

UDC 811.111-053.6(045)

DOI <https://doi.org/10.52726/as.pedagogy/2025.2.13>

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**LIGHTING THE SPARK: MAKING ENGLISH EXCITING
FOR TEEN BEGINNERS**

The article is focused on the analysis of teaching English to beginner teenagers and the unique challenges and opportunities this task presents. Teaching English to teenage beginners is often underestimated in terms of its complexity. While it may initially appear less demanding than instructing more advanced learners, educators soon discover that working with adolescents at the beginner stage requires a nuanced understanding of both pedagogy and psychology. This demographic group, with limited or no prior exposure to the English language, brings a distinctive combination of emotional sensitivity, curiosity, and vulnerability to the classroom.

The article explores effective teaching strategies that go beyond traditional instruction, aiming to transform early language encounters into rich, memorable, and motivating experiences. It draws on the principles of communicative language teaching (CLT), placing a strong emphasis on emotional engagement, building positive teacher-student rapport, and encouraging learner autonomy from the outset. Among the practical tools and methodologies discussed are gamification techniques, the integration of multimedia resources, personalisation of classroom content, task-based learning, and the use of positive reinforcement. These approaches aim not only to improve language acquisition but also to support the development of confidence and intrinsic motivation in young learners.

Furthermore, the article delves into common obstacles faced by educators, such as student anxiety, low participation, and the psychological gap between teacher and adolescent. It offers practical, experience-based solutions for overcoming these barriers, including creating a safe and supportive learning environment, managing classroom dynamics with empathy, and designing lessons that are linguistically accessible yet personally meaningful. Overall, the article highlights the importance of viewing beginner-level teaching as a professional and creative endeavour that requires adaptability, patience, and genuine understanding of the adolescent learner.

Key words: teenage beginners, communicative teaching, learner motivation, gamification, classroom engagement, emotional connection, language confidence.

Introduction. Despite the growing emphasis on inclusive and differentiated instruction in language education, teaching English to teenage beginners remains an underexplored and often undervalued area of pedagogical practice. Many educators perceive beginner-level instruction as less demanding due to its basic content and vocabulary. However, this assumption overlooks the significant cognitive, emotional, and motivational challenges that arise when working with adolescent learners who possess limited or no prior knowledge of English.

Teenagers in beginner classrooms often experience high levels of language anxiety, low self-confidence, and disengagement, especially when instructional methods fail to resonate with their developmental needs and personal interests. Furthermore, traditional teaching materials and approaches frequently lack the flexibility

and cultural relevance required to meaningfully connect with this age group. The absence of engaging, learner-centred strategies can lead to frustration, resistance to participation, and a negative attitude toward language learning in general.

The field of English language teaching (ELT) has produced a substantial body of research focused on communicative methodologies, learner engagement, and motivation (Dörnyei, 2001; Harmer, 2015). However, while considerable attention has been given to adult learners and advanced-level students, teenage beginners represent a comparatively underrepresented group in both empirical studies and practical literature.

Several studies (Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Cameron, 2001) emphasize the importance of age-appropriate input, scaffolded interaction, and affective support in fostering second language

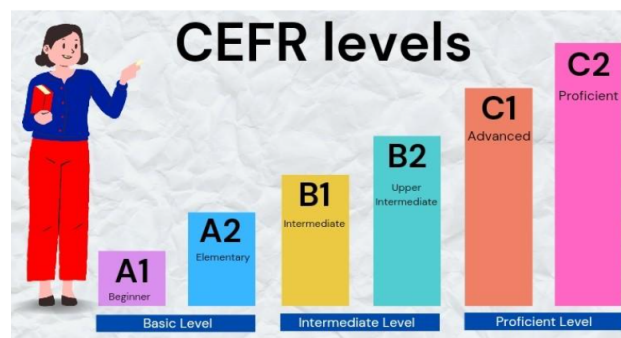
acquisition among young learners. These findings are particularly relevant when applied to teenagers, whose cognitive and emotional development requires teaching approaches that are both structured and flexible. At the same time, researchers such as Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) have highlighted the role of intrinsic motivation and learner autonomy as critical factors in maintaining engagement, especially in contexts where students may feel overwhelmed by the novelty and perceived difficulty of language learning.

