

METHODS FOR OVERCOMING STRESS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS IN ADULT LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract: This article substantiates the effectiveness of using communicative, interactive, collaborative teaching methods, gamification, reflection, and metacognitive strategies in reducing stress and overcoming psychological barriers. It also reveals the importance of optimizing the psychological environment between teacher and student, creating a supportive educational environment, and ensuring an individualized approach.

Keywords: language learning, stress, language fear, affective approach, andragogics, motivation, metacognitive strategies, interactive learning, reflection, gamification

Introduction

In today's globalization process, learning foreign languages, especially English, has risen to the level of necessity not only for young people but also for adults. The needs for professional development, international cooperation, access to scientific information, and personal growth motivate adult learners to learn a language. However, this process is directly linked to their psychological state, life experience, and individual characteristics, and is often complicated by various internal obstacles and stressful situations. Therefore, the issue of effectively organizing the language learning process among adults is one of the pressing problems of modern pedagogy and andragogy.

Older learners, unlike the younger generation, have a more developed worldview, stable social roles, and responsibilities. This situation, on the one hand, strengthens their conscious approach to learning, and on the other hand, creates psychological barriers such as fear of making mistakes, comparing oneself to others, and feeling uncomfortable in speech activity. In particular, the need for free communication in a language environment causes an affective state in many learners called "language fear." This, in turn, reduces learning efficiency and slows down the development of communicative competence.

From this perspective, in the process of language teaching, it is important not only to convey linguistic knowledge but also to consider the psychological state of learners, strengthen their internal confidence, and develop pedagogical mechanisms aimed at reducing stress. The modern educational paradigm requires a person-centered approach, placing the teacher not only in the role of a knowledge provider but also in the role of a facilitator and psychological support.

Today, innovative approaches such as communicative methods, interactive technologies, gamification, reflexive activity, and metacognitive strategies are recognized as effective tools for overcoming the psychological barriers of adult learners. Through these methods, it is possible to create a positive emotional environment in the learning process, foster a tolerant attitude toward mistakes, and increase students' self-confidence.

Thus, the scientific analysis of stress and psychological barriers arising in adult learners during the language learning process, as well as the development of effective methods for their

elimination, is one of the important directions of pedagogical research today. This article is aimed at highlighting the theoretical and practical aspects of this specific problem.

Analytical discussion. The process of learning a language in adult learners is not merely an activity for acquiring knowledge, but a complex pedagogical and psychological process closely linked to an individual's previously formed experience, social status, professional responsibility, self-esteem, and psychological stability. Therefore, it is scientifically insufficient to explain stress and psychological barriers in language learning solely by "lack of knowledge," "lack of preparation," or "low ability." On the contrary, this situation is associated with the inner experiences of the adult learner, previous educational experience, anxiety about social evaluation, and difficulties in adapting to a new communicative environment.

When an adult begins to learn a language, they often compare themselves to young learners. While this comparison sometimes creates positive competition, it often reinforces internal insecurity. Internal stereotypes such as "I started late," "I'm old, it's hard to learn a language now," and "others will laugh if I make a mistake" hinder the natural development of the learning process. As a result, the learner does not engage in active communication not because they do not know the language, but because they are afraid to use it. This is one of the greatest paradoxes in language learning: a person learns a language by speaking, but the fear of speaking slows down its development.

One of the important aspects of this problem is the phenomenon of language anxiety. Language fear manifests in the learner feeling discomfort, anxiety, and internal pressure while speaking, listening to, answering questions, or expressing opinions in front of an audience in a foreign language. In older learners, this state may be even more pronounced, as they usually have a certain professional or family status in society. For them, making mistakes can be perceived not only as a normal occurrence in the educational process but also as a situation that damages their personal reputation. Therefore, when teaching a language, the teacher should not punish or drastically correct the mistake, but interpret it as a natural stage of learning.

Analyses indicate that the nature of the learning environment is of decisive importance in reducing the psychological barriers of adult learners. If the educational process is based on strict control, constant assessment, and comparison, the learner experiences increased stress. On the contrary, if a supportive, error-tolerant, and collaborative environment is created, the learner will feel more at ease. Thus, the effectiveness of language teaching is determined not only by the choice of method but also by the psychological environment in which this method is implemented.

The andragogical approach is of particular importance in working with adults. Because, unlike children or adolescents, they enter the learning process with life experience, a clear goal, and an internal need. Therefore, it is more effective to teach them language not as a set of abstract grammatical rules, but as a practical tool used in real life situations. For example, tasks such as writing an email during the work process, talking with a foreign partner, asking for directions on a trip, making a professional presentation increase the learner's practical need for language. This need becomes a motivational factor that reduces stress.

