



Techniques Used by EFL Teachers While Teaching Children English: A Case on Primary School Level

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الأساليب التي يستخدمها معلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية عند تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية للأطفال

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Received: November 10, 2024

Accepted: January 06, 2025

Published: January 18, 2025

Abstract:

This study is set to investigate the techniques employed by EFL teachers when teaching English to kids. For the sake of the study, a questionnaire is designed to investigate the problem in question. The questionnaire was then administered to 10 primary school teachers who have been teaching EFL to kids for a number of years. The quantitative data was collected and analysed by descriptive statistics and results were obtained. One finding of the study is that the most commonly used techniques by the teachers in the classroom are those of the Grammar Translation approach. The findings of the study also demonstrate that most participants neglected using the target language as a medium of instruction. Moreover, about 80% of the sample gave no emphasis to aural comprehension. On the whole, the focus of the teacher in the classroom is shifted from enabling learners to effectively and appropriately communicate in English to prolonged explanation of grammatical rules.

Keywords: Teaching Techniques, English as a Foreign Language, Teaching English to Children.

المخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استقصاء الأساليب التي يستخدمها معلمو اللغة الإنجليزية لتدريس الأطفال. ولغرض الدراسة، تم إعداد استبيان يحتوي على 10 فقرات لدراسة المشكلة المعنية، إرسالها إلى 10 مدرسين في المدارس الابتدائية الذين درسوا اللغة الإنجليزية للأطفال لعدة سنوات. وتم جمع البيانات الكمية وتحليلها عن طريق إحصاءات وصفية والحصول على جملة من النتائج. ومن بينها: أن أكثر التقنيات شيوعاً التي يستخدمها المدرسون في الفصول الدراسية هي التقنيات المستخدمة في طريقة (ترجمة القواعد)، كذلك بأن معظم المشاركين أهملوا استخدام اللغة المستهدفة كوسيلة من وسائل التدريس، وعلاوة على ذلك، فإن نحو 80 في المائة من العينة لم تولي أي اهتمام للاستيعاب السمعي. في المجمل، فقد تحول اهتمام المعلم في الصف من تمكين التلميذ من التواصل باللغة الإنجليزية بصورة فعالة ومناسبة الي الشرح المطول للقواعد اللغوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أساليب التدريس، اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية للأطفال.

Introduction

The growth of English as the world's most widely used and commonly spoken language has led to a significant increase in the demand for children to learn the English language. These children learn English as a foreign language.

Scott and Ytreberg (1990) highlight that there are distinct differences in the abilities of children aged 5 compared to those aged 10. They add some children develop early, some later. Some children experience steady development, while others progress in sudden, significant spurts. It is impossible to assert that all children, at a certain age, possess the ability to do X. However, it is possible to say that there are certain attributes of young children that teachers should consider in the classroom.

The world of adults widely differs from the world of children. Kids may not always comprehend what the grown-ups say. The difference is that adults usually find out by asking questions, but children they either pretend to understand or they understand on their own terms and do what they think the teacher wants them to do. In addition, young children love to play and learn while they are playing, and they are usually enthusiastic and positive about learning. They tend to take themselves seriously and enjoy believing that their actions are genuine. Since teaching and learning English is essential nowadays and teaching children differs widely from teaching adults (Diptoadi et al., 2018), conducting a study observing the ways and strategies used throughout the process of teaching EFL to children is important.

It has been shown that children and adults have distinct learning methods. This study is set to examine the common techniques employed by EFL teachers in the classroom while teaching English to children in primary schools in Libya and whether the techniques used by EFL teachers help EFL children. The results obtained in this study are thought to help direct teachers and course designers toward perfecting their tools in approaching English language learning results and helping young pupils get to the level of fluency and proficiency they aspire to.

