

Enhancing EFL Students' Management of their Learning.

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Introduction

We might sometimes think that effective learning and effective instruction are but myths. However, it is through our attempt to make them concrete that we take risks and explore unknown areas of language learning and teaching.

The field of Educational Psychology encompasses so many interrelated variables that need, undoubtedly, to be studied both in isolation and at the same time in relation to each other; all having an influence on the very act of learning but also teaching. The educational environment has been considerably enriched with the new trends in language teaching but also by the new technological aids that can make learning faster and easier than it used to be. The result is that compared with the past ,where the teacher had a predominant role and a supremacy over the learners' behaviour and choices, today, he might be but one variable influencing the learning process. One might wonder ,then, about the efficiency, the usefulness, the clarity and purposefulness of the input presented to learners and about the way it is assimilated. Not sharing the same experiences and background knowledge, students and teachers purposes may not match and they may not understand each other when it comes to the mental representation of knowledge .

In this paper, some supportive components of an efficient and coherent conception of an instruction aiming at

developing learners' autonomy and proficiency in language learning, are suggested . Evaluating teachers' effective investment in students' learning as well as learners' way of conceiving of and dealing with it would be one step toward a better understanding of what constitutes an effective teaching and learning.

In our everyday practice ,we constantly wonder about the why's of the students' lack of systematicity and effectiveness in learning, about whether our teaching ensures students to learn in a deep, transitive and constructive manner. But, do we really fulfil the objective of making students able to encode the content presented to them, in their own way and be able to link it to other contexts, avoiding misconceptions and knowledge fragmentation? Do we help students reflect on their own processes of learning by developing their thinking skills essential to life-long learning, creativity, scepticism and imagination?

Learners are indeed different individuals with different backgrounds, different learning styles and strategies, expectations, attitudes and perceptions and therefore, with different motivations. Moreover, the knowledge and experiences that students bring with them to the class have to be considered seriously, as they are very determinant of their achievement. Providing a similar instruction to different types of learners is no longer a guarantee for achievement in education today. Therefore, our instruction needs to be concerned with the conditions and contexts that make students willing and be able to learn.

Moreover, the educational system is not only bound to the new trends and most recent orientations in teaching and learning research, but also, and especially ,to the new changes that society and the world are witnessing in the context of globalization as well as the important developments in

information and communication technologies. Such conditions are necessarily making of the learning of the English language at the heart of learners' needs whatever their field of study. In addition, we, teachers, are confronted to the necessity of rethinking about our teaching behaviours, perceptions and practices. Knowledge can no longer be dispensed in "daily doses to docile learners". Instead, students should be looked at as active determinants of the teaching/learning process as they are engaging in their previous knowledge and experience. Therefore, the following points need to be part of any instruction in an ELT context:

- ***Establishing an effective learning environment***

Most of the time, it is the task of the teacher to make the atmosphere inside his classroom appropriate to the type of learners he has, to their needs, level, expectations, preferences in the attempt of raising their motivation.

Making a positive learning climate is a prerequisite condition for learning to happen. We have to encourage teacher/student and student/student interaction, working together for one same objective: learning. Displaying interest in students, cheerfulness, respect, support and attentiveness to needs, difficulties and preferences is a way to create an appropriate and attractive classroom climate. In this way, Students would be more willing to be involved in classroom activities. To develop students' knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to prepare them for careers or further education ,in order to reach their individual potential to participate fully in an increasingly complex society .

- ***Making clear our instructional objectives***

It is essential to make clear for students the purposefulness of what we provide them with. We have to communicate clearly the nature and purpose of the content provided and the

methodology used building on their prior knowledge and keeping them goal-oriented. When starting any lesson, a teacher has to state the steps of his lecture and has to clarify its main idea so that students keep concentrated on it as a learning goal.

- ***Providing networks of connected information***

Presenting networks of related information organized around clear concepts with a content coherently presented, organized and sequenced clearly so that they can be retained with full comprehension. Moreover, they must be linked with other areas of the same concern by establishing the relationship between different constituents.

- ***Helping students establish effective learning habits***

Focusing the instruction on both propositional knowledge (what to do) and procedural knowledge (how to do it) is necessary too. This can be achieved by raising students' metacognitive awareness and self-regulation strategies by teaching the appropriate skills for learning to learn in the objective of developing their learning autonomy.

Our task as teachers , therefore, is not only to teach a content but is also to develop in learners the willingness to gain knowledge by showing them how to get it and how to use it efficiently. Teachers need to structure their instruction in such a way in order to link the abstract with the concrete, and try to motivate students by showing them the relevance of each task.

Undoubtedly, we have to think differently about knowledge today. Consequently, an efficient instruction is the one that helps students be able to think critically and flexibly about the

acquisition of such knowledge and its application in real-life situations.

- *Effective assessment measures*

Assessment which is an essential component of any teaching/learning situation, should focus on effective learning. More than an indicator of students' progress and teaching achievement it would help students receive improvement-oriented feedback. Assessment aims at evaluating progress depending on its intended outcomes on learning goals. It is supposed to build students' confidence in their own abilities. It is used to give feedback about students' own response as well as involvement and progress. But, assessment of progress should not be made on the basis of other classmates' good performances only. It is also a good occasion to diagnose their difficulties and try to find solutions accordingly.

- *Evaluating one's teaching*

Evaluation cannot be limited to standardized tests of students' progress, it should include also teachers' self assessment as far as their instruction and methodologies are concerned. Constantly evaluating teaching outcomes is an inherent part necessary for any teaching to be appropriate and effective. Recognizing the weaknesses and strengths of our instruction can only lead to an effective and more objective teaching.

- *What implications can be derived from the above points?*

Learners are supposed to develop both appropriate and useful academic skills but also personal skills and attitudes as a result of teachers' effective investment in students' learning. Among these are:

- *General Skills and Attitudes*

An appropriate instruction should aim at making students display the following characteristics:

- Have self-confidence and a willingness to risk mistakes in order to learn
- Are responsible for their own learning as independent or cooperative thinkers and informed decision makers.
- have the ability to adapt to new situations and react to new information.
- are able to concentrate and persevere on tasks.
- demonstrate academic honesty and respond to challenges with awareness and integrity
- are able to describe their learning needs
- have a basic understanding of the new technological means
- Show respect and empathy for others as for their differences and cultures.
- are able to work cooperatively and actively in decision making by listening to others, sharing opinion and respecting difference in viewpoints.

• **Reasoning and problem-solving abilities:**

Similarly, an efficient instruction has to foster the following abilities in learners:

- thinking logically and solving problems
- observing carefully
- defining problems
- framing useful questions
- Gathering and selecting information
- analysing data by comparing and contrasting

-Objectively criticising a given information

- *Expected abilities for language learning*

In the same view of things, a proficient EFL Students is expected to be able to do the following:

- to be able to conduct a straight forward communication
- To find satisfaction in reading different types of materials
- communicate clearly orally, in writing and even with graphics
- Have a strong command of standard oral and written English language conventions
- reflect on and evaluate their own language use

- *Conclusion*

To sum up, teaching is concerned with the area of knowledge and skills that students cannot acquire on their own and need the help of their teachers to master them. Experience teaches us that the more we get involved in it by making it useful, purposeful and attractive for our learners, the more we can feel a sense of accomplishment over our daily activities. There are indeed very few awards to take from the profession; the only satisfaction would be to see that thanks to our efforts, students have overcome learning difficulties and have successfully achieved in their learning.

• References

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