MODULE 1

Background to Language Learning

Learner characteristics

What are learner characteristics?

Learner characteristics are differences between learners which influence their attitude to learning a language and how they learn it. These differences influence how they respond to different teaching styles and approaches in the classroom, and how successful they are at learning a language. The differences include a learner's motivation, personality, language level, learning style, learning strategies, age and past language learning experience.

Key concepts

Can you think of how the ways in which you like to learn, how you have learned in the past and your age might influence how you prefer to learn a language?

Learning styles

Learning styles are the ways in which a learner naturally prefers to take in, process and remember information and skills. Our learning style influences how we like to learn and how we learn best. Experts have suggested several different ways of classifying learning styles. They relate to the physical sense we prefer to use to learn, our way of interacting with other people and our style of thinking. Here are some commonly mentioned learning styles:

visual	the learner learns best through seeing
auditory	the learner learns best through hearing
kinesthetic	the learner learns best through using the body
group	the learner learns best through working with others
individual	the learner learns best through working alone
reflective	the learner learns best when given time to consider choices
impulsive	the learner learns best when able to respond immediately

You can see from these descriptions how learners with different learning styles learn in different ways, and need to be taught in different ways. We must remember though, that learners may not fall exactly into any one category of learning style, that different cultures may use some learning styles more than others and that learners may change or develop their learning styles.

Learning strategies

Learning strategies are the ways chosen and used by learners to learn language. They include ways to help ourselves identify what we need to learn, process new language and work with other people to learn. Using the right strategy at the right time can help us learn the language better, and help to make us more independent or **autonomous** learners. Some examples of learning strategies are:
- repeating new words in your head until you remember them
- experimenting/taking risks by using just learned language in conversations
- guessing the meaning of unknown words
- asking the teacher or others to say what they think about your use of language
- deciding to use the foreign language as much as possible by talking to tourists
- recording yourself speaking, then judging and correcting your pronunciation
- asking a speaker to repeat what they have said
- deciding what area of vocabulary you need to learn and then learning it
- thinking about how to remember all the new words you see in each lesson and then deciding to write each new one on a separate card
- **paraphrasing** (using other language to say what you want to say).

Different learners use different strategies. Experts think that the strategies that learners use most successfully depend on their personality and learning style. This means there are no best strategies. But research shows that using strategies definitely makes learning more successful and that learners can be trained to use strategies.

Maturity

Maturity involves becoming grown up physically, mentally and emotionally. Children, teenagers and adults have different learning characteristics and therefore learn in different ways. Here are some of the main differences in maturity that influence language learning:

Children	Teenagers	Adults
Need to move	Starting to keep still for longer periods but still need to move	Able to keep still for longer periods
Can concentrate for shorter periods	Concentration developing	Can concentrate for longer periods
Learn through experience	Beginning to learn in abstract ways, i.e. through thinking, as well as experiencing	Learn in more abstract ways
Are not very able to control and plan their own behavior	Beginning to control and plan their own behavior	Usually able to control and plan their own behavior
Are not afraid of making mistakes or taking risks	May worry about what others think of them	Not so willing to make mistakes or take risks
Are not aware of themselves and/or their actions	Sometimes uncomfortably aware of themselves and/or their actions	Aware of themselves and/or their actions
Pay attention to meaning in language	Pay attention to meaning and increasingly to form	Pay attention to form and meaning in language
Have limited experience of life	Beginning to increase their experience of life	Have experience of life

Of course, every learner is different, so everyone may not fit exactly into these descriptions. They are generalizations that show likely, but not fixed, characteristics. But from looking at these differences we can see that each age group needs to be taught in different ways.

Past language learning experience

Teenage and adult learners may have learned English before. They may be used to learning in a particular way and have definite ideas about how to learn best. For example, an adult may have learned English at school through learning lots of grammar and may have been successful in learning this way. If he then finds himself in a class where the teaching is done just through asking learners to use language for communication, he may not like learning in this new way. Another adult may have learned by using translation at school and then come to a class in which translation is never used. She may or may not like this change. Teachers of adults (and sometimes teachers of teenagers) need to be aware of how their learners have learned previously and how they want to learn now. The learners may welcome a change in method but they may want to learn in the same way as they learned before. Teachers may need to discuss and explain their methods to learners who are unhappy with new methods. They may also need to change their teaching to make the learner more comfortable and confident in their learning.

