Teaching a Foreign Language According to Age Groups

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Teaching a foreign language according to age groups (adults, adolescents and preschool/school children) has its own specificity, as well as methods and principles with some attributes of adult learners being facilitative of this task and others constituting a source of difficulties. This study is aimed to provide an overview of key issues relevant to foreign language learning and teaching according to age groups, as well as highlights the ways in which the characteristics of age groups can be capitalized upon to optimize the teaching process. In the first place, common principles of language learning are discussed, which is followed by a consideration of issues concerning the specificity of teaching foreign languages according to age, as well as choice of the most effective methods and strategies.

Keywords: foreign language, principle, age groups, method, strategy

INTRODUCTION

Before starting to discuss the issues of teaching foreign languages according to age groups, it is necessary to define these categories, as well as note the distinctive characteristics of each group. It should be noted that this task itself may cause a serious challenge. Our study included three age groups: adults, adolescents and preschool/school children. So, for example, according to the criteria of Komorowska (2003), the group of adults includes individuals aged 19 and over, who have the ability to read and write, use abstract thinking, and possess intellectual and social maturity. With regard to the issues of teaching a foreign language in this age group, the author notes that this aspect is less problematic compared to the group of adolescents and preschool/schoolchildren. This is due to the fact that in most cases adults are responsible for their actions, and there is no need to force them to learn the language: the foreign language is learned of their own free will. Another researcher, Brown (2001), in his turn puts forward the idea that adults, compared to preschool/schoolchildren and adolescents, "have superior cognitive abilities". Longer attention allows them to easily carry out tedious activities; in addition, they are less prone to emotional stress and able to focus on specific linguistic features.

The teenage group of students is represented by adolescents aged 13 to 19. According to Maier (2011), during this period, adolescents have many important changes in their young life, when carefree childhood gradually transforms into a more complex adult world.

According to Ur (1996) adolescents are the most difficult group of learners. Given the fact that they have more potential than preschool/school children, in most cases they lack motivation, are less susceptible

to teacher support and are difficult to control. It takes a teacher more time and effort to gain their trust and respect. Besides, adolescent students often seek to participate in decision-making that is closely related to the material of the lessons, as well as methods and even curriculum. Unfortunately, English lessons, like other subjects in school, are not a priority among teenagers. It is common knowledge that it is difficult to interest and please the students, that is why teachers are always in search for original teaching methods that will attract and hold students' attention. However, this is just a small part of the general picture. "Every high school teacher had lessons, and sometimes even days and weeks, when the task of teaching a foreign language seemed daunting and, on bad days, even hopeless". However, according to the assumption of the methodologist Penny Ur, adolescents in general are best able to learn a foreign language.

As teenagers begin to develop cognitive ability, they can be exposed to language learning techniques that require more logical and/or abstract thinking. Attention span begins to lengthen, but there are also more distractions of an emotional nature. Probably the most important considerations for these learners are "affective" ones. Issues to do with ego and self-esteem are at their height, and teenagers can be incredibly sensitive to the ways others see their physical, mental and emotional development. Real or perceived errors can shatter confidence and detract from risk-taking. Teachers of teenagers need to be able to find ways to draw on and develop cognitive, analytical and logic skills, whilst being constantly mindful of feedback techniques and confidence building strategies

The third group is presented by preschool and school children aged 3 to 6 and 7-12 years respectively. At this age, they are extremely curious and full of enthusiasm to explore the world around them. Most children are eager to gain new experiences, including learning a new language. They like being active and can spend colossal energy in engaging activities, which in any preschool or school establishments is a good prerequisite to benefit from the combination of children's physical activity and language learning. According to Vygotsky (1962), children gain knowledge through social interaction. But taking into consideration the fact that children prefer physical activities, and attention concentrating is minimal, then physical exercises should be used, combined with foreign language learning. According to Scott and Ytreberg (1990), the demonstrative world around children always prevails, and they often use hands, eyes and ears to understand the environment. Moreover, when children create their own visual images and realities, they are more involved and interested in the learning activity and material uptake becomes effective.

