



Mohamed Khider University of Biskra

Course: Didactics

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Introduction to Didactics

‘Successful teaching is about shaping the information flow so that the student experiences it- moment by moment- at the right level of difficulty.’

Fiona McPherson

Introduction

Foreign language teaching and learning have experienced a significant revolution as a result of research in both scientific and theoretical knowledge. This shift has resulted in a change in the role of the teacher and in conceptions of knowledge and learning. Therefore, an introduction to foreign language didactics is needed to shed light on the various techniques, procedures, methods and strategies that didactics as a discipline studies.

1- Definition of Didactics

The word didactic is drawn from the Greek verb ‘didaskein’. It means teaching and ‘tékné’ suggests art; “art of teaching”. Didactics refers to the principles, phenomena, forms, precepts, and law of teaching with no subject in particular (Stoker, 1964; in Navarro and Pinero, 2012). Didactics concentrates more specifically on how teachers, learners and knowledge interact and support one another.

The concept of didactics has been defined in varying ways as reported by Harjanne and Tella (2007). According to (Dolch, 1965) didactics is the science and study of teaching and learning. Jank and Meyer (1991) expanded this definition to cover teaching content and methods. They also argued that didactics consists of the theory and practice of both teaching and learning. In the same context, Gundem (1998) defines didactics as a science and a theory of teaching and learning under any circumstances and in any form. All these definitions emphasize the importance of teaching and learning.

Moreover, for Lund (2003) teaching subjects are important because through them, knowledge construction is made visible. Uljens (1997) enlarges the definition of didactics. He states that didactics is the science of the teaching-studying-learning process. In fact, many contemporary conceptions of didactics emphasize the three components Uljens raised: teaching, studying and learning.

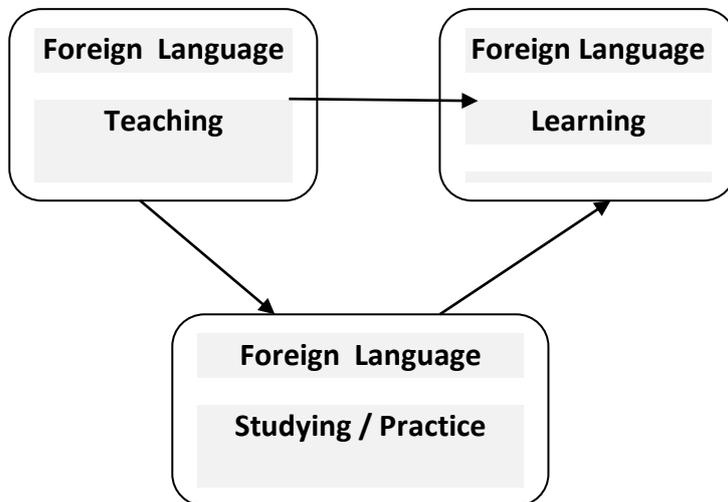


Figure 1. The foreign Language Didactic Teaching-Studying-Learning Process (in the spirit of Uljens, 1997; cf. Harjanne, 2003 a)

In short, the foreign language teaching and studying process aims at learning a foreign language, but it cannot guarantee that the target language will be learnt. Learning a foreign language can directly happen as a consequence of the teaching process without further study, and as a result of studying without any teaching (Harjanne & Tella, 2007).

2- Principles of Didactics

Comenius (1640) set a series of classical principles among which we may account:

- ‘– Didactics is both art and science.
- Teaching should have as its main aim the learning of everything by everyone.
- Teaching and learning should be characterized by speed and effectiveness, prioritizing the key role that language and images play in each of the two processes.’ (Maggioli, nd: 8)

3- Characteristics of Didactics

As any other discipline, didactics has its own characteristics which are fundamental and bring it back to the content and classroom. Some of these features are:

- 1- '*Didactics is said to draw closely on practice*'. In other words, more focus is put on visualising and embodying the full complexity of the teaching-studying-learning process.
- 2- '*Intentionality in school context*'. Successful schooling is the result of planned processes that are built around powerful knowledge where teaching and learning processes are interpreted and evaluated. The process of teaching is diverted to some kind of gone. This means that teaching is a purposeful activity. It is goal-directed
- 3- '*Didactical questions*' used for reflective planning processes and analyses of ongoing teaching.
- 4- '*The didactical triangle*' which is the simultaneous interest in content; learners and teachers and how these three components interrelate in the teaching and learning process.