Key concepts and the language teaching classroom

- Learners are not all the same. They do not all learn in the same way.
- Some learner characteristics, such as past language learning experience and learning strategies, are more relevant to teaching teenagers and adults than to teaching children.
- We can find out what our learners' characteristics are by asking them, observing them, giving them questionnaires, asking at the end of a lesson whether they liked the activities done in class and why, and in what different ways they might like to work.
- Learner characteristics may not be fixed. We must not limit a learner by thinking they can only learn in a particular way.
- We can train learners to become aware of and use different learning strategies.
- It is not possible for the teacher of a big class to meet the learner characteristics of each learner all the time. Across a number of lessons teachers can try to vary how they teach so that they can match the learner characteristics of a range of learners.

Multiple Intelligences

What does it mean to be intelligent? Traditionally, intelligence refers to a person's ability to perform certain academic skills, primarily knowledge-building and mathematics. However, parents and teachers often notice that each child is unique in the way he or she understands the world, and unique in terms of his or her skills and abilities. Some children are smart in very specific ways that may or may not be measurable on a standard intelligence test. This can be explained, in part, by the theory of Multiple Intelligences. This theory was developed by psychologist Howard Gardner and explained in his book *Frames of Mind* (1983). Gardner argues that there are many ways of being intelligent. He recognized seven distinct intelligences: logical-mathematical, linguistic, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, spatial, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Naturalist, an eighth intelligence, was added later.

INTELLIGENCE	DESCRIPTION	ACTIVITIES
Logical-Mathematical	a capacity for logical thinking, an enjoyment of numbers and patterns	math, logic problems, and puzzles; working with language rules or formulas
Linguistic	an understanding of how language works; an enjoyment of its sound, rhythm, and meaning; and a sensitivity towards its subtleties	communication activities: speaking, listening, reading, and writing tasks covering different genres (poems, stories, recipes, etc.); language analysis
Musical	an ability to produce and appreciate rhythmic and melodic sound and an understanding of musical expression	songs, rhymes, chants, poems; work with sentence rhythm and intonation patterns
Bodily-Kinesthetic	a skillful and coordinated use of the body for movement and expression, and the manipulation of objects	miming, acting, dance, action games
Spatial	an accurate perception of the visual/spatial world, an understanding of one's relation to it, and the ability to remember and recreate visual scenes	craft activities and art work, labeling activities (body parts), constructing models and labeling
Interpersonal	a natural ability to relate to others and to respond to moods, temperaments, and intentions of others; empathy, charisma, and social skills	doing role-plays, dialogues, surveys, presentations, peer-teaching; pair and small-group work
Intrapersonal	an ability for introspection and perceptive understanding of oneself: feelings, motivations, why we do things	writing a journal, setting goals, doing self-evaluation, identifying learning strategies
Naturalist	a special appreciation and understanding of nature and its cycles	talking about nature, observing the natural environment, doing demonstrations and experiments in class, bringing plants or animals to class, telling folklore and rural myths

Logical-mathematical and linguistic intelligences are traditionally valued in schools. Children whose strengths fall within those categories of intelligence tend to perform better in the academic setting, not because they are "intelligent" and the other students are not, but because their form of intelligence is well aligned with the content and methods of traditional academic study. According to Multiple Intelligences Theory, teachers need to value these other strengths, or intelligences, and avoid weighting the system heavily in favor of specific groups of learners. In addition, they should give children an opportunity to expand their abilities across the range of intelligences, rather than focusing only on a narrow set of skills. In practice, this means incorporating a variety of materials and activities into lessons (see the third column in the table above).

Learner needs

What are learner needs?
When a learner learns a foreign language he or she has various kinds of needs which influence his/her learning. They are personal needs, learning needs and future professional needs. Meeting these learner needs is part of being a good teacher.

Key concepts
Can you think of any learner needs that your learners have?

The different kinds of learner needs are shown in this table:

Learner Needs	
Kinds of needs	*Where the needs come from*
Personal needs	Age Gender Cultural background Interests Educational background Motivation
Learning needs	Learning styles Past learning experience Learning gap (i.e. gap between present level and the target level of language proficiency and knowledge of the target culture) Learning goals and expectations for the course Learner autonomy Availability of time
(Future) Professional needs	Language requirements for employment, training, or education

We can see from the table that different learners have different needs. This means they need to be taught in different ways and learn different things in the English classroom.

Key concepts and the language teaching classroom

Adults or older teenagers with specific professional, general or academic goals for learning English need courses that meet their needs. Here, for example, is a range of different kinds of professional, general and academic English courses. Notice the differences there are between them.

