

Khaienko Oleksandra

Master of Applied Linguistics

Teacher of English, the Faculty of Linguistics, NTUU "KPI"

LANGUAGE IMMERSION AS A METHOD OF TEACHING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Language immersion is a method of teaching a foreign language (also called the target language or TL) in which the target language is used for instruction. Unlike a more traditional language course, where the target language plays the role of the subject material, language immersion uses the target language as a teaching tool, surrounding or "immersing" students in the second language. Foreign language immersion programs, first introduced in the United States in 1971 as a way to incorporate intensive second language education into public elementary schools, have gradually spread across the country and are now viewed by educators as a highly effective way of teaching foreign languages. The ultimate goal of this type of program is for students to become proficient in the target language and to develop increased cultural awareness while reaching a high level of academic achievement. Foreign language immersion programs, also referred to as one-way immersion programs vary in intensity and structure according to the model implemented. Immersion programs may be categorized according to the *extent* of immersion *and the age* of the students participating in the program. The following are three main types of immersion programs according to the extent of immersion:

Total Immersion – Programs in which all subjects in the lower grades are taught in the target language; instruction in the native language usually increases to 20%-50% in the upper elementary grades, depending on the program. Initial literacy instruction is provided in the target language. Programs may continue in middle school and high school with classes taught in the target language.

Partial Immersion – Programs in which approximately 50% of instruction is provided in the target language. Initial literacy instruction may be provided in either the target language or native language or in both languages simultaneously. Programs may continue in middle school and high school with classes taught in the target language.

The *two-way immersion*, also called "*dual-*" or "*bilingual immersion*". This approach is mostly applicable for the cosmopolitan countries with the language minorities like Canada and USA. The idea is that there are the speakers of two or more languages in the same group. Ideally speaking, half of the class is made up of native speakers of the major language in the area (e.g., English in the U.S.) and the other half is of the target language (e.g., Spanish).

Class time is split in half and taught in the major and target languages. In this way students encourage and teach each other, and eventually all become bilingual. The goals are similar to the above program. Different ratios of the target language to the native language may occur.

If the age factor is taken into consideration, the *early*, *middle* and *late* immersion can be distinguished.

Early immersion capitalizes on the early neuropsychological, psycholinguistic and social psychological theories that find younger children better able to learn the language – physiologically, psychologically and attitudinally. Yet it is not applicable to teaching of the foreign languages to adults. The *middle* and *late* immersion consider the other psychological patterns of an adult person and their influence upon the learning ability.

The immersion approach succeeds because of the inherent meaningfulness of learning subject matter through a foreign language since it can be associated with those areas of use which are represented by the other subjects on the school or university curriculum and this not only helps to ensure a link between the reality and the students' own experience but also provides us with the most certain means we have of teaching the language as communication, as use, rather than usage.

However, there are certain concerns about the lack of accurate speech of the immersion students. The main emphasis is shifted to the ability of a fluent use of the language for certain academic purposes, not to the quality of the language mastering.

Proponents believe that the immersion study in a language foreign to the country of instruction doesn't produce as effective results as separated language learning and may, in fact, hinder education effectiveness and learning in other subject areas.

The problem is that the product of the immersion programs (the student's achievements) has always been emphasized. Little attention has been given to the process of the immersion education. In other words the teacher's behaviours have been ignored. In fact, few accounts of the immersion methodology exist (i.e. the classical Lambert and Tucker study).

Having originated in Canada, the immersion approach has gradually acquired popularity firstly in the bilingual countries, then in the USA and only afterwards in the rest of the world. Its elements are applied in the modern approaches to the language teaching in Ukraine as well. The major issue is an increasing demand for immersion teachers which requires the specific training courses, which, to be successful, depend upon well-informed teacher educators, as according to Snow, "The closer we get to capturing the strategies and techniques, the better prepared we will be to train immersion teachers". To address this specific goals a particular study of "teacher thinking" was undertaken.

