


<b>CRITICAL ISSUES IN TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TO ALBANIAN YOUNG LEARNERS</b>		<b>Linguistics</b>  <b>Keywords:</b> young learners, teaching practices, games, assessment, research.
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<b>Abstract</b>		
<p>This study presents a review of the literature and a study case concerning teaching English to young learners (TEYL). Study also discusses the growth of English as a global language, the different kinds of programs used around the world, the advantages of early language learning, some of the problems associated with TEYL and various teaching practices that have been found to be effective in teaching English to young learners. This study discusses on that how we can use games to teach English learners in the classroom, as Genevieve Roth says “playing is a child’s natural way of learning”. Too often we focus on “assessment of learning” on that how much our learners have achieved so this study will discuss this point of teaching too. Learning a foreign language presents a challenge which the teacher with students must overcome together. Perhaps a teacher may have doubts about how the class will be if we move from traditional teaching, are students going to learn easily or will have learning difficulties?, different students have different ways of learning even being the same age, class, and level and this may be a challenge for their teachers because they have to find an appropriate way to teach them.</p>		

## Introduction

Innovative and rapidly growing number of materials, publications, tests and conferences on ELT clearly indicate that this field has not remained static, just the opposite. As a field it is characterized as with dynamism, continuous evolution and development. With English having been called “a basic skill” for success in the twenty – first century (Graddol, 2006) the learning of English in Kosovo has become the language most commonly introduced. Considering the potential positive impact that knowledge of English has on a person’s future the quest for learning English has intensified in recent years. Kosovo’s government has introduced English in primary schools from first grade and the zeal for teaching and learning English is evident.

Each city or region has its own unique issues and challenges regarding early English education, however many issues are almost the same. This paper focuses mostly on (a) the growth of English as a global language, (b) different kinds of programs used around the world, (c) the advantages of early language learning, (d) problems associated with TEYL, (e) teaching practices, (f) games as teaching tools, (g) ICT on ELT and (h) assessment. Considering that these issues are particularly important to address this paper presents the gap between research and practice. Learning a language presents a challenge which the teacher and the student must overcome together. ELT has gone through multiple changes because of different factors or variables of different nature among others economic, pedagogical and sociological. Kosovo’s educational system has passed on rapidly changes from 99’s until today, so has ELT. All these changes have

brought different innovations and of course teacher training and development, curriculum design and review of materials to be used was needed.

This study has surveyed current trends and issues in English language education in Kosovo, that is 4 schools in Mitrovica, a northern city in Kosovo. The results of the survey reveal commonalities and diversity in the following aspects: the starting grade, class hours, national curriculum, textbooks, the use of computer, problems and concerns.

### **Literature Review**

Different practices used in different parts of the world and a closer look of practices used in Kosovo as a study case of this work are analyzed and presented at this part. Teaching and learning a new language are challenging processes both for teachers and students. Literature shows that different students have different ways of learning even being the same age, class, and level and this may be a challenge for their teachers because they have to find an appropriate way to teach them grammar. Traditionally, teachers in our country have worked in a classical way by writing or giving the grammatical rule in the table and then taking a few examples and if having time discuss them, and write new vocabulary and translate it on the board.

### **Different Kinds of Programs Used Around the World**

Teaching is a multifaceted and very complex task. The list of methods or techniques for teaching would include many ideas, methods, skills or approaches. Most experienced teachers suggest to be careful on selecting methods that will best help students understand the content. George Henry Evans says: “Every student can learn, just not on the same day, or the same way”.

This quotation by George Evans shows that what works best for some students may not always be the most conventional approach. If we really want no child to be left behind then we need to focus on making changes in classroom instructional method. Many students give up because they believe they simply are not good at something. Many students will surprise us with what they are able to do when they are given the right opportunity. Learning English is a skill that will help children achieve later in life. English can be learnt quickly and effectively with the right techniques. So, it is important to learn English which is practical and useful. It should not be stressful for children but fun and stimulating.