1 A four-week intensive course on exam strategies for taking a university entrance exam.
2 A series of one-to-one lessons over eight weeks on business presentation skills.
3 A six-month course for future tourists focusing on speaking and listening for social and daily survival English.
4 A year-long course on writing academic essays and reading academic books and articles.
5 A short summer course in the UK for teenagers, involving lots of sports, trips to tourist sites and chatting with English teenagers.
6 A once-a-week course for a small group of accountants held in the learners' company, a large accountancy firm, on English for accountants.
7 A four-week online course on writing business letters in English.

You can see that to meet the future needs of learners these courses vary in length, frequency, class size, language skill focused on, type of English, teaching methods and activities.

Learners at primary or secondary school may not yet have professional or academic needs, but they do have personal and learning needs in English. Meeting these needs presents the teacher with various choices for the classroom. These are shown in the table below.

Learner needs	*How the teacher can meet learner needs*
Personal needs	Choosing suitable: - Materials - Topics - Pace (speed) of lessons - Activities - Approach to teaching - Treatment of individual learners - Skills - Interaction patterns (e.g. group, pair or individual work) - Types of feedback (comments on learning)
Learning needs	Choosing suitable: - Materials - Activities - Interaction patterns - Approach to teaching - Language and skills - Learning strategies - Workload

Differences between L1 and L2 learning

What are the differences between L1 and L2 learning?

When we learn our first language (**L1**) we are likely to learn it in different ways and in different contexts from when we learn a second language (L2). We are also likely to be a different age.

Key concepts

What differences can you think of between L1 and L2 learning? Think about the learners' age, ways of learning and **context** that they are learning in.

	L1 learning	L2 learning (in the classroom)
Age	• Baby to young child. (L1 learning lasts into adolescence for some kinds of language and language skills, e.g. academic writing.)	• Usually at primary school and/or secondary school, it can also start or continue in adulthood.

	L1 learning	L2 learning (in the classroom)
Ways of learning	• By exposure to and picking up the language. • By wanting and needing to communicate, i.e. with strong motivation. • Through interaction with family and friends. • By talking about things present in the child's surroundings. • By listening to and taking in the language for many months before using it (silent period). • By playing and experimenting with new language.	• Sometimes through exposure but often by being taught specific language. • Through interaction with a teacher and sometimes with classmates. • Often by talking about life outside the classroom. • Often by needing to produce language soon after it has been taught. • Often by using language in controlled practice activities.
Context	• The child hears the language around him/ her all the time. • Family and friends talk to and interact with the child a lot. • The child has lots of opportunities to experiment with the language. • Caretakers* often praise (tell the child he/ she has done well) and encourage the child's use of language. • Caretakers simplify their speech to the child. • Caretakers rarely correct the form and accuracy of what the child says in an obvious way.	• The learner is not exposed to the L2 very much – ofter no more than about three hours per week. • Teachers usually simplify their language. • Teachers vary in the amount they praise or encourage learners. • The learner does not receive individual attention from the teacher. • Teachers generally correct learners a lot.

* Caretakers are people who look after a child. Often they are parents. But they may also be brothers or sisters, other members of the family, etc.

It is not always easy to describe L2 learning in the classroom because it happens in different ways in different classrooms. The description in the table above may not be true of all classrooms. Of course, L2 learning sometimes takes place outside the classroom when children or adults pick up language. In this situation, L2 learning is more similar to L1 learning, except that the learner often does not get as much exposure to the language as the L1 learner and may not be so motivated to learn. Another big difference between L1 and L2 learning is that L1 learning is nearly always fully successful, while L2 learning varies a lot in how successful it is.

Key concepts and the language teaching classroom

- Foreign language learners need to be exposed to a rich variety of language, use it to communicate and interact, and have opportunities to **focus on form.** This helps to make the circumstances of L2 learning more similar to those in L1 learning and allows L2 learners (who are usually older than L1 learners) to use their different abilities to process language.
- Motivation is very important in language learning, so we should do all we can to motivate learners.
- Learners are different from one another (in learning style, age, personality, etc.) so we should try to **personalize** our teaching to match their learning needs and preferences. We can do this by varying our teaching style, approaches, materials, topics, etc.
- Learners may find a silent period useful, but some learners, especially adults, may not.
- We should encourage learners to use English as much as possible in their out-of-class time. This increases their exposure to it. They could, for example, listen to radio programs or songs, read books or magazines, look at websites, make English-speaking friends, talk to tourists, write to English-speaking pen friends, etc.
- We should try to simplify our language to a level that learners can learn from, and avoid correcting them too much. They need to build up their fluency, motivation and confidence, and have opportunities to pick up and experiment with language.
- In the classroom we should try to praise learners and give them as much individual attention as we can.

Motivation

What is motivation?

Motivation is the thoughts and feelings we have which make us want to do something, continue to want to do it and turn our wishes into action, i.e. motivation influences:

- why people decide to do something
- how long they want to do it for
- how hard they are prepared to work to achieve it.

