

# 1

# Teaching English to Young Learners around the World: An Introduction

## ■ Getting Started

This chapter will introduce you to teaching English to young learners (TEYL). You will learn about the growth of English as a global language, the advantages of early language learning, the various kinds of program models used around the world, some of the problems associated with TEYL, and various teaching practices that have been found to be effective in teaching English to young learners. You will have the opportunity to reflect on the readings and discuss key questions related to the chapter. To help you apply new knowledge, you will respond to written journal prompts and complete hands-on activities. You

will hear the voices of teachers in the field who share their experiences teaching English to young learners.



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## Think About It

Think about your own experiences studying English. How old were you when you began studying English? What challenges did you face? What would have happened if you had started at an earlier age?

Now think about any experiences you have had observing young learner classes or talking with children who are learning another language. What are their experiences? Do they enjoy their language classes? If so, why?

Over the past decade, the age of compulsory English education has been lowered in many countries. Why do you think this has occurred? Has the age of English education been lowered in your country? If yes, why do you think that has happened? If not, why do you think that is?

## Discovery Activity

### T-Chart of Benefits and Challenges

In the T-chart below, write down what you think are the benefits and challenges facing English language programs for young learners.

PLUS +	MINUS -
Benefits of early language learning programs	Challenges of early English language programs

## ■ Theory, Planning and Application

### Reasons for an Early Start

Although there are various points of view about the best time to begin English language instruction (see the discussion below), and minor differences in student age and program categories, the fact is that in most countries, children are learning English at younger and younger ages. In many countries, English is a compulsory subject in the early primary grades (Nikolov, 2009; Pinter, 2006). In a recent survey of EYL teachers from 55 countries around the world, Shin and Crandall (2011)

found that more than 50 percent of these countries introduced compulsory English language courses by third grade. Even in countries where families may choose the foreign language for their children to study, English is “overwhelmingly the first choice” (Garton, Copland, & Burns, 2011, p. 5). The growing demand for English, plus parents’ belief that English skills provide their children with a better education and better employment opportunities, have led to an increase in the number of EYL programs (Enever & Moon, 2009; Gimenez, 2009).

There are two major reasons for an early start in English:

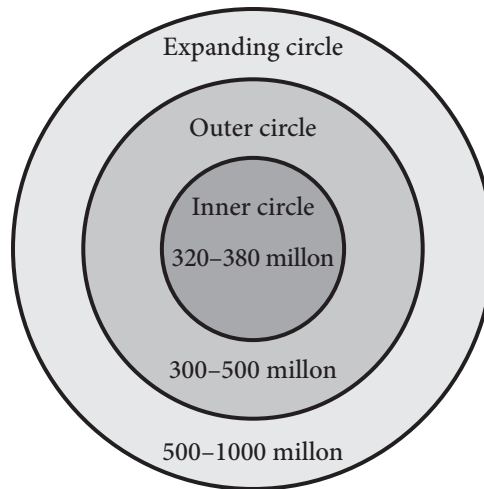
- The value of English for education and employment
- The benefits of early language learning

***The Value of English for Education and Employment*** Today, an estimated one billion or more people speak some English (Crystal, 2012). The number of people who are studying English increases every year, beginning at younger and younger ages.

About 400 million people have learned English as a first or native language and use English on a regular basis (Crystal, 2012). Most live in countries that Kachru (1990) calls “Inner Circle” countries, such as the United States, United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, Australia, or New Zealand, where English is the dominant language of education, government, and other institutions.

Another 300–500 million people live in “Outer Circle” countries (Crystal, 2012). “in which English has a long history and serves a variety of functions in education, government, literature, and popular culture” (McKay, 2002, p. 133). In the 70+ countries of the Outer Circle, which include India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Kenya, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Fiji, the populations have learned English as a second language (ESL) and have developed their own varieties of English.

But the largest number, estimated at 500 million to a billion English speakers (Crystal, 2012), live in what Kachru calls the “Expanding Circle.” In these countries, such as China, Korea, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Germany, Sweden, Chile, Brazil, or Mexico, English has no official function and opportunities to use English are usually only with those who do not share the same mother tongue. People in these Expanding Circle countries are studying English as a foreign language (EFL) or as an international language (EIL) because of the importance of English as a “lingua franca” or link language (a common language used by people who speak different languages) for business, media and communication, air and sea travel, and science and technology. English is increasingly used as a medium of instruction in higher education, and with international sporting events like the Olympics and the World Cup, English has become a major medium for tourism.



