

Article

Establishing Common Ground in Teaching: Attitudes and Approaches Across Different Age Groups

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Abstract: This article explores the importance of establishing common ground between teachers and learners across different age groups. It analyzes the attitudes and teaching approaches required for young learners, teenagers, and adult learners, taking into account psychological, pedagogical, and practical aspects. The study argues that effective teaching is not limited to delivering knowledge but also involves building meaningful relationships and mutual understanding in the classroom. By examining relevant theories and providing practical examples, the article demonstrates how teachers can adapt their methods to learners' needs, thereby improving engagement, motivation, and overall learning outcomes.

Keywords: common ground, teaching strategies, young learners, teenagers, adult learners, classroom interaction, pedagogy, learner-centered approach

1. Introduction

Teaching is a complex and dynamic process that requires not only subject knowledge but also a deep understanding of learners' characteristics. One of the key factors for successful teaching is the ability to establish common ground between the teacher and students. Common ground refers to mutual understanding, shared expectations, and effective communication that make the learning process smoother and more engaging.

In modern education, classrooms are diverse, and learners differ in age, background, motivation, and learning styles. These differences make it essential for teachers to adjust their teaching methods and attitudes. As Brown (2000) states, teaching becomes effective only when instructional strategies are aligned with learners' developmental stages. Therefore, teachers must be flexible and responsive to the specific characteristics of young learners, teenagers, and adults.

This article aims to explore how teachers can establish common ground with different age groups by analyzing their psychological features, preferred learning styles, and appropriate teaching strategies. It also provides practical examples to illustrate how theoretical concepts can be applied in real classroom situations.

Theoretical Background

The concept of establishing common ground is closely related to learner-centered education. Learner-centered teaching focuses on the needs, interests, and abilities of students rather than only on the content being taught. This approach encourages active participation and meaningful interaction in the classroom.

Piaget (1972) explains that children go through different stages of cognitive development, which affect how they understand the world. Young learners rely more on

concrete experiences, while older learners can think more abstractly. This means that teaching methods must be adapted to match learners' cognitive levels[1,2,3].

Vygotsky introduces the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which highlights the importance of social interaction in learning. According to this theory, learners can achieve higher levels of understanding with the support of a teacher or more knowledgeable peers[4,5,6]. This idea emphasizes the role of communication and collaboration in establishing common ground.

In addition, Knowles focuses on adult learning, or andragogy, and argues that adults are self-directed learners who bring prior experience to the classroom. They prefer learning that is practical and relevant to their lives.

These theories together show that effective teaching requires both psychological awareness and pedagogical flexibility. Establishing common ground is therefore not a single technique but a continuous process of interaction, adaptation, and reflection.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore how teachers establish common ground with learners across different age groups. The research is primarily based on a systematic analysis of existing literature in the field of language teaching and pedagogy[7,8]. Key academic sources, including works by Brown, Harmer, Vygotsky, and Knowles, were reviewed to identify theoretical frameworks related to learner-centered approaches, cognitive development, and adult learning.

In addition, a comparative approach was used to examine the characteristics, learning preferences, and effective teaching strategies for young learners, teenagers, and adult learners. The study also incorporates practical examples derived from classroom experiences to illustrate how theoretical concepts can be applied in real educational settings[9].

The data were analyzed through thematic analysis, focusing on identifying common patterns in teaching attitudes and methods that contribute to successful classroom interaction. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of how teaching strategies can be adapted to meet the diverse needs of learners and to establish effective communication and mutual understanding.

3. Results and Discussion

Results

Characteristics

Young learners (ages 5–10) are naturally active, curious, and enthusiastic about exploring the world around them. They learn best through doing rather than only listening or reading. At this age, children have a strong imagination and respond well to activities that involve movement, visuals, and interaction. According to Harmer (2007), their attention span is relatively short, so they cannot focus on one activity for a long time and need frequent changes in tasks to stay engaged.

In addition, young learners are still developing their first language skills, so their understanding of abstract concepts is limited. They usually understand meaning through context, gestures, tone of voice, and visual support rather than detailed explanations. They also enjoy praise and encouragement, which strongly influences their motivation and confidence in learning.

Teacher Attitudes

Teachers play a very important role in shaping a positive learning experience for young learners. First, teachers should be friendly and supportive. A warm classroom environment helps children feel safe and comfortable, which increases their willingness to participate.

Second, teachers need to be patient and enthusiastic. Since children may take time to understand instructions or may repeat mistakes, patience is essential. Enthusiasm from the teacher also spreads to students and makes learning more enjoyable.

