

LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES AT A YOUNG AGE

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Abstract: *This article outlines the advantages and disadvantages of teaching foreign languages to young children. Furthermore, it provides detailed insights into fostering effective language-learning habits in early childhood development.*

Key words: *learning habits, teaching methods and approaches, physical and mental ability, motivation, young learners, different games.*

Introduction. In contemporary society, there is a growing trend of parents introducing foreign languages to their children during early childhood. Children who begin learning languages at this stage are often regarded as having the potential to attain near-native proficiency. This is particularly evident in primary school-aged children, whose heightened brain plasticity allows for greater adaptability in acquiring new skills and knowledge. Additionally, acquiring foreign languages during early childhood has been shown to enhance cognitive abilities, particularly in areas such as problem-solving and critical thinking. The neuroplasticity of young brains enables them to adapt more readily to the complex structures of new languages, allowing for more efficient language acquisition. This cognitive flexibility facilitates the processing and integration of linguistic information, leading to improved overall learning outcomes and mental agility. Research suggests that early exposure to multiple languages stimulates neural pathways that contribute to advanced executive functions, further supporting cognitive development.

Main body.

1. The physical and mental ability of young learners in terms of learning language.

Young learners possess a heightened ability to acquire accurate pronunciation in foreign languages due to the greater adaptability of their auditory systems. This heightened plasticity allows them to absorb and replicate phonetic sounds with ease, facilitating the development of native-like accents. In contrast, although adults are capable of mastering advanced linguistic skills, they often face challenges in achieving native-level pronunciation and accent accuracy. This difficulty arises from a reduced sensitivity to phonetic distinctions and less flexible auditory processing in adulthood, which can hinder the precise acquisition of unfamiliar sounds. Young learners exhibit high energy levels and require physical movement, as their attention spans are naturally limited. Research indicates that early childhood represents an optimal period for language acquisition, with the ease of learning a foreign language decreasing as age progresses. At this developmental stage, children are strongly connected to their surroundings and demonstrate a marked interest in engaging in physical activities. For those under seven years of age, who have yet to acquire reading and writing skills, it is essential to design activities that exclude traditional tools like paper and pencil. Total Physical Response (TPR) activities are predominantly administered verbally, supplemented by visual

aids such as pictures. In these activities, children can identify images when prompted with corresponding words, and during storytelling, they can enact the actions described by the instructor.

2. Methods of teaching languages to young learners.

Numerous theories have been proposed to account for the age, proficiency level, and learning objectives of students. This section will examine strategies to support young beginner learners in addressing their unique challenges. Young students at the beginner stage exhibit a natural curiosity toward new experiences, with uncluttered minds and no fear of unfamiliarity. In interacting with peers, they often rely on non-verbal communication. Remarkably, children can play together without feeling hindered by language barriers, and they readily translate or relay information to adults in their native language, regardless of the language in which it was initially conveyed. In foreign language instruction for young learners, irrespective of the chosen teaching approach, a common challenge arises: children often default to using structures from their native language, which they are also in the process of mastering. However, once they acquire a basic vocabulary, they are highly motivated to engage in communication. The use of poems, songs, fairy tales, short plays, cartoons, and visual aids proves highly effective. Repetition through simple drawings, consistent patterning, and repeated exposure to poems, stories, songs, and visual content enhances language learning for young learners. Children are often willing to revisit the same activities—reciting poems, listening to stories, singing, watching cartoons, drawing, and even playfully exploring grammar repeatedly—with enthusiasm and enjoyment.

Conclusion: This study found that young children are able to acquire languages much faster than adults due to their developmental stage. Furthermore, engaging and age-appropriate materials that capture children’s attention can significantly enhance language learning. Additionally, incorporating physical activities such as walking, running, and dancing has a positive impact on language acquisition, supporting cognitive and sensory engagement. Age is therefore a critical factor in language learning, highlighting the importance of introducing languages to individuals at an early age to maximize learning potential and retention.

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