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Adopting task-based language teaching in language classes

چکیده

این مقاله به بررسی مفهوم فعالیت (task) و اهمیت آن در آموزش زبان می پردازد. در این راستا، برداشت های متفاوتی درباره ی فعالیت از نقطه نظر ذهنی، تعاملی، ارتباطی و فرهنگی- اجتماعی در آموزش زبان مطرح می شود. بحث های زیربنایی و کاربرد ضمنی هر رویکرد در تدریس و تحقیق زبان، از دیدگاه زبان آموزی و ارتباطی مورد بررسی قرار می گیرد. یافته های تحقیقاتی حاصل از این رویکردها، به دو شکل عمده در تدریس زبان قابل استفاده اند. آگاهی از جنبه های گوناگون فعالیت و تأثیر آن ها در میزان درستی، روان بودن و پیچیدگی زبان می تواند، معلمان و تهیه کنندگان مطالب درسی را در برنامه ریزی درسی کمک کند. هم چنین، آگاهی از بحث های مربوط به جنبه های اجتماعی- فرهنگی فعالیت، معلمان را از این نکته واقف می سازد که برنامه ریزی و انجام فعالیت، مستلزم در نظر گرفتن مسائلی فراتر از درستی، روان بودن و پیچیدگی زبان است. نقش دانش آموز و معلم در حین اجرای فعالیت، دیدگاه آن ها نسبت به فعالیت، و محیط انجام آن، همگی در انجام و یادگیری آن مؤثرند. در پایان، مسائلی مطرح و بحث می شوند که لازم است ارائه کنندگان رویکرد فعالیت محور، برای پذیرش این رویکرد توسط معلمان، آن ها را مدنظر قرار دهند.

کلیدواژه ها: فعالیت، تدریس زبان فعالیت محور، دیدگاه روان شناسی فعالیت، دیدگاه جامعه شناسی، رویکرد ارتباطی.

Abstract

This article starts with the notion of task and its importance in language teaching. Different conceptualizations of tasks have been proposed so far: cognitive, interactional, communicative, and

may not be problematic in schools or for their teachers. However, the problems are inherent in themselves. This characteristic will influence learners' success in language learning and in future life in society. Because teachers are responsible to enhance the future lives of their learners, they should deal with this problem. To help shy students overcome their problem, teachers should design different types of activities and groupings in the classroom. Such students may not experience a great degree of shyness when working with friends in pairs or small groups. This way, they can gain enough courage to participate in class activities and discussions later on. Moreover, if these students know that they will not be corrected for whatever minor mistake they make, this will help them gain enough self-confidence to participate more in class activities.

Conclusion & Implications

Teachers, schools, educational systems, and all the parties involved in language learning have great responsibilities towards learners. Learners are different and bring with themselves different characteristics to the educational system. If the job of the involved parties is to make these learners ready for later life in society, then they should prepare them for it. This is not possible but through helping them reach their full potentials. One of the best ways to achieve this is to take into account learners' affective characteristics and help them overcome their problems. The most crucial affective characteristics in language learning identified in different textbook and mentioned in this paper are motivation, attitude, anxiety, extroversion/introversion, self-esteem, risk-taking, self-confidence, inhibition, and shyness. Unmotivated learners, those with negative attitudes towards second language learning, those who experience great degrees of anxiety, extreme extroverts and introverts, learners who have low self-esteem, those who are not good risk-takers, those

who lack self-confidence, those who experience high inhibition, and those who are very shy will face serious problems in second language learning contexts. The role of teachers is very significant in helping such students overcome their problems. Of course, teachers should be trained to know how to help students who have problems. This is very demanding on the part of all the involved parties, especially the teachers. However, if an educational system really wants to be successful, all these factors should be seriously taken into account.

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is a personal judgment of worthiness, which is expressed in the attitudes that learners hold towards themselves. Self-esteem is believed to be the most important aspect of human behavior which influences self-confidence. Without self-esteem, learners do not believe in themselves and will face many problems in learning a second language.

The best thing teachers can do to enhance the self-esteem of learners with low self-esteem is providing situations for them which will enhance their self-confidence. This is possible by helping a learner to create a good image of him/herself through knowing that he/she is capable of learning another language competently.

6. Risk-taking

The ability to make intelligent guesses is called risk-taking. Risk-taking is an important characteristic of successful language learning. If language learners take the risk of being wrong, they will use the language especially in innovative situations better (Brown, 2001). Learners have to be able to gamble a bit, to be willing to try out their ideas about the language, and take the risk of being wrong.

Here again, the teacher's role is significant in providing situations in the class through which learners can experience risk-taking without being laughed at by the others. Moreover, "the teacher should observe an optimal level of student talk. In fact, high risk-takers who tend to dominate the class with their wild guesses may need to be reoriented by the teacher" (Farhady & Delshad, 2007, p. 222). All these show that a teacher should be very careful in conducting each step in the classroom. He/She should try to set an optimal level of risk-taking, encouraging those who lack risk-taking to take risks more and controlling those who are high risk-takers to be more cautious about their wild guesses.