Theoretical background

The characteristics of children

Teaching of English to children has been of particular concern. In teaching children English, there are some characteristics presented by Scott and Ytreberg (1990). Children aged 8-10, compared to children aged 5-7, possess certain attributes: they are more mature; they have a particular point of view; they are able to describe the difference between facts and fiction; they are curious about asking questions; they believe in what is said and the real world to express and comprehend meaning; they have distinct opinions about what they like and what they dislike; they are open to what happens in the classroom and begin questioning the teacher's decision. They can cooperate and learn from others. Scott and Ytreberg (1990) add that children, particularly those aged 8-10, are competent mother-tongue users. In this regard, they are aware of the basic linguistic rules of their mother tongue. At these ages, children can understand abstract concepts and symbols, generalize language, and organize it systematically. They can also interpret meaning without fully understanding the words. In teaching, it is often assumed that children learn a foreign language similarly to how they learn their native language.

Basically, children have the potential to acquire and learn a foreign language, and they even learn it more quickly than those who are learning the foreign language after puberty (McLaughlin, 1978 in Hashemi and Azizinezhad 2011).

Children tend to have shorter attention spans and a lot of physical energy. They are very attached to their surroundings and are more interested in the physical and the tangible phenomena. As Scott and Ytreberg (1990, p.2) describe, "Their own understanding comes through hands and eyes and ears. The physical world is dominant at all times."

Young learners get bored very soon and lose interest after a short period of time. In order to keep them engaged, it is necessary to supplement the activities with lots of brightly coloured visuals, toys, puppets, or objects. Language instructors can rely on these activities, to make the language input more enjoyable and comprehensible. Moreover, it is recommended that teachers keep children active and motivated by using a song, story, game, or a teacher-made activity in the method proposed by Asher (1977, in Hashemi and Azizinezhad 2011), known as Total Physical Response, children actively participate by listening and physically responding to a series of instructions or commands given by the teacher. The effectiveness of this method is enhanced when the activities are made enjoyable, this helps the children remember the language materials presented. Additionally, involving children in the creation of visual aids that are relevant to the lesson helps to engage them in the learning process. Given that young learners have limited attention spans, it is advisable to rapidly transition from one activity to another, spending no more than 10 minutes on each, as children tend to become easily bored. When teaching English to young learners using this method, it is possible to incorporate a variety of activities, songs, and stories that reinforce and recycle language throughout the unit. (Hashemi and Azizinezhad 2011)

The characteristics of language teachers who teach EFL to children

Hashemi and Azizinezhad (2011) assert that many researchers do believe that a successful language teacher of children should possess some characteristics as follows:

1. Needs to be energetic and patient.
2. Should have a genuine love for children.
3. Must recognize and cater to individual differences.
4. Should consistently provide encouragement.
5. Needs to highlight the beauty and utility of the language.
6. Should foster a love for both the teacher and the new language.
7. Must be knowledgeable about teaching techniques.
8. Should respect children as individuals.
9. Should begin teaching children at the earliest opportunity.

Teaching involves both intellectual and social aspects. It is also physical, emotional, practical, behavioural, political, experiential, historical, cultural, spiritual, and personal. In summary, teaching is highly complex, influenced by these 12 dimensions and possibly more. The complexity increases when focusing on language teaching, as it is shaped by teachers' perspectives on the nature of language, language teaching and learning in general, and their understanding of the specific sociocultural context in which teaching and learning occur. (Larsen- Freeman and Anderson 2011) Scrinever (2011) adds that 'traditional' teaching comes in many varieties, but the main feature is the teacher spends quite a lot of class time writing and explaining on the whiteboard as if 'transmitting' knowledge to the class. After the prolonged explanations, the students will do some exercise to ensure the point in question has been learned. This transmission view of the role of the teacher and students is widespread, and in many cultures is the predominant mode of education.

Teaching methods

The previous sections led us to the teaching methods that can be employed by teachers (Larsen- Freeman and Anderson 2011).

Grammar Translation Approach:

Grammar Translation approach believes that inexperienced persons have to be trained in the grammar of the target language (TL) and taught the way to translate literary texts from their native language to the target language or vice versa and this is how a learner learns TL.

The Direct Method:

In response to the shortcomings of Grammar Translation techniques, the Direct Method was developed. This approach emphasizes learning a foreign language by immediately conveying meaning in the target language through demonstrations and visual aids, with minimal reliance on the students' native language. The Direct Method has a fundamental rule: translation is not permitted.