Motivation is very important in language learning. It helps make learning successful.

Key concepts

Why were/are you motivated to learn English? List your reasons.

Many factors influence our motivation to learn a language. These factors include:
- the usefulness to us of knowing the language well, e.g. for finding jobs, getting on to courses of study, getting good marks from the teacher
- our interest in the **target language culture** (the culture of the language we are learning)
- feeling good about learning the language: success, **self-confidence** (feeling that we can do things successfully), **learner autonomy/independence** (feeling responsible for and in control of our own learning)
- encouragement and support from others, e.g. teacher, parents, classmates, school, society
- our interest in the learning process: the interest and relevance to us of the course content, classroom activities, the teacher's personality, teaching methods.

Learners may have strong motivation in one of these areas and little in another, or their motivation may be quite balanced. Different learners will also be motivated in different ways from one another, and motivation can change. Learners may, for example, be quite uninterested in learning a particular language, then meet a teacher who they like so much that they begin to love learning the language. Motivation can change with age, too, with some factors becoming more or less important as learners get older. We can see that motivation needs to be both created and continued.

Key concepts and the language teaching classroom

Here are some suggestions from two experts on motivation about how teachers can encourage greater motivation in their learners.

1. Set a personal example with your own behavior (i.e. be motivated as a teacher yourself).
2. Create a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom (i.e. try to prevent anxiety in yourself or the learners),
3. Present tasks in an interesting way which makes the tasks seem achievable to the learners.
4. Develop a good relationship with the learners.
5. Increase the learners' self-confidence about language learning (i.e. help learners feel they can be good at learning the language).
6. Make the language classes interesting.
7. Promote learner autonomy.
8. **Personalize** the learning process (i.e. make the course feel relevant to the learners' lives).
9. Increase the learners' awareness of their **goals** (i.e. what they want to achieve).
10. Familiarize learners with the target language culture.

(adapted from Ten commandments for motivating language learners: results of an empirical study' by Z. Dornyei and K. Csizer, Language Teaching Research, *Hodder Arnold 1998)*

How to keep your students motivated

By Cristina Cabal

- **Involve your students**
  You will not keep your students motivated if you do not involve them and let them take an active role in your classes. Long gone are the days when teachers talked for most of the lesson, with students taking a passive role. Classes need to be student-centered. The teacher should act as a coach and facilitator; to help, guide and direct the learning process.

- **Give students the chance to shine**
  It is also very important to give students the opportunity to be successful. Give them tasks where they can see the results of their efforts. That feeling of 'yeah, I did it!', that 'a-ha' feeling students get when they have done a difficult exercise, boosts their motivation.

- **Make learning fun**
  Make your classes memorable. Use games and competitions. Everybody loves competitions, and it gives students a nice opportunity to interact with each other, have fun and learn at the same time.

- **Step away from the textbooks**
  Bring in authentic material that your students can connect with, and that matches their needs and interests. Create your own activities and show them that you are also prepared to put in a lot of effort and time to help them succeed.

- **Explain why you are doing things a certain way**
  There is nothing more boring than a teacher telling students to open their book on page 22, and asking them to do exercise five. You need to explain why it is important for them to do this exercise, and what they are going to accomplish by doing it.

- **Give very clear instructions**
  When setting a task, be clear and allow students time to prepare first and ask you any questions. There is nothing more frustrating for them than not being able to perform well, because they didn't understand the task. This is very important to students. They need to have a very clear idea of what they are supposed to do.

- **Set clear, attainable goals for every lesson**
  You want your students to leave your class thinking it was worth their while. Start your lessons by writing down your lesson plan on the corner of the board, so that students know what they are going to learn. At the end of the class, point to the lesson plan and go over everything they have learned. It's important for them to see where they are now, and where you are going to take them next.

- **Vary the social dynamics and include movement**
  Ask students to work in pairs or in groups. Get them out of their seats and moving. Ask them to change partners regularly. To keep your students' attention, set a variety of engaging, meaningful activities, and create a friendly atmosphere where they feel they can talk freely and ask questions.

- **Use different materials**

  We all know that our students prefer looking at a screen than at a book, so use visuals, flashcards, infographics, quizzes, and make use of new technology. There are plenty of sites that offer online quizzes, games or videos. As teachers, it's up to us to seek out new resources that may benefit our classes, and bringing technology into our lessons is a great way to motivate students. You cannot expect your students to be motivated if you spend half the class doing endless grammar and vocabulary exercises.

