

Challenges in teaching english to young learners and ways to overcome them

ЖАРИЯЛАНДЫ
14.04.2026

СІЛТЕМЕ
<https://bilimger.kz/188116/>

Абдикаримова Насиба

Академик Е. А. Бөкетов атындағы Қарағанды ұлттық зерттеу университеті
Шетел тілдері факультеті

UDC 37.091.3:811.111

Author: Abdikarimova Nasiba

Karaganda National Research University named after academician E. A. Buketov

Faculty of two foreign languages

Abstract. This article, structured through IMRAD, examines the main challenges in teaching English to young learners and practical ways to overcome them. The analysis focuses on children's psychological characteristics, short attention span, mixed proficiency, learning materials, teacher preparation, and the impact of digital environments. The study argues that effective early English teaching requires an integrated use of play, visuals, storytelling, movement, repetition, and flexible assessment.

Keywords: young learners, English teaching, teaching challenges, methodology, motivation, differentiation.

Introduction

Teaching English to young students today has become not just a matter of starting a language discipline early, but a strategic direction that forms the quality of future education, cultural openness and communicative flexibility. However, the process of teaching a foreign language at an early age is not simple, since the perception, attention, emotional reaction and language experience of a primary school student is fundamentally different from that of an adult or high school student. Therefore, it is not only the content that plays a decisive role in teaching English to younger children, but the way it is transmitted. The purpose of the study is

to scientifically analyze the main difficulties in teaching English to young students and show effective ways to overcome them. The objectives of the study are to determine the nature of these difficulties, to reveal their causes, to differentiate methodological solutions based on current research and to offer applied recommendations worthy of school experience. The object of the study is the process of teaching English to young students. The subject of the study is pedagogical difficulties in this process and methodological mechanisms for overcoming them. The relevance of the study is manifested in the fact that, along with the expansion of English lessons at an early age, the need to improve its quality increases. The theoretical significance lies in the systematization of modern difficulties in teaching languages to young students, while the practical significance lies in the provision of clearly adapted approaches to the work of the teacher.

Methods

The article used methods of comparative analysis, content analysis and systematization of scientific literature. The selection included six sources published in 2023-2025. Among them are international empirical research, systematization analysis, labor and teaching materials related to the context of Kazakhstan and articles on the practice of teachers. The logic of analysis was based on the consideration of difficulties by external and internal factors. Internal factors include such phenomena as age, instability of attention, language level gap, speech compression, external factors include the curriculum, material quality, teacher training, assessment, digital environment and classroom organization.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the study «the Challenges in Teaching English Online to Young Learners: Teachers' Voices» by Wancey Alka, Dzulfikri, Haula Amelia Husna and Hainona Izza Golia, which looked at the elementary school experience in an online format, the technical problem, the difficulty of using different methods, maintaining student involvement in the lesson and evaluating language development are highlighted as the most complex nodes. The authors conclude that «online English Language Teaching activities more difficult than face-to-face classrooms», that is, an online English lesson is organized more complex than a traditional lesson [1, 2]. This conclusion proves that the content alone is not enough in teaching English for younger students, and the format of the lesson and the nature of interaction are also very important. Especially in elementary school, the teacher quickly learns what the child understands from his gaze, movements, intonation, and in the digital environment this opportunity decreases. Therefore, in such a situation, it is necessary that a short task, visual instruction, constant feedback and communication with parents go hand in hand.

The general logic of the development of the field of teaching English to young students is clearly demonstrated by the work of Ramadhani Uswatun Hasanah, Susipto and Septian DVI Chahio «two Decades of Teaching English to Young Learners: a Bibliometric Study». Analyzing

publications in the Scopus database from 2004 to 2024, the authors show that the number of research in this direction has clearly increased after 2022, the scope of the topic has expanded and such concepts as Game, context, early language environment have come to the fore [2, 137]. This fact, on the one hand, proves the relevance of the problem, and on the other hand, suggests that difficulties are not accidental, but a permanent problem recognized in World pedagogy. Consequently, it is not enough for young learners to explain the difficulties of teaching English only by the skill of an individual teacher; this is a problem that includes an entire methodological system, teaching material, and school policy.

In the article «Problems in Teaching English to Young Learners and their Solutions» by muqti Muhammad and Sugirin, classroom management, the use of monotonous tools, individual differences between students and heterogeneity of language training are highlighted as the main obstacles in teaching young learners. The authors emphasize that it is difficult for a child to keep his attention for a long time, and therefore the need for realistic materials, such as real objects, toys, colorful images and songs [3, 17]. This conclusion suggests that in elementary English lessons, abstract interpretation is weaker, and concrete, moving and emotionally presented content is more effective. For example, the transfer of the words "apple", "jump", "blue", "big" » not only by translation, but also by drawing, movement, object and short situation strengthens the child's memory. In this way, part of the difficulty comes not from the child's abilities, but from the inconsistency of the form of learning.

Maria Nilsson's research «Challenges and Teaching Materials in English for Young Learners in Sweden» among Swedish primary school teachers shows that the level difference is the biggest challenge. As a result of a survey of 109 teachers, the author writes that significant heterogeneity of the level of professionalism is the main problem for the teacher, in addition, there is a lack of material that attracts all students to oral language Activity [4, 46]. This issue is also very relevant for the School of Kazakhstan, because in one class there can be both a child familiar with English from kindergarten and a child who is learning the language for the first time. In such a situation, only one common task will later attract a weak student and bore a strong student. Therefore, differentiated learning is also very necessary at the level of young learners. For example, on the topic "my family", one student can name the words father, mother, sister according to the drawing, the second student can speak with the example "this is my mother", and the third student can say 3-4 sentences about family members. A single topic, but a three - level result, is the true way to solve the problem.

