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Challenges and Best Practices in Foreign Languages at Tertiary Level



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2016

Publio Publishing

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Reviewers:

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ISBN 978-963-424-848-4

Preface

COMMUNICATION has become a key mantra of our times. Without it there is no chance for cooperation or at least for mutual understanding of different worldviews, lifestyles and values. Whether we talk about communication within a family, a society or between nations, the necessity to learn how to express appropriately one's own attitudes and show respect for the attitudes of others is a crucial competence associated with soft skills. Communication across cultures/nations is further complicated with the necessity to command with foreign languages accompanied by a decent cultural literacy. Though many countries foster foreign language education from young age still tertiary level education seems to carry the weight of responsibility for preparing the young generation for real life in a globalized world where coping in a variety of private and/or professional environment is almost impossible without language and intercultural competence.

The presented collection of papers faithfully represents the wide variety of topics and issues that language teachers introduce into their teaching and research activities. We could divide them into three wider areas: language and education, language for specific purposes and cultural studies. Each of those offers a further rich variety of partial research questions for further study benefiting both teachers/researchers and their students. The authors of the studies related with general language education present their research results concerning the use of modern and traditional methods in classroom settings, the reasons and influences behind the choice of foreign language among the students or the relative advantages and disadvantages of using mother tongue in foreign language classes.

As foreign languages are frequently used in professional settings it is important to focus the attention of students at foreign languages for specific purposes. That valuable and extensive area is represented in the collection by papers discussing terminology as a crucial part of language for specific purposes and the importance of combining professional expertise with cultural awareness especially in the domain of economic sciences.

Last but not least, the area of cultural literacy seems to grow into prominence within language education at tertiary level. It has been proven many times that language proficiency without cultural awareness can cause much harm as a fluent speaker is automatically perceived as culture savvy and possible misunderstandings are judged as purposeful offences rather than unintentional blunders. Cultural literacy and intercultural competence are represented and dealt with in the collection from several perspectives such as cultural values, literature, balancing professional and private life or culture as a system of shared meanings.

In conclusion, let me express my deepest persuasion that the role of language teachers is irreplaceable though often undervalued and that the educational system of any country could strongly benefit from even more intensive language and cultural education.

Tatiana Hrivíková

editor

Applying Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle in Language Teaching

Dagmar Sageder

Abstract: The experiential learning process places emphasis on intentional action based on subjective experience at the centre of learning. Can it help the educators to be more efficient in the teaching process and motivate their students or what are the implications for experiential learning theory in learning languages?

Key words: experiential learning, teacher preparation, language teaching, learning styles, motivation, deep learning

Introduction

“Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb 1984: 38).

In today's era, the importance of learning languages is growing considerably and multilingualism has become more than “important”. It has become necessary. Having a good command of a language other than one's native language definitely gives someone who is eyeing the global stage a cutting edge. Additionally, foreign language proficiency has evolved to become extremely beneficial. Whether viewed from the financial or social aspect, proficiency in a foreign language increases global understanding, improves employment potential, and sharpens cognitive skills and analytical abilities.

There are many methods for teaching foreign languages and language pedagogy has come a long way since the times of the repetitive grammar-translation method which was regarded in the 17th century as the only approach to teaching and learning.

Innovation in foreign language teaching began in the 19th century and spread rapidly in the 20th century. It led to a number of different and sometimes conflicting methods (e.g. direct method, audio-lingual method) each trying to be a major improvement over previous or contemporary methods. The earliest applied linguists included Jean Manesca, Heinrich Gottfried Ollendorff, Henry Sweet, Otto Jespersen, and Harold Palmer. They worked on developing language teaching principles and approaches based on linguistic and psychological theories, but they left many specific practical details for others to devise (Richards, Rodgers 2001).

During the last decade it became very popular to implement ICT into the teaching process. Using ICT in the teaching-learning process has undoubtedly many benefits for students. ICT allows for higher-quality lessons through collaboration with teachers in planning and preparing resources

(Ofsted 2002). Students learn new skills such as analytical skills and improve reading comprehension (Lewin et al 2000). New technologies encourage independent and active learning and motivate students to take responsibility for their own learning (Passey 1999). It is also confirmed that many students find learning in a technology-enhanced setting more stimulating and effective than in a traditional classroom environment (Pedretti, Mayer-Smith 1998 in Baker 2012).