Communicative Language Teaching:

While studying the efficiency of learning the foreign language students, could speak or not, it came to light that scholars can produce sentences correctly in the classroom, but they cannot be confident enough to talk in the actual world. Thus, Communicative Language teaching became critical in teaching as its important goal is to talk within the TL.

Content-Based instruction:

The simple philosophy of Content-Based instruction is to use the target language to learn it rather than learn it to use it. In other words, it believes in teaching through communication rather for it, for instance, learning geography or faith in English. Though using suitable content material taken from various disciplines, content material-based teaching exposes its students to the system of language, no longer pre-decided linguistic content.

Methodology

The current study was conducted on EFL Libyan teachers to investigate the techniques they employ when teaching English at the primary school of Day Al-Hilal. All of them, have been teachers of English as a foreign language for a number of years. A number of 10 teachers volunteered to answer the study questionnaire. All of the teachers were female teachers. All of them were Libyan teachers with the same background, which is important to the study. So, this way, the researcher guaranteed that the sample is homogeneous. The choice of the sample was made for no reason other than to study the teachers' perceptions and thoughts on the techniques and methods employed to teach EFL.

A questionnaire was chosen as the study instrument. As Mackey and Gass (2005) illustrate in their book, questionnaires have the ability to gather information that participants are able to report about themselves such as beliefs, motivations, and thoughts. They also add that one type of questionnaire is a close-ended questionnaire which is characterised by a greater uniformity of measurement and therefore greater reliability. They also have the advantage of being easily quantified and analysed. On the previous account and based on the theoretical background a questionnaire was constructed to gather information on classroom methods and techniques adapted by the EFL teachers who teach children. A multiple-choice close-ended questionnaire was constructed. It was made of ten items.

Analysis and discussion of the study

Each item on the questionnaire was analysed, then graphs were drawn accordingly. The following is a detailed analysis of the items on the questionnaire.

1. *When teaching young children EFL to kids, the main focus of the lesson is:*
 - a. *Grammatical rule*
 - b. *memorizing list of vocabulary*
 - c. *developing oral ability and understanding sentence structure*

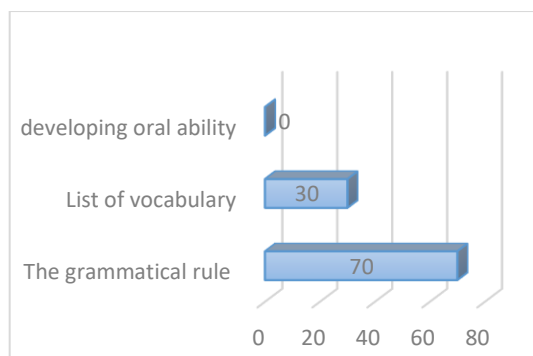


Figure 1: The main focus of the lesson according to the EFL teacher

The main focus of the teachers in the classroom is the grammatical rules and memorizing vocabulary. 0% of EFL teachers' attention is devoted to developing oral ability.

2. The teaching of English as EFL is done entirely in English, the main focus is on correct pronunciation.

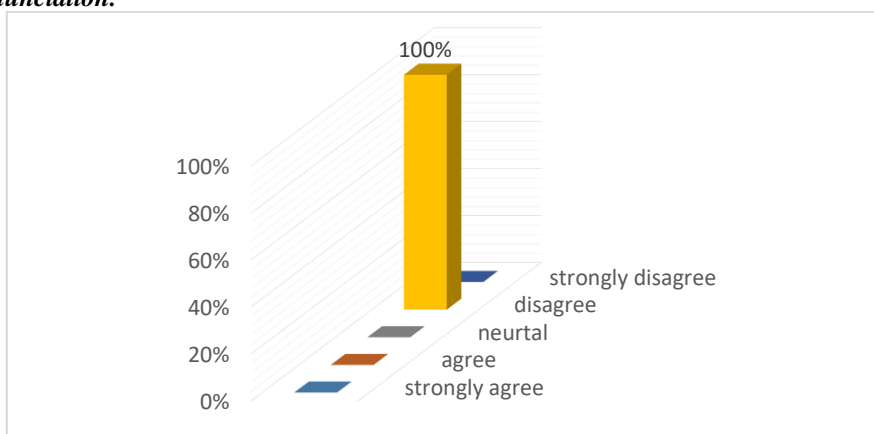


Figure 2: EFL teachers' attitude to correct pronunciation.