The «the practices and challenges of teaching English to young learners: a case of selected primary schools in Ethiopia» study by Esayas Teshome Taddese, Hubtamu Adem Yassin, Mitiku Tasisa Dinsa and Anteneh Kebede Lakeu, written on the example of Ethiopian schools, reveals that there is a significant gap between the Five Principles offered internationally and the actual classroom practice. The authors point out that the principles of orientation towards language use, the introduction of interesting activities, the use of songs, Fairy Tales, games, drama, the

reliance on visualization and movement, and the establishment of a stable Class Order are often not fully implemented [5, 3]. This result shows that the main difficulty of the young learners lesson is not only in the student, but also in methodological implementation. If the teacher often relies on translation and memorization in the lesson, the child will not interact with the language. And in a child who does not interact with language, both curiosity and the courage to speak slowly develop. Therefore, micro-instructions based on movement and action, such as "stand up", "touch your nose", "show me red", "find three circles», are considered not just a game in a beginner English lesson, but an important methodological necessity.

The problem in the context of Kazakhstan is deepened by the work of Bakhytgul Zhetpisbaeva, Elmira Uteubayeva, Tatyana Shelestova and Tatyana Kokhanover «Introducing Teaching English to Young (Preschool) Learners in Kazakhstan». In this study, the shortage of qualified personnel is mentioned as the most important problem in the implementation of early English teaching in the conditions of a multilingual environment, as well as the need for methodological support in the practice of teachers [6, 159]. This conclusion suggests that high-quality English teaching for young learners is directly related to the problem of teacher training. Even the best textbook will not give a complete result if the teacher does not master child psychology, the specifics of Early Language Teaching, phonetic modeling, game technologies and step-by-step transfer of language material. In the case of Kazakhstan, this is especially important, because English is often taught as a third language, and the student's language load in Kazakh, Russian, and English goes hand in hand.

The analysis allows young learners to group the main difficulties in teaching English into several areas. Firstly, the age of a child has a natural feature: he does not listen for a long time, gets tired quickly, but quickly becomes interested. Secondly, the level difference in the classroom and the heterogeneity of the language base make it difficult for the teacher to maintain a common tempo. Thirdly, the material and methodology sometimes do not correspond to the logic of the child's development. Fourth, assessments and feedback should be particularly soft and accurate at the young learners level. Fifth, teacher training and lesson design become the core of the entire result.

An effective way to overcome such difficulties is to bring the structure of the lesson closer to the nature of the child. For Young learners, the lesson should consist not of long explanations, but of short cycles: listening, repeating, moving, seeing, telling, the element of the game, a small conclusion. For example, on the topic "Animals", the teacher first shows a toy or a picture, then gives a sound sample, then "Show me The lion", "Jump like a rabbit", "What is it? the child learns the word through action, not mechanically. Similarly, it is better to organize the assessment in the form of a sticker, a smiley face, an instant verbal praise, a short paired response, and not a traditional strict check. For young students, it is necessary to make the mistake not a stopping point, but a stepping stone to the next action.

Conclusion

In summary, the difficulties in teaching English to young students are multifaceted and cannot be explained for a single reason. These difficulties arise due to age, attention instability, level differences, teacher training, material quality, and learning environment. However, this complexity does not mean that young learners cannot be taught English effectively. On the contrary, properly organized play, movement, conversation, visualization, differentiated learning, short feedback, and systematic repetition can clearly reduce these barriers. Therefore, the main requirement in teaching English at an early age is to consider the child not as a diminutive version of an adult student, but as an independent learner with a characteristic perceptual logic.

REFERENCES:

1. Алка У., Дзульфистри, Хусна Қ. Ә., Голия Х. И. The Challenges in Teaching English Online to Young Learners: Teachers' Voices // Child Education Journal. 2023. Vol. 5, No. 1. P. 1-9. DOI: 10.33086/cej.v5i1.3687.
2. Хасанах Р. У., Сусипто, Чахио С. Д. Two Decades of Teaching English to Young Learners: A Bibliometric Study // Allure Journal. 2025. Vol. 5, No. 2. P. 137-146. DOI: 10.26877/allure.v5i2.22692.
3. Мұхаммад М., Сугирин. Problems in Teaching English to Young Learners and Their Solutions // Britain International of Linguistics, Arts and Education Journal. 2024. Vol. 6, No. 1. P. 17-23. DOI: 10.33258/biolae.v6i1.1078.
4. Нильссон М. Challenges and Teaching Materials in English for Young Learners in Sweden // Educare. 2024. No. 3. P. 1-22. DOI: 10.24834/educare.2024.3.941.
5. Таддесе Э. Т., Яссин Х. А., Динса М. Т., Лакеу А. К. The practices and challenges of teaching English to young learners: a case of selected primary schools in Ethiopia // Frontiers in Education. 2025. Vol. 10. Article 1656387. DOI: 10.3389/feduc.2025.1656387.
6. Жетпісбаева Б. А., Утеубаева Э. А., Шелестова Т. Ю., Кохановер Т. А. Introducing Teaching English to Young (Preschool) Learners in Kazakhstan // World Journal of English Language. 2023. Vol. 13, No. 2. P. 159-167. DOI: 10.5430/wjel.v13n2p159.