In all, according to Crystal (2012), there are three times as many nonnative speakers as there are native speakers of English. There are at least 350 million speakers of English in Asia alone—almost the combined populations of the United States, Canada, and Great Britain. At least 25 percent of the world’s population can communicate to some degree in English (Crystal, 2012, p. 69). It is truly a global language.

As English becomes the world’s lingua franca, countries all over the world have adopted English language instruction as part of their education system. Many countries begin at the primary level, and students are studying the language at younger and younger ages (Jenkins, 2009). New English-medium universities are being established in many countries to enable students and faculty to study the latest research and textbooks, which are often written in English. This requires students to develop academic English proficiency during their primary and secondary schooling. The global role of English differentiates the teaching of English as an international language from that of other foreign languages.

***The Benefits of Early Language Learning*** Early studies of second or foreign language learning argued that there was a “critical period” (Lenneberg, 1967; Penfield & Roberts, 1959), or a “critical” or “sensitive period” (Oyama, 1976), prior to puberty in which children could acquire native-like proficiency in a foreign language. That perspective found ready acceptance among adults who thought children could “pick up” a language easily, often remembering their own frustration at not having mastered another language. While there is evidence for the benefits of acquiring another language naturally (for example, when two parents each speak a different language to a child), there is little evidence to support the critical period hypothesis for learning a foreign language (Garton, Copland, & Burns, 2011; Nikolov & Mihaljevic Djigunovic, 2011; Pinter, 2006; Read, 2003). A recent review of research on the

critical period (Marinova-Todd, Marshall, & Snow, 2000, p. 10) concluded that adolescent learners are more efficient language learners (they have already acquired their mother tongue) and that they can learn a second language “to a very high level and that introducing foreign languages to very young learners cannot be justified on grounds of biological readiness to learn languages” (see also McLaughlin, 1984/1985).

However, a number of “language policy documents explicitly state the advantages of early language learning” (Nikolov & Mihaljevic Djigunovic, 2011, p. 98). For example, the European Commission identifies “better language skills” and “favorable attitudes to other languages, people and cultures” as benefits of early language learning, if conditions such as trained teachers and small classes are in place (Nikolov & Mihaljevic Djigunovic, 2011, p. 98).

As Rixon (1999) points out, what matters more than the optimal age are the conditions under which young learner programs are offered. These include conditions outside the classroom (for example, the social, cultural, and economic value of the language) and inside the classroom. Read (2003) suggests that younger is better when learning is:

- Natural
- Contextualized and part of a real event
- Interesting and enjoyable
- Relevant
- Social
- Belongs to the child
- Has a purpose for the child
- Builds on things the child knows but also challenges the child
- Supported appropriately
- Part of a coherent whole
- Multisensory
- Active and experiential
- Memorable
- Designed to provide for personal, divergent responses and multiple intelligences
- Offered in a relaxed and warm learning atmosphere

(Adapted from Read, 2003, p. 7)

In addition, it can create a “sense of achievement” (Read, 2003, p. 7).

With these optimal conditions in mind, then, there are a number of reasons for starting language learning early. These include:

1. The value of increased time
2. The possibility of better pronunciation and fluency

3. The possibility of greater global awareness and intercultural competence
4. The value of bilingualism

**1. The value of increased time** One reason for starting English in the primary grades is the amount of time that children will have to learn the language. As noted above, although some researchers believe that adolescents are more efficient language learners, younger learners simply have more time to learn the language, and time is an important factor in overall attainment (Carroll, 1975), as any adult who has tried to learn another language has discovered. As Curtain and Dahlberg (2010) state, “When language learning begins earlier, it can go on longer and provide more practice and experience, leading ultimately to greater fluency and effectiveness” (p. 428). However, duration is not enough. Intensity also matters. Children need the opportunity to learn English for more than two 30-minute periods a week.

**2. The possibility of better pronunciation and fluency** Moreover, some researchers have concluded that young learners are more likely to attain native-like pronunciation (Scovel, 1988), greater confidence in speaking the language, and better oral proficiency (Harley, 1998). These studies do not refute the possibility that older language learners can achieve native-like pronunciation or proficiency, but they suggest that younger learners may have an advantage. If children begin learning another language before age 11 or 12, and they are given appropriate instruction and input, they “are more likely to acquire English to native levels without an accent” (Pinter, 2006, p. 29). “Appropriate instruction” requires well-trained teachers with good English proficiency who can foster the creativity and imagination of young learners, taking advantage of children’s willingness to imitate or mimic what they hear and to repeat the language, especially if the activity is fun.

