



## Understanding the Challenges and Coping Practices in Teaching English to Young Learners: A Study of Primary School English Teachers' Perspectives<sup>1</sup>

Sabriye ŞENER<sup>2</sup>, Ayten ÇOKÇALIŞKAN<sup>3</sup>

### Abstract

Young learners are energetic, curious, willing to explore the world around by their nature. For this reason, teaching English to young learners, especially in primary school context, may be difficult. Therefore, this study aims to explore the perceptions of English language teachers working in primary schools regarding the challenges they face in teaching young learners. A qualitative research design was employed. The data were obtained from 15 non-native English in-service teachers employed at primary schools across western Türkiye during the spring term of the 2019-2020 academic year, through semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed by using content analysis. It was found that English teachers working at primary schools had difficulties in some major areas such as insufficient time, dealing with crowded classes, and materials of the course, etc. The research suggests that teachers should be highly skilled professionals who combine theoretical knowledge and expertise with practical experience to address the specific demands and challenges of the foreign language classroom.

### Key Words

Teaching English to young learners  
Primary school  
English teachers

### About Article

Sending date: 30.10.2024  
Acceptance date: 30.12.2024  
E-publication date: 31.12.2024

<sup>1</sup> This paper was partly presented as an oral presentation at 2nd International Elementary Education Congress held in Muğla-Türkiye on October 23-27, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Retired Assist. Prof. Dr., Muğla Sıtkı Kocman University Education Faculty, Türkiye, [sa.sener@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:sa.sener@yahoo.co.uk), <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4926-8940>

<sup>3</sup> Teacher-Phd Student, Ministry of National Education- Muğla Sıtkı Kocman University Graduate School of Educational Sciences, Türkiye, [aytencokcaliskan@hotmail.com](mailto:aytencokcaliskan@hotmail.com), <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5616-1351>

## Introduction

The phenomenon of early English language teaching and learning has gained considerable attention since the latter half of the twentieth century. The idea that "the younger, the better" has consistently sparked strong enthusiasm and is becoming increasingly widespread around the world (Garton, Copland & Burns, 2011; Enever, 2011; Islahuddin, 2023). Chang (2012) also argued that introducing English at an early age has become both a trend and a competitive factor among non-native countries. Therefore, many elementary schools and even pre-schools have introduced English programs to prepare children with the necessary English skills for their future in society (Mutiah et al., 2020). The main goal of teaching English in the early years of schooling is to inspire young learners, build their self-confidence, and prepare them for learning English at more advanced educational stages (Hashemi & Azizinezhad, 2011).

The constructs of "intellectual readiness of young learners" and "the critical period hypothesis" have emerged as key arguments supporting early language learning in academic discourse. These concepts play a pivotal role in informing ongoing debates regarding the efficacy and appropriateness of introducing foreign language instruction at an early age, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of the interplay between cognitive development and language learning in young learners (Damar, Gürsoy and Korkmaz, 2013).

When it comes to the term "young learners", it can be said that "young learners" have been described by various scholars and researchers, primarily focusing on children in preschool and primary school age groups. However, even within this definition, there are variations from one country to another (Puskas, 2016). Young learners are described as "students between five and twelve years of age" (Cameron, 2001). Scott and Ytreberg (1990) also describe young learners as pupils between five and ten or eleven years old. When considering the definitions, it's evident that there is a notable distinction between five-year-olds and eleven-year-olds. However, children's development varies significantly in terms of pace and learning styles. While some children reach their milestones more quickly, others may take longer but can eventually catch up with their peers.

The literature also presents various definitions of young learners. Phillips (2000) explains that "young learners" describe children ranging from the beginning of formal schooling to about eleven or twelve years of age. According to Pinter (2011), young learners can be categorized into three groups: those who begin preschool at approximately three years old, those who enter primary school around the ages of 5 to 7, and those who complete primary school by the age of 11 or 12, though in some countries this may occur at around 13 or 14. In this study, the term "young learners" refers to children aged 6-9 and is used for student groups from second to fourth grade in primary school.

Young learners are believed to possess certain fundamental traits. For instance, they tend to grasp situations more readily than comprehending the language itself. Their understanding is rooted in the physical world and relies heavily on direct experiences. Additionally, they have limited attention and concentration spans. Young children approach learning with enthusiasm and a positive attitude, so offering praise is particularly essential to maintain their motivation and excitement. They seldom acknowledge when they lack knowledge (Scott and Ytreberg, 1990). Likewise, Halliwell (1992) highlights several valuable qualities of young learners for language acquisition, noting their ability to interpret meaning without knowing each word, using limited language creatively, learn indirectly, seek enjoyment in activities, display vivid imaginations, and take great pleasure in speaking.

Young learners have unique needs, expectations, interests, and developmental patterns, both psychologically and cognitively, that set them apart from teenagers and adults. Therefore, teaching a foreign language to young children is distinct from teaching it to adults (Shin, 2000; Wenny and Bansa, 2021). Although it is not less demanding, it is both more challenging and more captivating (Mart, 2012). They are often more enthusiastic and energetic in the classroom (Cameron, 2005), preferring hands-on activities but also becoming bored and distracted more easily. Kuchah (2013) also mentioned that they enjoy using participatory activities like drawing, storytelling, and listening to music. Such distinctions spark ongoing discussions about whether young children are better suited for language learning than adults. Young learners need different instructional methods than older learners, as their learning

processes may vary. Children aged 3 to 10 have not yet developed certain strategies that older learners are able to use.

