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Research Study Conducted by ELW

As Part of a Master in Arts (TEFL/TESL) Research Paper 2010

What are the most important ways in which young learners differ from adult learners in the context of EFL teaching? Outline three main ways in which EFL teaching needs to be adapted to the needs of young learners.

1. Introduction

In order to effectively answer the question of how young learners and adult learners differ, it will be useful to consider my local EFL context in Malaysia and identify the key differences in that specific situation. I will then be able to discuss their relevance to the wider context of EFL teaching in general.

Teaching English to young learners in Malaysia has gained popularity since early 2000 where the emphasis of English being taught at pre-school became mandatory by the ministry of education Malaysia. Since then the growth of pre-school and language centers throughout Malaysia has increased significantly to the extent where there is always a shortage of qualified teachers to teach English to young learners as a specialization. It is often the case that preschool teaching positions are filled by inexperienced or young teachers fresh out of high school to teach young learners English especially at kindergarten where learning of the language is at its critical stage. To overcome the shortage of teachers in this area, some schools even use EFL teachers that have adult teaching experience but are unaware of the difference in teaching strategies between young and adult learners. This has led to certain misconceptions in general when it comes to teaching English to young learners in Malaysia. As Cameron (2001: 12) suggests: there are two main misunderstandings concerning the process of teaching children: 1. Teaching children is straightforward 2. Children only need simple language. Another area is the lack of understanding of the diverse learning needs of the young English language learners in Malaysia as many different schools embark on a curriculum that only target certain language skills aspects like reading only.

The time factor is also important in language learning, this is another problem plaguing the young English language learners' experience in Malaysia as many schools only provide English lessons as a second language and it is often conducted for 4 to 6 hours a week which limits the exposure to the language. As Cameron argues that 'the central characteristics of foreign language learning lie in the amount and type of exposure to the language'. (2001:11).

This paper will look into the main differences between young and adult learners in terms of EFL context. In section 3 it goes on to show the differences in their characteristics and learning needs. Section 4 will go on to discuss the main EFL teaching strategies that need to be adopted for the needs of young learners.

2. Definitions of YELL

"YELL" stands for Young English language learner. This term varies in terms of age range from country to country depending on whether English is a first or second language in the education system. For Malaysian children who speak a language other than English in the home and are not fully fluent in English are designated as young English language learners (YELLs). Cameron (2001) identifies YELLs as being aged from 5 – 12 years, although Shelagh,Rixon (2000) also sees this as being a key question. It's the same dilemma in Malaysia as the general age range is from K1 to Primary 6 or 12 years. But confusion arises when some centers run the ESOL Cambridge syllabus where some of the elementary learners are teenagers from the age of 12 to 15. This poses a problem as the young learners of varying age have different backgrounds. Teachers often find the materials for young learners difficult to deliver when a wide range of young learners are grouped in the same class. This paper will be focusing on the young English language learners that have an age range from 5 – 12 which is also the K1 to Primary 6 equivalent in Malaysian school system.

3. Difference between Young Learners and Adult Learners in EFL context

There are many similarities and differences between adult and young learners. The greatest difference would be adult learners come to the class with prior knowledge of learning and the language (Harmer 2000: 179). Learning experiences of adults are maybe both full of glories and failures which possibly leads them to anticipate how teaching and learning should be carried out. Adult learners are usually more nervous of learning than younger learners, the former often experience self-esteem issues for being an adult learner. This is often associated with beliefs that second language acquisition by adult learners is slow, discouraging and often frustrating. Their main objective as working

adults is to use English as a second language with confidence and spontaneity, in the same way as they use their mother tongue. Most EFL teachers teaching adult learners would complain that "I can't say anything off the top of my head" (Rivers, 1992).

Adult learners have a number of special characteristics (Harmer, 2000): They can engage with abstract thought, have a range of life experiences, have definite expectations about the learning process, their own set patterns of learning, and are more disciplined than young learners. They are more likely to face certain linguistic problems like fossilized errors persistent from the L2 norm, language transfer –negative influence of their mother tongue on the productive skills. As compared to young learners, adult learners are believed to be focused on form or correctness: they are particularly conscious of deviations from the established networks, and seek to understand the nature of the rule system (Rivers, 1992).