**3. The possibility of greater global awareness and intercultural competence** As the world gets smaller and more interconnected through the Internet and international travel, children have the opportunity to become global citizens. Through learning another language, children can gain an appreciation for other languages and cultures. The experience can also make them more aware and reflective of their own language and culture.

Many years ago, while evaluating a bilingual program in its first year, we talked with some children in the program and we will never forget when one little boy said, “I used to think that [another child] talked funny, but now I know that he’s Spanish.” That kind of cultural understanding may be the most important benefit of early language learning.

4. **The value of bilingualism: mental flexibility** Being bilingual provides many cognitive advantages. Even when children are only using one of their two (or more) languages, they have access to the other language(s) and to those neural networks (Bialystok, 1999). For young learners, especially, being able to speak another language provides a number of advantages such as mental flexibility, the ability to see a problem from different perspectives. It can also increase a child's self-awareness. As Marsh (2000) explains, "What we need to realize is that the ability to use different languages, even to a modest extent, can have a positive impact on the youngster's thinking processes. Being able to see the same phenomenon from different angles, as though looking through different language 'spectacles', can have a very interesting impact on our ability to think and understand" (p. 3).

## Planning for Success in EYL Programs

A number of factors can affect the success of an EYL program. As Pinter (2006) points out, these include the status of English in the country or region, the goals of English education, and the motivation for learning English. Perhaps the most important factors are:

- Effective EYL program models
- Appropriately trained EYL teachers
- Culturally appropriate materials
- Continuity of curriculum between primary and secondary English

***Effective EYL Program Models*** Although starting a language in early grades has many advantages, we cannot rely on an early start alone to increase the levels of English language proficiency of our students, nor even the selection of an appropriate program model. As Nunan (1999, p. 3) has reminded us, programs to teach English to young learners need to be "carefully planned, adequately supported and resourced, and closely monitored and evaluated."

Young learner programs may begin in any primary grade, and the number of classes and the number of hours per week may also vary. Some programs meet for 20–30 minutes, once a week. Others may meet every day for 30 minutes. In still other EYL programs, children are taught subjects such as science or mathematics in English for as much as a full day, every day. With these different amounts of time for study and use of English, children's proficiency in English will vary. Children who have 30 minutes of English once or twice a week, even if

they begin at age 6 or 7, are not likely to become bilingual by age 12. Those who use English as a medium of instruction for some of their school subjects will attain much deeper proficiency.

EYL programs can also take many forms, with different goals or objectives, depending on national and local educational policy, available resources, cultural preferences, attitudes toward English and the role of various languages in the country, and the language(s) spoken by children in the home. Consider the need for different program models in countries like India or Kenya, where English becomes the medium of instruction in later grades, and in countries like Japan or Brazil, where English is a foreign or international language.

Whatever the model, effective EYL programs are those that encourage interaction, provide engaging activities, and build positive attitudes toward English language learning. Some program models in the United States that are also adapted and used in other countries are described below. These include:

1. FLEX programs
2. FLES programs
3. Immersion programs
4. Dual-language or two-way immersion programs
5. Transitional and maintenance bilingual programs

**1. FLEX programs** FLEX (foreign language exploratory or experience) programs introduce children to different languages and cultures. Children receive short sessions in which they learn basic words or phrases in one or more languages, sometimes in a before- or after-school program. Through music, songs, and stories, they may learn the numbers, colors, and greetings in a foreign language, but the major goal of a FLEX program is to increase children's awareness of other languages and cultures and thus of their own. The focus is on exploring or experiencing languages, rather than developing proficiency in these languages (Met, 1991). FLEX programs can also create a high level of interest and motivate children to want to study a language.

**2. FLES programs** In FLES (foreign language in the elementary school) programs, children study one language as a regular school subject for up to 45 minutes a day, several times a week. The goal of a FLES program is to help children develop listening and speaking skills in another language, as well as some proficiency in reading and writing the language, especially in the later primary grades (4–6). Developing an appreciation of other cultures is also a typical goal of a FLES program. While there are a number of different FLES programs, all expect



children to study a language for at least two years, often throughout the primary grades. Through extended exposure to the language, children can develop some proficiency and also develop “basic language-learning skills” that will help them as they continue to study the language in secondary school (Haas, 1998, p. 44).

