How learners of English learn best in a foreign language context? A glimpse of the debate over the written versus the spoken form

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Abstract

The primacy of speech in second language learning and the relative lack of importance of the written form have triggered a continuous debate in the field of language teaching methodology. The various approaches which have been developed throughout the years emphasise the importance of the spoken language. Therefore, the written form has been taken for granted in most teaching methodologies. This paper considers the question of whether second language learners learn best through spoken or written language. It reviews the literature with regard to how speaking and writing have been taught in the last two decades. In addition, it describes the differences between spoken and written forms of languages. The paper then presents some characteristics and features of both language forms and states the situation of teaching English in a foreign language context. The paper concludes that both spoken and written aspects of any language are important in language learning and they both complement one another. Second language learners need to learn both aspects in order to master the language. The degree of exposure to spoken or written language is yet determined by the learners' purpose for learning the language.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, language learning, spoken language, teaching methodologies, written language

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