Given the enormous difficulty and variety of issues that arise in the process of teaching foreign languages regardless of age group, the discussion of the topics highlighted often reflects the research interests of the author, and the expressed views may present his beliefs or personal experience, rather than theoretical statements or empirical proof. It should be noted that discussion and analysis of the tasks and goals of language pedagogy, the choice of teaching methods and principles, and the need for an advertency to individual requirements between students of different age groups fully determines the objective and relevance of this research.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Teaching is a didactic process involving both teacher and student, and its main purpose is to promote the development of skills and competencies. According to Johnsson-Walker (1828) teaching is an instruction, providing of information. Brown (2000) considers that teaching should be defined in terms of learning because "teaching" facilitates the learning process, gives the student the opportunity to learn, and creates the necessary conditions for it. A broader definition of teaching always leads to a variety of methods that the teacher can use to simplify the learning process.

Teaching process in educational establishments is realized on the basis of didactic principles. These principles are aimed at achieving effective education, acquiring basis of knowledge and developing skills to apply obtained knowledge in real life.

The most recognized principles are: visual principle, scientific principle, systematic principle, principle of accessibility, principle of considering learner's individual abilities, cognitive principle, teaching foreign language. Methodology based on general didactic principles has created methodical principles: 1)

communicative (speech) approach to teaching a foreign language; 2) consideration of native language peculiarities; 3) prevailing role of exercises on the all stages and in all spheres of foreign language acquisition.

In determination of methods, the distinction between "philosophy of language teaching at the level of theory and principles and a set of derived procedures for teaching a language, is central".

E. Antony identified three levels of conceptualization and organization, which he named **approach, method and technique**. According to his model: approach is the level at which assumptions and beliefs about language and language learning are specified; **method** is the level at which theory is put into practice and at which choices are made about particular skills to be taught, the content to be taught, and the order in which the content will be presented; technique is a level at which classroom procedures are described.

Approach is considered to be the theory about the feature of language and language learning that stands as the source of practices and principles in language teaching. J.C. Richards and Th. S. Rodgers present linguistic and psycholinguistic aspects of *approach*, as follows: a) theory of language which has three different theoretical views of language and nature of language proficiency: the structural, functional and interactional view; b) theory of language learning which associates with a method at the level of approach emphasizing either one or both of these dimensions: process oriented and condition oriented theories. The second level at which approaches and methods are treated is a design and it is a dimension specially developed for an instructional system which leads an approach to a method. At this level of method analysis objectives, language content, learning tasks and teaching activities, role of students, role of teachers and role of instructional materials are designated. And the third level of approach and methods analysis-procedure is concerned with how the tasks and activities are integrated into lessons and used as a basis for teaching and learning.

Thus, *methods* are held to be fixed in teaching systems with prescribed techniques and practices, whereas *approaches* represent language teaching philosophies that can be interpreted and applied in a variety of different ways in the classroom. Method can be distinguished according to the teaching and learning context and it is used in wide context (Communicative language teaching) and narrow context (project work, problem-solving, brainstorming). Approach and method are based on the *principles* as initial theoretical points. Procedure itself includes task, techniques and activities. Tasks and activities can be considered as exercises. Technique is a way for a teacher to organize a learner's activity. Through techniques we develop in learners productive, receptive and interactive skills that are necessary for effective communication.

Technology is meant as a procedure of teaching and learning foreign language in the classrooms. By technology of teaching we understand the complex system including algorithm of operations and actions and ways of acquiring the content of foreign language for achievement the result of foreign language as a certain level of communicative competence.

Pedagogical technology is the systematic method of creation, application and determination of the foreign language teaching process and acquiring the knowledge with the help of technical and human resources and their interaction for the goals of optimizing the forms of education. Technology can be manifested also at the level of operations and actions in the teaching and learning process.

