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PROBLEMS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING FOR ADULT VETERINARY MEDICINE SPECIALISTS: REASONS AND THEIR SOLUTION

ПРОБЛЕМИ НАВЧАННЯ ІНОЗЕМНОЇ МОВИ ДОРΟΣЛИХ ФАХІВЦІВ ВЕТЕРИНАРНОЇ МЕДИЦИНИ: ПРИЧИНИ ТА ЇХ ВИРІШЕННЯ

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ABSTRACT

Learning a foreign language by adults is one of the most critical aspects of lifelong learning in Ukraine. Many adults have worked in certain spheres of the Ukrainian economy; they must improve their qualifications once in a certain period. This should include specialized subjects and learning a foreign language. However, the organization of this process requires much effort and the unique skills of a language teacher since teaching a foreign language to adults can be fairly challenging, facing many problems.

The article **aims** to determine the main problems and their solution in teaching foreign languages to adults.

Вивчення іноземної мови дорослими є одним із найважливіших аспектів навчання впродовж життя в Україні. Багато дорослих людей працюють у певній сфері економіки України, їм доводиться раз на певний період підвищувати свою кваліфікацію. На нашу думку, це має включати не лише профільні предмети, а й вивчення іноземної мови. Проте організація цього процесу потребує великих зусиль і спеціальних навичок викладача іноземної мови, оскільки навчання іноземної мови для дорослих може бути досить складним процесом, який стикається з багатьма проблемами.

Мета статті – визначити основні проблеми та їх вирішення у навчанні іноземних мов дорослими.

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Methodology. We focus more on learning a foreign language in continuous education, using the example of specialists in the veterinary field of Ukraine. To conduct research, we interviewed 14 people aged 45 and over and 18 people aged 35-40 who studied at the Stepan Gzhytskyi National University of Veterinary Medicine and Biotechnologies of Lviv. In addition, English classes were held with eight persons from among those interviewed. The survey was conducted as an interview, where participants were asked to answer presented questions.

Results. After interviewing the respondents of our study and analyzing the learning process, we can single out the most common problems when adults learn English: psychological, phonetic, lexical, and grammatical. The research results have demonstrated that teaching a foreign language to adult specialists requires the teacher's deep linguistic and psychological knowledge. Considering the problems raised during teaching, two groups of issues are solved by frequent training, explaining materials, memorizing rules, and vocabulary.

Conclusion is psychological problems require a creative approach from a teacher to solve them.

Keywords: language teaching, adult specialists, lifelong learning, problems of foreign language learning.

Методика. Ми вирішили зосередитися на вивченні іноземної мови в безперервній освіті, використовуючи приклад фахівців ветеринарної галузі України. Для проведення дослідження ми опитали 14 осіб віком від 45 років та 18 осіб віком 35-40 років, які навчалися у Львівському національному університеті ветеринарної медицини та біотехнологій імені Степана Гжицького. Крім того, були проведені заняття з англійської мови з вісьмома особами з числа опитаних. Опитування проводилося у формі інтерв'ю, де учасникам було запропоновано відповісти на запитання.

Результати. Опитавши респондентів нашого дослідження та проаналізувавши процес навчання, ми можемо виділити наступні найбільш поширені проблеми при вивченні дорослими англійської мови: психологічні, фонетичні, лексичні та граматичні. Результати дослідження показали, що навчання іноземної мови дорослих фахівців вимагає від викладача глибоких психологічних та лінгвістичних знань. Розглядаючи проблеми, які піднімаються під час навчання, можна констатувати, що систематичні заняття, пояснення матеріалу, правил, опанування лексики вирішують дві групи проблем.

Висновок – психологічні проблеми вимагають від викладача творчого підходу до їх вирішення.

Ключові слова: викладання мови, дорослі фахівці, навчання впродовж життя, проблеми вивчення іноземної мови.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English to adults is one of Ukraine's most critical conceptual foundations of continuous (continuous) education. Most higher education institutions in Ukraine have departments or faculties that improve workers' qualifications in various fields of the economy. Since the majority of the adult population of Ukraine has a particular specialty, this complicates the learning process of a foreign language. In our opinion, such training or preparation should be carried out with mandatory consideration of such specialty or specialization of "students". Foreign language teachers should teach a general foreign language and a specialized or foreign language with a professional orientation.

