

Challenges in Teaching ESL to very Young Learners

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Abstract

This article considers the challenges faced by language minority children at school as they struggle to learn the English language. These students are in a strange land trying to maintain a sense of identity. What a heavy burden for young children! Here we shall explore some of the key characteristic, needs and strengths of the very young learners. It also needs a dedicated teacher for providing healthy environment for young children.

KEYWORDS: ESL, Challenges, teacher and remedies.

Introduction:

English is a difficult language to learn and as such it can be a difficult language to teach. The learners who have their mother tongue as English do not find it difficult. But many young ESI learners find it difficult and it is the challenging job for most of the teachers. The teacher has to face numerous challenges while teaching young kids. One of the important characteristic which is necessary is to keep them attentive towards the teacher. Every day brings surprises and delight. To meet the challenge of teaching children, George Stocker suggests the first step is to stop thinking of them as "short adults"! My first experience was terrible and I felt out of my breath. Then I took a step back, and realized that, hey, they're just kids – lovely, attached kids towards you with a cute smile on their face. So one should enjoy them in the classroom!

Teaching young learners English is different than teaching English to older children and adults. Younger children are restless and may not give their teacher full attention which makes learning difficult. Younger children are not interested in learning any language. They want to learn English because they are forced by their parents and the school surrounding compels them to learn it. Adults have clear reasons for learning the language. Motivating young children quickly becomes one of the main tasks of a teacher. They often lose interest quickly in the things they are doing if they are restless. Adults will usually try to hide their boredom in class but children don't have the same filter. When they're bored, kids will go around the classroom, disrupting other children. This has a huge impact on classroom management and teachers will have to carefully manage children's behavior. Children have a strong instinct to learn through experience and activity. Children love to touch and play with objects like building blocks. In language learning, this means that children are more likely to learn through activities that require them to feel rather than being taught formally. For example, when children participate in a game and follow instructions, they are already involved in understanding the language used.

Guiding children's play will help teachers achieve the maximum learning curve for their young students. Children often learn from experience and teachers should take this into account when constructing their lesson plans for young learners. Teachers should also remember that children give more attention to understanding and making sense of things. When presented with a new situation such as a television show, kids will try to work out what's going on, using visual cues and previous experiences. They don't pay much attention to the words, which is very different from adults and teenagers who are more interested in the language itself. There are many challenges when teaching young children. However, young children are also imaginative, and they respond well to rewards from teachers and are less shy than older learners. To teach children effectively, educators need to take into account these positive traits and nurture them.

Difference Between Young Learners and Adults

The learning style of young learners, although has similarities to Adult Learners, also has many distinct differences. Young learners are usually in a learning environment because they are directed to learn by their parents or other adults. They learn as they are told it will benefit them in the future. Young adults usually learn what is presented to them by the teacher, like to be challenged, and are open to new ideas. They see an adult teacher as a role model and depend on them for the material they are to learn. It is important to keep classes interesting to keep the students stimulated and excited about what they are learning. If they like what they are being taught they will absorb it quickly. Young learners usually have a fairly short attention span, are curious and are full of energy; therefore, it is important to keep the class active - changing activities often and using interactive fun activities. Keeping young learners motivated can also be a challenge. Children are often very demanding, needing the teacher's attention. They love praise and recognition for their ideas and their good grades. It is important for the teacher to get to know the students and to draw on each student's ideas, strengths and interests. If the teacher can build on the skills the students have already developed, it will make them feel important and increase their self-confidence. If young adults act out, disciplinary action may have to take place. It is important to clearly state that the action is inappropriate; but often students are acting out because their needs are not being met. If the teacher looks for ways to involve the student and to recognize what he/she does well, the unacceptable behavior will usually be replaced with a more positive attitude. Adult learners on the other hand are more self-directed and will take learning seriously, as they are investing in their own education. Adults usually have a purpose in learning and need to see the personal value or reward in taking the classes. Attendance problems are not usually a problem with adults as they are usually there because they want to be. Learning is their Choice. Adults like to be in control of their lives and feel responsible for themselves; therefore it is important to listen to their needs and ideas and to integrate them into your lesson plans. Although adults learn slower than young learners, they bring many years of life experiences to classes.

These experiences and the knowledge they bring can be drawn on to make classes very interesting and interactive. Adults love to share their experiences and can gain in confidence by being listened to and given recognition. Contrary to young learners, adults can learn through lectures, but they also require a lot of interaction and group activities to keep their attention.

