

UDC 372.881.111.1-053.6

<https://doi.org/10.33619/2414-2948/118/64>

METHODS OF TEACHING ENGLISH TO TEENAGERS: HOW TO KEEP THEIR ATTENTION

©*Tashtanova N., International University of Kyrgyz Republic, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan*

©*Zhumagulova E., SPIN-code: 4453-2267, International University
of the Kyrgyz Republic, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan*

МЕТОДИКА ПРЕПОДАВАНИЯ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ПОДРОСТКАМ: КАК УДЕРЖАТЬ ВНИМАНИЕ

©*Таштанова Н. Д., Международный университет Кыргызстана, г. Бишкек, Кыргызстан*

©*Жумагулова Э. Ж., SPIN-код: 4453-2267, Международный университет
Кыргызстана, г. Бишкек, Кыргызстан*

Abstract: This paper explores the challenges of maintaining teenagers' attention in English language classrooms. Drawing on psychological theories and contemporary language teaching methodologies, it examines why adolescents often lose focus and proposes effective strategies to engage them. By integrating communicative, task-based, and project-based approaches with multimedia tools and gamification, teachers can create dynamic, relevant, and motivating learning environments. The study underscores that sustaining attention is essential not only for immediate engagement but also for fostering long-term language competence and learner autonomy.

Аннотация. Рассматриваются проблемы поддержания внимания подростков на уроках английского языка. Опираясь на психологические теории и современные методики преподавания языка, авторы исследуют причины частой потери внимания подростками и предлагают эффективные стратегии для их вовлечения. Интегрируя коммуникативный, ориентированный на задачи и проектный подходы с мультимедийными инструментами и геймификацией, учителя могут создавать динамичную, релевантную и мотивирующую учебную среду. В исследовании подчеркивается, что поддержание внимания необходимо не только для непосредственного вовлечения, но и для развития долгосрочной языковой компетенции и самостоятельности учащихся.

Keywords: teenagers, English language teaching, project-based learning, gamification, multimedia learning.

Ключевые слова: подростки, обучение английскому языку, проектное обучение, геймификация, мультимедийное обучение.

Teaching English to teenagers is a complex pedagogical task requiring not only linguistic expertise but also an understanding of adolescent development. Piaget identifies adolescence as the stage of formal operational thinking, where abstract reasoning emerges but cognitive regulation is not yet fully developed. Vygotsky emphasises the role of social interaction in learning, particularly within the Zone of Proximal Development, where guidance and collaboration enable learners to achieve more than they could independently. Bruner adds that instruction should be scaffolded and meaningful within the learner's cultural and personal context.

From the perspective of second language acquisition, Krashen's Input Hypothesis suggests that learners acquire language most effectively when exposed to comprehensible input slightly beyond their current proficiency level. Harmer and Ur further argue that for adolescent learners, input must also be engaging and relevant to compete with the constant stimuli of the digital age. Research by Carrier et al. shows that adolescents' frequent media multitasking correlates with shorter attention spans, reinforcing the need for dynamic, varied lesson design. Psychological development in adolescence, described by Erikson as the "identity vs. role confusion" stage, is marked by an acute sensitivity to peer perception and a heightened need for self-expression. According to Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory, intrinsic motivation is enhanced when learners experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness — all crucial considerations in teenage pedagogy [1].

Cognitively, adolescents are capable of understanding irony, metaphor, and hypothetical reasoning, but their emotional regulation skills may lag behind, resulting in fluctuating classroom engagement. Attention control remains fragile, particularly for tasks perceived as irrelevant or overly repetitive. Teachers must therefore create lessons that strike a balance between challenge and accessibility, integrating opportunities for self-expression, peer interaction, and immediate feedback. Teenagers' learning behaviour is influenced by the interplay of cognitive potential, social orientation, and cultural environment. Their developing abstract reasoning skills allow them to tackle sophisticated grammar and discourse analysis, yet they need structured support to sustain focus. Socially, the influence of peers is profound: group-based and collaborative activities are often more effective than individual tasks.

Culturally, many adolescents engage daily with English-language media — films, music, games, and social networks — which can both enhance and distort expectations for language learning. This informal exposure offers a valuable entry point for lesson design if harnessed strategically.

Teenagers' learning behaviour is influenced by the interplay of cognitive potential, social orientation, and cultural environment. Their developing abstract reasoning skills allow them to tackle sophisticated grammar and discourse analysis, yet they need structured support to sustain focus. Socially, the influence of peers is profound: group-based and collaborative activities are often more effective than individual tasks. Culturally, many adolescents engage daily with English-language media — films, music, games, and social networks — which can both enhance and distort expectations for language learning. This informal exposure offers a valuable entry point for lesson design if harnessed strategically.

