

Introduction to Teaching English to Young Learners



Video Lecture Outline

UNIT 1: WHO IS THE YOUNG LEARNER?

Dr. Nunan is one of the leading experts in the field of TESOL.

At the end of the module you should be able to:

- provide your own definition of 'young learners'
- describe the developmental stages that learners go through between birth and puberty
- discuss the practical implications of learner characteristics at different developmental stages
- describe challenges and solutions in teaching younger learners
- discuss the pros and cons of the early introduction of a foreign language

Young learners

3-14 years of age.

Developmental stages

Physical and psychological needs. Teachers have to provide care and instruction.

What developmental stages do young learners pass through and what are the implications of these developmental stages for instruction?

- Sensori-motor
- Pre-operational
- Concrete-operational
- Formal operational.

Introduction to Teaching English to Young Learners

Who is the 'young learner'?

Young Learners	Older Learners
Children are at pre-school or in the first couple of years of schooling.	These children are well established at school and comfortable with school routines.
Generally, they have a holistic approach to language, which means that they understand meaningful messages but cannot analyse language yet.	They show a growing interest in analytical approaches, which means that they begin to take an interest in language as an abstract system.
They have lower levels of awareness about themselves as language learners as well as about process of learning.	They show a growing level of awareness about themselves as language learners and their learning.
They have limited reading and writing skills even in their first language.	They have well developed skills as readers and writers.
Generally, they are more concerned about themselves than others.	They have a growing awareness of others and their viewpoints.
They have a limited knowledge about the world.	They have a growing awareness about the world around us.
They enjoy fantasy, imagination, and movement.	They begin to show an interest in real life issues.

Piaget's 4 developmental stages:

STAGE	DESCRIPTION OF STAGE	Age
Sensori-Motor	The child learns to interact with the environment and to manipulate objects.	0-2 years of age
Pre-operational	The child is egocentric and believes the world revolves around him or her. The ability to think logically is extremely limited at this stage. Linguistically, learners consolidate the knowledge of the grammatical system and by the age of 7, the acquisition of the target grammatical system is almost complete.	2-7 years of age
Concrete-operational	The child begins developing the ability to separate him or herself from the environment and to think logically.	7-11 years of age
Formal operational	Abstract thinking develops and the child is able to generalize beyond his or her immediate context, from the instance to the general.	11-15 years of age

What are the main challenges and solutions in TEYL?

1) Cognitive development: The instructional process needs to take cognizance of these developmental stages and to exploit them. At the earliest stages of learning, for instance, the child can follow single-step instructions, followed by two-step, and then three-step instructions. As a simple example, we may start with a one-step instruction for teaching the letter 'A,' such as "Write the first line like this" while showing the learners. "Draw the second line like this," and so on. Later we may be able to use a

two-step instruction, such as, “Write the first line like this and the second line like this;” again demonstrating to the learners how to do this. Followed by instructions for writing the last line in the letter ‘A.’ As learners develop, we may be able to use three-step instructions. For instance, “To write the letter ‘A,’ write the first line like this, the second line like this, and the third line like this;” again modeling to learners as we write the capital ‘A.’

Learners in the earliest stages can understand symbolic concepts such as numbers and letters prior to beginning reading. Therefore, they may know what the letter ‘A’ is and know what ‘3’ means, but not be able to read yet.

Next, learners are able to do word play activities such as rearranging scrambled letters to make words, followed by the ability to grasp abstract concepts.

Inductive learning activities requiring learners to generate rules from samples of language are unlikely to be successful before the stage of formal operations. Therefore, asking learners younger than the age of 11 to study samples of the language to work out the rule for the present progressive, for example, is not likely to be beneficial.

2) Motivation: Educational psychologists commonly refer to two types of motivation:
extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

Extrinsic motivation is the drive to do or learn something for an external reward such as school grades or rewards. Therefore, if a child takes part in an activity because an adult told them to do so, or because the child wants to please someone, this is an example of extrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is the drive to do or learn something for its own sake. If a child chooses an activity or chooses to join an activity, this is an example of intrinsic motivation.

Strategies that can help to maintain motivation are set out in the following box.

Make learning goals explicit Select content that learners can relate to Scaffold the learning process Personalize the learning process Encourage group / collaborative learning Provide opportunities for authentic communication Provide evidence of progress
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3) Attention: Children have limited attention spans and we need to vary the activities for learners. One method which can help maintain motivation is Total Physical Response (TPR), which was developed by James Asher. In TPR activities, the students perform physical actions and carry out instructions given by the teacher or an audio source. Typically, TPR is used with commands. For instance, the teacher tells the learners to stand up and the teacher stands. The teacher says, “Sit down,” and the teacher sits. By modeling the command and repeating as many times as necessary, the learners can imitate the action and learn the meaning of the commands.

4) Multi-level groups: Many different levels – attitude, motivation, aptitude, ability to stay on task. Not just language proficiency level.

5) Assessment: Seeing assessment as part of the learning process has practical implications. All teaching tasks can be turned into in-class assessment tools, with the addition of two elements: i) criteria for judging the task and ii) some kind of feedback mechanism for students.

Learning task + criteria + feedback
= Assessment task

Assessment for learning.

Teacher Talk:

How did you become interested in teaching English?

Challenges in teaching English in EFL and ESL settings.

Motivation: Example of a Russian student who was very eager to learn English. Taking any opportunity he could to learn the language.

Motivation levels of various age groups in Japan.

Memory game used for 5-years olds and also middle-aged adults. He was able to play the same game, but was able to adjust it for the adults.

Grammar with older learners and younger learners. Older learners have a longer *attention span*. Children have a much shorter attention span and he had to vary activities more frequently.

Donut game with kids: animals for Tony; occupations for Maya.

Horse-shoe game: Excellent for motivation and development. Good for all young learners.

Conclusion