### **Problems associated with TEYL**

Teaching English as a foreign language is a challenging but rewarding career choice. ESL teachers should focus on their students' needs. This means dealing with different problems in the classroom. A good ESL teacher identifies these problems and works to find solutions. As Jeff Davis on his article “Teaching ESL: 10 Common Problems in the Classroom” says, in order to be a great ESL teacher, one must not only teach, but inspire and empower (Davis, 2016).

Teachers face numerous challenges in and out of the classroom. One of the challenges is the limited classroom language opportunity for the learners to practice the language. Teaching English in primary school level is naturally much different from teaching the language in other levels of education, such as secondary school or university. The difference may lie on numerous teaching components, among others curriculum, learning environment, students, and teaching or content delivery (Mukhlash, 2016).

Many researches have conducted a large number of studies to identify and help teachers to overcome their difficulties. Appropriate teacher trainings, large classes, limited time, limited materials and sources were some of the difficulties that researchers found.

### **Culturally Appropriate Materials**

Textbooks are good source of information and saves time in not having to create materials, but today children have different opportunities to get the information they want. They help teachers use effective activities, create targeted lesson plans and also give specialized help to different types of students. In order to be useful textbooks should be flexible, appropriate with your students' age, level and their field of interest. Giving your students suitable materials for them will make the teaching-learning process be effective and meaningful. When choosing materials teachers need to know their students' present knowledge in order to extend their knowledge and their need. It is considered motivating because materials meet their needs.

Culturally appropriate reading materials are important because we want our students to be engaged as they read and providing them with culturally appropriate reading materials is a powerful way to engage and motivate student readers and can also contribute to overall reading growth and achievement.

As pointed above to be able to produce a good material, the teacher should always start from the students. Said many times before that teaching material is an integral part of a teaching and learning process. It has a vital role in improving students' learning.

A good teaching material will be able not only to facilitate students' learning process, but also provide enjoyment for the students. Furthermore, a good teaching material may become the turning point which decide the result of a learning. Putting into practice the presented suggestions will help teachers to succeed in combining language learning and cultural learning. Students should be enabled to discuss their native culture at the same time they are provided with a real-life content of the target culture.

### **The Importance of Teachers' Quality**

In order to make students learning effectively and efficiently a teacher has to perform a large number of activities inside and outside the classroom.

The teacher is inevitably the key element for the success of the teaching and learning process in the classroom. Teachers who deal with young learners must have both professional and pedagogical competence. Teacher quality is an important factor in determining gains in student achievement. No teacher is perfect. But if he/she strives to always become better, they will be a successful English teacher. If you as a teacher feel like you lack in how you communicate, what you know and what you do, it's ok as long as you are willing to become better. According to Susan Verner top teachers are flexible, they are creative, organized, good at getting students to talk and also knowledgeable (Verner). The best EFL teachers are not born but are made. Ethan Miller thinks that there are some qualities that make a good EFL teacher. As he says being aware of these qualities and more importantly, working at it, can turn a competent teacher into a brilliant one.

### Teaching Practices

Learning today is very different process than it was in the past. While teaching on 20<sup>th</sup> century was focused on memorization and acquired skills (reading, writing) much of the way we learn today is through the use of higher order skills. The 21<sup>st</sup> century educator looks forward to the future. Janelle Cox says that a 21<sup>st</sup> century teacher should be a master of technology in the classroom, knows how to collaborate, is adaptive, is a lifelong learner, advocates for their profession (Cox, n.d.)

Young learners learn directly from their surroundings not only from their peers but also from the adults. We as teachers should understand their need and support them to learn the English language.

Teachers teaching young learners are expected to be able to find various and interesting methods since children are easily to be bored. Knowing and understanding students' characteristics are necessary for young learners' teachers. It will influence many aspects in teaching English in order to have effective teaching such as teaching style, methods, learning materials, lesson plan and the way of getting along with them. According to Gymboree Editors the early learning center for children in Tokyo today's society children need "4C Education" to succeed. "4C Education" consists of "communication", "collaboration", "critical thinking", and "creativity" (Editors G. , 2017).

The main components of "4C Education" are listed below: **Communication**- Ability to communicate with people from various backgrounds, **Collaboration**- Ability to collaborate and work with others, **Critical Thinking**- Ability to come up with your own answers rather than relying on other's answers, **Creativity**- Ability to use your imagination and be creative.

