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Topical Issues of Linguistics and Teaching Methods in Business and Professional Communication

LEARNING STYLES AND TEACHING METHODS

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Abstract

The issue of teaching foreign languages methods and their adaptation to student's learning styles seems particularly relevant in the current context of modernizing the educational process in order to increase the effectiveness of training. Learning styles are traditionally considered the most convenient and familiar for a particular person's way of studying and processing information. There is an increasing interest in individual differences in learning due to the development of constructivist pedagogy, which focuses on creating the conditions for the independent formation of new knowledge among students. The idea of individual learning styles goes back to Jung's theory of psychological types. Since then, the issue has been further developed in numerous studies. Therefore, David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory allows identifying one's own individual style of cognition, Neil Fleming's VARK model helps to determine the optimal channel for perceiving information, namely: kinesthetic, verbal, auditory or visual. The article aims to establish the relationship between individual learning styles and methods of teaching foreign languages at a university. The methodological basis of the study is David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, Neil Fleming's VARK model, as well as communicative and multimodal approaches. The implementation of the principle of an individual approach to learning includes the creation of pedagogical conditions that promote self-development of students, increase motivation by engaging in search and research, using multimodal technologies. The article offers practical forms of implementing an individual approach to teaching a foreign language, taking into account the socio-psychological characteristics of the modern generation of students.

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Keywords: Individual learning styles, teaching methods, foreign language, multimodal approach.



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1. Introduction

Nowadays, individual approach to teaching is one of the key requirements to organize educational process at a university. Constructivism is a pedagogical philosophy the key idea of which is that knowledge cannot be transferred to the learner in a finished form. The teacher can only create pedagogical conditions for the successful self-construction and self-growth of students' knowledge. From a more general point of view, constructivism reflects a rather simple idea that throughout life, each of us constructs his/her own understanding of the world. That is why each person developed a unique world vision and beliefs. Constructivist pedagogy puts the learner's point of view at the forefront, no matter how "raw" it is now.

According to Piaget (1964), this is exactly the starting point from which the construction of new knowledge in a person begins by overcoming the cognitive conflict between the existing internal structure, or experiences, and the external unknown reality. The elimination of this conflict restores the so-called temporary cognitive stability or cognitive equilibrium, characterized by constructed knowledge based on the previous cognitive structure. Bruner (1985) and Chomsky (as cited in Rieber, 1983), later emphasized the special significance of the existing cognitive structure, i.e. previous experience, in the construction of new mental structures.

Piaget (1964) points out that knowledge is

the ability to modify, transform, and operate on an object or idea, such that it is understood by the operator through the process of transformation. Learning, then, occurs as a result of experience, both physical and logical, with the objects themselves and how they are acted upon. Thus, a learner must assimilate knowledge in an active process with matured mental capacity, so that knowledge can build in complexity by scaffolded understanding. Understanding is scaffolded by the learner through the process of equilibration, whereby the learner balances new knowledge with previous understanding, thereby compensating for transformation of knowledge. (p. 12)

The basic principles of constructivism as applied to the learning process are the inability to transfer knowledge to the learner in a finished form. The teacher should motivate for learning through the inclusion of students in the search, research, and solution of significant problems, designing the content of training with reliance on generalized concepts and integrative skills, encouraging discussions, hypotheses and conjectures, organizing meaningful communication and exchange of students' opinions.

Due to the development of constructivist pedagogy, which focuses on creating the conditions for the independent formation of new knowledge among students, there is an increasing interest in individual differences in learning. Individual learning styles are the ways in which a person perceives, processes and stores information. Students have various preferences in learning. Some willingly work with specific information, others with abstract theory; some learn new things better in the form of drawings, diagrams, tables, others in the form of verbal descriptions.

The idea of individual learning styles goes back to Jung's theory of psychological types. In his work "Psychological types", Jung (1971) singled out extroverted types, oriented to the outside world, and introverted, oriented to his inner world. In his book, he noted four main psychological functions: thinking, feeling, sensation, and intuition. According to Jung, the types whose main functions are thinking and feeling

are rational or reasonable, because their main feature is the primacy of reasonably reasoning functions. The rationality of consciousness of both types means the conscious exclusion of the accidental and inappropriate to the mind. The types whose main functions are sensation and intuition are irrational because their actions are not based on the judgment of the mind, but on the absolute power of perception. However, it would be completely wrong to understand these types as “unreasonable” only because they put judgment below perception. They are simply highly empirical and draw on experience (Jung, 1971, p. 280).

