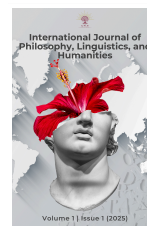




## International Journal of Philosophy, Linguistics, and Humanities

Journal Homepage: <https://ijmshe.com/index.php/ijplh>



### Research Article

# Key Factors Influencing the Teaching of English to Adults

Abdellah Badda<sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Cordoba University, Spain; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9493-2666>; [badda2stars@gmail.com](mailto:badda2stars@gmail.com)

### Article Info

#### Article history:

Received: 23 January 2025

Revised: 3 February 2025

Accepted: 11 February 2025

#### Keywords:

Adults, EFL, Features, Needs and Interests, Acceptance, and Constant Exposure

### Abstract

Developing a good mastery of English is becoming vitally important in our rapidly growing world. Ranging from using English for personal communicative reasons to highly professional and academic purposes, learning English has become very important in our time for children and adults alike. In this regard, teaching English to adults may seem similar to instructing the language to children. However, it should be noted that various aspects of difference can be underlined. In addition to the nature of the linguistic content to be offered in class and the teaching approaches to be adopted, significant characteristics of adults have to be considered by teachers involved in this type of teaching. This study examines key characteristics that influence the effectiveness of teaching English to adults, including age, interests, needs, and acceptance. Using a systematic literature review, the paper highlights pedagogical considerations that differentiate adult learners from younger learners, emphasizing the importance of tailored teaching approaches. The findings provide insights for educators and researchers in the field of adult EFL education.

**Cite as:** Badda, A. (2025). Key Factors Influencing the Teaching of English to Adults. *International Journal of Philosophy, Linguistics, and Humanities*, 1(1), 30–40. <https://doi.org/10.70847/592962>

<sup>1</sup>Corresponding Author: Abdellah Badda

\*Corresponding Email: [badda2stars@gmail.com](mailto:badda2stars@gmail.com); Tel.: +212618190070

## Introduction

In our ever-evolving world, learning English has become a fundamental necessity for everybody, especially adults. People aged over 23 years old (Cozma, 2015) who might be pursuing their studies or who have graduated without mastering English consider the learning of such a foreign or second language as a pivotal requirement today (Tarnopolsky, 2016). Scholars, researchers and postgraduates find English proficiency essential for academic publishing. Accordingly, a strong demand for learning English is easily noted among adults for varying drives, including job market needs as well as other personal reasons such as travelling (Graddol, 2006).

This significant demand is obviously due to the importance which the English language has been gaining recently. Nowadays, English is widely adopted in many countries based on its actual importance as a language of science, research and global communication (Dalton-Puffer, 2011). In light of the above-mentioned situation, people wishing to learn English, though they are highly motivated and have higher ability to use abstraction and logical thinking (Koutská, 2020) to learn the language independently, resort to teachers of English for the sake of getting help with effective learning of the language.

However, teachers who are supposed to deal with adults should be aware of the fact that such a task differs from teaching English to children in many ways (Cozma, 2015). In this connection, they must be aware of Knowles' (1975) andragogical contributions defined in his book entitled "*The Modern Practice of Adult*

*Education. From Pedagogy to Andragogy*" about learning patterns, behavioural characteristics and methodological considerations which are very specific to adults. Along with other very recent contributions to the field of adult education, it is agreed that key features of adults have to be taken into account while planning for teaching English as a second or foreign language (Anisenko & Pryanitska, 2024). Zhang et al. (2020) stress the fact that teaching adults should take place in an integrative pleasure-based classroom atmosphere. Similarly, it should be mentioned that despite the importance and spread of this specific type of foreign language education presently, its pedagogical and methodological foundations have hardly been developed (Tarnopolsky, 2016). Little empirical research has been done with regard to EFL adult education which paves the way for further future research.

