

## **How to teach grammar/form to young learners?**

English plays an important role in all spheres of life for people around the world. Globalization has made English as the main factor for the development of all countries in terms of economy, information technology, education and cultures. The English language is used for teaching, learning in schools, and also for official purposes in government and business. This language is thought and learned in schools as a foreign language to prepare students to communicate with foreigners. For this reason, English language teaching has started at the lower levels in primary schools.

There are many reasons for teaching English to young learners. As Lee and Azman suggested that young learners are more likely to adapt to sound systems and acquire phonological patterns of a new language than adults. Generally, young learners understand meaningful messages that cannot analyze language. As they have lower levels of awareness about themselves as language learners and have limited reading and writing skills. Young learners do not know about the world. They always enjoy fantasy, imagination and want to be active in the lesson.

According to Piaget's notion, children's learning and development occur through several chronological stages, from birth to the age of over twelve. Children develop their knowledge through their sensory impressions and actions and concrete contexts, and also they can learn through imagination and abstract phenomena as they grow older.

Grammar plays an important role in English language teaching. It is a mental system of rules and categories that allows pupils to form and interpret the words and sentences of their language. According to Ur (1999) in the case of learners, grammatical rules enable them to know and apply how sentence patterns should be put together. In listening and speaking, grammar plays a crucial part in expressing spoken language. In reading, grammar gives opportunity learners to comprehend

sentence interrelationship in a paragraph, a passage and a text. In terms of writing, grammar allows the learners to put their ideas into the correct sentence that enables them successfully communicate in a written form. And also in terms of vocabulary, grammar provides a way to learners how lexical items can combine into a good sentence so that meaningful communicative statements or expressions can be formed.

Early foreign language learning has a positive effect on children in terms of language skills, positive attitudes to other languages and cultures. Learning a foreign language in primary school is divided into two stages: early grades and subsequent grades. They differ from each other in terms of their holistic development, their intellectual and social development, ability to read and write ability to think logically and development of abstract thinking. In the first stage (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades) young learners become more active in English and experience this language through playing activities. In the second stage (4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades) young learners experience more organized English including more systematic teaching of grammar.

The whole language approach, inductive approach and implicit grammar teaching are included in instructional materials for young learners. Young learners faced chunks, phrases and sentences which are learnt in chants, rhymes, songs and stories. Moreover, the development of language awareness during English language learning can occur in three following stages:

- 1) Noticing new language structures: teachers focus young learners' attention to the form of the target language. So they attain the structure and meaning
- 2) Structuring knowledge of English system. Young learners manipulate forms and meanings of the structures in controlled practice.
- 3) Proceduralizing: Young learners use language fluently and communicate in a controlled context.

According to Ellis (2004) Form Focused Instruction refers to any planned or incidental instructional activity that is intended to induce language learners to pay attention to linguistic forms. FFI includes both traditional approaches to teaching

forms based on structural syllabi and more communicative approaches, where attention to form arises out of primarily meaning-focused activities.

Focus on the form is a condition where learners' attention is drawn to a language feature as necessitated by a communicative approach. Doughty and Williams (1998) claim that form-focused instruction is more beneficial for learning.

Spada (1997) defined “form-focused instruction” (FFI) as “any pedagogical effort which is used to draw the learners’ attention to language form either implicitly or explicitly” (p. 73). Two main types of FFI have been discussed in recent years, namely *Focus on Form* (FonF), where attending to the linguistic elements of language is usually part of a communicative or content-based activity, and *Focus on FormS* (FonFs), where discrete linguistic structures are taught in lessons separate from communication or content, often following some kind of language syllabus (Doughty & Williams, 1998a; Ellis, 2001; Laufer, 2006), as in PPP – presentation, practice, and production (see, e.g., Harmer, 2007). More recently, Spada and Lightbown (2008, pp. 185-187) have written about this difference by distinguishing between what they call *integrated* and *isolated* form-focused instruction. In integrated FFI for example provided teacher-student interaction during a game. In *isolated* FFI, the teacher would most likely first introduce and explain the form or structure, perhaps following a grammatical or other syllabus, and then move on to exercises or activities which might enable students to practice the form being focused on.

