OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES TO THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN ALGERIA

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ملخص

ان قدرة الطلبة لتعلم اللغة الانجليزية تعتبر من الاهداف بعيدة المدى التي يسعى كل استاذ لتحقيقها.ويعتبر المشكل في تدريس اللغة الاجنبية هو تحضيرالطلبة لاستعمال اللغة.وفي هذا الصدديجد الطلبة انفسهم متخوفين من مستواهم.وكنتيجة لهذه الحالة يبقون جامدين نظرا لهذا التخوف من ارتكاب الاخطاء.تهدف هذه الدراسة الى ابراز الصعاب والعراقيل التي يواجهها طلبة اللغة الانجليزية وكذلك الفرص المتاحة للتغلب عليها.

الكلمات المفتاحية :الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية ; تحصيل الطالب; طرق التدريس ;التحديات التي تواجه الطلبة ;الفرص والحلول.

ABSTRACT

The ability of students to learn English is one of the long term goals that language teachers would like to achieve in class. The problem in teaching a foreign language is to prepare the students to use the language. In this context, the students usually feel insecure about their level. As a result, they rather remain

stagnant as they are in fear of making mistakes and do not show active participation in different lessons. The present work is meant to emphasize the hardships and barriers that the learners of a foreign language, specifically English, often encounter and the existingopportunitiesthat may help overcome these difficulties. In more clearly stated terms, it presents options and arguments concerning the teaching process and methods that are applied to minimize learning difficulties of learners in English.

KEY-WORDS: English as a foreign language; learner achievement; teaching methods; challenges facing learners; opportunities and solutions

RESUME

La culpabilité des étudiants à apprendre l'Anglais est l'un des objectifs à long terme que les enseignants veulent atteindre. Le problème de l'enseignement d'une langue étrangère est de préparer les étudiants a utiliser cette langue. Dans ce contexte, les étudiants se sentent souvent non confiants et ont peur des fautes. Cette étude montre les différentes difficultés et les obstacles que les étudiants confrontent et éventuellement présente les remèdes pédagogiques adéquats.

MOTS-CLES: Anglais comme langue étrangère; achèvement d'apprenant ; méthodes d'enseignement ;défis confrontant les étudiants ; opportunités et solutions

I. INTRODUCTION

Learners of English as a foreign language represent an important part of the population across the world. This population continues to increase more rapidly than that of native English speaking students (Shore, 2001), so the teaching of English is becoming of great significance. However; the students' proficiency does not seem to meet the standards expected by the teachers and the state's educational aspirations. Thus, the teachers should have to continually reflect on teaching and update practice to meet the needs of the learners. The present work includes an analysis of the different challenges that EFL students have and the techniques that teachers can use to face these challenges.

II. OBSTACLES OF EFL LEARNING OVERSEAS

As the class size increases, the teachers' ability to incorporate adequate assignments diminishes. The number of opportunities available to students is limited to a minimum. The same also holds true, for example in the exams where many teachers find the correction as a heavy burden and consequently they no longer require the students to write. This problem brings to the surface the serious question of absence of feedback, providing systematic guidelines for students, which no one can deny its paramount importance in the teaching/learning process. In the different modules, the students' roles are limited to corporal presence and remain as audience all along the course, taking no

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part and making no use of the target language.

 Furthermore, the teachers, in spite of being linguistically competent, find themselves in a dilemma. All along they have been challenging with large classes, yet they are confronted with limited teaching time and little contact time. Due to this constraint of time, they do not often give full attention to language use. They are rather required to complete the syllabus by following the yearly plan, prepare materials for lessons, be involved in exams, etc. Thus, emphasis should be given to address this problem because the language use is an important element in mastering the English language across the different modules

The major challenge that the learners of an EFL experience is described as *"language shock,"* a struggle to learn the English language to be absorbed in a society that is unwilling to embrace diversity outside the classroom. Such is the situation of the learners who find themselvesin a dilemma trying to maintain a sense of identity related to their native culture. Students encounter many obstacles in their efforts to find or create an English learning environmentfor practice so as tobecome proficient in the English language. They often come to realize that in order to be fully accepted, they must abandon their native language, surrendering an aspect of their identity. They are caused to feel they must inevitably either speak English or

nothing at all. Thus, they become trapped in a painful power struggle over the use of English and their native language. Teachers along with learners must realize that education occurs in the context of a social climate which is conducive to the acquisition of any language. Thus we have to come to the reality that what is learnt should not remain imprisoned between the walls of the classroom.