7. Self-confidence

"Learners' belief that they indeed are fully

capable of accomplishing a task" (Brown, 2001, p. 62) is their self-confidence. The more confident a learner is the better performance he/she will have.

Crozier (1997) also talks about self-confidence and the problems related to lack of it in learning situations. He says that some learners achieve success but attribute it to effort and not to their ability. This shows that these learners lack control on their behavior because they believe they have no control over their achievement. As a matter of fact, these learners have problems with their identity. One of the most important tasks of schools and teachers in this regard is to value learners' identities. Teachers should fight with the idea inherent in the mind of some learners that they are inferior and inadequate. They should help these learners believe that they are capable of doing many things including the difficult task of second language learning. If teachers and schools are not successful in increasing the self-confidence of such students, they will face serious problems when entering the society later in their life.

8. Inhibition

Inhibition refers to a number of defenses one builds around him/herself for protection. Those learners who have a high self-esteem usually experience less inhibition whereas those who have a low self-esteem usually experience more inhibition. Teachers should try their best to create contexts for learning in which the inhibitive barriers are reduced so that learning can occur in a relaxed environment. For example, they can help their students understand that making mistakes is part of second language learning and if they make mistakes, the teacher is present there to help them overcome their problems not to laugh at them (Crozier 1997).

9. Shyness

Shyness and the problems associated with it are explained by Crozier (1997). According to him, shyness is a hidden problem in schools. Shy learners

are called anxiety. Anxiety may be caused by different factors such as learners' competitiveness and can be experienced at various levels. According to Brown (1994), some learners are generally anxious about many things, and some are anxious about some particular events. It is important for a teacher to understand whether a learner's anxiety is general or related to a particular situation at the moment because each of these problems should be treated differently. If a learner is always anxious about everything, he/she may need special consultations on the part of the teacher. The teacher may have to consult with the student's parents to find the source of anxiety so that he/she can help the learner overcome his/her anxiety. This is sometimes possible by private meetings between the teacher, the student, and the parents. If the anxiety is related to a particular situation at the moment, then the teacher's task will be different. He/She should check all the things done to see whether it is possible to change the situation for better use of the anxious student.

Anxiety may be either facilitative or debilitating. Facilitative anxiety helps the process of language learning while debilitating anxiety causes problems in learning a new language (Chastain, 1988). "Facilitative anxiety has a positive effect because it leads to some concern on the part of the language learner to be worried about the task to be accomplished. A good example is language test situations where a little concern and anxiety would make the learner more careful. Debilitating anxiety, however, is destructive and decreases the performance level of the learner. This kind of anxiety is to be removed from language learning contexts". In many cases, examinations cause frustration and anxiety. Crozier (1997) says that anxiety is a real influential factor on performance and therefore to be fair, it should be best tried to offer a range of assessment methods to let learners with different characteristics show their real abilities. In this way,

is some learners feel more anxious with one method, they can compensate for it through the other methods.

4. Extroversion/ Introversion _____

Extrovert people are usually outgoing and aggressive. Their thoughts are usually centered on others and are directed outward. They usually tend to take a trial-and-error approach to acquire new experiences and to participate actively in class. Therefore, they can communicate much better. On the other hand, introvert people are usually shy, self-centered, inwardly directed, and they spend time reflecting on new experiences.

Each type has its own advantages and disadvantages in terms of language learning (Brown, 1994). Possible weaknesses may be that introverts may avoid others, may lose opportunities to act, dislike being interrupted, and do not perform well in social situations. They usually work independently, are reflective, avoid generalizations, and are careful before acting. Extrovert people, on the other hand, are attuned to the culture, people, and things around them and are interested in variety and group work, but they may become impatient with long tasks.

A good teacher should try to balance those on the extreme. This can be done by private meetings between teachers and learners. Teachers can provide some guidelines and activities to extreme extroverts and introverts so that they can get advantage of the characteristics of the other group because each group has its own advantages in language learning.

5. Self-esteem _____

One of the other important affective characteristics is self-esteem. How one evaluates him/herself and how a person thinks of him/herself as being capable, significant, successful, and worthy is called self-esteem (Williams, & Burden, 1997). It

integrative. Instrumental motivation refers to motivation to acquire a language as means of attaining instrumental goals such as finding a job, reading technical materials, translation, etc., while an integrative motivation refers to motivation when learners wish to integrate themselves within the culture of the second language group. Each of these types can be greatly influential in motivating the students. However, if teachers try to combine these two motivations, its positive effect will be much higher. Teachers can highlight the instrumental goals for their students by focusing on the opportunities they may gain in their future life by knowing another language. Further, they can explain the foreign culture to their students and let them know that there are different ways of living and thinking which might be different from their native culture. They should pinpoint that these are just differences among cultures, and it is not the matter of superiority or inferiority of any particular culture. This way, students may get interested in learning about the target culture. To know more about that particular culture, they need to know their language better (Harmer, 2001).

