Child vs. Adult Instruction in EFL Teaching :
Considerations for Language Teachers

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Abstract

This paper will address some important ways in which young learners differ from adult learners in the context of EFL teaching, and recommend ways in which EFL teaching could be adapted to the needs of children.

Introduction

Educators need to be made aware of various considerations regarding children learning English in an English as a foreign language (EFL) environment. Their motivation and schematic influences are different from adult EFL learners. Child EFL learners also do not benefit from an immersion environment in the way that ESL learners do. Language teachers in EFL environments need to consider ways to compensate for these factors. This paper will offer some suggestions.

Adults vs. young learners in the context of EFL teaching

The EFL environment

Teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) varies from teaching English as a second language (ESL). In ESL environments, learners come from more than one linguistic background. For these learners, English is not only the target language, but also the primary means of communication with their classmates. In EFL environments, both adults and young learners have the advantage of their L1 to communicate and will use it. How much it is employed will vary. Adults have motivation, maturity, self-discipline and patience that children lack.

Motivation

Adult learners of a foreign language see a need for it, while young learners generally do not (Howard, 2009 : 2 : 6). The motivation for adult EFL learners can be intrinsic, extrinsic, or some combination there of. While adults can see the immediate value of English, children are not in an environment where they can (ibid.). Therefore it is necessary that teachers make the class as interesting as possible.

Cultural influences : Domestic schema

The cognitive development of adults is far more advanced than children's. This has an advantage in that it may help with conceptualization and organization of new information. A

disadvantage is interference (negative transfer) not only from the L1, but also from the organizational culture – how individuals are trained by their educational systems to approach the organization of information.   The more established the first culture schemata becomes, the more interference from that schemata in conceptualizing and thus organizing the L2.   Classifications contain cultural biases.   In English speaking societies, 'dog' and 'fish' would likely fall under the category of pet, where in other societies they would fall under the category of domestic (farm) animal (Cameron, 1994 : 34).   Thus, the more advanced the learners L1 development, the more entrenched and inflexible the learners' schematic organization is likely to be.   The inverse is true for children.   The younger the child, the less of a problem this interference is likely to be.

First language transfer and its implication

The structure of the first language has implications for the acquisition of a second. According to the 'competition model', meaning in different languages is conveyed by 'cues' (Bates & MacWhinney in Bates et al., 1984 : 344).   These cues differ depending on the language.   For English, word order and word endings are important cues (Slobin in Cameron, 2001 : 15), while for languages such as Japanese, lexical semantics are important (Hakuta in Bates et al., 1984 : 343).   When children encounter a new language they look for the cues and grammar from their first language in an attempt to comprehend (Harley ; Schmidt in Cameron 2001 : 15).   The implication of this for teaching English is that learners may need to have the cues of the target language brought to their attention.

Ways in which EFL teaching needs to be adapted

I have identified the following considerations for which EFL teaching should be adapted to the needs of children.   These are :
     1) Motivating children in an EFL environment.
     2) Mitigating the monolingual (EFL) environment.
     3) Coping with large classes.

Motivating Children in an EFL environment

The motivation for children in EFL environments is far different from that of adults.   The younger the pupil, the less the motivation is likely to be ; therefore, the motivation must be generated internally through the child's natural curiosity about the world they live in, as well as the social interaction between pupils and between themselves and the teacher.   The goal of English teachers should be finding ways to harness this curiosity and combine it with scaffolding that allows children to fulfill their zones of proximal development (ZPD).   In order to do this, the teacher must make choices about appropriate content, methodology/approaches, and materials.   Paul (2003 : 10) says that a child's motivation to learn English depends on a variety of factors including the attitude of friends and family, transferability (usefulness of the target language in multiple situations) of the language patterns used, self-perception (seeing himself/herself as successful), but most of all personalization through what he calls child-centered