The issue of attention loss among teenage learners is multifaceted and cannot be attributed to a single cause. One of the most significant factors is the perceived lack of relevance in lesson content. Adolescents, as numerous studies in educational psychology confirm, are highly sensitive to whether a task feels meaningful in relation to their own lives. If the material appears disconnected from their personal interests, aspirations, or immediate social environment, it is quickly labelled as "boring" and mentally discarded [2].

Another common reason is lesson monotony. A classroom dominated by one-way teacher talk or repetitive exercises can fail to provide the variety adolescents require to stay cognitively engaged. Harmer notes that even well-designed materials lose their impact if delivered in the same format repeatedly, as the teenage brain thrives on novelty and change [4].

A further contributor is the overemphasis on linguistic form at the expense of communicative meaning. While grammar and vocabulary are essential, teenagers tend to disengage when language learning becomes purely mechanical. Ur emphasises that communicative use, embedded in authentic contexts, is more motivating for this age group than isolated drills [6].

Finally, there is the omnipresent challenge of technological competition. Smartphones and social media platforms offer instant gratification through high-frequency stimuli, which can condition the brain to expect constant novelty. In comparison, a traditionally paced classroom can feel slow and unstimulating. This reality means that teachers must actively design lessons that can at least partially match the engagement level of digital environments. Recognising these challenges is not a cause for pessimism but rather a necessary first step toward designing lessons that sustain focus. It is here that methodological considerations and scholarly discussions provide valuable guidance. The literature on adolescent language learning offers a rich set of frameworks for tackling the problem of engagement. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) remains a cornerstone in ELT methodology, emphasising interaction and meaningful language use. Within CLT, Task-Based Learning (TBL), as outlined by Ellis [3], offers a particularly promising approach for teenagers because it provides clear objectives, tangible outcomes, and opportunities for problem-solving — all of which align with their developmental need for autonomy and competence.

From the motivational standpoint, Dornyei's L2 Motivational Self System highlights the importance of helping learners develop a vivid, personal vision of themselves as competent English speakers. Lessons that allow students to imagine and rehearse real-world communicative scenarios can strengthen their investment in the language. This aligns with Self-Determination Theory, which stresses the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness in sustaining motivation.

Methodologists also point to project-based learning (PBL), rooted in constructivist theories of Vygotsky and Bruner, as a way to sustain focus over longer periods. PBL enables teenagers to work on extended, personally meaningful projects, often integrating multiple skills and disciplines. This approach mirrors authentic life tasks, thus increasing perceived relevance.

Incorporating multimodal learning is another widely endorsed strategy. Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning provides empirical support for combining verbal and visual input to enhance retention and engagement. Given that adolescents are digital natives, integrating video, audio, and interactive platforms is not just a motivational tactic but also a way to align with their natural modes of processing information [5].

What emerges from these scholarly discussions is that methodology for teaching teenagers should be neither rigidly traditional nor purely entertainment-focused. Instead, it should combine cognitive challenge, emotional connection, and sensory variety in a coherent pedagogical design. This understanding naturally leads to the formulation of practical strategies for classroom application. Drawing from the methodological principles above, a set of interconnected strategies can be implemented to maintain teenage engagement. The first is maximising interaction. Debates, problem-solving tasks, and role plays transform learners from passive recipients into active participants. For example, a simulation of a real-life situation, such as planning a school event or negotiating a travel itinerary, not only develops linguistic competence but also appeals to teenagers' social instincts. The second is integrating multimedia and authentic resources. Carefully chosen music tracks, podcasts, YouTube clips, and even selected TikTok videos can serve as linguistic input and discussion prompts. This not only broadens exposure to authentic language but also bridges the gap between the students' everyday media consumption and the classroom.

Third, personalisation is essential. Assignments linked to students' hobbies, cultural interests, or community issues create a sense of ownership over learning. Project-based tasks — from producing a podcast episode to designing an English-language social media campaign — are particularly effective in this respect. Fourth, lesson pacing and variation are crucial. Alternating between high-energy and reflective activities prevents fatigue and caters to different attention rhythms. Short, focused activities with clear goals give students frequent opportunities to “reset” their attention. Finally, gamification can harness the motivational power of competition and

progress tracking. Points, badges, and leaderboards can be integrated into classroom routines to encourage sustained participation without overemphasising performance pressure. The strength of these strategies lies in their synergy: when interactive tasks are combined with multimedia input, personal relevance, varied pacing, and gamification, they create a learning environment that feels dynamic, purposeful, and emotionally engaging. The next logical step is to consider how these principles manifest in concrete classroom activities.