Crozier (1997) also talks about the important role motivation plays in education. Based on the degree of motivation, he classifies learners into three groups of under-achievers, optimum-achievers, and over-achievers. The main problem is with under-achievers who believe that they have little control over their ability to succeed. The associations between learners' beliefs about the amount of their effort and their achievement are very crucial in this regard.

Schools and teachers can have significant influences on the success of unmotivated or less motivated learners. They can set up programs of rewards and punishments in a way that under-achievers are encouraged to learn and they feel the impression that they are learning. Another way is to provide activities related to the needs of the learners. This is possible by using different types of activities for different learners. The third way is providing

interesting lessons. Different learners have different interests. That is why different range of topics should be covered in different lessons. Moreover, teachers should provide scaffolding to their learners. They can help their students overcome their problems in the difficult parts of each lesson. In this way, the idea in the minds of some students that they are not able to learn will be solved to a great extent. Then, unmotivated students who felt they couldn't learn anything will change into motivated ones who can learn everything by the help of their teachers.

2. Attitude

The next important affective characteristics closely linked to motivation is attitude. Attitude refers to one's likes and dislikes. Language learners have different attitudes about second language learning. Some of these attitudes may be positive, which will enhance their language learning process, and some may be negative, which will inhibit their language learning process (Brown, 1994; Harmer, 2001).

Teachers should be very concerned about those learners who have negative attitudes towards second language learning. Teachers can overcome this problem by helping their students' learning processes. If such learners can overcome their learning difficulties, it is quite natural that their attitudes will change into positive. "Negative attitude can be changed through orientation and instruction. One reason for the development of negative attitude is often misunderstanding or misconceptions about a phenomenon. Teachers should be conscious of the potential negative attitude in the students and try to understand the source of misunderstanding. Sometimes, an understanding of the target culture is helpful because cultural and social distances are two factors contributing to the formation of negative attitude" (Farhady & Delshad, 2007, pp. 219-220).

3. Anxiety

Feelings of uncertainty, insecurity, and self-doubt

educators, and teachers. Therefore, the affective characteristics should be treated more appropriately. To this end, some of the crucial affective characteristics including motivation, attitude, anxiety, extroversion/introversion, self-esteem, risk-taking, self-confidence, inhibition, and shyness which are explained in details, besides the implications of their importance for teachers job is very demanding in identifying problems associated with any of these characteristics and helping learners overcome those problems. Some of the strategies teachers can do to help their students are having private meetings with students and their parents, creating a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom, using different types of activities and grouping in the classroom, and not correcting all the mistakes students make.

Key Words: affective characteristics, motivation, attitude, anxiety, extroversion/ introversion, self-esteem, risk-taking, self-confidence, inhibition, shyness

Introduction

Affective characteristics are gaining more attention in educational settings because of the shift of emphasis from teaching to learning and the value given to learners and their affective characteristics. The current emphasis in educational settings is now on the effectiveness of schools to tackle learners' affective characteristics. Some of the most crucial affective characteristics most writers emphasize on are motivation, attitude, anxiety, extroversion/introversion, self-esteem, risk-taking, self-confidence, inhibition, and shyness. These characteristics are of great interest to educationalists, curriculum developers, and teachers. Chastain (1988) believes that learner characteristics in general and their affective characteristics in particular are some of the most influential characteristics that affect the development of second language skills. In addition, Crozier (1997) states that people learn differently based on their different characteristics. Healso says that five important personality traits, namely, aggressiveness, anxiety, motivation, self-confidence, and shyness, affect learners' learning in one way or another.

1. Motivation

Motivation is an inner drive, emotion, or desire that moves one to learn something (Brown, 1994,

2001; Farhady & Delshad, 2007; Mirhassani 2003, Samuels, 1984; Williams, & Burden, 1997). Motivation is believed to be the most important factor in the success or failure of learning, in general, and language learning, in particular. It seems that motivated learners are ready to learn the new language quite easier than other learners are.

Gardner (1985) classifies motivation at two levels of goal motivation and core motivation. Goal level motivation includes the learner's core motivation, the learner's orientation to language learning, and the learner's attitudes towards the learning situation. Core level motivation includes the attitudes towards learning a language (affect), the desire to learn the language (want), and motivational intensity (effort). A highly motivated learner will want to learn the language, enjoy learning the language, and strive to learn the language. In this regard, teachers should provide opportunities for their students through which they enjoy the language learning task. This is possible by creating interesting situations in the classroom and letting the students know that new horizons will be opened for them if they can communicate effectively in the new language.

Motivation can be either instrumental or