3.1 Characteristics and learning needs of Young Learners

To fully understand young English learners (YEL), we need to first understand some important characteristic that would be useful to EFL teachers to keep in mind. Young learners are equally capable of acquiring two or more languages and there is no evidence to prove otherwise. In fact, in many parts of the world it is a norm, rather than the exception, for young learners to grow up bilingual or multilingual (De Houuwer, 1999). That is why in Malaysia, it is puzzling when parents expect their children to be taught English using translation or having teachers that can speak in their mother tongue to teach English. As when this is practiced, there is a tendency that the child is not able to master two languages and this is quite evident in the Chinese student population in Malaysia where the majority of them are found to be good in their mother tongue but lacking in English from the age group of 5 to 12.

Piaget's learning theory shows the learning needs during early development stage where construction of knowledge is done through physical learning activities and exploration. This effectively means EFL teaching needs to cater for learning activities that combines

exploration and physical activities like playing games, drama or singing into language learning. Vygotsky places the emphasis on children learning through social interaction and this is similar to the EFL emphasis on the importance of having trained EFL teachers for young learners to work closely with children during the development stage through the ZPD (Zone of Proximal development). The quality of interaction and support from the adults or teachers are crucial in the child's construction of knowledge. Another theory is that the children learn effectively through scaffolding by adults where children are guided to language learning through finely-tuned talk. (Cameron, 2001)

Young learners from the age of 5 to 12 have the following characteristics:

Young learners acquire through hearing and experiencing lots of English, in much the same way they acquire L1. They learn things through playing; they do not consciously try to learn new words or phrases. For young learners learning is more incidental. (Slatterly, M., & Willis, J.,2001) they love playing with language sounds, imitating, and making funny noises. Young learners are not able to organize their learning and not able to fully read and write in L1 especially those under 7 years of age. The grammar will develop gradually on its own when exposed to lots of English in context. As the young learners moves towards the age of 7 to 12 they would be able to read and write in L1, and develop the thinking skills to understand the difference between the real and the imaginary. Young learners at the later age of 10 to 12 develop the ability to plan and organize how best to carry out an activity. They later develop a sense of teamwork and take responsibility for class activities and routines. (Slatterly, M., & Willis, J., 2001)

The kinds of activities that engages them during learning would be activities that would allow them to interact physically, for example, kinesthetic games and songs with actions, activities that are similar to those used in total physical response lessons, and tasks that involve coloring, cutting, and sticking, along with simple, repetitive stories and speaking activities that have contextual value to young learners. A simple grammar game that is usually conducted in Malaysia that draws a parallel with this theory is using a ball and a empty box to teach preposition, where students would need to place the ball according to

the teacher's instruction like above, next to, in front and etc. Understanding the learning needs of the young learners is crucial in engaging them in the EFL classroom; the activities should be simple enough for the learners to understand what is expected of them. Lesson objectives and expectations to the learners need to be spelt out clearly and repetitively throughout the lesson. The task planned should be within their abilities, balancing the needs of an achievable task but at the same time sufficiently stimulating for them to have a sense of achievement when that task has been completed. The activities should be largely orally based with listening activities taking up a large proportion of class time, for example teacher conducting a story telling session. The activities planned should be interchangeable ranging from whole class to pair work and some quiet to active activities. These changes of pace and focus helps young learners to be interested and motivated. The close monitoring of individual, pair or group activities and guidance throughout their learning process through the use of scaffolding is essential.

3.2 Characteristics and learning needs of adult learners

According to Knowles (1976), a prime characteristic of adultness is the need and capacity to self-directing (P.182) therefore leading to adult learners primarily being independent and self-directed in what he/she learns. There are many similarities and differences between adult and younger learners. Perhaps the greatest difference is that the former come to class with a long history of learning experience.(Harmer 1999) This experience can be drawn upon during learning and this can work both ways in class where opportunities can be provided for sharing and learning among adults. Activities designed should be in context to the adults' prior experience to give a more engaging session during learning. On the other hand, this prior experience may be a barrier to further learning as an adult who has not had a positive learning experience and may be hesitant about trying again. An Adult learner is most likely to be interested in topics that relate to the developmental stage of his/her life and this is particularly important when it comes to designing activities that are relevant to adult learners. In learning, an adult learner is most interested in information and ideas for language learning that can solve problems they face presently at their work place. This is also important when language activities are

6

planned in context to working adult scenarios or life that can be applied immediately after class. One big advantage of adult learners even in Malaysia, they are usually self-motivated in learning as most of the time its money forked out from their own pockets and also the desire to improve oneself for their career motivates them intrinsically. There are instances where teachers do find adults that are not motivated in EFL classroom, for example where a company pays for the student or they are forced to take English lessons which they are not interested in and this may lead to motivational problem on the part of the student.