Children typically have shorter attention spans and a lot of physical energy, making them more engaged with their surroundings and interested in hands-on experiences. As noted by Scott and Ytreberg (1990), children learn through their senses, with the physical world being a central aspect of their understanding. Teaching English to young learners requires a different approach compared to adults, as highlighted by Harmer (2001), who explains that young learners often lose interest quickly. Brown (2001) also states that teaching children involves focusing on their intellectual development, managing their attention span, incorporating sensory input, addressing emotional factors, and using authentic, meaningful language, which requires teachers to be creative in both material selection and lesson delivery. Young language learners rely heavily on the teacher because they have not yet developed a solid foundation in English or effective general learning strategies (Enever, 2015). To keep them engaged, it's important to include a variety of colorful visuals, toys, puppets, and other tangible resources in lessons. Collecting useful items like toys, pictures, and maps for classroom use can enhance the learning experience, making language input enjoyable and accessible (Hashemi and Azizinezhad, 2011).

The primary school years are crucial not only for building a solid foundation in knowledge and cognitive abilities but also for fostering students' intellectual, physical, emotional, and social development. "English for Young Learners" refers to the process of teaching English to children in pre-primary or primary school, particularly those who are not native speakers. It encompasses students who primarily speak their country's national language and are learning English as a secondary language. Language teachers working with young learners should be mindful of their unique characteristics and recognize that teaching a specific skill often depends on other skills, as various abilities and competencies are interconnected during this developmental stage. It can be said that teachers play a crucial role in working with young learners (Bland, 2019).

The issue of introducing foreign languages into formal education is quite complex. While the advantages of an early start are often emphasized, it is equally important to address several problematic aspects. These challenges include the limited time allocated for language instruction at the primary level, issues with classroom management and control, difficulties in motivating learners, insufficient resources, large class sizes, government policies and curricula, inadequate funding for the necessary equipment and facilities for learner-centered teaching, the quality of textbooks, and a significant shortage of trained primary school English teachers, among others. Consequently, teaching foreign languages to young learners requires specialized instructional methods. A teacher working with young learners should not only have a strong command of the foreign language but also possess social, musical, and reflective skills, along with a solid understanding of general pedagogy and primary education (Cameron, 2003). Encouraging teachers to adopt reflective teaching, which involves reviewing their teaching practices, recalling classroom events, and critically evaluating their own methods, would also be a beneficial approach (Eröz-Tuğa, 2013).

Johnstone (2009) described the introduction of languages in primary schools as "possibly the world's biggest policy development in education" (p. 33), with English being the most commonly introduced language. Several factors contribute to this trend. Research suggests that starting language learning at an early age is advantageous (Hu, 2007; Nunan, 2003). Additionally, economic globalization has made English a dominant global language (Enever and Moon, 2009; Hu, 2007), and parents increasingly desire for their children to acquire English skills to thrive in the modern world (Enever and Moon, 2009; Gimenez, 2009). In a similar vein, Lie (2017) stated the rising popularity of English courses among children from middle to upper-class families, while Zein (2017) observed a trend of parents increasingly enrolling their children in schools offering English programs.

Governments are increasingly implementing English language programs in primary schools at younger ages, with numerous kindergartens also providing English classes for children during their preschool years (Puskas, 2016). This trend of introducing English in preschool and primary education is widely observed, although it has generated both supporters and critics (Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991). Consequently, it is essential for children to develop English language proficiency at an early age

in order to learn and understand the information conveyed in English. Nonetheless, there is no empirical evidence to suggest that beginning English language learning at an early age in foreign language settings results in more proficient English speakers (Nunan, 1999).

When it comes to Türkiye, in March 2012, the Turkish Ministry of National Education introduced a structural reform to its English language teaching policies, restructuring primary, secondary, and high school durations to four years each, while beginning English lessons from the second grade (Erdoğan and Savaş, 2022). As a result, English language teachers were placed in primary schools to educate young learners. After graduating from the 4-year English Language Teaching (ELT) program at a Faculty of Education, English teachers in Türkiye are eligible for employment in primary, secondary, and high schools (Çamlıbel-Acar, 2016). However, it can be said that there is a significant need for specialized language teachers trained to teach young learners, as this role requires a unique combination of skills (Rokita-Jaskow, 2008).

Several research studies have been carried out to explore the teaching of English to young learners. Some researchers examined the role of English at the primary level, its rise in popularity, whose interests this growth serves, and the status of various world Englishes (Block, Gray and Holborow, 2012; Coleman, 2011; Edge, 2006; Kumaravadivelu, 2011). Other studies focused on how policies impact young learner classrooms, the pedagogical approaches employed by teachers worldwide, and teachers' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities in these settings (Garton, Copland and Burns, 2011), challenges of teaching English at primary level (Straková, 2015) using different teaching techniques such as using short stories (Wenny and Bansa, 2021), teachers, students, and schools' readiness in conducting English programs for young learners (Mutiah et al., 2020). Additionally, researchers analyzed textbooks to determine their appropriateness and effectiveness in the classroom (Butler, 2004; Mee, 2003; Hoque, 2009; İnal, 2009; Nunan, 2003), as well as teachers' proficiency levels and their confidence in their teaching abilities (Ghatage, 2009; Kuchah, 2009; Littlewood, 2007). Furthermore, studies have addressed government policies, curricula, and national examinations (Li, 1998; Littlewood, 2007; Kunnan, 2005; Gorsuch, 2000; İnal, 2009).

