Teachers' Practice of Affective Strategies in Teaching Foreign Language Oral Tasks

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Abstract:

The aim of this study is to explore teachers' practice of affective strategies in teaching foreign language oral tasks. We started with the conviction that "to be affective, the teacher must be effective" and have certain qualities which are classified by most research in literature into four types: personal attributes, classroom management, implementing instruction and monitoring learners' success. The participants are fifteen Oral expression teachers from three Algeria universities. The study is conducted through classroom observation. The Results reveal that problems are not related to the teacher as person but those qualities related to pedagogy; along recorded observation, there was a reflection of gap in teacher education and training which is represented in the lack of clear objectives, planning, variation, appropriate feedback and monitoring which are all essential for an effective teaching to take place. Therefore, recommendations should be made at two levels: teachers' education and training and improving classroom conditions in the Algerian university.

الملخّـــــص:

تهدف الدراسة الى الاطلاع على ممارسة الاستاذ لاستراتيجيات التأثير في تدريس التطبيقات الكلامية للغة. انطلقنا من قناعة لكي يكون الاستاذ مؤثرا يجب ان يكون فعالا ويكون لديه بعض الخصائص والتي تم تصنيفها من طرف المتخصصين الي صفات شخصيه تسيير ألقسم تطبيق الدروس ومراقبة النجاح والتقدم. في هده ألدراسة تقم تقسيم الاستراتيجيات الي ثلاث مستويات مستوى أللغة المتعلم ومحيط التعلم. لكي يكون الاستاذ مؤثرا ويحصل على نتائج جيدة يجب ان تكون لديه صفات معينة في المستويات الثلاث. تمت الدراسة مع 15 استاذ لمادة التعبير الشفهي في ثلاث جامعات جزائرية باستعمال الملاحظة. اكدت النتائج بان المشاكل لا تتعلق بالصفات الشخصية للأستاذ بل الصفات المتعلقة بالتخطيط والأهداف مما يعكس فجوة في تعليم الاستاذ وتدريبه. لهدا الاصلاحات يجب ان تكون على مستويين: مستوى تدريب الاستاذة ومستوى تحسين ظروف التعليم في الجامعة الجزائرية

Introduction

The core of effective teaching is an affective teacher. To be an affective teacher, one has to be effective at the different levels of the teaching/learning process: personal attributes, classroom management and organization, implementing instruction and monitoring learners' success which can be reflected in teachers' practice of certain strategies. In this paper, we are going to discuss teachers' practice of all these strategies at three levels: the language level, the learner level and the learning situation level; thus there would be a discussion of some of the problems teachers and learners may encounter and some suggestions and tips to overcome them.

1. Rationale for the Observation

One of the leaders of classroom observation Danielson (2012: 32-37) explains that in the following words: "classroom observation can foster teacher learning-if observation systems include crucial components and observers know what to look for". Therefore, it might give a chance to compare teachers' beliefs to their practice and infer problems from the context as well as explore conditions and problems that may hinder the work of any teacher. Teacher observation is effective if done within norms. It plays a great role to in teacher development; Danielson (2010: 35-39) summarized its benefits in these points: to ensure teachers' quality, to promote professional development and finding time for professional conversations.

The classroom observation is based on two standards: characteristics of modern classrooms and 21st century skills. Classroom environment encompasses a broad range of educational concepts, including the physical setting, the psychological environment created through social contexts, and numerous instructional components related to teacher characteristics and behaviours. A classroom should be made like a place where students get the urge to grow and develop themselves professionally and mentally. In this section, a focus is made on characteristics that may affect students in foreign language oral tasks though all classroom components can influence in one way or other. Before discussing the aspects stressed in the study, here is a summary of some studies that shed the light on characteristics of good language classrooms in a modern communicative teaching/learning practice. **Saxena (2013)** made a comparison between a traditional and a modern classroom saying that the educational practices of the traditional classroom are

no longer effective and teachers must develop new teaching strategies that are radically different from those employed in the traditional classrooms. The modern day classroom should be more cantered on students and teachers should take the role of facilitators and guides instead of being mere providers of knowledge.