In this respect, the present paper generally aims at drawing FL teachers' attention to the importance of differentiating between regular EFL learners and adults by prioritizing characteristics of foreign language adult learners. It suggests that the success of the teaching and learning processes is strongly connected to paying special attention to various individual features while teaching English as a foreign language to adults. Specifically, it aspires to discuss significant aspects and pinpoint key factors which are exclusively specific to adults in order to arrive at conclusions which are relevant for teachers who are involved in teaching English to adults.

## Research objectives

This article intends to stress the fact that teaching adults differs from instructing children in various ways. Accordingly, it aims to throw light on the importance of differentiating adults' from children's education with regard to the teaching of English as foreign language. In this

respect, it aims at identifying and showcasing some aspects which are specific to teaching EFL to adult learners. More specifically, it intends to discuss significant adults-related factors which have to be taken into account by EFL teachers for effective teaching and contributes to the

---

<sup>1</sup>Corresponding Author: Abdellah Badda

\*Corresponding Email: [badda2stars@gmail.com](mailto:badda2stars@gmail.com); Tel.: +212618190070

existing literature by addressing the gaps in previous research regarding the nature and effectiveness of EFL adults' classes

## Research method

This article employed a literature review methodology to investigate how teaching English to children and adults are different. By combining related research findings, the study aims to help provide a nuanced understanding of the nature of EFL adult education through drawing attention to non-content factors for effective teaching and learning. For this purpose, the paper is structured around a systematic literature review approach which focuses on existing scholarly articles. This design allowed for the identification of theoretical views and frameworks which demonstrate the impact of non-linguistic aspects while dealing with adults in EFL classes.

To collect data, a comprehensive data research was conducted. 17 peer-reviewed articles from databases such as Scopus, ERIC and Google Scholar were thoroughly consulted. The review focused on studies discussing adult EFL

education. The review process focused systematically on a combination of recent and previous studies carried out in the field of adult learning, adult education and EFL teaching. Two qualitative studies with experts and practitioners in the field of EFL education were reviewed. A recent quantitative study with adults as respondents was thoroughly reviewed in addition to case study-based systematic reviews of reference books on the topic of adult education. Findings of previous research were compared and contrasted. This analytical step led to synthesizing the findings and drawing conclusions about the necessity of dealing with adults differently from children. This synthesis highlights a gap in previous and recent research about the pedagogies and methodologies of adult education and suggests lines for future research by stressing the need for more empirical investigations on adults' EFL teaching.

## Results and findings

### 4.1 Characteristics of adults

Given the wide age difference between young and adult learners, it goes without saying that each type of learners has distinctive features which obviously affect planning for and carrying out the teaching process for each one of them. Young learners are characterized by aspects which dictate lesson planning, teaching methodology, teaching activities as well as assessment methods. Accordingly, teaching adults following the same approaches adopted in classes of regular students will not suit the teaching and learning processes (Harmer, 2002).

Based on this, it is of paramount importance to keep the characterizing features of adults in mind as pedagogical requirements which can offer implications for the teaching practices in general. Table 1 below summarizes the results of the review carried out for the present paper.

---

<sup>1</sup>Corresponding Author: Abdellah Badda

\*Corresponding Email: [badda2stars@gmail.com](mailto:badda2stars@gmail.com); Tel.: +212618190070

**Table 1.** *Results of the systematic review*

<b>Author</b>	<b>Main Purpose</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Key Findings</b>
Anisenko & Pryanitska (2024)	Role of andragogy in orienting adult education	Systematic literature review	Motivation is a key factor to adult learning
Koutská (2020)	Role of age difference in EFL teaching and learning	Qualitative research	Age variables should be considered and integrated in EFL teacher training programmes
Beck (2004)	Highlighting the role of motivation concept in humans	Topical research	Motivation is responsible for increasing interest and encouraging better performance of adults
Tarnopolsky (2016)	Gap in pedagogy and methodology of adult education	Systematic review of related literature	Teaching English to adults should be based on six principles, namely needs, attitudes, autonomy, limited intensiveness, absence of home tasks and integration of culture
Cozma (2015)	Differences between adult and children education	Systematic review of theoretical and research data	Learners' motivation, determination and life experiences benefit the context of adult education
Frențiu & Cozma (2013)	Differences between young and adult learners	Systematic review of theoretical and research data	Explicit teaching suits adults to prepare them achieve their learning goals
Harmer (2002)	Requirements of teaching English as a second or foreign language	Practice-based descriptive study	EFL teaching entails self-confidence training and enough knowledge about the learners' characteristics

