Popular ideas about language learning

1. Languages are learned mainly through imitation.
   - Learners produce novel sentences.
     * e.g., The cowboy *rode* into town.
   - Children imitate selectively.
   - Individual learning strategy
     * For some advanced learners who are determined to improve their pronunciation, careful listening and imitation can be valuable.
     * For beginning learners, the slavish imitation and rote memorization led many learners to a dead end. (lack of practice in struggling to understand and make themselves understood in genuinely meaningful interactions)

2. Parents usually correct young children when they make grammatical errors.
   - When children are very young-schoolers, parents rarely comment on grammatical errors.
   - As children reach school age, parents often correct non-standard speech.
   - Parents tend to focus on meaning.
   - Without corrective feedback and guidance, second language learners may persist in using certain ungrammatical forms for years.

3. Highly intelligent people are good language learners.
   - IQ is a good predictor for success in classrooms where the emphasis is on learning about the language.
   - In classrooms where acquisition through interactive language use is emphasized, research has shown that learners with a wide variety of intellectual abilities can be successful language learners.

4. The best predictor of success in second language acquisition is motivation.
   - Age: Learners who begin learning a second language as adults rarely achieve the fluency and accuracy that children do in first language acquisition.
   - Language learning aptitude, how the instruction interacts with individual learners’ styles and preferences for learning.

What can teachers do about motivation?
   - Make the classroom a supportive environment in which students are stimulated, engaged in activities which are appropriate to their age, interests and cultural backgrounds, and most importantly, where students can experience success. This in turn can contribute to positive motivation, leading to still greater success.

5. The earlier a second language is introduced in school programs,
the greater the likelihood of success in learning.

- Only those who begin second language learning at an early age will eventually be indistinguishable from native speakers.
- When the goal of the educational program is basic communication skill for all students, it can be more efficient to begin second language teaching later.

- Older children (for example, 10 years olds) are able to catch up very quickly on those who began earlier (for example, at 6 or 7 years old) in programs offering only a few hours a week of instruction.
- One or two hours a week—even for seven or eight years—will not produce very advanced second language speakers.
- This approach often leads to frustration as learners feel that they have been studying ‘for years’ without making much progress.

6. Most of the mistakes that second language learners make are due to interference from their first language.

- Overgeneralization of the target language rules.
- Research has shown that second language learners from different first-language backgrounds often make the same kinds of errors when learning as particular second language.
- Some errors are similar to the kind of errors made by first language learners.

- When errors are caused by the overextension of some partial similarity between the first and second languages, these errors may be difficult to overcome.
- This may be particularly problematic if learners are frequently in contact with other learners who made the same errors.

7. The best way to learn new vocabulary is through reading.

- True, but not the whole story.
- Second language learners benefit from opportunities to read material that is interesting and important to them.
- However, those who receive guidance from instruction and develop good strategies for learning and remembering words will benefit more than those who simply focus on getting the main ideas from a text.

8. It is essential for learners to be able to pronounce all the individual sounds in the second language.

- Second language speakers’ ability to make themselves understood depends more on their ability to reproduce the phrasing and stress patterns than on their ability to articulate each individual sound.
- Most language of the world are spoken in many different varieties. Thus, it not longer seems appropriate to insist that learners be taught only one language variety.

9. Once learners know roughly 1,000 words and the basic
structure of a second language, they can easily participate in conversations with native speakers.

- Pragmatic features are also important.
- The decline in accuracy may show that learners are incorporating new information about the language into their own internal system of rules.

10. Teachers should present grammatical rules one at a time, and learners should practice examples of each one before going to another.

- Isolated presentation and practice of one structure at a time does not provide learners with an opportunity to discover how different language features compare and contrast in normal language use.

11. Teachers should teach simple language structures before complex ones.

- Research has shown that no matter who language is presented to learners, certain structure are acquired before others.
- Second language learners benefit from the efforts of native speakers and fluent bilinguals to modify their speech to help second language speakers understand.
- Teachers increase the complexity of their language intuitively as the learner’s proficiency increases.

12. Learners’ errors should be corrected as soon as they are made in order to prevent the formation of bad habits.

- When errors are persistent, especially when they are shared by almost all students in a class, it is useful to bring the problem to the learners’ attention.
- This does not mean learners should be expected to adopt the correct form immediately or consistently.

13. Teachers should use materials that expose students only to language structures which they have already been taught.

- There will be a loss of motivation if students are not sufficiently challenged.
- Students also need to deal with ‘real’ material if they are eventually going
to be prepared for language use outside the classroom.

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- When a particular form is introduced for the first time, or when the teacher feels there is a need for correction of a persistent problem, it is appropriate to use narrow-focus materials which isolate one element in a context where other things seem easy.
- But it would be disservice to students to use such materials exclusively.

20 14. When learners are allowed to interact freely, they learn each other's mistakes.

- If the tasks are well designed, learners working in groups get far more practice in speaking and participating in conversations than they ever could in a teacher-centered class.
- Learners do not produce any more errors in their speech when talking to learners at similar levels of proficiency than they do when speaking to learners at more advanced levels or to native speakers.

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- Learners at similar levels cannot provide each other with information which would help to correct those errors.
- Tasks can be devised in such a way that learners working together can discover information or knowledge about the second language they didn’t know they had. In order for this to happen, the tasks must be carefully planned and the learners must have access to the correct language forms they are trying to discover.

22 15. Students learn what they are taught.

- Some aspects of the second language develop according to 'natural sequences of development and learners may be more likely to learn certain sequences of development and learners may be more likely to learn certain language features when they are developmentally 'ready.'
- Other aspects of language, however, for example, vocabulary, can be taught at any time, as long as the learners are interested in the opportunity to learn and the teaching methods are appropriate to the learner’s age, interests, and learning styles.
- Learners can learn a great deal that no-one ever teaches them.

23 16. errors by correctly rephrasing Teachers should respond to students what they have said rather than by explicitly pointing out the errors

- Not interrupting or embarrassing
- Adults
- Children
- Structure-based instruction
- Content-based instruction, communicative instruction

24 17. Students can learn both language and academic content simultaneously in classes where the subject matter is taught in their second language

- Motivation
- More time in contact with the language
- More varieties of vocabulary and language structures
Foreign Language Acquisition

- Developed comprehension skills, vocabulary, and communicative competence
- Not accuracy on language features that do not interfere with meaning
- Addition of form-focused instruction is helpful.