(Claesson, 2018: 11 – 13)

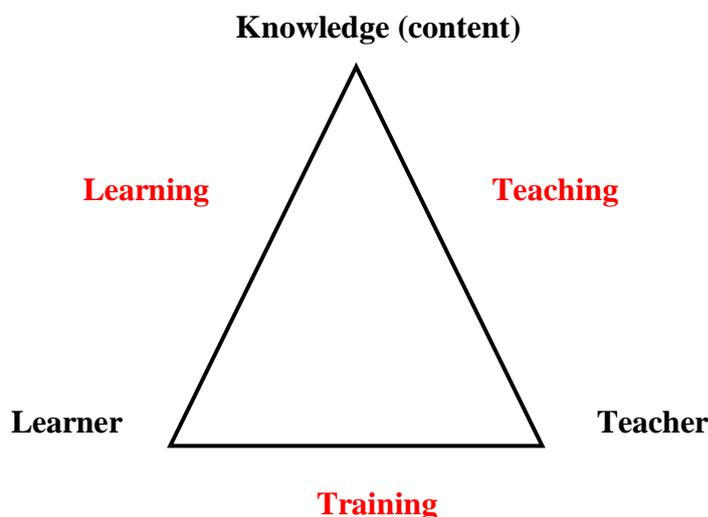


Figure 2. Didactic Triangle (Seghnoucheni et. Al, 2014: 29)

4-Key Terms Related to Didactics

4.1- Didactics versus Pedagogy

Pedagogy comes from Latin and Greek, in which a pedagogue refers to a servant or a man who guards and supervises a child (Watkins & Mortimore, 1999; in Harjanne & Tella, 2007). In ancient Greece, pedagogues took care of pre-puberty-aged boys. The meaning of the concept of pedagogy has changed over the times. Kroksmark (1995) sees that the concept of pedagogy is significantly very similar to the concept of teaching, and therefore not far from the concept of didactics. As a synonym for study of teaching, pedagogy and didactics are parallel concepts. In the same way, Kansanen (2003) expands the concept of pedagogy by arguing that it includes content, context, actors, goals and it is usually guided by the curriculum. The definition of didactics also contains education though teaching is emphasized more.

	German	Anglo-American	Finnish
Didactics	Related to theory	Related to educational psychology	The study of teaching and the science of teaching
Pedagogy	Education and teaching	Close to the European concepts of didactics	Systematic study of education or teaching

Table 1. A summary of the Main Interpretations of Didactics and Pedagogy (Tella & Harjanne 2004a, 29)

Pedagogy is the biggest of the two as it covers the why and how of education, but also talks and thinks about the curriculum, the values and the visions on education. However, didactics focuses on the how. It is more mechanic, often easier to research.

4.2- Pedagogy versus Andragogy

“Andragogy is the theory and practice of education of adults. It arose from the practice to pedagogy to address the specific needs in the education of children.” (Hodgson, 2017: 204)

Adult learning is based upon comprehension, organization, reflection, critique and synthesis of knowledge rather than rote memory. Table 2 summarizes the main differences between pedagogy and andragogy.

	PEDAGOGY	ANDRAGOGY
LEARNER:	-The learner is dependent on the instructor, the teacher schedules all the activities; determining how, when and where they should take place	-Learner is self-directed and moves towards independence -Learner is responsible for the learning -Self-evaluation is seen
LEARNER'S EXPERIENCE	-There is little experience which could be gained from this kind of learning -Method is didactic	-There is large quality of experience gained -Method used is problem solving, discussion, service-learning
READNESS TO LEARN	-Standardized curriculum set which will be based on societal needs	-Curriculum is more application based and it revolves around life
ORIENTATION TO LEARNING	-Here, it is a process of acquiring subject matter	-Here learning is for performing tasks and solving problems
MOTIVATION	-Motivation is by the external pressure, and there is lot of competition for grades	-It is driven by internal motivation. Includes self-actualisation, self-confidence etc.

