

TEACHING READING SKILLS TO YOUNG LEARNERS: METHODS AND  
CLASSROOM PRACTICES

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**Annotation:** Reading is considered one of the most essential language skills in learning a foreign language, especially for young learners. In English as Foreign Language (EFL) contexts such as Uzbekistan, teaching reading to young learners requires the use of age-appropriate methods and effective classroom practices. This article aims to examine key methods used in teaching reading skills to young learners and to analyze practical classroom strategies that support reading development. The study is based on a qualitative review of existing literature and classroom practices commonly applied in primary education. The article also discusses challenges faced by teachers and suggests possible solutions within the Uzbek educational context.

**Key words:** reading skills, young learners, EFL, teaching methods, classroom practices, Uzbekistan.

**Annotatsiya:** O'qish chet tilini o'rganishda, ayniqsa yosh o'quvchilar uchun eng muhim til ko'nikmalaridan biri hisoblanadi. O'zbekiston kabi ingliz tili chet tili sifatida o'qitiladigan (EFL) muhitda yosh o'quvchilarga o'qishni o'rgatish yoshga mos metodlar va samarali sinf amaliyotlaridan foydalanishni talab etadi. Ushbu maqolaning maqsadi yosh o'quvchilarga o'qish ko'nikmalarini o'rgatishda qo'llaniladigan asosiy metodlarni ko'rib chiqish hamda o'qish rivojini qo'llab-quvvatlovchi amaliy sinf strategiyalarini tahlil qilishdan iborat. Tadqiqot boshlang'ich ta'limda keng qo'llaniladigan mavjud adabiyotlar va sinf amaliyotlarining sifatli tahliliga asoslangan. Shuningdek, maqolada o'qituvchilar duch keladigan muammolar muhokama qilinib, O'zbekiston ta'lim tizimi doirasida ularning mumkin bo'lgan yechimlari taklif etiladi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** o'qish ko'nikmalari, yosh o'quvchilar, EFL, o'qitish metodlari, sinf amaliyotlari, O'zbekiston

Reading plays a crucial role in the process of language learning. For young learners, reading is not only a linguistic skill but also a cognitive and developmental tool. Through reading, children develop vocabulary, pronunciation, comprehension, and critical thinking skills. In the context of

teaching English as a foreign language, reading helps learners understand language structures and use them meaningfully.

In Uzbekistan, English has become an important subject at primary school level due to educational reforms and globalization. English is introduced from early grades, which increases the responsibility of teachers to apply effective teaching strategies. However, teaching reading to young learners is often challenging because children have limited vocabulary, short attention spans, and different learning styles. Traditional teaching methods that focus only on memorization and translation are not effective for young learners. Instead, interactive, child-centered, and communicative approaches are required. Therefore, this article focuses on modern methods and classroom practices that can improve reading skills among young learners in EFL classrooms.

The main purpose of this article is to analyze methods of teaching reading skills to young learners and to describe effective classroom practices that can be applied in primary English classrooms in Uzbekistan.

**Characteristics of Young Learners:** Understanding the characteristics of young learners is essential for effective teaching. Young learners usually refer to children aged between 6 and 10 years. At this age, learners are still developing cognitively, emotionally, and socially.

Young learners learn best through:

- Visual materials
- Games and songs
- Stories and pictures
- Repetition and routine

They have strong imagination but limited ability to analyze abstract concepts. Therefore, reading lessons should be concrete, meaningful, and enjoyable. Motivation plays a key role, as children are more engaged when activities are fun and interactive.

Another important characteristic is that young learners learn language implicitly rather than explicitly. This means they acquire language naturally through exposure rather than through grammar explanations. As a result, reading instruction should focus on meaning and enjoyment rather than accuracy alone.

**The Nature of Reading Skills:** Reading is a complex process that involves decoding, word recognition, and comprehension. For young learners, reading begins with recognizing letters and sounds, then progresses to understanding words, sentences, and short texts.

There are several types of reading relevant to young learners:

- Phonics-based reading: focuses on letter-sound relationships
- Sight reading: recognizing common words without decoding
- Reading for meaning: understanding the message of the text

These types often work together in the reading process and should be taught in an integrated way.

Two main approaches to reading are commonly discussed:

- Bottom-up approach: learners start from letters and sounds and move to meaning
- Top-down approach: learners use background knowledge and context to understand the text

For young learners, a balanced approach combining both methods is considered most effective.

### Methods of Teaching Reading to Young Learners

**Phonics Method:** The phonics method is one of the most widely used approaches in teaching reading to young learners. It focuses on teaching the relationship between letters and sounds. This method helps learners decode unfamiliar words and improve pronunciation. In Uzbek classrooms, phonics is especially useful because learners are not exposed to English sounds outside the classroom. Teachers can use songs, chants, flashcards, and phonics games to make learning enjoyable.

**Whole Language Approach:** The whole language approach emphasizes learning language through meaningful texts rather than isolated sounds or words. Learners are encouraged to read stories, poems, and simple texts. This method helps young learners understand that reading is about meaning, not just pronunciation. However, it should be combined with phonics instruction for better results.

