

## THE SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS OF TEACHING DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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**Abstract:** Language educators almost always face some difficulties when they are planning their lessons and activities which might not be suitable to their students' age and abilities. Because there is clearly significant difference in teaching an additional language between young learners, teenagers and adults. In general, children are full of energy and they do not listen to teacher when they want to play games. The second group is teenagers, who, according to some teachers' opinions, are the hardest group to deal with. The last one is adults who have their own motivation as they can choose whether to attend to courses or not, however, when it comes to this group, it can be a little difficult to meet everyone's learning needs, because of different levels of proficiency. This article concern with the main differences and difficulties in teaching previously mentioned 3 groups and explores how to conduct lessons according to their specific characteristics and needs.

**Keywords:** *language teaching, lesson plan, children, young learner, teenager, adolescent, adult learner, EFL, teaching method, elementary school, high school.*

### INTRODUCTION

English language is the most learned and spoken language in the world after Chinese, that is why, interests toward this language is increasing day by day as it can give more opportunities to people to work or study overseas. This international language is taught almost in every country to different students, ranging from young children to adult learners who have different individuality and learning styles related to it. Teaching foreign language is considered one of the hard jobs when teacher does not know how to approach his students by taking into account their individual differences and characteristics. For making it easier to understand, most researchers divide learners into 3 main groups: children, teenagers and adults.

**Methods of teaching young learners.** There are a number of methods which are popular among educators to teach children such as Audio-lingual, Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP), The Communicative Approach, Total Physical Response, The Natural Approach and some teachers use songs, cartoons, flashcards and games as well to create more suitable atmosphere.

The first one is Audio-lingual method which emphasizes the importance of active listening by requiring use of audio and video materials to help students practice their pronunciation. It is, also, based on making new behavior by doing drills and repetition

exercises in order to establish some fixed sentences and phrases in the students' dictionaries. The next one is traditional way of teaching everything, Presentation-Practice-Production, PPP in short. It consists of 3 stages: presenting the rules, giving activities to practice and making students to use learned rules in context with a little help by teacher. The Communicative Approach is based on real communications involving students to use their natural strategies for language acquisition. The fourth method is Total Physical Response (TPR). It is learning from oral instruction, in other words, children learn foreign language from speech directed to them. The Natural Approach is the last method which is very close to TPR and The Communicative Approach. However, according to this one, native language should not be used at all and teacher explains to students everything with the help of pictures and body language.

While conducting lessons with these methods, educators can use songs, cartoons, flashcards and games as their helpers. Beginning with songs, they are powerful, catchy and remain in children's mind for a long time which is excellent, because they are also inexhaustible source of vocabulary as well. Song, as a technique of teaching, can teach pronunciation, vocabulary and phrases. Just like the songs, cartoons can be useful while teaching children to keep them alive and live up the class, moreover, they can be a source for improving learning atmosphere, because it can attract attention immediately and motivates all learners, age does not matter, to learn. Flashcard's main goal is introducing vocabulary and with them, teachers can play fun games with children. Admittedly, games are by far the most fun techniques of all already mentioned. Games are effective as they make learners forget about boring lesson and have fun while learning unconsciously.

**Significant characteristics of adolescent learners.** Teachers should take into consideration some factors which can affect their students' learning process, examples for such factors can be their mental and physical condition. Brown and Knowles (2007) say that, teenagers' stage is a "period of time characterized by vast development changes" (p. 3), which means that young adolescents are people who are growing and facing many challenges that vary in each personal experience. One of the most distinctive characteristics in teenagers is that although they want to be treated as adults, their thoughts, their way of making decisions irrationally and not taking responsibility for their actions are just childish, however, they never admit it. Crawford (2008) affirms that, "adolescence is a developmental time of erratic physical growth, social exploration, and unfolding intellectual capacity. It is time to awakening, realization, anticipation, confusion, awkwardness, transition, change, identify defining, and self-discovery" (p. 26).

On the one hand, developmental learning needs to construct meaningful concepts, which are also necessary to take in consideration to teach adolescents. That is why

Crawford (2008) describes these learning needs as personal connections because they have to connect personal experiences with the new knowledge.

On the other hand, intellectual challenges and metacognitive developments are also necessary because teenagers are developing their cognitive capacities during their learning process. It is significant to talk about emotional engagement as it is essential to keep students motivated. Finally, social interaction and comfortable learning environment help them to support their education.

**Adult learners.** Unlike other age groups mentioned above, adults know what they are doing and they are not forced to come to lessons, which means they are highly motivated as they have specific objective or reason for learning. Although, educators may think that if they have intrinsic motivation, they work hard to achieve their goals, there are actually two problems that can be challenging while teaching adults. Firstly, other than study, they have work and family which can take priority over language lessons. Furthermore, adult classes often include different level of students. Educator can face difficulty to fulfil everyone's needs when they are all starting from different points.

In such situations, teachers should conduct their lessons with the usage of activities which are appropriate for all ability levels and their age. The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Approach can be highly effective and relevant method for adult learners when its focus is pointed on real-life situations. For instance, they can write a job application, prepare for a citizenship test or conducting mock interviews.

### **CONCLUSION**

While Teaching various groups, educators can see their distinctiveness in characteristics when it comes to their ages and dealing with them sometimes seems impossible. However, professionals do not feel that way, because they know how to use their students interests and needs to their own advantage such as using children's playful nature to teach new words with flashcards, games, songs and cartoons, understanding teenagers interests and organizing lessons according to them, utilizing more authentic materials and tasks for adult learners taking into consideration of their needs. Remaining one fact in mind is important, lessons are successful when students can understand and apply it in real life. To reach this success, teachers should take into account that every individual has their own nature and has their own ways of learning. They cannot force their students to learn, only directing and showing them the right way of learning with interesting and engaging activities can be solution to their problems.

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