- **Don't over-correct**

  Avoid over-correcting, especially when students are speaking in front of the class. Don't undermine their confidence by interrupting every single time they make a mistake. Listen to them, and when they finish, thank them for their contribution and point out one or two important mistakes they might have made. You can then remind students that making mistakes is a natural part of learning and that everybody makes mistakes, even the teacher.

- **Praise**

  In capital letters. A 'well done' or a 'thank you' at the end of their contribution, even if their answer was not correct, will boost confidence a lot, especially for weaker students. There is always something positive to say. Start with the positive thing, and then tactfully move on to what needs to be improved.

  So what is the best tip I can offer? The one I stick to after 26 years teaching, which probably best summarizes all the tips I have shared here, is 'teach as you would like to be taught'. It is as simple as that.

Exposure and focus on form

What are exposure and focus on form?

Across the centuries people have studied how foreign languages are learned. Many experts now believe that one way we learn a foreign language is by **exposure** to it, i.e. by hearing and/or reading it all around us and without studying it. They say we then **pick it up** automatically, i.e. learn it without realizing. This is the main way that children learn their first language.

Experts also say that to learn a foreign language, particularly as adults, exposure to language is not enough. We also need to **focus** our attention **on the form** of the foreign language, i.e. on how it is pronounced or written, on how its grammar is formed and used, and on the form and meaning of vocabulary. They say we need to use language to interact and communicate, too.

Key concepts

Have you learned English more successfully from formal study or just by picking it up?

Research has identified three main ways in which we learned a foreign language. Firstly, experts talk of us **acquiring** language. This means the same as picking it up. They say that to really learn a foreign language we need exposure to lots of examples of it, and that we learn from the language in our surroundings. We need to hear and read lots of language which is rich in variety, interesting to us and just difficult enough for us, i.e. just beyond our level, but not too difficult. **Acquisition** takes place over a period of time, i.e. not instantly, and we listen to and read items of language for a long time before we begin to use them (a **silent period).**

Secondly, to learn language we need to use it in **interaction** with other people. We need to use language to express ourselves and make our meanings clear to other people, and to understand them. The person we are talking to will show us, directly or indirectly, if they have understood us or not. If they have not, we need to try again, using other language, until we manage to communicate successfully.

Thirdly, research shows that foreign language learners also need to focus on form. This means that they need to pay attention to language, e.g. by identifying, working with and practicing the language they need to communicate.

Nowadays, experts generally agree that we do not learn a foreign language best through learning grammar and translating (the **grammar-translation method).** Nor do we learn by constantly practicing until we form habits (the behaviorist or structuralist approach) or just by communicating (the **communicative approach).** We learn by picking up language, interacting and communicating and focusing on form. But the research still continues, and we do not yet fully understand how foreign languages are learned.

Key concepts and the language teaching classroom

- To acquire language, learners should hear and read a wide variety of language at the right level for them. They need exposure to language both inside and outside the classroom.
- Learners need time to acquire language. They may need a silent period before they can produce new language and we cannot expect them to learn things immediately. Learning language is a gradual process.
- Learners need to use language in the classroom to interact with classmates or the teacher. This gives them the opportunity to experiment with language and find out how successful their communication is.
- Learners need opportunities to focus on forms of language they have read or listened to in texts or used in tasks. The teacher can help them to notice certain points about language, think about their use and practice them.
- But we need to remember that some learners may like to learn and/or are used to learning in particular ways. Teachers always need to match their teaching to the characteristics and needs of the learner.

The role of error

What is the role of error?

This unit focuses on mistakes learners make when they speak or write English. Mistakes are often divided into **errors** and **slips. Errors** happen when learners try to say something that is beyond their current level of language processing. Usually, learners cannot correct errors themselves because they don't understand what is wrong. Errors play a necessary and important part in language learning, as we will see below. **Slips** are the result of tiredness, worry or other temporary emotions or circumstances. These kinds of mistakes can be corrected by learners once they realize they have made them.

Key concepts

There are two main reasons why learners make errors. Can you think what they are?

There are two main reasons why second language learners make errors. The first reason is influence from the learner's first language (**L1**) on the second language. This is called **interference** or transfer. Learners may use sound patterns, lexis or grammatical structures from their own language in English.

The second reason why learners make errors is because they are unconsciously working out and organizing language, but this process is not yet complete. This kind of error is called a **developmental error.** Learners of whatever mother tongue make these kinds of errors, which are often similar to those made by a young first language speaker as part of their normal language development. For example, very young first language speakers of English often make mistakes with verb forms, saying things such as 'I goed' instead of 'I went'. Errors such as this one, in which learners wrongly apply a rule for one item of the language to another item, are known as **overgeneralization.** Once children develop, these errors disappear, and as a second language learner's language ability increases, these kinds of errors also disappear.