**Story-Based Learning:** Story-based learning is one of the most effective methods for teaching reading to young learners. Stories capture children's attention and stimulate imagination. They also provide meaningful context for vocabulary and grammar.

Teachers can use:

- ✓ Picture books
- ✓ Short stories
- ✓ Fairy tales

In Uzbekistan, using culturally familiar stories alongside English stories can help learners relate better to the content.

Effective classroom practices are essential for successful reading instruction.

**Reading Aloud:** Reading aloud by the teacher helps learners develop listening skills and correct pronunciation. It also models fluent reading.

**Shared Reading:** In shared reading, the teacher and students read together. This practice builds confidence and supports weaker learners.

**Use of Visual Aids:** Visual materials such as pictures, flashcards, and real objects help young learners understand the text better.

Interactive activities play a vital role in developing reading skills among young learners. At this stage, children learn best when they are actively involved in the learning process rather than being passive readers. Interactive reading allows learners to engage with the text, the teacher, and their peers, which improves comprehension and motivation. Activities such as matching words with pictures, sequencing story events, and answering simple comprehension questions help learners understand texts more effectively. In Uzbek EFL classrooms, these activities are especially useful because learners often have limited exposure to English outside school, and interaction helps reinforce language input. Games are also an important part of interactive reading. Word games, simple puzzles, and role-play based on short texts make reading enjoyable and reduce anxiety. When learners enjoy the activity, they are more willing to participate and take risks. Technology-based activities, such as interactive whiteboards or simple reading apps, can further support engagement if available. However, even without advanced technology, teachers can create interactive reading tasks using printed materials and group work.

The teacher plays a central role in the development of reading skills in young learners. Unlike adult learners, children depend heavily on the teacher's guidance, encouragement, and support. The teacher is not only a source of knowledge but also a facilitator who creates a positive learning environment. In reading lessons, the teacher selects appropriate materials, explains tasks clearly, and provides continuous feedback. In the Uzbek context, many young learners see the teacher as the main model of English use. Therefore, the teacher's pronunciation, intonation, and reading fluency significantly influence learners' reading development. A supportive and patient attitude helps learners feel confident and reduces fear of making mistakes. Teachers should also be sensitive to individual differences, as some learners progress faster than others. By using differentiated tasks and mixed-ability grouping, teachers can ensure that all learners benefit from reading activities. A well-organized classroom environment supports effective reading instruction. Young learners need a safe, friendly, and motivating atmosphere to develop reading skills successfully. A classroom that includes colorful posters, word walls, and reading corners encourages learners to interact with written English naturally. Even small changes, such as displaying students' work or labeling classroom objects in English, can increase exposure to print. Materials used for teaching reading should be age-appropriate and culturally relevant. Texts that reflect learners' interests and daily experiences are more engaging and easier to understand. In Uzbekistan, combining international English materials with locally adapted content can improve comprehension and motivation. Teachers should avoid texts that are too long or linguistically complex, as these may discourage young learners. Instead, short texts with clear visuals and simple language are more effective at early stages.

Despite the availability of various methods and practices, teachers face several challenges when teaching reading to young learners. One common challenge is limited vocabulary, which makes it difficult for learners to understand texts. Another issue is low motivation, especially when reading activities are repetitive or not engaging. Large class sizes and mixed-ability groups also create difficulties in managing reading lessons effectively.

In the Uzbek EFL context, limited instructional time and lack of authentic reading materials can further affect reading development. Some learners rely heavily on memorization rather than understanding, which slows progress. Teachers may also lack sufficient training in modern reading methodologies, leading to overuse of traditional techniques.

To address these challenges, teachers should adopt flexible and learner-centered approaches. Vocabulary should be taught through context, visuals, and repetition rather than direct translation. Reading activities should be varied and include games, stories, and collaborative tasks to maintain motivation. Using pair and group work can help manage mixed-ability classes and promote peer learning.

Teacher training programs should place greater emphasis on teaching reading skills to young learners. Providing teachers with practical strategies and ready-to-use materials can improve classroom practice. Schools should also support teachers by supplying age-appropriate reading resources. Even simple storybooks and printed materials can make a significant difference in reading instruction.

This article is based on a qualitative descriptive methodology. Relevant academic literature on teaching reading skills to young learners was reviewed and analyzed. In addition, classroom practices commonly used in primary EFL classrooms were examined. The focus was on identifying effective methods and strategies suitable for young learners in the Uzbek educational context. The study does not include experimental data but provides a theoretical and practical overview of reading instruction based on existing research and teaching experience.

Teaching reading skills to young learners is a complex but essential task in EFL education. Effective reading instruction requires an understanding of young learners' characteristics, the use of appropriate methods, and the application of engaging classroom practices. Methods such as phonics instruction, story-based learning, and interactive reading activities have been shown to support reading development effectively. In the context of Uzbekistan, where English is taught as a foreign language, teachers play a crucial role in creating meaningful and motivating reading experiences.

By adopting learner-centered approaches, using suitable materials, and addressing common challenges, teachers can significantly improve young learners' reading skills. Developing strong reading abilities at an early age not only supports language learning but also contributes to learners' overall academic success.

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