Lyster (2004b) in his quasi-experimental classroom study investigated the effects of form-focused instruction and corrective feedback on immersion students’ ability to accurately assign grammatical gender in French. Analyses of data showed a significant increase in the ability of students exposed to form-focused instruction to correctly assign grammatical gender. It was also found that form-focused instruction is more effective when combined with prompts than with recasts or no feedback.

And also as Byrd (2005) summarizes on instructed grammar and suggests planning ahead to allow for FonF in the classroom, using recasts carefully and effectively, and recognizing grammar in context. FFI has a role in communicative language teaching, though as Brown (2007a) notes, "research on learner characteristics, styles, and strategies supports the conclusion that certain learners benefit more than others from FFI" (p. 280). Teachers need to know their students and determine what FFI will best help them learn.

Some scholars like Ur and Hedge (in Ellis, 2005:84) view grammar teaching as the presentation and practice of discrete grammatical structures. As Ellis suggested, "Grammar teaching involves any instructional technique that draws learners' attention to some specific grammatical form in such a way that it helps them either to understand it metalinguistically and/or process it in comprehension and/or production so that they can internalize it" (ibid:84).

In addition to the point of views mentioned above, another perspective on exploring grammar in the classroom is the distinction between teaching grammar as a product, process and skill.

This table shows the three approaches to teaching grammar which suggested Batstone, 1995.

<b>Teaching grammar as product</b>	<b>Teaching grammar as process</b>	<b>Teaching grammar as skill</b>
helps learners to notice and to structure by focusing on specified forms and meanings	gives learners practice in the skills of language use, allowing them to proceduralize their knowledge	carefully guides learners to utilize grammar for their communication

Cameron, 2001 pointed out according to teaching grammar to young learners:

- grammar is necessary to express precise meanings in discourse;

- grammar ties closely into vocabulary in learning and using the foreign language;
- grammar learning can evolve from the learning of chunks of language;
- talking about something meaningful with the child can be a useful way to introduce new grammar;
- grammar can be taught without technical labels.

The main focus in teaching grammar to young learners is on building up grammatical awareness rather than cognitive grammatical knowledge. Teubner summarizes the reason for the necessity of an approach that advocate a more explicit teaching of grammar for young learners, such as:

- Children of primary school age have the cognitive requirements necessary for awareness.
- Children confuse many things without awareness.
- Using awareness in English classes in primary school as a learning aid (especially for the weak students) is very essential.
- Many students need support leading to awareness, and they want this support.

### ***Analysis of 4<sup>th</sup> grader's course book***

Using course books with meaningful content in teaching English to young learners is important for teachers in their teaching process. Nowadays there are plenty of course books for teaching English to young learners. Usually, course books are the main resource in language teaching. They provide support to be useful, meaningful and interesting for YL that suitable for their needs. They must provide support in teaching; they should have clear techniques and methods.

Allwright claims that learning materials rather than teaching materials with two types of guidance: the first guide for independent language learning to establish priorities and adjust exercises for learners' personal use; the second guide is for the successful language learning situations.

In this paper we are going to analyze the 4<sup>th</sup> graders' course book "Sunshine" with a focus on form-focused instructions needed for language awareness.

Analyzing this course book we can answer to these questions: What form-focused instruction is provided? What form-focused activities are offered in the course book?

Activity based teaching tries to make young learners active, real and challenging. Role-playing, sequencing, memorizing, singing, painting and others are important activities that teachers can use when planning English activities with YLs.

The most popular activities used for presenting grammar are chants, dialogues, songs and charts. There are commonly revealed in this course books: after input on favorite foods, hobbies. For example, children are instructed to interview their friends to find out their favorite foods. In this case, they must use the correct form of the grammar. And also group work activities are included which give opportunities for internalizing and structuring grammar patterns. Drills and chants used in this course book provide learners to practice their speaking skills.

Noticing activities included by using puppets. Such activities are interesting for pupils to notice the grammar rules correctly. For example, by using the puppets pupils ask some questions from each other. Here they need to pay attention to the grammar aspect. And also this book focused on the role play activities that useful for young learners to practice the grammar and also oral ability. Using everyday situations in the classroom also give an opportunity to improve their knowledge of grammar. This course book highlighted the activities where young learners can use everyday expressions by using the correct form.

As researchers mentioned young learners want to be active and challenging in the lesson. Interesting and meaningful activities help them to acquire language effectively. For this reason, drawing activities are highlighted in this course book which enables pupils to reveal their imagination and memorizing abilities. For example, pupils are instructed to draw their friends and describe them. Teachers monitor their pupils' using of grammar points correctly.