The communicative method is especially important for older learners. Because the main goal in learning a language is not to memorize grammatical knowledge, but to be able to communicate. However, if the psychological readiness of the learners is not taken into account

when applying the communicative method, it can have the opposite effect. For example, making someone speak in front of an audience without preparation, demanding quick answers to complex questions, or immediately criticizing mistakes increases stress. Therefore, the communicative approach should be organized on the basis of gradual, soft psychological adaptation. A consistent methodological sequence, such as first short dialogues in pairs, then discussion in small groups, and then expressing opinions in front of a general audience, yields effective results.

Interactive methods are also an important tool for reducing psychological barriers. Role-playing games, problem situations, pair discussions, and small group assignments transform the learner from a passive listener into an active participant. Especially in role-playing games, the learner speaks not on behalf of their personal “I,” but within the framework of a specific image or situation. This reduces the level of fear of making mistakes. Because the learner perceives a mistake not as a personal failure, but as a natural part of the game process. In this regard, interactive methods develop not only language competence but also psychological freedom.

The importance of gamification technologies also deserves special attention. For older learners, game elements can sometimes be viewed as a childish method, but properly organized gamification is an effective tool for increasing motivation, reducing stress, and bringing emotional activity to the lesson. Points, levels, small prizes, team assignments, and creative challenges transform the learning process from a boring theoretical session into an active experience. It is important that gamification does not intensify competition excessively, but serves cooperation and positive incentives.

Metacognitive strategies also play an important role in reducing stress. When an adult learner understands, plans, and evaluates their learning process, they feel a sense of control over themselves. This sense of control reduces stress. For example, if a learner analyzes their activity by asking questions such as “which topic am I struggling with?,” “which method is helping me more?,” “what small result did I achieve today?,” they perceive the language learning process as a controlled process. As a result, learning uncertainty decreases, and inner confidence increases.

Reflection is also one of the effective methods for overcoming psychological barriers in adult learners. At the end of the lesson, expressing a brief written or oral opinion, analyzing one’s feelings, and identifying successes and difficulties allows the learner to understand their situation. Through a reflexive approach, the learner learns to perceive mistakes as signals for improvement rather than failures. This significantly reduces affective barriers in language learning.

The role of the teacher is central to this process. A teacher working with adult learners should act not only as a specialist explaining grammar or vocabulary but also as a manager, motivator, and facilitator of the psychological environment. The teacher’s tone of voice, attitude toward mistakes, method of encouragement, culture of asking questions, and form of feedback directly affect the student’s internal state. In particular, instead of sharply evaluative expressions such as “you said it wrong,” supporting phrases such as “let’s try saying it differently,” “your idea is good, now we will clarify it grammatically” reduce stress.

Furthermore, an individual approach is a necessary methodological condition for working with adult learners. This is because their language learning experience, professional needs, psychological training, time opportunities, and motivation vary. While one learner may be learning English for professional communication, another may be learning for travel, academic

pursuits, or personal development. Consequently, if the content and methods of the lesson are adapted to these needs, the student's internal interest will increase, and stress will decrease.

From an analytical perspective, methods for overcoming stress and psychological barriers should function as an interconnected system rather than being separate from one another. For example, the communicative method leads the learner into communication, interactive methods make them an active participant, gamification increases emotional activity, and reflection enhances self-awareness. Metacognitive strategies allow for the conscious management of the entire learning process. Only when these methods are combined will a comfortable, safe, and effective language learning environment be formed for the adult learner.

Conclusion. The process of learning English in adult learners is a complex psychological and pedagogical phenomenon in which, along with the acquisition of knowledge, personal experience, motivation, self-confidence, and social factors play an important role. Research analysis indicates that stress and psychological barriers arising during the language learning process - specifically, fear of language, fear of mistakes, and anxiety about social evaluation - significantly reduce the effectiveness of learning activities. Therefore, ignoring these factors leads to insufficient effectiveness of the language teaching methodology.

As substantiated in the article, the integrated use of modern methodological approaches is of great importance in overcoming stress and psychological barriers. Communicative and interactive methods involve learners in active communication and form psychological freedom. Elements of gamification bring a positive emotional background to the educational process and increase internal motivation. Reflection and metacognitive strategies enhance the learner's self-awareness and help manage the learning process consciously. Taking individual characteristics into account, creating a supportive and error-tolerant learning environment based on an andragogical approach strengthens the confidence of adult learners in language learning. The teacher's facilitating role, positive feedback style, and motivational approach also play a decisive role in reducing stress.

In general, the effectiveness of language learning in adult learners is determined not only by linguistic knowledge but also by their psychological state and emotional readiness. Therefore, in the process of modern language education, stress reduction, overcoming psychological barriers, and creating a favorable learning environment must be considered as priority methodological directions. When these approaches are implemented in practice, the communicative competence, self-confidence, and interest in learning of adult learners increase significantly.

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