

PECULIARITIES OF TEACHING ENGLISH TO ADULTS

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Summary

Teaching English to adults presents a unique and captivating challenge distinct from instructing children or teenagers. Adults bring diverse backgrounds, motivations, and learning styles to language acquisition, making it essential for educators to adapt their approaches. Motivation is a key factor in adult learning, with adults often choosing to learn English for specific reasons such as career advancement or travel. While many adults urgently need English for international communication, they may face challenges due to prior unsuccessful learning experiences.

The concept of "andragogy" emphasizes the practical orientation of adult learning, independent work, and the student's leading role in achieving specific goals. Notable psychologists like Carl Rogers stress the importance of relevance, preserving identity, involving the whole person, and encouraging self-criticism in successful adult learning.

Ukrainian psychologists and scientists, including O. Tarnopolsky, M. Kushnirov, O. Palii, and T. Besarab, have explored the peculiarities of teaching English to adults. They highlight variations in language proficiency, goals, and learning styles among adult learners, advocating for individualization of training to cater to diverse needs. The time constraints of adults necessitate flexible schedules and the option for online learning. Practical language usage in real situations is crucial for effective learning.

Key words: communication, intercultural exchange, skill development, adult learners, psychological factors, motivation.

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1. Introduction

Teaching English to adults is a fascinating and distinctive challenge, different from teaching kids or teenagers. Grown-ups bring their own experiences, motivations, and learning styles to the language-learning table. In this article, we explore the unique aspects of teaching English to adults and the effective strategies that can make the learning journey more engaging and successful.

Adults, unlike children, often have varied backgrounds, jobs, and life experiences. These differences can affect how they learn a new language. Recognizing and adapting to these diversities is key to being an effective English teacher for adults.

Motivation plays a crucial role in adult learning. Unlike children who may learn English as part of their school curriculum, adults often choose to learn for specific reasons, such as career advancement, travel, or personal growth. Understanding these motivations helps tailor teaching methods to better suit their goals.

A huge number of adults have an urgent need to learn English in order to become full partners in international communication and activity. However, it is adults who experience increased difficulties in learning English, which is most often explained by unsuccessful previous learning experience. Teaching adult audiences has a number of features, knowledge and consideration of which will help to effectively use methodological techniques and solve the problem of optimizing the educational process.

2. Analysis of research and publications

Teaching adults is very different from teaching children and teenagers. The definition “andragogy” was offered by the German historian A. Kapp in 1833. This is “one of the names of the pedagogical science, covering theoretical and practical problems of education, training and education of adults” (Kapp, 1833). Andragogy studies the features of perception and mastery of knowledge, formation of skills and abilities of adult students. The main principle of andragogy is the practical orientation of learning, the priority of the student’s independent work, his leading role in the learning process aimed at realizing a specific goal.

M. Knowles in 1975 in his book “Modern practice in adult education” discussed the basic principles of andragogy. The most general principles for organizing the adult learning process are as follows:

1. The main type of work of adult students is their independent work.
2. Learning activities are carried out together with other students. Students plan, implement and evaluate their work together.
3. Students’ work is based on their professional experience. They use the skills they have acquired in the field of their professional activities.
4. The training program is focused on the implementation of specific goals and objectives of students.
5. The program is built taking into account the level of training of students, their psycho-physiological and cognitive characteristics, as well as their professional experience.
6. The content, forms, methods and means of training, as well as methods for assessing results, correspond to the goals and objectives of training.
7. Education is built taking into account social, temporal, everyday factors and is focused on the student’s fulfillment of his social role.
8. The knowledge, skills and abilities acquired as a result of training can be immediately applied in practice.
9. The student is given a certain degree of freedom in choosing goals, content, forms, methods and means of teaching.
10. Formation of new educational needs among students.
11. Students learn consciously and understand the necessity of the actions they take (Knowles, 1975).

American psychologist Carl Rogers investigates adult learning and states that it is successful if:

- the subject of study is relevant;

- the identity of the student (his Self) is not threatened;
- the whole person is involved in learning;
- most of the learning is realized through practical activities;
- self-criticism and self-esteem are encouraged, which helps strengthen feelings of student's independence and self-confidence (Rogers, 1969).

The peculiarities of teaching English to adults are investigated by domestic psychologists and scientist (O. Tarnopolsky, M. Kushnirov, O. Palii, T. Besarab). They highlight that adults have different levels of language proficiency, learning goals, and learning styles. Individualization of training allows a teacher to take into account these differences and adapt the approach according to the needs of each student. Adults most often learn a foreign language for specific purposes, such as work, travel, education or cultural exchange. It is important to consider these goals when choosing content and teaching methods. Adult learners often have limited time to study because they can work or have family obligations. Schedule flexibility and the ability to study at home or online can be key factors for their success in learning. Practical usage of language in real situations is considered to be very important. The use of real scenarios and tasks can improve practical skills in using the language in various spheres of life.

3. Presentation of the main material

For a teacher, working with an adult audience is of great interest, since an adult, as a rule, is more motivated to study than a child or teenager. He wants to learn because he realizes the need to acquire new knowledge and the opportunity to apply it in one's professional activities. An adult has professional and life experience, and therefore your point of view. Adults have something to say and want to express their opinions. Adults strive to actively participate in the learning process, using their already acquired knowledge and experience. This gives the classes a lively, discussion-like character and makes them extremely exciting.