Third, teachers should be encouraging and positive. Simple praise such as “Good job!” or “Well done!” can significantly boost children’s confidence[10,11]. Positive reinforcement helps learners stay motivated and reduces fear of making mistakes.

Teaching Approaches

Effective teaching for young learners requires interactive and engaging methods that match their developmental stage.

- Games and songs: Games help children learn vocabulary and grammar in a fun and natural way. Songs improve pronunciation, memory, and rhythm. For example, action songs like “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes” combine movement with language learning, making it easier for children to remember new words.

- Visual aids and realia: Pictures, flashcards, toys, and real objects help children understand new concepts more easily. Since young learners think concretely, visual support makes abstract language more meaningful. For instance, showing a real apple while teaching food vocabulary is more effective than just explaining the word.

- Storytelling and role-play: Stories capture children’s imagination and help them learn language in context. Teachers can use simple stories with repetition and pictures to reinforce understanding. Role-play activities, such as acting out a shop or a classroom situation, allow children to practice real-life communication in a fun and meaningful way.

Overall, teaching young learners requires creativity, energy, and a supportive attitude. When lessons are interactive and enjoyable, children are more likely to develop a positive attitude toward learning English from an early age.

According to Ur, young learners benefit most from activities that combine language with movement and visual support,[12,13]. Effective teaching strategies for young learners include games, songs, storytelling, and the use of visual materials such as pictures, flashcards, and real objects. These methods make learning more enjoyable and help children understand new concepts more easily. Teachers should also use simple language and clear instructions. Repetition is important, as it helps reinforce learning. In addition, involving physical movement in activities can improve memory and engagement[14].

For example, when teaching action verbs such as “run,” “jump,” and “clap,” the teacher can use a game like “Simon Says.” Instead of explaining the meanings, students perform the actions, which makes learning more interactive and memorable.

Teaching Teenagers

Teenagers (ages 11–17) go through a complex stage of development where they begin to form their own identity and seek greater independence. At this age, they are no longer children, but not yet fully adults, which often leads to emotional fluctuations and changing behavior. They start to think more critically, question ideas, and express their own opinions. However, despite this growing independence, many teenagers still struggle with self-confidence and are highly sensitive to how their peers perceive them[15]. Peer approval often becomes more important than teacher approval, which can influence their participation, motivation, and willingness to take risks in the classroom.

In addition, teenagers may experience anxiety about making mistakes, especially in front of classmates. This can affect their language learning, as they might avoid speaking or participating actively. At the same time, they are capable of deeper thinking, problem-solving, and engaging with more complex and meaningful topics, which provides teachers with an opportunity to design more interactive and thought-provoking lessons. Because of these characteristics, teacher attitudes play a crucial role in creating a positive learning environment. First, teachers should show respect toward students. Teenagers want to feel that their opinions and ideas are valued. When teachers listen carefully and respond respectfully, students are more likely to engage and trust the teacher. Second, teachers need to be understanding and supportive. Since teenagers may face emotional and social

challenges, a supportive teacher can help build their confidence. Encouraging effort rather than only focusing on correct answers can make students feel more comfortable and willing to participate. Finally, teachers should avoid being overly authoritative. While maintaining classroom discipline is important, too much control can create resistance or reduce motivation. Instead, teachers can involve students in decision-making, such as choosing topics or activities, which helps develop a sense of responsibility and ownership of their learning.

Overall, teaching teenagers requires a balance between guidance and freedom. A respectful, supportive, and flexible approach can help students feel secure, motivated, and ready to learn.

Teaching Approaches

Effective strategies include:

- Group discussions
- Project-based learning
- Use of real-life topics (social media, environment, culture)

Brown (2000) emphasizes that teenagers need opportunities to express their opinions and develop autonomy in learning. For instance, a lesson on social media can involve group discussions where students share their opinions about its advantages and disadvantages. This not only improves language skills but also develops critical thinking and communication. Effective teaching strategies for young learners include games, songs, storytelling, and the use of visual materials such as pictures, flashcards, and real objects. These methods make learning more enjoyable and help children understand new concepts more easily.

Teachers should also use simple language and clear instructions. Repetition is important, as it helps reinforce learning. In addition, involving physical movement in activities can improve memory and engagement.

Teaching Adults

Characteristics

Adult learners are generally more independent and self-directed compared to younger learners. They usually enter the classroom with clear goals in mind, such as improving their career opportunities, passing exams, or using English for daily communication. Because of this, they are typically more focused on practical outcomes rather than abstract learning. As Harmer (2007) explains, adults bring a rich background of prior knowledge, skills, and life experience, which strongly influences how they understand and process new information.