Many studies in literature identified some basic features of a modern or 21st century classroom such as those by **Saxena, Heik (2014), Kelly, Thompson and Meer**. They tackled different issues related to different dimension of the learning/teaching process but each study stressed some aspects on behalf of others. It is noticed that all features are centred on four criteria or domains which are the student, learning, the classroom and assessment. As far as students are concerned, all studies stress the importance of engaging students in every activity that takes place in the learning process. Thus, students should be trained to be actively involved and responsible. Self-directed learners will not only encourage each other but also help their teacher to achieve goals. If students are given opportunity and are invited to participate in every activity, they can feel self esteem and self confidence which are keys to motivation and success.

The second dimension emphasized in the previously mentioned studies is the type of learning. In a modern classroom, learning should be given new features; learning should be active and adaptive. Students participate in more active learning by working in groups or on computers and complete projects and other interesting activities that help them discover new skills. When students are encouraged to take an active interest in learning, they are more likely to retain the knowledge they have accumulated (Saxena). The modern approach of adaptive learning gives students the freedom to learn at their own pace and in the way they are most comfortable with because any classroom will always have students of different types of learning abilities in it which often makes it difficult for teachers to make sure that all of them understand the concepts. For learning to be active and adaptive, it should be also collaborative as collaboration and cooperation enhance students' critical thinking and give opportunity to use social/affective strategies which are essential for communication.

The third dimension is the classroom environment. All discussions in literature related to that stress the importance of creating the basic motivational conditions to make the classroom invitational. To achieve that, the classroom should not be crowded and

cramped which is the case in many of Algerian universities and the University of Biskra is a good example of that. An invitational classroom should at least have basic materials required for teaching such as interactive whiteboards and LCD projectors which is not the case of classrooms observed in the study. Teachers can use some classroom management if the number of students does not exceed their ability. They should be taught to each other's contributions to the class as well as resolving conflicts which is called by Thompson "a general sense of togetherness and steadfast courtesy"**.** The last dimension identified by those researchers is assessment where they all focus on performance assessment which is persistent, authentic, transparent and never punitive. When evaluating students, rubrics should be discussed with them clearly including success criteria and norms. Teachers should also enhance self evaluation as a metacognitive strategy and encourage peer assessment as an essential part of the whole process.

Concerning 21st century skills for the language classroom, different taxonomies emerged in the field of education. . 21st century skills are defined in different ways but the education reform group give a common and broad definition: "The term **21st century skills** refers to a broad set of knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits that are believed to be critically important to success in today's world, particularly in collegiate programs and contemporary careers and workplaces". These words imply the importance of those skills in life and the classroom is a particular corner of it. Among studies that discussed those skills, Trilling and Fadel (2009), Piirto (2011), Griffin and Care (2015). These books share common framework which is based on four characteristics: creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration. So, teachers need to shift their thinking from the traditional idea that language learners need only language skills and competencies; rather, they need: learning skills (Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking, Collaborating, and Communicating), literacy skills (Information Literacy, Media Literacy, Technology Literacy) and life skills (Flexibility, Initiative, Social Skills, Productivity, Leadership). However, in our observation, we could not cover all of those skills but we focused on skills related to learners' motivation and task performance.

2. Research Methodology

The method used for this study is descriptive using observation as a tool. The essential reason to conduct observation is to

be able to study events and behaviours within their natural context and as they unfold and to discover new behaviours or attitudes which are not expected and cannot be explored through other research tools. Classroom observation was conducted using video recording with absence of researcher believing that would reduce participants worry and researcher's subjectivity. Unfortunately, as known about observation limitation as a tool, the majority of participants refused to be observed in any way. Only 15 participants, which represents 50% of the sample responded to our request but only for one session of Oral Expression which was not really reliable neither valid. Five Teachers accepted to be observed but not recorded. So, the total was 50% of the sample dealt with in this study.

To analyse the data obtained from the observation an observation grid is used which designed based on different frameworks of motivational strategies as well as well as classroom observation forms such as: Motivational Orientation of Language Teaching (MOLT) Observation Scheme by Guilloteaux and Dörnyei 2009, the framework for teaching evaluation instrument, 2013 by Danielson and teacher evaluation rubrics by Marshall 2009.