In content-based FLES or content-enriched FLES programs, content from other subjects from the school curriculum (mathematics, science, social studies) is taught in the foreign language. By focusing on both language and content, these programs (referred to more generally as content-based instruction, CBI, or content and language integrated learning, CLIL) offer the opportunity for learners to develop academic language and thinking skills in a meaningful context (Crandall, 2012). These programs usually also provide more time for language learning. Because of this increased time and the enriched content, learners in content-based FLES programs usually attain a higher level of language proficiency than learners in regular FLES programs (Reeves, 1989).

**3. Immersion programs** Language immersion programs, as the name suggests, immerse children in another language by using that language as the medium of instruction, at least for part of the school day. Unlike the programs discussed above, where English is a school subject, in immersion programs, English is the language of instruction for at least some courses. However, in effective (often referred to as additive) immersion programs, students retain their native language, and literacy in the native language is never abandoned or discarded.

In a total English immersion program, children study all of their subjects (except their own language) through English. In partial immersion programs, they may take half of their subjects in their own language and the other half in a foreign language. Some partial immersion programs begin with only a few subjects or hours of instruction in the foreign language and then gradually increase the number of subjects and the time in the foreign language in later grades. Some try to provide children with the opportunity to learn mathematics, science, and social studies in both the local and foreign language over the course of the six years. In some programs, children continue in an immersion program in secondary school. Additive immersion programs can begin at any age, even as late as secondary school, but most begin in the primary grades (Faulkner-Bond et al., 2011).

The goal of these immersion programs is for children to develop functional proficiency in another language (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2010) without loss of the native language. Additive immersion students, especially those who participate in “early” foreign language immersion (beginning at ages 5–7) can become very good at listening and reading in another language, and they do this without any

harm to their own language. As Harley (1998, pp. 29–30) says, “Studies have shown that immersion students, without detriment to their [first language] and subject matter learning, develop excellent listening and reading comprehension skills,” as well as very strong speaking and writing skills. As might be expected, the children who begin earlier generally achieve better listening and speaking skills.

**4. Dual-language or two-way immersion programs** In dual-language programs (also referred to as two-way bilingual programs), equal (or nearly equal) numbers of children who speak one language (for example, Spanish) and those who speak another language (for example, English) take some of their instruction through each language. Some programs begin with using one language 90 percent of the time in K–1, then gradually move to using each language 50 percent of the time in grades 2–6; others start using 50 percent of each and continue with that distribution throughout the program. The program may involve two teachers, each speaking one of the languages, or one teacher who carefully uses only the required language during each part of the school day. The goal of these programs is additive bilingualism, wherein children become bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate and retain their home or heritage language while they are learning another (Faulkner-Bond et al., 2011).

**5. Transitional and maintenance bilingual programs** The goal of a transitional bilingual program (also referred to as early-exit) is to help children transition from their first language into the language of schooling, usually after three years of bilingual instruction. Children begin with more instructional time in their first language, learning to read in that language, while they are also learning the new language. They also receive instruction in major subjects through both languages over time, helping to establish basic concepts in the first language, but also preparing for the switch to the language of instruction in upper grades. This program model does not support continued literacy or development of the native language after the initial years of native language use. It is subtractive in nature, in that continued development of literacy and academic learning in the native language is not a goal or expectation.

Unlike transitional bilingual programs, maintenance (also referred to as developmental or late-exit) programs continue to provide instruction through the first language for several (usually six) years of school. The goal of a maintenance bilingual program (as the name suggests) is to develop deep literacy and academic learning in the first language, while also providing increasing amounts of instruction through the second, so that by secondary school, children can make the transition to another language, though they may continue to study their

first or heritage language as a subject in secondary school (Faulkner-Bond et al., 2011; Met, 1991).

***Appropriately Trained EYL Teachers*** Educational research continually reminds us that the most important factor in any child's education is the teacher. Effective EYL programs have well-trained teachers with adequate proficiency in English to help their children learn English. Effective EYL teachers have appropriate training in teaching young learners, in teaching English, and in teaching through English (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, 2009). But with the growing number of EYL programs in the world, a major challenge is finding enough teachers or teacher training programs to prepare these teachers (Hu, 2005; Kirkgöz, 2009). Too often, EYL teachers have taught English to adolescents, but find themselves teaching young learners with no special training on how to teach children. Other times, EYL teachers are regular elementary classroom teachers and are assigned the added responsibility of teaching English, even if they do not feel comfortable using English (Curtain & Pesola, 2000; Garton, Copland, & Burns, 2011).