The correct pronunciation is not of concern to teachers. The instructions are not done in English.

3. Grammar rules are the main focus in the classroom.

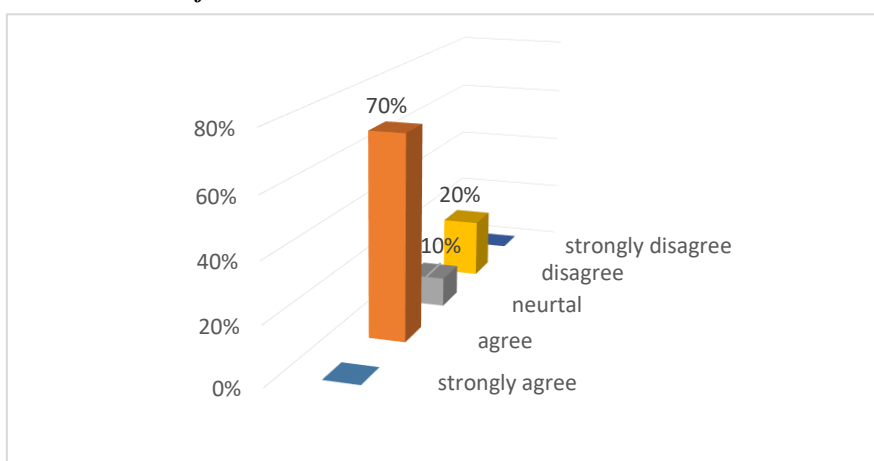


Figure 3: EFL teachers' attitudes to teaching grammar.

70% of teachers believe that grammar is the main focus of the EFL course.

4. English language is drilled into kid's minds before they can write the exact same thing.

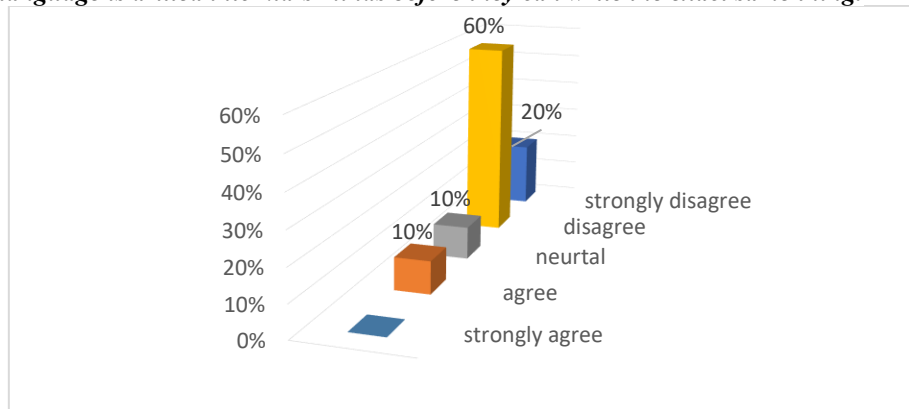


Figure 4: EFL teachers' attitudes to drilling EFL before writing it.

Only 10% concerned themselves with oral drills, and consequently trained their students in writing in the English language.

5. Kids are asked to practice dialogues in each and every situation. Sometimes small dialogues, sometimes big dialogues. In this way, they absorb a habit of talking in the target language.