Here we should note that the modern linguistics distinguishes conventional and unconventional methods of teaching foreign language. Conventional methods which are usually applied in the teaching practice contributed to the development of new methods. According to Komorowska (2001) there are four fundamental conventional methods. The Direct Method forces the learners to make the conversation in the target language. The direct method consists in conveying the meaning through action without the necessity of translating it into the native language. Here the teacher and the learner are partners, and their relation is friendly and complementary. The significant feature of this method is speaking in target language. The teacher does not correct all the student's mistakes in order to give him the possibility to self-correction. The Grammar Translation Methodis generally based on learning the grammar rules and their application in translation of foreign language texts. The Audio - Lingual Method is aimed to acquire by the learner the communicative competence. The most characteristic aspect of ALM is learning and memorizing whole sets of phrases using various drills. Another example of conventional method presented by Komorowska (2001)

is Cognitive Code Learning, which is based on the development by the learner the communicative competence, which may allow him to understand and compile infinite number of correct sentences by means of the grammatical rule.

Alongside with conventional methods Komorowska (2001) distinguishes five unconventional ones. The first one is the Total Physical Response, which is based on teaching foreign language through listening and at the same time physically reaction to the particular commands given by the teacher. The native language is rarely used; the meaning is conveyed through the movement of the body. Another unconventional method is Silent Way, when the teacher is silent most of the lesson time and his major role is to be an assistant and a person who will motivate the learners. The central role is played by the students, who actively participate in the lecture and lead the conversation. This method is known for using Cuisenaire Rods and Sound-Color Charts which are colorful materials with pronunciation patterns, grammar rules or vocabulary lists. The next method proposed by Komorowska (2001) is Community Language Learning (also called Counseling Language Learning), which assumes that communication between people occurs only when they want to exchange information on a particular subject. The Natural Approach is a method consisting in listening to foreign language conversations whose main sense is understandable for learners because it results from well known situations.

Besides all above discussed methods in methodology the following technologies are also applied: illustrative, dialogic, playing, problem-solving, project, case study, information-communication.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In methodology the different approaches are used to distinguish methods. They can be classified according to different criteria:

1. according to the sources of information (sources transmission and acquiring the knowledge): 1) verbal methods – lecture, conversation, explanation; 2) method of working with a book – working on textbook, reading additional literature, preparation of messages, abstracts); 3) method of observation, experiment; 4) methods of exercises and practice – practical experience of learners;
2. according to the quality parameters as particular features of cognitive process they are: 1) explanative-illustrative method; 2) reproductive method; 3) problem-recount method; 4) partly-searching method; 5) research;
3. in agreement with specifics of foreign language teaching and its action-oriented character there are methods of teaching: 1) demonstration (presentation); 2) explanation; 3) practice (training); 4) feedback and self-control.

The methods of interaction between a teacher and learners oriented to the foreign language teaching in the aspect of organization are: 1) familiarization of the teaching material on the basis of visual-sensory perception; 2) independent comprehension of teaching material and operations with it; 3) practice for production of speech; 4) practice for reception of speech; 5) motivational production of oral and written speech; 6) motivational reception of oral and written speech; 7) control, correction and evaluation of speech acts of a productive plan; 8) control, correction, evaluation of speech acts of a receptive plan.

These methods demonstrate the interaction between the teacher and learners: the teacher (or textbook) organizes the algorithm of operation and actions, and learners implement them. These methods related to the general didactic methods of foreign language teaching specifics of EL as a subject and levels of foreign language acquisition. But at the same time they bring the dominant idea, for instance, method of observation or explanative-illustrative method. They are tools which can be used consecutively while working on the new material. If we use visual aids, motivational strategies, various situational contexts, during the presentation of new material, then learners will better percept, comprehend and remember the new material.

These methods put together a hierarchical system; they are in collateral subordination; a learner moves from step of familiarization to comprehension, then to training and to using, i.e. to communication. As well as in teaching process it is necessary to undertake an assessment for effective gaining accuracy and foreign language by learners. For this aims various ways (methods) are used.

Choice of Teaching Methods According to Age Groups

It is important for teachers to keep up with current instructional methods and their underlying principles as well as effective classroom techniques, materials, and assessment strategies appropriate to a certain stage depending on the learners' age group.