It is important to emphasize that the field of veterinary services in Ukraine is becoming widespread and constantly developing. However, it should be noted that it has transformed from the Soviet system of veterinary medicine, where collective farms prevailed, to the modern model, where private clinics for small animals already prevail.

Nevertheless, farming also occupies one of the main niches in the work of a veterinarian. Most of the drugs, treatment methods, and equipment are produced in foreign countries, so a modern specialist in veterinary medicine must know a foreign language.

In Ukraine, this language is mostly English, to a lesser extent French, German, Spanish, and Polish.

Knowledge of foreign languages by veterinary specialists is an essential factor in their work. However, there is another, no less critical problem – the knowledge of a foreign language by experienced specialists, those who graduated from higher education institutions or studied in the former USSR. Such specialists, realizing the importance of foreign language competence in their profession, also desire to learn foreign languages. However, there is a specific difference between learning foreign languages for adults and young people.

PURPOSE

The purpose consists in determining the main problems and their solution in teaching foreign languages to adults.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

It is worth defining the concept of continuous education and its status in Ukraine. Analysis of scientific works on this topic shows that this term is relatively new. It originated in Western Europe, denoted by various phrases: life-long learning, life-long education, continuing education, etc.

However, they all boil down to one thing in common – this is the essence that these concepts denote, namely learning not only at school and university but also during the practical activity of a person. While working, a person deepens his knowledge, develops and acquires new knowledge, skills, etc. In the future, we will use the term “continuous learning” or “life-long learning”.

The term “continuous learning” has many interpretations. Thus, Nalyvaiko (2017) understands it as a potential opportunity for personal and professional development throughout life and an institutional system for ensuring continuity. The scientist notes that today, continuous education needs more support from the state administration of Ukraine.

Markina (2018) interprets continuous learning as a comprehensive development of the individual and a way of promoting the development of the entire society. Continuous learning covers purposeful learning in various situations to expand knowledge and improve skills and competencies. The content of constant education is four directions: learning knowledge, learning skills, learning interaction with other people, and comprehensive self-development.

We agree with the explanation of the concept of continuous education by Sushko (2010), who understands this concept as the development of people's knowledge, skills, and competencies throughout their lives to achieve economic and social goals with the help of meaningful and reflexive behavior. In addition, the researcher identifies six priorities of continuous learning: recognition of the value of knowledge, information, career guidance, and counseling, investment of time and money in training, bringing education closer to the consumer, basic skills, and innovative pedagogy.

Zharkova (2021) singles out four basic directions on which continuous learning is based: learning how to learn, learning how to do, living together with others, and learning how

to be. The researcher also notes that continuous learning motivates people to constantly update their information database, investing their time, energy, and intellectual and material resources to continually search for sources of information and ways to use it.

The components of speech are one of the keys to the professional activity of a specialist. Therefore, it is essential to emphasize the importance of language training in continuous learning. Foreign language training or the development of foreign language competence in adult specialists will ensure full-fledged communication between specialists at the highest level of communication, namely at the international level, facilitating the exchange of helpful information.

The survey conducted by Gagina and Los (2020) confirms the importance and understanding of foreign language learning by the adult population of Ukraine. Thus, according to the researchers, more than 64% of respondents in the Chernihiv region study a foreign language for professional activities.

Teaching adults a foreign language is a complex process that requires a slightly different approach than teaching children and students. Such an educational process has significant differences. Thus, Lavasani and Fajardres (2011) point out that teaching a foreign language to adults is mostly about meaning and process, and less attention is paid to content. In addition, the authors claim that adults are easier to work with because they are more motivated than younger students or schoolchildren.

According to Yatsyshyn (2016), the advantages of adults in learning foreign languages over younger ones are: "Along with this, there are positive qualities that contribute to learning: life experience, reasonableness, rationality of thinking, tendency to analyze, etc." Adults tend to be much more motivated and focused than children or students.