ICT undoubtedly enhances the quality of teaching. However, it is still just a tool which can be used while implementing proper strategy in teaching. Learning is described as a matter of transforming perceptions into conceptions, using language to represent what one experiences. According to Kolb (1984: 41) it is defined as 'the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience'

Therefore, can experiential learning, which puts emphasis on the important role that experience plays in the learning process, become a crucial component in the teaching-learning process of languages and can it help to create a unique lucid learning space conducive to deep learning?

Experiential learning theory

Kolb's experiential learning theory (ELT) has been considered one of the most useful descriptive models available in the adult learning process as well as one of the most popular theoretical models of learning styles. This model proposes six assumptions (Vince 1998; Kayes 2002), which are as follows:

- Learning is a process not outcome.
- Learning is driven from experience.
- Learning requires the learner to resolve conflicts through dialect.
- Learning carries a more holistic and an integrative view.
- Learning requires the individual to interact with the learning environment.
- Learning creates knowledge (Kolb 1984: 25-38).

ELT explains that knowledge results from experiences that have been grasped and transformed (Kolb, 1984). It describes learning as a cyclic process involving four modes: two dialectically related modes of grasping experience, Concrete Experience (CE) and Abstract Conceptualization (AC), as well as two dialectically related modes of transforming experience, Reflective Observation (RO) and Active Experimentation (AE) (Kolb, Kolb 2009). In order to learn, individuals first acquire knowledge of the complex situations or demands, resulting in gaining knowledge (concrete experience) and breaking down of the knowledge into meaningful chunks (abstract conceptualization). The second dimension, 'transformation', is responsible for the learning process and helps the individual to recall or reflect upon the experience gained (reflective observation) and stimulates the learner to interact with the environment (active experimentation) (Kayes 2002). (Fig.1).

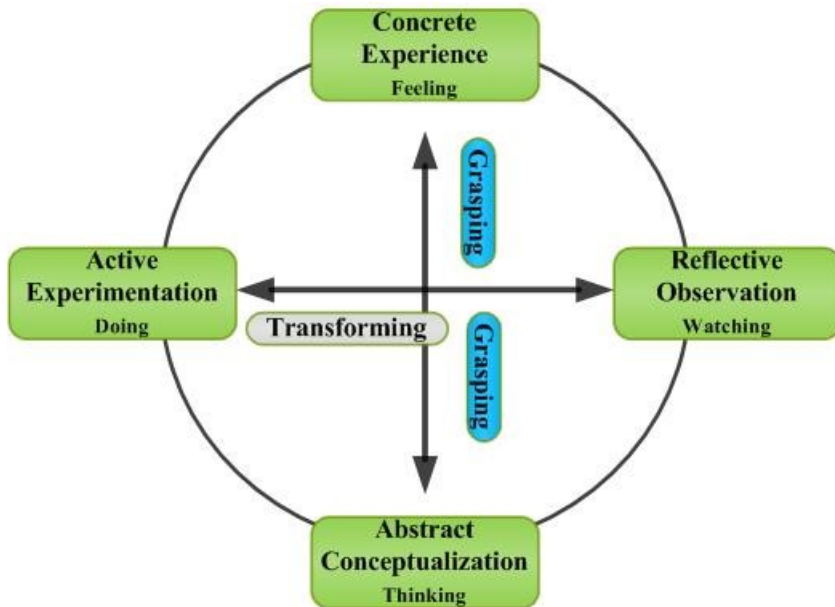


Figure 1: Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

Therefore, when a specific experience is supported by reflection and given concrete meaning through thinking and transformed by action, the new experience becomes more intensive. Repetitions of the cycle further deepen learning and its transfer to experiences in other situations and contexts (Kolb, Kolb 2009).

In order to facilitate effective learning, an ideal learner integrates and utilizes all four modes of the model. The average learner prefers only one ability on each dimension. Nevertheless, because people can differ in many ways (e.g. genetic makeup, life experiences, needs and wants), they usually develop a preferred way of selecting from the four learning modes.

Learning styles

The results of the two dimensions (grasping or prehension (Baker 2012) vs. transformation) represent four different forms of knowledge associated with four different learning styles. (Fig. 2). Learning styles describe the unique ways that individuals spiral through the learning cycle based on their preference for the four different learning modes.