During the early 1970s Malcom Knowles introduced the term "andragogy", describing the difference between children and adult learners (Knowles, Swanson, & Holton, 2005). Andragogy focuses on the special needs of adult learners. Knowles identified six assumptions about adult learning: (1) the need to know, (2) self-concept, (3) prior experience, (4) readiness to learn, (5) learning orientation, and (6) motivation to learn.

A summary of the both the young and adult learner characteristics and learning needs are shown in table 1 below.

Characteristics of learners	
Young	Adult
- Construct knowledge from actively interacting with physical environment - Acquire through hearing and experiencing lots of English same as learning L1 - Learning is more incidental - Learn best through playing with language sounds, imitation and noises - Not able to organize their learning so need scaffolding from adults and teachers to construct knowledge	- Capacity of self-directing. Independent and self-directed learners. - Able to draw upon vast and prior experience in classroom for learning - More contextual based activities are required to suit their working needs - Interested in ideas and information that can solve problems faced at work - Self-motivated due to work requirement and personal development needs

Learning Needs	
• More holistic learners • Need physical activities based learning • Kinesthetic games and story • Activities planned should be interchangeable with varying activities and pace • Close monitoring	• Need to understand why they are learning something before undertaking learning • The learning environment created must allow for learners to develop their self-directed learning skills • Tapping on learners' prior experience to cater for greater needs of individualization and learning strategies • Contextual learning needs that is relevant to work or application in society • Orientation of learning are task or problem centered learning Materials presented must help them to perform task or deal with problems they confront in real life context

Table 1

4. Adapting EFL teachings to the needs of young learners

4.1 Choice and presentation of activities

The choice of activity and content of a lesson for young learners during EFL lesson is crucial in engaging students. This greatly depends a great deal on their age, abilities and interest. It would be challenging to ask a child of six to do a task that demands a sophisticated control of spatial orientation if she or he has not fully developed this skill. For young learners aged 6 to 12 years of age there would be a spectrum of activities that needs to be considered, especially considering young learners tend to have short attention spans and a lot of physical energy. In addition, children are very much linked to their surroundings and are more interested in the physical and the tangible. As Scott and Ytreberg (1990) describe, "Their own understanding comes through hands and eyes and ears. The physical world is dominant at all times" and Philips (2001:5) argues that "young learners respond to language according to what it does or what they can do with

it, rather than treating it as an intellectual game or abstract system. The choice of activities for young EFL learners should provide learners with bodily-kinesthetic activities such as making things, singing action songs to teach learners pronunciation and reading skills. Designing activities that allow learners to learn language through games, project works, doing hands-on activities is a great booster for young learners to understand the target language due to the fact that they eagerly explore the language to understand through physical activities.

4.1.1 Teaching through Visuals

In terms of language learning, young learners are keen on learning visually and spatially (Reid, 1987) Teaching activities and choice of materials for EFL young learners should be supported visually; through big colourful pictures, posters, drawings or flashcards, puppets, toys and real objects or by dramatizing the meanings of new words or vocabulary taught in classroom through mime, facial expressions, gestures and so on. The choice of visuals matches with the young learners' learning style of predominantly visual and kinesthetic learners. The use of visual aids abundantly in the classroom makes learning memorable and fun- especially if the pictures are large, colourful and amusing, and the miming is exaggerated and funny. Interesting or entertaining pictures motivate students to respond in ways that more routine teaching aids, such as a textbook or a sentence on the board cannot (Celce-Murcia&Hilles,1988:73). Added to an exciting story, these make the young learners class even more enjoyable and unforgettable. So, the young learners' teachers must be really well prepared at all times, and make sure to have a variety of visual aids and techniques ready before each lesson. When a suitable atmosphere to learn in the EFL classroom is created, any learners would be able to learn comfortably in a secure and engaged environment.

4.1.2 Teaching in context

Contextualized activities facilitate learning any topic as it makes them work out the meaning of unknown language from a situation or a context. For example getting the

young learners to plan a birthday party as an activity would allow the teacher to teach new vocabulary through a theme and activities that is built into this lesson would be more engaging for young learners. If the language to be introduced in the classroom is accompanied with visuals along with the contexts, retention would be longer.