Most EYL programs are fortunate in having nonnative English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) who share the cultural backgrounds and educational expectations of their students and understand the contexts in which English is used in their communities and countries. Teachers who share their young learners' language and culture will understand the ways that children learn in that country and will also be able to make connections between what is learned in the EYL class and what is learned in the children's other classes. Some programs also have native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) who can complement the teaching of the NNESTs through their access to more English resources, a wider English vocabulary, and greater comfort in using the language in a range of contexts.

***Culturally Appropriate Materials*** If English is an international language, does that affect how we should teach English to young learners? What should be our goals in teaching an international language? We will be considering this throughout the book, but first and foremost, the purpose of teaching English to young learners is not to expect them to speak American or British English. What we want is for them to be understood by other speakers of English as an international language. Nor do we want them to learn only about the cultures of countries in the Inner Circle. Because English is an international and intercultural language, we should also include materials from many cultures around the world. The children we teach will most likely use English with other EIL speakers, and what they really need is an appreciation of different cultures. We also want to include the students' home culture. This will help students to talk about their own culture in English

(McKay, 2002) and develop what Kramsch and Sullivan (1996) call a “sphere of interculturality” in the classroom, one that promotes a healthy process of learning about cultural differences through reflection on one’s own culture.



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### ***Continuity of Curriculum Between Primary and Secondary English***

When countries adopt early language programs, they also need to think about how those programs impact the language programs for older learners at secondary school (Curtain & Pesola, 2000; Gilzow, 2002; Read, 2003). According to Cameron (2003, p. 105), secondary school language teachers will likely have to “cope with classes of mixed levels of language skills and knowledge” and also with “the task of maintaining or restoring motivation over long periods of language learning.” She continues, “English language programs in the secondary school “may look quite different from earlier models that served a system in which language learning began around 11 years of age” (p. 106). Curricula need to be aligned to promote a smooth transition for students and to help teachers meet the needs of former young learners.

***Pitfalls to Avoid in EYL Programs*** Curtain and Pesola (2000) identify some “common pitfalls” of early foreign language programs that need to be considered in developing effective EYL programs:

- Scheduling language classes too infrequently or in sessions that are too short
- Treating foreign languages differently from other subjects, rather than as “valid academic subjects”
- Implementing a new program in all grades at the same time
- Failing to create program cohesion from primary to secondary grades
- Planning and scheduling foreign languages in isolation from the general curriculum

To these we could add:

- Providing insufficient professional development for EYL teachers
- Supplying inadequate or inequitable resources, especially access to technology, with urban and private schools having greater access to both print and digital materials (Butler, 2009; Enever and Moon, 2009).

***Common Features of Effective EYL Programs*** Nikolov and Curtain (2000), in *An Early Start: Young Learners and Modern Languages in Europe and Beyond*, identified the following characteristics of effective YL programs from 20 countries.

These programs:

- Focused on meaning
- Integrated language instruction with mainstream curriculum
- Used task-based and content-based approaches
- Provided fun in the classroom
- Set up children for success
- Fostered learner autonomy
- Set realistic expectations and assessment
- Provided continuity between primary and secondary school language programs

Additionally, according to Gilzow (2002), in some contents, effective young learner programs:

- Used technology appropriately
- Had adequate funding
- Provided professional development
- Advocated for the program
- Used a standards-based curriculum

We will be discussing many of these characteristics in the following chapters.

## ■ Teacher to Teacher

### English Education Profiles

Below are three profiles of English education written by teachers in an online professional development course from Myanmar, Madagascar, and Romania. The English education profiles were written to provide information about each country's education policy and requirements for teaching English. In addition, the writers included descriptions of the classroom environment, as well as materials

and resources available. The student profile included provides information about the students' age, gender, level of proficiency, and the level of exposure they may receive outside of the EFL classroom. These examples will show how three different countries have applied the teaching of English to young learners.

As you read these profiles, consider the following:

- What factors of effective programs do you see in these profiles?
- What challenges do these teachers face?
- What are the similarities between these educational contexts and your own context?
- What did you learn from the policy or the teachers' classes that you can adopt in your own teaching?