Age can be considered as a learner variable, a contextual consideration assessed alongside knowing who your learners are, and where and why they are learning English. While it might be rash to claim that a particular method is appropriate for a particular age group of students, there are certain general considerations related to age groups that should encourage teachers to be careful or selective about teaching methods and the methods they use.

Teaching English to Adults

For the majority of adults, the study of the foreign language does not play a key role. For those who study the language as a requirement in bachelor and master's programs there is no immediate value of foreign languages in their lives, and unfortunately, it usually leads to obtaining the language course required to complete their studies. As a result, there is simple satisfaction that students with basic knowledge of foreign language can use their communication skills, for example, when they go on vacation abroad. For adult learners who need the foreign language for their future work, the degree of study and teaching will be determined by specific professional needs. For example, for a physicist aimed to obtain a Ph.D. degree, priority may be given to reading academic texts, learning specific terminology and at some point writing articles or understanding and speaking at international conferences. For a person involved in the business sphere, it will be much more important to have the ability to negotiate with partners in different fields, although sufficient reading and writing skills can also contribute to the career progress. Such varied goals will surely influence the ways of teaching the foreign language and learning goals.

But, on the other hand, this age group shows more focused attention in the learning process and they can cope with tasks that require more cognition and abstract thinking. The adults generally respond well to teaching grammar rules. They may be reluctant to "take risks" and generally need respect and have "choices" in the classroom.

It should be noted that in case of adults, regardless of their specific purposes, the teaching methods can contribute to their language proficiency, abstract thinking ability, and superior analytical skills. For example, while learning grammar of the foreign language, adults can spend a long time replacing active sentences with passive ones; in pronunciation practice this can entail tedious practice of minimal pair contrasts, and vocabulary requires memorizing lists of words or phrases. Adults can better focus on language skills in isolation by working on certain types of reading and listening, for example. However, this aspect should not be interpreted as an obstacle to the ability to use the functions of the target language in communication or to integrate various skills to achieve communication goals, since only by this way it is possible to achieve results for successful communicative interactions. Brown (2001) emphasizes that adults are capable of complex cognitions, even if they are not always able to express their ideas in a foreign language correctly.

Teaching foreign languages to adults is rather a serious challenge that brings many opportunities, but at the same time constitutes the need to overcome serious difficulties. This is because, on the one hand, adults have qualities that can increase their chances for obtaining success in language learning, such as superior cognitive skills, the ability to self-govern, persistence, and at least significant motivation, but on the other hand, they are more prone to emotional outbursts, and quickly become discouraged. Therefore, to provide effective teaching, teachers should try to capitalize on the strengths of this age group and take steps to minimize the harmful effects of their weaknesses. It is critical in this regard to carefully consider the learning objectives and ensure that they are the most reasonable and achievable. In this situation, the choice of the most suitable program, as well as the most fruitful method and strategy, as well as the issues related to teaching grammar and corrective feedback fully depends on the tutor. The students in this age group are able to achieve a high level of proficiency in the target language, and it can certainly be guaranteed that some of them will be successful, regardless of whether this success equates to basic communication skills

such as comprehension of specialized texts, or advanced productive knowledge and use of the foreign language in various situations.

Teaching English to Adolescents

Adolescents, being the most demanding and difficult, as mentioned above, group of learners, require a systematic option of teaching. It is related to the fact that adolescents go through a very stormy period, which includes significant psychological and physical changes. Therefore, the teacher is responsible for providing the best useful way for learning language. In order to optimize the teaching process, the teacher may apply many different methods and techniques suitable for teenagers.

