

The importance of physical movement in EFL coursebooks for young learners: A comparative analysis

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is the analysis and comparison of two selected English as a foreign language coursebooks, namely *English World Pupil's Book* by Mary Bowen and Liz Hocking and *Family and Friends Classbook 1 (Second edition)* by Naomi Simmons. First, the importance of physical movement for young learners in EFL classrooms is examined focusing mainly on the perspective of teachers and learners. Perspectives and methods of researchers are presented and discussed. Then, the correct selection and the criteria of selecting coursebooks are investigated. The paper presents the results of a comparative analysis of the two selected coursebooks, which is based on the investigation of the opportunities provided for physical movement and the incorporation and implementation of physical movement by the selected coursebooks.

Keywords: young learners; physical movement; coursebooks; analysis; EFL

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Introduction

Teaching is a very challenging profession, especially if we talk about young learners. Teachers that put their heart and soul into education face many difficulties during the teaching and learning process. It is necessary for teachers to be well-informed about their learners, and to know their characteristics and learning styles in order to fulfil their learners' needs and to provide appropriate support (Puskás 2018, 11–12).

The definition and age of young learners differs according to researchers, but generally the age of young learners can be given between 5 and 13. In Slovakia, children start primary school at the age of 6 or 7, after one compulsory year of kindergarten. Most of them stay in primary school up to the age of 15 (sometimes 16, it depends on the child's birth date), because elementary school is divided into lower and upper primary education in Slovakia. Many children arrive at school with basic English knowledge, because there are kindergartens that offer English classes for beginners as an extracurricular activity, however, officially, they do not start

to learn English until third grade (most primary schools with Hungarian language of instruction in Slovakia start to teach foreign languages only in third grade, of course there can be some exceptions). In schools with Hungarian language of instruction, English is not the only foreign language taught, learners start to learn Slovak as a foreign or second language in first grade, while they start to learn English as a foreign language only in the third grade. In most Slovak schools, young learners start to learn English as soon as they start school, already in first grade.

Different linguistic environments need to involve various modern and up-to-date solutions. Teaching young learners through physical movement can be one of these. Many teachers and schools do not recognize the necessity of involving physical movement in English lessons for young learners. Whether it is because they do not know how to start it, or they do not know the methodology that is needed, many educators try to avoid and bring physical movement into the classroom, simply because they are afraid of the negative consequences they might imply. By this we mean increased noise level, jumping and potential accidents that are the natural inherent in movement. Many times, it is easier for teachers and educators to follow the structure of the selected coursebook and they completely rely on it, although most of these coursebooks lack the activities that require some kind of physical movement.

This paper will focus on and study the importance of physical movement while teaching young learners and how it is processed in the coursebooks written and designed for learning English as a foreign language.

The importance of physical movement for young learners in the EFL classrooms

There are many factors that influence language learning (such as intelligence, personality, learning styles, language learning aptitude, motivation, social factors, etc.) and age is just one of them. Teaching and learning require a positive attitude toward the language and learning from both the learners (whether they are very young or older) and the teachers. Many researchers claim that learning a foreign language could be easier for learners from the age of 11, because of their more expanded cognitive and sociocultural perspective. There is a huge number of theories and many methods offered by researchers that increase the success and high-level proficiency of learning English as a foreign language by young learners (Puskás 2018, 13–16).

Teaching English to young learners must meet a few important conditions. The lessons should be enjoyable for both learners and teachers, properly planned and they must be based on clear goals and ideas. In order to be successful, teachers need to include not only playfulness and good cooperation between themselves and their learners (and among their learners as well), they also need relevant resources and ideal conditions provided by the school (Puskás 2018, 21–24). A traditional English lesson that is completely designed on the basis of a coursebook and the activities listed in it may be quite boring for young learners. In order to

maintain their interest in the English lessons, teachers need to be creative and find solutions to include their learners in the teaching process. Physical movement is one of the factors that is proven to help young learners with gaining deeper knowledge in a foreign language.

Researcher James J. Asher (1977) developed the method of Total Physical Response (TPR). While studying the way of learning languages by really young learners, he realised, that they are better at developing language skills than older learners. He noticed that babies, although they are not speaking, are still active users of language, and they respond to oral commands non-verbally, physically. TPR has many advantages in learning English (Puskás 2022, 88–90). Learners use all three channels – listening, watching and in the end speaking, until they are able to decide when to use the language as soon as they feel ready. Nevertheless, it is also crucial to consider the difficulty of vocabulary and grammar, and to use easy commands, especially with very young learners during an English lesson (Linse 2005, 30–32). TPR is just one of the many examples that prove that the usage of physical movement during the learning process results in more efficient language acquisition, especially if it is used with young learners.