4.1.3 Teaching through activities

Young learners have short attention spans. For ages 5–7, keeping activities around 5 and 10 minutes long is crucial for engagement in class. For ages 8–10, keep activities 10 to 15 minutes long. Scott and Ytreberg (1990) suggest creating a balance between activities that generates quiet and noisy exercises. The activities should include 4 skills: listening/talking/reading/writing. The design of activities should be varied to include individual/pairwork/groupwork/ whole class. The lesson in the classroom should seek a balance between teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil activities.

The use of various activities in the classroom to teach a foreign language has a great impact on young learners. They would love to learn by means of activities as such kind of attempts encourage them to explore something, which is quite stimulating, motivating and interesting. Types of activities that can be used in the classroom can be a project work, drawing, colouring, cutting out, making things, solving problems, recording information …etc. The reason behind such activities is that learners learn by doing, by being actively involved in their learning; and it creates opportunities for them to use their imagination and creativity in language learning.

4.1.4 Teaching language activities through fun and games

In designing activities for teaching young learners, another area to consider is to have fun and games incorporated into the chosen activities, as young learners are most engaged when an activity designed consist of these two elements. Argondizzo (1992:6) propounds the view that "most children who start foreign language instruction do not have autonomous motivation to learn a foreign language." Children will learn better if they are motivated and want to do it. Thornton (2001:12) has the following to say on the

importance of motivation:"…some experts go so far as to say that motivation is more important than the learners' aptitude or the method of teaching employed. One thing teachers are sure of, however, is that fun and games are a must in the English language classroom because they are intrinsically motivating for children and again, because they are part of a child's natural world: the "here and now" of a child's life."Furthermore, Phillips (2001:79) points out "games in foreign language teaching help students to see learning English enjoyable and rewarding. Playing games in the classroom develops the ability to co-operate, to compete without being aggressive, and to be a good loser".

Games that can be incorporated into language teaching activities can be categorized depending on the types such as structure games, vocabulary games, spelling games …etc. Songs, rhymes, chants, and musical games are fantastic materials for the language teacher to use with young learners (Çakır, 1999:7).

In deciding the choice and presentation of activities, we would also want to further explore into activities like story telling whether there would be motivational benefits and disadvantages of using emotionally charged stories as compared to the conventional fairy tale stories. Stories that may be a little scary, tense or sad (i.e. ghost stories, etc) with young learners? Is it possible to import rudimentary discussions in any form into YL lessons, such as "what would you do if …" questions?

4.2 Error Correction

On top of designing and planning for activities for young learners, another main area of EFL teaching is error correction in the classroom. It plays a crucial role in the process of learning as teachers' role in the class in terms of feedback can play a part in constructing or obstructing the potential of learning among young EFL learners. Therefore EFL teachers would need to steer clear of the tendency of focusing on what young learners do wrong at the expense of helping them to get things right. This is especially crucial for young learners as they may be put off to participate in class activities and lead to a low self-esteem issue during the second language acquisition process.

When giving feedback to learners on their performance in speaking English, the emphasis for the teacher should be to discover what learners didn't say and help them say that, rather than criticize what they did say. This requires the use of activities which stretch learners appropriately and the teacher listening to what learners aren't saying. The features of the teacher's language use which facilitate learner involvement and construct positive learning for young learners very much depend on whether the activity is to encourage fluency or accuracy in the child. For instance if the activity focuses on speaking and the young learners are still struggling with the content then only fluency would be encouraged instead of accuracy which will put of the young learners. Some error correction methods used are as follows based on a simple extract of a teacher revising simple past tense with a young learner in an EFL classroom. (Hammer, 2007:142-143)

Extract 1. In this short extract the teacher's aim is to revise Simple Past tense with young learners.
17. T   …. Do you remember Simple Past Tense? Such as; *gittim, geldim*
18. L4   Yes teacher.
19. T   Okay. Tell your friends what is that?
20. L4 Did.
21. T   Yes we use did, but in what kind of sentences? Positive?
22. LL No
23. T   Negative?
24. LL Yes
25. T   Yes, good. Question?
26. LL Yes.
27. T   Yes, very good. Who wants to make a sentence? A negative sentence.
28. L1   May I?
29. T   Yes please.
30. L1 I don't…..
31. T   Be careful! I ask you to make a **past sentence**. …..
32. L5 Teacher?
33. T   Yes dear.
34. L5 I didn't played football yesterday.
35. T   Okay. It is very good but there is a mistake. Who wants to correct it?