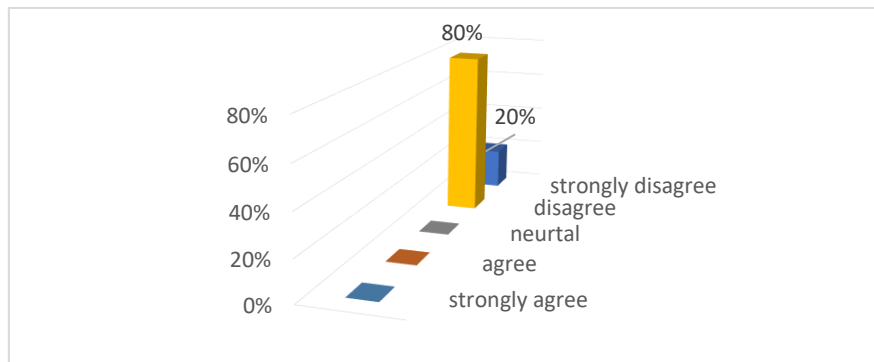


Figure 5: EFL teachers' attitudes to practice dialogues.

All the participant's focus is not directed toward dialogues or aural-oral practice in the target language.

6. Children are introduced to the complex concept of grammar rules. These rules need to be learned one at a time and in a particular order.

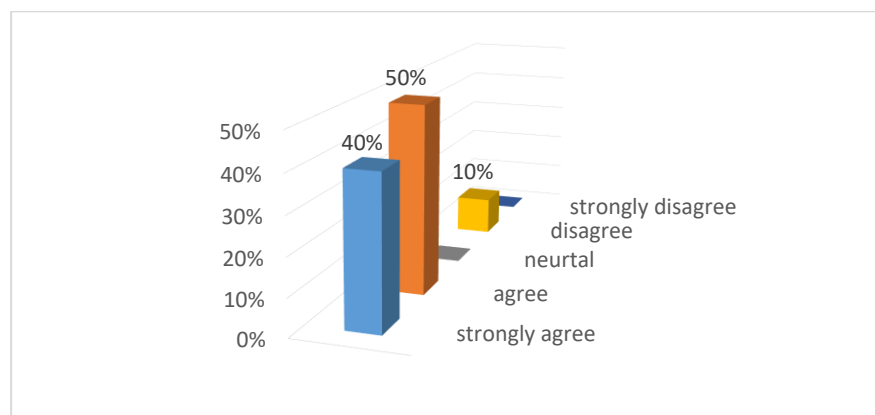


Figure 6: EFL teachers' attitudes to the teaching grammar procedure.

90% of the participants recognize the importance of grammatical rules. Only a small number gives less weight to grammar rules.

7. *The teacher puts more emphasis on aural comprehension rather than writing. The pupils are observed to check whether they can respond to simple commands such as “Stand Up”, “Close Your Book”.*

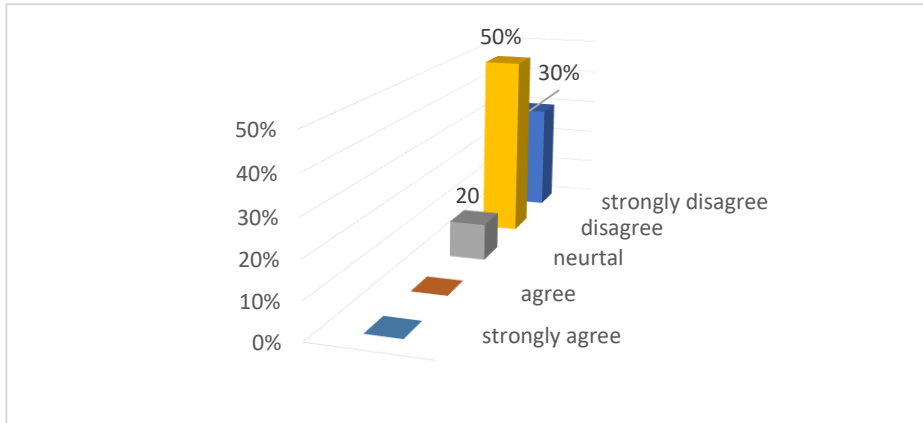


Figure 7: EFL teachers' attitudes to aural comprehension.

80% of teachers objected to the statement. Kids' aural understanding is not of concern to them.

