THE COGNITIVE APPROACH IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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Abstract:

In recent years, the issue of using new approaches for teaching languages has been increasingly raised. This is not only technical means, but also new methods and forms of teaching and a new approach to the learning process. One of them, being suggested by scholars and methodologists is a cognitive approach.

Key words: *Cognitive approach, TESOL, suggestopedia, verbal behaviour.*

Cognition refers to mental activity including thinking, remembering, learning and using language. When we apply a cognitive approach to learning and teaching, we focus on the understanding of information and concepts. If a person is able to understand the connections between concepts break down information and rebuild with logical connections, then his reception of material and understanding will increase. When a person is aware of his mental actions, monitor them and control his learning processes it is called metacognition (the self-reflection or ―thinking about thinking‖ necessary for students to learn effectively (Baker, Gersten, & Scanlon, 2002), which will greatly effect on how the individual behaves in this or that situation. Cognitivist theories emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s as a reaction against the previously dominant paradigm; whereas behaviourism focused on observable behaviour and the response of humans to environmental stimuli, cognitivism took into account the human mind and complex processes of the mind such as thinking, problem solving, and memory (Schunk 2004/2007b). Noam Chomsky challenged behavioral approaches in the 1950‗s through his critique of B.F. Skinner‗s book, Verbal Behavior (Chomsky, 1967). Albert Bandura‗s Social Learning Theory (later known as Social Cognitive Theory), stressed observational learning and was seen as a bridge between behaviorist and cognitive learning theories. Currently, cognitivism underlies the major theoretical perspectives of learning (Schunk, 2004/2007b)

Cognitive approaches to learning are concerned with how information is processed by learners. A great number of scholars identified the learner‗s role in this approach, characterizing students as active in ―an internal learning process that involves memory, thinking, reflection, abstraction, motivation, and meta-cognition‖ (Ally, 2008). Students organize old knowledge, scripts, and schema, find relationships, and link new information to old (Cognitive Theories of Learning, n.d.). Ertmer and Newby (1993) note that ―learning is a change in the state of knowledge, and is a mental activity where an active learner internally codes and structures knowledge‖ (p. 58). They believe that ―the real focus of the cognitive approach is on changing the learner by encouraging him/her to use appropriate learning strategies‖ (Ertmer & Newby, 1993, p. 59). Ertmer and Newby (1993) see the peculiarities of cognitive approach in how learning occurs (mental activity internal coding and structuring by the learner); in the factors influencing learning (environmental conditions, practice with

corrective feedback, processes of mental planning, goal-setting, and organizational strategies,way learners attend to, code, transform, rehearse, store and retrieve information, learners' thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and values); in the role of memory (information is stored in an organized, meaningful manner; need to relate new information to prior knowledge). Cognitive theory assumes that responses are also the result of insight and intentional patterning. Insight can be directed to: a) the concepts behind language i.e. to traditional grammar. b) to language as an operation - sets of communicative functions. A group of scholars identified the value of cognitive strategies, which are useful tools in assisting students with learning problems. The term "cognitive strategies" in its simplest form is the use of the mind (cognition) to solve a problem or complete a task. Cognitive strategies may also be referred to as procedural facilitators (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987), procedural prompts (Rosenshine, 1997) or scaffolds (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). A cognitive strategy serves to support the learner as he or she develops internal procedures that enable him/her to perform tasks that are complex (Rosenshine, 1997). Reading comprehension is an area where cognitive strategies are important. A self-questioning strategy can help students understand what they read. The use of cognitive strategies can increase the efficiency with which the learner approaches a learning task. These academic tasks can include, but are not limited to, remembering and applying information from course content, constructing sentences and paragraphs, editing written work, paraphrasing, and classifying information to be learned. In a classroom where cognitive strategies are used, the teacher fulfills a pivotal role, bridging the gap between student and content/skill to be learned. This role requires an understanding of the task to be completed, as well as knowledge of an approach (or approaches) to the task that he/she can communicate to the learner. Cognitive learning is a way of learning that helps students use their brains more effectively. This method of learning is active, constructive, and long-lasting. It encourages students to fully engage in the learning process so learning, thinking, and remembering get easier. Cognitive learning is not about memorization or repetition. It is about developing true understanding; it is about learning how to learn.

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