Figure 1

a. Direct error correction

The teacher uses full autonomy when correcting errors and teacher corrects the errors with a very open and direct approach through prompting or questioning technique as shown in the extracted conversation in figure1"Be careful! I ask you to make a past sentence...". This is less time consuming. In error correction, in order not to interrupt the

oral fluency the correction should be minimum and direct. This method of correction could bring about a dilemma especially in some EFL local context where the emphasis for young learners is to focus on accuracy for young learners at the expenses of building the learners' confidence by encouraging them to express themselves.

b. Content feedback

The teacher uses natural occurring conversation to give both negative and positive feedback. The teacher's use of conversational language while giving feedback resembles utterances found in the real world so as to aid the young learners in better understanding the content correction better. For example when the young learners made a mistake of saying I don't… instead of I didn't.

c. Extended wait time

Although being dominant in the course discourse is thought to have negative effects on learning. Teacher compensates this situation by letting students think after asking questions and constructs the involvement. A sample of this would be "Be careful I ask you to make a past tense…" from figure 1. Extended wait time , the time allowed by the teacher to answer a question not only increases the number of learner responses but also results in more complex answers and leads to an increase in learner interaction (Nunan, 1991). This raises the question whether extended time if not used effectively would have a negative impact on holding young learners' attention, because of the increase in pauses?

4.3 Elicitation and teaching of new lexis

As Nagy (1997) points out, first-language learners pick up most vocabulary from the context, and the acquisition of multi-meaning words is accounted for by this incidental learning. He also points out that contextual inferences contribute to learners developing an understanding of word meaning at different levels of knowledge: linguistic knowledge (syntactic knowledge, word schemas, vocabulary knowledge), word knowledge and

strategic knowledge. Is this same approach applicable for second language acquisition? Even in Malaysia EFL classroom young learners are taught vocabulary through cue cards and given chunks of word list to memorize its meaning but this has seen students not being able to apply the new lexis learned both in writing and communication. It has its advantages especially for young learners to pick up many new lexis but it has to be built into more contextual inferences to develop the understanding and application of the lexis.

Some methods that could be useful are as follows:

1. Setting the context – Learning new lexis of different fruits through a shopping activity for example is essential in engaging young learners and it would naturally generate the target lexis.
2. Eliciting vocabulary –Elicitation ensures that young learners work towards understanding the meaning as this is more likely to help them remember and recall the vocabulary taught. We need to remember that our young learners are, as Tudor (2001: 15) puts it, "not…blank sheets of paper onto which a pre-ordained body of knowledge can be transferred in a neat, predictable manner." Normal elicitation techniques need to be adapted to suit young learners with for example, a greater emphasis on exaggerated mime, drama, colourful acted narratives, and suitable visual and auditory aids.
3. Drilling – A drill is invaluable because it gives highly controlled practice of a word or chunk of language, aiming to aid memorization of the form and phonology of the new vocabulary through repetition. The flip side of this is that it can be quite mechanical quite easily, which can lead to young learners becoming bored. Hence it's important to use different types of drill like choral drills, individual drills, chain drills, back and front chaining, etc.., putting energy into them and making them quick, snappy and fun.
4. Concept Check Questions (CCQs)–To ensure that young learners understand the underlying concept of lexical item, appropriate Concept Check Questions (CCQs) need to be asked. This is important to avoid questions like 'Do you understand?' and 'Are you following?', the answer to which could be in the affirmative without

indicating any true understanding of concept involved.(Choudhury, 2010) A good simple CCQ would be' Is a skyscraper a tall building?' while teaching the word 'skyscraper'.

5. Practice activity – After going through the vocabulary item to clarify spelling and stress, young learners should be set an activity that forces them to use the new word items in pairs/groups to help reinforce learning. For example activities like Games like Pictionary, taboo, completing crosswords, Bingo and etc.

5. Conclusion

The teaching of Young Learners has its own unique set of requirements when it comes to classroom interaction and lesson plan design for EFL teachers. This paper has covered the characteristic and learning needs of young learners by understanding the various learning theories that covers young learners. It can be concluded that the young learners from the age group of 6 to 12 would require a very specific approach to the design of material and the choice of activities to teach and engage them in classroom. From the delivery of the lesson to the correcting of students' errors, it must come with a specific strategy to implement in the classroom to ensure young learners fully understand the components of the lesson. The activities designed should promote learners to get involved in the activity as much as possible. It should be kept in mind that young learners will learn better when they feel secure, satisfied, and when the activity offers them an enjoyable learning atmosphere in the classroom.

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