In the Turkish context, this issue has also been explored. Several researchers have examined various aspects, such as teacher trainers' perspectives on the appropriate starting age for L2 learning (Damar, Gürsoy and Korkmaz, 2013), student motivation (Bahar, 2018), and the challenges encountered by pre-service English teachers (Çamlıbel-Acar, 2016).

In the Turkish context, there are few research studies examining the perceptions of in-service teachers on teaching English to young learners. Therefore, this study aims to determine the perceptions of English language teachers working at the primary school level regarding the problems they encounter. It also seeks to identify the activities they use to motivate themselves and prepare for their classes.

To achieve this objective, the study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What challenges do English teachers working in primary schools encounter in classes of young learners
2. What efforts do English teachers make to prepare themselves for their classes?

## **Method**

### ***Research Design***

A qualitative research design, framed within a case study approach, was employed in this study. The research aimed to investigate the perceptions of English language teachers working at the primary school level, particularly focusing on the challenges they encounter and the efforts they make to prepare themselves for their classes. Yin (2009) describes a case study as a method of empirical research that explores a phenomenon within its real-world setting. Case study methodology enables an in-depth examination of the existing situation, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of human behavior within its contextual environment, as qualitative research is best for exploring and understanding a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

In this study, the case study approach was selected because it allows for an in-depth examination of a phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2009). The aim of the research is to understand the challenges faced by teachers in English language teaching and the efforts they make to prepare themselves for their classes. These complex and context-specific issues can be said to require examination in their natural settings, making the case study design a suitable choice.

### *Setting and Participants*

A purposeful sampling method was utilized, which is commonly applied in qualitative research to select information-rich cases, ensuring efficient use of available resources (Patton, 2002). This approach entails selecting individuals or groups with substantial knowledge or experience relevant to the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011).

Purposeful sampling was chosen in this study to select participants with significant knowledge and experience related to the phenomenon being examined. As the research aims to explore the challenges faced by English language teachers and the efforts, they make to prepare themselves for their classes, it was essential to include individuals with direct experience in the field who could offer valuable insights. This sampling method ensures the selection of knowledgeable participants, optimizing the use of available resources while enabling a comprehensive understanding of the research questions.

The participants consisted of 15 non-native English in-service teachers employed at various primary schools in the Muğla city center during the spring term of the 2019-2020 academic year. (See Table 1).

**Table 1.** Information about the participants

Participants	Gender	Experience	Age
P1	Male	11 years	38
P2	Male	20 years	45
P3	Female	5 years	29
P4	Female	5 years	31
P5	Female	8 years	33
P6	Female	18 years	44
P7	Male	3 years	27
P8	Female	9 years	36
P9	Female	13 years	39
P10	Male	25 years	49
P11	Female	23 years	49
P12	Female	12 years	38
P13	Female	16 years	41
P14	Female	20 years	45
P15	Male	10 years	37

The demographic data shows a varied group in terms of gender, teaching experience, and age. Among the 15 participants, nine are female and six are male. Their teaching experience ranges from 3 to 25 years, providing a diverse set of perspectives shaped by various stages of their careers. Age differences also emerge, with participants between 27 and 49 years old, providing a cross-generational perspective on teaching practices. This diversity in age and experience enriches the study, offering valuable insights into how teachers at various career levels and ages address language teaching challenges and strategies to motivate learners.

The participants' identities were kept confidential in the study by assigning them pseudonyms. They were assigned code names, with "P" representing "Participant", followed by numbers such as P1, P2, P3, and so on up to P15.



### ***Data Collection Tool***

Semi-structured interviews were utilized as the data collection tool. During the development of five interview questions, relevant studies in the field (Copland, Garton and Burns, 2014; Çamlıbel-Acar, 2016; Damar, Gürsoy and Korkmaz, 2013; Straková, 2015) were reviewed, and feedback was obtained from two experts in English language teaching to enhance the validity and reliability of the questions. Furthermore, a pilot study was carried out with a small group of teachers to assess the clarity, relevance, and understandability of the questions. Based on the feedback, revisions were made to ensure the questions were clear and suitable for the study.

### ***Data Collection Process***

All participants were informed about the ethical considerations, including that their personal information would not be shared. Teachers' participation was voluntary. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews. Participants received preliminary information about the research, along with a consent form to review. Those who agreed to participate signed and dated the consent form. The second researcher personally conducted all interviews, each lasting approximately 10-15 minutes. After each interview, the researcher asked if participants wanted to add anything further, and the interviews were concluded accordingly. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim shortly after the sessions. The interviews were conducted in English, in a comfortable setting to encourage open and honest responses, and all participants were assured of confidentiality to ensure ethical standards.