It is recommended to apply methods of teaching which will emphasize all four learning aspects - listening, speaking, reading and writing, as well as make a stress on the communicative competence. The Direct Method and Counseling Language Learning are most appropriate methods of teaching English to adolescents. The Direct Method teaches the foreign language in the same way as students learn the mother tongue. Besides, this method can afford students to think in English rather than in their mother tongue. Starting to express the thoughts by means of English, they surely can acquire fluency in speaking better. Students will be able to speak or write in foreign language without the necessity to translating them into mother tongue. At lessons students should be actively involved in using the language in realistic everyday situations. In addition, students can practice through reading a passage, play, or dialogue aloud. Besides, the teacher should provide the option of self-correction by giving them a choice between what they said and an alternative answer and asking them to choose the right one. Another method of teaching English for adolescents is Counselling Language Learning, which provides autonomy to the learners. Adolescents are very bound with their peers and this method gives them a chance to work together. Students know about their strengths and weaknesses and like to work as a group. The Method of Grammar Translation **is** effective in case if the adolescents are required to know basic grammar rules. This method gives learners a base and force them to develop communicative skills. Students who are taught successfully will have the ability to translate even difficult texts from their native language into English.

Few more lines should be dedicated to teaching strategies here. In our opinion the teacher who has to deal with a doles cent should use the strategies that facilitate most of all the communicative competence. So, one of the most appropriate of them is the communication strategy. Learners can use it to support communication with other students and gain a lot of benefits. "The use of communication strategies facilitates spontaneous improvisation skills and linguistic creativity".

Another fruitful teaching tool for adolescents are socio-affective strategies. Using social strategies in foreign language learning is quite efficient and allow the students to be more self-confident in speaking in English. The teacher may use audio and visual materials to make the lesson more interesting involving the whole class.

The teacher's task is to discover the way in which the adolescent learner will completely succeed in foreign language learning. Moreover, it should be always kept in mind that every student as an individual having his needs to be filled, and the teacher has to teach the foreign language in a way which does not neglect the rest of the students.

ELT at colleges is organized within content-based and task-based instructions. The methods which are used at college: analysis and reading the specialized texts, working with terms, problem-solving, clustering, grouping, matching, etc. Word- problem activity can be built around almost any theme.

The audio/video means can be used in teenager groups at schools, academic lyceums and colleges. Diligently used, they help teachers assure themselves that their students perceive intonation and pronunciation easier, and understand English leisurely by hearing it. Students' reading may be corrected handier. Explanations may be offered to learners while they are watching a certain video material on the topic. While watching a film or a documentary they have the chance to hear native speakers talking. Students can also write a dictation (recorded on tape). Literary passages may be recorded and after the learners have heard them, they comment or analyze them, etc. When it comes strictly to video materials, we can distinguish between before-watching activities, while-watching activities, and after-watching

activities. Including all these in a lesson, working with the video images becomes really productive and offers learners the possibility to broaden both their cultural horizon and their knowledge.

Teaching English to Preschool and School Children

It is well-known that children (aged 3-6 and 7-12) are very much orientated in their minds around the "here and now" and directly visible/perceivable environment. Grammatical rules/explanations are usually lost on them, as are somewhat "adult" notions of what is correct and what isn't. They develop well when given plenty of examples and patterns to follow. They tend to have a much shorter attention span and need activities that capture their immediate interest. They also need much in the way of "sensory input" - that is, they need to have many or all of their five senses stimulated at once. While generally less inhibited than adults in terms of experimenting with new language, they tend to have more fragile egos and can be very sensitive to their peers.

According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, preschool children are in the preoperational stage of intelligence so learning process can be realized through experience with concrete materials such as objects, pictures, stories, and videos.

Each approach and method put into practice will be shaped at least by the teacher, the students, the conditions of instruction, and the broader socio-cultural context. A particular method cannot be participation for success for everyone. First of all, choosing the method depends on the goal, characteristic, age, and contents of the lesson. The English teacher may choose from a wide range of methods such as conversation, presentation, re-telling, translation, etc. An EL teacher might also consider selecting from this range of methods.

For the 1-2 class learners at school the EL is presented, practiced and learned through speaking and listening. For these learners, effective classroom strategies have traditionally involved use of plays, songs, rhymes and stories with repeated language structures. One way to capture attention of children under 7-8 years and keep them engaged in activities is to supplement the activities with lots of brightly colored visuals, toys, puppets, or objects to match the stories that a teacher tells or songs that a teacher sings. These can also help make the language comprehensible and can be used for follow-up activities, such as retelling stories or guessing games. Listening and drawing the pictures (animals) is a very effective method for teaching young children EL. It is successful to move smoothly from one activity to another; one activity can be only for 5-10 minutes.