“Every local school in Myanmar began a FLES program in 1970–1971 school year. It is designed for students in 5th standard through 10th standard and is offered as a special program at some high schools in Yangon, Myanmar. Continuity is offered at another big city like Mandalay two years after. In the 1990s, the government implemented a new education system to develop standards for foreign language education from kindergarten through grade 11. The educators and curriculum designers drew well-designed and standardized curriculum and assessment for students learning effectively. The goal of education policy for teaching foreign language in primary school is by using English, students can build up the developed nation to stand shoulder to shoulder with the other countries in the world. In the late 1990s, there were a few private schools that offered Immersion programs in their school to attract the rich families and their children starting from primary level.

In general, students in Myanmar are taught English as a regular school subject since they are in kindergarten to grade 11 (from 5 years to 16 years) in local schools. Students are taught English 4 times a week and 45 minutes in each session. There are more than 50 students in a class. The class has chairs and desks, a white board, wall posters and a computer, though some students in other schools are cramped in the room and use table and benches and blackboard in the classroom, and some classes have more than 70 students.

### **My Grade 3 Class**

I teach in a private school called “Crane International School” located in Sanchaung Township, Yangon. My class is Grade 3 and there are 20 multinational students aged between 7–10 years. In my school, we teach in an Immersion program; all subjects are taught in English. We teach English starting at the age of 3 (in nursery) and they continue to learn it until Grade 12 (at the age of 17–18 years). Children in my school have eight English lessons per week and 50 minutes in each lesson. My class is not very spacious for

students to move around to do the activities but there is enough room for teachers to walk around in the class. Each student uses a moveable chair with desk; we have a white board, a cupboard to keep classroom materials; register, dictionaries, students' homework books, a television set and a CD cassette player. We have a library that has lots of books relevant to students' level and teachers' needs. Every class has to go to the library once a week to borrow a book and write a book report. We have a computer lab where students can go once a week and have Internet access. Every student has a colorful textbook that includes vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, comprehension check questions and grammar workbook.

There are 20 students in my class, varying in background. The majority of them are from Myanmar; I also have three Japanese students, two Indian students, two Korean students and one Australian student. The number of boys is two times more than girls. Because they are all of different ages, ranging from 7 to 10, and their cultural backgrounds, and different learning experiences, they have different learning styles and preferences, but all are motivated, curious, and active. One new learner has only studied English for two months; another uses English as his native language. Some prefer working in pairs, working individually, working in groups, playing games, copying from the board, and repeating after the teacher. Two boys prefer working by themselves, whereas, the rest enjoy playing games and working in groups. On the whole, the students' goal is to improve their use of the language as a means to communicate with other people and to move to an English speaking country for their further studies.”

—Sanda Than Pe, Primary English Teacher, Myanmar

“The education policy for English in this public primary school falls in line with the national education policy for English In Primary (EIP) established by the Ministry of Education of Madagascar in 2002. This school is one of the first 42 pilot schools around the country where English education was introduced in the Malagasy primary education system, beginning in the 4th grade. Before 2002, English instruction began in secondary schools only, from 6th grade on. The school is currently using the national 4th grade curriculum, which was revised and finalized by the Ministry of Education in 2006 for all the pilot programs. The Ministry of Education of Madagascar provided the following description of its national curriculum for primary school: ‘This curriculum provides classroom material through 5 thematic units based on topics which are relevant to Malagasy children’s lives at this age, falling in line with the Competency Approach that all other school subjects are to follow. This curriculum is based mainly on listening and speaking skills and thus features such activities as songs, dialogues and games, which are also used to promote motivation and interest in children. The objectives of introducing English at the fourth grade include the possibilities of exposing children at an early age to the language so that they can obtain better

proficiency and fluency before adolescence, preparing them for entrance to the secondary school or CEG (College d'Enseignement Général), and finally preparing them for international communication, business, tourism, and travel.' At this initial familiarization stage, EFL is introduced in an enjoyable way and neither assessments nor grades are required. English is taught as a separate regular school subject and is time-tabled for two hours a week, spread out into 20 minutes of instruction a day during the 9-month school year. There is only one teacher—Marie Rose, a former primary school teacher who was one of the 42 pilot primary school teachers to be trained to use the curriculum and to teach the lessons via the Communicative Approach, with the objective of learning English for communication.

### **Marie Rose's 4th Grade Class**

Marie Rose's 4th grade FLES class is made up of 40 nine- and ten-year-old boys and girls. These children do not have much literacy in English and do not seem to have much exposure to the language outside the EFL classroom either, as English is not widely spoken yet and such media forms as newspapers, TV and radios are mostly in Malagasy and French.