### ***Data analysis***

The data were analyzed using content analysis. Content analysis is generally described as 'the systematic coding of qualitative or quantitative data according to defined themes or categories' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). One of the most common examples of content analysis is coding and organizing data gathered from observations or interviews in a systematic manner (Dinçer, 2018). Issues of reliability and validity play a critical role in qualitative research. For a case study to be reliable and valid, it is important to consider transparency, adherence to findings, ethical conduct, and avoiding value judgments (Akar, 2016). To ensure the reliability of data analysis, assistance was sought from a colleague. After coding and determining the categories, a colleague applied the same procedures. The reliability was determined by comparing the similarities and differences between the two researchers, and inter-coder reliability was calculated using the formula recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994), yielding a reliability score of 0.87. This score indicates a high level of agreement between the coders, ensuring consistency and trustworthiness of the data analysis. To further validate the results, any discrepancies between the coders were discussed and resolved, enhancing the overall robustness of the coding process.

Content analysis is used in this research to systematically examine the data gathered from interviews or other qualitative sources, identifying and categorizing key themes, patterns, or trends. It allows the researcher to organize and interpret the participants' responses in a structured way. By using content analysis, the study ensures a consistent and objective approach to analyzing the qualitative data, facilitating the identification of common themes and offering insights into the research questions.

## **Findings and Discussion**

The data of the study were analyzed in relation to each research question. Themes, categories and codes were created and presented in the table.

RQ 1. What challenges do English teachers working in primary schools encounter in classes of young learners?

**Table 2.** The opinions of English teachers working in primary schools on the challenges they encounter

Themes	Categories	Codes
Challenges	related to time (9)	limited teaching hours (5) insufficient time to prepare materials (4)
	related to classrooms' physical environment (11)	not suitable for activities (6) limited classroom materials (5)
	related to classroom management (22)	large class size (9) energetic students (8) lack of control (5)
	related to material (34)	lack of material & equipment (11) limited sources and materials (10) complex textbook materials (8) inadequate facilities (5)
	related to learners (27)	short attention span (9) shyness/nervousness (6) lack of motivation (7) fear of making errors (3) different learning styles (2)
	related to school administration (9)	lack of support from school administrators (9)
	related to parents (11)	parental expectations (7) less support from parents (4)
	related to teacher (25)	too demanding of energy (8) adapting lectures to the learners' levels (7) time management (5) problem with using technology (3) using L1 in the classroom (2)

According to the findings, the most encountered problem stated by the teachers is challenges related to the teaching materials. The other problems expressed by the teachers are related to learner, teacher and classroom management. The problems related to classroom physical environment; parents; school administration and time are also expressed.

The findings reveal a range of challenges that primary school teachers encounter when working with very young learners, shedding light on the complex demands of teaching this age group. One major issue involves time constraints; teachers often report that limited teaching hours and insufficient time to prepare materials impact their ability to deliver comprehensive and engaging lessons. For instance, P13 mentioned, *“In addition, we cannot find the tapescripts of the book. I have to read aloud the listening passages to my students and that is not proper, I think.”* With young learners needing diverse, hands-on activities to stay focused and engaged, the lack of preparation time can limit the quality of instruction and make it difficult to adapt lessons to meet each student's needs. P5 also highlighted the problem, stating, *“The preparation time we have is insufficient. I end up hurrying through the lessons, which impacts the quality of learning.”*

Another significant challenge is related to the classroom environment. Inadequate physical settings, such as classrooms that are not suitable for young learners' activities or lack essential materials, can hinder teachers' efforts to create an interactive and stimulating learning space. A well-equipped and appropriate age environment is essential for capturing the attention and interest of young children, and without it, teachers may struggle to implement effective activities. P9 shared, *“...my students get bored very easily. Sometimes, I do not know how to motivate them or how to take their attention. I think of crying at that time...”*

Classroom management emerges as a major area of difficulty, particularly due to large class sizes, high-energy students, and control issues. Teaching young learners often means managing various levels of energy and attention, and this can be even more challenging with large groups. Maintaining order while ensuring each child is engaged and learning requires specific skills and resources, which teachers may find difficult to deploy in these circumstances. P1 expressed a similar worry, mentioning, *“Managing so many students makes it difficult to keep their attention. I find myself dedicating so much time to controlling the class that it impacts the quality of my teaching.”* In line with this finding, Nguyen (2017) points out that managing English classrooms for young learners is often difficult, and Zein (2018) emphasizes that behaviors such as disrespect, rudeness, and attention-seeking are seldom examined in research. Copland, Garton and Burns (2014) also found that maintaining control is a significant concern for teachers of young learners.

A recurring theme in the findings is the lack of suitable materials. Teachers frequently encounter issues with complex textbook materials and a lack of resources and facilities. The limited availability of age-appropriate and accessible materials makes it hard for teachers to design lessons that young students find engaging and understandable. P4 highlighted a similar issue, saying, *“The materials we use are often not appropriate for my students' levels. I find it difficult to find engaging resources that cater to their needs.”* Without the right tools, the teaching process becomes more challenging and less effective.

The characteristics of young learners themselves add another layer of complexity. Teachers must address learner-related issues such as shyness/nervousness, lack of motivation, short attention spans, and fear of making errors. Each of these factors requires specific strategies, as young learners often need encouragement and support to feel comfortable participating. Furthermore, different learning styles among learners mean that teachers must be flexible and adaptive to cater to each student's unique needs.

