

THE ROLE OF TEACHING ENGLISH TO CHILDREN IN KINDERGARTENS

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ANNOTATION

In today's modern society, learning English is becoming more and more popular. This article describes the role of the English language in our modern life and the importance of teaching it to young children in pre-school educational institutions (kindergartens) and the opinion of European scientists about it. Teaching English to children at an early age has a special place for this language to become more popular and widely used in the future, and teaching English to children as a second language from a young age is the basis for their future knowledge.

Keywords: preschool education, second language, communication skills, problem solving skills, critical thinking, cultural sensitivity, academic achievements, curiosity, tolerance, cultural and emotional confusion, empathy, well-conducted.

In the 21st century, the significance of communication skills, and the English language in particular, has become paramount. In short, communication comes prior to all other skills required to move up the ladder and achieve goals, irrespective of the field chosen. After all, effective and strong communication skills are the key to accomplish every other milestone in your child's career. It's evident just how important English as a language is in today's world. Many global businesses conduct meetings in the English language, in several universities English is the medium of instruction for teaching many courses and, tourists and travellers around the world use English as a common language.

Research extols the benefits of being bilingual, especially so if it's learnt in the early years of one's life. Studies have proven that learning English early on helps children grasp other languages faster and more easily. Kids get more time to learn things, have fewer inhibitions, and most importantly, they have a brain designed for language learning. Education is important and so is learning the right English from an early age to improve their quality of life. Teaching your kids English will help boost memory, problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills, and develop an ability to multitask. Also, children good in other languages display a sign of enhanced creativity and mental flexibility. Feeding their brains right is equally important and it comes with the skill of learning a second language.

Strong communication skills help a child in many ways. It enhances their ability to connect with people at a global level in later life, develops confidence, preparing kids to make them understand how to present themselves before the world. It enables them to communicate well their stance in different situations. The chances of excelling in academics is yet another perk, as there are cognitive benefits of learning a language, it will have a direct impact on your child's academic achievement. It also helps in nurturing their curiosity, tolerance, cultural sensitivity, and most importantly, empathy. It opens a world of opportunities for them later on.

It is obvious from the illustration that 74% of people voted for kindergartens as the best place to start learning English, while 26% of them for school. In addition to this, participants of the questionnaire shared with some feedbacks. One of them thinks that children mostly comprehend this language at school, since they are more conscious, while preschoolers assume

this activity as game and they can just learn names of subjects, animals, plants and something else.

Methodologies used by teachers and the capacity of perception of information are changing, therefore learning approaches should be also replaced. According to scientists' point of view, early teaching of English complicates the content of preschool education and it is detrimental, since it robs a kid's childhood. However, researches have shown that utilization of rational methodologies during teaching may develop children and boost their educational and cultural level. It is just necessary to choose the age, which is more favorable for the beginning of teaching. So, what do people mean by early teaching English to preschoolers? It should be understood that it is the teaching which is based on practical approach from the moment of birth until the studying at school. Possessing high functions of psyche and brain, children have more opportunities of development, realization of which are depended from education and upbringing of surrounding adults. Thus, they should be developed in all different spheres from first days. According to the professor N. A. Bonk, it is necessary to include following aspects on the basis of teaching foreign language at early stage:

- Developing (priority- oriented)
- Well- conducted
- Cognitive
- Educational

If kids are introduced to the English language much earlier, it can help them stay ahead of their peers. Learning a language takes years. However, it is not only about merely learning the language but keep refining and mastering the skills that one has acquired. Unfortunately, India isn't the world's top when it comes to mastering the Lingua Franca. There's no minimum age to start learning a language, the sources of learning can be many and are not only restricted to books and academics. To make them excel in learning a language, you would need to start early. Language acquisition in kids is an incredible factor so there's no such defined age when it comes to teaching your child an extra language as kids are born with the capability to reproduce words. The time a learner would get to devote to learning a language has a direct and positive correlation to cognitive development. It also allows them to grow alongside the second language and culture, developing a deeper connection as they grow older. Also, when kids learn a language at a very young age, they have a much better chance of not having a foreign accent when speaking another language, rather they sound natural.

According to Curtain and Dahlberg (Citation2010, p. 428) "When language learning begins earlier, it can go on longer and provide more practice and experience, leading ultimately to greater fluency and effectiveness". In addition, Hashemi and Azizinezhad (Citation2011, p. 2083) explain that "English knowledge will help to open many opportunities for them (children) in the future and it will be invaluable in their future careers". Furthermore, children will master better communication and social skills, when learning English at a very young age. They will gain self-confidence and will be motivated to continue improving their English at higher levels of education. Nikolov and Mihaljević Djigunović (Citation2011, p. 98) extend the many benefits of early language learning to include "better language skills" and "favorable attitudes to other languages, people and cultures", as long as teachers are trained and classes small.