There are various ways of categorizing learning styles including Kolb’s (1981) model and the Neil Fleming’s VARK model. In Fleming’s (2006) model, which is often referred to as VARK learning styles, learners are identified by whether they have a preference for visual learning, i.e. pictures, movies and diagrams, auditory learning, which implies music, discussion and lectures, reading and writing, i.e. making lists, reading textbooks, taking notes, or kinaesthetic learning which include movement, experiments, and hands-on activities.

2. Problem Statement

When learning a foreign language, students differ from each other according to learner’s inner characteristics such as personality, aptitude, language learning strategies, cognitive style, motivation and worldview. The education has always aimed to teach all students equally, in spite of some differentiated approach applied. Although there is a significant amount of studies devoted to how the students percept information, there is still a problem of multimodal education since there is a conflict between the teaching methods and learning styles. Multimodality is a theory that investigates how people communicate and interact with each other, not just through writing but also through speaking, gesture, gaze, and visual forms, i.e. through different modes.

Taking into account learning styles in teaching foreign languages can significantly enhance academic success and motivation of students studying foreign languages. Certainly, it does not mean that students should perform only their preferred types of tasks; they should also work with those that are less suitable for them. However, stress and frustration can occur if students learn for a long time in a way that is not in accordance with their preferred style. Multimodal approach in teaching foreign languages suggests all channels of information perception, which meets the needs of representatives of different learning styles (Kress, 2009).

3. Research Questions

- 3.1. Individual differences in learning provides effective teaching of foreign languages.
- 3.2. Today’s students differ from previous generations: they get their information from the Internet, communicate digitally 35% of the time, they are tech-savvy, pragmatic, open-minded and individualistic. In fact, they are considered to be the most diverse and multicultural generation ever (Merriam Webster.com Dictionary, 2019).
- 3.3. Representatives of the modern generation of students perceive more information through the visual channel of information than through the auditory one; they are hard to grasp the information presented in solid text without infographics, images, and diagrams. Therefore, the

most effective means of teaching today's students is to use various visualization tools and multimodal texts.

4. Purpose of the Study

The article aims to establish the relationship between individual learning styles and methods of teaching foreign languages at a university. The purpose of the study is to justify the multimodal approach as the most appropriate to the needs of all the learning styles and to offer practical forms of implementing an individual approach to teaching a foreign language, taking into account the socio-psychological characteristics of the modern generation of students.

5. Research Methods

The methodological basis of the study is the dialogic paradigm of education, which treats learning as an act of interaction between the teacher and the student, communicative and multimodal approaches (Ho, 2017), Kolb's (1981) learning theory and Fleming's (2006) model. Kolb's learning theory points out four different learning styles: 1. Diverging: concerning students who prefer to watch and to listen, they are likely to work in groups; 2. Assimilating: this kind of students needs an explanation in a logical and reasonable way. They prefer reading, lectures, exploring analytical models; 3. Converging: such students prefer working with practical applications; 4. Accommodating: these students draw on other's findings and prefer practical method of knowledge. In Fleming's model or VARK learning styles (VARK stands for Visual, Aural, Read/write, and Kinesthetic), students are defined by tendency to visual learning; auditory learning; reading and writing; or kinesthetic learning (Peterson & Kolb, 2017).

6. Findings

As stated above, when learning a foreign language, students differ from each other according to learner's inner characteristics such as personality, aptitude, language learning strategies, cognitive style, motivation, and worldview. Today's students are creative, entrepreneurial, cause-driven individuals, they are tech-savvy, pragmatic and open-minded. Almost half of them are online for 10 or more hours a day. Statistics indicate that fast internet speed and multiple choices have led to a decline in their attention span of 8 seconds (Sparks & Honey, 2019).