In this regard, Marchenko (2015) notes: "Sustainable motivation makes learning effective, even considering some methodological shortcomings. It can have a decisive influence on the degree of mastery of the language, and its formation by various means should always be at the center of the student's attention. The stronger will of adults, their perseverance, and increased working capacity allow them to overcome difficulties in language learning more successfully than children". Mesh (2010) summarizes the following advantages of adults over children in terms of learning a foreign language: adults are more motivated; adults learn material based on what they need today, not in the future; adults already have some learning experience, so it is essential for them to understand, and not to memorize. The similar results of high motivation of adults towards learning a foreign language are mentioned in the research by Viktorova (2020).

In addition, it is also worth emphasizing the activities of the International Program for the Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) – a periodic monitoring study of the professional skills and competencies of the adult population of working age in the countries of the world. The Organization for International Cooperation and Development (OECD) developed and implemented this program with other leading organizations. This program assesses general competencies most often used by individuals in their professional activities, including problem-solving in a technological society, literacy, numeracy, and reading skills.

METHODOLOGY

To conduct the research, we interviewed 14 people aged 45 and over (Group 1) and 18 people aged 35-40 (Group 2) who studied at the Stepan Gzhytskyi National University of Veterinary Medicine and Biotechnologies of Lviv. In addition, English classes were held with eight persons from among those interviewed. The survey was conducted in the form of an interview, where the following questions were asked:

- 1) *What, in your opinion, is the main problem of learning a foreign language?*
- 2) *How often did you need to use a foreign language in your professional activities?*

In addition, we conducted individual and collective training of adult veterinary medicine specialists for a year and a half. We analyzed the main problems when teaching a professionally oriented foreign language.

RESULTS

After interviewing the respondents of our study and analyzing the learning process, we can single out the following most common problems when adults learn English: psychological, grammatical, phonetic, and lexical. Therefore, the results are presented in the tables below for each group separately:

Table 1

The results of the Group 1 (aged over 45 y.o.)

| Problem type | Psychological | Phonetic and lexical | Grammatical |
|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| Amount of responders, % | 8 (57%) | 4 (29%) | 2 (14%) |

Table 2

The results of the Group 2 (aged 35-40 y.o.)

| Problem type | Psychological | Phonetic and lexical | Grammatical |
|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| Amount of responders, % | 3 (17%) | 8 (44%) | 7 (39%) |

Furthermore, questionnaire participants specified the problems they faced while learning the English language. In addition, while teaching these students, we observed some main problems which occurred in the educational process. The detailed description is the following:

1. Psychological:

- Underestimation of one's abilities (for example, I am already 43, and my brain assimilates information very poorly compared to younger people).
- Fear of mistakes (I will not talk because I do not know all the rules).
- Excuses for own ignorance (we had a lousy teacher).
- Little time is spent on learning foreign languages (adults still have more work and responsibilities than students or children, who spend most of their time studying. For adults, the primary function is work, for children and youth – study).

2. Phonetic and lexical:

- Structures are challenging to learn *it takes me 40 min to write, I am about to leave*, etc.;
- Prepositions: *good at* (but should be *in*);
- The letter combinations *th, ea, kn, ght, ou* are pronounced poorly;

3. Grammatical:

- Tenses, especially Present Perfect, all types of Futures (Future simple, be going to, present continuous, present simple).
- Infinitive form/gerund.
- Causative form and Passive Voice.
- Articles.
- Morphology and word formation of the language or Word formation.

DISCUSSION

The results of the research allowed us to group all problems, which adult learners face while learning foreign language into three main categories: psychological, lexicophonetical, and grammatical. Marchenko (2015) singles out the following issues in adults' study of foreign languages: psychological, material, territorial, and socio-cultural. Regarding psychological problems as one of the main ones in learning a foreign language, Yatsyshyn (2016) emphasizes: "...the main difficulties of an adult in learning a foreign language are psychological in nature." While researching teaching the English language to adults, Viktorova (2020) conducted a survey on the attitude of adults to different language learning ICT tools. The biggest problems occurred with the interface.

It should be noted, based on our research, that problems mostly appear based on differences between Ukrainian and English languages. In this regard, Gurunandan et al. (2019) argue that when learning a foreign language as an adult, the dependence on the native language is significant at the elementary and secondary levels, gradually decreasing with the movement to a perfect level of foreign language proficiency. Therefore, those grammatical/phonetic categories absent in the Ukrainian language are the most problematic for learning and mastering, especially for beginners.