learning. In child-centered learning children learn naturally, actively, spontaneously and most of all enjoy themselves (ibid. : 25). The role of the teacher is minimized as much as possible, giving pupils as much opportunity as possible to experiment with the language and become "emotionally involved in the learning (ibid : 26)." The pace of the class should be slow enough that all young learners can follow the syllabus and not fall behind. Individual lessons should be integrated and because of the short attention spans of children, varying in focus and style. Paul (ibid : 40) points out that children in an EFL environment, have no need for English outside of the classroom and it is therefore necessary to create a need for the language inside of the classroom. He does this through games, which not only entertain the pupils, but cause them to have authentic need for the language in order to continue and complete their activities. Phrases such as, "What is it?" "How do you say that?" "What does that mean?" become internalized as they are repeatedly used for each class. Additional motivation can be provided through cooperative learning, where pupils help each other by providing scaffolding and emotional support.

Mitigating the monolingual (EFL) environment

Unlike an ESL environment where learners are immersed in English all around them, children in an EFL environment have only minimal exposure to English. Because an ESL pupil may hear a word repeatedly in their environment, they are able to build up their oral vocabulary (Paul, 2003 : 86), but EFL learners do not have this advantage and need to find means to compensate. Ways must be found to maximize comprehensible input. This means employing the four skills in balance as soon as possible. The four skills act to reinforce each other and enhance exposure to the language (Paul, 2003 : 84).

Listening and Speaking

Some techniques that may be employed include :
● Dictation
● Stories (narrative) by the teacher
● Recordings (CDs, or tapes)

Dictation can be useful in expanding children's aural interpretation of pronunciation, and can be particularly useful when teaching phonics (Paul, 2003 : 73). Stories (read aloud or recordings) can also be used for listening practice, particularly when paired with an activity like arranging pictures in sequential/temporal order as the story progresses or having children mime, gesture, or act out the story with puppets (ibid. 72). Recordings have other advantages such as not varying the language, so students can rewind and go over vocabulary again and again, introducing new voices and accents other than the teachers, and in some cases the students are able to listen to the recordings outside of class to increase their level of exposure (ibid : 74). From the age of nine, children can start doing listening tasks where they engage in prediction and reflective exercises (Vandergrift in Goth and Tab, 2006 : 224).

Reading

Dlugosz (2000 : 285) says that : "If reading is emphasized in their curriculum from the very beginning of their language education…young children will progress faster not only in learning to read, but also in understanding and speaking the language." Dlugosz is a strong proponent of the 'look and say (whole word)' approach, though she does not discount phonics. Her concern with phonics is that according to her, children need to be 5 before they can start to learn that approach, where a whole word approach can be started at any age (Dlugosz, 2000 : 285). In a study of two groups of six-year old children, she found that after ten months, the children who had been taught reading scored slightly better on comprehension of new phrases and vocabulary than the control group with an average retention of 70% for the control group and 85% for the test group. Comprehension was tested by asking children to interpret English (L2) into Polish (their mother tongue), but when students were asked to translate from Polish to English the ratios were 47% for the control group and 75% for the test group. She also found that children in the test group had little problem in reading novel texts, so long as the vocabulary within those texts was what they had been already taught. They also were more eager to speak and their pronunciation "seemed to be closer to that of a native speaker than that of their control group peers (Dlugosz, 2000 : 288)." Dlugosz (ibid.) posits that among other things, the primary reason for success seems to be presenting new material through multiple "channels of perception," or what Tellier refers to as "multimodality" or the "co -occurrence of several modalities" (Tellier, 2008 : 220). Tellier (ibid., 220-221) cites extensive research that links improved memorization of information and language acquisition by linking information through different modalities (motor, visual, verbal). Her own research findings supported the link between verbal and visual modalities and improved memorization, but found an even stronger correlation between verbal and motor modalities. Repeating words with gestures left a richer trace memory in her subjects than looking at pictures and repeating the words.