The relationships between students and accompanying range of social behaviors have a major impact on how well EFL students learn English. Many learners fail to adjust in an unwelcoming, hostile environment where they are made fun of when they try to speak English and also when they speak their native language; so they end up silent and withdraw from participation, thus their learning and achievement is hindered. While EFL students are taught academic English in different situations, they often lack the ability to interact in social settings with English speaking peers and often have limited opportunity to interact academically or socially. They often have great difficulty learning the "slang" and social English because they have no one to learn it from. Such learners come to prefer English out of necessity, often abandoning their native languages to fit in. They end up without comfort in either language and may end up losing the ability to communicate with family members and friends in their native land. It can be concluded that EFL

students will remain torn between two worlds until society truly embraces diversity and the notion that biculturalism and bilingualism are assets. What is needed in the education of EFL learners is the development of English and maintenance of their native language.

III.OBSTACLES TO EFFECTIVE TEACHING

Here are mentioned some of the obstacles and the appropriate measures that teachers may use to help the EFL students in overcoming the barriers to effective teaching. Teachers can use strategies basing themselves on the social integrationisttheories of Vygotsky, to create a pleasant healthy and relaxed atmosphere in the classroom for the sake of fostering learning by modeling and helping students to buildunderstanding. This has a dual final objective; that of being conscious of their cognitive assimilationand hence become smart thinkers in problem solving situations.

Given the above, we can classify the different obstacles in a taxonomy that would include four elements that hinder effective teaching. These are respectively: the cognitive obstacle, the culture obstacle, the language obstacle and the learning obstacle. It is a first requirement for the English language teachers to be skilful and well versed in this area to bring to a minimum these obstacles and ignite students' interest and motivation by

devising an adequate syllabus including original,creative and genuine tasks.

A. THE COGNITIVE OBSTACLE

This would comprise all new concepts to introduce in a lesson like the grammatical points, vocabulary items and the functions of language. It is critical that we consistently assess prior knowledge of all students to identify the concepts and skills they do and do not possess. We must then fill in any conceptual gaps by trying to relate new concepts to life experiences of EFL students. Thus, it becomes more critical to try an elicitation warm up phase to know about the prerequisites of these students so as to understand them better.

B. THE CULTURE OBSTACLE

This refers to the way language and culture is related and the amount of cultural knowledge required comprehending meaning or participating in an activity. Meanings of words are determined by the uses of words within linguistic and cultural settings, never the same in any two cultures. English learners need to learn the words in English as well as the cultural background that gives the words their English meaning. They need to learn words in context to understand the meaning. Additionally, the information conveyed in our textbooks and lessons is culturally embedded. Some texts or topics can actually

be culturally offensive. Culture load also refers to how teachers expect interaction to occur in a classroom that includes when to speak, when to stay silent, when to respond and when to write. These expectations vary from one culture to the next. English learners are often expected to determine the classroom behavioral norms independently. The following strategies can help teachers lighten the culture load for students.

-Teachers should treat English learners with respect, not judgment, and try to be friendly with students and try to establish social relationships with their elders.

-Teachers can use information gained through these relationships to develop lessons and activities that help students understand the target language culture.

-By demonstrating respect for students, teachers allow a door of trust to open that can serve to further deepen and foster teacher-student relationship.

C. THE LANGUAGE OBSTACLE

It refers to the number of unfamiliar words encountered as an English learner reads a text or listens to teacher or peer academic talk. Teachers can lessen this problem by rewriting or explaining text material. Complex sentences can be broken down into comprehensible parts. Academic vocabulary can be

presented at the start of a lesson and highlighted.Several different texts can be available covering the same content but at different reading ability levels. In addition, teachers should model both academic and social language and scaffold its appropriate use to help the learner acquire it, use it effectively, and move to more sophisticated levels of speaking and writing.

D. THE LEARNING OBSTACLE

This represents what teachers expect students to do with English in the learning activities. An example is brainstorming, an activity that is oral and fast-paced, with few visual examples and minimal clarification in the initial stages. An English learner would have difficulty following such an activity, let alone participating. Thus, teachers must carefully consider the learning obstacles of all activities involving English learners, making adaptations and offering supports accordingly. One such strategy is the language bath. This strategy involves the teacher doing the initial talking about a new topic and students listening before any brainstorming or other activity is assigned. This strategy is also effective with English speaking students. It prepares students to participate by familiarizing them with vocabulary and develop their thoughts on a topic. There is another interesting concept of the "yearning goad," which is intrinsic motivation, a drive to know and learn more. This needs to be cultivated by teaching, whenever possible, through topics

of high student interest. Teachers should also endeavor to broaden student interests by sharing their passions with students. Critical selection and creative implementation of curriculum are also important. By emphasizing one or two of these obstacles and arranging meaningful learning for students, teachers can motivate students and facilitate learning of both the English language and content. This can help EFL students avoid being misinterpreted, unmotivated or resistant to learning.