<sup>1</sup>Corresponding Author: Abdellah Badda\*Corresponding Email: [badda2stars@gmail.com](mailto:badda2stars@gmail.com); Tel.: +212618190070

Harmer (2007)	Guidance for EFL teaching in various classrooms	Descriptive study	Special attention should be paid to age differences among EFL learners in terms of attention span, dealing with abstraction and engagement
Hiemstra (2013)	Learners' potential in adult education	Qualitative research	Adapting teaching methodologies through students' directed approach can be effective to benefit from adults' learning capabilities
Graddol (2006)	Developments in learning English as foreign language	Synthesis of previous research in the field of EFL teaching and learning	English is getting affected by the demographic and economic developments
Rogers (1999)	Characteristics of traditional adult literacy programmes	Case studies'-based systematic review	Experimental approach to learning may benefit adults though it may be difficult to assess
Zhang et al. (2020)	Learning an L3 by adult learners	Quantitative study	Adult students show instrumental motivation to learn a foreign language and develop their language proficiency
Dalton-Puffer (2011)	Role of CLIL in EFL teaching in various learning contexts	Synthesis of research data in the field of content and language integrated learning	CLIL methodology can be effective for EFL learning outcomes in contexts where English has a strong job market-related impact for adults
Knowles et al. (2011)	The need for tailoring learning for the adults	Practical examples-based descriptive study	Tailored learning through problem-centered approach can be a source of

<sup>1</sup>Corresponding Author: Abdellah Badda

\*Corresponding Email: [badda2stars@gmail.com](mailto:badda2stars@gmail.com); Tel.: +212618190070

			motivation for adults and suits their interests
Knowles (1984)	Contrasting pedagogy and andragogy approaches	Case studies and practical examples of application	Adults are active participants who can play a role in directing their education
Knowles (1975)	Differentiating characteristics of young and adult learners	Synthesis of previous research data	Adults have to be treated differently from young learners because of their distinctive features
Merriam & Baumgartner (2007)	The nature of adult learning	Systematic synthesis of scientific contributions to the field of adult education	Adults' social contexts and their experiences are key to shaping their learning

In the field of adult education, describing adult learners is commonly done in light of Knowles' (1975) andragogical model discussed in his book *"The Modern Practice of Adult Education. From Pedagogy to Andragogy"*. Generally, Knowles (1984) stresses the idea that teaching adults is obviously different from children. He strongly underlines this difference claiming that adults are self-directed learners who can orient their learning (Knowles et al., 2011). In light of this, it is concluded that adults are very likely to be more focused learners, which benefits the teachers' task and brings about an appropriate learning atmosphere. Additionally, adults are expected to enhance learning thanks to their life experiences which may help in enriching learning. Not less importantly, Knowles (1984) claims that learners show readiness in various learning situations such as role playing. Besides, adults are aware of their learning objectives meaning that their focus on learning is well-oriented (Knowles, 1984).

Throwing more light on the teaching process, Knowles' contributions to the field of adult education are still regarded as worth-reviewing. In his previously mentioned book on adult education, Knowles (1975) provides implications which have to be taken into account by teachers involved in adult education classes. In their classroom practices, teachers are invited by Knowles (1975) to consider the fact that:

- adult students mainly work independently;
- adult learners can take part in planning, implementing and evaluating their work together;
- adults use the skills they acquired in their professional lives;
- content and teaching and evaluation methods and means of training correspond to the goals and objectives of the class;
- adults can apply their newly learnt knowledge immediately;

<sup>1</sup>Corresponding Author: Abdellah Badda

\*Corresponding Email: [badda2stars@gmail.com](mailto:badda2stars@gmail.com); Tel.: +212618190070

- adults participate in choosing goals, content, methods and means of teaching;
- adults are conscious and understand the necessity of their role in class (Knowles, 1975).

