



"The Importance of Foreign Languages in Primary Education"

Why should we teach foreign languages in a primary education?

There are two main reasons behind the introduction of foreign languages in primary classrooms :

- ▶ The first is the belief that 'the younger the better', the idea that young children are intrinsically better language learners, and will therefore become more proficient more quickly.
- ▶ The second is that in an increasingly globalized world, intercultural competence is essential, and that it is important to awaken children's interests in other people and cultures at a time when they are open and receptive.




Young children are very enthusiastic and love learning foreign languages. They find it fun and they enjoy discovering new worlds and new ways of saying things.



Motivation in learning languages

- ▶ Research has shown that what really motivates young children is the fun of language learning: not only the fun activities typical of the primary language classroom, but also learning about another culture and its language: learning about children in other countries, what they do, how like/unlike them they are, how they speak etc.

Regular opportunities for direct contact with foreign language are highly motivating. Additionally, learning a foreign language helps children with their literacy skills in English, as well as offering other recognized cognitive benefits. The motivational, cultural, and cognitive benefits of language learning need to be stated more positively to ensure adequate recognition of their importance and value in the national curriculum.



Primary school teachers are usually excellent motivators; they enthuse children about learning new topics, and all the evidence shows that children learning foreign languages in primary schools share this enthusiasm. It is only once children realise that proficiency targets need to be met that their motivation wanes. Focussing less one-sidedly on a goal of linguistic proficiency would help mitigate some of the problems outlined above. Visits to and from foreign countries; internet exchanges with foreign schools, projects about some aspect of the foreign country/people, possibly linked with some other aspect of the curriculum, reflections on positive reasons for learning languages, and on the strategies which will help learners progress, would help foster an enduring enthusiasm for language in its cultural and social context, and thus support gradual linguistic progress. This agenda needs to be much more central and consistent in our curriculum.

Teaching English in primary schools has great potential!

- ▶ The introduction of foreign languages in primary has great potential, but its goals need to be clearly articulated and realistic, taking account of what research has shown about how young children learn and of the context in which schools and teachers have to operate.
- ▶ Foreign language teaching needs to be embedded within the children's overall education from the early years to the end of schooling, to avoid the highly demotivating transition issues.



Eight Helpful Ideas for Teaching English to Young Learners

Supplement activities with visuals, realia, and movement.

- ▶ Young learners tend to have short attention spans and a lot of physical energy.
- ▶ One way to capture their attention and keep them engaged in activities is to supplement the activities with lots of brightly colored visuals, toys, puppets, or objects to match the ones used in the stories that you tell or songs that you sing. These can also help make the language input comprehensible and can be used for follow-up activities, such as re-telling stories or guessing games.



Involve students in making visuals and realia

- ▶ One way to make the learning more fun is to involve students in the creation of the visuals or realia. Having children involved in creating the visuals that are related to the lesson helps engage students in the learning process by introducing them to the context as well as to relevant vocabulary items. In addition, language related to the arts and crafts activities can be taught while making or drawing the visuals.
- ▶ Some activities could use objects, toys, stuffed animals, or dolls. A “show and tell” activity is a perfect way to



Move from activity to activity.

- ▶ As stated before, young learners have short attention spans. For young students, from ages 5 to 10 especially, it is a good idea to move quickly from activity to activity. Do not spend more than 10 or 15 minutes on any one activity because children tend to become bored easily. As children get older, their ability to concentrate for longer periods of time increases. So for students ages 5–7, you should try to keep activities between 5 and 10 minutes long. Students ages 8–10 can handle activities that are 10 to 15 minutes long. It is always possible to