The observation grid or form was designed to fit research questions and hypothesis. Therefore, the criteria were selected based on Dornyei's framework of motivational strategies (2001)which are the language level, the learner level and the learning situation level including teachers' specific, course specific (here Tasks are emphasised) and classroom specific. In Dornyei's model, the levels are related to both teachers and learners, but in this grid the focus is only on the teachers' attitude toward these aspects or components of the language learning process with four scales (so not used for same purpose and with same indicators and strategies).

The language level is devoted to explore teachers' use of language in the Algerian context, the main language model or speaker is the teacher; so, if teachers do not control their pronunciation and use of language that would be an obstacle to perform well in Oral Expression course and tasks either by getting bored or following the wrong model. At the learner level, the intention is not to explore learners' motivation or attitudes and behaviours but the teachers' behaviour and attitudes as the latter is the core of the study and the research aim. One cannot decide about teachers' attitudes in one session but some indicators were used to reveal the answers. At the

learning situation level, three dimensions were focused on. The first dimension is the teacher specific which encloses teachers' enthusiasm and motivation that reflect his/her dedication to teaching. The second dimension is course-specific; this aspect embodies task objectives, task planning, and task clarity and task variety. The last dimension is classroom-specific, which is the atmosphere which plays an essential role to set the basic motivational conditions for any learning to take place.

3. Discussion of Results

This section is devoted to discuss the results of the recorded data; results are classified into three categories.

3.1. The Language Level

Results show that the observed teachers' language is simple and clear in what indicates that teachers in the Algerian university do not encounter a problem of language and the majority of them are good despite the lack of training and the authentic context.

When language used is accurate, teachers could be good models for their students especially in modules that involve speaking. language accuracy normally comprise the three competencies grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, here, four participants were excellent in terms of the three of them where as 4 were good showing mastery of strategic competence using compensation and communicative strategies when they face a language problem especially in vocabulary and pronunciation. Language consistency is very important element in the language classroom and the curriculum in itself; however, many teachers do not control that and use variety of accents ranging from American to British and sometimes using different patterns which are neither American nor British. When they are asked, the majority say we follow the RP.

3.2. The learner level

At this level, the study is not concerned with learners' attitudes or behaviour rather with teachers' attitudes towards learners including**:** teachers' Caring**,** teachers' fairness and respect and interaction with learners. The psychological side of the teacher is very important and for some students it is more essential than the learning purpose or task itself. Teachers' caring is a prerequisite in any learning activity but more called for in an Oral Expression courses and tasks as they demand much contact with learners. Teachers' caring can be shown through calling names, listening to students, being available when called by students or asked questions and the results of the

observation reveal that only 4 teachers were passive and we cannot say are not caring because it could be due to their moral state that day or because of other circumstances. All others confirmed that they are caring and interested in their students. Teachers' respect and fairness were clear in the way participants behaved with their students and the way the perceive students' behaviour. It was also clear in opportunities given to students to participate or perform during tasks. The majority of participants seemed to give equal chances to students during tasks only those teachers, who deal with free discussion activities, usually work with a few students who participate and interact in any step during the task.

As far as Interaction and Communication with students are concerned, as roles for the teacher in the modern language classroom change; all roles call for a communicating and energetic teacher. According to the international encyclopaedia of communication (2008), there are two student–teacher interactions, both in and out of the classroom, is influenced strongly by the teaching perspective embraced by the teacher. Within the instructional communication discipline, teaching can be viewed from two perspectives: the rhetorical perspective and the relational perspective. Teachers whose student–teacher interaction is governed by the rhetorical perspective communicate with their students as a means to influence or persuade them.. To communicate effectively with their students, teachers focus on teaching clearly, making course content relevant, and acting in an assertive manner. In essence, their in-class communication behaviours centre on performing their classroom functions as lecturer and discussion leader and managing the classroom. Conversely, teachers whose student–teacher interaction is governed by the relational perspective communicate with their students as a means of developing a relationship. Communication is mutually created and shared between students and teachers, with an emphasis on the role of shared emotions and feelings used by students and teachers to respond both affectively and effectively to each other.

