the practice of english language teaching

by Jeremy Harmer · Language: EN

Summary by booksummaryai.com —
https://booksummaryai.com/country/en/the-practice-of-english-language-teaching

Overview

Jeremy Harmer's "The Practice of English Language Teaching" is a seminal textbook designed for both trainee and experienced English language teachers. It offers a comprehensive and accessible exploration of the principles and practices of teaching English as a foreign or second language (EFL/ESL). The book systematically covers various aspects of language pedagogy, from understanding how languages are learned and the different methodological approaches to practical classroom management, lesson planning, and the teaching of specific language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) and systems (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation).

The book's main argument centers on the idea that effective language teaching requires a blend of theoretical understanding and practical application, emphasizing a communicative approach while acknowledging the value of various techniques. Harmer encourages teachers to be reflective practitioners, adapting methods to suit their students' needs and contexts rather than adhering rigidly to a single methodology. It matters because it provides a foundational understanding for new teachers entering the profession and offers a valuable reference and source of new ideas for seasoned educators, making it one of the most widely used and respected resources in English Language Teaching.

Key Takeaways

- Understand that effective language teaching involves a balance between various methodologies, adapting them to suit specific student needs and learning contexts.
- Prioritize creating a positive and engaging classroom atmosphere where students feel comfortable taking risks and participating actively.
- Integrate the teaching of language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) with language systems (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) for holistic development.
- Plan lessons meticulously, considering aims, stages, activities, and potential problems, but also be prepared to adapt plans spontaneously.
- Utilize a variety of teaching techniques and materials to maintain student motivation and cater to different learning styles.
- Reflect regularly on your teaching practice, evaluating what works and what doesn't, and continuously seek opportunities for professional development.

• Recognize the importance of feedback, both corrective and encouraging, in helping students improve their language proficiency.

Chapter Summaries

Part A: Background

This foundational section introduces the field of English Language Teaching, exploring its historical development and the evolution of various methodologies, from traditional Grammar-Translation to contemporary Communicative Language Teaching and Task-Based Learning. It delves into the nature of language itself, dissecting its components such as grammar, lexis, phonology, and discourse, and how these elements interrelate. Furthermore, it examines theories of language learning, discussing different learning styles, learner characteristics, and individual differences that significantly influence the acquisition process. This part establishes the essential theoretical framework upon which practical teaching strategies are built throughout the rest of the book, emphasizing the importance of understanding both language and learners.

Part B: Teaching Skills

This part focuses on the practical, day-to-day skills indispensable for effective classroom management and instruction. It covers strategies for creating a positive learning environment, establishing rapport, organizing students for pair and group work, and giving clear instructions. Detailed guidance is provided on lesson planning, including setting aims, sequencing activities, and anticipating problems. The section also addresses the selection and effective use of various teaching materials and aids, from textbooks to technology. Crucially, it explores techniques for giving constructive feedback, correcting errors sensitively and appropriately, and understanding different approaches to testing and assessment, including formative and summative evaluation methods.

Part C: Teaching Language

This section is dedicated to the methodology of teaching specific language systems: grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. For grammar, it explores various presentation techniques, such as inductive versus deductive approaches, and a range of practice activities designed to develop both accuracy and fluency. The part on teaching vocabulary covers strategies for presenting new lexis, encouraging retention through recycling, and dealing with aspects like collocations, word families, and lexical chunks. It also provides guidance on teaching pronunciation, addressing both segmental features (individual sounds) and suprasegmental features (stress, rhythm, intonation), and offers practical techniques for improving learners' phonological awareness and intelligibility.

Part D: Teaching Language Skills

This part delves into the methodologies for developing the four core language skills: speaking, writing, listening, and reading. For speaking, it outlines activities that promote both fluency and accuracy, such as discussions, role-plays, and presentations, emphasizing interaction and communication. The writing section addresses different approaches, including process and product writing, various genres, and effective feedback strategies for written work. For receptive skills, it details strategies for teaching listening (e.g., predicting, listening for gist, listening for detail) and reading (e.g., skimming, scanning, extensive vs. intensive reading), highlighting the importance of authentic materials and task design to develop comprehension strategies.

