

DIFFICULTIES IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES TO YOUNG LEARNERS

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Annotation: This article explores the key difficulties faced by teachers when teaching foreign languages to young learners. It examines challenges such as short attention spans, limited cognitive skills, mixed abilities, classroom management, lack of motivation, limited exposure outside the classroom, pronunciation and listening difficulties, and assessment issues. The article also offers practical suggestions for overcoming these challenges and highlights the importance of a supportive and engaging learning environment.

Keywords: foreign language teaching, young learners, attention span, motivation, classroom management, cognitive development, language exposure, pronunciation, listening skills, assessment, learning strategies

Teaching foreign languages to young learners is an exciting and meaningful task, but it also brings many challenges. Young children are enthusiastic and curious, but they have special needs and characteristics that require teachers to adapt their methods. Understanding the difficulties in teaching foreign languages to young learners can help teachers improve their strategies, make lessons more effective, and support children's language development.

Short Attention Span

One of the biggest challenges is the short attention span of young learners. Children can easily get distracted or bored if an activity lasts too long or is not interesting. To keep them engaged, teachers need to use various activities such as games, songs, crafts, storytelling, and physical movement. Changing activities every 10–15 minutes can help maintain children's focus.

Limited Cognitive and Memory Skills

Young children are still developing their cognitive abilities, so they may struggle to remember new words, understand abstract grammar rules, or apply language structures. Teachers should focus on teaching simple, practical language through repetition, visual aids, gestures, and real-life contexts. Instead of grammar explanations, using examples and modeling helps children internalize language naturally.

Mixed Abilities and Learning Styles

In most classrooms, children have different levels of ability, language background, and learning styles. Some children may have already been exposed to the foreign language at home or in preschool, while others are complete beginners. Teachers need to plan differentiated tasks and provide additional support or challenges to match learners' needs.

Classroom Management

Young learners are energetic and social, but they can also be noisy, restless, or distracted. Managing their behavior while teaching a foreign language is a significant challenge. Teachers should set clear classroom rules, establish routines, and use techniques like praise, rewards, and group points to motivate good behavior. Positive reinforcement is key to maintaining a happy and productive classroom.

Low Motivation or Fear of Making Mistakes

Some children may feel shy or unmotivated to participate, especially if they are afraid of making mistakes in front of others. Teachers should create a safe, supportive learning environment where mistakes are seen as part of learning. Encouraging words, smiles, and small successes can help build learners' confidence and motivation.

Lack of Exposure Outside the Classroom

For many young learners, the only place where they hear and use the foreign language is the classroom. Without practice at home or in daily life, it's hard for children to develop fluency. Teachers can recommend activities to parents, such as watching cartoons, singing songs, or reading picture books in the foreign language to increase exposure.

Teaching Pronunciation and Listening Skills

Young learners may have difficulty pronouncing foreign sounds or understanding native speakers. Teachers need to provide plenty of listening practice using songs, stories, and videos, and offer pronunciation activities through fun games and chants. It's important to focus on understanding and communication rather than perfect pronunciation.

Assessment and Feedback

Assessing young learners' language progress is another challenge because traditional tests can be stressful or inappropriate for children. Teachers should use informal assessment methods such as observation, portfolios, and simple projects. Giving constructive and positive feedback helps children recognize their progress and areas to improve.

Conclusion

Teaching foreign languages to young learners is both challenging and rewarding. By recognizing children's unique needs and difficulties—such as their short attention spans, limited memory, mixed abilities, and fear of mistakes—teachers can design lessons that are enjoyable, interactive, and effective. With patience, creativity, and a

caring attitude, teachers can help young learners develop strong language foundations that will benefit them for life.

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