Moreover, empirical evidence suggests that the use of gamification (Burke, 2014; Godwin-Jones, 2014), digital media (Pegrum, 2014), and personalized content (Tomlinson, 2013) can significantly enhance student participation, enjoyment, and retention at the beginner level. These methods have been shown to improve learners' affective responses, lower anxiety, and foster a sense of connection between the language and students' real-world interests – an outcome particularly desirable when working with adolescent learners.

Nevertheless, the specific intersection of teenage psychology, beginner-level instruction, and engagement-focused teaching strategies remains insufficiently explored. Few studies directly address how classroom rapport, cultural relevance, and interactive tasks can work in tandem to «spark» initial interest and sustain motivation among teens with no prior English background. Therefore, this article contributes to the field by synthesizing relevant theoretical frameworks and applying them to the specific challenges of teaching teenage beginners in modern, dynamic learning environments.

The **subject matter** of the study is the development of engaging strategies for teaching English to teenage beginners. For advanced teachers and those just starting their teaching experience, teaching beginners might seem more straightforward than instructing students at more advanced levels. Nevertheless, this is a wrong impression. The beginner level is more of a challenge, since it sometimes demands more comprehensive preparation for the lesson. However, once you have the proper techniques and materials for guidance, beginners can be the most rewarding students to teach.

Results and Discussion. The CEFR, or Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, is an international standard for language ability. The Council of Europe developed it and is widely used in language teaching and assessment worldwide. According to *La Forêt Education Pvt Ltd* (2024), CEFR has six levels, from A1 for beginners to C2 for users who are proficient in the language.



Pic. 1. CEFR levels

According to the CEFR, beginners are learners at the A1 level, and sometimes also A2, depending on the context. The learners can be characterised in the following way:

- They have little to no prior knowledge of the language;
- They can use and understand basic everyday expressions (e.g., greetings, asking for directions, introducing themselves);
- They can interact very limitedly if the other person speaks slowly and clearly;
- They require support with vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation.

A true beginner has zero knowledge of a language, which is rare with a language as prevalent as English.

You're more likely to encounter false beginners on your teaching journey. These learners have some language knowledge, which they may have acquired at school, through media, or self-study. However, their knowledge is so limited that they must start from square one.

At the beginner level, a student should have basic skills and knowledge for effective communication in everyday situations. In particular, those at the A1 level study the components in the table below. This was set out by the Council of Europe (2001), Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment.

English communication A1 CEFR	English vocabulary A1 CEFR	English grammar A1 CEFR
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchanging greetings • Giving personal information • Using numbers, days, months, years • Asking for and telling the time • Describing people • Giving information about objects • Describing places • Describing habits and routines • Expressing likes and dislikes • Describing simple actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Days of the week and months • Numbers and prices • Countries and nationalities • Colours • Personal possessions • Parts of the body • Family and friends • Food and drinks • Household rooms and objects • Clothes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions words • Possessive adjectives and pronouns • Present simple • There is/There are • Imperatives • Present continuous (now or in progress) • Prepositions of place • Modals: can, can't, do, doesn't • Simple adjectives • Comparatives and superlatives

Pic. 2. CEFR Overview: Key Skills in Communication, Vocabulary, and Grammar

Teenagers are at a unique developmental stage. They experience physical, emotional, and cognitive changes that directly impact how they learn. What makes it challenging to teach teens as beginners? These students typically strongly desire independence while simultaneously experiencing heightened self-consciousness regarding how their peers perceive them. Though they're developing more complex abstract thinking capabilities, their motivation and confidence often vary significantly daily. When teaching adolescents, it's essential to recognise that they generally resist direct authority but thrive in environments built on mutual respect. Their sensitivity to embarrassment means teachers must approach error correction with particular care and tactfulness.

Tips for working with teen beginners:

1. Teens need to express their identity, even with basic English. Simple projects about their interests help them connect with the language personally. To maximise learning outcomes, lessons should incorporate content that connects meaningfully to teenagers' real-world interests and experiences, making the language learning process more personally relevant and motivating.

2. Technology is your friend. Most teens enjoy using apps, social media activities, and creating digital content to learn English.

3. Group work is practical. Teens often learn better from peers than teachers, and working together reduces pressure on individuals.

4. Use mature materials. Even though they're beginners, teens need content that respects their age, not materials designed for young learners.

5. Some teens get frustrated when they can't express complex thoughts in simple English. **Regular encouragement and celebrating small achievements** help keep them motivated.

