



Blended Learning in Teaching EFL to Different Age Groups

Maria V. Arkhipova¹(✉), Ekaterina E. Belova¹, Yulia A. Gavrikova¹,
Natalya A. Lyulyaeva¹, and Elina D. Shapiro²

¹ Nizhny Novgorod State Pedagogical University named after Kozma Minin
(Minin University), Nizhny Novgorod, Russian Federation
arhipovnn@yandex.ru, natachaluna@yandex.ru,
belova_katerina@inbox.ru, y.a.gavrikova@mail.ru

² Nizhny Novgorod State Linguistic University named N.A. Dobrolyubov,
Nizhny Novgorod, Russian Federation
shapiro_elina@mail.ru

Abstract. The article investigates how blended learning inspires students of different ages to be more motivated in the process of acquiring receptive and productive foreign language skills. The authors analyze the neurobiological and psychological characteristics of various age groups of people learning a foreign language. The results of this analysis lead to the conclusion that the age of a student is a defining factor of the necessity of information technologies use in the learning process. The authors argue that the younger the learners are the more IT-oriented they are. It means that neglecting new technology in teaching a foreign language to children, teenagers and young adults is not an option any more. Older students used to traditional methods of teaching a foreign language appreciate the use of online resources and tools. The combination of student-centered methods and modern technology is the quintessence of blended learning which serves as an effective teaching tool for EFL students.

Keywords: Blended learning · IT-technologies · Age groups · Teaching EFL
Electronic course · Online resources · Foreign language skills

1 Introduction

Being the international language English is widely used as a means of communication in the international relationship and commonly used in all branches of knowledge. This fact made it necessary to include English into school curriculum starting from the primary level. Nowadays the study of English as a foreign language (hereinafter EFL) by young children in Russia is definitely on the rise. The demand for English among adults is huge too. Among teenagers there is a need for English when taking various examinations as it represents a contribution factor, whereas among adults to know and improve English skills constitutes an additional opportunity for promotion and career development. An effective learning environment for children and adults is sure to be different. Thus, methods, and techniques applied to teaching dissimilar learning groups

are entirely different propositions and should be based on diverse approaches, biological and psychological aspects related to age impact.

As pointed by Asl and Valipour (2015) age plays a crucial role in what to teach and how to teach it, since a young learner class is different from an adult or a teenager class in terms of the learners' language learning needs, the language competences emphasized, and the cognitive skills addressed. Harmer (2007) emphasizes that learner groups are to be kept in mind in the process of teaching as well as the fact that every learner is unique.

In accordance with this fact the goal of our study is to provide theoretical bases on teaching English as a foreign language to different age groups. The following questions constitute the foundation of our research: (1) What are the differences of teaching EFL to different age groups in terms of biological and psychological aspects? (2) Can blended learning promote students' motivation towards learning a language?

2 Theoretical Fundamentals of the Research

Teaching English to young learners at elementary and secondary school is different from that to adults, the main differences of which being the following:

(1) Language perception

Children perceive messages better if they are presented in natural chunks and language-acquisition theory bears this out. The necessity to break these chunks into individual pieces is of much less relevance for children than for adult learners, because (a) children are more accepting and tend not to analyze, and (b) children's ability to mimic is extremely good (Abe 1991). On the contrary, adults can engage with meta-language and can talk about abstract issues (Harmer 2007).

Junior students have weak capacity for memorizing the material, first of all, lexical. The more complicated the training material is, the slower the educational process becomes.

(2) Attention span

Ruff and Lawson (1990) point out that the time spent consciously on doing a task is different according to different ages. Children have a short attention span; the amount of time they can concentrate and focus on learning materials varies from 5 to 10 min after which they can easily get bored (Harmer 2007). Dukette and Cornish (2009) state the range of concentration of about 5 min for a two-year-old child, to 20 min of teenagers. Adults have a longer concentration span to continue an activity and are more self-disciplined.

(3) Styles of learning

Children understand better when they interact, touch, hear, and see. Flash cards, pictures, various objects and realia, games make lessons alive and resemble more closely the outside world. According to Harmer (2007), adults can benefit from their abstract thought, life experiences; they have expectations about the learning process and their individual patterns of learning.

