

TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS

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Characteristics of Young Language Learners:

Younger learners:

- Children are at pre-school/in the first couple of years of schooling.
- Generally they have a holistic approach to language, which means that they understand meaningful messages but cannot analyze language yet.
- They have lower levels of awareness about themselves as language learners as well as about process of learning.
- They have limited reading & writing skills even in their first language.
- Generally, they are more concerned about themselves than others.
- They have a limited knowledge about the world.
- They enjoy fantasy, imagination, & movement.

Older learners:

- These children are well established at school & comfortable with school routines.
- They show a growing interest in analytical approaches, which means that they begin to take an interest in language as an abstract system.
- They show a growing & their learning.
- They have well developed skills as readers & writers.
- They have a growing awareness of others & their viewpoints.
- They have a growing awareness about the world around us.
- They begin to show interest in real life issues.

***Misconceptions* in teaching approach to younger learners can lead to failure:**

Teacher tend to approach the teaching-learning process & employ teaching methods & techniques for the teaching English to young learners in an exactly the same way as they would teach adult learners.

Actually, children have their own culture & learning preferences.

They learn by way of physical activities that embedded in their daily life, they have a relatively short attention span, & they learn with the motive of meeting immediate goals (*here & now* principle)

Some myths and misconceptions about second/foreign language learning:

A. Children learn second/foreign languages quickly & easily.

Adolescents & adults perform better than young children under controlled conditions, *except pronunciation*. Young children do not have access to the memory techniques & other strategies that more experienced learners use in acquiring vocabulary & in learning grammatical rules. Children are more likely to be shy & embarrassed around peers than adults.

B. The younger the child, the more skilled in acquiring an L2/FL

Oyama (in Pinter, 2006) found that *the earlier a learner begins a second language, the more native like the accent he/she developed*. An early start for “foreign” language learners makes a long sequence of instruction leading to potential communicative proficiency possible & enables children to view L2 learning & related cultural insight as normal & integral.

Beginning language instruction gives children more exposure to the language.

C. The more time students spend in an L2/FL context, the quicker they learn the language.

The increased exposure to English *does not necessarily speed the acquisition of English*. Children with exposure to the home language & to English acquire English language skills equivalent to those acquired by children who have been in English-only program.

D. Children have acquired an L2/FL once they can speak it

For school-aged children, *proficiency in face-to-face communication does not imply proficiency in the more complex academic language needed to engage in many classroom activities*. Children may have language problems in reading & writing that are not apparent if their oral abilities are used to gauge their English proficiency.

E. All children learn an L2/FL in the same way

Some children are outgoing, sociable & learn the second language quickly, they do not worry about mistakes, but use limited resources to generate input from native speakers. Other children are shy & quite, they learn by listening & watching, they say little, for fear of making a mistake. Children are likely to be more responsive to a teacher who affirms the values of the home culture.

Skills should be taught first in TEYL:

As in mother tongue learning, English should start with an emphasis on listening & then speaking because children often cannot read & write at all yet.

- *listening should precede speaking* (communicative skills should be the aim of the good language classroom).
- *reading and then writing* will emerge when the language learner is ready and should not be forced.
- comprehension of language should precede production.

Theories of Children Learning Development:

1. Jean Piaget: There are 4 universal stages of development that all children go through & the development was a process of acquiring the principles of formal logic.

Piagetian stages of development are:

a. ***Sensory-motor stage*** (from birth to 2 years of age):

The young child learns to interact with the environment by manipulating objects around him.

b. ***Pre-operational stage*** (from 2 – 7 years of age):

The child thinking is largely reliant on perception but he/she gradually becomes more & more capable of logical thinking. On the whole this stage is characterized by egocentrism & a lack of logical thinking.

c. **Concrete operational stage** (from 7 – 11 years of age):
Year 7 is the turning point in cognitive development because children's thinking begins to resemble "logical" adult-like thinking. *They develop the ability to apply logical reasoning in several areas of knowledge at the same time but this ability is restricted to the immediate context.* This means that children at this stage cannot yet generalize their understanding.

d. **Formal operational stage** (from 11 onwards):
Children are able to think beyond the immediate context in more abstract terms. They are able to carry out logical operations such as deductive reasoning in a systematic way. They achieve "formal logic".

Teaching implication

Teacher should be sensitive, open to the needs and interests of various age groups, and continually monitor their changing needs.