Part E: From Theory to Practice

This concluding part bridges theoretical understanding with practical classroom application, often focusing on broader pedagogical issues and continuous professional development. It discusses the critical role of motivation in language learning, exploring various types of motivation and practical strategies for fostering and maintaining it in the classroom. This section also addresses the unique characteristics and needs of different learner demographics, such as young learners, teenagers, and adults, offering tailored teaching approaches. Finally, it often includes discussions on reflective practice, action research, and the importance of ongoing professional development for teachers, looking towards future trends and challenges in the field of English Language Teaching.

Themes

- ELT methodology
- Classroom management
- Language skills development
- Teacher professional development
- Learner-centered teaching

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the practice of english language teaching about?

Jeremy Harmer's "The Practice of English Language Teaching" is a comprehensive guide for English language teachers. It covers the theories of language learning, practical classroom management techniques, methods for teaching all four language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking), and systems (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation), as well as lesson planning and assessment. It aims to equip teachers with both theoretical knowledge and practical tools.

Is the practice of english language teaching worth reading?

Yes, it is highly recommended and considered a cornerstone text in English Language Teaching (ELT). It's invaluable for trainee teachers seeking a foundational understanding and for experienced teachers looking to refresh their knowledge or explore new approaches. Its balanced perspective, clear explanations, and practical advice make it an essential resource for anyone involved in teaching English.

How does the practice of english language teaching end?

Spoiler: As a non-fiction pedagogical textbook, the book doesn't have a narrative ending. It concludes by emphasizing the importance of ongoing professional development, reflection, and adaptation for English language teachers. Harmer encourages teachers to continuously evaluate their practice, stay informed about new developments, and tailor their methods to the specific needs of their learners and teaching contexts.

Who should read the practice of english language teaching?

This book is essential reading for anyone training to become an English language teacher, including those pursuing CELTA, DELTA, or MA TESOL qualifications. It is also highly beneficial for experienced teachers who wish to deepen their understanding of ELT principles, explore new methodologies, or find practical solutions to classroom challenges. Teacher trainers also find it a valuable reference.

How long does it take to read the practice of english language teaching?

Given its comprehensive nature and academic depth, reading "The Practice of English Language Teaching" thoroughly can take a significant amount of time. Depending on your reading speed and how much you engage with the concepts and activities, it could take anywhere from 10 to 20 hours to read cover-to-cover. Many readers also use it as a reference book, dipping into specific sections as needed.

Best Quotes

“Motivation is perhaps the single most important factor governing the success of language learning.”

Learners and Motivation

This line highlights Harmer's belief that a learner's drive and interest are crucial for effective language acquisition, more so than any other factor. It appears early in discussions about learner characteristics and underpins much of his pedagogical advice, emphasizing the teacher's role in fostering and maintaining this essential element.

“Good teachers are good managers.”

Managing the Classroom

Harmer emphasizes that effective classroom management, including organizing activities, maintaining discipline, and ensuring smooth transitions, is fundamental to successful teaching. This quote underscores the practical, organizational aspect of the teacher's role, arguing that a well-managed environment is a prerequisite for effective learning.

“Error is a natural and inevitable part of the learning process.”

Correcting Students

This quote reflects Harmer's learner-centered view, advocating for a positive approach to mistakes. He argues that errors provide valuable feedback for both learners and teachers, indicating areas for further development rather than failures, and should be handled constructively rather than punitively.

“The teacher's role is not just to teach, but to create the conditions for learning.”

The Teacher

This statement encapsulates Harmer's philosophy that teaching involves more than simply imparting information. It emphasizes the teacher's responsibility to facilitate an environment where students are actively engaged, motivated, and able to discover and construct their own understanding, rather than passively receiving knowledge.

“Authenticity is a key ingredient in successful language teaching.”

Materials and Aids

Harmer stresses the importance of using real-world materials and tasks in the classroom. This quote highlights his belief that exposing learners to authentic language use helps them develop practical communication skills and prepares them for real-life interactions outside the classroom, making learning more relevant and engaging.

Questions & Answers

What is Jeremy Harmer's main argument regarding the role of the teacher in "The Practice of English Language Teaching"?

