RESEARCH ARTICLE

Modern Methods In Teaching English For Adult Learners

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Abstract.

The article examines modern methods of teaching English to adult learners in the context of higher and continuing education. The specific characteristics of adults as language learners are analysed on the basis of the theory of andragogy, and the main contemporary approaches are reviewed: Communicative Language Teaching, Task-Based Language Teaching, Content and Language Integrated Learning and English for Specific Purposes, flipped and blended learning, mobile and artificial intelligence-assisted learning, project-based learning and gamification. The methods are compared according to their core principles, typical activities, benefits and limitations for adult learners. A conceptual framework is proposed that links the principles of adult learning with the choice of teaching methods and expected outcomes. It is concluded that a principled combination of methods, in which the teacher acts as a facilitator, is the most effective strategy for teaching English to adults.

Keywords: adult learners; andragogy; English language teaching; communicative language teaching; task-based learning; ESP; flipped classroom; blended learning; mobile learning; artificial intelligence; gamification.

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, English has become the main language of international business, science, technology and education. For a growing number of adults, the ability to communicate in English is no longer an optional skill but a condition for professional growth, academic mobility and participation in global networks. In Uzbekistan, the importance of foreign language learning has been emphasised at the state level, in particular by the Presidential Decree “On measures to further improve the system of learning foreign languages” [20], and the number of adults who study English at universities, in-service training courses and private language centres continues to increase. These learners include university students of non-philological specialities, young professionals, civil servants, teachers of other subjects and specialists who need English for work.

Adult learners differ significantly from children and adolescents. They come to the classroom with rich life and professional experience, clearly formulated goals and limited time. At the same time, many of them have negative memories of traditional language lessons based on memorising grammar rules and translating texts, and they may feel anxious about making mistakes in front of others. As a result, methods that were designed for school learners often fail to meet the needs and expectations of adults, leading to low motivation and high drop-out rates.

The problem is also connected with the changing nature of professional activity. Many adults need English not for general

communication but for specific tasks: reading professional literature, participating in international projects and online meetings, writing emails and reports, and presenting the results of their work. Such needs cannot be satisfied by general courses alone and require methods that integrate language learning with professional content and real communicative tasks. At the same time, digital technologies and artificial intelligence have created new opportunities for flexible and individualised learning that did not exist even a few years ago, and teachers need guidance on how to use them effectively.

Over the last decades, language pedagogy has moved from teacher-centred, grammar-focused instruction towards learner-centred, communicative and technology-enhanced approaches [1, 2]. However, the question of which modern methods are most effective for adults, and how they should be combined in practice, still requires discussion. The aim of this article is to analyse modern methods of teaching English to adult learners, to compare their advantages and limitations, and to propose a framework that links the principles of adult learning with the choice of teaching methods.

Literature review

The theoretical basis for teaching adults is andragogy, the theory of adult learning developed by M. Knowles. According to Knowles, adults are self-directed, bring a reservoir of experience to learning, are ready to learn what is relevant to their social roles, have a problem-centred rather than subject-centred orientation, and are driven mainly by internal motivation [3]. These assumptions have important implications for language teaching: adults need to understand why they are learning something, to participate in planning their learning, and to see an immediate connection between classroom activities and their real life.

J. Mezirow's theory of transformative learning adds that adult learning often involves critical reflection on previous beliefs and experience [4]. In language learning, this means helping adults to reconsider fixed ideas such as "I am too old to learn a language" or "I must speak without mistakes". S. Krashen's affective filter hypothesis also explains why anxiety and low self-confidence can block language acquisition, which is particularly relevant for adults who fear losing face [5]. Z. Dörnyei emphasises that motivation is not a fixed trait but can be created and maintained by the teacher through appropriate strategies [6].

Research on adult language learners also points to specific cognitive features. Compared with children, adults usually have a more developed analytical ability, a larger general vocabulary and better learning strategies, which allow them to progress quickly, especially at the initial stages and in the acquisition of grammar and reading skills. At the same time, they may find it more difficult to achieve native-like pronunciation, and their working memory and attention may be affected by fatigue and the demands of work and family life. These features suggest that adult courses should make use of learners' analytical skills and conscious learning strategies, while providing sufficient practice for the automatisation of oral skills and organising lessons in short, varied stages that maintain attention.

A further key concept is learner autonomy, defined as the capacity to take control of one's own learning [21]. For adults, autonomy is both a natural

characteristic and a goal of language education, since their learning will largely continue outside formal courses. Teaching methods for adults should therefore develop learning strategies, self-assessment skills and the ability to find and use resources independently. J. Harmer notes that the effective teacher of adults combines clear structure and support with gradually increasing learner responsibility [22].

