

THE ROLE OF DEEP LEARNING IN ENGLISH FOR YOUNG LEARNERS STUDENTS

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Abstract

Deep learning is a learning approach that emphasizes deep understanding, active student engagement, and the ability to apply knowledge in real-life contexts. This approach has become increasingly relevant in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, particularly for young learners who tend to learn more effectively through direct experiences, social interaction, and meaningful learning activities. This article aims to examine the role of deep learning in English language learning for young learners within the EFL context based on theories and research findings published over the last five years. The study employs a literature review method by analyzing various theories and research findings related to deep learning, EFL, and young learners. The findings indicate that the implementation of deep learning in EFL classrooms can improve students' learning motivation, engagement, critical thinking skills, language proficiency, creativity, collaboration, communication, and self-confidence in using English. Furthermore, this approach helps create more meaningful learning experiences because students not only learn English as a school subject but also use it as a tool for communication in various learning situations. Therefore, deep learning can be considered an effective approach to support English language learning for young learners in the EFL context while fostering the development of twenty-first-century competencies.

Keywords: Deep Learning, EFL, Young Learners

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the concept of deep learning has become one of the most widely discussed approaches in education. Deep learning does not merely focus on mastering learning materials; rather, it emphasizes deep understanding, critical thinking, collaboration, communication, creativity, and the ability to apply knowledge in real-life situations (Fullan et al., 2021). This approach is considered highly relevant to the demands of twenty-first-century education, which requires students to become active learners who can face various challenges in an increasingly complex world.

The development of deep learning has also significantly influenced English language teaching, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Richards and Renandya (2022) explain that EFL refers to the learning of English in countries where English is not used as the primary language of daily communication. In this context, students have limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom. As a result, classroom instruction plays a crucial role in developing their language proficiency. On the other hand, the group of

learners commonly referred to as young learners possesses characteristics that differ from those of adolescents and adults. According to Pinter (2021), young learners are elementary school-aged children who are naturally curious, active in learning, and more likely to understand concepts through direct experience rather than memorization. These characteristics indicate that English language instruction for young learners should involve active participation and provide meaningful learning experiences.

Recent studies conducted within the last five years have shown that the implementation of deep learning in EFL classrooms can enhance students' learning motivation, engagement, critical thinking skills, and language proficiency (Hiver et al., 2021; Mercer & Dörnyei, 2022). Therefore, it is important to understand how deep learning contributes to English language learning for young learners in EFL settings. This article aims to examine the role of deep learning in English language learning for young learners based on theories and research findings published over the last five years.

DISCUSSION

Deep Learning in Education

Deep learning is an educational approach that emphasizes understanding rather than memorization. According to Fullan et al. (2021), deep learning enables students to connect new knowledge with prior experiences, apply learning in different situations, and develop competencies required for lifelong learning. These competencies include communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, character, and citizenship. UNESCO (2021) highlights that contemporary education should prepare learners to adapt to rapid social, technological, and economic changes. Therefore, educational practices should move beyond transmitting information and focus on developing higher-order thinking skills. Deep learning supports this objective by encouraging learners to investigate problems, explore ideas, and construct knowledge through meaningful experiences. Similarly, OECD (2023) argues that deep learning enhances students' ability to transfer knowledge to unfamiliar contexts. Students who engage in deep learning are more capable of applying what they learn to solve problems and make informed decisions. These characteristics make deep learning particularly relevant for language learning, where learners must apply linguistic knowledge in diverse communicative situations.

EFL and Young Learners

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) refers to learning English in environments where English is not commonly used for everyday communication. According to Richards and Renandya (2022), EFL learners often face challenges because opportunities to practice English outside the classroom are limited. Consequently, classroom instruction becomes the primary source of language exposure and practice. Young learners face additional challenges due to their developmental characteristics. However, these characteristics also provide unique opportunities for language learning. Pinter (2021) explains that children learn effectively

when they are actively engaged in enjoyable and meaningful activities. Games, songs, storytelling, role-playing, and project-based activities are particularly effective because they align with children's natural learning preferences. Research by Mourão (2022) indicates that social interaction plays a crucial role in young learners' language development. Children acquire language more effectively when they participate in collaborative activities and communicate with peers and teachers. Therefore, successful EFL instruction for young learners should create opportunities for interaction, communication, and active participation.

The Relationship between Deep Learning, EFL, and Young Learners

The relationship between deep learning, EFL, and young learners can be understood through constructivist learning theory, which views learning as an active process of knowledge construction. Deep learning reflects this perspective because learners actively build understanding through experience, interaction, and reflection rather than passively receiving information. Mehta and Fine (2020) explain that deep learning occurs when students develop meaningful understanding, connect learning to real-life experiences, and apply knowledge in different situations. These characteristics are particularly important in EFL learning because language acquisition requires meaningful communication rather than simple memorization of vocabulary and grammar rules.

In EFL contexts, students often have limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom. Consequently, language learning can become focused on examinations and rote learning. Deep learning addresses this challenge by creating learning environments in which English is used as a tool for communication, collaboration, and problem-solving. Students learn language by using it in meaningful situations rather than merely studying its forms. For young learners, this approach is especially beneficial because children naturally learn through exploration and interaction. Cameron (2021) argues that children acquire language most effectively when language serves a

meaningful purpose. Activities such as storytelling, role-playing, project work, and collaborative learning provide authentic opportunities for communication while maintaining learners' interest and engagement.