Support from school administration is also highlighted as a key factor. Teachers report a lack of backing from administrators, which may limit access to necessary resources and professional development opportunities. Support from the school administration can provide a stronger foundation for teachers, allowing them to better manage classroom demands and improve learning outcomes for young students.

Parental involvement is another area where teachers face challenges. High parental expectations and insufficient support from parents can add to teachers' responsibilities and pressures. Collaboration with parents is often critical to reinforcing learning at home, but without this partnership, teachers may find it more difficult to foster consistent progress in young learners.

Lastly, teachers encounter personal challenges related to teaching methods and classroom dynamics. Adapting lessons to young learners' levels, managing technology use, and balancing the use of the first language in the classroom require careful consideration. Additionally, young learners demand a high level of energy and attention, which can strain teachers' time management and energy, especially in large classes. P1 mentioned, *“Trying to manage everything can sometimes be very exhausting. Especially in bigger classes, sustaining their energy and attention and modifying lessons to suit them require greater focus and energy.”*

By examining the findings, it can be concluded that most of the teachers have difficulty in teaching materials such as complex textbook materials, inadequate facilities, limited sources and materials, etc. The findings of the study are in line with the findings of the research studies conducted by Butler (2004); Pandian (2003); Mee (2003); Hoque (2009); Hu (2007); Mathew and Pani (2009); İnal, (2009); Nunan (2003). The findings of this study indicated that problems related to the learners are the other challenges mostly encountered by the teachers.

The lack of suitable materials for teaching English to young learners remains somewhat of an issue, though it appears to be less problematic than it was previously (Copland, Garton and Barnett, 2024). In her study, Nilsson (2024) also identified challenges such as difficulties in finding effective materials, ensuring all learners actively participate in target language interactions, and managing limited time for lessons and preparation.



Teachers working with young learners should be aware of the characteristics of young learners such as short attention span, energy, and lack of motivation. Therefore, they are expected to design activities to keep them busy and motivated. It is not fair just to complain about their energy and motivation. This finding aligns with the results of several studies. Ho (2003); Li (1998); Abrar (2016); Copland, Garton and Burns (2014) found similar results.

RQ 2. What efforts do English teachers make to prepare themselves for their classes?

**Table 3.** The efforts English teachers make to prepare themselves for their classes

Themes	Categories	Codes
Activities	for professional development (25)	attending seminars/webinars, workshops/training courses (9) participating in research/national/international projects (8) networking with other ELT professionals (5) collaborating with experts in other disciplines (2) learning from peers (1)
	for having more effective lessons (40)	preparing teaching tools (11) using online resources for language instruction (9) using web-based learning tools (9) learning new methods (5) book study (3) examining curriculum (3)

The findings reveal that teachers engage in various activities to prepare themselves for their classes, which can be categorized into two main themes: professional development and enhancing lesson effectiveness. Teachers in the study stated that they do activities mostly to have more effective lessons, in other words to become more competent teacher, in English classes of young learners.

They also expressed that they do some activities for their professional development. In terms of professional development, teachers most commonly participate in research/national/international projects, and attend seminars/webinars, workshops/training courses. They also engage in peer learning. Collaboration with experts in other disciplines, although less common, is another reported activity. Cameron (2005) emphasizes that young learners require teachers to be highly skilled at connecting with their world. This involves understanding both how young learners absorb knowledge and the most effective teaching methods for them. One teacher (P8) shared: *"I find it essential to attend seminars, webinars, workshops, and training courses to stay updated on the latest research and methodologies in our field. This helps me bring fresh ideas into my classroom."* This reflects the importance of ongoing professional development in adapting teaching practices to the needs of young learners.

Networking with other English Language Teaching professionals is another finding from the study. It can be said that it is a vital component of professional development. Engaging with peers allows educators to exchange ideas, share resources, and stay informed about the latest trends and methodologies in the field. This collaborative approach not only enhances teaching practices but also fosters a sense of community among educators (Richards, 2015). The importance of networking has been highlighted in various studies (Nicholas, Avram, Chow and Lupasco, 2018; O'Dowd and Dooly, 2022). P11, for example, emphasizes the significance of staying updated: *"...I always try to be informed about the seminars, activities or workshops. I think the best thing you can do for your students is to develop yourself..."* This statement reflects the view that ongoing professional development, through networking and engagement with current trends, is crucial for teacher growth (Borg, 2015). Another participant (P5) emphasized: *"Networking with other teachers has given me the confidence to try out new activities in my lessons, and it has really made a difference in my teaching style."* This demonstrates how professional collaboration can enhance both teaching techniques and confidence.

Examining the findings we can say that teachers are aware that they should become more competent in teaching English to young learners properly. The most stated activities are preparing teaching tools; using online resources for language instruction; using web-based learning tools and learning new methods. Regarding activities aimed at having more effective lessons, teachers focus on

preparing teaching tools, studying books related to their field, and utilizing the Internet to access language teaching resources.