Future educators must also know that our schools were created in a world that looks very different to the one we inhabit today. Schools must transform to better prepare students for the future. This transformation is about more than just improving classroom practice – it's about rethinking and reshaping every aspect of school life. Most important factor in any child's education is the teacher.

As can be seen teaching isn't easy. Many studies have described aspects of teaching practice which are related to effective classroom learning and students' outcomes.

### **Games as Teaching Tools**

You may have heard that games are used only to kill the time or someone may say "he/she only likes playing with students". This is as a result because people are used of seeing teachers having only a traditional approach towards their students and they see other approaches as a mistake or waste of time. Teachers should know that games have pedagogical values but they also should know that they have to be played governed by rules. Game based learning has risen in popularity recently but there is still some debate how effective is a learning tool. As well as being fun, games can provide learners with necessary language practice, as well as lowering the negative emotions that can all impact on learning. Young learners love playing games, particularly during school hours. Games are fun way to practice English and it can be a really motivating way to learn a language. Through games children who are shy or worried about making mistakes, can have the opportunity to communicate in English in a safe and fun way. Fun experiences are memorable to the brain. It is really challenging for any ESL teacher whether experienced or recent graduate to keep students engaged. Many researches have shown that one of the best ways to do this is to incorporate some classroom games to make learning more fun and exciting. Emma Lander, a qualified EFL teacher considers games and fun activities vital part of teaching English as a foreign language. As she says: "...games will liven up your lesson and ensure that your students will leave the classroom wanting more" (Lander, 2018).

### **ICT in ELT**

As mentioned above English is a very important language which is playing a role in the process of expending knowledge. It is often known as a Global language, in Kosovo it is treated as a Second Language. It has become a must for learning and earning. Kosovo's educational system includes teaching English from early age (pre-scholars). Different and various approaches and methods are used in our country to teach English. But most of them are traditional, less interesting and as a result less effective. Lately ICT has been included to develop better understanding of basic skills of English. Md. Shakil Akhtar, asst.prof. at Faculty of Education in Saharsa mentions some of important ICT tools and applications used in the field of English Language Teaching, and they are as follows: **Computers, Over head projector, Lingua phone, Radio, Television, Internet.** As Guru Prasad Poudel (Poudel, 2018) claimed technology integrated learning requires certain strategies to make it effective in learners' learning and teachers' professional development. In this regard, he cited White and Ray (2015, pp. 17-18) who have presented following strategies: The teachers must have the knowledge of the subject, Similarly, they should appeal to all learning styles, In the same way, they should facilitate the content, They have to create platforms for learning, The course documents should be available to every student, They have to communicate clear goals, Teachers can establish social networking, They have to list the course pathways, They need to make effective usage of available resources, They should mention the clear expectations and establish a supportive community.

## Assessment

Today's educational system doesn't need traditional teachers, the ones that are used of assessing at the end of school year. If reading more about actual trends of teaching and assessing in different parts of the world, the ones used in most developed countries we will see that there is much work to do in Kosovo's schools' educational system. Different online resources give us multiple definitions about what assessment is. Assessments are mostly associated with traditional tests, especially standardized tests.

We can define assessment as an integral part of teaching & learning process, helping student learning and improving instruction. It is important to know that what really matters is student improvement.

Susan Riley, also agrees that assessment is a hot topic in education. She claims that we should be flipping the switch and refocus on what really matters: student learning. She divides assessment based on their purpose into three main types of assessment that can be used during the teaching and learning cycle: Diagnostic, formative & summative (Riley, 2017). According to Connie M. Moss and Susan M. Brookhart (2009), there are three main questions that we have to answer to guide the formative assessment process: *Where am I going? Where am I now? What strategy or strategies can help me go to where I need to go?* Furthermore, the authors mentioned that these three main questions can guide teachers as they (1) plan their lessons, (2) monitor their teaching, and (3) help their students become self-regulated learners (Moss & Brookhart, 2019).