The goal of all early language education (1-4 forms) should be to hook pupils when they are young and keep them interested in learning English for the rest of their lives. So, the goals of English instruction for young learners should be to: 1) make children feel competent and confident while learning English; 2) provide a safe, entertaining, and educational environment: 3) create basis for life-long learning English. The following methods and approaches in teaching English to children can be effective:

- *Arranging a teaching process around physical activities.* It can be carried out by the way of combining the language learning with physical activities such as making things, drawing pictures, completing puzzles, matching words and pictures, playing games, acting out movements in response to instructions using hands, eyes and ears. Many listening activities for children are based on this principle, in which children listen and respond to commands (e.g. 'sit down', 'turn around', 'touch your nose', 'shake hands', etc.), listen and choose or draw a picture. In the same way, speaking activities may involve singing songs, making up dialogues and conversations in different situations.
- *Arranging lessons around tasks.* A task is a type of activity that requires learners to draw on and use their existing linguistic resources to complete the task, such as drawing a picture according to oral instructions, or working in pairs, or completing a story. Classroom tasks for children are conditioned by unity for learners (from topic, activity and/or outcome), meaning and purpose for learners, and involvement of children's attention.
- *Arranging lessons around themes.* Classroom activities can be arranged around topics or themes, such as family, animals, friends, food or cars for preschoolers; and for school children themes can be made up according to the subjects in their other classes and the community, such

as transport, country life, travelling, film stars, famous scientists, etc. Theme-based lessons provide continuity across activities and enable English learning to be connected to the children's lives.

- *Provision of content to children to which they are familiar with.* Teaching process can also be arranged based on familiar content from the children's culture, for instance, stories and events (national holidays, cultural events, traditions).
- *Collaboration during the teaching process.* Children are more exposed to socialization, and enjoy communication with each other. That is why activities when children work in pairs or groups are more productive. Activities that involve collaboration require careful preparation to ensure that children have the words and expressions they need in order to carry out an activity.
- *Using of enjoyable activities so that children could participate feeling no frustration.* Children enjoy participating in activities that they can successfully achieve, but sometimes it can cause a kind of challenge. Activities type and content is strictly dependent on the teacher; he and the materials provided are the primary source of foreign language.
- *Setting purposes and providing feedbacks.* Children like to obtain success at any activity they do in class. In order to achieve this, it is important to set clear goals for children and to let them know when they have been successful, or if not, why not. Here also the most important thing is praise for their success; praise can be expressed by using stickers, points or smiley faces.

Speaking in the mother tongue only when needed. The aim of teaching children is using as much English during classed as possible, but in case of homogeneous classes, it is quite appropriate to use the mother tongue when necessary to explain the meaning of words and expressions and to help explain activities.

- *Inviting speakers of English to class*. It is useful to invite speakers of English to class to meet children. These could be children from the international schools or older children who are quite advanced in English, or even native speakers of English (foreign guests). They can ask and answer simple questions, take part in a role play and do other activities that will interest and motivate children.

CONCLUSION

Thus, summarizing the above discussed we may conclude that all foreign language learners despite their age groups need appropriate and useful approaches and methods applied. Concrete materials helps them understand and process the meaning. Teachers provide a range of activities to get learners' attention and arouse constant interest. For preschool/school learners, physical activities such as walking, running, jumping, dancing and climbing contribute positively to learning when coordinated with language. Age is the important factor in language acquisition both in first language and foreign language. Studies show that early language acquisition is necessary to reach proficiency in language. Besides, cognitive development affects the language acquisition process as well as language development. Therefore, adults and adolescents who are cognitively mature have faster start but it is only short term advantage over children. As a final note, further research is necessary on children' learning process and their learning styles, as there is a limited number of studies on future effects of early start in acquiring the foreign language rather than the second language.

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