Communication not only turn taking; it can be in many forms such as checking understanding, appeal for help, message confirmation and negotiation of meaning. To achieve that, less teachers' talk is needed, unfortunately the observed teachers showed great deal of communication but there was always exaggeration in

their talk and explanation on behalf of students' talk. The six participants who showed fair interaction kept either talking alone or exchanging knowledge and talk with a few students while other students were totally passive. Teachers need to be aware that interaction is an elicitation of willing student participation and initiative which requires a high degree of interpersonal communication skills. Interaction is the exchange of information between the teacher and the students or among the students. Whatever its form is quiet or nosy, dynamic and alert, in large or small classes, it makes students deeply involved in activities that draw on their creativity.(Jeyasala 2014:165). So, teachers should demonstrate these qualities to learners to help them overcome their inhibitions and fear of embarrassment which would be a good chance of practice for learners. Teachers should also bear in mind the fact that in an interactive classroom, comprehension and production retrieve their normal relationship as an interactive duo. To achieve this Rivers (1985) says:'' we need an ambiance and relations among individuals that promote a desire for interaction. Thus, teacher needs to remember that interaction can be two-way, three-way, four-way, but never one way when they dominate the classroom.

            Concerning engaging students in tasks, during observation session, teachers who were dealing with variety of tasks succeeded in involving all students though different tasks using different group dynamics where as those who use only teachers' talk or free discussion kept working with a few students where as others do not show any effort.   Further**,** despite some of the positive aspects mentioned in previous items, teachers' control and monitoring was like absent. When dealing with group or pair work, the majority of teachers were not controlling students' work or progress and they did not give feedback at the end.

3.3. The Learning Situation Level

        The learning situation level encompasses strategies related to three aspects: the teacher, the course and the learning setting.

3.3.1. Teacher Specific

            Teachers' attitudes towards learners are explained in the previous section; so, we focused only on the teacher as a person through exploring his/her motivation and enthusiasm Teachers, who are not motivated, never expect their students to be motivated. So, teachers need to show their enthusiasm explicitly; they can talk about their love of the subject, their love to their students and their

dedication to teaching. The more the teacher is enthusiastic, the more students get influenced by him or her and see them as models even their teaching practice is not really satisfactory or good enough. 46.7 of participants looked like bored and not interested as if the job or the module is imposed upon them. Teachers' interaction and communication are much related to their motivation; someone who is not motivated can never achieve what he/she is there for and cannot promote communication and interaction as both demand inner motive and feelings

3.3.2. Course Specific (task)

As far as the course is concerned, here the focus is not on the course but only a specific part of it which is the task and all aspects related to task teaching and planning. In any learning process, communicating objectives is essential. It is not sufficient to set objectives for one's own rather express them correctly and share them with students. So, students must know and understand precisely what is expected from them. Research in the field of education is rich with explanation, discussions and criteria on how to set objectives and make them work. All researchers emphasize the importance of following the SMART objectives model assuming that an objective that follows SMART is more likely to succeed because it is clear (specific) so it known exactly what needs to be achieved. One can tell when it has been achieved (measurable) because there is a way to measure completion. A SMART objective is likely to happen because it is an event that is achievable. Before setting a SMART objective relevant factors such as resources and time were taken into account to ensure that it is realistic. Finally the timescale element provides a deadline which helps learners and teachers focus on the tasks required to achieve the objective. The timescale element stops them postponing task completion. Unfortunately, during observation sessions no one was aware of that and all participants did not explain objectives clearly and those who explained instructions did not really give clear explanations of specific objectives for tasks (See also Robert J Marzano, Debra.J. Pickering, Jane.E. Pollock 2001, Jane D Hill and Kathleen M Flynn 2006)

Nowadays, many teachers and educators have shifted their thinking to another model found by Josette le Blanc which is called SMILE. The model is defined as: (Simplify, Measure, Integrate, Lean and Let Go, Enjoy). The uniqueness in this model that makes it different from the SMART one lies in two aspects. The first is "Lean

in and let go" indicating the importance of reflection after articulating objectives. LeBlanc classified the stages into two: objectives creation and actualization and she recommend reflecting, rethinking and revising objectives. The second special aspect is the fact of enjoying the final result of achievement. She invites teachers to enjoy and share that with their students through praise, celebrating or whatever they may do to motivate themselves to work and achieve more. So, here, as teachers, we should not think only about the task but also task accomplishment and enjoyment and how to protect motivation after the task achievement.

