

The EFL Educator's Role in Adult Learning

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Introduction

The advantages of learning English as a foreign language (EFL) are not only associated with the enrichment of adults' qualifications concerning employment opportunities or vocational advancement, but they also cover adult needs related to their personal development, studies, entertainment and everyday routine. Therefore, an increasing number of adults join relevant lifelong education programs in order to be able either to obtain or to improve their English language skills.

In this educational context, the role of the adult educator becomes essentially central and fundamental, complicated and different from this one of the traditional or conventional EFL teacher. This role is directly determined by the adult learners' profile and automatically entails the respect to the adulthood of all the participants in the learning process (Κόκκος, 1999· Rogers, 2002).

The main purpose of this paper is to define the EFL educator's role in adult learning discussing briefly first the main aspects of the EFL adults' profile (Rogers, 2002· Jarvis, 2004).

EFL adult learners' profile

Adults' incentives for learning English as a foreign language are mainly socio-vocational and socio-cultural. Adults consider that the improvement of their linguistic skills in English will be necessary in their work and help them be promoted hierarchically and, thus, financially (Ε.Κ.Δ.Δ.Α.-ΙΝ.ΕΠ., 2006). Adults expect that by improving their English language skills they will feel higher self-confidence both as individuals and as professionals, achieving a better financial state and more chances to travel abroad either for professional reasons or for personal fulfillment.

Furthermore, adults are characterized by a constantly developing process of growth, carrying a number of experiences and values, specific intentions and expectations regarding the learning process (Courau, 2000· Jarvis, 2004). Adults form a special target group of learners with particular social, vocational and educational characteristics, with several personal and professional interests and learning motives.

As a result, every EFL adult educator should know and apply all the general adult learning principles on the grounds that adult learners are characterized by social maturity, responsibility, self-direction, free will and independence (Κόκκος, 1999). For this reason, adult educators should ensure the mutual respect and interaction with their learners, enhancing adult freedom of expression, self-esteem and friendliness. Their basic obligation is to make use of educational methods which will promote adult learners' autonomy and free development through disciplined action (Jarvis, 2004). At this point the crucial question asking for answer is:

What is or what should be the EFL educator's role in adult learning?

The EFL educator's role in adult learning

Instructive approach

The adult educator is the learning *manager* setting the learning goals and planning the whole curriculum program, the *organizer* as far as the learning duties, the learning environment and the conditions of adults' participation are concerned. At the same time he is the *leader* who encourages adult learners via incentives, by selecting and using the most appropriate methods and techniques, for instance, brainstorming, role-play, simulation, problem solving activities, projects, work groups (Courau, 2000).

EFL educators should agree with their adult learners on scheduling EFL material together. They should promote adults' autonomy under an informal 'Learning Contract' (Knowles, 1978; Rogers, 2002) by sharing with them the responsibility for achieving desired EFL outcomes and specific learning objectives with a view to combining pure linguistic information successfully with the real communicative needs of the individual adults.

He is also the *supervisor* caring about the achievement of the learning goals, the curriculum development and the learners' progress. The educator becomes the major *mediator* throughout the learning process. He mediates between the adult learners and the learning object, in the present case English language. The participants need to realize purely the direct learning goals from the beginning of the class in order to accept them consciously and believe that they can attain them.

Socio-psychological approach

The EFL educator plays the role of the *investigator* who is interested in finding out about the adults' personality, everyday life, existent abilities, skills, knowledge, experience and work habits in order to help them develop themselves further not only linguistically but also socio-psychologically (Courau, 2000). Adults' individual characteristics and particularities should be taken into consideration to be reinforced by aiming at the personalization/individualisation of the learning process (Jarvis, 2004). The adult educator's role should be 'built' on the basis of the adults' needs and special characteristics.

Psychologically speaking, adult learners may be easily discouraged by the learning demands doubting about their EFL learning ability. In this case the educator should be their *supporter* by realizing in due time adults' lack of self-confidence in order to interfere dynamically and effectively in an encouraging and supporting way.

Additionally, in the EFL learning process the adult learner should be treated as socially active, that is, as an active member of society, who needs to use English language to ask for or receive information in a certain communicative context and under certain communicative circumstances. To this end, the adults should activate their own foreign language skills and strategies, based on their own knowledge, feelings, desires and abilities.

Pedagogical approach

Pedagogically speaking, the EFL educator is the *coordinator* of activities, a *catalyst* and a *source* being exploited by the adults to the extent they need and desire rather than a knowledge transmitter.

The educator is *conveyor* of duties and responsibilities to the adult learners. He is the *motivator* as long as he tries to activate the adults' interest, abilities, opinion, thought and behaviour via the appropriate stimuli (Noyé & Piveteau, 1999; Rogers, 2002, 2003).

He is the *transformer* who realizes which are the best conditions and the most suitable atmosphere to generate learning opportunities. At the same time, he should contribute to create an atmosphere of mutual trust among the group members, in which there is dialogue, mutual appreciation and cooperativeness while possible conflicts can be creatively exploited (Rogers, 2002, 2003).

The adult educator is the *guarantor* of an equal relation with the learners, a relation of mutual respect, mutual support and reciprocity. He should behave as a *friend* and

cooperator, modest and ready to receive dispute and criticism regarding his pedagogical and teaching methods. The EFL educator is the *motive power* who contributes to overcome possible obstacles or difficulties by encouraging adult learners to develop all their abilities with self-confidence (Rogers, 2002, 2003). He should cooperate harmonically with the adults since they know better than anyone else their own communicative needs in English, which may be different not only from one learning group to another, but also from one adult learner to another.

Linguistic approach

The EFL educator should be *expert* and *facilitator* by setting the appropriate learning objectives which will develop and improve adult learners' communicative competence on the basis of their prior cognitive level (Noyé & Piveteau, 1999). The educator should help adults develop knowledge with regard to the morphology, phonology and structure of English as a foreign language. He should also facilitate them develop skills related to the written and oral speech comprehension, written and oral speech production, the realization of the target language socio-linguistic context through mediation, that is, parallel use of Greek and English. In some cases the EFL educator should convey specialized English language knowledge (e.g. terminology) associated with adults' special vocational interests and needs.

The EFL educator is the *creator* of situations which facilitate active and autonomous learning. He has to connect, even from the very first classes, English structures (grammar and syntax) with the possibilities of using them in real communicative circumstances relevant to the adult learners' vocational, social and personal everyday routine (Jarvis, 2004). The educator should help adult learners transmit knowledge from their mother tongue into English effectively by using new linguistic and cultural elements which will help them improve their communicative competence in English.

Conclusion

To conclude, in adult education programs the educator and the learners are involved or should be involved in a dynamic interaction, in an equal relation of mutual respect, solidarity and reciprocity. The EFL educator's role is definitive and manifold, as he becomes the cooperator, the animating spirit, the mediator and the adult learners' friend. Educators, thus, should not ignore or forget that the adult

learner's profile (learning style, needs, experience, preferences, psychology, etc) is what determines to a great extent their role and constitutes a prescriptive factor for the effectiveness of adult EFL learning.

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