Paul (2003 : 86) argues that whole-word approaches are not suitable for the EFL environment. In an ESL environment learners often hear words many times before they actually see the written form. The word is already internalized into their oral vocabulary. When they see the written form they can guess the word from its context. In an EFL environment learners have a more limited oral vocabulary and therefore have more difficulty guessing the pronunciation and meaning of a word from its context. If they can use phonics to sound out the pronunciation they may be able to guess its meaning from its pronunciation, so long as they already have acquired that word into their oral vocabulary.

Bryant and Bradley (in Cameron, 2001 : 131) found that for pupils studying English as their L1, those with greater phonological awareness have greater success at learning to read in English. According to Cameron (ibid.) phonological awareness is learned before children begin attending school and is learned through rhyming in songs and texts. Gowswami (in Cameron, ibid.) found that a useful strategy for learning to read was analogy. For example, when a child who knows how to read the word *bell* comes across the word *fell* for the fist time,

they can use analogy to help them sound out the pronunciation by noticing that the final rime
–*ell* is identical for both words.

Writing

Writing is motor modality, which can help reinforce memory. Tellier (2008 : 233) found
a strong correlation between verbal and motor modalities. Though she was referring to
gestures, her findings have implications for writing. Writing, as both a motor modality and a
visual modality, should help to reinforce the acquisition of language.

Paul (2003 : 96) argues that writing should be taught for a short time on a regular basis.
This makes sense from the stand point that an over emphasis on writing for a long duration
could lead to physical and mental fatigue, as young children attempt to focus their attention on
their motor skills and older children/adolescents become bored. He goes on to recommend
that early writing should be of phonics patterns and can be tied in with dictation and phonics
writing games. Sentences (ibid. : 98) can be taught through prompts, such as giving children
pictures and having them write a sentence about it. If the students need further prompting,
they might be given the first part of a sentence to get them started. Puzzles can be used, where
children must decipher jumbled up words or sentences. This can be particularly useful for
teaching word order (an English language cue) and can be done in pairs or groups allowing for
cooperative learning. Additional cooperative learning can be facilitated through team writing.

Using Stories (Narratives)

Narratives play an important role in children's development (Cameron : 2001 : 55), and
can be found in a variety of forms in the young learner's world from an early age. Narrative
acts not only as a discourse form, but as a mode of mental organization (ibid.) and reflects the
values of its culture. Narrative can be extremely useful in teaching English in a number of
ways. English translations of L1 narratives that the children are already familiar with can be
used. The children are already familiar with the narratives, so comprehension of the story
already exists and there are no cultural misunderstandings to worry about. The children are
free to focus their attention on the language, which describes a story they already know.
Later, native English narratives can be used to promote understanding of English language
culture (Ghosn, 2002 : 177). Grammatically, teaching narrative can be very useful. Nelson
(in Cameron, 2001 : 55) points out that the construction of cohesive narrative "⋯requires the
use of relative clauses, connectives, pronominal reference, and of adverbs, verb tense and aspect
to convey temporal relationships."

Narrative can also be taught using code switching or weaving one language into the text
of another producing a "Diglot-Weave" (Bradley, 2003). This has a number of advantages.
Key vocabulary can be taught in the target language, while the rest of the text remains in the
L1 giving context. This aids comprehension and lowers affective filters. The amount of the
L1 used can be moderated according to the complexity of the material involved, and gradually
withdrawn.

Adopting a learner-centered approach

In many countries EFL is taught in classes that are teacher centered.   Teacher centered English classes create the following problems :

- The teacher is talking most of the time, while most of the students are listening.
- Pupils cannot personalize their involvement nearly as easily, because when they talk, they are usually engaged in drills.
- When students do get a chance to answer individually, the rest of the class isn't occupied, leading to discipline problems.   It may also be embarrassing for the pupil who is the focus of the classes' attention (especially when they make mistakes).

Given these problems, a change to a learner centered cooperative approach would seem to be advisable.

Coping with Large Classes

A major issue in EFL education is class size.   Large classes in EFL environments are often quite common leading to a variety of difficulties.   Coleman (in Howard 2009 : 9 : 8-9) surveyed primary school teachers in East Malaysia and identified 5 main categories of difficulties teachers reported having with large classes.   These were : Classroom management, paying attention to learners, preparation of materials, time, and providing feedback.

