

General Notes on Main Principles of Teaching English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract:

The study of foreign languages in modern society is becoming an inseparable component of the professional training of specialists of various profiles, and the successful solution of professional growth issues and the expansion of contacts with foreign partners largely depend on the quality of their language training. Based on the essence of some books on teaching English, this article examines some of the basic principles and techniques used to teach English at different levels.

Keywords: foreign language, teaching principles, developing all four language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking), communicative competence.

Teaching is such a complex phenomenon that its realization will often be short of perfection. Nevertheless, some teachers follow invariable methods of teaching in the course of their studies, which might be their innovations or imitation from their previous teachers and professors, on the assumption that there are no more logical and fully-fledged procedures than theirs. Based on the essence of some books on teaching English, this article examines some of the basic principles and techniques used to teach English at different levels. Teaching a foreign language means first and foremost the formation and development of pupils' habits and skills in hearing, speaking, reading and writing. We cannot expect to develop such habits and skills of our pupils effectively if we do not know and take into account the psychology of habits and skills, the ways of forming them, the influence of formerly acquired habits on the formation of new ones and many other necessary factors that psychology can supply us with it. If the teacher wants his pupils to speak English he must use all the opportunities he has to make them hear and speak. Furthermore, to master a second language is to acquire another code, another way of receiving and transmitting information. To create this new code in the most effective way one must take into consideration certain psychological factors.

In modern society language is used in two ways: directly or orally, and indirectly or in written form. Thus we distinguish oral language and written language. Direct communication implies a speaker and a hearer, indirect communication implies a writer and a reader. Hence the practical aims in teaching a foreign language are four in number: hearing, speaking, reading, and writing.

When adopting the practical aims for a secondary school course the following factors are usually taken into consideration: the economic and political conditions of society, the requirements of the state; the general goals of secondary school education; the nature of the subject, and the conditions for instruction.

Methods of foreign language teaching are based on the fundamental principles of didactics; among them, a conscious approach to language learning, activity, visualization, and others. However, in foreign language teaching, due to the specific features of the subject in which means and ends are equally essential, principles are used in a particular way.

The principle of conscious approach to language learning implies comprehension of a linguistic phenomenon of language material by the pupil usually through the medium of the native language, or the arrangement of the material in sentence patterns graded in difficulties with the emphasis on same elements which are singled out as “teaching points”. In all cases pupils understand both the form and the content of the material they are to learn, and they are aware of how they should treat the material while performing various exercises which aim at developing habits and skills in using it. Such an approach to language learning usually contrasts with “mechanical” learning through repetitive drill.

In teaching a foreign language therefore, it is more reasonable to help pupils in assimilating language rules which function in this language by introducing the rules, rather than to wait until the learners deduce these rules through speech activity.

A conscious approach to foreign language teaching implies the use of the learner's native language. Modern methods has devoted much attention to the problem of the mother tongue in teaching and learning a foreign language. If a man knows only his native language his concepts are directly associated with the expression of these concepts in this tongue. The associations which arise, extremely complicated in nature, are very lasting due to systematic speech practice. The acquisition of a foreign language means the transition to thinking in a second language. For this purpose, it is necessary to acquire the ability to establish direct associations between concepts and their means of expression in the second language. Indeed, when a pupil begins to learn a foreign language the words of this language are often associated with the words of the mother tongue first. However, thanks to constant practice the intermediate link -- the native language -- fades, and foreign language words come into the pupil's consciousness directly in connection with the concepts they express. Mastery of the language means formulating one's thoughts within the foreign language.

In connection with the analysis of the principle of conscious teaching, it is necessary to dwell upon the forming of habits and skills in a foreign language. All language habits and skills are extremely complex in their nature and are closely connected with conscious activity of students. What are habits? Here are some definitions of habits.

A habit may be regarded as an instance of learning in which a relatively simple response is made, automatically and fairly frequently, to a relatively simple kind of situation.

The principle of activity in foreign language teaching, of utmost importance since learning a foreign language should result in mastering the target language which is possible provided the pupil is an active participant in the process; he is involved in language activities throughout the whole course of instruction.

As a conclusion, it is worth noting that English currently plays an important role on a global scale, which makes it a very urgent matter to teach it as a foreign language. Following the basic principles of teaching English as a foreign language will help develop students' ability to master the language and prepare them for successful communication in a global society.

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