After deciding about objectives and articulating them correctly, some task components should be emphasised and given attention mainly those within the task itself such as: task planning, task variation and task clarity. Staring by task planning, same can be said about this aspect where all participants did not discuss planning of any task. Tasks were given and prepared in a random way. 66.7% showed poor perception of that while 33.3 gave general instruction about the task without any reference to task steps or time which is devoted to each step. Further, concerning task variation**,** the results shows that only 20% of participants seemed to vary tasks during the one observed session where as others spent the whole session 1h130 in one activity which is very boring in case the task is not chunked into smaller parts or activities. Finally, task clarity**;** there are five key behaviours which are considered essential for effective teaching. These key behaviours are: lesson clarity, instructional variety, teacher task orientation, and engagement in the learning process and student success rate (Borich, 2010; Scheuerman, 2013). As far as task clarity is concerned, 86.7% were positive but not in task planning as mentioned before but about task content.

Further, task success is related to some other aspects such as types of skills, teacher orientation, expectations and content**.** The results indicate that teachers' emphasis is directed only to tasks of speaking where as receptive skills are neglected. 60% of participants show no integration of other skills whereas 26.7% gave little focus on reading some pieces of work associated with speaking activities where the aim was to achieve speaking not reading. Many teachers and students when asked about Oral expression, they start talking about speaking without any reference to other skills and competencies. In fact, producing language in orally involves a language reservoir which is normally gained from receptive skills which form the base of the

communicative language pyramid. Teacher task orientation refers to **the knowledge of planning and delivering instruction and of evaluating learning.** The extent and quality of the professional preparation teachers receive will influence both the quality and the style of their teaching. The more knowledge teachers have of planning and delivering instruction and of evaluating learning, the better their students learn. Instructors without sufficient pedagogical or teaching knowledge are forced to teach by instinct and are doomed to trial-and-error approaches. Teacher task orientation is a behaviour that refers to the classroom time a teacher devotes to teaching an academic subject. Borich (2010:10) states, "The more time allocated to teaching a specific topic, the greater the opportunity students have to learn"

The majority of participants show poor appraisal of task orientation and did not pay any attention to planning and time management of tasks. That obviously is due to the lack of clear objectives from the beginning of the task or course. Dynneson (2009) explains the importance of task orientation in the following words: Task orientation is an important aspect of Effective Teaching because it relates to how much time the teacher actually spends on a designated instructional task. As a rule, the more uninterrupted minutes spent concentrating on a learning task, the higher possibility of learning success. In other words, students are most likely to learn through their focus on the task. Staying on task requires that the teacher plan for an uninterrupted period of time in which the focus on instruction becomes intensive. Task orientation is not a simple matter and it relies on many factors. Task orientation must appeal to the students. The first step in task orientation is to capture the attention of students. The second step in task orientation is to keep students' attention and to heighten their interest in the task. Once this is accomplished, natural inclinations of human behaviour will drive the lesson to a successful conclusion. Therefore, it is essential from a teacher to ask him/herself these questions: How much time do I spend lecturing, asking questions, and encouraging students to inquire or think independently? How much time do I spend organizing for teaching and getting my students ready to learn? And, How much time do I spend assessing my learner's performance? And here we always go back to SMART objectives; if smart objectives set at beginning of each task, all these questions would be answered and problems of planning and time management would be solved.

In recent years, teachers became very pessimistic about the situation because of varied factors at the Algerian University. Among the main raisons is the number of students oriented to departments of English and their language level. Only 26.7% expressed their expectations clearly whereas the remaining were neutral and confused in which they seemed not sure about students' achievement and work on the task. Many studies in the literature proved that teachers' expectations influence to high degree students' achievements and school effectiveness but also their expectations are affected by school policy and students' level.

