Teaching of English as a Foreign Language to Non-Native Learners

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Abstract : Teaching of English to non-native students has always been a topic of discussion among the researchers. As English has acquired the status of an international language and has become a status symbol, it has become important to study this language in this age of Globalization. English has become a compulsory language in almost all schools and higher studies across the globe. But there are also some complexities to teaching of English as a foreign language to non-native students. This paper discusses the obstacles faced by the EFL learners and the role of teachers and some of the teaching problems in the situation.

IndexTerms **- EFL/ESL, Language Skills, Motivation, Non-Native Learners, Native Speakers**

I. INTRODUCTION

It is very necessary for non-native students or EFL learners to be able to read, write and communicate in English correctly and on their own, but the obstacle that hinders in their progress is the unknown vocabulary which demands the immediate attention of the EFL teachers. It is worthy to note that vocabulary and words go together hand in hand. If words are the building blocks of any language, then grammar is the cement which holds them together. Hence, both are supposed to get equal attention in any language learning situations. Both complement each other.

To be able to use English language successfully, it is necessary to have an acquisition upon the four basic skills of language: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing and grammar and vocabulary play a vital role in this whole process. Thus, both are obligatory in teaching English to non-native learners. Furthermore, for an effective learning, the teachers should provide an enjoyable learning environment to their students which can result in the maximum usage of learning opportunities.

II. CULTURAL DIFFERENCE VS TEACHING ENGLISH

It is worth to be noted that while teaching English to non-native students, teachers often working on role plays, teaching structures, etc., reflect their own society rather than teaching in the context of the society they are in. However, the fact that students should be encouraged by the teachers to use English as is used by the native countries, can't be ignored, it is equally true that if the teachers are aware of the cultural differences, they can help the students better to understand and use English.

III. IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND SOCIO-EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Foreign languages have been and are being taught across the globe with different objectives and methodologies since centuries. In past, it was believed that in order to learn a foreign language, especially the conversational form, one should study the literary form of that language first. It was not considered as a privilege to learn a foreign language in itself as it was not considered as a prestigious field of study. A foreign language was learnt only to support in the learning of other sciences.

In the modern or current age, learning of a foreign language has its own field of study and now unlike in the past, the most important objective to learn foreign language is primarily for communication in addition to other secondary objectives. It is very important for a language teacher to identify the objectives of students in order to help him/her to choose the most appropriate methods, techniques, and approaches for a successful teaching learning process.

Wilga Rivers (1980) distinguishes seven classes of objectives for L3 learners. The first two are traditional objectives and the last five are modern ones. They are:

1. To develop the students' personal culture through the study of the great literature and philosophy to which the new language is the key.

2. To develop the students' intellectual powers through the study of another language.

3. To increase the students' understanding of how language functions and to bring them, through the study of another language, to a greater awareness of the functioning of their own language.

4. To teach the students to read another language with comprehension so that they can keep abreast of modem writing, research, and information.

5. To give students the experience of expressing themselves within another framework, linguistically, and culturally.

6. To bring students to a greater understanding of people across national barriers, by giving them a sympathetic insight into the ways of life and ways of thinking of the people who speak the language they are learning.

7. To provide the students with the skills that will enable them to communicate orally and, to some degree, in writing in personal or career contexts, with the speakers of another language or with the people of other nationalities who have also learned this language.

English is known as a lingua franca and an international language, as it is the only means to communicate and links us with people of different cultures as well as different countries of origin. According to Freed(1991), "By accidents of history and by the rapid spread of industrial development, science, technology, international trade, and by something like an explosion in the speed and ease of travel and by all the factors which have broken down frontiers and forced nations into closer interdependence, English has become a world language. It is the means of international communication; there is no other".

IV. PURPOSE AND NEEDS OF THE NON-NATIVE LEARNERS

Since English being the fast emerging international language, it has become very necessary to have knowledge of the language to communicate effectively across the world as a result of which there is an increase in the need and desire for the language. English as a foreign language instruction works best with students when started at an early stage. According to the researches, for a successful EFL instruction:

  a.   a simple language should be used.
  b.   Students should be given enough time for the successful completion of their tasks.
  c.   Group work.
  d.   Encourage students to use correct English instead of making corrections.
  e.   Using the results of multiple choice tests and standardized tests cautiously.