An experience grasped through apprehension and then transformed through intention results in divergent knowledge (Diverger). An experience grasped through apprehension and transformed through extension results in accommodative knowledge (Accommodator). An experience grasped through comprehension and transformed through intention yields assimilative knowledge (Assimilator). Finally, an experience grasped through comprehension and transformed through extension leads to convergent knowledge (Converger) (Kolb 2005) (Fig. 2).

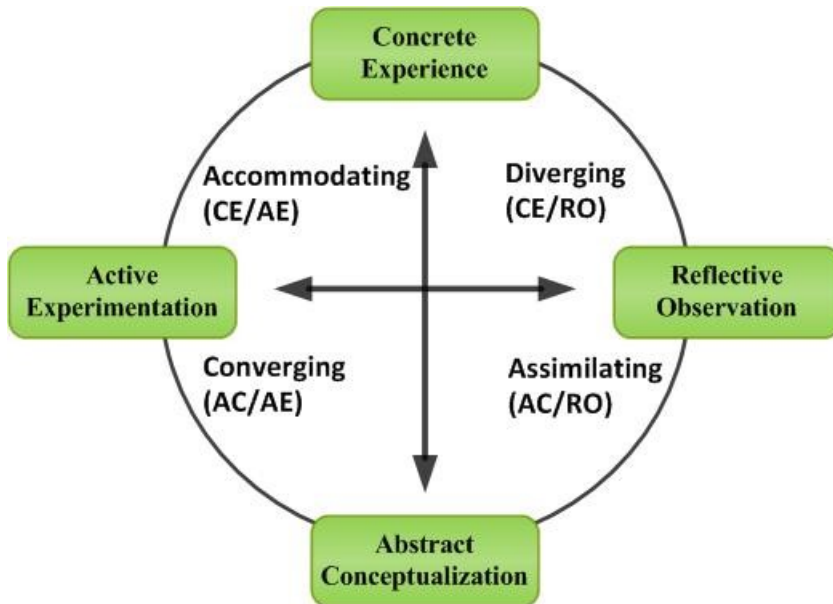


Figure 2: Kolb's Learning Styles

The Kolb Learning Style Inventory 4.0 (Kolb, Kolb 2011, 2013) provides a new integration of learning styles with the learning cycle through the expansion of learning style types from 4 to 9.

The Fig. 3 illustrates the revised learning cycle model. The nine styles have been identified based on individuals' relative preferences for the four learning modes. Four of these style types emphasize one of the four learning modes—Experiencing (CE), Reflecting (RO), Thinking (AC) and Acting (AE). Four others represent style types that emphasize two learning modes, one from the grasping dimension and one from the transforming dimension of the ELT model—Diverging (CE & RO), Assimilating (AC & RO), Converting (AC & AE) and Accommodating (CE & AE). The final style type balances all four modes of the learning cycle—Balancing (CE, RO, AC & AE). (Kolb 1984; Kolb, Kolb 2005).



Figure 3. Kolb's Nine Learning Styles

Educational implications in teaching languages

Both Kolb's learning stages and cycle could be used by teachers to critically evaluate the situation in the classroom and to develop appropriate strategies for teaching as well as understanding the way students are able to gain knowledge in the learning process.

Knowing a person's learning style enables learning to be orientated according to the most appropriate method. Moreover, learning might require different styles at different stages of the learning process. The whole process can undoubtedly be applied when teaching languages.

Therefore, according to the experiential learning theory, the effective learner undergoes a direct practical experience, participates in new experiences, or reinterprets the existing experiences (CE) and then reflects upon these experiences. Then, s/he tries to find out what the particular experience means for him/her (RO) in order to develop informal theories. Reflection might also give rise to a new idea. (AC). Then, the learner uses these theories to make decisions or solve problems (AE).

It is crucial for the teacher to serve as a constant guide and assist students to go through the cycle. Learning can start in any of the four modes, but to facilitate effective learning and to create a unique lucid learning space conducive to deep learning, it is critical to teach around the cycle (not necessarily in order).