Errors are part of learners' **interlanguage,** i.e. the learners' own version of the second language which they speak as they learn. Learners unconsciously process, i.e. analyze and reorganize their interlanguage, so it is not fixed. It develops and progresses as they learn more. Experts think that interlanguage is an essential and unavoidable stage in language learning. In other words, interlanguage and errors are necessary to language learning.

When children learn their mother tongue they seem to speak their own form of it for a while, to make progress on some language items, then to go backwards, and to make mistakes for a time before these mistakes finally disappear, usually without obvious correction.

Errors are a natural part of learning. They usually show that learners are learning and that their internal mental processes are working on and experimenting with language. We go through stages of learning new language, and each new piece of language we learn helps us learn other pieces of language that we already know more fully - like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle which only make full sense when they are all in place.

Developmental errors and errors of interference can disappear by themselves, without correction, as the learner learns more language. In fact, correction may only help learners if they are ready for it, i.e. they are at the right stage in their individual learning process. But experts believe that learners can be helped to develop their interlanguage. There are three main ways of doing this. Firstly, learners need exposure to lots of interesting language at the right level; secondly they need to use language with other people; and thirdly they need to focus their attention on the forms of language. (See Unit 10 for more about these three ways.)

Sometimes errors do not disappear, but get 'fossilized'. Fossilized errors are errors which a learner does not stop

making and which last for a long time, even for ever, in his/her foreign language use. They often happen when learners, particularly adults, are able to communicate as much as they need to in the foreign language and so have no communicative reason to improve their language. These fossilized errors may be the result of lack of exposure to the **L2** (second language) and/or of a learner's lack of motivation to improve their level of accuracy.

Key concepts and the language teaching classroom

- We need to think hard about whether, when and how to correct learners.
- We mustn't expect instant learning. Learning is gradual, and errors will occur.
- We need to think about what kind of mistake the learner is making - a slip or an error.
- If the mistake is a slip, the learner can probably correct him/herself, maybe with a little prompting from the teacher or another learner.
- Sometimes, particularly in fluency activities, it is better not to pay attention to learners' errors (i.e. **ignore** them) so that the learners have an opportunity to develop their confidence and their fluency, and to experiment with language.
- Some errors may be more important to correct than others. Those which prevent communication are more important than those which do not, e.g. missing the final *s* off the third person singular of a present simple tense verb doesn't prevent communication. But using the present simple tense instead of the past simple tense can sometimes prevent communication.
- We need to think about what is best for the learning of each learner. Different learners within the same class may need to be corrected or not, depending on their stage of learning, learning style and level of confidence. Different learners may also need to be corrected in different ways.
- Ways of helping learners get beyond their errors are:
  - to expose them to lots of language that is just beyond their level through reading or listening
  - to give them opportunities to focus on the form of language
  - to provide them with time in class to use language to communicate and interact and see if they can do so successfully.
- A good time to correct learners or to provide them with new language is when they realize they have made a mistake or need some new language. We should encourage learners to ask us for this help.
- Errors are useful not only to the learner but also to the teacher. They can help the teacher see how well learners have learned something and what kind of help they may need.

Teaching Young Learners

Teaching a foreign language requires educators to recognize the needs of their students. The requirements of adult learners differ greatly from those of young English language learners (YELLs). By identifying their needs, teachers can then adapt various factors in the classroom in order to have the greatest impact on YELL learning.

The way YELLs process information in their native language (L1) as well as in the foreign language (L2) differs from adults. From an early age, children first begin to sort out words involving concrete objects. When introduced into the L2 classroom, they "need very concrete vocabulary that connects with objects they can handle or see". In contrast, adult learners are able to cope with abstract ideas.

YELLs do not comprehend abstract ideas such as grammar.

Who are young learners?

On standard assumptions, young learners, also known as child second language (L2) learners, refer to children whose first exposure to another language occurs after their first language has been established for at least 3-5 years. In EFL contexts young learners are generally referred to children aged six to twelve.

Age of acquisition

If there is anything about second language acquisition that has attracted so much attention and has led to much controversy all over the world, it is probably the debate about the age of acquisition, perhaps mainly because many child L2 learners generally perform better than adult language learners. According to many research findings, the younger the child is when L2 acquisition starts, the better proficiency the child arrives at. Overall, one can argue that normally developing children can learn another language at an early age, given sufficient exposure and interaction.

