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CONVERSATIONAL ENGLISH

FOR ADULT LEARNERS

"AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY"

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Education

Ein Shams University

for

The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Education

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May, 1976

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to express my indebtedness to many individuals for their assistance during the period of the research for this study. My deepest gratitude goes to Dr. Abdel Messih Dawoud and Dr. Salah El Arabi for their guidance and their keen interest in the progress of the work. The effectiveness of their guidance shows in every line of this study.

Thanks are also due to Dr. Helmi Abul Fetouh, Dr. J. Donald Bowen, Dr. Samir Bibawi, Mrs. Bowen, Mrs. Byrd and Mrs. Witherspoon for their help which contributed greatly to the realization of this study.

I would like also to express my gratitude to Dr. Rushdi Khater and all members of the Department of Curricula, Faculty of Education, Ain Shams University.

I am also grateful to Dr. Frank Blanning, Dr. Herbert Reas and all members of the Division of Public Service at the American University in Cairo for their continuous help and encouragement.

It is also my pleasure to express my sincerest appreciation to my husband, Yassin Abu El Seoud, for his continuous encouragement, patience and moral support which assisted me all through the way.



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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I Introduction

In this introduction the writer will point out the need for the study, the definition of the problem, the hypotheses, and the operational procedures.

It is hoped that this introduction will show the significance of the study, since it has not been fully investigated before, and explain the way it is carried out.

A Need for the Study:

With the recent progress in the fields of science and technology, the natural need for more communication with the peoples of the world, across national barriers, has increased. Economic and cultural ties that link us with Europe and America, have added to our national requirements the need for individuals to speak foreign languages and be able to communicate easily with native speakers of these languages.

Among those who need to use foreign languages are holders of new jobs in industry and commerce, scientists, administrators who work with international agencies and those who plan to emigrate to or work in an English speaking country.

Because the A.R.E. government has realized the importance of learning English by school students, this foreign language is considered an important subject in the curricula of both preparatory and secondary schools. English, however, is less intensively taught at the university and higher institute levels.

Even after spending at least six years learning English, it is generally noticed that most university graduates can hardly ex-

press themselves in English especially when they are communicating with native speakers. There is an evident imbalance between the adult students' proficiency in reading and writing and that of speaking and understanding the oral aspects of the language. This was repeatedly observed by the writer when she was teaching English at the Division of Public Service, the American University in Cairo, for six years.

As this deficiency of adult students in oral comprehension and speech production was generally felt, many cultural centers, as well as university extensions and privately and internationally owned organizations have opened their doors for adult students who need to increase their proficiency in foreign languages. As evidence of the need for improving oral skills there has been an increase* in enrollment of students who apply for conversational English classes at the Division of Public Service, A.U.C.

The reason for the present study then, was to find a way through which adult learners would benefit more and get the utmost gain in remedial and refresher courses of conversational English.

The basic requirement seem to be a curriculum built with proper material and taught by means of methods that would suit the capabilities and needs of adult learners.

* In 1972 there were 243 students for the beginning course of conversational English; in 1974 there were 597 students applying for the same course.

B Statement of the Problem:

Many adults feel that their oral skills are not as proficient as their reading and writing skills. The purpose of this study is to develop materials for a conversational English course at the beginning level, to be taught in the form of a unit, to a group of adult learners, stressing:

- 1- that this material was designed for learners who are different from young learners in their nature, characteristics, learning abilities motivation and attitudes.
- 2- that this material stresses the improvement of the learners' oral skills.

C Assumptions of the Study:

It was assumed that if adult students who wanted to master spoken English were given the correct type of material based on their needs and designed according to their psychological, physiological and educational characteristics and taught according to modern methods of teaching that stress the oral skills, they would be able to attain their goals and speak the language fluently.

D Research Hypotheses:

1. There are basic differences between young and adult learners, thus adults need different teaching material and techniques.
2. Using the designed material will enable adult learners to gain positive progress in communicating in the foreign language more than other learners who follow traditional material.
3. Using the proposed teaching method will have positive in-

4,

fluence on mastering spoken English and result in significant improvement not attained through the currently used methods.

E Operational Procedures:

1. In the introduction the problem was defined as having three main variables, the adult learner, the material used and the method followed.
2. Data would be collected on students and courses through questionnaires meetings and discussions with adult learners and their teachers. Visiting professors and experts in the fields of adult education, English language teachers and curricula designers would also be interviewed. The purpose was to get a complete idea of the different aspects that might help in designing a successful program for adults in Conversational English courses.
3. A unit to be taught to a group of adult learners at AUC would be developed including objectives of the unit, timing, duration, sampling techniques as well as material designed and method followed.
4. Pre tests and post tests would be designed to ascertain whether the experimental group had gained in oral skills more than the control group after being taught according to the unit developed and the method of teaching recommended.
5. The effectiveness of the unit would be evaluated according to the results of pre and post tests and the questionnaire returns on materials taught and methods followed.

6. After analyzing the findings, recommendations would be presented and suggestions for further study expressed.
7. Summary and conclusion of the present study would be given.

CHAPTER II

SURVEY OF PERTINENT LITERATURE

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In order to design materials suitable for the adult learner, certain aspects have to be described and analyzed.

A. Adult Learners

The adult differs, among other things, in maturity, learning ability, motivation and attention span from a young learner. Traditional teaching may have ignored some of these basic differences and conveniently considered the adult different from the child only in age.

Many educational centers and institutes for teaching adult learners use the same material written for young people especially in the field of teaching foreign languages. This may be one of the main reasons which make many adult learners drop out of these courses. To avoid this mishap and to design a well constructed program, the researcher surveys in this chapter some basic aspects of adults learning to speak a foreign language. These aspects include:-

1. General and specific objectives of adult education and objectives of learning conversational English.
2. Physical and psychological characteristics of learners studying English with regard to the nature of spoken English.
3. The learning ability of adult learners.

The researcher listed some of the shortcomings that might happen if those aspects were not taken into consideration before planning a course for adult learners. Out of this survey, the researcher arrived at some important assumptions which were used as the framework followed in designing the experimental program including material approach and teaching activities.

I Objectives of Adult Learners

a. General Objectives of Teaching Adult Learners:-

Many educators have written on the definition of adult education and its different objectives. They all agree on the importance of defining the objectives needed before designing any instructional/program. Among those educators are Verner, Gage and Bloom. Verner ⁽¹⁾ says that the core for all adult education lies in the design of learning experiences which meet the needs of the learners. Gage ⁽²⁾ on the other hand says that the effectiveness of the learning process is considered according to the amount of change that took place in the individual as a result of his experience in thinking, feeling and behavior.

Both Verner and Gage believe that education is a system of learning experiences.

The researcher believes that a study of the learning experiences that are needed to meet the objectives of learners is a pre-requisite to designing a new program.

A widely accepted definition of the domains of education is mentioned in 'The Taxonomy of Educational Objectives' by Bloom ⁽³⁾ and associates.

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- (1) Coolie Verner, "Definition of Terms" in Adult Education: Outline of an Emerging Field of University Study. (A.E.A. Washington D.C. 1964)p.32.
 - (2) N.L. Gage, "Paradigms for Research on Teaching" in Handbook of Research on Teaching (Rand McNally & Co. Chicago 1963) p.96
 - (3) Benjamin Bloom, Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. (David McKay Co. Inc., Canada, 1956). p.7.