However, we noticed that English-language professional veterinary vocabulary is easier for adult veterinary professionals to learn, as many terms are transliterated. Such terms have the same sound in English and Ukrainian since they mostly come from Latin. In this context, Pikulytska (2020) suggests learning new specialized vocabulary through reading professional texts on veterinary terminology. Professionally oriented training, according to the scholar, presupposes not only working with specialized content but also adding methods that form professional abilities (Pikulytska, 2020).

In addition, Stamer and Vitevic (2012) note that when learning new foreign words, adults remember better those that are phonologically closer to their native language than those that are further away. This also confirms that veterinarians learned the names of various diseases and drugs better than ordinary words since such names are mostly the same in Ukrainian and English (Stamer & Vitevic, 2012).

In addition, researchers note that phonological connections with previously learned words help to understand better new foreign words (Stamer & Vitevic, 2012). The respondents of our study noted that there were very often cases when they did not understand the essence of the conversation or text, but when they heard a term (*name of a drug, disease, etc.*), they mostly managed to understand its meaning.

It is worth highlighting problems when adults learn lexical constructions, such as *It takes me ... min to do smth.* This is primarily because there are no counterparts to such constructions and grammatical categories in the Ukrainian language. Therefore, it is challenging for specialists to understand why and how they are used. Even after learning the rules, proper practical use comes over time, after many hours of practice.

Another problem arises here; after several failed attempts or total misunderstandings, the listeners stopped learning and became discouraged from using such inflections or constructions. In such a situation, explaining to them that learning new things in the language is a long process is essential. The example we set for all of them proved to be very effective – riding a bicycle, car, or skiing. The bottom line is that it is also hard to learn all the nuances at first, but the more you practice, the better you ride. It had a relatively positive effect on adults.

Adults often need help correctly using language morphology and word formation in conversation. They can sometimes use a verb instead of a noun or a noun instead of an adjective. It refers to words that are similar and are part of the grammatical topic of word formation. For example, *management – manage, communicate – communication – communicative*. In our opinion, this is because certain established norms of using parts of speech and grammatical norms have already taken root in adults, so it is difficult for them to switch to other norms.

Lexical-phonetic problems are best solved by practice. A person learning a language should learn words by heart and try to use them most often, write sentences, speak dialogues, etc. (Chernionkov, 2022; Kolisnichenko, 2023).

Concerning grammar, it is more difficult here since more is needed to learn the rules; you must also be able to apply them in practice. The best option is not memorization of grammar rules but their understanding. We discovered a quite effective method: subordinate bilingualism. This is a teaching method where students learn a foreign language through the prism of their native language. This method involves comparing foreign language components, lexical and grammatical, with the same components of one's native language. This is learning through explaining grammatical categories in the native language.

For example, we explain the English present perfect with Ukrainian examples and variants. This explanation will not fully reproduce the English grammatical category of the perfect, but it will be clear. It is essential to give information in portions for better perception and understanding. For example, when explaining the present perfect, in the first study, the general rules of use are explained; secondly, the specific features of use are explained; thirdly, the particular nuances are explained.

It is also worth emphasizing important grammatical topics in English, such as tenses and the infinitive/gerund. After analyzing the obtained materials and practical experience, these grammatical topics are among the most difficult for adults to learn. This is caused

by the lack of corresponding analogs in the Ukrainian language; therefore, they are incomprehensible to adults. According to our observations, it is the most difficult for Ukrainians to understand the present perfect tense (Present Perfect), as it seems to refer to the present. Still, in Ukrainian, it will be translated as the past. In this context, it is suggested adding more visual elements into the grammar teaching to adults.

We consider psychological problems one of the most important, and their overcoming requires much effort from a person (Kostikova et al, 2023). First, it is difficult because an adult person is already formed with a particular worldview and experience, so it is difficult for him to be flexible in learning new things. Secondly, it is essential to convince oneself of one's inability to learn something new. Adults explain this with a phrase that can be generalized: "I'm too old to study".

Much research says that learning, especially foreign languages, is most effective when it starts early. The younger a person is, the more effectively he will learn a foreign language. Singleton and Zaborska (2020) mention that adults often are discouraged from learning a new language because they think that the effect would be inappropriate and it will take too much time.