2. Lev Vygotsky:

The social environment, the cultural context, and the influence of peers, teachers & parents engaged in interactions with children are *major sources of learning & development (Social Constructivism)*.

The other concept is: **the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)**: the difference between the current knowledge of the child & the potential knowledge achievable with some helps from a more knowledgeable peer/adult.



3. Jerome Bruner called it as *Scaffolding*: helping children to learn by offering systematic support.

The social environment, i.e. social interaction with parents & teacher can make a difference in terms of offering unique, enriching experiences.

4. Howard Gardner:

When assessing children's intelligence, it had no unitary character, rather, it manifested itself in many different ways in different children (*multiple intelligences*). The types of intelligences are linguistic, logico-mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and natural.

5. Noam Chomsky:

children often produced language that they could not have heard in natural interaction with others (***Universal Grammar***).

6. Eric Lenneberg:

brain plasticity was only conducive to language learning until puberty (**Critical period hypothesis**). Children **below 11-12**, who are given advantageous learning circumstances, such as plenty of input & interaction in an English environment, are more likely to acquire English to native levels without an accent.

7. James Asher:

He developed *Total Physical Response (TPR)*: Kinesthetic intelligence and memory is used because children do not learn in a conscious intellectual way. Children do not learn by thinking, but by “doing” things.

8. Krashen & Terrell: the Input Hypothesis

- Spoken fluency in second language is not taught directly. Rather the ability to speak fluently and easily in a second language emerges by itself, after a sufficient amount of competence has been acquired through input.
- We acquire (not learn) language by understanding input that is a little beyond our current level of (acquired) competence. Listening comprehension and reading are the primary importance in the language program, and the ability to speak (or write) fluently in a second language will come on its own with time. Speaking ability "emerges" after the acquirer has built up competence through comprehending input.

The major points on the Input Hypothesis are:

- it relates to acquisition, not to learning;
- we acquire by understanding language a bit beyond our current level of competence. This is done with the help of context;
- spoken fluency emerges gradually and is not taught directly;
- when caretakers talk to acquirers so that the acquirers understand the message, input automatically contains "**i+1**", the grammatical structures the acquirer is "ready" to acquire.

The implications for classroom practice:

- whatever helps comprehension is important;
- vocabulary is important. With more vocabulary, there will be more comprehension, and there will be more acquisition.
- in giving input, in talking to students, the teacher needs to be concerned primarily with whether the students understand the message.

A natural approach is required in language teaching. Its main tenets are as follows:

communicative skills should be the aim of the good language classroom; comprehension of language should precede production (***listening should precede speaking***); speaking and then writing will emerge when the language learner is ready and should not be forced.

9. John Dewey:

- Education should be child centered.
- Education must be both active & interactive.
- Education must involve the social world of the child and the community.

Implication:

- Plan purposeful curriculum.
- Make sense of the world for children.
- 'It's fun' is not enough.

10. Maria Montessori:

- Children learn language and other significant life skills, without conscious effort, from the environments where they spend their time.
- Children learn best through sensory experiences, by doing & through repetition.
- Children are capable of great concentration when they are surrounded by many interesting things to do & given the time and freedom to do them.
- Children need more physical activity.

11. Erik Erikson:

- How children develop the foundation for emotional & social development & mental health.
- Consider individual differences.
- Focus curriculum on real things.
- **Stages of Psychosocial Development** (“Eight Ages of Man”); theory of emotional development, which covers the life spans of human beings.

“Exposure to English”:

How much children hear & how often they have opportunity to interact in English. It's important that opportunities are created in the classroom for children to be exposed to natural language & to interact with each other.

The implication:

Teachers' competencies in terms of their proficiency in English to provide the necessary exposure to the language, and their methodology to offer appropriate tasks & activities for children to communicate in a variety ways.

Teaching Listening :

Children should start with easier “listen & do” activities, teacher often talk a lot in the target language because they provide the language input, teacher use “language modification” to avoid & solve misunderstandings, like repetitions, comprehension checks, clarification requests, & confirmation checks, TPR, and listening to stories.

Teaching Speaking:

Children do not have to be able to produce complete sentences/questions to initiate an utterance. After they have been exposed to English through listening, they soon want & are able to participate in interactions with the teacher & each other. Using “unanalyzed chunks”, children can remember phrases from previously heard input & use them without conscious analysis. Singing songs also.

