

Implementing Efficiency within foreign language teaching

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Abstract :

The concept of efficiency has shifted from the scientific, economic and financial domains to education. Basically into the field of foreign language teaching, in terms of exploiting all possible resources at hand to save time and energy, and obtain maximum, successful results in teaching and learning foreign languages. Consequently the role of a foreign language teacher has become more and more complex and sophisticated.

Nowadays we view teaching and learning foreign languages under the angle of efficiency. The “how much” of everything, because FLT is much more than listing vocabulary items and setting grammar rules. Language learning is not also a matter acquiring a system of linguistic formulas.

Teachers should be aware that they must be well versed in the broad background knowledge of the learners’ social environment that influences their students. Different pedagogical teaching; social and cultural aspects of the language being taught, relevant techniques to decode psychological characteristics of the learners.

In efficiency language teaching is rather centred on variables than methods.

المُلخَص :

لقد انتقل مفهوم الفعالية من الميادين العلمية و الاقتصادية و المالية الى التربية و تحديدا في مجال تعليم اللغات الاجنبية، خاصة في استغلال كل الوسائل الممكنة و المتاحة لاقتصاد الوقت و الجهد. فالحصول على أكبر نسبة من النتائج الايجابية في تدريس و تعليم اللغات الاجنبية و بالتالي اصبح دور معلم اللغات الاجنبية تدريجيا معقدا و دقيقا.

و في يومنا هذا نعتبر تدريس و تعليم اللغات الاجنبية تحت زاوية الفعالية و نعني بها اعتبار و تقييم كل صغيرة و كبيرة تخص المتعلم و المعام في ان واحد. لان تعليم اللغات الاجنبية ليس حصر المفردات و القواعد اللغوية و تعلم اللغة ايضا ليس انشاء نظريات لسانية. و يجب على الاساتذة ان يكونوا على دراية و وعي بكل المعلومات المتعلقة بالمتعلم بما فيها المحيط الاجتماعي الذي يؤثر على المتعلمين و مختلف طرق التدريس البيداغوجية و الجانب الثقافي و الاجتماعي للغة التي يتم تدريسها و التعرف على المميزات اللغوية التي تساعد على الالهام بنفسية المتعلم . و الفعالية في تدريس اللغة تتمركز اكثر على المتغيرات منه على طرق التدريس.

Introduction:

How do we do to make our language teaching better?

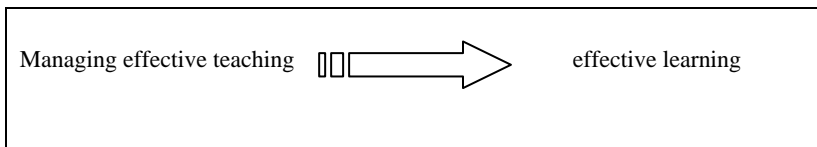
The most evident answer is to “improve” our method of work by studying, practising keeping up with the literature on the subject. But it is not as simple as that. Teaching does not just involve the relationship we have with students. As professionals, we are also asked to perform all the tasks related to teaching (Harmer 2007). Teaching is not also a matter of transmitting knowledge to learners through usual channels and formal environment. Conditions of becoming an effective teacher lay in the accumulation and combination of having knowledge (science) and having the ability to transmit this knowledge (art) via various mechanisms such as teaching methods, syllabus, visual aids and various skills. These mechanisms are necessary but not sufficient to perform an improved teaching. The study and use of “accredited” learning method does not bring about effective teaching and learning unless subordinated to the principles of “efficiency”: That is the attainment of the maximum profit (in terms of achieved learner proficiency) for the minimum cost (in terms of the teacher’s and learners’ time and effort). The term “efficiency” has shifted from economics, finance trade, business and services to language teaching.

Definition of the concept:

When we open the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary to check the meaning of the term efficiency we find that it’s defined as follows:

- * It’s the quality of doing something well with no waste of time or money.
- * Ways of wasting less time and money.
- * Ways of saving time and money.
- * The relationship between the amount of energy that goes into a machine or an engine and the amount that it produces.
- * Doing something well and thorough with no waste of time, energy or money
- * To exploit with rationality to get maximum profit with maximum cost.
- * To exploit all the existing means at hand to obtain maximum good results. (p. 422).

Efficiency is a kind of “contract of performance” to achieve the best possible results in terms of teaching and learning out put. Today’s language teacher must manipulate more information in several different areas of knowledge. The problem lies not only in the amount of information to be mastered, but in the organisation and application of that knowledge to a practical situation. Efficiency puts a language teacher in the centre of an “a successful operation”. In other words the teacher must achieve efficiency in teaching ,to consider his occupation not as a job but as a duty.

**Methodology:**

Among the variables that contribute to a class’s success in learning a language, the method used may be one of the least significant. Takeushi (2003) gives one set of such variables which he divided into learner, instructional and sociocultural factors.