Piaget came to almost the same conclusion as Asher during his research. He studied what happens during the learning process in early ages. Actions taken by children (or young learners) during their familiarization phase is driven to a complex cognitive development. Further on, Piaget differentiates two developmental ways as results of activities in his Piagetian psychology, assimilation (there is no change to the child itself during the action) and accommodation (in some way the child adjusts to the environment). From this point of view, it can be stated that from Piaget's perspective, the child is an active learner (Cameron 2005, 2–4).

Susan Hrach offers a new holistic perspective in learning and teaching by introducing her strategies of the embodied learning approaches that help to deepen knowledge and skills. With her approach, she tries to help adult learners to acquire knowledge by physical movement during the learning process, however, the approaches listed in her book *Minding Bodies* may be implemented in the learning process of younger learners as well. The body affects the learning process and it indicates if change is required. Many children feel that it is difficult to sit still for a long time. More physical movement can be helpful for better concentration and it improves creativity as well (Hrach 2021, 3–6).

Scholars at the University of Michigan write about research that shows how movement helps to improve learning. Movement break and physical movement help learners to process the content they are learning, and the craving for learning is also sustained. A few examples of physical movement tasks that may be used during lessons are also listed.¹

Using different activities that include physical movement during the English class can be challenging and time-consuming for teachers, but it is more enjoyable for

¹ Using physical movement to increase student engagement and learning. Available at: <https://lsa.umich.edu/technology-services/news-events/all-news/teaching-tip-of-the-week/using-physical-movement-to-increase-student-engagement-and-learning.html>

young learners. Songs, finger-plays but even storytelling could be way more fun when including physical movement. Young learners often need the freedom to move-along during classes. It can be atrocious for them just to sit around for 45 minutes and listen to the teacher or take notes without any kind of movement. Learners, especially those that start to learn English demand flexibility and playfulness in order to pay attention for a longer time. Physical movement helps them recoil from boredom after a longer period without any kind of action. Whether teachers use a coursebook or not, to complete the tasks and exercises with playful activities might help to improve the teaching and the learning process as well. Today, when the very special needs of learners are paid special attention, it is easy to find teacher's resources of activities that include physical movement to use as a source for one's own teaching process. It is profoundly recommended by researchers to build in physical movement into the EFL classroom to make language acquisition more effective, especially in the case of young learners, for whom learning by doing is a natural process that derives from their nature (Cremin et al. 2015).

Teaching materials for young learners: coursebooks

Most teachers use a coursebook during their teaching process, whether it is selected by the school/government or by themselves, because it gives them some kind of a guidance and framework, which can be helpful to comply with the curriculum. Only a very low number of teachers is given the opportunity to choose the coursebook freely. In this case it is vital for them to choose the most appropriate coursebook that will make their teaching effective, and careful evaluation and selection are necessary to be successful with this process.

There are many advantages and disadvantages of coursebooks. As it has been already mentioned, many times it is helpful to use a coursebook, because it gives some kind of guidance and a framework that helps teachers to work with the given curriculum. Some coursebooks have ready-made tasks, exercises and texts, which are also printable, so teachers do not need to write and prepare them themselves. Coursebooks also come with a teacher's book that contains tests for each unit. In addition, coursebooks are offered together with a CD or an audiobook, and modern coursebooks also have working materials that can be used with interactive boards as well as access to further interactive online activities. However, there are also some disadvantages of using coursebooks during an EFL class. Many times, these are present because of the poor selection of coursebooks and they have a negative effect on the work of the teacher and the learning process of learners as well. A wrongly selected coursebook may be demotivational, especially when it is overused by teachers (classes that are built mostly on the coursebook can be very boring for young learners and they might lose motivation quickly).

Coursebooks should be used as guidance and stimulators that offer opportunities both for the teacher and the learners and should be adapted to the needs of learners. Young learners demand a lot of movement and physical activities, therefore, teachers must pay attention to the involvement of physical movement during

EFL classes. The interest of young learners needs to be maintained in order to make the language learning process successful. Learners who have fun during classes have more positive experiences, which boosts the acquisition of educational materials.