It can be said that technology and digital-based learning have had a significant impact on language education, particularly for young learners. In line with the findings, research has highlighted that using digital games for vocabulary learning can enhance vocabulary acquisition by reducing students' anxiety, increasing their interest and motivation, promoting interaction among learners, and addressing diverse learning needs (Zou, Huang and Xie, 2021; Jabali, 2021). As P4 expressed, "...websistes are my best friends. Whenever I try to find a song or an activity, I always search for a useful website for my students..." demonstrating how teachers increasingly rely on digital resources to support their instructional practices. Teacher P3 noted: "I find that using digital tools and websites helps my students stay engaged and excited to learn English. They're more interactive, and that's what we need with young learners." Another teacher (P6) shared: "Technology has helped me make my lessons more varied. I can adjust activities to each student's needs, which was hard with traditional methods."

Many participants also rely on using web-based learning tools and examine the curriculum to ensure their lessons align with educational standards. Additionally, teachers actively seek to learn new methods to improve their teaching practices. These findings illustrate a broad range of efforts made by teachers to both enhance their professional development and improve the quality of their lessons. Similarly, Enever and Moon (2009) point out that well-equipped classrooms with well-designed teaching tools are useful for teaching English to young learners. One teacher (P4) mentioned: "I often explore new methods in professional development sessions. It's important for me to stay ahead, so I can provide the best education to my students." Another participant (P10) emphasized: "Learning new teaching strategies keeps me motivated and helps me meet the different needs of my students." These statements highlight the commitment of teachers to professional growth and the continuous evolution of their teaching strategies.

The findings are also in line with related literature. Ghatage (2009) found out that better access to new technologies is important in learners' success. Prapaisit de Segovia and Hardison (2008) stated that training in new language teaching methodologies for language teachers is vital in teaching English to young learners.

The teachers in this study also stated that professional development is also a crucial issue in teaching English to young learners. They said that attending seminars/webinars, workshops/training courses and participating in projects were the most important activities for professional development. Şener and Çokçalışkan (2017) also found that "attending courses, workshops or seminars" was among the professional development activities in the Turkish context. Şişman (2024) also suggested in her study that the professional development of the EFL teachers of young learners is essential and crucial.

### Conclusion and Suggestions

This study aimed to explore the perceptions of English language teachers working at the primary school level regarding the challenges they faced and the preparations they made to motivate learners and provide more effective lessons. The results revealed that most teachers experienced difficulties in finding or using teaching materials, such as complex textbook content, inadequate facilities, insufficient resources, and challenges in material design. Additionally, teachers reported struggling with time management, the physical environment of the classroom, classroom management, learners' characteristics, school administration, parental involvement, and personal challenges.

In summary, the study's findings indicate that primary school teachers face a range of interrelated challenges when teaching young learners. These challenges include logistical issues such as time and resource constraints, as well as behavioral and motivational factors related to working with young children. The findings highlight the need for systemic support, adequate resources, and targeted teaching strategies to effectively address the unique needs of young learners. Furthermore, teachers engage in various activities to improve their teaching in English classes for young learners and to enhance their professional development.

As highlighted in the relevant literature and findings, teaching a foreign language to young learners is both a challenging and a highly rewarding endeavor. The teacher must be a proficient professional who integrates theoretical knowledge with practical experience, while considering the unique needs and conditions of the foreign language classroom. Therefore, all stakeholders—including learners, teachers, school administrations, parents, and policymakers—should collaborate in teaching English to young learners.

The findings of the present study suggest that teachers who begin teaching young learners must adapt their approaches to meet the unique needs of this age group. Lessons should be designed to be enjoyable, engaging, repetitive, and easy to understand. Young learners thrive when teaching methods capture their interest while providing consistency and clarity, helping them build a strong foundation in English. Using age-appropriate strategies, such as interactive activities, storytelling, and visual aids, can significantly enhance their learning experience and foster a positive attitude toward language acquisition.

Teachers who begin teaching young learners should carefully adapt their approaches to address the unique needs of this age group. As many language teachers start working with children without specialized training, it is essential to design lessons that are enjoyable, engaging, repetitive, and easy to understand. Young learners thrive when teaching methods capture their interest while providing consistency and clarity, helping them establish a strong foundation in English. Implementing age-appropriate strategies, such as interactive activities, storytelling, and visual aids, can greatly enhance their learning experience and nurture a positive attitude toward language acquisition.

This research employs a case study approach, a qualitative research design, conducted with 15 in-service teachers working in the western part of Türkiye. While this study provides valuable insights, the small sample size limits the generalisability of the findings. The results may not fully represent the perspectives of all in-service teachers across Türkiye, as regional and contextual differences could influence their experiences and views. Therefore, it is suggested that future studies involve participants from a broader range of regions and include larger sample sizes to enhance the generalisability of the findings. Additionally, future research could explore various teacher profiles and settings to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