From the phase of concrete experience to reflective observation, the educator's role is that of the facilitator. From reflection to abstraction, the teacher's role is that of the subject expert - he makes the connection between what students have experienced and observed and the concepts he wants to teach. Next from abstraction to action, the teacher's role is that of the evaluator. From action up to

experience again, he is again a coach that is applying the knowledge back into the experience (Baker 2012). Fig. 4

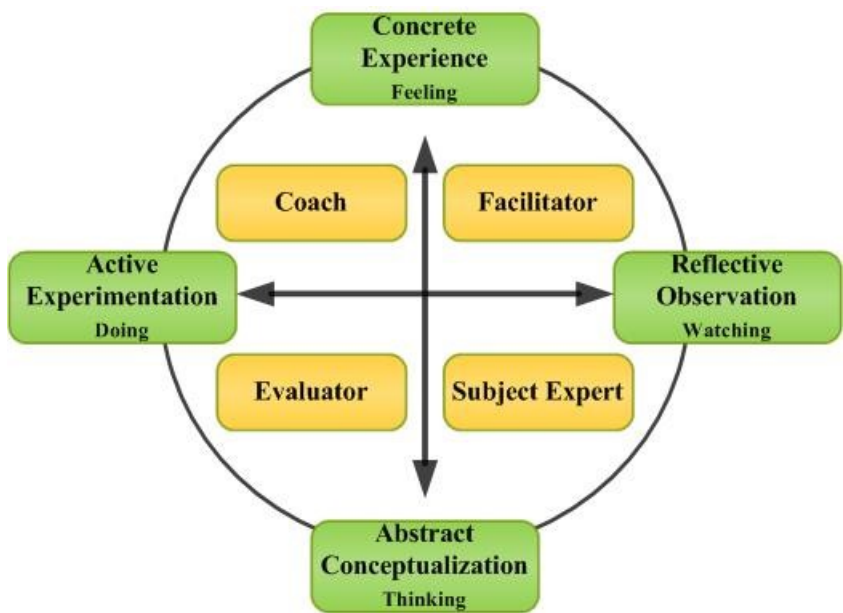


Figure 4: Roles of the Teacher

With the experiential learning model, the teacher can ensure that a learner is able to transfer theoretical knowledge into independent professional performance. The key technique for accomplishing this transition is called 'scaffolding'. By means of this technique, a teacher tailors the learning process to the needs of individual learners. The model of teaching around the cycle provides a framework for this scaffolding process (Baker, 2012). To be able to tailor the teaching process to the individuals and chose an appropriate teaching mode (facilitator, evaluator, expert, coach), it is also important for the teacher to learn about individual learning styles of students. The following table presents the strengths and weaknesses of individual learners' styles according to Kolb (2005, 2014).

Table 1: Learning Styles - Strengths and Weaknesses

LEARNERS	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
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INITIATING/A CCOMODATING	ability to initiate action in order to deal with experiences and situations	prefer to act on intuitive "gut" feelings rather than on logical analysis
	function well in ambiguous and uncertain situations ability to learn from "hands-on" experience	can sometimes be disorganized and act before thinking
	prefer to work with others to get assignments done, to set goals, to do field work, and to test out different approaches to completing a project	less emphasis on reflection and thinking
	the ability to find meaning from deep involvement in experience	
EXPERIENCING	ability to deeply involve themselves in concrete experiences while be equally comfortable in the outer world of action and the inner world of reflection adept in relationships with people love hands on activities but also learn by carefully observing the world around them	sometimes are disorganized, lacking plans and theories to guide them
DIVERGING /IMAGINING	the ability to imagine many different possibilities by observing and reflecting on experiences	observe rather than take action

REFLECTING	<p>a capacity for deep reflection informed by the ability to be both feeling oriented and conceptual</p> <p>learn by combining the abilities of creative idea generation and putting ideas into concise, logical form</p> <p>best at understanding a wide range of information and putting it into concise, logical form</p>	<p>have trouble putting plans into action, spending much time buried in thoughts</p> <p>they may prefer to work alone</p>
ANALYZING/ ASSIMILATING	<p>less focused on people and more interested in abstract ideas and concepts</p>	<p>find it more important that a theory have elegance and logical soundness than practical value</p>
THINKING	<p>do not make quick decisions but think things through</p> <p>deep thinkers who are able to inductively develop a particular concept or idea and deductively evaluate its validity and practicality by testing them in the real world</p> <p>value being logical and unemotional</p>	<p>may be uncomfortable with personal relationships and prefer working alone</p>
DECIDING/ CONVERGING	<p>are best at finding practical uses for ideas and theories</p> <p>like to solve problems and make decisions based on finding logical solutions to issues or problems</p>	<p>they can be uncomfortable in ambiguous situations and interpersonal issues</p> <p>prefer dealing with technical tasks and problems than with social and interpersonal issues</p>