Harmer argues that the teacher's role extends far beyond simply imparting knowledge. He sees teachers as facilitators, managers, assessors, prompters, and resources, whose primary task is to create optimal conditions for learning. This involves motivating students, managing the classroom effectively, providing appropriate feedback, and adapting to diverse learner needs, rather than just delivering content.

How does Harmer suggest teachers approach error correction in the classroom?

Harmer advocates for a balanced and constructive approach to error correction. He views errors as a natural and inevitable part of the learning process, providing valuable diagnostic information. He suggests that teachers should decide when, what, and how to correct based on the activity's aim (fluency vs. accuracy), the type of error, and the individual learner. He emphasizes techniques like self-correction, peer-correction, and delayed correction over immediate, intrusive correction, especially during fluency activities.

What is the significance of "authenticity" in language teaching according to Harmer?

Harmer considers authenticity a key ingredient for successful language teaching. He defines authentic materials as those not specifically created for language learners but for native speakers, such as real newspaper articles, songs, or TV shows. Using authentic materials and tasks helps learners engage with language as it is used in the real world, develops their communicative competence, and prepares them for real-life interactions, making the learning process more relevant and motivating.

What are some of the key factors Harmer identifies as influencing learner motivation?

Harmer identifies several factors influencing learner motivation, including the intrinsic interest in the subject, the relevance of the learning to their goals, the teacher's methodology and personality, the learning environment, and the learners' self-esteem. He emphasizes that teachers play a crucial role in fostering motivation by making lessons engaging, setting achievable goals, providing positive feedback, and creating a supportive classroom atmosphere.

How does Harmer distinguish between 'accuracy' and 'fluency' activities?

Harmer distinguishes between accuracy and fluency activities by their primary focus. Accuracy activities prioritize correct language use, often involving controlled practice of grammar or vocabulary, where error correction is frequent and immediate. Fluency activities, conversely, focus on the ability to communicate meaning smoothly and without undue hesitation, even if some errors occur. In fluency tasks, such as discussions or role-plays, immediate error correction is typically avoided to encourage natural communication.

What is the role of 'planning' in Harmer's view of effective teaching?

Harmer stresses that planning is essential for effective teaching, providing structure and direction for lessons. Good planning involves setting clear aims, selecting appropriate activities and materials, anticipating potential problems, and considering timing. However, he also emphasizes that plans should be flexible, allowing teachers to adapt to unexpected classroom dynamics, student needs, and emergent learning opportunities. Planning serves as a guide, not a rigid script.

What does Harmer mean by "learner autonomy" and why is it important?

Harmer defines learner autonomy as the capacity of learners to take charge of their own learning. This means they can identify their learning needs, set goals, choose strategies, and

evaluate their progress independently. He considers it important because autonomous learners are more motivated, effective, and lifelong learners. Teachers can foster autonomy by encouraging self-access, providing choices, teaching learning strategies, and promoting self-reflection.

How does Harmer discuss the importance of classroom management?

Harmer views effective classroom management as fundamental to successful teaching, stating that "good teachers are good managers." He emphasizes that managing the classroom involves not just discipline, but also organizing activities, grouping students, managing resources, and ensuring smooth transitions between tasks. A well-managed classroom creates a positive and productive learning environment where students feel secure and can focus on learning without unnecessary disruptions.

What are some of the key considerations for selecting teaching materials, according to Harmer?

Harmer suggests that teachers consider several factors when selecting materials: their relevance to learner needs and interests, their authenticity, their potential to engage students, their cultural appropriateness, and whether they provide opportunities for both receptive and productive skills practice. He also advises teachers to evaluate if materials align with lesson objectives and if they are adaptable to different learning styles and levels.

What is the significance of "feedback" in Harmer's teaching methodology?

Harmer considers feedback an integral and crucial part of the learning process. He emphasizes that feedback should be constructive, timely, and appropriate to the learning goal. It serves to inform learners about their progress, highlight areas for improvement, and reinforce correct usage. Effective feedback, whether explicit correction, reformulation, or simply acknowledging effort, helps learners understand their performance and guides their future learning.