Furthermore, deep learning promotes student engagement, which is a key factor in language learning success. Hiver et al. (2021) found that engaged learners demonstrate stronger language achievement and higher motivation. Through meaningful tasks and collaborative activities, deep learning encourages behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and social engagement. The relationship among these three concepts is also evident in the development of critical thinking skills. Deep learning encourages learners to analyze information, solve problems, evaluate ideas, and make connections. Even young learners can participate in age-appropriate critical thinking activities such as making predictions, comparing information, and expressing opinions. These activities support both language development and cognitive growth.

Social interaction provides another important link between deep learning, EFL, and young learners. Drawing upon Vygotskian perspectives, language develops through interaction with others. Deep learning incorporates collaborative activities that allow students to communicate, negotiate meaning, and learn from peers. Through these experiences, learners develop both linguistic competence and social skills. Overall, deep learning, EFL, and young learners are interconnected through shared principles of meaningful learning, authentic communication, active participation, social interaction, and learner engagement. These shared principles create favorable conditions for successful language acquisition and holistic child development.

The Role of Deep Learning in EFL Learning for Young Learners

Deep learning plays a significant role in improving English language learning among young learners. One of its primary contributions is the creation of meaningful learning experiences. Fullan et al. (2021) emphasize that

meaningful learning occurs when students connect classroom learning with their personal experiences. In EFL classrooms, students may discuss topics related to their families, schools, hobbies, and daily lives, making language learning more relevant and understandable. Another important contribution is the enhancement of learning motivation. Mercer and Dörnyei (2022) suggest that motivation increases when learning activities are meaningful, enjoyable, and connected to students' interests. Deep learning supports these conditions by encouraging exploration, creativity, and authentic communication. As a result, learners become more enthusiastic and willing to participate in English learning activities.

Deep learning also increases student engagement. Hiver et al. (2021) found that engaged learners achieve better language outcomes than passive learners. Through activities such as storytelling, project-based learning, role-playing, and collaborative tasks, students actively use English while interacting with others. These experiences strengthen both language proficiency and learning engagement. Furthermore, deep learning supports the integrated development of language skills. Rather than teaching listening, speaking, reading, and writing separately, deep learning combines these skills within meaningful activities. Students may listen to a story, discuss its content, read related texts, and produce written responses as part of a single learning experience. This integrated approach reflects authentic language use and promotes communicative competence.

Another significant contribution of deep learning is the development of critical thinking skills. OECD (2023) identifies critical thinking as a fundamental competency for contemporary education. Through inquiry-based activities, discussions, and problem-solving tasks, young learners develop the ability to analyze information, evaluate ideas, and express opinions using English. Deep learning also encourages creativity. Creative activities such as storytelling, drawing, designing projects, and role-playing allow students to express ideas in original ways. These activities make language

learning more enjoyable while helping students develop confidence in using English. Collaboration represents another important outcome of deep learning. Through group work and cooperative learning, students learn to communicate effectively, negotiate meaning, share ideas, and work toward common goals. These experiences not only support language acquisition but also develop social and interpersonal skills that are valuable beyond the classroom.

In addition, deep learning promotes learner autonomy. Through inquiry, reflection, and exploration, students gradually learn to take responsibility for their learning. Although young learners require guidance, opportunities for independent thinking and decision-making help them become more confident and self-directed learners. Finally, deep learning contributes to the development of self-confidence. Many EFL learners hesitate to use English because they fear making mistakes. Deep learning creates supportive learning environments where mistakes are viewed as part of the learning process. As students experience success in communicating and expressing themselves in English, their confidence increases, leading to greater participation and willingness to communicate. Overall, deep learning contributes significantly to language proficiency, motivation, engagement, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, autonomy, and self-confidence. These outcomes demonstrate that deep learning is highly effective in supporting English language learning among young learners in EFL contexts

CONCLUSION

Based on the theories and research findings discussed in this article, it can be concluded that deep learning provides a strong pedagogical foundation for English language learning among young learners in EFL contexts. The literature demonstrates that deep learning promotes meaningful learning experiences by encouraging students to actively construct knowledge, connect learning with real-life situations, and apply language skills in authentic contexts. The findings further reveal a

close relationship between deep learning, EFL, and young learners. The communicative demands of EFL learning, combined with the developmental characteristics of young learners, create a strong need for learning environments that emphasize interaction, engagement, and meaningful communication. Deep learning addresses these needs by transforming English from a subject to be memorized into a tool for communication, collaboration, and problem-solving. Furthermore, the implementation of deep learning contributes not only to language proficiency but also to the development of critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, learner autonomy, motivation, and self-confidence. These competencies are essential for young learners in the twenty-first century and align with contemporary educational goals. Therefore, deep learning can be regarded as an effective and relevant approach for English language learning among young learners in EFL settings. By integrating meaningful learning, authentic communication, and active participation, deep learning supports both linguistic development and the broader educational growth of young learners, preparing them for future academic, social, and global challenges.

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