

DIFFICULTIES IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES TO YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract

Teaching foreign languages to young learners is both a rewarding and challenging task. While children have a natural ability to acquire new languages, the teaching process involves several difficulties. This article explores the common challenges faced by language teachers when working with young learners and provides insights into how these issues can be addressed effectively.

Keywords: foreign language, young learners, language acquisition, classroom challenges, teaching methods, motivation

Introduction

In the modern world, learning foreign languages has become an essential part of education, especially from an early age. Children who start learning languages early tend to have better pronunciation, greater fluency, and a more natural feel for the language. However, teaching a foreign language to young learners is not without its difficulties. The success of language learning at a young age largely depends on the teaching methods, materials, classroom environment, and the learners' motivation and developmental stage.

Limited Attention Span

One of the most significant challenges in teaching young learners is their **short attention span**. Children often lose focus quickly, which makes it difficult for teachers to maintain their interest throughout the lesson. Activities need to be engaging, dynamic, and varied frequently to keep students interested.

Lack of Motivation or Understanding of Purpose

Unlike adults, children may not understand the long-term benefits of learning a foreign language. As a result, their **intrinsic motivation** may be low. Teachers must find ways to make learning meaningful and fun, often through games, songs, storytelling, and visual aids.

Limited Cognitive Development

Young learners are still developing their cognitive and abstract thinking skills. This can make it difficult for them to grasp **complex grammar rules**, understand abstract vocabulary, or follow instructions in a language they are just beginning to

learn. Teachers need to simplify language, use a lot of repetition, and rely heavily on context and visuals.

Pronunciation and Sound Recognition

Although children are more capable of acquiring **native-like pronunciation**, they may also struggle with distinguishing between similar sounds or producing unfamiliar phonemes. This is especially true when the sounds do not exist in their native language.

Classroom Management

Keeping order in a classroom full of young children can be challenging. Disruptions, talking out of turn, or emotional outbursts can interfere with the learning process. Teachers must balance language instruction with **effective behavior management** strategies.

Dependence on Native Language

Young learners may frequently switch to their **first language (L1)** when they struggle to express themselves in the target language. While this is natural, it can slow down the process of full immersion. Teachers need to encourage use of the target language in a supportive, non-threatening way.

Inadequate Teaching Materials

Many textbooks and resources are designed for older learners and may not be appropriate for children. Teachers often need to **create or adapt materials** that are age-appropriate, visually appealing, and interactive.

Role of Parents and Home Environment

The support a child receives at home greatly influences their success in learning a new language. **Lack of parental involvement**, especially in non-English speaking households, can hinder progress. Encouraging parents to engage with their child's learning at home is vital.

Conclusion

Teaching foreign languages to young learners is a complex but highly impactful process. Teachers must be patient, creative, and sensitive to children's developmental stages. Despite the many difficulties, with the right approach and resources, young learners can become enthusiastic and successful language learners. Focusing on fun, interaction, and consistent exposure to the target language can help overcome the challenges and lead to effective language acquisition.

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