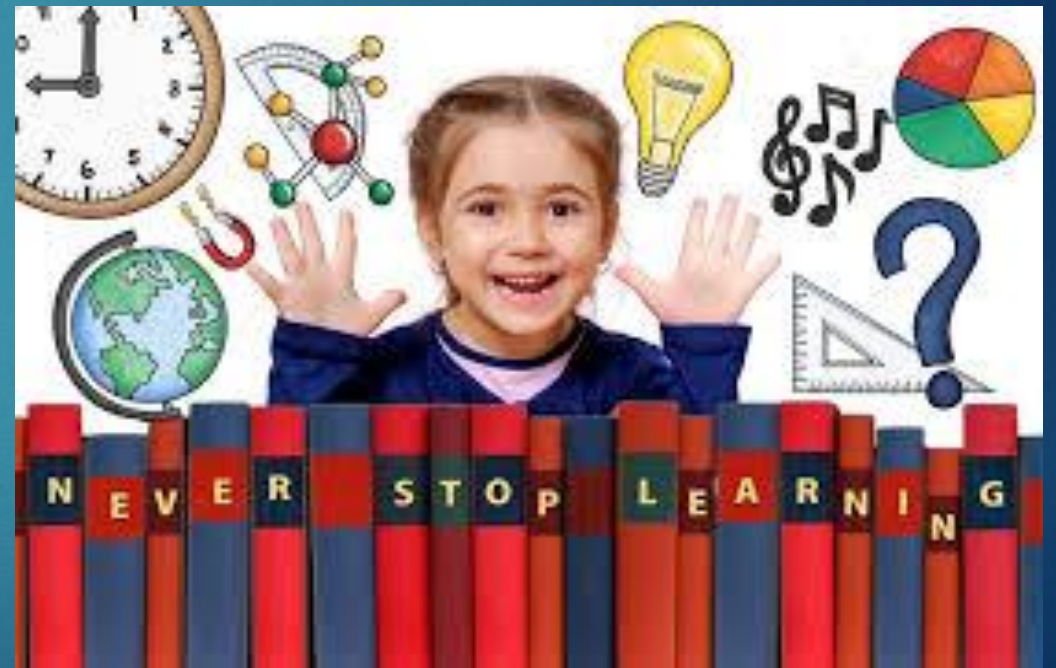
Teach in themes.

- ▶ When you plan a variety of activities, it is important to have them connect to each other in order to support the language learning process. Moving from one activity to others that are related in content and language helps to recycle the language and reinforce students' understanding .



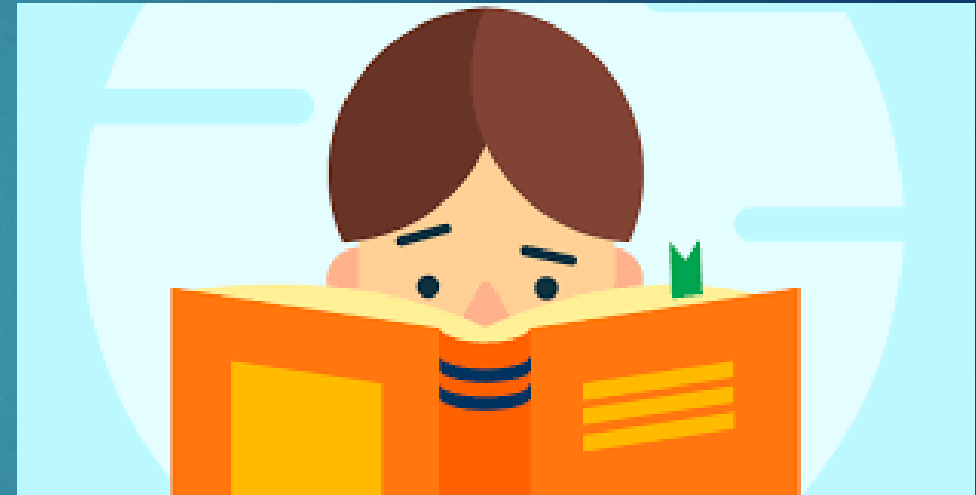
Use stories and contexts familiar to students.

- ▶ When choosing materials or themes to use, it is important that you find ones that are appropriate for your students based on their language proficiency and what is of interest to them. The contexts that you use when teaching English, which may be a completely new and foreign language, should be contexts that are familiar to them. Use of stories and contexts that they have experience with in their L1 could help these young learners connect a completely new language with the background knowledge they already have.



Establish classroom routines in English.

- ▶ Young learners function well within a structured environment and enjoy repetition of certain routines and activities. Having basic routines in the classroom can help to manage young learners. For example, to get students' attention before reading a story or to get them to quiet down before an activity.



Use L1 as a resource when necessary.

- ▶ Consider using L1 when it is more important to spend time doing the activity rather than explaining it. Use L1 in the classroom as a resource for forwarding the learning process without becoming too reliant on it.



Collaborate with other teachers in your school.

- ▶ It is useful to find out what students are learning in their other classes, in their native language. Collaborate with other teachers in your school to make the learning experience richer for your students. Connect your lessons to the topics, activities, and stories your students are learning in their native language by planning related thematic units that parallel the learning in other subjects.