Finally to get the results and outcomes expected, two aspects are needed for any task to be successful: task monitoring and feedback. As mentioned before, monitoring is one of the metacognitive strategies teachers' can use to guarantee success or task achievement. Monitoring plays a great role in reducing students' anxiety and gives the teacher the opportunity to hear how the students are coping with the activity and to make notes about pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar points that are causing difficulty as well as being acquainted with their needs During observation, only a few of them were controlling and monitoring students and that due to many hindering factors such as the type of the classroom, classroom patters and the number of students per class. For example, at the branch of English at Mohamed Khider University, number of students reached 50 to 60 per group where sometimes no space between tables and there is no way to arrange different sitting patterns or organize group work. Though 66.7% of participants were passive concerning that, they cannot be blamed for because of the status of English class at the Algerian University.

As far as feedback is concerned, first, we need to have deep insight into feedback and how to deal with it. It is defined by Hattie and Timperley (2007:81) as: "As information given by an agent regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding. Sadler (2010: 536), emphasizes that feedback should help the students understand more about the learning goal, their own achievement status in relation to that goal, and ways to bridge the gap between their current status and the desired status. The key to "moving learning forward" is for feedback to provoke thinking. Feedback that provokes thinking needs to offer hints and suggestions rather than complete solutions (Didau 2014). Further, **Sadler (2010: 537)** contends that "regardless of levels of motivation to learn, students cannot convert

feedback statements into actions for improvement without sufficient working knowledge of some fundamental concepts." So, for a constructive feedback to take place, teachers should be aware of conditions and strategies mentioned in literature which are: timing, amount, mode, audience; choosing feedback content: focus, comparison, function, valence. Here, we will not discuss all these points but only focus to know what types of feedback teachers can give Hattie and Timperley (2007) distinguish four levels of feedback: Feedback about the task, about the processing of the task, about self-regulation and about the self as a person. Unfortunately, during the observed sessions, all of those aspects were not given attention only through some remarks orally to correct pronunciation or syntactic structures which is not the aim of a foreign language task.

3.4. Classroom specific

The learning setting is represented by four main elements: organization, group dynamics, discipline and materials. The majority of classrooms were not organized and one cannot blame teachers for that because of the number of students per class and the type of classrooms. For instance, classrooms of Biskra University were established for classes of maximum 30 students while now the minimum is 30 to reach even 60 per class. With some classes, it is impossible to arrange group work, round tables or find space to control students during tasks. Concerning **time management,** as shown in previous discussions, time management, teacher's task orientation and objectives are all related and the absence of one absolutely would lead to a deficiency in the others. If as said before, objectives are not well elaborated and decisions are not set in the task planning stage, time management will not take place.

Despite the challenging nature of classrooms and the number of students, the majority of teachers were trying to vary group dynamics and base their tasks on group work and pair work. The atmosphere Biskra and Constantine Universities were not really motivating and instructions and making organizing groups was really a hard job to deal with. In a class of 40 students, it is time and energy consuming if you arrange groups of 4 to 5 students and it would have no meaning if you divide them into 4 or 5 groups of ten students per group. Thus, there is no compromise to be followed. The majority of teachers showed great deal in the discipline of students. All observed teachers' behaviour and attitude towards unexpected and annoying

behaviours were positive and intelligent. This indicates that the personal qualities of teachers are positive. During observed session, no one of participants used materials though it is known that a variety of materials are used by teachers though personal effort to provide some materials even time and circumstances are not encouraging them to do so.

4. Conclusion

Classroom observation allowed to explore the neglected part of Oral expression teaching in general and tasks in particular. All problems are related to two main issues. The first issue is teacher education and training which was clear in the absence of clear objectives, planning, task types, variation and task orientation. The second issue is related to University policy and Algerian universities circumstances such as number of students per class, lack of materials and luck of pre- service and in- service training. To solve these issues, a decision should be made at higher levels to train teachers to be effective; then thinking about having affective teachers.

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