- 1- learner’s factors: include such thing as linguistic ability, intelligence, and motivation
- 2- instructional factors: include the frequency, length and distribution of lectures the number of students in the class, the teacher’s knowledge and personality, expected cross-linguistic interference from the previous acquired languages, available teaching aid’s and strategy.
- 3- Sociocultural factors include: language attitudes, status of the target language itself, language loyalty, ethnocentrism and anomie.

Only aids and strategy bear any relation to methodology, it is all the others that mainly determine the success or failure of a lecture. Method then, seems relatively not important.

The above conclusions are borne out by studies that have found a definite relation between foreign language learning and such factors as motivation (Anderson 1991) or language aptitude (Schram and Oxford 2007); but little or none between achievement and method. As Takeushi (2003) says “Numerous studies in the last twenty-five years or so have attempted to resolve the issue of effectiveness of

various methods of foreign language teaching, none of which has been adequate enough to permit any definitive conclusion.”p10

If method were a significant variable in foreign language instruction we should expect comparative studies of different methods such as Zimmerman, Schiver , Kovac. (1996) experiment to yield more or less unequivocal results. As it is we must conclude that the choice of method has relatively little effect.

Where does that leave us? Does it really not matter the methods we use? Of course it matters. But not because one method is intrinsically better than another. Or a good method makes good teacher and learners, or because right choice of teaching strategy will make a drastic difference in learner achievement. It matters that first of all because even the apparently small differences that the right choice makes insignificant. In terms of our results, selecting a more effective strategy will not remove a class of failures into a class of brilliant overachievers, but it may shift them up a point or two, which especially for the marginal ones may make all the difference.

It matters, secondly because small as it is; it is the only variable over which we the teachers have control. All the others are beyond us, out of our reach:

There is not much we can do about slow learner an overcrowded classroom or prejudice against the language we teach. But we can adapt our teaching method to the setting in such a way that within the conditions imposed on us, we can reach our goals with maximum efficiency.

a/Diversity, selection and crisis:

Today the students and beginning teachers are confused by a multiple of “recommended approaches to language teaching” each carrying its battery of classroom techniques and recommendations: the grammar-translation method with its list of translated vocabulary and complex grammatical rules and exceptions. The audio-lingual method with its drills and choral-work, cognitive code-learning with its inductive and deductive exercises the functional-national dialogues and communication games. The learning by doing, the competence-tasks based approach the teaching objectives method to name but a few. This large spectrum of methods and the rich choice of accompanying materials is not in

itself a bad thing. Teaching methods are drawn from teaching experiments and teaching experiences (Harris and Snow 2004).

What is bad is the fact that one method is supported at the expense of another. Arguments are too often polemic. "His method is wrong and detrimental mine is good because it corrects all his mistakes." The teacher is left with implied conclusion that there is a "right" and a "wrong" method; and by a dangerous consequence he is led to feel that he is using a "wrong" method, he must be a bad teacher. How many of us felt guilty about using a tactic of translation in our lessons?

Some comforting books and articles have discussed this problem (Richards and Rodgers 2001 Lewis 1993, Harmer2003, Hedge 2000.)

All reassuring us that we are not alone in our confusion and that the choice is ours. But they give no real answer to such question as "how do I choose" or "how far may I be eclectic?"

This brings us back to the question asked at the beginning of this article to which books and articles on methodology give no clear-cut answer and may even be misleading. They give us an inflated idea of the importance of method in the teaching-learning process, they inculcate in us the notion that there are methods that are "better" or "worse", they belittle our own intuition about what will or will not "work" for us, they provide us with a variety of possibilities but no standard by which to judge which we should use or in what combination but we must somehow, sometime, choose our teaching strategy, tactic, aid according to our relative and appropriate teaching environment. How do we do it?

Efficiency:

The overriding principle of the teaching-learning process should be efficiency. Or to put it another way: within the given conditions of my teaching task, how can I achieve my aim with the most favourable ratio of profit (achieved proficiency) to cost (time and work) (Harmer 2007). Efficiency thus makes two prior claims on the teacher: to assess his teaching conditions and to state his aims only after he has done this can he choose his strategy (Cohen and Macaro 2007). At this stage, but not before, he may exploit his methodological knowledge in order to choose appropriate and effective techniques.

a/Teaching conditions

Teaching conditions include the physical and temporal organisation of the course, the background character, age and abilities of the learners, the personality, knowledge and abilities of the teacher when considering the physical and temporal organization of the course, the teacher must ask himself such questions as: how many students are there in the class? What's the room and furniture like? What teaching materials and aids are available? What about my time table-and my syllabus and at what time? How long are the lessons? How much preparation time will I have? How many lessons do I have a week? What extra curricular activities may help or interfere with my course?