As multimodal text involves all channels of information perception, the cognitive and creative abilities of students will be developed at a higher level, since interest in the subject will increase, and key competences will be formed and developed. Modes are different ways that texts can be presented in. Image, writing, layout, speech and moving images are different kinds of modes. Many texts use more than one mode; these are referred to as multimodal. Advertisements, newspapers, reports, music videos etc. are all multimodal. Multimodal texts do not have to be necessary digital, whether a text is created on a computer or paper it can enable a combination of words, photos, charts, layout etc. in order to communicate a message and be categorized as multimodal. There are five different types of modes: linguistic, visual, aural, gestural, and spatial.

A multimodal text uses a combination of two or more communication modes. For example print, image and spoken text as in film or computer presentations, a picture book, in which the textual and visual elements are combined, a webpage, in which sound effects, oral language, written language, music, moving images are assembled, a theatre performance, in which all the elements are present, including gestural and spatial. Actually, verbal communication forms like traditional reading and writing, continue to be necessary skills, but informal learning encourages students to develop other skills and competences in meaning making, which involves creating and using multimodal and multimedia texts. Educators in order to provide worthy education for today's students should consider this fact.

The education has always aimed to teach all students equally, in spite of some differentiated approach applied. Although there is a significant amount of studies devoted to how the students perceive information, there is still a problem of multimodal education, since there is a conflict between the teaching and learning styles. Textbooks are usually focused on one teaching style, which is the author's one. Nevertheless, in a usual language classroom only half of the students have equally developed visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic perception. Other students are mainly visual auditory or kinaesthetic learners. This is why it is so important to provide information in the classroom using all channels of perception. Then each of the students has a chance to acquire at least a part of the messages.

Visual learners learn best by seeing. Graphic displays such as charts, diagrams, illustrations, handouts, and videos are all helpful learning tools for visual learners. Auditory learners prefer to listen to class lectures rather than read from the textbook or a podcast rather than going over their class notes. Reading and writing learners prefer to take in information displayed as words; they enjoy making lists and reading definitions. Kinaesthetic learners like performing tasks that involve directly manipulating objects and materials. They are good at applied activities and have to practice doing something in order to learn.

Multimodal texts meet requirements of all learning types. Teaching foreign languages through multimodal texts covers a wide range of good practice and innovative ideas. A wide variety of educational activities arouses interest in students to learn foreign languages. Multichannel knowledge sharing is a way to modernize the global cultural space. In this regard, particular importance in foreign languages teaching is attached to Internet resources: websites, educational portals, teleconferences, students' collective work, implementing business games methods. Multimedia services provide multi tools this is communication through various ways, which are the following:

1. Multimedia Presentation.

2. Mind Mapping. Educators have been drawing concept maps and mind maps on paper for many years, organizing ideas into graphic patterns. Digital and online mind mapping software such as *MindMeister* enables you to store more detailed information in form of notes and links. This is a great way to add sample sentences, definitions, synonyms, pronunciation tips, mnemonics or audio recordings of a word. Using grammar mind maps, students will be able to view all rules, exceptions and examples related to a specific topic.

3. Multimodal text creation. Creating newspapers, brochures, posters, performance, digital slide presentations, web pages, music videos students transmit meaning through combinations of written language, visual, gestural, and spatial modes.

4. Audiobooks. They offer a wide range of audiobooks to read, listen along and download.

5. Subtitled films. Internet development activities, wide distribution of games and the need to create attractive educational practices led to the emergence of gaming as a new form of education and training.

6. Gamification makes teaching and learning more entertaining and you can find in it such invaluable opportunities as involvement in the learning process, high motivation, autonomy, and semantic content.

As experience shows, when using multimodal texts mental processes like thinking, memory and emotions are involved, which contributes to the process of retention, that is, the preservation and delayed reproduction of the material studied.

7. Conclusion

Multimodal approach gives students the opportunity to receive information through their best perception channel. To do this, the teacher needs to bring all educational information to the maximum extent, so that all perception channels were involved.

Kolb's learning styles could be used by teachers to critically evaluate the learning provision typically available to students, and to develop more appropriate learning opportunities. Educators should ensure that activities are designed and carried out in ways that offer each learner the chance to engage in the manner that suits him / her best. Multimodality causes students' creativity and increases foreign language learning efficiency.

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