It is worth to be noted that EFL instruction is not remedial as some students think. Instead, it develops the four language skills of non-native students

V. INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES AMONG LEARNERS

The learning of a language depends on many factors. For many years, researchers have been trying to explain as to why some non-native learners learn SL/FL successfully while others do not. Many psychologists and applied linguists attempted to explain this phenomenon according to whom individual language variation in language proficiency happens only among non-native learners and hardly among native learners. The reason is that the native learners learn the first language subconsciously through informal methods like interactions with the family and natural exposure to the language while as the second language is learnt consciously through formal methods such as classrooms etc.

Thus, in language acquisition, certain factors such as cultural, social, psychological factors, etc, all lead to individual differences and among all these factors mentioned, cognitive styles and learners' attitude play an important role in learning of language in a classroom setting and the learner can acquire a foreign language depending on his/her interest. The two sources of interest are first either from his/her family and people around him and the second being his/her own interest for learning a new language.

VI. MOTIVATION AS A FACTOR FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

The only key for a learner to achieve his/her goal is motivation. "Motivation" has been derived from the Latin word "movere" which means "to move" and it has been seen as a process which activates and directs behavior (Young, 1961). Most of the psychologists and applied linguists (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Corder, 1973 and Gardner, 1985) have agreed upon the fact that motivation plays a very important role in language learning. For Bigge (1971), motivation is when a person develops a state of tension resulting from an unsatisfied need. Gardner (1972) would expect motivation "to play a direct role in the formal training situation because it would serve to keep the student in the program, influence his perception of the training situation, and serve as the basis for many reinforcements which might be obtained in the classroom".

Thus all the literature on motivation conclude that the definitions are mainly based on three main components in a learning situation. These are: 'goals' of the learner towards learning, 'needs' of the learners and 'drive' of the learners towards a language. Every learner has her/his own goal or motive for learning a language. In other words, we can say that motivation is individual. There are four types of motivation which could be relevant to language learning. They are 'integrate vs. instructional motivation' and 'extrinsic vs. intrinsic motivation'.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) are called as the pioneers of language learning motivation studies. In their earliest studies (1959), they classified two distinctive types of motivation, namely, integrative and instrumental. Integrative motivation can be defined as learning of a language in order to know the people who speak that language so as to get integrated into their culture. They define instrumental motivation as a desire to gain social recognition or economic advantages through the knowledge of a second or foreign language. Learners, who belong to the instrumental type of motivation, know the other language to benefit them for getting a better job or position. However, the importance of an integrative-instrumental motivation largely depends on the context in which a language is learned. An instrumental motivation is effective in certain situations where the target language is used as an international means of communication.

The learners, however, depend on two main types of motivation: extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. There are three main components of extrinsic motivation: stimuli, response and reward and the learners get this type of motivation from outside like by performing certain tasks like for getting rewards such as passing the test, avoiding punishments such as failure in the tests, etc. Unlike extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation comes from the initiative taken by the learner to do the task like understanding something for its own sake.

However, the social context in which a learner learns the language, is determines the attitude of the learners' social status in a second or foreign language. As far as the first language is concerned, the factors influencing the motivation to learn a second or foreign language are economic, political and social factors respectively.

Instrumental motivation becomes the pre- requisite for economic advancement when the status target language group is higher than that of the socio-linguistic status group. Thus, it can be said that the social context influences the learning factors of an individual and these are to be kept in mind during the interpretation of learner's behavior.

The teacher needs to understand the learner's intrinsic motivation, motivation being an individual and needs to find certain ways to address that intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, the teacher needs to understand the learner's capability and how he or she deals with the learning tasks as each learner has his own unique way of learning the tasks. In some cases, the teacher is the only source of motivation when the learner depends wholly and solely depends on the teacher.

VI. THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN EFL CONTEXT

The role of a teacher is vital and crucial in learning situations, especially English. The English teacher has to be sociable and friendly and encouraging so that the learners can take the initiatives to participate in the learning tasks or activities.

As learning is concerned with almost all academic and social aspects of the classroom environment, thus the teacher's role is very complex. Dornyei's (1994) framework of L3 motivation outlines three key components of the teacher's role that has an impact on L3 motivation: the affiliative motive (i.e., students' desire to please the teacher), authority type (i.e. authoritarian, democratic teaching style) and direct socialization of student motivation, which includes modeling, task presentation and feedback. The extent to which the teacher fulfills these roles, in other words, the extent to which opportunities for learner engagement are either constructed or obstructed, does not only depend on what the teacher does in the classroom, but also on how the classroom discourse is used (Walsh, 2002).