## References

- Abrar, M. (2016). *Teaching English problems: An analysis of EFL primary school teachers in Kuala Tungkal*. Birmingham, UK: The 16th Indonesian Scholars International Convention.
- Akar, H. (2016). *Eğitimde nitel araştırma desenleri*. A. Saban ve A. Ersoy (Ed.), *Durum çalışması* (ss.111-148). Ankara: Anı Yayıncılık.
- Bland, J. (2019). Teaching English to young learners: More teacher education and more children's literature! *CLELE Journal*, 7(2), 79–103.
- Block, D., Gray, J., & Holborow, M. (2012). *Neoliberalism and applied linguistics*. London, England: Routledge.
- Borg, S. (2015). Overview-Beyond the workshop: CPD for English language teachers. *Professional development for English language teachers: Perspectives from higher education in Turkey*, 5-12.
- Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy*. New-York: Longman.
- Cameron, L. (2001). *Teaching languages to young learners*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Cameron, L. (2003). Challenges for ELT from the expansion in teaching children. *ELT journal*, 57(2), 105-112.
- Cameron, L. (2005). *Teaching languages to young learners*. Cambridge University Press.
- Chang, P. (2012). Using a stance corpus to learn about effective authorial stancetaking: A text linguistic approach. *ReCALL Journal*, 24, 209–236.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education* (5th Ed.). London and New York: Routledge Falmer.
- Coleman, H. (2011). *Dreams and realities: Developing countries and the English language*. London, England: The British Council

- Copland, F., Garton S. & Burns, A. (2014). Challenges in teaching English to young learners: Global perspectives and local realities. *TESOL Quarterly*, 48(4), 738-762.
- Copland, F., Garton, S., & Barnett, C. (2024). *Global practices in teaching English to young learners: Ten years on*. British Council. <https://doi.org/10.57884/JHCP-DS26>
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Çamlıbel-Acar, Z. (2016). Teaching English to young learners: Some challenges faced by pre-service teachers. *The Eurasia Proceedings of Educational and Social Sciences*, 5, 323-327.
- Dinçer, S. (2018). Content analysis in scientific research: Meta-Analysis, meta-synthesis, and descriptive content analysis. *Bartın University Journal of Faculty of Education*, 7(1), 176-190. <https://doi.org/10.14686/buefad.363159>
- Edge, J. (Ed.). (2006). *Relocating TESOL in an age of empire*. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ekşi, G. (2010). *An assessment of the professional development needs of english language instructors working at a state university*. (Unpublished master's thesis). The Graduate School of Social Sciences, Middle East Technical University, Ankara.
- Enever, J., & Moon, J. (2009). *New global contexts for teaching primary ELT: Change and challenge*. In J. Enever, J. Moon, & U. Raman (Eds.), *Young Learner English language policy and implementation: International perspectives* (pp. 5-21). Reading: Garnet Education. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-971X.2012.01766.x>
- Enever, J. (2015). *The advantages and disadvantages of English as a foreign language with young learners*. In J. Bland (Ed.), *Teaching English to Young Learners. Critical Issues in Language Teaching with 3–12 Year Olds*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 13-29.
- Erdoğan, P. & Savaş, P. (2022). Investigating the selection process for initial English teacher education: Turkey. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 110(2022), 1-18.
- Eröz-Tuğba, B. (2013). Reflective feedback sessions using video recordings. *ELT Journal*, 67(2), 175-183.
- Garton, S., Copland, F., & Burns, A. (2011). Investigating global practices in teaching English to young learners. *ELT Research papers*, 11(1), 1-24.
- Ghatage, M. M. (2009). *Introduction of English from Grade 1 in Maharashtra, India*. In J. Enever, J. Moon and U. Raman (Eds.), *Young Learner English Language Policy and Implementation: International Perspectives*. (pp. 45–51). Reading: Garnet Education.
- Gimenez, T. (2009). *English at primary school level in Brazil: Challenges and perspectives*. In J. Enever, J. Moon, & U. Raman (Eds.), *Young learner English language policy and implementation: International perspectives* (pp. 53–59). Reading, England: Garnet Education.
- Gürsoy, E., Korkmaz, S. Ç., & Damar, A. E. (2013). Foreign language teaching within 4+ 4+ 4 education system in Turkey: Language teachers' voice. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 53(1), 59-74.
- Halliwell, S. (1992). *Teaching in English in the primary classroom*. Harlow: Longman.
- Harmer, J. (2001). *The practice of English language teaching*. Longman.
- Hashemi, M., & Azizinezhad, M. (2011). Teaching English to children: A unique, challenging experience for teachers, effective teaching ideas. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 30, 2083–2087. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.10.405>
- Ho, W. K. (2003). *English language teaching in Asia today: An overview*. In W. K. Ho and R. Y. L. Wong (Eds.), *English Language Teaching in East Asia Today: Changing Policies and Practices* (pp. 1–32). Singapore: Eastern Universities Press
- Hoque, S. (2009). *Teaching English in primary schools in Bangladesh: Competencies and achievements*. In J. Enever, J. Moon, & U. Raman (Eds.), *Young learner English language policy and implementation: International perspectives* (pp. 61–69). Reading, England: Garnet Education.
- Hu, Y. (2007). China's foreign language policy on primary English education: What's behind it? *Language Policy*, 6, 359–376. doi.10.1007/s10993-007-9052-9
- Islahuddin, M. (2023). Teaching English to young learners: A literature review. *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding*, 10(10), 500-513.
- İnal, D. (2009). *The early bird catches the worm: The Turkish case*. In J. Enever, J. Moon and U. Raman (Eds.), *Young learner english language policy and implementation: International perspectives* (pp. 71–78). Reading: Garnet Education.