(4) Attitude to mistakes

Children, as a rule, are sociable and learn a foreign language more quickly without worrying about their mistakes. In comparison with children, most adults care about being corrected and this makes them feel anxious and, therefore, leads to avoiding speaking a foreign language in public (Asl and Valipour 2015).

Some students' fear to make a mistake in case of extremely demanding teachers, who reduce the mark for any tiny slip/mistake, complicates the educational process. It is especially unacceptable with pupils, because this attitude of teachers' may lead to the students' antipathy to the subject, namely, the English language.

(5) Motivation

Adults for the most part are highly motivated. They attend classes of their own free choice usually at some personal and financial sacrifice. They lack the uninhibited enthusiasm of small children (K.S. Joan).

The latest research in Russia in the field of motivation has revealed its continuing decline. At primary school children are eager to learn a foreign language (I.N. Andreeva, I.A. Zimnyaya, and I.B. Minayeva). But later the accumulation of the basic material and overcoming various difficulties reduce their counter activity. Psychophysiological characteristics of teenagers (the fear of making a mistake, the lassitude provoked by the uniformity of lessons presentation manner) contribute significantly to motivation reduction. The research of students' motivational aspect, related with the foreign language study, also shows the process of its permanent decline (M.V. Arkhipova, I.L. Belykh, L.V. Garibova, N.N. Kasatkina, and N.V. Shutova). The scientists have stated a sharp decline in the sphere of motivation for foreign language education among university students as well. First and second year University students demonstrate a high level of anxiety when studying foreign languages. Oral speech and the likelihood of making mistakes represent the most widespread stressors (E.A. Sedova). Third year students consider the possibility of negative consequences in case of failure as the dominant factor while learning a foreign language (M.V. Arkhipova, I.A. Bakhtina, E.A. Sedova, and N.V. Shutova). After conducting the research in the sphere of students' motivation for foreign languages learning we have revealed a similar tendency both among school and university students.

The dependence of studying on motivation was validated by multiple treatises (V.G. Aseev, L.I. Bozhovich, V.K. Vilunas, V.S. Ilyin, A.N. Leyontiev, A.K. Markova, A. M.Mateshkin, Y.I. Meshkov, A.A.Rean, P.V.Simonov, V.A. Yakunin and other disquisitions). The studies revealed the capacity of motivation to represent the compensatory factor in case of lacking aptitude. Meanwhile, even the paramount abilities fail to recompense the lack or low level of motivation for studying, thus being a stub track to success in education.

Taking into consideration all the above mentioned differences, it is of vital significance to find appropriate teaching methods for children and adults with respect to their biological and psychological capabilities.

The question of methods of teaching English as a foreign language has always attracted attention of scholars. Recent studies show that language learners may benefit when the process of language learning includes *blended learning*.

According to the empirical research (S. Fridman), the traditional lecture has proved to be inefficient in today educational environment. Having studied the so-called Internet generation's attitude to such traditional educational form as lecture, S.G. Krylova (2015) discovered that the strongest stimulus to attend lectures is the necessity to follow teachers' or educational establishment rules and regulations. Academicians attend more willingly the lectures supported by electronic presentations and gladly accomplish the tasks involving interactivity.

One of the urgent tasks of foreign language tuition has become the introduction of blended learning. The term *blended learning* means the combination of online digital media use with traditional classroom methods. Only blended learning is able to satisfy the needs and requirements of today education. Teachers' irresponsiveness to the necessities of current education requirements puts at risk the efficiency and effectiveness of the teaching/learning process as a whole, creating a growing gap between a teacher and a student, between a trainee and a mentor.

3 Methodology of the Research

The material for the research has been collected for many years of teaching a foreign language. The descriptive methodology was used as the main tool. It was carried out in the forms of observation and survey.

The first stage included study and analysis of various literature on methods of teaching English as a foreign language to children and adults with respect to their biological and psychological characteristics. In the second stage the survey results were studied and compared. These two stages lead to their subsequent conclusion and definition of the prospective and potential research.