This book also points cultural meaning context that is interesting for pupils to know the information about other cultures. By using this cultural information they put the sentences correctly and learn more about other cultures.

Colorful pictures and interesting activities are useful for young learners learning a foreign language. As I mentioned above young learners want to be active in the lesson. Acting activities also provide learners with meaningful grammar context which helps them to use language accurately.

Young learners are only just starting their schooling so teachers have opportunity to identify the learners' expectations and needs of life in school. They need physical movement and activity that improves their thinking. As researchers pointed that children's language learning is more closely integrated with real communication. And also young learners have more time for language learning than older learners. Thus, such kinds of course books provide teachers with meaningful and useful materials that they can use in the teaching process.

### ***Form-focused activity.***

Storytelling is a great way to introduce English as a foreign language. Young learners cannot analyze language but naturally receive as meaningful learning. Stories are useful for these kinds of activities because they can be repeated over and over again in many different ways. By teaching grammar rules in a meaningful context, children would enjoy learning it and acquire a new language effectively.

We know that everyone loves a story. Stories can be used to highlight grammar points. Storytelling can be convenient and natural grammar teaching tool. We can find that this technique holds young learner's attention and provides an enjoyable lesson. Pupils can help create stories and imagine characters in them. They will appreciate teachers' efforts to include them in the storytelling process and also enjoy learning forms through the stories. Stories should last from one to five minutes. Because young learners want to be active in the lesson. This technique is convenient and flexible for teaching any phase of a grammar lesson.

#### **Activity steps:**

- The teacher tells a story to the class

- The teacher cuts the prints story paragraphs, sentences or phrases depending on the grades of the learners.
- He/she divides the learners into groups and asks group to order the strips correctly.
- Then the teacher can retell the story strips if they have done it incorrectly.
- Or learners can do these exercises before telling them the story and use it as a prediction exercise.

Such kind of activity provides interaction between students. A story provides a realistic context for presenting grammatical points and focuses on learners' attention into the meaningful context.

### ***Conclusion***

One of the major issues of language teachers and researchers is the most effective form of grammar instruction in communicative classrooms. Nowadays, many research studies identified that there is a need for approaches and activities that consistently create an environment that pushes students to focus their attention on form in the process of language learning. To teach grammar to young learners, there is no need to present the grammatical rules and elements and then practice target structures in single isolated sentences. As the experience of language teachers demonstrates, this method is effective and also encourages language learners to be enthusiastic about grammar. Adopting form-focused instruction as a modification of communicative language teaching which is in line with the learners' needs to communicate meaningfully and effectively is being accepted by many ELT scholars.

How can we best help our students achieve grammar competency? Should we teach grammar explicitly or implicitly? Should we integrate grammar in a meaningful context? These are the kind of questions that language teachers face daily to make decisions about their instructions. We know that teachers' decisions are based on their beliefs and consequently teachers' beliefs are the primary factors in their grammar teaching as well.



Several studies show FonF as having a facilitating effect on children's L2 learning, relatively little is known about what aspects of this grammar instruction appeal to young learners, if any. It is not yet clear which FonF tasks, for instance, can best generate interest in young learners of different age groups, or of different cultural and educational backgrounds. Harley (1998, p. 158) notes the importance of using stimulating and visually attractive FonF activities and material for primary school children to promote attention and relate attention to learners' intrinsic interest in the activities. A related finding indicates that 'although the importance of instrumental motivation increases with age, engagement and persistence in learning activities are not directly influenced by this: children will only persist in learning tasks if they see them as worthwhile' (Hunt *et al.*, 2005, p. 374).

According to the finding of research studies, it is important to point out that children seem to give undue significance to production tasks. They tend to view output as a measure of their success and the overall difficulty of tasks. Form-focused instruction improves children's L2 proficiency.

In this paper, we have suggested that form-focused instruction plays an important role in teaching young learners. The teacher of young learner also helps to develop children's grammar point in acquiring the second language and give opportunity for grammar learning by using interesting and meaningful activities. Tasks, stories, songs and classroom talk will have many techniques to bring grammar patterns to the children's notice and organize meaningful and effective practice in the lesson. To do meaningful and effective lessons require good teaching skills and also many efforts to receive positive feedback.

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