ACTING	<p>combine the ability to find solutions to questions or problems based on their technical analysis with attention to the needs of people and sources of information in concrete situations are equally comfortable in functioning in a practical world that can make use of their feelings and actions as well as in subjective world that requires their thinking abilities learn best through real-life projects, field trips, and hands-on experiments</p> <p>balance the extremes of the dialectics of action/reflection and concrete/abstract by finding a middle ground between them their central position allows them to see many different</p>	<p>may become overcommitted to their idea of how things should be done</p>
BALANCING	<p>perspectives on issues and bridge differences between people with different styles</p> <p>able to change their learning style to meet the learning demands of the task they face in a team they often adapt to fill in the missing style needed to get the task done</p>	<p>experience difficulty in making decisions</p>

Conclusion

Experiential learning, when prepared and carried out properly, can have positive effects on the teaching-learning process in the case of language learning and teaching. Studies that have examined

the effectiveness of experiential learning on knowledge of retention in a number of domains confirm that experiential learning produces results that are better than traditional educational models (Ash, Clayton, 2004; Eyler, Giles 1999; Eyler, Halteman 1981; Steinke, Buresh 2002; Steinke, Fitch 2003).

The experiential learning cycle provides a good framework for enhancing teaching. By using a model based on experiential learning theory, learners can better understand the learning process, themselves as learners and the appropriate use of learning strategies based on the learning task and environment. Moreover, experiential learning builds metacognitive skills and can be goal oriented and capable of being assessed (Kolb 2005). Additionally, experiential learning can help educators to better understand the preferable learning styles of the students in particular situations and adjust their teaching strategies accordingly, creating an inspiring and motivating atmosphere for the learners and ensuring that all learning will be connected to thinking and experiencing and that students will gain knowledge that will be easily remembered and applied later in life.

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The role of the mother tongue in teaching foreign languages

Hana Pašková and Eleonóra Zsapková

Abstract: *Our paper examines the controversial topic of using the mother tongue in foreign language teaching. The aim of our study is to find out the attitudes and opinions of foreign language teachers at the University of Economics in Bratislava to this issue. The questionnaire is used as the main research tool. The findings of the study demonstrate that respondents are significantly in favour of using the mother tongue in teaching foreign languages. Participants also reveal the reasons why the correct dosage of the mother tongue is in the foreign language acquisition appropriate.*

Key words: mother tongue, questionnaire, findings, benefit

Introduction

The opinions of methodologists about incorporating the mother tongue in teaching foreign languages differ and there is not agreement whether its use may contribute to the higher effectiveness of the teaching process. One of the main factors influencing the changing attitudes towards its use has been the prevailing methodological approach applied in the teaching foreign languages during the time. Even nowadays there doesn't exist the same opinion on the issue which method provides the best outcomes. The choice of the method may be influenced by the personality, professional training, experience and values of the teachers but also by external factors as the technological development and national language policies.

Historical overview of changing attitudes towards using native language in teaching foreign languages

One of the first methods applied in the teaching foreign languages was the **Grammar-Translation Method** which was first used in teaching classical languages, Latin and Greek, from which its name **Classical Method** was derived. The beginnings of this method stretch back to the seventeenth century when teaching foreign languages focused on emphasizing grammar rules,

syntactical structures, memorizing vocabulary and translation of literary texts. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson state that “this method was used for the purpose of helping students to read and appreciate foreign language literature. It was also hoped that through the study of the grammar of the target language students would become more familiar with the grammar of their native language and that this familiarity would help them speak and write their native language better” (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011: 13). As the main goal of this method was translation into the students’ native language, the role of the mother tongue was essential and its use was necessary when translating literary texts.

According to Howatt and Smith (2014) the negative consequence of the grammar translation method was the attempt of modern language teachers to apply similar methodology when teaching modern languages with the emphasis on grammar rules, paradigms, vocabulary and exceptions. The main purpose of this method was to teach students a language to be able to translate and therefore the ability to communicate in the target language was not taken into consideration. It concentrated mostly on the development of reading and writing and little attention was given to speaking and listening. During the time the criticism of this method increased as there emerged the need to promote teaching of the spoken language. Gradually foreign language teaching moved away from the dependence on the students’ native language which was replaced by the use of the target language.