



TEACHING VERY YOUNG AND YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract. *Teaching very young and young learners requires a specialized approach that aligns with their cognitive, emotional, and social development. Unlike older learners, children acquire language through play, interaction, and sensory experiences, making it essential to incorporate age-appropriate methods and techniques. This paper explores effective strategies for teaching very young (preschool) and young (primary school) learners, emphasizing the role of play-based learning, storytelling, songs, and Total Physical Response (TPR). The study also examines the challenges educators face when teaching children and provides recommendations for creating an engaging and effective language learning environment.*

Keywords: *early childhood education, young learners, play-based learning, Total Physical Response (TPR), storytelling, songs.*

Introduction. Teaching a foreign language to very young and young learners differs significantly from teaching older students. Young children learn best through interaction, exploration, and movement rather than through direct instruction. Their cognitive and linguistic abilities are still developing, requiring a teaching approach that is engaging, multisensory, and emotionally supportive. Educators working with young learners must integrate various strategies that cater to their developmental needs. Play, songs, stories, and physical activities help children absorb language naturally, much like they acquire their first language. This paper examines key methods used in early language instruction, the benefits of these approaches, and the challenges teachers may encounter.

Research on early childhood language learning suggests that children are highly receptive to new languages during their formative years (Cameron, 2001) [1]. Unlike adults, they acquire language implicitly through exposure rather than through formal grammar instruction. Pinter (2011) emphasizes that young learners benefit most from interactive, communicative activities that engage their senses and emotions[2].

Play-based learning is one of the most effective techniques for teaching young learners. According to Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, children learn best through social interaction and play[3]. Games and role-playing activities provide a low-stress environment where children can experiment with language naturally.



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Similarly, songs and rhymes reinforce vocabulary and pronunciation through repetition and rhythm, making language learning enjoyable and memorable (Shin & Crandall, 2014)[4]. Storytelling is another powerful tool for young learners. Studies indicate that narratives help children develop listening and comprehension skills while exposing them to new vocabulary in meaningful contexts (Ellis & Brewster, 2014) [5]. Using visual aids and interactive storytelling methods can further enhance engagement and understanding.

Total Physical Response (TPR), developed by Asher (1969), has proven highly effective for very young learners[6]. This method involves pairing language with physical movement, helping children associate words with actions in a natural and engaging way. TPR is particularly useful for children who are still developing their verbal skills, allowing them to participate actively before they are ready to produce language.

Teaching Strategies for Very Young and Young Learners

1. Play-Based Learning

Games and play activities help children learn language in a fun and stress free way. Activities such as role-playing, puppet shows, and interactive group games encourage communication and vocabulary retention.

2. Songs and Rhymes

Music plays a vital role in early language acquisition. Songs with repetitive lyrics help children memorize new words and improve pronunciation. Action songs, where movements accompany lyrics, make learning more interactive.

3. Storytelling and Picture Books

Stories provide a natural context for language learning. Teachers can use picture books, props, and storytelling techniques such as voice modulation and gestures to capture children's attention and enhance comprehension.

4. Total Physical Response (TPR)

By combining movement with language input, TPR helps children develop listening skills and word associations before they begin speaking. Activities like "Simon Says" and action-based commands support kinesthetic learning.

5. Visual and Tactile Aids

Young learners benefit from visual and hands-on learning experiences. Flashcards, toys, puppets, and realia (real-life objects) help reinforce vocabulary and concepts.

Challenges in Teaching Young Learners



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Despite the effectiveness of these methods, teaching young learners presents several challenges:

Short Attention Span: Children have limited concentration, requiring frequent changes in activities and interactive teaching techniques.

Classroom Management: Maintaining discipline in an active, playful environment can be difficult. Teachers need to establish clear routines and rules.

Language Comprehension: Young learners may struggle with complex instructions, so teachers must use simple, repetitive language supported by gestures and visuals.

Parental Involvement: The support of parents is crucial in reinforcing language learning at home. Teachers should encourage parents to participate in activities and provide language exposure outside the classroom.

Conclusion. Teaching very young and young learners requires a dynamic, engaging, and developmentally appropriate approach. Play-based learning, storytelling, songs, and TPR are highly effective strategies that align with children's natural learning processes. While challenges such as short attention spans and classroom management exist, educators can overcome them by creating a structured yet playful learning environment. By integrating these methods, teachers can foster a positive language learning experience that lays the foundation for future proficiency.

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