Criteria for selecting a coursebook

Coursebook selection should be based on meeting various criteria. Different scholars and researchers have different lists of criteria depending on a variety of circumstances and conditions. Various learning and teaching situations, whether they include academic or professional reasons, or are taught by native or non-native teachers, might need different coursebooks. Coursebook evaluation is the main core of coursebook selection. While evaluating a coursebook, numerous factors need to be considered. The selection of a convenient coursebook requires specific inspection and investigation (Puskás 2018, 44–46).

Andrea Puskás gives some practical tips for selecting a coursebook. She claims that it is important to investigate the context of language teaching and learning in details for a better understanding and examination of concrete coursebooks while the specific criteria may be different (such as the age of the learners, level of learning, purpose of learning, etc.). Puskás summarizes the criteria of coursebook evaluation as follows: standards and objectives, layout and appearance, language study and language skill activities, relevance, teacher's guide, price and availability and interest (Puskás 2018, 47–49).

The following subsections will contain the analysis of two different coursebooks designed for young learners of the lower level of primary school, widely used by schools in Slovakia. The two books are the following: *English World Pupil's Book* by Mary Bowen and Liz Hocking and *Family and Friends Classbook 1 (Second edition)* by Naomi Simmons. In addition to the criteria mentioned above, the coursebooks will also be examined from the point of view of physical movement, more specifically, whether they contain activities built around physical movement or not.

English World Pupil's Book 1 by Mary Bowen and Liz Hocking

English World Pupil's Book 1 is a coursebook for young learners who begin their journey with learning English as a foreign or a second language. It is widely used in primary schools in Slovakia. At the back cover of the book, it states that it is mainly written to boost the confidence of learners in listening, speaking and reading skills. It deals with the vocabulary and grammar that learners at this age need to know. The book itself is quite thick and long for a beginners group, it has got 126 pages and it begins with a summary. The pages include three or four exercises each with simple instructions (such as listen and sing, listen and point, draw, etc.) and large and colourful pictures. The units are really long and contain lots of exercises that are hardly different from each other. Most of the exercises seem to be composed

for younger children (younger than the recommended target group of the book), so learners might get bored by them by the end of the unit. There is only one game implemented after the introductory unit, and there are revision and project pages after every three units. The topics in the coursebook are suitable for the recommended age of learners and the curriculum. It is not hard to follow the sequence of the topics, but it is a bit boring and monotonous.

The exercises in the coursebook *English World Pupil's Book 1* are mostly the same in each page, however the pictures are different. There are hardly no exercises based on physical movement, except those that instruct the learners to point to something. This book does not give any examples of exercises for teachers that would help them to use physical movement with their young learners. Teachers need to reconsider the exercises themselves and expand them with their own exercises if they want to use motion during the English class.

The coursebook comes together with an additional workbook, a dictionary booklet, flashcards and posters but no teacher's book. However, all these additional books need to be bought separately.

Family and Friends Classbook 1 (Second edition) by Naomi Simmons

Family and Friends Classbook 1 is a coursebook designed and printed by Oxford University Press for young learners of primary schools beginning their studies in English language. This book is quite similar to the previous one in structure, however, it is more colourful with more complicated exercises at first sight. The vocabulary and the grammar included in this book are intended for young learners and the exercises and their structure and sequence is more suitable for the recommended target group of the book (they are not as childish as the exercises in the first coursebook, *English World Pupil's Book 1*). This coursebook is the same length as the first one, but the partition is a little bit different. The pages contain maximum four exercises, which together with the pictures create a somewhat crowded effect compared to the previous coursebook. The units are not too long, each page corresponds to one English lesson and at the end of each unit there is a summarizing page for revision purposes. After every third unit there is a page called "fluency time" that contains exercises to improve listening and speaking skills and to make a project. There are also two review pages after every third unit to practice new vocabulary and grammar. The subject matter and the materials are suitable for young learners of third grade (third grade is the year when learners start to learn English as a foreign or second language in Hungarian schools in Slovakia, however, young learners are many times familiar with lots of words, expressions or grammatical compositions, since there are many kindergartens or schools that provide English lessons as extracurricular lessons from a very young age) and the curriculum. At the end of the book, after the units, there are cultural topics with reading tasks and some exercises (the very same kinds as in the regular units) and grammar reference pages.

In the coursebook *Family and Friends Classbook 1*, the exercises are similar in each unit, and their main focus is on listening, speaking and writing skills. There are a few exercises where the instruction says “listen and point, point, ask and answer”, which requires some kind of physical movement from the learners, but apart from these, nothing else encourages them to move during the English lesson.