In methodology, J. Richards and T. Rodgers describe the transition from the Grammar-Translation and Audio-Lingual methods to Communicative Language Teaching, which views language as a tool for communication and gives priority to meaningful interaction [1]. Task-Based Language Teaching, developed in the works of R. Ellis, D. Nunan and M. Long, makes the communicative task the central unit of the syllabus [7–9]. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) link language learning to subject or professional content [10, 11]. In recent years, research has increasingly focused on blended and flipped learning [12, 13], mobile-assisted language learning [14], gamification [15] and, most recently, the use of generative artificial intelligence tools such as ChatGPT in language education [16]. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, with its action-oriented approach, provides a common basis for setting goals and assessing outcomes [17].

Materials and methods

The study is based on a descriptive and analytical review of the scientific and methodological literature on adult learning and English language teaching, including fundamental monographs, international frameworks and recent journal publications. The selected methods were compared according to four criteria: the underlying principle, typical classroom activities, benefits for adult learners and possible limitations. The analysis was supplemented by the author's practical experience of teaching English to adult students at the Department of Foreign Language and Literature of Tashkent University of Applied Sciences and by observation of classes. On this basis, a conceptual framework was developed that connects the principles of andragogy with modern teaching methods and expected learning outcomes.

Results and discussion

Communicative Language Teaching remains the methodological foundation for teaching adults. Its central idea is that learners acquire language most effectively when they use it to exchange real information and achieve communicative goals [1, 18]. For adults, communicative activities such as role-plays of workplace situations, discussions of current issues and information-gap tasks are attractive because they are directly connected with the situations in which they will use English. At the same time, practice shows that a purely fluency-oriented approach may lead to fossilised errors. Therefore, communicative activities should be combined with a focus on form: the teacher draws attention to grammar and vocabulary when they are needed for the task and provides constructive feedback.

Task-Based Language Teaching develops the communicative approach further by organising the course around tasks that have a clear, non-linguistic outcome, for example planning a business trip, comparing job offers or preparing a short report [7, 8]. A typical lesson follows the cycle of pre-task, task and post-task (language focus) proposed by J. Willis [19].

TBLT is particularly well suited to adults because it reflects their problem-centred orientation and allows them to use their professional experience. The main difficulty lies in selecting and grading tasks so that they are neither too simple nor too demanding for learners at different levels.

To illustrate, a task-based lesson for adult students of economics may be built around the task of choosing a supplier for a company. In the pre-task stage, learners read short descriptions of three suppliers and revise vocabulary for comparing prices, quality and delivery terms. In the task stage, they discuss the options in small groups, make a decision and present it to the class with reasons. In the post-task stage, the teacher focuses on the language of comparison and persuasion that learners needed or used incorrectly. Such a lesson integrates reading, speaking and listening, draws on learners' professional knowledge and gives them language they can transfer directly to their work.

Content and Language Integrated Learning and English for Specific Purposes respond to the need of adults to use English in their profession. In ESP courses, the content is chosen on the basis of a needs analysis, and learners work with authentic materials from their field, such as technical documentation, medical case reports or business correspondence [11]. This approach increases the perceived relevance of learning and motivation. Its limitation is that the language teacher often lacks deep subject knowledge; this problem can be solved through cooperation with specialists and by involving learners as "experts" in their field.

Blended and flipped learning are especially valuable for working adults who cannot attend classes regularly. In the flipped classroom model, learners study new material at home through short video lectures, online texts and quizzes, while class time is devoted to discussion, problem solving and speaking practice [12]. Blended learning combines face-to-face lessons with online modules in learning management systems such as Moodle or Google Classroom [13]. These models make learning more flexible and allow each learner to work at their own pace. However, their success depends on learners' self-discipline, digital literacy and reliable internet access, which need to be taken into account when designing a course.

Mobile-assisted language learning extends learning beyond the classroom. Smartphone applications for vocabulary, listening and pronunciation allow adults to use short periods of free time, for example while travelling to work [14]. A new stage in the development of digital methods is the use of generative artificial intelligence. AI chatbots can act as conversation partners, explain grammar, generate practice exercises and give immediate feedback on written texts [16]. For adults who are shy about speaking in a group, practising with a chatbot can reduce anxiety. At the same time, the teacher must teach learners to use these tools critically, since AI output may contain errors, and to avoid replacing their own thinking and writing with automatically generated text.

Project-based learning and gamification increase engagement and promote collaboration. In project work, adult learners create a meaningful product in English, such as a presentation of their company, a short video or a survey, which integrates all four skills and develops soft skills like teamwork and time management. Gamification uses game elements such as points, levels, badges and leaderboards in non-game contexts [15]; digital quiz

platforms like Kahoot! or Quizlet make vocabulary and grammar revision more dynamic. With adults, game elements should be used carefully: they should support learning objectives and not be perceived as childish.