Classroom management

The average size of the class in Coleman's survey was reported as 43.5 pupils.   Given such large class sizes many teachers opted for a strategy of seating pupils facing the front of the room, but this made formation of groups and pairs more difficult, and when groups were formed pupils often had difficulty staying focused on the task at hand and began to play and chat.   Control and discipline were the most frequently reported problems in this category, followed by noise, overcrowding and restricted movement, forming and using groups and management activities.

Paying attention to the learners

In this category, the most frequent problems were paying attention to individuals, helping weak learners, involving all the learners and helping stronger learners.

Preparation of materials

Preparing materials for large classes and carrying them to the classroom was difficult.

Feedback

Feedback for written work is extremely time consuming and burdensome for the teacher.

Cooperative learning

Cooperative learning can play a significant role in adapting to the needs of children. There are three schools of cooperative learning, with "*The Structural Approach*" being the most

common.   Structures are described by Kagan (1992 : 5 : 2) as "content free" ways of organizing lessons.   They can be applied with varying content to create an activity.

Structure + Content = Activity

These structures are very similar to routines in that they take the same basic form, but combine with varying content to form an activity.   Routines are important because they provide "the security of the familiar with the excitement of the new," and allow scaffolding to take place (Bruner in Cameron, 2001 : 8).

Team Formation

Kagan (1992) offers the following approach.   The class should be divided into teams of four.   If there are an odd number of pupils then teams should be formed as follows.

Figure 1 : Team formation with an odd number of pupils

1 left over = 1 team of 5
2 left over = 2 teams of 3
3 left over = 1 team of 3

(Kagan, 1992 : 6 : 2)

Team formation can be done at random or by self-selection, though both these methods run the risk of putting too many weak pupils on the same team, and self-selection also reinforces cliques.   A better method would be for the teacher to select a weak, a strong, and two average pupils (Kagan 1992 : 6 : 1).   Selection could be based on the previous year's performance or a placement test.   The students should be seated facing each other, and perpendicular to the front of the room, so they can always see the teacher and the teacher can always see them. This allows the pupils to be aware of the teacher and vice versa.   The strongest pupil should be seated diagonally across from the weakest pupil, as the strongest pupil would likely not like to work with a pupil who is much weaker than themselves (Kagan, 1992 : 6 : 3).   These teams can be changed later.   For example, near the end of the course, the teams may be changed to allow pupils of the same level to work together on class presentations.   It should be noted that no type of competition should be allowed, as the advanced pupils would invariably win and de -motivate the rest of the class!

Modeling

Kagan (1992 : 7 : 6) advises modeling activities by having one team carry out an activity, while their classmates watch.   This allows the students to see the activity while some verbal instructions are given.   As the teams carry out the activity, the teacher can circulate and attempt to help the teams having difficulty.   If many teams are unsure, the teacher may call on one team to re-demonstrate to the class how the activity is carried out.   As mentioned earlier in Cameron (2001), children often seek to please the teacher and this can be used for classroom management by giving positive attention to those groups that are working well together in front of the class (Kagan, 1992 : 7 : 7).   The other groups will see this and

hopefully attempt to improve their behavior in hopes of receiving positive attention from the teacher.

Mitigation of large class problems

Noise can be mitigated through techniques such as quiet signals (Kagan, 1992 : 7 : 3) and assigning the role of *quiet captain* (High, 1993 : 2 : 3). When the teacher raises their hand, the pupils are to stop talking. As each pupil sees the teacher, they raise their hand and stop talking until every pupil sees the signal and stops talking. The teacher may then lower their hand, palm down, to indicate the necessity to reduce noise levels. Another variation of the quiet signal is "stoplight cards" (Kagan, ibid.), where the teacher gives green, yellow, and red cards to each group depending on their noise level. Green is okay, yellow is a warning, and red is too noisy. One student on each team can be designated a *quiet captain*, whose job it is to remind pupils to speak more quietly.