The background, character, age and abilities of the learners are found out in part as the teacher goes along; but much of this is usually known before the course starts. The age of the students, their sociocultural background, the likely transfer effects of the native language. Exactly how motivated they are, what discipline problems there may be. How they react to specific teacher tactics. This is all learned later by experience.

The personality, knowledge and abilities of the teacher are known to himself. But he can do a little self-assessment: how well do I know the language I'm required to teach? What are my shortcomings and strong points as a teacher? What is the range of techniques I have at my disposal (i.e, that I have used or known I could if I want it to)?

b/Aims and Objectives

The formulation of aims is only partly the province of the teacher. Often he must teach a course for which the materials are specified, with a set of objectives already implied or he may teach a course linked to a particular subject and set of skills. The teacher aims should be expressed in terms of terminal skills and abilities (Harmer 2007) expected of the pupils. But whether or not the teacher has to formulate his own long-term aims, he is the one who must break them down into immediate objectives guided by the nature of the course material he is using. For example, one of the aims of university courses maybe a high level of proficiency. In writing a composition, but the objective of a particular set of lessons maybe the acquisition of the ability to ask questions in order to elicit information, and a still more limited objective maybe the

increase of fluency in the use of such questions. The more short-term the objective, the greater, the responsibility of the teacher for its formulation and achievement.

The aims and objectives of the course are bound to be affected considerably by the teaching conditions enumerated in the previous sections.

c/Which strategy to adopt?

Having cleared in his mind both the teaching situation and the aims of the course, the teacher is now ready to use all his knowledge of and experience with different methods, psychological theory, and linguistics in choosing a strategy that will be maximally effective.

I'm unable in the article of this sort to describe an entire teaching situation; I shall deal with certain aspects of a teaching situation and course aim, and suggest some of their practical implication for efficient classroom strategy.

My approach is not a recipe, but an example of the process by which I can decide. Let's say that I want to teach a set of integrating skills towards writing to the 1st year English university students in written expression module:

The tables below are representation of various skills from which I can operate effectively

Table one:

Real life writing: writing can be taught using different skills:			
Letters	Lists	Essays	Guessing game
Diaries	Messages	Questionnaire	Pictures
Reports	Fill in forms	Paragraphs	Real life situations
Articles	Stories	Dialogues	Summarizing
Notes	Jokes	Interviews	Ordering

Table two:

Important stages that should be used in writing:
• Type of writing
• Restrictions (language, content, structures, lines...)
• Preparation (vocabulary, ideas, structures, opening, ending)
• How the writing should be carried out?
• Who is the writing for!

Table three:

Golden rules of performing effective activities in writing:
• Any performance should not be too long
• The task should be reusable
• The task should be simple to organize in the classroom
• The task should be adapted to the number of pupils

Adapted from teaching efficient writing streamline connections (Oxford University press 2001)

The class is a group of 28 students of mixed ability, with high motivation, well disciplined with good general learning habits, university new comers. I have at my disposal a blackboard ,chalk., and some pictures The course is aimed at the acquisition of both oral and written skills and abilities as a basis for more specific courses to be trained in the techniques of writing a composition, a paragraph, a text. The class meets in the early morning at 8.00 am so they are fresh and at their most receptive. Their attention span is very long and I know from experience that the number of new items they can assimilate is more than twenty. They get frustrated and restless if they lose the thread of what I am saying or do not understand for any length of time, the meaning of the displayed items must therefore be made clear. My knowledge and teaching experience teaches me that distributed, varied learning is most effective(harmer,2007) that material that is reinforced visually is absorbed better then that which is presented by oral means alone, that material used by students reproduce in meaningful combinations of their own is learned more thoroughly (Cohen and Macaro 2007) and so on. I know also from my own experience, that when students learn the spellings of words for some reason they learn the meaning better, too.

Conclusion

Linking my methodological study of the issue described above, I can conclude that the examples of learning and teaching situation give only some of the simplest and most obvious factors to be taken into account and their application in practice. In a real situation there are many more: their scope is wider, their nature more complex and their interaction more involved then I have shown. But I am not trying here to give an exhaustive exposition of the idea of “**Efficiency**”, only to present a principle of the pedagogical implications which teachers will work out for themselves. The complexity and number of the factors to be considered when planning efficient strategy is “daunting” however this is often in fact done intuitively. One hears teachers say things like “that will work well in my class” or “he can teach it, but I cannot” or “can’t do that in our department because of many considerations”.

All of which are practical comments on aspects of the efficiency of different techniques. In fact, each separate premise and conclusion

in the illustration is obvious and simple: a matter of common sense and “**Efficiency**” is a matter of common sense; that is all it is.

Foreign languages are often taught inefficiently simply because teachers do not stop and think and work out these common sense conclusion for themselves; they have no time and energy or they rely too much on methods recommended by the “experts”, or they lack self-confidence, or perhaps they just have not thought of it.

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