4 Analysis of Survey Results

The aim of blended learning approach consists in ascertaining a harmonious balance between the traditional in-class education, online access to the lessons and independency of the foreign language studying process. The use of online digital media is based on visualization, which helps to activate all the analyzers and connected with them mental processes of sensation, perception and analysis. As a result, a rich empirical basis arises for cumulatively analytical mental activity not only of children but adults as well. Online resources give access to authentic materials and native speakers' oral and written practices, which is crucial for communicative and other skills training. Online authentic resources appeal to both students and professors due to certain characteristics: demonstrativeness; structured and laconic character of the theoretical material or lesson content; familiar and user-friendly interface; simplicity of the usage; up-to-date authentic content allowing the necessary or required skills development; and independent or individual learning.

Some of the features should be dwelt upon at length.

The human's mind receives its nourishment primarily from visual rather than verbal sources, and visualization is rightly considered one of the underlying principles in the

process of education. A narrative rendered in visual images attracts all ages, especially junior students. The blended learning method is of great help here, as it may keep you from droning the material to the class or group. Instead, they make the class more interesting and stimulate students' imagination. Complete visual images and sophisticated ideas are provided while giving the teacher time to organize their discussions. They also have controversial topics and present a myriad of viewpoints. The teacher can gradually expand not only viewing time and attention span, but also analytical abilities.

The use of IT-technologies being an integral part of the blended learning method may be extremely beneficial for computer-minded students and those, who are passive at the lesson. Their passive participation in the educational process is conditioned by their inferiority complex, their extreme shyness to ask questions in front of their groupmates in case they do not understand something.

The study revealed the following sample tips of developing an electronic course:

1. The modularity principle presupposes splitting the material into sections consisting of modules that are closed in content; what is equal to children's easiest perception of material in chunks.
2. The principle of completeness means the presence of a theoretical core, control questions, tasks and exercises for independent solution, control tests with answers, references and comment;
3. The principle of regulation, which gives the student the ability to independently control the course, thus making it possible for the learner to feel comfortable;
4. The principle of adaptability signifies that the course allows adaptation to the needs of a particular user in the process of learning activities, variation of the depth and complexity of the material studied, as well as its applied orientation which depends on the future specialty of the student.

Blended learning has certain evident advantages because (1) students are confronted with electronic devices almost from birth nowadays, (2) they have learned to read the sophisticated visual language but have not developed the cognitive ability to distinguish the real world from the virtual one, (3) students who have been exposed to electronic devices are one year ahead of their unexposed peers in vocabulary, (4) students exposed to electronic devices have a fragmented and confused idea of reality and a shorter attention span.

In order for students to develop cognitively it is necessary for them to be able to interpret things they encounter in the real world. It is also necessary for teachers not to foster the misconception that school is only a socializing experience. In order for the school to be a humanizing experience, it is necessary to return to the primary duty of teaching the younger generation via the powers of the subject how to remain human despite dehumanizing elements in their environment. To do this, teachers should explore the world that the students live in every day. It is not necessary to like *The Sponge Bob*, but it is necessary to know who he is and why he is a superhero. An approach to incorporating blended learning into a classroom does not need to do away with the traditional method, but a teacher has to invest more time and pay careful attention to how all material is to be used.

The humanizing experience can be obtained with the atmosphere of trust between the teacher and the learner. If they expect the teacher to refuse, criticize their impressions or opinions and their expectations come true, the teacher is likely to fail to ever feel their further respond to the material offered in any format. If the students feel that the teacher expects only his/her own viewpoint to be supported, the class will be counterproductive. Teachers will have to learn to take it into consideration and make the process of teaching student-oriented.

5 Conclusions

Information and computer technologies, which play a growing part in current educational process and stimulate research, represent one of the most efficient ways of educational environment organization. They allow academic process participants to reap the benefits of modern electronic educational sphere by using the latest pieces of research in diverse domains and formats, trying collaborative activities which significantly boost motivation and introduce personalized approach into learning. Information and computer technologies facilitate communication between trainees and mentors. Furthermore, the blended learning method intensifies various grammar and speaking activities forming deep and reliable skills. Introducing the latest IT forms and achievements within the blended learning method into the class boosts students' motivation and creativity.

