

TEYL

As English has become the dominant/ international/ common language in the world, it has also become one of the components of tertiary, secondary, primary and even pre-school education in the EFL teaching contexts. Thus, the concept of young learners has started to cover a larger age range than it did 2 or 3 decades ago. This change can clearly be seen in the quality and quantity of coursebooks written for different ages and levels of young English language learners, and the publications made in this area. Moreover, it also brings a demand for competent English language teachers to teach (very) young language learners.

Ironically, today in Turkey some non-native English language teachers of young learners teaching in the primary education or in some cases pre-school education (kindergarten and nursery) have never been a young foreign language learner themselves or never experienced being a student in a young learner English class. Besides, the ones with an ELT diploma had not taken a special course, training or education on teaching English to young learners during their undergraduate education until 1998, after which *Teaching English to Young Learners* as an ELT course has been included in the pre-service foreign language teacher education programs by the Higher Education Council (YOK).

As the concept “teaching English to young learners” suggests, *age* plays a crucial role in what we teach and how we teach it, since a young learner class is different from an adult and/or a teenager class in terms of the learners’ language learning needs, the language competences emphasized, and the cognitive skills addressed. That’s why, it is highly important to show the differences of these three learner groups keeping in mind the fact that every learner is unique and such lists can only reflect generalizations (Harmer, 2007):

Young Children	Adolescents	Adults
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They respond although they do not understand. - They learn from everything around them: they learn indirectly rather than directly. - They understand mostly when they see, hear, touch and interact rather than from explanations. - Abstract concepts are difficult to deal with. - They generally display a curiosity about the world and an enthusiasm for learning a language - They like talking about themselves and respond to learning that uses their lives as the main topic. - They love discovering things, making or drawing things, using their imagination, moving from one place to another, solving puzzles. - They have a short attention span; they can easily get bored after 5-10 minutes. - Teachers should have a rich repertoire of activities to help young children receive information from a variety of sources and plan a range of activities for a given time period. - Teachers should work with students individually or in groups - Teachers need to be aware of the students' interests to motivate them. - The classroom should be colorful and bright with enough room for different activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Despite their success in language learning, they are seen like problematic students. - They commit passionately when they are engaged - Most of them start to understand the need for learning. - Attention span is longer as a result of intellectual development. - They can talk about abstract issues to a certain point. - They can use many different ways of studying and practicing language. - They search for identity and self-esteem; thus they need to feel good about themselves and valued. - They need teacher and peer approval and are sensitive to criticism of their own age group. - Teachers should link teaching to their everyday interests and experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They can engage with abstract thought - They have a whole range of (positive or negative) life and learning experiences. - They have expectations about the learning process and they have their own patterns of learning - They are more disciplined than the other age groups and know how to struggle on despite boredom - Unlike other groups, they know why they are learning and what they want to have at the end. - They sustain a level of motivation even for a distant goal, which is difficult for the other groups. - They can be critical of teaching methods or they may feel uncomfortable with unfamiliar methods. - Older ones worry that their intellectual powers diminish by age. - They have a longer concentration span to continue an activity than the other groups. - Teachers should consider their (positive or negative) learning experiences.

Adapted from: Harmer, J. (2007). *The Practice of English language teaching (4th Ed.)*. Essex: Pearson Longman.

Who are young learners?

As one year of age makes a huge difference among children, the generalizations made for young learners may need more detailed analysis and some subcategorization. Although different sources classify young learners taken into account different ages or grade levels, the following grouping reflects the EFL teaching environment and the learners of English in the primary education in Turkey.

Very Young Learners	Young Learners	Older/ Late Young Learners
Age: 3-6 years old	Age: 7-9 years old	Age: 10-12 years old
Grade: Pre-school Education	Grade: 1 st – 3 rd grade	Grade: 4 th - 6 th grade
Language Focus/ Skills Used: Listening & Speaking Vocabulary Items (concrete & familiar objects) No Grammar Teaching or metalanguage (can't analyze language but may be exposed to chunks through songs, classroom language) No reading & writing (may recognize letters or short words)	Language Focus/ Skills Used: Listening & Speaking Vocabulary Items (concrete & familiar and new objects) New in Reading and Writing (word to sentence level) No Grammar Teaching or metalanguage (chunks through songs and classroom language)	Language Focus/ Skills Used: Listening/Speaking/Reading/Writing Vocabulary Items (concrete & abstract) Grammar (inductive)
Characteristics: *Low concentration span but easily excited *High motivation; active involvement *Love talking but problems in sharing *Short memory: Learn slowly Forget easily *Repetition and revision is necessary *Limited motor skills (using a pen and scissors) but kinesthetic and energetic *Learn holistically *Love stories, fantasy, imagination, art, drawing and coloring	Characteristics: *Low concentration span: Wide variety of activities needed *Short memory: frequent revision is needed *Logical-analytical: Asking questions *Problems in sharing in group work * Developing confidence in expressing themselves * Developing world knowledge *Limited motor skills (left-right) *Reasonable amount of input *Love stories, fantasy, imagination, drawing & coloring	Characteristics: *Longer attention span but still children *Taking learning seriously *World knowledge *More cooperation in groups and in pairs *Developed social, motor and intellectual skills *Learning strategies are used and developing

Adapted from: Ersöz, A. (2007). *Teaching English to young learners*. Ankara: EDM Publishing.