An important issue that cuts across all methods is the treatment of errors and the emotional climate of the lesson. Adults are often more sensitive to correction than younger learners, since mistakes in public may be perceived as a threat to their professional and social status. Excessive, immediate correction during communicative activities can increase anxiety and discourage learners from speaking, whereas a complete absence of feedback leads to fossilisation. A balanced strategy is therefore recommended: during fluency-oriented tasks the teacher notes typical errors and discusses them with the whole group afterwards without naming individuals, while during accuracy-oriented activities more direct correction is appropriate. Peer feedback, self-correction and the use of recordings, for example of learners' presentations, help adults to notice their own errors and develop self-monitoring skills.

Assessment also needs to be adapted to adult learners. Traditional final examinations based on grammar and translation do not reflect the communicative goals of modern courses and often increase anxiety. Formative assessment, which provides learners with regular information about their progress, is more consistent with the principles of andragogy. Portfolios, presentations, project products, recorded speaking tasks and self-assessment checklists based on the CEFR "can do" descriptors allow learners to see their progress in terms of real abilities and to set their own goals for further learning [17]. Digital platforms make it easier to collect such evidence and to give timely, individual feedback.

The main characteristics of the analysed methods are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of modern methods of teaching English to adult learners

Method	Core principle	Typical adult classroom activity	Benefit / limitation for adults
Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)	Language is learned through meaningful interaction and negotiation of meaning	Role-plays of workplace situations, information-gap pair work, discussions	Builds fluency and confidence; may neglect accuracy unless form-focused feedback is added
Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)	Learning is organised around real-world tasks with a clear outcome	Planning a business trip, writing a complaint email, preparing a short report	Highly relevant to adult needs; requires careful task design and grading
CLIL / ESP	Language is learned through professional or subject content	Reading field-specific texts, presenting professional case studies	Immediate professional value; teacher needs subject knowledge or cooperation with specialists

Method	Core principle	Typical adult classroom activity	Benefit / limitation for adults
Flipped and blended learning	Input is studied at home; class time is used for practice	Video lectures and online quizzes before class; speaking practice in class	Flexible for working adults; depends on learners' self-discipline and internet access
Mobile and AI-assisted learning	Learning continues anywhere through digital tools	Vocabulary apps, AI chatbots for conversation practice, automated writing feedback	Personalised and available 24/7; risks of over-reliance and inaccurate output
Project-based learning and gamification	Learners create a product or compete in game-like activities	Group projects, digital quizzes, points and badges for completed tasks	Raises engagement and collaboration; game elements must not become an end in themselves

The comparison shows that no single method can satisfy all the needs of adult learners. Each method has its strengths and weaknesses, and their effectiveness depends on the learners' goals, level, available time and technical conditions. Therefore, a principled eclectic approach is most appropriate, in which the teacher selects and combines methods on the basis of the principles of adult learning. This relationship is presented in Figure 1.