With the above-mentioned characteristics taken into account, it is concluded that teachers of English involved in adult education are obviously encouraged to reconsider their usual

#### ***4.2 Crucial factors to adult foreign language education***

Being over 23 years old (Cozma, 2015), learners' age remains crucial for EFL learning and has to be taken seriously by teachers involved in giving classes to adults. It is decisive in the sense that it clearly stresses the difference between children and adults in FL classes. It is because of this factor that teachers have to be careful about addressing students' needs and interests. Put differently, though adults may be placed as beginners for EFL learning, it does not make sense to expose them to themes used with children. Taking this factor into consideration, adults are supposed to be more motivated to learn from material which matches their ages and current interests (Rogers, 1999). Such a conclusion is in line with Tarnopolsky (2016) who conducted a research on this type of foreign language education and found that the principle of developing English courses on the basis of learners' needs and interests is strongly advocated.

Based on this, designing teaching activities which suit adults' needs and age is a key factor which is likely to contribute to effective EFL learning provided that adults are generally motivated to learn (Beck, 2004) due to internal rather than external factors (Knowles, 1984). Accordingly, EFL teachers of adults are necessarily urged to take their learners' age into consideration by designing tasks which suit their age and interests. Because motivation plays a crucial role in adult learning (Anisenko & Pryanitska, 2024), teachers are also invited to be flexible in doing without their usual teaching

practices. In other words, dealing with adults the same way regular students are treated is not likely to lead the learning process to success. Additionally, some children-related classroom practices may not appeal to adult learners for they need proper treatment, especially with regard to their age, needs, interests as well as their readiness to learn (Zhang et al., 2020).

practices. At least, teachers should adapt their teaching approaches and material to this special category of learners on the ground that adults bring various backgrounds and learning styles to language acquisition (Anisenko & Pryanitska, 2024). Similarly, teachers should try to improve students' curriculum experience by improving the classroom atmosphere and integrating teaching with pleasure' (Zhang et al., 2020). Provided their high levels of motivation, it is significant to stress the conclusion that adults can contribute tremendously to the teaching process when introduced to teaching material which triggers their abilities.

The role of age in adult learning is worth-considering by teachers for it can decide on the effectiveness of their teaching practices. Thanks to their age, adults tend to be self-directed. That is, they have a full understanding of what is going on around them and that they can direct their own learning (Knowles, 1984; Hiemstra, 2013). In contrast to the case of children, self-awareness is very likely to help improve the teaching process and contribute to implementing innovative ideas in class. Not less importantly, being aware of their learning goals, teachers can guarantee maximum benefit from the in-class learning time with adults. In other words, they will not need to focus on classroom management requirements or discipline issues because adults tend to be more disciplined and more willing to struggle for learning despite boredom (Harmer, 2007).

---

<sup>1</sup>Corresponding Author: Abdellah Badda

\*Corresponding Email: [badda2stars@gmail.com](mailto:badda2stars@gmail.com); Tel.: +212618190070

Because of their rationally supposed maturity, adult learners may be characterized by another factor, which has to be taken into serious account by teachers, because it can help them collaborate in class for a successful learning experience. It is attention-grabbing to emphasize the idea that adults are more aware and ready to accept the nature and complications of learning a new language (Harmer, 2007). In simple words, adult learners of foreign languages are more cognitively prepared to understand and accept the possible conceptual complexities of foreign languages (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2007) than younger students who may face difficulties which can lead to anxiety. Based on this, adults are believed to show less anxiety, a longer attention span and can engage with abstract thought (Harmer, 2007) because they can have a higher ability to use abstraction and logical thinking (Koutská, 2020).