Marie Rose's fourth graders learn English in a typical concrete-floored classroom which is quite spacious though basic as it comes equipped with only a small cassette player, a large chalkboard, a teacher desk, and 20 wooden student desks. The students sit in pairs on the wooden desks arranged in 5 rows of 4 desks that can be moved easily. Unlike the students and teachers in primary schools in the US and Europe who have access to audiovisual equipment, textbooks, a library, a computer lab and to the Internet, Marie Rose and her students do not in the Analamahitsy EPP. The only resources available to her are the curriculum accompanied by supporting materials such as sample lesson plans and pictures provided by the Ministry of Education and the materials provided by the Teacher Resource Center (TRC) in the downtown area. As for her students, they do not have any textbooks or workbooks for reading and writing. They only have copybooks in which they are to keep the handouts Marie Rose gives them. These are handouts of the songs and chants they learn and perform in class as well as of pictures they can color at home and that illustrate vocabulary and grammar covered in class.”

—*Laingo Ramanantoanina, English Teacher, Madagascar*

“Ever since I was a student myself, the Romanian education system has been promoting foreign language studies. Back then, students started learning the first foreign language in the 5th grade (at the age of 11) and the second one in the 6th grade (at the age of 12). Nowadays, the national curriculum introduces the first compulsory foreign language in the 3rd grade (at the age of 9) and the second in the 5th grade. All the teachers of English in state schools have to follow the common national program designed by the Ministry of Education. They are free to use any of the ministry-approved textbooks which they find suitable



for their needs or their students' profile. Students are assessed according to the common criteria; therefore, at the end of each year of study they have to be assessed according to the competencies mentioned in the national program. According to the Common European Frame of Reference for Language (CEFR, 2001), by the end of high school students should have reached the B2 level.

Most Romanian schools choose English either as the first or the second compulsory foreign language. If students start learning English in primary school, they usually have the same specialist teacher from the 3rd grade until they are in the 8th grade, when they finish secondary school. During primary and secondary school years, foreign language studies are allotted 2, maximum 3 hours a week for expanding or improving linguistic competencies. In high school the number of hours per week stays the same, except for the special philology classes, which can have 4 up to 5 English lessons per week and have a special test every semester.

## **My Class**

I teach English as a separate school subject to primary and secondary school learners at a public school located in the largest university town in eastern Romania. My school is a state school with 755 primary and secondary level pupils, built in the first decade of the 20th century, and located in the centre of the town. It is a very old, but impressive building, with 15 large, tall classrooms. Some classrooms have individual desks; others have desks for two or three children. Each of them has a chalkboard and a teacher's desk in front of it. Every classroom is shared by two classes of children, as primary school children have lessons in the morning, and secondary school learners study in the afternoon. All teachers have at their disposal a CD player, a whiteboard, a laptop and two OHPs. Nevertheless, the Internet connection is not available in all the rooms. Moreover, because of its low budget, the school cannot afford to make photocopies of written materials for students, and teachers have to make them at their own expense.

The school management team has decided to have English as the first foreign language and French as the second one. Both languages are taught as separate school subjects in a FLES program, with 2 or 3 lessons a week. There are three teachers of English (including myself) working with both primary and secondary level students, and a teacher of French. All through the school year the committee has special activities such as open lessons and presentations of new teaching materials. It also organizes language contests and celebrations (such as the Foreign Languages Day, Halloween, Christmas, or Europe's Day). Every semester we have meetings with all teachers of English in the region where matters such as effective planning or teaching methods and materials are discussed.

The children's environment is favorable to learning English. Their families encourage them to learn the language, either because they consider it useful to be proficient in a global language, or because they have older relatives who study English. They also listen to modern international and Romanian music

extensively, and these days most Romanian dancing songs are in English, so children are curious about what the lyrics mean. In addition, most pupils in this class have personal computers and Internet connection at home. Thus, they are exposed to lots of information or games in English.

To conclude, I could say that I think of my work with the children as a continuous challenge, but their enthusiastic, inventive and playful nature has won me over. Therefore, I try to make their experience with English as pleasant as possible, even if I am aware of the fact there is always room for improvement.”

