

LANGUAGE LEARNING CHALLENGES AND PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES FOR LEARNERS WITH DOWN SYNDROME IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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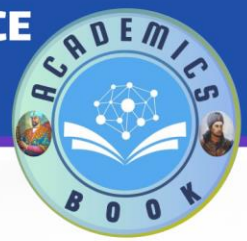
Abstract. Learners with Down Syndrome (DS) encounter distinctive challenges in acquiring both their first and foreign languages. These difficulties include delayed speech, restricted vocabulary growth, and persistent grammatical limitations, often compounded by physical and social factors. This article reviews key problems faced by DS learners in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms and explores pedagogical strategies to support their learning. Suggested approaches include individualized monitoring, curriculum adaptation, interactive and stress-free activities, and responsive teaching methods involving both teachers and parents. The study emphasizes the importance of inclusive classroom environments and further research to identify the most effective practices for teaching EFL to learners with DS.

Keywords: Down Syndrome, EFL, language acquisition, communication skills, grammar difficulties, inclusive pedagogy.

Introduction. Learners with Down Syndrome (DS) have distinctive developmental and linguistic profiles that shape their acquisition of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). They often encounter challenges in phonological processing, vocabulary growth, and grammatical accuracy, influenced by cognitive limitations and physical factors such as hearing difficulties and oral-motor issues. At the same time, DS learners demonstrate strengths in visual learning, social motivation, and routine-based activities, which can be effectively harnessed in instruction. Teaching English to DS learners therefore requires specialized strategies, including multimodal input, repetition, scaffolding, and inclusive classroom practices. This article examines the main challenges DS learners face in language learning and outlines adaptive methods that enhance their participation in EFL classrooms.

Literature review. Down Syndrome is caused by the presence of an extra chromosome 21 (Al-Shamsi et al., 2006). Children with DS often develop speech and communication skills more slowly than their peers, with vocabulary growth and grammar mastery remaining limited (Buckley, 1993, 2002). Many of them tend to produce short utterances rather than complete sentences. Oral communication disorders, underdeveloped vocabulary, and social marginalization further hinder progress (Padurean, 2014; Kliever, 1998). Physical factors such as hearing loss, small oral cavity, and weak facial muscles also affect pronunciation and phonological processing (Al-Shamsi et al., 2006). Grammar acquisition is particularly difficult due





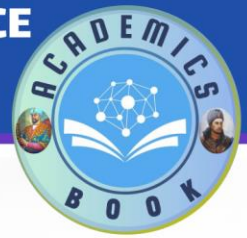
to short-term memory limitations. While DS learners can build a lexicon, they struggle with syntax and producing grammatically correct sentences. Moreover, many adult DS learners find challenging to mastering grammatical rules in order to talk grammatically correct and being restricted with short utterances instead of fully organized sentences (For example, “went to Zoo Dad” rather than “I went to the Zoo with my Dad”) (Bray & Woolnough, 1988 as cited in Buckley, 1993). Vocabulary may improve during teenage years, but grammar knowledge often remains limited (Buckley, 2002).

Analysis and exploration. Effective teaching requires patience, strong language knowledge, and varied methods. Teachers should monitor individual progress and adapt instruction to each learner’s needs (Buckley, 2002). Each learner is particular individual and some of them have more serious problems in speech and language acquisition than others. Since every child has their own learning style not only learners with particular disabilities but also healthy ones. Integrating the first language in grammar instruction can support comprehension. Lesson materials should be engaging, interactive, and stress-free, with activities such as singing and play to maintain attention (Padurean, 2014). Teachers should be trained properly for teaching and preparing appropriate materials for students with special needs particularly with DS.

Teachers should act as advisors or friends, fostering a supportive environment where learners feel comfortable interacting. Creating inclusive atmospheres helps them feel valued and supported. According to the Encyclopedia of Health people with Down Syndrome are extremely kind and loving and need more caring and attention, thus creating friendly atmosphere by giving them more chance to interact with others really helps teachers to achieve successful results in teaching them EFL. Responsive teaching methods, which emphasize shared control and expressive communication, can transform passive learners into active participants. Parental involvement is essential for the success of these approaches (Mahoney et al., 2006).

Conclusion. Learners with Down Syndrome face significant challenges in acquiring language, particularly in communication and grammar. Teachers must adopt inclusive, individualized, and interactive strategies to support their learning in EFL classrooms. While current research offers valuable methods, further studies are needed to identify the most effective approaches. Creating friendly, responsive, and well-adapted learning environments remains central to improving outcomes for DS learners.



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