skills in another language, as well as some proficiency in reading and writing the language, especially in the later primary grades (4–6). Developing an appreciation of other cultures is also a typical goal of a FLES program. While there are a number of different FLES programs, all expect children to study a language for at least two years, often throughout the primary grades. Through extended exposure to the language, children can develop some proficiency and also develop “basic language-learning skills” that will help them as they continue to study the language in secondary school (Haas, 1998, p. 44). In content-based FLES or content-enriched FLES programs, content from other subjects from the school curriculum (mathematics, science, social studies) is taught in the foreign language. By focusing on both language and content, these programs (referred to more generally as content-based instruction, or content and language integrated learning,) offer the opportunity for learners to develop academic language and thinking skills in a meaningful context (Crandall, 2012). These programs usually also provide more time for language learning. Because of this increased time and the enriched content, learners in content-based FLES programs usually attain a higher level of language proficiency than learners in regular FLES programs (Reeves, 1989) [5].

The findings in our articles offered some insights into the duration, staffing and methods of TEYL programs. Study’s findings suggest that instruction time significantly correlates with outcomes. For example, courses that provided one hour of TEYL instruction per week were found to lead to “only rudimentary understanding and no

productive skills development”. The effects of TEYL appeared to be best at three hours of instruction per week, but they plateaued after two years. Pfenninger’s study seems to suggest that methods that foster implicit learning, are more effective for young learners than traditional teaching is. This seems consistent with the observation, by Muñoz, that younger learners seem to benefit more from implicit language learning. It is also in line with a considerable corpus of evidence, which suggests that children who learnt a second language by immersion tended to develop strong communicative skills [6. 59].

To conclude, I could say that I think of my work with the children as a continuous challenge, but their enthusiastic, inventive and playful nature has won me over. Therefore, I try to make their experience with English as pleasant as possible, even if I am aware of the fact there is always room for improvement.

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