- Johnstone, R. (2009). *An early start: What are the key conditions for generalized success?* In J. Enever, J. Moon, & U. Raman (Eds.), *Young learner English language policy and implementation: International perspectives* (pp. 31–41). Reading, England: Garnet Education.
- Kuchah, H. (2013). *Context-Appropriate ELT pedagogy: An investigation in Cameroonian primary schools*. University of Warwick.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2011). *Language teacher education for a global society: A modular model for knowing, analyzing, recognizing, doing, and seeing*. Abingdon, England: Routledge
- Larsen-Freeman, M., & Long, M. (1991). *An Introduction to second language acquisition research*. Longman.
- Lie, A. (2017). English and identity in multicultural contexts: Issues, challenges, and opportunities. *TEFLIN Journal*, 28(1), 71–92
- Li, D. F. (1998). It's always more difficult than you plan and imagine: Teachers' perceived difficulties in introducing the communicative approach in South Korea. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32(4), 677–703.
- Mart, C.T. (2012). Encouraging young learners to learn English through stories. *Canadian Center of Science and Education*, 5 (5), 101-106.
- Mathew, R., & Pani, S. (2009). *Issues in the implementation of teaching English for young learners (TEYL): A case study of two states in India*. In J. Enever, J. Moon, & U. Raman (Eds.), *Young learner English language policy and implementation: International perspectives* (pp. 113–120). Reading, England: Garnet Education
- Mee, C. Y. (2003). *English language teaching in Singapore today*. In W. K. Ho & R. Y. L. Wong (Eds.), *English language teaching in east Asia today: Changing policies and practices* (pp. 351–374). Singapore: Eastern Universities Press.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. (2nd ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mutiah, S. D., Nakhriyah, M., HR, N. H., Hidayat, D. N., & Hamid, F. (2020). The readiness of teaching English to young learners in Indonesia. *Jurnal Basicedu*, 4(4), 1370-1387.
- Nguyen, C. D. (2017). Creating spaces for constructing practice and identity: Innovations of teachers of English language to young learners in Vietnam. *Research Papers in Education*, 32(1), 56-70.
- Nicholas, B., Avram, A., Chow, J., & Lupasco, S. (2018). Building a community of connected ELT professionals on Twitter. *TESL Canada Journal*, 35(2), 166–178. <https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v35i2.1296>
- Nilsson, M. (2024). Challenges and teaching materials in English for young learners in Sweden. *Educare*, (3), 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.24834/educare.2024.3.941>
- Nunan, D. (1999). Does younger = better? *TESOL Matters* 9 (3): 3.
- Nunan, D. (2003). The impact of English as a global language on educational policies and practices in the Asia-Pacific region. *TESOL Quarterly*, 37, 589–613. doi:10.2307/3588214
- O'Dowd, R., & Dooly, M. (2022). Exploring teachers' professional development through participation in virtual exchange. *ReCALL*, 34(1), 21–36. doi:10.1017/S0958344021000215
- Pandian, A. (2003). *English language teaching in Malaysia today*. In W. K. Ho & R. Y. L. Wong (Eds.), *English Language Teaching in East Asia Today: Changing Policies and Practices* (pp. 269–292). Singapore: Eastern Universities Press
- Prapaisit de Segovia, L., & Hardison, D. M. (2008). Implementing education reform: EFL teachers' perspectives. *ELT Journal* 63(2), 154–162.
- Patton. M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Phillips, S. (2000). *Young learners*. Oxford University Press.
- Pinter, A. (2011). *Children learning second languages*. Berlin: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230302297>
- Puskas, A. (2016). *The challenges and practices of teaching young learners*. Komarno: J. Selye University Faculty of Education.
- Richards, J. C. (2015). *The changing face of language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Rokita-Jaskow, J. (2008). Training foreign language teachers of young learners in Poland: Principles and Problems. *New trends in English teacher education*, 213-222.
- Scott, W. A., & Ytreberg, L. H. (1990). *Teaching English to children*. London: Longman.
- Shin, J. K. (2000). *Teaching English to young learners*. University of Maryland.



- Straková, Z. (2015). Challenges of teaching English at primary level. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 174, 2436-2443.
- Şener, S., & Çokçalışkan, A. (2017). English language teachers' perceptions on professional development: A case study of in-service teachers in Muğla. *ELT Research Journal*, 6(2), 205-217.
- Şişman, B. (2024). *Interactional speech modification strategy use of teachers of young EFL learners* (Unpublished master's thesis). Yeditepe University, Institute of Educational Sciences, İstanbul.
- Wenny, S. J., & Bansa, Y. A. (2021). Teaching English to young learners through short stories: Why and how. *Journal of Language Education and Development*, 3(1).
- Yin R. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Zein, M. S. (2017). Elementary English education in Indonesia: Policy developments, current practices, and future prospects: How has Indonesia coped with the demand for teaching English in schools? *English Today*, 33(1), 53–59.
- Zein, S. (2018). *Classroom management for teaching English to young learners*. In S. Garton & F. Copland (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Teaching English to Young Learners*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 154-168.
- Zou, D., Huang, Y., & Xie, H. (2021). Digital game-based vocabulary learning: Where are we and where are we going? *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 34(5-6), 751-777.

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