YELL MOTIVATION

Research has proven that "motivation is one of the main determinates of second/foreign language learning achievement". Several types of motivation must be considered. Intrinsic motivation relates to a learner who has a desire to do something regardless of external pressures. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, involves outside forces that want the learner to complete a task.

Teachers can adapt lessons through the use of stir and settle activities. When a teacher finds that students' attention begins to wander, or they are becoming more reticent, the activity needs to be switched to one that is more active. This can renew interest in the lesson. Activities such as oral work, competitions, games or any activity that requires the students to stand up and move about all stir the classroom.

Playing games in the classroom raises students' interest and motivation to participate in class. It is important to remember that these games need to relate to the language being learned. One good way of getting students to review vocabulary is to play a memory or category game. Students can sit in a circle and start to say words one by one based on the topic of the lesson. The students continue one by one to say different words on the topic until one student cannot think of a word, or repeats what another students has said. They are then "out" and the game continues, or the game resets using a different topic, typically from a previous lesson. One variation of this is when the students say their word, and then subsequent students must say all of the preceding words before saying their own word.

In situations when the students become more rowdy or too noisy, settle activities need to be applied. This will be anything that will focus the students' attention on something in front of them, and reduces interaction with the other students. Reading tasks, or if their level allows for it, any kinds of writing are examples of settle activities. When the students are involved in producing something on their own, the classroom mood will become more subdued.

Methodology in young learners' classrooms

Principles
- Listening and speaking should be taught first.
- The primary focus should be on meaning rather than form.
- Activities should be fun and enjoyable.
- Activities should involve "doing" or performing tasks.
- Activities should create a need or a desire to communicate.
- Young learners should feel relaxed in the classroom.
- Language use should be illustrated by use of objects, pictures, actions or gesture.
- Suitable activities include use of rhymes, songs, stories, poems and drama.
- The use of 'chunks' of language should be promoted.
- Lessons should be conducted in the L2 as much as possible.
- There should be a variety of activities.
- Classroom routines should be established.
- Activities should use children's sense of imagination.
- Tasks should be simple enough for children to understand what they are expected to do.
- Activities should be demanding, but not too demanding, and must be achievable.

Why teach English to young learners?

While there may not be immediate linguistic benefits in teaching English to young learners, there are many good reasons for doing so. Most crucially, positive early experiences of learning a foreign language may help young learners to develop self-esteem and positive attitudes that will equip them to study English with greater confidence when they are older. It can also help them apply more developed learning and cognitive skills to the more formal and abstract learning they may experience in secondary school. Intercultural benefits may derive from the realization that other countries have a language with sounds and rules different from their own. As they realize both the similarities and differences between English-speaking people and themselves, they may also learn values of tolerance, empathy and curiosity. These values will be useful in later life and for the society in which they live. They may gain academic benefits from learning English, too: generic concepts such as time, number and changes in the season can be consolidated through learning English, as can learning skills such as planning, organizing and checking work.

Teaching Teenagers

The students

Today's teenagers, just like previous generations, are a varied and fascinating group of individuals. They are changing physically, sometimes at astonishing speed, and are often preoccupied with their appearance. They are coping with new and strange emotions and at the same time they are learning to think in a more abstract way, which allows them to discuss issues and ideas. Through this whirlwind of change, teenagers are trying to establish their identity and learn who they are.

Unlike previous generations, today's teenagers are surrounded by technology, which they can generally use with ease and efficiency. They live in a world where sounds, images, words, and ideas come at them in a constant stream from many different sources. They usually think nothing of surfing the Internet, texting, listening to music, and watching TV at the same time.

New technology also gives teenagers increased contact with their peer group – often the most influential group of people in a teenager's life. The need to appear cool and be accepted by this group can often be the strongest motivating force in a teenager's life. These peer group pressures, coupled with rapid mental and physical changes, may from time to time lead to conflict with family, friends, and authority.

Another pressure on today's students is the increasing need for qualifications that demonstrate their skills in foreign languages, especially English. Given all of the influences mentioned, teenage students of English need teaching materials that reflect their world and that broaden their skills to facilitate their goal of gaining qualifications.

In addition to helping students attain competence in the English language, classroom materials should help students explore and establish their own moral and ethical values. What is right and wrong can be a challenging area for teenagers, and it is important that they have the chance to hear the opinions of others, voice their own, and judge for themselves.

The teaching situation

Motivation

Many students will have had several years of formal instruction in English before they start a course. These experiences may not always have been successful or enjoyable. Consequently, students may bring to the classroom preconceived ideas about whether or not learning English is fun, and whether they are "good" at languages or not. If their experience of learning English has not been positive, their level of interest and motivation may be low. On the other hand, their previous experience of learning English may have been a positive one, in which case, their level of motivation when they join an English class may be quite high. In either case, it is essential that their new English course include topics that are interesting to them and exercises that are intellectually challenging and that have "real-world" value in their eyes.