Problems with forming groups are mitigated because the teacher has already planned their formation and the groups stay together for as long as the teacher thinks appropriate. Overcrowding and restricted movement are somewhat dealt with in that because they are already in their groups, it is less necessary to move around the room.

Paying attention to learners is easier with groups, because while the teacher is dealing with one group of four, the others are busy working. Thus most of the class continues uninterrupted as the teacher gives individual attention to the pupils (Kagan, 1992 : 7 : 8).

The *structural approach* to Cooperative Learning has four basic principals : Simultaneous interaction, positive interdependence, individual accountability, and equal participation.

Simultaneous interaction is achieved by giving all the pupils, as much opportunity to be engaged in the class at the same time as possible. By using pair and teamwork, students can maximize the time they are actively engaged in the class. *Positive interdependence* is achieved when pupils work together as a team to achieve success. This means that the stronger pupils help the weaker pupils to succeed, because the success of each team member means the success of all the members of the team. *Positive interdependence* can be facilitated by the use of structures such as *Heads Together* and *Blackboard-Share* (appendix 1). These structures also ensure individual accountability (involving all learners), as pupils are unaware of who will be called upon to answer the teacher.

Figure 2 : Cooperative learning mitigation of large class problems

Problem	Mitigation by cooperative learning
Group and pair formation/restricted movement	-Groups (teams) and pairs pre-assigned/ minimal need to move
Pupils have difficulty staying focused – control and discipline problems – noise	-Students are assigned roles (appendix 2) -Quiet signals used
Paying attention to learners	-Strong pupils help weaker ones -Teacher can help individual learners (weak or strong) with minimal disruption of the class
Involving all the learners	Gatekeeper role -Structures (heads together, blackboard share)

Other applications of cooperative learning

Cooperative learning structures can be applied to teaching children a number of ways in addition to those already mentioned. Both *Round Robin* and *Roundtable* (appendix 1) can be applied as follows at all levels.

- Naming the days of the week
- Naming the months
- Ordinal numbers
- Cardinal numbers
- Words that start with a, b, c,
- Words that rhyme with a phonics sound (i.e. cat, bat, hat, fat etc)   (High, 1993)

Conclusion

Young learners differ from adult learners in the context of EFL teaching. Adults have much more schemata to both assist with and interfere with their L2 development and their motivation is purpose driven, where children's motivation is drawn from the language learning experience itself. Given this, it is necessary for teachers to modify their approaches to motivate children and mitigate their monolingual (EFL) environment through employment of learning strategies using multimodality within a four skills approach, while employing learner centered strategies such as Cooperative Learning.

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Appendix 1
Some Structures
Adapted from Kagan (1992)

Round Robin
1. Teacher poses a question (i.e. name the days of the week).
2. Pupils go around their groups in clockwise fashion each of them giving an answer.
3. Pupils continue until they run out of time.

Round Table
1. Teacher poses question (i.e. name the days of the week).
2. Pupils go around their groups in clockwise fashion each of them writing an answer on a piece of paper.
3. Pupils continue until they run out of time
4. Teams do Blackboard-Share.

Blackboard-Share
1. One representative from each team goes to the board and all teams post their answers simultaneously.

Heads Together
1. Teacher poses question (s) (questions can be asked orally or given on worksheets).
2. Pupils are given thinking time and write down their answers individually.
3. Pupils number off - 1, 2, 3, 4
4. A random pupil is chosen to share their answer (s) with team.
5. Next pupil shares until all have answered.
6. Students discuss and reach consensus on team's best answer (s).
7. A random pupil is selected to answer for the team or do Blackboard-Share.

Appendix 2
Team Roles

Pupils may be helped to stay focused by assigning them roles with responsibilities such as :
- *Taskmaster* – responsible for keeping the group on task
- *Gatekeeper* – responsible for making sure everyone in the group gets a chance to talk
- *Question Commander* – responsible for ensuring that pupils' questions are answered by the team or if they do not know, the teacher