

INVESTIGATING THE AGE APPROPRIATENESS OF THE DIRECT METHOD FOR BEGINNER-LEVEL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

The appropriateness of the Direct Method (DM) in teaching English is reviewed based on scientific research. Firstly, academic articles, research, and approaches which were conducted on the effectiveness of this method on various age groups, psycholinguistic basis and the impact on language learning process are analyzed. Then, as a practical step of the research, observations and short experimental tasks were conducted with 10 students whose ages differed from one another. The result of the experiment shows that the connection of the effectiveness of DM and the age; in younger learners, higher motivation and quicker speech responses were observed due to the creation of a natural language environment, whereas in older learners, the effectiveness of the method may be limited by the need for additional explanations. The conclusion of the research points the importance of the age effect in choosing an appropriate method in teaching English.

Key words: Method, methodology, Direct Method, age effect, pronunciation, grammar, speaking, translation, target language, L1, Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH).

INTRODUCTION

Teaching a foreign language effectively is of the significance in today's globalized world, the process of selecting an effective method is directly connected to the age of students, the level of readiness, and psycholinguistic and psychological features. One of the efficient methods in teaching English is Direct Method (DM) which is a method oriented to learning naturally, without translation. This method is especially considered as a powerful tool to form fast communication, speech development and natural acquisition.

Despite this, in the existing literature, the effectiveness of the Direct Method across different age groups has been evaluated differently. Some of them claim the effectiveness of this method among young learners, while other sources mentioned that the need to explanation for adults may limit the effectiveness of this method.

In this article, with the aim of clarifying this issue, the academic sources are examined, and furthermore, practical effectiveness of this method is analyzed based on a case study of ten different aged students. The result of the research serves to identify the benefits and limitations of DM hinged on the age effect.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical foundations: DM emphasizes natural language acquisition, mirroring first-language development (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, cited in Alwan, 2025). The Critical Period Hypothesis (Lenneberg, 1967) provides additional theoretical support: language acquisition potential is highest before puberty, and empirical studies (Johnson & Newport, 1989) confirm stronger outcomes for learners aged 7-12.

Evidence from young learners: research by Muñoz (2006, 2011) and Jaekel et al. (2017) indicates that young learners benefit more from naturalistic input and visual cues, which aligns with DM principles. Faster cognitive processing of contextualized meaning and reduced reliance on translation make the method particularly suitable for children aged 6-12.

Evidence from older learners: studies involving adult learners (Muñoz, 2014; Pfenninger & Singleton, 2017) consistently report limitations: adults generally require explicit grammar, metalinguistic explanations, and structured learning. Moyer (2004, 2013) similarly argues that adults adapt more slowly to immersion-style environments, indicating a mismatch with the implicit nature of DM.

METHODOLOGY

A one-month observational study was conducted with ten beginners –aged 12 to 38. Pseudonyms were used. Learners received input through pictures (300 words), reading passages, pronunciation-oriented tasks, and listening materials. Only English was allowed during instruction; unknown words had to be expressed through gestures or realia. Grammar was introduced implicitly through texts and teacher hints, consistent with DM.

On November 7, 2025, students completed a 50-item test assessing vocabulary recognition, reading comprehension, and listening-based grammar. A score above 60% indicated adequate acquisition through DM.

RESULT

The result of the test was analyzed in the table. The students were placed according to their ages. Then, the important result was given in percentages. After that, the effectiveness of DM was determined whether 1 or 0. If the usage has been proven effective, 1 was put; while if it has not been proven, 0 was determined. Learners under 18 achieved an average of 75.4%, whereas those aged 18 and above achieved 54.2%, confirming a substantial age effect on DM efficiency.

N	Name	Age	Result %	Effectiveness of DM
1	Khalid	12	98	1
2	Bonu	12	77	1
3	Sevar	14	82	1
4	Nadia	14	56	0
5	Begoyim	18	61	1
6	Sofia	25	60	1
7	Baxodir	27	57	0
8	Sardor	30	52	0
9	Andy	38	60	1
10	Newl	38	42	0

DISCUSSION

The data reveals a strong relationship between age and the suitability of DM. Younger learners showed greater responsiveness to naturalistic instruction and performed significantly better. Older learners, particularly those over 25, exhibited difficulties consistent with findings in prior studies: the implicit nature of DM led to cognitive overload and confusion due to the absence of explicit grammar explanations. These results align with the broader literature: positive outcomes for young learners (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Muñoz, 2006) and documented limitations for adults (Pfenninger & Singleton, 2017).

This research observed direct connection between DM and the age effect. While the observation and experiment, the highest result was taken by Khalid aged 12, he took 98 %. The lowest one was Newl aged 38, he received only 47 %. The average scores across different age groups further highlight the influence of age. Students under 18 years of age achieved an average of 75.4 points, this in turn means that they achieved higher marks through natural language situation and DM. Besides, those above 18 received 54.2 on average, highlighting the decrease of the effectiveness of DM depending on age.

CONCLUSION

The study confirms that the effectiveness of the Direct Method is closely tied to learner age. Children and adolescents benefit from its naturalistic, immersion-based characteristics, while adults often require supplemental explicit instruction. Therefore, age must be considered a key factor when applying DM in beginner-level English teaching.

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