This coursebook comes with an additional teacher’s book, workbook and teacher’s resource pack, that means that it is better equipped for teachers and gives supplementary exercises and thoughts on lesson planning. All the extra books need to be bought separately from the coursebook. It is a bit pricier than the previous coursebook.

Physical movement in coursebooks: a comparative analysis

The coursebooks *English World Pupil’s Book 1* and *Family and Friends Classbook 1* have been selected because they are widely used in Slovakia. Many schools have decided to use these particular books, although there are many other books available in the market.

Having compared the two selected coursebooks, it turned out, that these two have many similarities. Both of them meet the expectations of the curriculum in Slovakia. Vocabulary areas and grammar items included in them are almost the same, with a very little difference in vocabulary areas in the units, but this is only a minor difference, just a few words. The grammar items included in the coursebooks is almost identical, which shows that these books are in accordance with the curriculum. When the tasks and instructions included in the coursebooks are examined, it is clearly seen that they are almost identical. Both coursebooks primarily focus on listening, writing and speaking skills. Each unit in both coursebooks has the same exercises, of course with different pictures, vocabulary and grammar.

However, there are a few differences as well. The outlining of the pages is quite dissimilar. While in the first coursebook, *English World Pupil’s Book 1*, there are bigger and more simple pictures and the exercises are not age appropriate (there are rather childish, designed for even younger learners), in the second coursebook, *Family and Friends Classbook 1*, there are more complex pictures and exercises as well (compared to the first coursebook). The coursebooks, together with the additional books that come with them, are available in the Slovak market, perhaps *Family and Friends Classbook 1* costs a few euros more.

From the point of view of physical movement both coursebooks are poorly designed and have a variety of weaknesses. There are nearly no exercises that focus on physical movement, except from those that say “point” to something, that are used quite often but still do not encourage learners to move during the English classes. There are songs and exercises that could involve physical movement, but the coursebooks concentrate only on the given vocabulary or grammar with the practice of reading and listening skills. Teachers cannot rely on these coursebooks

if they want to implement some kind of physical movement during their lessons, they need to make up their own additional tasks and exercises in order to do this. However, the coursebook *Family and Friends Classbook 1* provides some exercises that could be adapted by teachers to practise physical movement.

The coursebooks *English World Pupil's Book 1* and *Family and Friends Classbook 1* do not contain exercises and tasks explicitly designed for involving physical movement during English classes, therefore their usage with young learners is not highly recommended unless the teacher invests a lot of time and work in adapting the exercises and tasks included in these books to fit the needs of young learners during the teaching and learning process.

Conclusion

Teaching is a profession connected with constant innovation and great care and teaching young learners might be quite difficult and challenging if one wants to do this job properly. Sometimes teachers have to go above and beyond in order to achieve the desired effect of teaching. Young learners, and learners in general, need encouragement by their teachers in order to learn English to the best of their ability. In order to fulfil learners' needs, teachers need to find out information about their learners, which can be a very hard task if we consider EFL teaching in Slovakia. Teachers sometimes meet their learners two or three times a week, and there are 12 to sometimes 17 learners in a classroom. In order to optimize the teaching and learning process during EFL classes, teachers need to reconsider the crucial factors that influence language learning.

Including physical movement in EFL teaching and learning might be one of the most creative ways of making these processes effective. Many researchers and scholars advocate its usage and there are a lot of attempts around the world to make physical movement a natural part of EFL teaching (Pinter 2006; Puskás 2020). The first step towards this can be the selection of the proper coursebooks and the adaptation of activities and tasks to learner needs. Criteria for selecting the best coursebook for EFL lessons can be found in many publications and research papers that aim to help teachers with making the best decision.

In this paper, two coursebooks used with young learners on EFL lessons in Slovakia were examined, namely *English World Pupil's Book 1* and *Family and Friends Classbook 1*. The comparison showed the similarities and differences between the two books, however, the main focus was on the notion if they use any exercises that include physical movement. The result of the comparison based on the above criterion is rather negative – the main focal point of these coursebooks is on teaching and improving listening, reading and speaking without any attempt to include physical movement in English lessons. Therefore, these coursebooks are not the best choices if we want to satisfy young learners' needs for movement and physical involvement.

Many EFL teachers working with young learners around the world lack the encouragement from the institutes, schools and the government, so they need to find it in themselves. In order to design more interesting, more playful lessons and to make learners' language acquisition and learning more effective, it is crucial to use physical movement during EFL lessons.

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