8. *The focus of the teacher in the classroom is to enable the kids or generally the learners to communicate effectively and appropriately. They can learn to invite, suggest, complain, use notions, express emotions, time, quantity and location.*

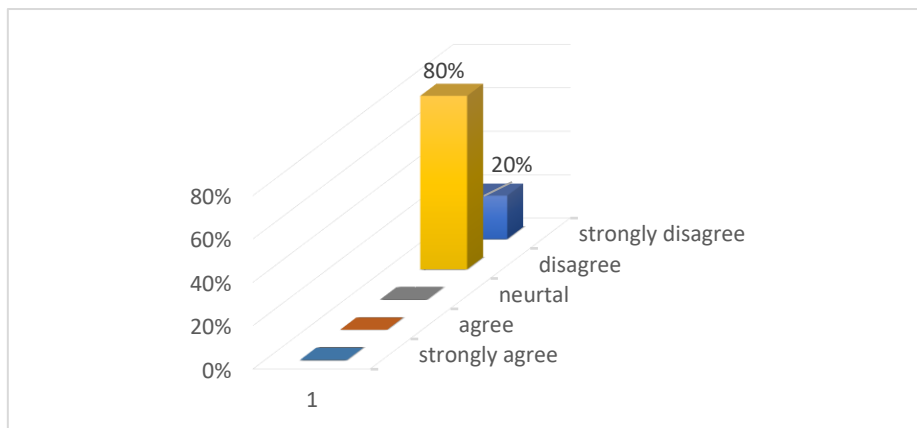


Figure 8: EFL teachers' attitudes to communication skills.

All participants' responses to this item ranged from disagree to strongly disagree. Therefore, we can confidently assert that communication in the target language is not of importance to EFL teachers.

9. *While teaching EFL to kids, the activities are planned around physical and tangible material presented in the classroom.*

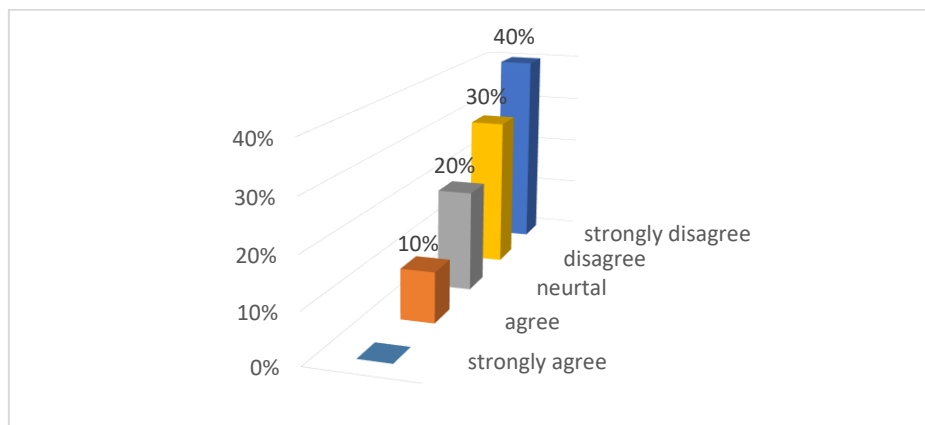


Figure 9: EFL teachers' attitudes toward using the material in the classroom.

10. *In EFL class, the classroom is supplemented with activities with lots of brightly coloured visuals, toys, puppets, or objects. Using these activities, a language teacher can make the language input enjoyable and comprehensible as well.*