6. Clear progress markers are essential. Teenagers respond well to seeing evidence that their skills are improving.

Teen beginners need clarity and structure to feel secure and purposeful in their learning. Make sure you start with clear goals. To make it more effective, share the lesson's goal at the start and refer back to it during the class. Don't use overwhelming language while presenting learning objectives; it's a good idea to present them in student-friendly language (e.g., 'Today we will learn how to talk about our families'). Break down long-term goals into small, achievable steps. For example, the long-term goal would be 'Talk about daily routines using the present simple.' Meanwhile, the short-term goal is 'Say what time you wake up, have breakfast, and go to school.'

When the goals are set, beginners must build a foundation in core skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The teacher's task is to guide them in their journey and build a strong and balanced foundation for future language development.

Why is focusing on key skills necessary for teen beginners? These students aren't just memorising words and grammar rules – they're learning how to use the language in real situations. Each skill plays a role:

Speaking: Builds confidence and fluency; helps learners communicate.

Listening: Develops comprehension and models correct pronunciation.

Reading: Reinforces vocabulary and grammar structures.

Writing: Encourages organisation of thoughts and accuracy.

In real-world communication, we often combine skills. Imagine ordering food: you listen, speak, possibly read a menu, and might write something down. Teaching in isolation doesn't prepare students for this. That's why lessons that combine all four skills are naturally more dynamic and engaging. For example, reading a short comic (reading) can lead to a discussion (speaking), followed by a creative writing task (writing), all while listening to character voices in audio (listening). Focusing on all skills allows students to develop holistically and helps teachers identify who needs support in a particular area. Some may speak well but struggle with writing; others may read fast but fear speaking in class.

By setting clear goals and building core language skills, you're helping teen beginners navigate the early stages of their language journey with purpose and confidence. However, even with a well-planned path, students must see how far they've come and where they're headed. This is where tracking and reviewing progress become essential.

Teenagers often question the point of what they're learning, especially at the beginner level, where progress can feel slow. If they don't see precise results, they may quickly lose interest. When teachers highlight progress through goals achieved, new vocabulary used, or successful tasks completed, students feel a sense of achievement and purpose. If a student couldn't introduce themselves a week ago but now can say, "Hi, I'm Ivan. I'm 15. I'm from Vinnytsia", and visible improvement boosts their confidence.

Revisiting what students have learned and allowing them to apply it again helps move information from short-term to long-term memory. Beginners benefit from lots of review through repetition, recycling language, and short assessments. A student learns food vocabulary on Monday, uses it in a guessing game on Wednesday, and writes a menu on Friday. That's a meaningful review.

Finally, when teens reflect on what they've learned or check off what they can do, they become more active participants in their learning.

They know how to self-assess and set personal goals – a key step toward becoming independent language learners. Tracking allows teachers to notice patterns: who is struggling and progressing quickly, and which skills need more practice across the class. This helps with differentiated instruction and better planning. Use simple progress trackers (charts, journals, folders) or short self-reflection tasks at the end of lessons to gather student feedback.

Before exploring how to teach English to beginners, we must consider what you should prepare. Choosing the right content for your learners is one of the first and most important steps you can take.

Many teachers begin by teaching lexical sets, which include things like numbers, animals, or food items, because they seem like a simple and easy place to start. However, this language is often irrelevant for learners and doesn't give beginners the content needed to form sentences and use the language. The logical division of information into parts will significantly improve its perception and assimilation. Structure the lesson plan; break it down into small tasks and straightforward steps.

Teens often have short attention spans and varied interests. Keeping them engaged requires dynamic lessons and interactive tasks. Using visual aids and gestures may help you to demonstrate the task and engage your students more. Teen beginners benefit greatly from visual support. Pictures, flashcards, icons, and realia help clarify meaning without translation. Gestures provide extra cues to reinforce instructions and vocabulary. For example, you add valuable context to the phrase 'Hello, my name is...' by putting it next to an image of a person wearing a name tag and shaking someone's hand. You could also clarify this phrase using gestures by waving when you say 'hello' and pointing to yourself when you say your name. When teaching 'sit down' and 'stand up,' point to a chair or mime the action while saying the word. Use emotion-based facial expressions to support adjectives like 'happy,' 'angry,' or 'tired.' Before each lesson, plan the best way to introduce the target language so you're well-prepared with images and gestures to help your student follow along.