Keeping adults motivated is crucial in their learning process. Giving them recognition for their ideas, and giving them praise for their accomplishments can accomplish this. Some adults have not been to school for many years and are lacking in confidence, it is important to keep them interested and motivated to help them raise their confidence and self-esteem. Other challenges, a teacher may have with an adult class is factors of aging, such as hearing loss, vision problems, mobility and memory. Depending on the demographics, the teacher will have to make concessions. We can see that there are quite a number of differences in teaching young learners and adults, but there are also similarities. Both groups will require clear instructions from their teachers, and will learn more when being challenged and given praise for what they do well. All people need a climate of Respect, Trust, Support and Fun to be successful in learning. The teacher is there to guide the learning through well-planned and appropriate lessons and to set a comfortable learning environment for the growth of the students.

Benefits of Teaching Very Young Learners

1 Young learner classes are typically more action packed, with much more variety than adult classes. And teachers are encouraged to make use of English language based games, songs, videos, drama, storytelling, drawing etc. to keep the students engaged and motivated. Their attention spans are a lot shorter and therefore it is essential the teacher brings in creative and fresh ideas to keep the class interesting.

2 Especially at the younger ages the progress which students make can be really impressive and it can be visualized because the students often starts with zero English.

3. Learning with kids is really having fun and enjoying the class.

4. Constantly bringing in fresh ideas and creative approaches will really help the kids and the teacher can also learn many new things from them.

5. Kids classes are often less technical and require less detailed explanation.

6. Kids have a good thinking, reasoning and incredible energy. Therefore things are learnt quite quickly by Kids than the adults

Effective Teacher

The most important quality which is needed to be an effective teacher is to have a lot of patience. New teaching techniques should be implemented to keep the young learner's interest. Effective teaching is possible only when it is activity-based. It should involve group work among students, such as reading aloud, and work at the small group that will enable pupils to engage in dialogue with one another. The teacher should also use activities such as singing, arts, stories, playing games and others.

Necessary steps for teaching

The most important thing which is necessary is to build up their trust before they can learn anything.

When they come into the classroom be there to welcome them and use their names as much as possible

In the first lesson you should establish a handful of memorable class rules. These could include no shouting, no going under or over tables, always listen to the teacher and your classmates, no throwing pencils etc. Explain these rules when you have everyone's full attention.

Establish toilet or drinking water rules also.

Young children are too eager. The problem arises when they are eager to do things other than what you're trying to teach them. So keep them interested and motivated.

It's very important to always begin and end your lesson in the same way each time. The more children are familiar with class routines the easier they are to manage.

Ask everyone to get their books and a pen out and to put their bags under the table before you start the lesson.

Kids can be naughty, lazy or just not in the mood to learn. Classroom management can be more of a challenge with kids than adults and it's important that you have clear, fair and consistent rules. Therefore building a good rapport with your students from day one is very important with young learners.

Make sure all your papers are ready before the children come into the classroom so you can properly give them your undivided attention. If they are in the room before you then make your entrance as quickly as possible, lay out your materials without completely turning your back on the class and begin the class always with the same greeting.

At the end of the lesson you could have a 'goodbye song' or simply a mini-conversation 'Thank you. See you next week. Have a good week.' Where the children repeat what you say. Get them to be quiet before saying this farewell and they will soon understand what they have to do at the end of each lesson. Don't just run out of a rowdy class at the end!

Need of young Learners

The following points should be taken into heed because working with this age group is demanding and so we need to plan lots of resources, ideas and changes of activity to match their short attention span.

1. Young children need conducive and a challenging environment for learning. So offer young learners active roles in the experience.
2. Young learners have short attention spans and have a lot of physical energy. Teachers need to channel that energy into constructive avenues in the learning process.
3. Using Common themes in teaching such as animals, friends, family, shopping or stories.
4. Using familiar stories to the students' country or culture can help young learners connect English with their background.

5. Having a collaborative activity in the class would help to have a close intimacy with each other.

6. Use activities that provide opportunities for comprehensible input by allowing them to perform the tasks independently with little instruction or support.

7. Young learners function well in structured environments and repetition of routines. Therefore having basic routines in English will reinforce the lessons and help teachers to manage young learners.

So it is up to the teacher to make the lives of their kids a pleasure one. Very Young Learners are a joy to teach, although teaching a class can be quite intimidating when you first start. Once you start to get the routines, you'll begin to love the class, and feel great about the difference you're making in their lives.

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