IV. EFL AND LANGUAGE FLUENCY

This part is related to curriculum alignment for EFL instruction. EFL standards can have a significant impact on EFL student achievement by integrating academic language into the EFL curriculum. The EFL standards provide structure and guidance that can help increase student academic success. Linking the EFL standards to state academic standards ensures that EFL students will receive high quality instruction in English language and content areas. The standards that provide the teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) with scope and sequence of the language skills that EFL students need for success in classrooms are the use of:

-English to communicate in a social setting

-English to achieve academically in all content areas

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-English in socially and culturally appropriate ways.

Several strategies can be applied to develop competency in social use of English which include the use of seating Arrangements (such as round tables, groups or pairs) to encourage social interaction. Teachers can also try to structure opportunities for students to use English outside the classroom. Collaborative learning encourages the use of language in a social manner. Positive social interaction can help students perceive the classroom as a comfortable and friendly place, where they feel safe using their new language skills and where they may find intrinsic motivation for communicating in English.To enhance academic achievement, teachers can create a language-rich classroom, by providing opportunities for students to work, bringing in variety and diversity , label parts of the classroom to build vocabulary and help students make connections to their native language; and have different media available for student use (books, magazines, newspapers, audio-tapes, video tapes, computer software) to address different learning styles and also help build connections. To help students to use English in appropriate ways, teachers should teach what language is appropriate in what setting so students can determine when to speak and in what way (for example, formal speech or slang). Teachers should also recognize diversity and sameness in their classrooms, incorporate multicultural literature

into the curriculum, and invite guests to share their cultures and talents with the class. Students need to develop an understanding and appreciation for others considering the diversity of society.

V. SOME SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Here are some suggestions that are fruitful and beneficial to overcome some of the difficulties encountered in the teaching /learning process:

1. Activities should be provided based on the students' needs and teachers should provide authenticmaterials for students that help them understand better the natural use of language just asthe native speakers do.

2. Teachers should design tasks that arouse students' interest and help them learn the different skills andstrategies. These tasks not only test the students' comprehensionand learning but also motivate them to use varioustypes of strategies in order to gain the maximum benefits in doing their activities.

3. Teachers should provide students with different types of input like lectures, radio news, films, TV plays,announcements, everyday conversation, and interviews. All this is for the sake of variety.

4. Teachers should familiarize their students with the rules of how language functions in order to help them practice the

differentnatural forms language and ask them to imitate and practice in real life situations.

5. Teachers should help their students to be familiar with the accents of different native speakers. Due to the factthat native speakers have specific accents, it is necessary for students to recognize the differences betweenAmerican and British accents.

6. Activities should be presented according to their level of complexities; that is, activitiesshould be provided from the very simple texts to the lower level students and moved to the very complicatedauthentic materials to the advanced students.

7. Teachers should provide background knowledge and linguistic knowledge to their students while working on different materials.

8. Teachers should give their students the necessary feedback on their performance because it can promote their error correction and increase their motivation, and help them develop self confidence in building their own learning.

9. Teachers should help their students develop the necessary skills to decipher meaning from different contexts like listening for understanding particular information, reading to get the main ideas, explanation and inference. This can be achieved through different tasks and activities at different levels.

10. Teachers should use paralinguistic gestures and body language such as pointing and facial expressions to reinforce oral messages among the students.

VI. CONCLUSION

We have to ignite a compelling pedagogical action for projects based on the research that has emerged in cognitive and learning theory over the last years. Efforts should be made to provide a wide range of opportunities that can be offered, ways to construct assignments and guide the process, ways to prepare materials, and approaches to integrate the language use and practice across the different modules. We have to acknowledge the difficulty of the duty especially because most teachers have these individualistic paradigms and cannot easily conceive of ways to work together and provide support to help one another.

Butnevertheless; teachers need to consistently see that students' language proficiency may be part of their work. This view can help us move behind that oversight in our teaching and, in fact, can stand as one way out of the conflict .We are trying to bring about a persuasive and shared view among teachers to be conscious of the hard work ahead of them, yet it is underestimated and sometimes neglected in the teaching/learning process.Teachers should be allowed the opportunities to develop into a professional learning community that is focused on the improvement of teaching. It cannot be forced to occur but rather structured to take place.

The discussion on the various aspects of teaching and learning English as a foreign language brings us to the conclusion that the learning of English is a must for almost all intellectual people throughout the world. In the meantime, the learners come across some cultural and social obstacles and challenges that should be overcome. Moreover some hurdles make the meaningful instruction sluggish. All these odds can be ridden over by the use of appropriate strategies which include cooperative learning, positive social interaction, language-rich classroom and the incorporation of multicultural literature into the curriculum.

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