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KEY ISSUES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

The elevation of English to the status of an international language has brought with it the reconceptualisation of many traditional issues as well as the emergence of new insights in the language-teaching profession. Teaching is no longer viewed as a self-contained activity that does not need to look much beyond itself. Instead, effective language teaching today is seen both as a pedagogical problem and an organizational one. Here are some of the key issues which influence the way that teachers teach and students learn foreign languages in classrooms nowadays.

The first, certainly a very important issue, is some paradigm shifts which are constantly experienced in second language teaching [2]. Teaching approaches and pedagogical beliefs come and go, others are modified and updated as well as various language teaching methods and approaches ranging from the oldest – Grammar-Translation – to the most current variations of the Communicative Approach such as Task-based Language Teaching, Content-based Instruction, and Content and Language Integrated Learning. Communicative language teaching emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. Thus, the main goal of teaching English as a foreign language today is viewed as the formation of a communicative competence.

Secondly, it should be noted that languages are taught and learned in various places, some in informal settings, others in formal contexts, such as classrooms. It is common knowledge that regardless of the method used, second language learners achieve mastery of the target language to varying degrees. Although 10 individuals may be in the same language class for a year, their eventual proficiency level will be different from one another.

Teaching a foreign language one has to take into consideration the fact that children learn their first language subconsciously with relative ease and little if any stress. When all circumstances are normal, most children learn the basic structures and vocabulary of their first language within the first four years of their life. The language continues to develop through life in sophistication and complexity depending primarily on the child's eventual level of education and use of the language in question [2].

Although people are capable of learning any number of languages during their lifetime, many experience failure to different degrees in the process of learning other languages. Adults often complain that the target language (second/foreign language) is difficult to understand or pronounce. Language learning and teaching requires time, energy and often funds.

Thirdly, there is a highly controversial issue of the balance that teachers should seek between using the target language and the students' first language in the second language classroom. The controversy concerns not so much the value of using the target language since, as there is near consensus that teachers should aim to make maximum use of the target language. It concerns rather the role that the first language can perform. Here opinions differ. Positions range from insistence on total exclusion of the first language, towards varying degrees of recognition that it may provide valuable support for learning.

And the last, but not the least, teachers should embrace the fact that language learning is never a linguistic phenomenon only. It is affected by some sociolinguistic and psychological factors which are all intertwined in unique ways in the case of each learner. The person's prior knowledge, attitudes, personality, learning environment and styles and skills and motivation, to mention a few, are all factors related to the eventual outcome of the language study.

Certainly a good teacher should have professional values, professional development, subject knowledge, understanding of learners and their learning, but also it is crucial for teachers to have some basic socio-affective skills to interact with their students and maintain the educational process effectively. These skills include a

wide range of items such as motivating students, sparing time for students when they ask for help, being enthusiastic for teaching, responding to students' needs and providing a stress-free classroom atmosphere. Teacher should have a sense of humor, be creative, tolerant, patient, kind, open-minded, flexible, optimistic, having positive attitudes toward new ideas [1].

The process of teaching requires lots of practical skills like an ability to communicate effectively. We are usually aware of the importance of good communication skill, but we often forget about the fact that approximately 80-100% of a communication can happen nonverbally. Therefore the material elaborately chosen for lessons must be “accompanied” by proper behavior, gestures, facial expressions in other words a teacher must improve communication skills as well as his/her psychological well-being.

To conclude, language teaching and learning is a complex package of issues. There is no one-size-fits-all prescription to guarantee everyone's success at the same rate. Nevertheless, realizing above mentioned facts will definitely have a positive influence on the eventual outcome of the language study. Clarity of speech, friendly disposition, smiling face, smooth movements can help to develop successful interaction.

REFERENCES

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