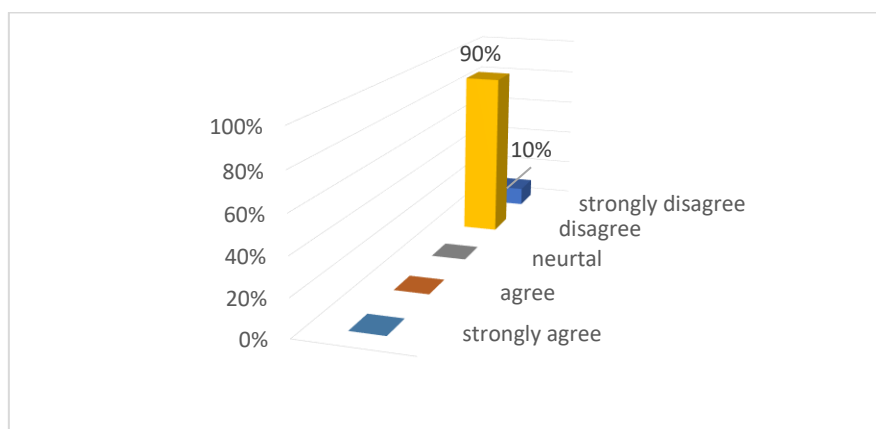


Figure 10: EFL teachers' attitudes to the use of coloured and children-appealing activities.

Although tangible materials, songs and colours are very important to kids (see page 4) because these things are in their circle of interest, almost all teachers failed to give them sufficient focus. As it is presented in the theoretical background, that kids learn better when presented with things that interest them. The sample failed to meet the children's interests and needs. 70% and 10% of teachers on Items 9 and 10, respectively, failed to use suitable material for the age group in question.

Results and recommendations

- 1) The main focus of EFL teachers teaching kids is grammatical rules and vocabulary; while the main concern of young children is to play and they learn as they are playing.
- 2) Almost all participants agree on neglecting to use the target language as a medium of instruction or to correct the learners' pronunciation.
- 3) The vast majority of the sample (about 80%) avoid drilling the target language into the kids' minds. Accordingly, no attention is given to practicing or using dialogues in the classroom. On the whole, children do not get to absorb the habit of talking in the TL which is quite unfortunate since it is the ultimate goal of the teaching-learning process.
- 4) The findings also demonstrate that almost 80% of teachers do not emphasize aural comprehension. Such pupils are not trained to respond to simple commands such as "stand up" or "close the door".
- 5) According to the findings of the study, communication skills, developing the pupil's ability to invite, suggest, complain, use notions, express emotions, time, quantity, and location, seem to receive no focus from the part of an EFL teacher. None of the participants emphasize appropriate and effective communication.
- 6) Although children have shorter attention spans and a lot of physical energy (see page 3), almost 70% of participants avoid using activities planned around physical and tangible materials.
- 7) Moreover, given the age group in concern, the EFL classroom is not supplemented with brightly coloured visuals, toys, puppets; which fails to meet the kids' needs given the fact that EFL learners at this age are more concerned with their physical world and their understanding comes through hands, ears, and eyes (see page 4).
- 8) About 70% of the sample agree on giving grammar the utmost importance which is quite a serious alert to the researcher. This finding coincides with Scrinever's (2011) notes on these techniques "... in many cultures is the predominant mode of education". No attention is given to aural comprehension. The emphasis is put on grammar and written work. This finding also raises a further inquiry: whether EFL teachers' employed techniques in the classroom are of ignorance of modern language teaching method and techniques or are merely resulting from convenience reasons?

Some teaching tips for teachers

Adult educators might need to adjust their methods when teaching children. Currently, many language teachers who typically instruct adults are now teaching children, often without specialized training. Teaching English to children should be fun, engaging, repetitive, and easy to understand. Therefore, it's important to use suitable

methods and techniques for teaching English to young learners. There are some helpful ideas to incorporate into the language classroom (Hashemi and Azizinezhad 2011).

1. Use simple English during lessons.
2. Speak clearly and to the point.
3. Frequently use the board.
4. Incorporate fun language-learning games.
5. Maintain a sense of humor.
6. Allow them to listen to English music and watch cartoons.
7. Use CDs for pronunciation models if you're not a native speaker.
8. Bring real objects to class.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study revealed that EFL teachers in Libyan primary schools predominantly focus on grammatical rules and vocabulary, neglecting oral ability, correct pronunciation, aural comprehension, and communication skills. In short EFL Libyan teachers tend to use the Grammar-translation method. The findings indicate a lack of emphasis on using the target language as a medium of instruction and incorporating suitable materials and activities for young learners. This highlights the need for EFL teachers to adapt their methods to make learning English for children more engaging, fun, and suited to their learning characteristics.

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