Repetition helps beginners absorb new language, but it shouldn't feel boring. Vary the format – use chants, echoing, games, or student-led repetition to make it interactive and memorable (Korovii, 2025). After introducing new vocabulary (e.g., days of the week), repeat it through choral drilling, a memory game, and a quick quiz game at the end of class. Find more drilling techniques in the table below.

When teaching beginners, it's important to use simple language. With teens, do this without sounding like you're talking down to them. Use clear, everyday English instead of overly simplified 'teacher talk.' Speak at a normal speed, but make sure to say each word clearly. Take short pauses between sentences to give them time to think. Simplify your directions, instructions, praise, and feedback to the shortest possible forms, such as: 'Good job!' 'Take out your workbooks' or 'Listen, please'.

Showing is better than telling. Instead of just explaining a task, demonstrate it or use a confident student as an example. Break complicated tasks into numbered steps, and provide visual aids or written instructions that teens can use independently. This helps them feel more independent.

Use the exact words for classroom routines and instructions regularly. Teens will quickly

learn these words through repetition. This sets a strong base for understanding language that is more complex later. When teaching new words or grammar, put them in real-life situations or stories that teens can picture and connect with, rather than just listing isolated words or rules.

Always check how well your students have understood the lesson material. They are frequently too shy to inquire or clarify information. Instruction Checking Questions (ICQs) and Concept Checking Questions (CCQs) are helpful tools for teaching teen beginners, but how you ask them is essential.

ICQs: Ask questions in a friendly way, like 'Are you writing or speaking?' or 'Do you work alone or with a partner?' This helps check if they understand without making them feel small.

CCQs: Be careful with how you ask these questions, as teens might not want to show they are confused. Instead of asking directly, try to check understanding through fun activities. For example, have students put events in order on a timeline to see if they understand the past tense, or use quick online polls where everyone answers at once, so no one feels singled out. Prepare your CCQs in advance not to make them more complicated than the concept itself. After teaching 'He goes to school,' ask: 'Does he go

Table 1

Drilling techniques

<i>Prompt:</i> New York is the capital of the USA. (not) <i>Response:</i> New York is not the capital of the USA.	Transformation drill (Ss are given a structure to be transformed)
<i>Prompt:</i> What's the matter? <i>Response:</i> I have a (backache). <i>Prompt:</i> What's the matter? <i>Response:</i> I have a toothache.	Questions and answers drills (use of the questions as prompts)
<i>Prompt:</i> I didn't like the TV program, so I slept. <i>Response:</i> I didn't like the TV program, so I went to sleep.	Repetition drill
<i>Prompt:</i> Leila is a very beautiful girl (intelligent). <i>Response:</i> Leila is a very intelligent girl. <i>Prompt:</i> John is helpful (modest). <i>Response:</i> John is modest	Substitution drill (practice structures or vocab items)
<i>Student 1:</i> My name is Ann, and I am mad about watching TV. What about you? <i>Student 2:</i> My name is Clara, and I love surfing. And you? <i>Student 3:</i> My name is John, and I like reading. What about you?	Chain
<i>Teacher:</i> 'Salad' <i>Students:</i> 'Salad' <i>Teacher:</i> 'Cobb salad' <i>Students:</i> 'Cobb salad' <i>Teacher:</i> 'to order a Cobb salad' <i>Students:</i> ' to order a Cobb salad' <i>Teacher:</i> 'I'd like to order a Cobb salad' <i>Student:</i> 'I'd like to order a cobb salad'	Back-chaining

now or every day?’ or *‘Is it one time or always?’*. Make sure your CCQs are clear to understand and draw a conclusion about a concept.

Scaffolding is a teaching strategy that involves giving learners the proper support to complete a task beyond their current ability, and gradually reducing that support as they become more confident and independent. For teen beginners, scaffolding is essential because it helps them to build confidence step by step and grasp new language and skills through structured practice. Here are several practical ways to scaffold learning for teen beginners:

1. **Model the task:** consistently demonstrate it before asking students to do it. This reduces uncertainty and provides a clear example. If students are writing about their weekend, show them your short paragraph first and read it aloud. Highlight useful phrases like *‘On Saturday, I went...’*

2. **Break tasks into smaller steps:** don’t expect students to produce complex language immediately. Start with manageable steps that build toward the goal. For example, your goal is for students to write about their daily routine.

Steps:

Step 1: Match routine verbs with pictures.

Step 2: Put verbs into sentences.