Rodriguez-Fornells et al. (2009) claim that there are specific critical periods of a person's life during which learning foreign languages takes place as efficiently and quickly as possible. According to researchers, it is mostly childhood and youth. We find a similar statement in the work of Birdsong (2006).

In addition, regarding this problem, Marchenko (2015) notes: "Much more effort is required from an adult than from a child, because mental processes are already stable, which means the cessation of active development; learning a foreign language requires memorizing a large number of rules, vocabulary units, mental flexibility and plasticity to develop the ability to correctly use these rules to express themselves and understand the thoughts of others; accordingly, more time and effort is spent compared to the younger generation".

A similar statement can be found in the study of Yatsyshyn (2016): "Adults lose to young people in the speed of learning material, in the speed of performing educational exercises, etc". In this regard, Koval (2021) advised establishing interaction between learners, which will help to develop communicative skills and, thus, overcome psychological obstacles.

The main problem in adults learning a foreign language is the experience of previous foreign language learning. In general, among the people we interviewed, the vast majority pointed to a negative experience of learning a foreign language at school or university. Respondents noted that they mostly memorized words and grammar rules and learned dialogues by heart. Little time was devoted to oral communication and the practical use of learned grammar rules and vocabulary, mainly through oral communication.

It is very often difficult for adults to devote time to study because most of their time is occupied by work. At the same time, young people studying at school or in higher education spend most of their time studying. It is essential that a person, whether an adult or a youth, work with the educational materials and practice independently. In addition, Makukhina (2022) mentions that adults often come to classes tired after work,

and therefore, their brain activity cannot work effectively. During classes, teachers teach how to do certain things, and practical improvement falls on students' shoulders. Therefore, it is crucial not to overload students with learning materials.

Another point adults use to learn foreign languages is the interval between practical classes. Practicing or studying daily is essential to learning a language effectively. It is more efficient to allocate a smaller amount of time to study each day rather than a significant amount of time in one day.

In addition, online foreign language learning is quite effective as a method of independent learning. However, online learning is an auxiliary or supplement to stationary learning of a foreign language. Mesh (2010) notes the advantage of online adult education.

Among the most important things, the researcher points out the lack of fear of making mistakes, especially when speaking, since you can always rewrite. This lack of fear can increase the desire to speak a foreign language. The researcher also notes that blended learning of a foreign language to adult specialists was more effective in such speech activities as listening and speaking.

We have observed that adults learning a foreign language fear using new, learned material. This was especially evident in oral speech. In addition, most respondents noted that oral narration or communication with a foreigner is the most difficult for them. Even if they knew the basic rules and words, they still needed to use this knowledge for minimal communication. When we asked about the reasons, the answer was mostly reduced to one reason – they were afraid to make a mistake. According to Yatsyshyn (2016), adults often have doubts about their abilities, fear that their incompetence will be revealed in the learning process and look worse in front of others in the study group.

One of the leading solutions to this problem is psychological support and avoidance of correcting mistakes made during oral communication between a student and a teacher. It is essential to psychologically influence a person and support him so that he begins to speak, even if he makes numerous mistakes. Here, the teacher must correct only some of the mistakes made by the person at once because he will become discouraged and may stop using the acquired knowledge of a foreign language. The main reason is that she makes many mistakes.

Therefore, from the teacher's side, we recommend "skipping" specific minor errors that will not affect the content of the coded information. You can gradually correct such mistakes by learning the language and various grammatical and lexical topics. The main thing in this process is not to sow despair in the student's knowledge but to support and force him to start expressing his thoughts in a foreign language.

CONCLUSIONS

Therefore, teaching adults, especially specialists, a foreign language requires deep linguistic knowledge and psychological knowledge from the teacher. Adults' main problems in learning a foreign language are psychological, phonetic-lexical, and grammatical. The last two groups of issues are solved mainly by frequent training, explanations of materials, memorization of rules and vocabulary, etc. Psychological problems require a creative approach from the teacher to solve them. For their effective

solution, you must first understand the causes and sources of the problem. The primary source of mental, lexical-phonetic, and grammatical issues in adults learning a foreign language is an ineffective educational process that adults go through earlier when they are students or pupils.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

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