Thus, we see the prospect of our further studies in conducting an experiment with the aim to research the impact of the blended learning method on the process of teaching EFL to different age groups. The experiment is supposed to provide evidence supporting our hypothesis: if to organize the process of teaching that will meet biological and psychological needs of different age students' groups, it is possible to increase motivation to learn a foreign language, influence students' performance so that it could enhance academic achievements.

References

- Abdulova, E.V., Krylova, S.G., Minyurova, S.A., Rudenko, N.S.: Virtual educational environment – a means of intercultural interaction. In: Okushova, G.A. (ed.) *Connect-Universum – 2014: Collection of the Materials of the 5th International Scientific and Practical Internet Conference*, pp. 46–50. Tomsk State University, Tomsk (2015)
- Arkhipova, M.V., Zhernovaya, O.R.: Experimental study of the peculiarities of training motivation of modern pupils during studying foreign languages. *Hist. Socio-Educ. Thought* **8** (6–1), 177–179 (2016)
- Belova, E.E., Minasyan, V.A.: Regarding easy and difficult languages. In: Belova, E.E. (ed.) *Theoretical and Practical Aspects of Linguistics, Literature Study, and Methodology of Foreign Languages Teaching: Collection of Articles on the Materials of the International Scientific and Practical Conference*, 15 April 2015, pp. 11–18. Minin University, Nizhny Novgorod (2015)

- Gavrikova, Y.A.: Meliorative communicative strategies as a mechanism of influencing the complex axiological vocabulary. *Bull. N.I. Lobachevsky Nizhny Novgorod Univ.* **6**, 347–352 (2010)
- Lyulyaeva, N.A.: Algorithmization of foreign languages teaching in higher school. Problems of modern pedagogical education. Series: Pedagogics and psychology. Collection of scientific articles: Yalta: RIO GPA, (55). – P. 11. pp. 63–73 (2017)
- Filippova, S.Y., Shapiro, E.D.: Certain results of the experiment on implementation of blended learning in N.A. Dobrolyubov NNLU. In: Bwlova, E.E. (ed.) *Language and Language Education in the Modern World: Collection of Articles on the Materials of the International Scientific and Practical Conference*, 13 April 2016, pp.266–268. Minin University, Nizhny Novgorod (2016)
- Abe, K.: Teaching english to children in an EFL setting. *J. Teach. Engl. Outs. United States* **XXIX**(4), 6–7 (1991). *English Teaching Forum*, 11
- Asl, H., Valipour, V.: Teaching english as a foreign language to persian children vs. adults. *Indian J. Fundam. Appl. Life* **5**(S1), 5199–5204 (2015)
- Harmer, J.: *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, 4th edn. Pearson Longman, Essex (2007)
- Hobbs, R.: Measuring the impact of media education on student skills and teacher performance. In: *Forum International de Recherchers “Les Jeune et les medias demain. Problematiques et Perspectives”*, p. 25. UNESCO-GRREM, Paris (1997)
- Hobbs, R.: Media literacy’s effect on viewing motivations. *Telemidium J. Media Lit.* **46**(1), 15 (2000)
- Joan, K.S.: *Teaching English to Young Learners*, 62 p. English Language Center University of Maryland, Baltimore County
- Masterman, L.: A Rational for Media Education. *Media Literacy in the Information Age*, pp. 15–68. Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick and London (1997)
- Kaznacheeva, S.N., Bondarenko, V.A.: Specifics of motivation learning a foreign language by students of non-language directions in Minin University. *Bull. Minin Univ.* **3**, 1 (2016)
- Ruff, H.A., Lawson, K.R.: Development of sustained, focused attention in young children during free play. *Dev. Psychol.* **26**(1), 85–93 (1990)
- Dukette, D., Cornish, D.: *The Essential 20: Twenty Components of an Excellent Health Care Team*. RoseDog Books, pp. 72–73 (2009)