## Teaching Methods and Strategies

Various methods, approaches and techniques have been adopted from early ages. The teacher of English should be familiar with the knowledge of different methods to achieve their objectives of teaching English language.

Being an effective teacher requires the implementation of creative and innovative strategies in order to meet students' needs.

Whether you have been teaching for three months three years or thirty years each should know that the classroom is a dynamic environment, bringing together students from different background with different abilities and personalities, so it can be difficult to know which teaching strategies will work best with your students.

Teaching today differs a lot from it was time ago. Years ago, most of teachers used traditional method of teaching and it is described as a process of teaching when a teacher directs student to learn. This way of teaching directs students to learn through memorization but it does not develop their critical thinking, problem solving or and decision-making skills.

Teaching styles have changed significantly over years. Let us explain below differences between traditional and modern or so-called progressive teaching.

Firstly, should mention that traditional education method is still widely used in schools. The traditional way of teaching is all about recitation. Students sit in silence, while one student after another take turns to recite the lesson. Teacher listen to each student's recitation and at the end they are expected to study and memorize the assignment. At the end of the module or semester a written test or oral examination is performed. The modern or progressive way of teaching is more activity based, using questioning, demonstration and collaborating techniques. This way of educational teaching practices focusses more on the individual student's needs.

## **Results and Discussion**

This study aimed to compare results found from analyzing others' work and the results found from interviews done with teachers, parents and students of Mitrovica. From the research and the literature we saw that there is a difference between what experts suggest having while teaching English but unfortunately the results from the research showed us that there are many gaps in this process.

English as a global language has a significant presence in Kosovo's educational system but unfortunately teachers, students and parents are not satisfied. All stakeholders complained for the conditions of the process of learning and teaching. Teachers think that textbooks should be revised because their students are not finding them attractive enough.

Most teachers complained that the textbooks are not appropriate. They are waiting from the Ministry of Education to change these textbooks because it is difficult to teach with these textbooks.

Literature suggests using technology because technology has the power to transform teaching. This model links teacher with their students to a professional content, resources and systems to help them improve their learning and teaching.

Assessment is beneficial for both teachers and learners. By controlling the process of teaching, learners' skills, and knowledge the teacher will be able to work in more effective ways, and with more attractive methods of teaching a foreign language. Unfortunately, research with students, teachers and parents shows that students are still evaluated only at the end of the semester or school year.

Of special importance is teacher training too. All interviewed teachers claimed that they would like to have more training so they can keep themselves updated with the new trends of teaching.

## **Conclusions**

If we read more about trends of teaching used in different parts of the world, the ones used on top of developing countries we will see that there is much work to do. Good and well-qualified teachers are essential to the quality of education, this means that teachers should continue

attending trainings related to teaching and improve their skills. Today's education system doesn't need traditional teachers because of trends taking place in the world. Years before, teachers were the only source of information, nowadays teachers are not considered the only source of information, so, they should be prepared to walk in the same steps as their students do. If they want their students respect them or if they do not want their classes to be boring, they should be well prepared and informed what happens in the world.

Unfortunately, the research found out many gaps in the process of learning and teaching. In order to keep their students motivated and engaged research findings suggest teachers to: Be more attractive; Use extra materials besides textbooks; Teach by doing; Create a safe learning environment; Practice differentiated teaching strategies. In order to get improved and learn easier the language, the research suggests learners to: Have a plan; Exercise; Have 5 or 10 minutes of listening & Use English in a real-world situations; Because of the role of English as a global language and its potential for providing education and employment advantages, English is being introduced at earlier ages around the world. Many children now start English as early as age 6 or first grade. In Kosovo, there are schools where English is being taught starting at age 5 or pre scholars. There are many points of view about the best time to start learning another language there are potential benefits to an early start. A wide number of factors affect the success of an EYL program. Including here the presence of appropriately trained teachers, appropriate materials, methodologies used and also the continuity of the English curriculum from primary to secondary school. Materials and curricula need to be culturally and linguistically appropriate. Unfortunately, the research found that books and materials used in our schools are not the best ones.

It can also be suggested that teachers should use technology in their classes in order to increase their students' language awareness but they should be careful while using technology inside and outside of the classroom.

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