Additionally, teachers should make profit of adults' ability to encourage them to accept the necessity of reviewing their stereotypes about the foreign language they are involved in. In this connection, teachers of an adult audience should seriously consider drawing their attention to the inappropriateness of thinking in their native language which prevents them from assimilating

### **Limitations of the study**

As the case with any research, the present paper has some limitations to address. Because of focusing on reviewing and synthesising the findings of previous research in the field of adult education this article shows much reliance on secondary data. Accordingly, selecting previous studies for review can be a source of bias. Moreover, the absence of primary empirical

### **Conclusion**

Teaching English as a foreign language to adults is likely to be a challenging task. However, a good understanding of the features of this type of learners is very likely to make the teaching process more effective. It is stressed in this

the speech structures of a foreign language (Anisenko & Pryanitska, 2024). Moreover, adult learners should be encouraged to focus on their learning experience and avoid comparing it to any failures relating to learning another foreign language, especially at school.

Taking into consideration their natural capabilities of accepting the nature of a given foreign language as well as their awareness about the difficulties of learning, it is concluded that teachers of English involved in adults' classes are encouraged to offer teaching content which can foster adults' knowledge about the language. It will be unfair to focus on teaching linguistic content and miss the opportunity of making learners more informed about the language itself, namely its culture, origin and history. In this context, teachers are preferably required to address adult learners straightforwardly, without needing to camouflage learning (Frențiu & Cozma, 2013). This knowledge will possibly boost learners' self-confidence and increase their motivation to discover the language they are learning more deeply. Being aware enough, adults can be invited to do more research to discover the language and broaden their knowledge about it.

research makes this study lack experimental validation of its findings. However, it sheds light on an important topic in adult EFL education. More importantly, it offers practical insights through placing more focus on pedagogical implications as well as providing room for future lines of empirical research.

paper that by taking into consideration adults' natural capabilities, their readiness to accept, self-orientation and direction as well as their awareness about their learning objectives, teaching adults' classes is very possible to be

---

<sup>1</sup>Corresponding Author: Abdellah Badda

\*Corresponding Email: [badda2stars@gmail.com](mailto:badda2stars@gmail.com); Tel.: +212618190070



effective. Meanwhile, it should be underlined that EFL teachers involved in this context of foreign language teaching are necessarily required to show much flexibility towards rethinking their traditionally regular classroom practices. In light of this, teaching adults can be

a rewarding experience which matches their learning expectations. In terms of significance, this article is of interest to EFL researchers as well as English teachers involved in teaching English as a foreign language to adults.

### Conflicts of Interest:

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

### Funding:

This research received no external funding.

### References

- Anisenko, O., & Pryanitska, V. (2024). Peculiarities of teaching English to adults. *Scientific Journal of Polonia University*, 62(1), 28-32. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.23856/6203>
- Beck, R. C. (2004). *Motivation: Theories and principles* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall. <https://uws-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo-e>
- Cozma, M. (2015). The challenge of teaching English to adult learners in Today's World. *Procedia-social and behavioral sciences*, 197, 1209-1214. DOI: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.07.380
- Dalton-Puffer, C. (2011). Content-and-language integrated learning: From practice to principles?. *Annual Review of applied linguistics*, 31, 182-204. DOI: 10.1017/S0267190511000092
- Frențiu, L., & Cozma, M. (2013). Preparing adults for professional English examinations. In F. Szabo (Ed.), *International conference on vocational and adult education. "Gyula Juhasz" Faculty of Education, University of Szeged* (pp. 66-81). Szeged: SZTE JGYPK.
- Graddol, D. (2006). English next. *British Council*. <http://www.britishcouncil.org/learning-research-english-next.pdf>
- Harmer, J. (2002). *How to teach English*. Malaysia: Longman. <https://dn790000.ca.archive.org/0/items/HowToTeachEnglish/How%20to%20Teach%20English%20Harmer%2C%20Jeremy.pdf>
- Harmer, J. (2007). *The practice of English language teaching* (4th ed.). Harlow: Longman. [https://archive.org/details/practiceofenglish0000harm\\_d212](https://archive.org/details/practiceofenglish0000harm_d212).
- Hiemstra, R. (2013). Self-directed learning: why do most instructors still do it wrong? *International journal of self-directed learning*, 10(1), 23-34. [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Stephen-Brewer-2/publication/325817337\\_Developing\\_self-directed\\_learning\\_in\\_the\\_language\\_classroom\\_The\\_work\\_of\\_Leni\\_Dam/links/60f4419c16f9f313008f5a79/Developing-self-directed-learning-](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Stephen-Brewer-2/publication/325817337_Developing_self-directed_learning_in_the_language_classroom_The_work_of_Leni_Dam/links/60f4419c16f9f313008f5a79/Developing-self-directed-learning-)