Teaching vocabulary and grammar:

Vocabulary & grammar should be taught & learnt together. It's better if *grammar* is noticed & learnt *from meaning-focused input*, children need to be able to see the relationship between *form & function*.

Teacher should provide lots of meaningful practice, recycling, & guidance in attending to language form. So children will *learn grammar in a holistic way*.

Teaching Reading and writing:

It would be ***controversial*** to introduce reading & writing in a second language to children who are not yet literate in their first language. Reading & writing are usually taught in parallel because children who begin to read enjoy writing too. Children can only benefit from phonics training if the meaning of the words makes sense to them. It is useful for children to **start with tracing & copying**. *Visual aids* like Posters containing commonly used phrases, calendars, and English notice board would attract children's attention & help them **make the links between spoken & written forms**.



Activities recommended are:

singing, reciting rhymes, listening to stories, playing games according to the learners' age, interests, & abilities.



Recommended activities
(see the video)

Assessing Young Language Learners

Traditional methods problematic because:

Traditional “paper & pencil test” (like filling in gaps in sentences, answering multiple choice questions /translating vocabulary lists) often do not work because such *isolated exercises* **do not show what children know & can do with confidence** (*The negative washback effect of test*). It would **discourage children** & cause them **to lose their motivation** to learn English.



Assessment techniques which are appropriate to measure the children progress:

Observation, self-assessment, portfolio, project work.

A Lesson Plan of TEYL:

Child-centered Learning:

- Noticing
- Wanting
- Challenging/taking a risk
- Playing/experimenting
- Succeeding
- Linking/Internalization

A child-centered lesson

- Teacher -centered;
 - We can plan a lesson carefully
 - We can use time effectively
 - We can teach clearly and logically
 - The children behave well and do not chat so much.

Child-centered:

- The children enjoy themselves
- They learn naturally and actively
- They are spontaneous
- Their eyes shine brightly

What can go wrong?

- We do not give the children space to notice
- They do what we want them to do
- They do not try for themselves
- They do not experiment enough
- They are unsuccessful
- They do not make links

Planning a Lesson

- Preparation
- From familiar to unfamiliar
- Varying the focus
- Varying the style
- Moving on to the next target

Techniques

- Repetition
- Introducing new words
- Introducing new patterns
- Creating a need

Organization

- One-to-one, pairs, and groups
- Routines
- Scoring systems
- Homework

Classroom Language

1. Pre-activities:

Greetings:

Good morning, students / Good afternoon,
everybody.

Register:

Who is absent today? / Who isn't here today? /
What's the matter with ... today? / Why were you
absent last ...?

2. Whilst-activity:

a. Waiting to start:

I'm waiting for you to be quiet / We won't start until everyone is quiet / Stop talking & be quiet.

b. Time to begin:

Let's begin our lesson now / Is everybody ready to start? / Open your book at page...

c. Late:

Where have you been? / Did you oversleep?

d. Check Ss' understanding :

Is there any questions? / Do you understand? / Do you get it? / Are you with me?

2. Post-activity:

a. Time to stop:

It's almost time to stop / We'll have to stop here /
That's all for today.

b. Next time:

We'll do the rest of this chapter next time / We'll
continue this chapter next...

c. Homework:

Do exercise ... on page ... for your homework.

d. Goodbye:

Goodbye, students. See you on... / See you again
next ... / Have a good holiday.

TEYL in Indonesia Context

Requirements for effective TEYL:

- a. English should be used all the time to ensure that children have relatively much exposure to English.
- b. Print-rich environment in English should be created and around the classroom.
- c. Teachers of EYL should use activity-based teaching-learning techniques such as TPR, games, & projects.
- d. The teachers should use various techniques for short periods of time to maintain the interest level of the children in engaging the English lessons.

TEYL in Indonesia Context

- d. The teachers should focus on functional English for vocabulary development & for immediate fulfillment of communicative needs of the learners.
- e. The teachers should reiterate often to ensure the acquisition of English expressions/vocabulary items.
- f. The teachers should provide useful, acquisition-promoting routines.
- g. The teachers should have a good command of English & **have an ability to act as a role model to the learners they teach.**

Motivating Expressions:

- That's good
- You're right
- Good work
- Great
- That's it
- Excellent
- Good remembering
- Keep on trying
- Keep up the good work
- That kinds of work makes me happy

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