Another important feature of adult learners is that they prefer meaningful and relevant content. They are more motivated when they can see a direct connection between what they learn and their real-life needs. However, some adults may also feel less confident in language learning due to previous negative experiences or fear of making mistakes in front of others.

Teacher Attitudes

Teaching adults requires a respectful and professional approach. First, teachers should treat learners as equals. Adults do not respond well to being spoken to in a childish or overly controlling manner. Instead, they prefer a learning environment where their opinions are valued and their autonomy is respected.

Second, teachers should respect learners' experiences. Adults often have a wide range of personal and professional backgrounds, and these experiences can be used as a valuable resource in the classroom. Encouraging learners to share their knowledge not only increases engagement but also makes lessons more interactive and meaningful.

Third, it is important for teachers to focus on clear objectives. Adults appreciate structured lessons where goals are explicitly stated and progress is visible. Knowing what they are expected to learn helps them stay motivated and organized.

Teaching Approaches

Effective teaching strategies for adults are usually practical, task-based, and related to real-life situations.

- **Problem-solving tasks:** These activities encourage learners to think critically and work together to find solutions. For example, discussing how to plan a business trip or solve workplace communication issues helps learners practice language in realistic contexts.
- **Role-plays and simulations:** These methods allow learners to practice real-life situations in a safe classroom environment. For instance, simulating a job interview or a hotel check-in helps adults develop functional language skills they can immediately use outside the classroom.
- **Real-life communication activities:** Activities such as writing emails, making phone conversations, or discussing current events make learning more relevant and practical. These tasks help bridge the gap between classroom learning and everyday communication.

According to Knowles' theory of andragogy (as cited in Brown, 2000), adults learn most effectively when the learning material is directly connected to their personal, social, or professional lives. This means that the more relevant and meaningful the content is, the higher the level of motivation and engagement among adult learners. Overall, teaching adults requires respect, practicality, and clear purpose. When teachers acknowledge learners' experiences and design lessons around real-world needs, adults become more confident, motivated, and successful in their language learning journey.

Example

In a lesson about travel, students can role-play situations such as booking a hotel or asking for directions. This makes learning practical and meaningful.

Establishing Common Ground: Practical Strategies

Establishing common ground requires deliberate effort and awareness from the teacher. It involves understanding learners' needs, interests, and expectations, and adapting teaching methods accordingly. Some effective strategies include learning students' names, using appropriate language for each age group, and creating a safe and supportive classroom environment. Encouraging participation and interaction is also essential, as it helps build trust and confidence. Teachers should be flexible and responsive to feedback. If students do not understand a concept, the teacher should be ready to explain it in a different way or provide additional examples. This adaptability helps maintain a strong connection between teacher and learners.

To build common ground, teachers can:

- Learn students' names and interests
- Use appropriate language for each age group
- Create a supportive and safe environment
- Encourage participation and interaction
- Adapt teaching methods based on feedback

Challenges in Teaching Different Age Groups

Teaching learners of different ages presents several challenges. These may include differences in ability levels, lack of motivation, and cultural diversity. For example, some students may learn quickly while others need more time and support.

Teachers may face challenges such as:

- Mixed-ability classes
- Lack of motivation among students
- Cultural differences

To address these challenges, teachers can use differentiated instruction, which involves adapting tasks and materials to suit different learners. Creating a positive classroom atmosphere and maintaining open communication can also help overcome difficulties.

Discussion

Establishing common ground is essential for effective teaching. It requires understanding learners' needs, adapting teaching styles, and maintaining a positive attitude. As Harmer (2007) suggests, the relationship between teacher and learner significantly influences motivation and engagement. The analysis shows that establishing common ground plays a crucial role in successful teaching. When teachers understand their students and adapt their approaches, learners become more engaged and motivated. This leads to better participation and improved learning outcomes.

Teachers who successfully connect with students can improve participation and learning outcomes. Moreover, adapting teaching strategies to suit different age groups ensures that instruction remains relevant and effective (Scrivener, 2011). Furthermore, the teacher's role is not only to provide knowledge but also to guide and support learners. In a learner-centered classroom, interaction and collaboration are key elements. Teachers who build strong relationships with their students can create a more effective and enjoyable learning environment.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, teaching different age groups requires flexibility, awareness, and a learner-centered approach. Establishing common ground is essential for creating a productive and supportive learning environment. By understanding learners' characteristics and adapting teaching strategies, teachers can improve both motivation and achievement.

Overall, the integration of psychological understanding and pedagogical strategies plays a crucial role in successful teaching practice (Brown, 2000). So effective teaching is a combination of knowledge, communication, and empathy. Teachers who successfully connect with their students are more likely to achieve positive educational outcome.

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