---

<sup>1</sup>Corresponding Author: Abdellah Badda

\*Corresponding Email: [badda2stars@gmail.com](mailto:badda2stars@gmail.com); Tel.: +212618190070

- in-the-language-classroom-The-work-of-Leni-Dam.pdf
- Knowles M. (1975). *The Modern Practice of Adult Education. From Pedagogy to Andragogy*. Chicago: The Adult Education Company.  
<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/8948/296248bbf58415cbd21b36a3e4b37b9c08b1.pdf>
- Knowles, M. et al. (1984). *Andragogy in action. Applying modern principles of adult education*. San Francisco: JosseyBass.
- Knowles, M. S., Holton, E. F., & Swanson, R. A. (2011). *The adult learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development* (7th ed.). New York: Elsevier Inc. DOI:10.4324/9780429299612
- Koutská, I. (2020). *Age-Related Variables in ELT Training* [ Rigorous thesis, Univerzita Karlova]. Digitální depozitář Univerzity Karlovy. doi: <https://dspace.cuni.cz/handle/20.500.11956/121428>
- Merriam, S. B., Caffarella, R., S., & Baumgartner, L., M. (2007). *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide* (3<sup>rd</sup>). San Francisco, C.A.: Jossey-Bass Publishers.  
<https://download.e-bookshelf.de/download/0000/5707/55/L-G-0000570755-0003317679.pdf>
- Rogers, A. (1999). Improving the quality of adult literacy programmes in developing countries: the real literacies' approach. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 19(3), 219-234. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0738-0593\(99\)00015-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0738-0593(99)00015-2)
- Tarnopolsky, O. (2016). Foreign language education: Principles of teaching English to adults at commercial language schools and centers. *Cogent education*, 3(1), 1135771. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2015.1135771>
- Zhang, H., Dai, Y., & Wang, Y. (2020). Motivation and second foreign language proficiency: The mediating role of foreign language enjoyment. *Sustainability*, 12(4), 1302. DOI:10.3390/su12041302

---

<sup>1</sup>Corresponding Author: Abdellah Badda

\*Corresponding Email: [badda2stars@gmail.com](mailto:badda2stars@gmail.com); Tel.: +212618190070



© **The Author(s) 2025**. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

### **Creative Commons Licensing Terms**

Authors retain copyright for their published articles, with the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) applied to their work. This license allows anyone in the community to copy, distribute, transmit, or adapt the article without needing permission from the author(s) or publisher, as long as clear and proper attribution is given to the authors. This attribution should clarify that the materials are being reused under the Creative Commons License. The opinions, views, and conclusions presented in the articles belong solely to the author(s). The Open Access Publishing Group and the European Journal of Applied Linguistics Studies disclaim responsibility for any potential losses, damages, or liabilities arising from conflicts of interest, copyright issues, or improper use of content related to the research. All published works meet Open Access Publishing standards and are freely accessible for educational, commercial, and non-commercial use, allowing for sharing, modification, and distribution under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0).

---

<sup>1</sup>Corresponding Author: Abdellah Badda

\*Corresponding Email: [badda2stars@gmail.com](mailto:badda2stars@gmail.com); Tel.: +212618190070