However, the teacher also has to deal with a number of problems. One of the main ones is the cognitive characteristics of perception, memorization and thinking of an adult. These processes in adults are less productive than in children or adolescents, especially in the evening, after a hard day at work.

In addition, life and professional experience can also play a negative role, since an adult has established mental models and behavioral habits. Stereotypes of thinking in his native language prevent him from assimilating the speech structures of a foreign language. This problem is especially often encountered by teachers working in groups of beginners, since these students have very little experience in learning a foreign language, and it is difficult for them to overcome stereotypes of thinking in Russian.

A big problem is the increasing workload of students at work, lack of time to complete homework and absence from classes. This problem is also especially relevant at the initial levels of education, when regular attendance at classes and homework are absolutely necessary.

Some psychological factors also complicate the learning process. Many adults experience learning difficulties because they are not ready to change their attitude towards learning, as they are still influenced by the educational system to which they are accustomed. Technical specialists especially suffer from this. In many of these universities, technocratic thinking and a focus on mastering ready-made knowledge still prevail, and the lecture form of classes is one of the main types of educational activities.

Teaching English to adult learners in non-linguistic universities involves employing methods that are tailored to their unique needs, motivations, and diverse backgrounds. Here are some effective teaching methods commonly used for adult learners in non-linguistic university settings:

1. Task-Based Learning (TBL): Task-based learning focuses on practical, real-life tasks that require language use. In non-linguistic universities, this could involve activities related to the specific field of study. For instance, business students might engage in case studies or report writing, while science students might work on research proposals or presentations in English.

2. Content-Based Instruction (CBI): Content-based instruction integrates language learning with subject matter content. In non-linguistic universities, this method involves teaching English through academic content relevant to the students' disciplines. This approach not only enhances language skills but also reinforces comprehension and communication within the context of their field of study.

3. Project-Based Learning (PBL): Project-based learning encourages collaborative work on extended projects. In non-linguistic universities, English language projects can be designed to align with the students' academic interests and career goals. These projects provide opportunities for research, critical thinking, and presentation skills development in English.

4. Flipped Classroom Approach: The flipped classroom model involves students engaging with course content outside of class and using class time for discussion, problem-solving, and application. This method allows adult learners in non-linguistic universities to access language materials at their own pace, providing more time for interactive language practice and application during class sessions.

5. Role-Play and Simulations: Adult learners benefit from role-playing scenarios and simulations that mimic real-world situations. This method helps them practice language in context, developing both their linguistic and interpersonal communication skills. In non-linguistic universities, role-playing can be adapted to industry-specific situations relevant to the students' fields.

6. Interactive and Communicative Approaches: Emphasizing interactive and communicative language activities is crucial for adult learners. Non-linguistic universities can integrate group discussions, debates, and problem-solving activities into English language instruction. These activities foster effective communication skills and encourage students to express complex ideas in English.

7. Technology Integration: Leveraging technology is essential in teaching English to adult learners in non-linguistic universities. Online platforms, multimedia resources, and language learning apps can be incorporated to provide additional learning materials, facilitate self-directed study, and offer opportunities for language practice outside the classroom.

8. Incorporating Authentic Materials: Using authentic materials such as academic articles, research papers, or industry-specific reports helps adult learners connect language learning to their academic and professional contexts. This method makes the learning experience more relevant and meaningful to non-linguistic university students.

9. Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness: Acknowledging and addressing cultural differences in language use is vital. In non-linguistic universities, understanding the cultural nuances within academic and professional contexts ensures that language instruction is not only linguistically accurate but also culturally appropriate.

10. Flexible and Tailored Approaches: Recognizing the individual needs and preferences of adult learners is crucial. Tailoring instruction to accommodate diverse learning styles, preferences, and proficiency levels ensures that the teaching methods resonate with the specific characteristics of non-linguistic university students.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, teaching English to adults presents a multifaceted challenge that demands a nuanced and adaptive approach. The recognition of diverse backgrounds, motivations, and learning styles among adult learners underscores the need for individualization in teaching methodologies. Motivation, a pivotal aspect of adult learning, is often fueled by specific goals such as career advancement or personal growth.

The principles of andragogy, emphasizing practical orientation, independent work, and the student's active role, provide a solid foundation for effective adult education. Noteworthy contributions from psychologists like Carl Rogers further underscore the importance of relevance, personal identity preservation, and practical engagement in successful adult learning experiences.

Domestic researchers, such as O. Tarnopolsky, M. Kushnirov, O. Palii, and T. Besarab, have delved into the distinctive features of teaching English to adults, emphasizing the variability in language proficiency, learning goals, and styles. The flexibility in scheduling and the incorporation of real-life language scenarios are critical considerations for addressing the time constraints of adult learners.

In non-linguistic university settings, the implementation of tailored methodologies like Task-Based Learning, Content-Based Instruction, and Project-Based Learning proves effective. These approaches integrate language acquisition with academic content, fostering a deeper understanding and application of English within the context of students' disciplines.

The importance of technology integration, cultural sensitivity, and the acknowledgment of individual differences cannot be overstated. Acknowledging and accommodating the unique needs and preferences of adult learners contribute significantly to the success of English language instruction in non-linguistic university environments.

In essence, the key to effective teaching lies in a dynamic and responsive pedagogical approach that recognizes the diversity, motivations, and goals of adult learners. By embracing these principles and methodologies, educators can create an engaging and successful learning journey for adults seeking to acquire proficiency in the English language.

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