There is a need to accommodate multiple agendas by the teacher of English in his or her teaching. The teacher is required to understand the needs of his or her students for a successful teaching learning process. Once the teacher understands the needs, the teacher can easily motivate the students in right direction.

The knowledge of the mother tongue of their respective students is very important for cognitive development and individual self-expression. But the knowledge of other language which is English is equally important. In order to qualify for a teaching certificate or license, English is taught for three or four years as a university degree in universities and colleges around the globe or one year post graduate degree course respectively.

Nevertheless, the world of TEFL is immensely different. Most of the non- English speaking countries hire native English speakers to teach English if he or she has a degree from his or her country. That degree may be either in Science with a major in Botany, Psychology, or history, etc. In other words, anyone with any university degree can travel to non-English speaking countries and become a "teacher of English as a second/foreign language." It is often seen that these teachers fall within the negative connotation of being an "...elitist or purist..." teacher. (Offner, 1995). These pseudo teachers often force 'their superior form of language' onto the foreign language students. (Offner, 1995).

Despite the fact that, there has been no research done nor is there any statistics available, it is well understood that most of the native English teachers who teach in a foreign country don't have any formal second language teaching qualifications. They are English teachers by the virtue of their contract in spite of the fact that they don't have any understanding of the basic knowledge needed to be an English teacher and responsibilities that come with it. Pickert (1978) suggests that "...good language learners...want a teacher who is systematic, and logical, and easy to understand (in Grammar) which means they have to use a proper and formal grammar. This places a serious burden on a teacher to self-evaluate his style and adapt accordingly, though it does suggest that the teacher needs a double personality, one for good language learners and one for the others."

VII. THE ROLE OF FIRST LANGUAGE IN EFL

The use of English language in the classroom should be at maximum since the non-native learners have little opportunity to use language outside the classroom and this could be done in a better way through classroom management in EFL situation. In order to have an effective classroom management, the use of English should be well planned and in a consistent way. Classroom management can involve various activities like telling the class what to do, controlling the behavior, explaining activities, etc. The role of the LI in classroom management can be decreased and the role of the L3 can be increased by identifying through observation, the functions and forms of the language of classroom management and then a list of useful sentences could be devised in order to make use of grammatical structures and high frequency words.

In a situation like classroom where all learners share the same L1, there are chances that L1 will be used by the learners in activities like conversations or group activities, discussions, etc which are supposed to be done in a foreign language or L3. The reason is that firstly, the use of L1 is more natural with others having the same L1. Secondly, it is easier for the learners to communicate in their mother tongue more effectively and thirdly, the use of L3 may result in embarrassment for learners who are not proficient in L3 usage.

VIII. SOME OF THE TEACHING PROBLEMS

One problem that teachers often face while teaching non-native learners is the usage of easy vocabulary and slowing down. Native speakers often don't realize in the classroom that they are speaking very quickly. The teachers need to make efforts to slow down while speaking and the teacher needs to beware of the vocabulary and structures that he or she uses. The teacher needs to avoid the usage of idioms and phrases so as not to confuse the students and as a result not understanding the teacher. For example:

Hello Students. Did you get through your homework today?

Thus by using the phrasal verbs (get through), the chances of the teacher not being understood are increased. Instead, the teacher can use a simple word "finished" instead which can be well understood by them.

Thus by avoiding the usage of phrases and idioms and slowing down in speech in the classroom can go a long way and help the students in grasping and learning more effectively.

The other problem associated with teaching the non-native students is to focus on the function. The best way to shape a lesson or make a lesson plan is to focus on certain function which could be taken as a cue for teaching grammar during the lesson. For example:

Mary wakes up at 6 o'clock in the morning. She takes a shower and then has her breakfast. Then she goes to university and reaches there at 8:30 am. She then attends her classes and meets her friends, etc….What do you do every day?

In the above example, the teacher uses the function of talking about daily routines to introduce or expand on the simple present. He or she can ask the students questions related to their daily routine in order to teach them interrogative form and in turn the students can also ask the questions related to daily routine to the teacher. Then the teacher can move on to questions about their partner using third person singular (When does he come back from university? Instead of , When do you come back from university?). Thus, the teacher can help the students produce language and improve their language skills by providing structures.

Thus above were some of the problems and their solutions though not all listed, that a teacher faces while teaching a new language.

IX. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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