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Features of Foreign Language Teaching in a Multi-aged Group of Learners

Due to the processes of globalization and internationalization more and more people of different ages are learning foreign languages. They need it to improve their education, pursue their careers, or simply for travelling. Classes in language schools often contain mixed teens and adults in the same group which makes it challenging for teachers to conduct lessons.

The issue of teaching multi-aged groups of foreign language learners has attracted educationalists' and researchers' interest [3], [6] but no substantial research has been done yet.

In this work we are going to discuss how psychological, cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral characteristics of learners influence the process of foreign language teaching in a multi-aged group.

It has been scientifically proved that teenagers learn faster than adults [3]. Still, if an adult has to work intellectually in his everyday life, he has no problems learning a language [2]. Young people are open about expressing their attitudes, feelings and emotions while adults are known to be more reserved. Teenagers have no problems using technology, while older learners don't feel as comfortable, some of them even experience problems, making it an obstacle for attending classes [3]. Some practicing teachers note that teenagers are more fluent and adult students are more accurate and cautious. Teenage learners are known to be more creative, while adult learners are more knowledgeable and have more life experience. Younger students are better at pronouncing foreign language sounds and imitating intonation. Adult learners have a more developed abstract thinking as well as analytical abilities.

It is widely accepted that younger learners are drawn by extrinsic motivation and adults learn a language to achieve their personal goals, so their motivation is mostly intrinsic. Most often younger learners need a foreign language some time later in life, while adults' learning is prompted by the immediate need to use it.

One of the most crucial characteristics of young people is their search of individual identity [5]. Teenage approval is more important for them than the attention of teachers and adults. Lots of educators point out that young people are prone to disruptive behavior and often bring outside problems to class [5]. Still, there are other observations according to which, older learners in class can help to discipline the younger ones. Younger learners may also be required to "perform adult roles" if their language skills are more advanced than the adults' [4]. Older students can also experience some health problems which prevent them from productive learning.

Adult learners have to combine their education with performing professional, social and family responsibilities. They don't always have enough time for studying. Adults are often afraid of making mistakes and looking stupid and awkward in the presence of younger learners.

There is one more interesting observation. Some adult students may have experience of learning other foreign languages. Some may have studied a language using a different approach. These advantages can be widely used in the classroom.

When teaching a multi-aged group of learners, a teacher's job is to create a friendly positive atmosphere in the classroom. A foreign language teacher should consider learners' life experience as well as cultural and educational background. It is crucial for a teacher to be able to build rapport with his students. Individual approach is very helpful. It is also helpful to show genuine interest in students' lives. Considering learners' psychological characteristics, a teacher should be able to "read" people's emotions and react to emotional manifestations in the classroom.

As the primary task of learners is to be able to speak a foreign language, the communicative approach should be applied.

A teacher needs to spend some time to find out his learners' interests. The tasks should be based on learners' experience. Though it is difficult to find material to suit all ages, one can find appropriate topics for all. A teacher should also adjust the pace of learning to the students' abilities and have some extra materials for those who are faster. It is important to use the elements of experiential learning (dialogues, group-work, dramatization, using real-life situations). Pair-work and group work should be organized. Fortunately, having students of all ages in one classroom is beneficial to suit these purposes and to imitate real-life every day communication.

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