Table 2: Differences between Pedagogy and Andragogy (Hodgson, 2017: 204)

5- Education

“Education is the process of facilitating learning or the acquisition of knowledge, skills values, beliefs, and habits”. It frequently takes place under the guidance of educators, but learners may also educate themselves in formal or informal settings

6-Educational Psychology

- “It is the scientific discipline concerned with the development, evaluation and application of principles and theories of human learning.” (Wittrock & Farley, 1989; in Moreno, 2010:8)
- According to Skinner (1958), “Educational Psychology covers the entire range of behavior and personality as related to education. It is the branch of psychology which deals with teaching and learning.”
- Peel (1956): “Educational Psychology is the science of education.”
- Berliner (1992): “Educational Psychologists study what people think and do as they teach and learn a particular curriculum in a particular environment where education and training are intended to take place.”

To sum up, Educational Psychology focuses on teaching and learning. It also facilitates the work of the teacher by solving teaching problems, and guides the teacher on what to do and how to do just like in Didactics. Besides the field to educational psychology relies heavily on quantitative methods, involving testing and measurement, to foster educational activities related to instructional design, classroom management, assessment, which facilitate learning process in different educational settings across the lifespan.

7-The Nature of Learning the English Language

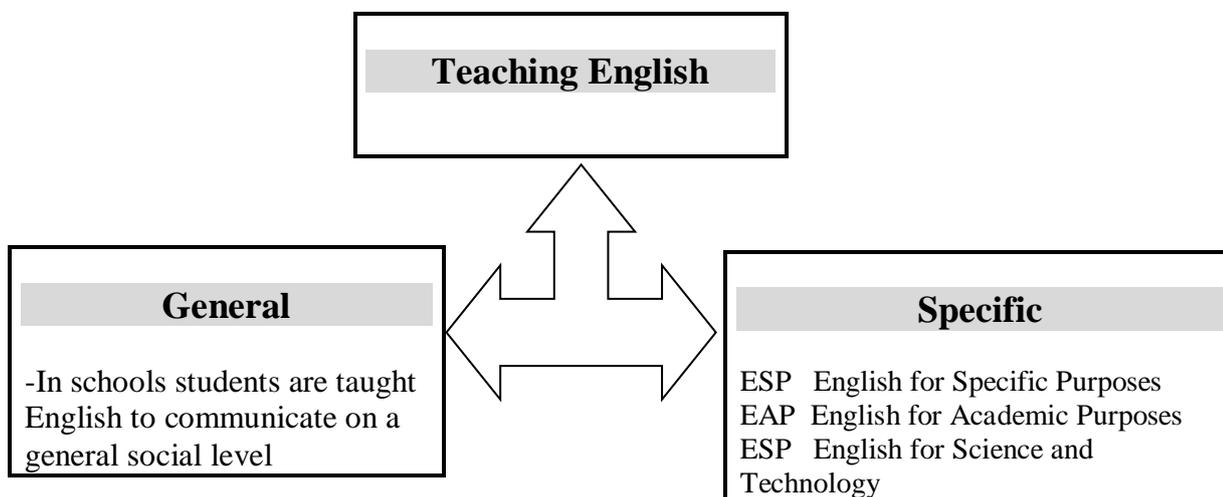
7.1-The Place of English in the World

Though English is not the language with the largest number of native language speakers. It has become a **Lingua Franca**. “A lingua franca can be defined as a language widely adopted for communication between two speakers whose native languages are different from each other’s and where one or both speakers are using it as a “second’ language. (Harmer, 2001:1)

There are a number of reasons for the popularity of English as a lingua franca. Many of these are historical, economic, and cultural factors. English is the predominant language of the world’s greatest economic and political power.

7.2-General or Specific

Teachers have to decide whether the English they teach students will be general or specific.



7.3-Second Language or Foreign Language

They are not learnt in the same way because of many factors such as learning content, age and motivation. Unlike a second language, a foreign language has no function in the speaking community. Take the example of French and English in the Algerian context.

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