The Ministry of Education has included English as a compulsory subject from primary to high school education (AlAzmi, Citation2018). However, it would be highly innovative to introduce English language teaching in Kuwaiti public kindergarten schools as well, with promising learning outcomes. To assure success, it is therefore important to explore the beliefs of kindergarten teachers prior to any implementation of English language teaching at that level. Stronge (Citation2000) reminds us that teachers affect student performance significantly, as they are the most influential factor in the teaching/learning process. Sanders et al., (Citation1997) also point to the strong cumulative effect teachers have on students' achievement. The focus on kindergarten teachers' role in the success of kindergarten education is captured by Hanušová and Najvar (Citation2006, p. 7), when they state that "the younger the pupil [starting to learn L2], the more significant the qualification of the teacher". Rixon (Citation2015) also emphasizes that teachers play a crucial role in providing the right conditions for language learning to take place, especially in contexts where there is limited contact with English outside school, as in Kuwait. When it comes to the right age for teaching English to young learners, several influential researchers support the theory that language learning is most effective at an early age. Long (Citation1990) argues that the combined findings of studies conducted to date warrant the conclusion that:

1. The ability to attain native-like phonological abilities in an SL begins to decline by age 6 in many individuals and to be beyond anyone beginning later than age 12, no matter how motivated they might be or how much opportunity they might have. Native-like morphology and syntax only seem to be possible for those beginning before age 15. (p. 280)

Peçenek (Citation2002) also concludes that it is beneficial to start teaching foreign languages at an early age, yet it is also important to provide the necessary conditions for successful language learning in this age group such as competent teachers, suitable materials and proper teaching methods. Du (Citation2010) also supports the claim that learner achievement in second/foreign language learning is largely determined by the age at which that student is first exposed to the language. This clearly suggests that it is preferable to begin second/foreign language learning at the primary stage and perhaps even in kindergarten. According to Chang (Citation1990), children have great potential to develop accurate pronunciation and fluency. In addition, Dunn (Citation1990, p. 3) stated that "young children are willing to use language and to experiment with sounds, without worrying about making mistakes. Adolescents and adults are less willing to do so". However, there are researchers who hold opposing views regarding the teaching of a foreign language at an early age. For example, Soto (Citation1991) indicates that when comparing young children with adults in second language acquisition, children's performance is poorer apart from regarding pronunciation. Johnstone (Citation1994, p. 51) reports on an immersion program in Canada "that early immersion students (beginning in kindergarten) have an advantage in speaking and listening, but late immersion students (beginning at age 13) appear to have an advantage in reading and writing". Furthermore, Politzer and Weiss (Citation1969) advocate that initial pronunciation and retention of vocabulary increase with age. In general, based on research into the age factor, Krashen et al. (Citation1979) reach the conclusion that adults learn a second language faster than children in the early stages of learning.

Another important factor to consider when teaching English as a second or a foreign language is culture. Al-Dubeab (Citation2002) asserts that language cannot be taken alone, but it comes with various notions and cultural perceptions, which have an impact on the loyalty of a child to his/her own language and culture and that leads to a child's cultural and emotional confusion. Mitchell and Mylesm (Citation2004, p. 235) argue that "language and culture are not separate but acquired together, with each providing support for the development of the other". Gao (Citation2006, p. 59) confirms that "the interdependence of language learning and cultural learning is so evident that one can conclude that language learning is culture learning and consequently, language teaching is cultural teaching". Gao (Citation2006) further states that foreign language teachers should be aware of the place of cultural studies in the foreign language classroom and try to improve students' cultural awareness and promote their communication competence. Moreover, Wang (Citation2008) affirms that foreign language teaching means foreign culture teaching, and this makes foreign language teachers foreign culture teachers as well. According to Wei (Citation2005, p. 56) "language has a dual character: both as a tool of communication and a carrier of culture". Alyasery (Citation2018, p. 1) confirms that "language and culture are inseparable and can be simply described as two sides of the same coin". The understanding of culture is very important for understanding any language. According to Al-Ghamdi (Citation2003, p. 2) "the ultimate purpose of teaching a foreign language is to enable the learner to benefit from the knowledge of speakers of that language and communicate with them. If the learner is unfamiliar with the culture of the speakers, s/he cannot understand the literature or communicate effectively". Differences of culture may cause many mistakes. Thus, no one can ignore the impact of language on the culture of the people; language and culture are deeply connected. Hussein (Citation2000, p. 165) maintains that "it is difficult to engage in effective dialogue without knowing the culture and background of the people with whom you are communicating". Hussein (Citation2000) affirms that the importance of teaching English to children stems from introducing them to the language functions which facilitate communication and interaction. However, Zughoul (Citation2003, p. 26) states that "teaching English as a second/foreign language anywhere in the Arab World would give it a freehand to intrude into the territory of Arabic and such a practice will have its impact on identity and culture".

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