Large classes

In a significant number of schools, large classes are the norm rather than the exception. Large classes make it difficult for teachers to ensure that all students have the amount of practice for them to make significant progress. Furthermore, large classes make it more difficult for teachers to pay individual attention to students.

The use of pair work and group work allows each student to have more practice time in class and may enable more proficient students to help less proficient ones. Once pairs or groups have been set up, the teacher can then monitor students and provide more individual attention to those students who need the most help.

Not enough teaching hours

Students frequently have only three English lessons per week and it is sometimes difficult for teachers to feel that they are achieving enough in the time available. They may feel unable to cover the work as thoroughly as they

would wish or to ensure that all students are making enough progress. Teachers and students need to have a clear goal in the time available and a sense of progress as they move through the book. Extra materials are necessary for those students who risk falling behind, and reinforcement and review for those students who are keeping up.

Monitoring progress

Close monitoring of students' progress is increasingly a feature of teaching in schools today. This results in a heavier workload, as teachers have to prepare and grade tests, give assessments, and write student profiles. Plenty of review and testing material helps with the assessment of students' progress.

Multi-level and mixed-ability classes

Many English classes today are multi-level. Some members of the class will have studied English for many years and a few are joining the class as complete beginners to foreign language learning. Classes are invariably also mixed ability. In one class, there will be students who have a natural aptitude for learning languages, with excellent skills and strategies, and others whose natural aptitude lies elsewhere. These students will need more time to achieve the same level and a lot of teacher patience and encouragement to make relative success of language learning. Practice material in motivating formats is needed to occupy faster learners as well as providing extra material for those who need more practice.

Principles behind an effective language course

1. Motivate

The design of a course, and the topics and issues it deals with, must motivate students from the start. This can be achieved by:
- using authentic location photography, magazine articles, website articles, and e-mails, as well as games
- using teenage characters with whom students can easily identify
- focusing on situations, topics, and emotional issues that students recognize and respond to
- presenting authentic functional language and everyday expressions that teenage native speakers of English use in daily conversation
- including topics that expand students' knowledge of the world

2. Maintain interest

Learning tasks must involve and challenge students both linguistically and cognitively to maintain students' interest and ensure that learning is effective. This can be achieved by:
- cognitive stimulus through memory exercises and puzzles
- interesting and varied exercises to encourage practice of key language (for example, fun quizzes and questionnaires)
- personalization of the language to allow students to talk about themselves and their opinions
- real-life functional exchanges that provide realistic communicative practice of everyday language

3. Enable all students to succeed

An effective course material should make it possible for every student to achieve success at his or her level of ability.

TEACHING ISSUES

Though most teachers are busy with planning, preparation, teaching, and grading students' work, it can be useful

for a teacher to pause from time to time to consider any ongoing teaching issues and problems that they may have, and to try different approaches in the classroom to find out which ideas work best. This can refresh and renew teaching techniques and keep lessons alive for teachers and students alike. Below is a brief review of some current issues with suggestions for modifying teaching techniques.

Teaching teenagers

A typical class of teenagers will include students with a wide-ranging level of physical development, emotional maturity, and cognitive ability. Indeed, some students will appear to be one or two years older than other students. This is because teenagers develop at different rates. Girls tend to develop faster than boys, but there are also different rates of maturity among girls and boys.

Although teenage behavior can be erratic, most teenagers, given the right classroom environment, genuinely want to learn. However, there are certain conditions that turn teenagers off. Most of them don't like being seen as different. Acceptance by their peer group is very important. If asked a question in class, they may not want to answer in case they are seen by their friends as not smart enough or, alternatively, too smart.

Teenagers are often shy and self-conscious and feel embarrassed if asked to do activities like miming or performing. They also don't like being patronized. Many teenagers have a wealth of knowledge about particular subjects, and they are often happy to share this knowledge in pairs or small groups. Tapping into this knowledge and openly acknowledging those areas where students know more than the teacher can help to create mutual respect in the classroom.

Tips

- Avoid asking teenagers to do something that may embarrass them in front of their peers, unless you know that they have a particular talent for performance.
- Avoid activities that students might see as childish or patronizing, such as miming or answering questions which are obvious.
- Take the opportunity to put students into pairs or groups. Pair and group work allow them to work in English with reduced risk of embarrassment and also allows shyer students to make their voices heard.

Learn as much as possible about your students as individuals and as learners. A successful class is often one that allows students to achieve the goal in whichever way suits them best.