

Position Statement on Teaching English as a Foreign or Additional Language to Young Learners

Policy changes mandating the earlier introduction of English in foreign language settings are increasingly being implemented worldwide. Although research has suggested that age may have an effect as to the way a language is learned, age alone does not determine success in learning a foreign language. As various sociocultural contexts, government policies, and historical language practices will all impact the success or failure of a language instructional program, there is no single best way to implement an English as a foreign or additional language (EFL/EAL) program for young learners. Rather, effective EFL/EAL teaching for young learners starts with a clear understanding of the following factors and how they relate to one another.

- *Program planning, content, and learner goals:* Those involved in teaching EFL/EAL to young learners should have a clear understanding of the program's objectives and goals, as well as the extent and structure of the program. What students should know and be able to do should be clearly outlined and established along with how that is to be measured. Where academic-level proficiency is desired, there should be long-term strategies for continued support and articulation between educational levels. The program should have a learner-centered approach, and materials should be selected in accordance with the age of the children, the length of the program, its objectives, and the learning environment. Teachers, trainers, and teacher associations should all be partners in program development, and planners should be flexible in regards to methodology.
- *Effective teachers:* As stated in TESOL's *Position Statement on Teacher Quality in the Field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages* (June 2003), native speaker proficiency in the target language alone is not a sufficient qualification for such teaching positions; the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) is a professional discipline that requires specialized training. Therefore, qualified ESL and EFL educators not only should demonstrate written and oral proficiency in the English language (regardless of native language), but also should demonstrate teaching competency. Teachers should have training in teaching EFL/EAL, as well as in the ways young students learn. Effective EFL/EAL teachers should themselves be successful and experienced language learners. Just as important are teachers' personal attitudes toward continued education and learning and their willingness to model language learning for the students with whom they work. Where applicable, EFL/EAL educators should receive the necessary degree, licensing, validation, or certification as determined by their institution, country, or region from qualified EFL/EAL teacher educators.
- *Programmatic and institutional support:* Depending upon the program model and methodology employed, institutions need to be able to provide the type and level of resources necessary to support the program. Support materials should be designed for both teachers and students with the appropriate cultural context of the country in mind. The culture of the EFL/EAL young learner should be regarded as a valued and respected

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resource that informs decisions regarding approaches, techniques, activities, learning styles, curriculum design, and materials whether the young learner is in his/her native cultural setting or in a mixed-culture setting in a classroom in a country where English is spoken as a native language. Institutions should provide resources for young learners to be able to portray their cultural values within English-speaking contexts, whenever possible, with the sole purpose of strengthening their own cultural identity at the same time as they are exposed to EFL/EAL learning experiences. Additionally, resource materials should be provided in sufficient quantities so that teachers can do their work well and productively. Community and home support for the program should be encouraged, as well as continued professional development for teachers, as it is an essential part of effective teaching.

What is most important to understand about these factors is that they need to be defined for and understood within the local educational and cultural context. In addition, while the three factors are related, there is not necessarily a direct correlation among them. Just as there is no one way to teach a language, there is no one program or model for all educational contexts. Finding the right balance among these three factors is a key part of delivering an effective program.

Resources

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