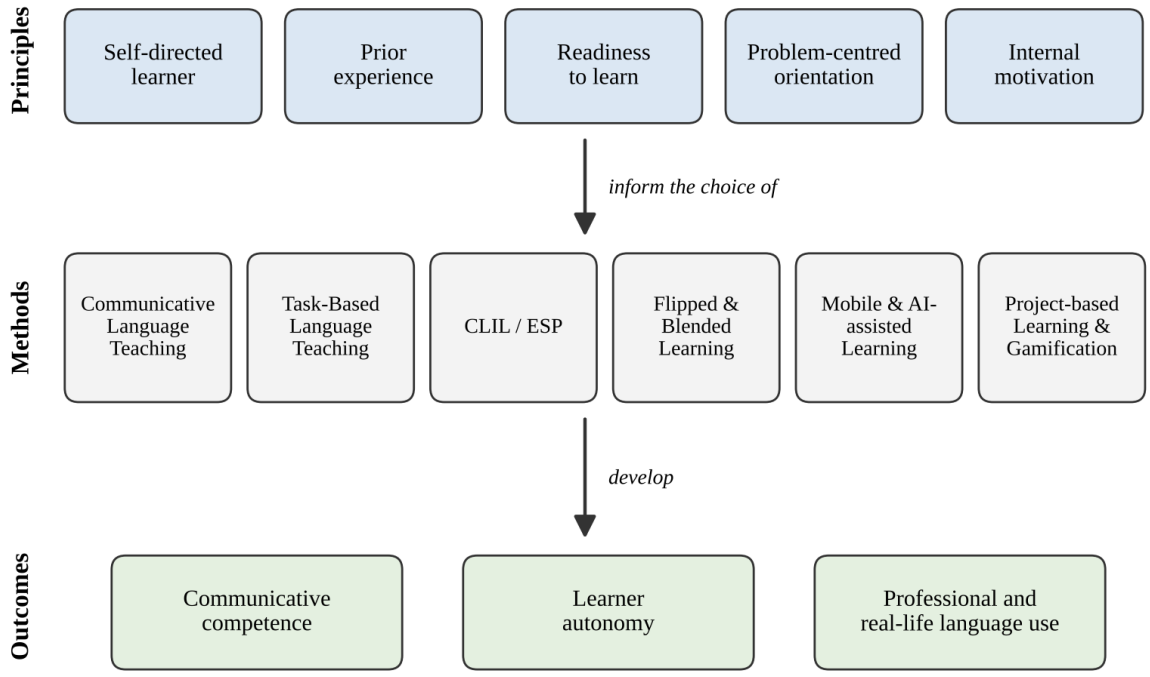


Figure 1. Framework linking the principles of adult learning, modern teaching methods and learning outcomes

As shown in Figure 1, the principles of andragogy form the basis for choosing teaching methods, and the methods, in turn, are directed at developing communicative competence, learner autonomy and the ability to use English in professional and real-life situations. For example, the principle of prior experience is realised through TBLT and ESP, which build on learners' professional knowledge; self-direction and internal motivation are supported by flipped, mobile and AI-assisted learning, which give learners control over the pace and content of their learning; and readiness to learn and problem-centred orientation are reflected in communicative and project-based activities based on real situations.

In the practice of teaching adult students at Tashkent University of Applied Sciences, the following sequence has proved convenient. At the beginning of the course, a needs analysis and placement test are carried out to identify learners' goals and level. New language material is introduced through short online lessons before class. Classroom time is used for communicative and task-based activities related to learners' future profession, followed by a focus on language form and feedback. Between lessons, learners practise with mobile applications and, under the teacher's guidance, with AI tools. Each module ends with a project in which learners apply what they have learned. Assessment combines traditional tests with portfolios, presentations and self-assessment based on CEFR descriptors [17].

The role of the teacher also changes. In modern adult education, the teacher is no longer the only source of knowledge but a facilitator, consultant and organiser of the learning process. Creating a supportive, low-anxiety atmosphere, respecting learners' experience, explaining the purpose of each activity and involving learners in decisions about the course are essential conditions for the success of any method. Continuous professional development of teachers, including training in digital and AI tools, is therefore an important task for higher education institutions.

At the same time, the introduction of modern methods in adult education faces a number of practical challenges. Groups of adult learners are often mixed in level, age and professional background; learners combine study with work and may miss classes; class sizes at universities can be large; and access to technology varies. In addition, some learners and teachers still expect traditional, teacher-centred lessons and may initially resist communicative and interactive activities, regarding them as less serious than grammar explanations and translation exercises.

These challenges can be addressed through a number of measures. Differentiated tasks with several levels of difficulty and flexible grouping allow learners of different levels to work productively in the same class. Recorded lessons and online materials in a learning management system help learners who miss classes to catch up. Clear explanation of the aims of communicative and task-based activities, and of how they relate to learners' real needs, reduces resistance to new methods. Finally, the gradual introduction of digital tools, starting with simple and familiar applications, makes it possible to take into account differences in

learners' digital literacy. Developing intercultural competence should also be considered an integral part of the course, since adults increasingly use English to communicate with partners from different cultures, and awareness of differences in communication styles, politeness strategies and business etiquette is as important for them as grammatical accuracy.

Special attention should be paid to the ethical and pedagogical aspects of using artificial intelligence. Clear rules on the acceptable use of AI tools in assignments, tasks that require personal reflection or oral defence of written work, and discussion of the strengths and limitations of AI with learners help to ensure that technology supports rather than replaces learning. When used in this way, AI tools can become a valuable resource for developing adult learners' autonomy.

Conclusion

Teaching English to adults requires methods that take into account their experience, goals, motivation and limited time. Modern approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching, Task-Based Language Teaching, CLIL and ESP, flipped and blended learning, mobile and AI-assisted learning, project-based learning and gamification offer effective tools for meeting these needs. The analysis shows that each method has specific advantages and limitations, so the most productive strategy is a principled combination of methods based on the principles of andragogy.

The proposed framework links the principles of adult learning with the choice of methods and the expected outcomes and can be used by teachers in planning courses for adult learners. Further research should focus on empirical evaluation of combined models and on the responsible integration of artificial intelligence into English language teaching in higher education in Uzbekistan.

On the basis of the analysis, the following practical recommendations can be made for teachers working with adult learners: to begin each course with a needs analysis and to involve learners in setting goals; to use authentic, professionally relevant materials and real-life tasks; to combine communicative fluency practice with a focus on form and balanced feedback; to use blended and flipped models to make learning flexible; to integrate mobile and AI tools under the teacher's guidance; to apply formative and alternative forms of assessment; and to create a supportive learning atmosphere in which mistakes are seen as a natural part of learning.

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