—*Simona Balan, Primary and Secondary English Teacher, Romania*

## ■ Chapter Summary

### To Conclude

**Reasons for an early start to English language learning** Because of the role of English as a global language and its potential for providing education and employment advantages to English speakers, English is being introduced at earlier and earlier ages around the world. Many children now start English as early as age 6 (or first grade).

While there are many points of view about the best time to start learning another language, there are potential benefits to an early start, especially if optimal conditions occur within the language classroom. EYL programs can provide more time to learn the language and can lead to better pronunciation and fluency, enhanced intercultural competence, and mental flexibility.

**Factors affecting success of an EYL program** A number of factors affect the success of an EYL program. These include the choice of the EYL program model, the presence of appropriately trained teachers, the availability of culturally and linguistically appropriate materials, and the continuity of the English curriculum from primary to secondary school.

**Models of effective EYL programs** There are a number of models of effective EYL programs. These include FLEX, FLES (including content-based or content-enriched FLES), immersion, dual-language, and transitional and maintenance bilingual programs. Another way to look at program models is in terms of their topics and amount of time for instruction. Programs can develop their curricula around traditional topics found in student language textbooks, topics drawn from other subjects, community-based topics, or actually teaching part of the curriculum in English.

**Need for appropriately trained EYL teachers** Appropriately trained EYL teachers know how to develop engaging, motivating activities and have adequate English proficiency to help their young learners in learning English. Unfortunately, the growth in demand for EYL classes has outstripped the capacity of many countries to provide appropriate TEYL training. There are few specialized training programs or courses for EYL teachers.

**Need for culturally and linguistically appropriate materials and curricula** Materials and curricula need to be culturally and linguistically appropriate. The local and national culture and cultures of other countries, including the cultures of the traditional, Inner Circle countries, all need to be included to help children develop intercultural competence and grow in understanding of their own culture.

**Need for continuity of primary and secondary school English curriculum** The primary and secondary school curricula need to be aligned so that students make a smooth transition in their language learning. Children who have participated in EYL programs will need higher-level English classes in secondary school than those who begin at the secondary school level.

**Additional factors affecting EYL program success** There are a number of additional factors that programs need to consider if they are to be effective. These include scheduling, integrating the English class into the overall school curriculum, and gradually introducing young learner classes, when teachers and materials are available, as well as providing appropriate resources and professional development for current EYL teachers.

## ■ Over to You

### Discussion Questions

1. What are some reasons why more people around the world are learning English? What is the main reason your program or programs in your country were developed?
2. What are some differences in studying or teaching English in countries in the Inner, Outer, and Expanding Circles? In which "Circle" are you teaching English?
3. What are some goals of teaching English as an international language? What are your program goals or the goals of programs in your country?

4. What are some benefits of learning English at a young age? Have you seen these advantages in your students?
5. What are some of the pitfalls of TEYL? Have you experienced any of these?
6. What are some program models for EYL and the differences in their goals and objectives?
7. Discuss how your views apply to the various program models. Would a FLEX or FLES program be a better fit for your context? Or would a bilingual program be better? Why?
8. What kind of program do you teach in or will you teach in? Do you see similarities in your program to the kinds of programs discussed in this chapter?
9. Do you identify with any of the teachers whose story is told? If so, how?

## English Education Profile

Now that you have read about different countries and their uses and policies about English, think about your own country. Use the English Education Profile on pg. 388 to describe the English education profile of your country, region, local school system, and classroom.

## Write About It

**Reflection on policies toward English in your country:** Write a 1–2 page reflective essay using the prompts below. Explain your views and provide examples for support based on your own teaching context:

- Has the age of compulsory English education in your country been lowered? Why or why not?
- What do you think are some benefits of starting English language instruction early? Are there any disadvantages of an early start?
- What do you think are the most important factors for improving the conditions for English language learning for children?
- What are some things that teachers, teacher supervisors, teacher trainers, and curriculum developers can do to create an optimum English language learning environment for children?

## Resources and References

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Marinova-Todd, S. H., Marshall, D. B., & Snow, C. E. (2000). Three misconceptions about age and L2 learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 34(1), 9–34.

## Useful Web Sites

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages:  
[www.actfl.org](http://www.actfl.org)

British Council: <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/teaching-kids>

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Center for Applied Linguistics: [www.cal.org/resources/digest](http://www.cal.org/resources/digest)

Nandu Early Language Web site: [www.cal.org/earlylang](http://www.cal.org/earlylang)

National Network for Early Language Learning: [www.nnell.org](http://www.nnell.org)

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