Step 3: Put sentences in order.

Step 4: Write about your routine.

3. **Use sentence starters and frames:** give students structured language to help them express ideas before they are ready to do it independently. For example, before completing a production task on expressing likes and dislikes, prepare some prompts: *‘I like ___ because it’s ___.’ ‘I don’t like ___. It’s ___.’*

4. **Provide word banks or visual aids:** beginner teens may know the ideas they want to express, but lack the vocabulary. Please support them with visuals, word lists, or picture dictionaries. During a speaking task about

hobbies, please give them a small list of verbs (play, watch, go, read) and pictures to guide their choices.

5. **Gradually reduce support:** as students become more capable, reduce the amount of help. Let them take more responsibility – for example, by creating their sentences instead of using sentence frames, or working in pairs rather than being guided as a class.

All things considered, teaching beginners a language is challenging, but seeing their rapid improvement can be incredibly rewarding. Gaining the skills and confidence to teach beginners is also an excellent way to expand your student base or continue your teaching journey.

Teaching English to teenage beginners presents a unique blend of challenges and opportunities. While their linguistic journey starts from the ground up, it is precisely this foundational stage that offers the greatest potential for lasting impact. As this article has argued, the key to success lies in moving beyond traditional instruction and embracing strategies that resonate with teenagers’ emotional, social, and cognitive realities.

By integrating communicative methods, gamified learning, and multimedia tools, educators can create lessons that not only build language skills but also foster motivation, confidence, and a positive attitude toward learning. Understanding the adolescent mindset, nurturing classroom rapport, and allowing room for autonomy are essential to sustaining engagement and reducing anxiety.

Ultimately, igniting enthusiasm for English in teen beginners is not about simplifying content – it’s about enriching the learning experience. With the right pedagogical mindset and creative approaches, teachers can spark curiosity and inspire learners to see English not as an obligation but as a meaningful and empowering part of their personal growth.

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ЗАПАЛЮЮЧИ ІСКРУ: ЯК ЗРОБИТИ АНГЛІЙСЬКУ ЗАХОПЛИВОЮ ДЛЯ ПІДЛІТКІВ-ПОЧАТКІВЦІВ

Стаття присвячена аналізу особливостей викладання англійської мови підліткам-початківцям та тих унікальних викликів і можливостей, які супроводжують цей процес. Викладання англійської мови підліткам на початковому рівні часто недооцінюється з огляду на його складність. Хоча на перший погляд воно може здаватися менш вимогливим, ніж навчання учнів вищих рівнів, на практиці робота з підлітками-початківцями потребує тонкого розуміння як педагогічних, так і психологічних аспектів. Ця вікова група, яка має обмежений або повністю відсутній попередній досвід вивчення англійської, вирізняється поєднанням емоційної чутливості, допитливості та вразливості.

У статті розглянуто ефективні стратегії навчання, які виходять за межі традиційного підходу, з метою перетворити перші мовні заняття на змістовний, захопливий і надихаючий досвід. В основі представлених методів – принципи комунікативного підходу до навчання мов (Communicative Language Teaching, CLT), що передбачає емоційне залучення учнів, формування позитивної атмосфери в класі та розвиток автономії учнів з перших уроків. У статті пропонуються практичні інструменти й підходи, зокрема ігровізація, використання мультимедійних ресурсів, персоналізація навчального контенту, створення навчальних завдань, пов'язаних з особистим досвідом, а також позитивне підкріплення.

Також проаналізовано типові труднощі, з якими стикаються викладачі: тривожність учнів, небажання брати участь у завданнях, а також поколіннєвий розрив між вчителем і підлітками. Стаття пропонує рішення, засновані на реальному досвіді викладання, що сприяють створенню безпечного, підтримуючого освітнього середовища, де підлітки можуть вільно досліджувати мову й практикувати спілкування. Загалом, автор підкреслює, що викладання англійської на початковому рівні підліткам є складним, але надзвичайно важливим і творчим завданням, яке вимагає гнучкості, емпатії та професійної майстерності.

Ключові слова: підлітки-початківці, комунікативне навчання, мотивація учня, гейміфікація, залученість у класі, емоційний зв'язок, впевненість у мовленні.

Дата першого надходження рукопису до видання: 28.05.2025

Дата прийнятого до друку рукопису після рецензування: 23.06.2025

Дата публікації: 25.07.2025