What is the "PPP" model, and what are Harmer's views on it?

The PPP model stands for Presentation, Practice, Production. Harmer describes it as a widely used, traditional teaching sequence where the teacher first presents new language, students then practice it in controlled exercises, and finally, they use it more freely in communicative tasks. While acknowledging its popularity and utility for introducing new discrete language items, Harmer also discusses its limitations, suggesting that it doesn't always reflect natural language acquisition and can be too linear for complex communicative goals.

How does Harmer suggest teachers cater to different learning styles?

Harmer acknowledges that learners have different learning styles (e.g., visual, auditory, kinesthetic) and preferences. He suggests that teachers cater to these differences by varying their teaching techniques and activities. This includes using a range of visual aids, incorporating listening tasks, encouraging movement and hands-on activities, and offering choices in how

students approach tasks, ensuring that all learners have opportunities to engage effectively.

What is the importance of "rapport" in the classroom, according to Harmer?

Harmer stresses the importance of establishing good rapport between the teacher and students, and among students themselves. He argues that a positive and supportive classroom atmosphere, built on mutual respect and trust, significantly enhances learning. Good rapport encourages students to participate, take risks, and feel comfortable making mistakes, thereby fostering a more effective and enjoyable learning environment.

What does Harmer advise regarding the use of the students' first language (L1) in the English language classroom?

Harmer suggests a pragmatic approach to using L1. While advocating for maximizing target language (L2) use, he acknowledges that L1 can be a valuable resource, especially for beginners or when explaining complex grammar points, checking understanding, or building rapport. He advises teachers to use L1 judiciously and purposefully, ensuring it supports L2 learning rather than replacing it, and to gradually reduce its use as students progress.

How does Harmer view the role of "games" in language teaching?

Harmer views games as a valuable and legitimate tool in language teaching, not just as a frivolous activity. He argues that games can be highly motivating, reduce anxiety, provide meaningful contexts for language use, and encourage interaction. When well-designed and purposeful, games can effectively practice specific language points, develop fluency, and create a dynamic and enjoyable learning environment, contributing significantly to learning outcomes.

What is the main takeaway for new teachers from "The Practice of English Language Teaching"?

Spoiler: The main takeaway for new teachers is that effective English language teaching is a complex, multifaceted skill requiring a blend of pedagogical knowledge, practical management, and reflective practice. Harmer provides a comprehensive guide covering everything from understanding learners and managing classrooms to planning lessons and assessing progress, emphasizing that successful teaching involves creating engaging conditions for learning and continuously adapting to student needs.

How does Harmer address the concept of "differentiation" in the classroom?

Harmer addresses differentiation by acknowledging that learners have diverse needs, abilities, and learning styles. He encourages teachers to vary their teaching approaches, tasks, and materials to cater to these differences. This can involve providing different levels of challenge, offering choices in activities, grouping students strategically, and giving individualized support or extension tasks, ensuring that all learners can access the curriculum and progress effectively.

What is Harmer's perspective on the importance of "teacher development"?

Harmer strongly emphasizes the importance of ongoing teacher development. He advocates for teachers to be reflective practitioners, continuously evaluating their own teaching, seeking feedback, and engaging in professional learning. This includes observing other teachers, attending workshops, reading professional literature, and experimenting with new techniques, all aimed at improving their skills and adapting to evolving pedagogical understanding and student needs.

What does Harmer mean by "task-based learning" (TBL)?

Harmer explains Task-Based Learning (TBL) as an approach where students complete a communicative task (e.g., planning a trip, solving a problem) using any language they have, and only after the task is completed, the teacher focuses on specific language forms that emerged or were needed. TBL prioritizes meaning over form initially, aiming to develop fluency and authentic communication, with language analysis and practice following the task experience.

How does Harmer suggest teachers manage mixed-ability classes?

Harmer suggests several strategies for managing mixed-ability classes, including varying tasks and activities, providing differentiated materials, using pair and group work effectively, and offering extra support or challenge where needed. He emphasizes that teachers should aim to provide opportunities for all students to succeed and feel engaged, rather than trying to teach to the 'middle' and potentially losing both stronger and weaker learners.