One effective activity is English Speed Dating, where students rotate partners every two minutes to answer prepared conversational prompts. The rapid pace maintains high energy levels and ensures that all students interact with multiple peers in a short time. Another is the Meme Translation Challenge, in which students select internet memes, translate them into English, and explain their humour or cultural references. This not only fosters linguistic precision but also sparks lively discussions about cultural context. A more elaborate option is the Detective Story Project, where the class is divided into groups, each receiving different clues in English. Over multiple stages, students must collaborate, exchange information, and piece together the mystery. This project integrates reading, speaking, listening, and problem-solving in a naturally engaging narrative framework. Each of these activities embodies the methodological principles discussed earlier: they are interactive, authentic, personalised, varied, and inherently motivating. Moreover, they illustrate how theoretical insights can translate into practical tools that keep teenagers focused while advancing their language skills.

The challenge of sustaining teenagers' attention in English language classrooms cannot be resolved through a single methodological choice or a set of superficial engagement tactics. Rather, it requires a deliberate synthesis of pedagogical theory, psychological insight, and creative instructional design. As the preceding discussion has shown, adolescents bring to the classroom a complex interplay of cognitive maturity, emotional volatility, and strong social orientation, all of which influence their engagement with learning tasks. While they possess the capacity for sophisticated reasoning and the ability to navigate abstract concepts, their attention is fragile and easily diverted, particularly in an era dominated by digital media and instant gratification.

The scholarly perspectives reviewed — from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory to Dornyei's motivational frameworks and Mayer's multimedia learning principles — collectively point to the need for instruction that is dynamic, socially interactive, and personally meaningful. Approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching, Task-Based Learning, and Project-Based Learning, when adapted to the adolescent context, offer powerful tools for aligning instructional goals with teenagers' psychological and social needs. Equally important is the recognition that teaching strategies cannot be static; lesson pacing, variety, and relevance must be continuously recalibrated in response to the shifting energy levels, interests, and interpersonal dynamics of the group.

Practical strategies — including interactive simulations, multimedia integration, personalisation of content, and gamification — are not merely attention-grabbing devices but vehicles for deeper learning. When embedded in a coherent methodological framework, they enable teenagers to perceive English not as an academic requirement but as a living, functional skill connected to their identities, aspirations, and cultural experiences. This reframing is essential for sustaining both immediate attention and long-term motivation.

Ultimately, the effective teaching of English to teenagers hinges on the teacher's ability to act as a designer of experiences rather than a mere transmitter of knowledge. It involves crafting learning environments where challenge is balanced with support, novelty with structure, and individual autonomy with collaborative interdependence. Such environments do more than hold students' attention for the duration of a lesson; they cultivate habits of engagement, resilience, and curiosity that extend beyond the classroom and into lifelong learning.

In this sense, keeping teenagers' attention is not an end in itself but a gateway to deeper educational aims: fostering linguistic competence, intercultural awareness, and the confidence to participate fully in an interconnected world. The task is demanding, but the rewards — for both learner and teacher — are profound.

References:

1. Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2013). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. Springer Science & Business Media.
2. Dörnyei, Z. (2009). The L2 motivational self system. *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self*, 36(3), 9-11.
3. Ellis, R. (2003). Task-based Language Learning and Teaching. *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching*, 13, 125-129.
4. Harmer, J. (2001). The practice of English language teaching. *London/New York*, 32(1), 401-405.
5. Mayer, R. E. (2013). Multimedia instruction. In *Handbook of research on educational communications and technology* (pp. 385-399). New York, NY: Springer New York. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-3185-5_31
6. Ur, P. (2012). *A course in English language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.

Список литературы:

1. Deci E. L., Ryan R. M. Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior. – Springer Science & Business Media, 2013.
2. Dörnyei Z. The L2 motivational self system // Motivation, language identity and the L2 self. 2009. V. 36. №3. P. 9-11.
3. Ellis R. Task-based Language Learning and Teaching // Asian Journal of English Language Teaching. 2003. V. 13. P. 125-129.
4. Harmer J. The practice of English language teaching // London/New York. 2001. V. 32. №1. P. 401-405.
5. Mayer R. E. Multimedia instruction // Handbook of research on educational communications and technology. New York, NY: Springer New York, 2013. P. 385-399. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-3185-5_31
6. Ur P. A course in English language teaching. – Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Работа поступила
в редакцию 10.08.2025 г.

Принята к публикации
19.08.2025 г.

Ссылка для цитирования:

Tashtanova N., Zhumagulova E. Methods of Teaching English to Teenagers: How to Keep their Attention // Бюллетень науки и практики. 2025. Т. 11. №9. С. 533-537. <https://doi.org/10.33619/2414-2948/118/64>

Cite as (APA):

Tashtanova, N., & Zhumagulova, E. (2025). Methods of Teaching English to Teenagers: How to Keep their Attention. *Bulletin of Science and Practice*, 11(9), 533-537. <https://doi.org/10.33619/2414-2948/118/64>