

Acquisition of English Language

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Abstract

This article reflects some questions which are the result of observations done in English language classes of some state schools in Salvador. Here some aspects of the teaching process are focused on. Deficiencies have been perceived when some classes were observed. Due to such a fact, some suggestions are given in order to improve the English teaching, having in mind the application of a public policy as well as the preparation of fluent speakers to communicate with international tourists. The theoretical foundation was based on Canadian, American, British, and Brazilian researchers. It should be mentioned that when the teacher of English has actually a clear objective with such a process, he really might make the difference so that the language can have its social role played, not only in a classroom setting, but also in the society, in order to be in accordance with the Curriculum guidelines.

Keywords: Deficiency. Teaching. Social role. Curriculum guidelines. Suggestions. Public policy.

With the advent of globalization and the fact that English has become an international language of communications within society, the dominance of English has brought an element of cultural hegemony. Nevertheless, English language teaching in state schools has mainly based upon the acquisition of writing and reading skills rather than the development of speaking and listening skills, which some researchers see as a more efficient method of language acquisition leading to effective communication. Therefore, ways by which students may master the language using both written and oral skills, in order to develop fundamental teaching techniques, related to economic and social requirements in contemporary society should be an important part of any teaching methodology.

The classroom in state schools as an experimental environment has demonstrated a deficiency of the spoken language as an integral part of the teaching program. Therefore, it may result in poor skills acquisition by the student. This deficiency may be evidence of poor motivation on the part of teachers (due to many reasons) or previous poor skills acquisition. However, an improvement of the teaching methodology, on the one hand, along with an improvement of resources, audio visual material, appropriate textbooks and so on, may allow students to exhibit greater motivation and confidence as part of the acquisition process and help the teachers to improve their methods. In other words, the correct understanding by the teachers of the various means by which a language is acquired is important, and it may be demonstrated that different psychological personality types may learn differently, if he/she has a real objective in his/her mind in order to improve such a situation.

It is possible and necessary to evolve teaching techniques in state schools if the process of language acquisition is to be better understood and improved. However it depends on investment and motivation of the teachers in order to improve such a situation. According to Dornyei (2000):

Besides, motivational training might be a very good investment in the longer run, and it may also make our own life in the classroom so much more pleasant. Sometimes the best motivational intervention is simply to improve the quality of our teaching.

According to Maria Luiza Duprat (2002):

There is no recipe to teach us how to create our methodology except our own practice.

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Moreover, fundamental research as it relates to the social and psychological characteristics of the students and their professional requirements, along with a process of further instruction for teachers as it relates to the process of language acquisition may be necessary as it might lead to greater proficiency in teaching. In particular the teachers must understand the essential requirement of spoken communication with native speakers who use the language as a first one; otherwise errors are only reinforced in the student as the result of poor knowledge by teachers. Correct pronunciation is fundamental to good communication. For example teachers who mispronounce an English word certainly do their students no favor. An efficient system might introduce native speakers or a process of listening to recordings of native speakers, thereby enabling the student to bypass the pronunciation faults of their teacher and enable the student to have the opportunity to compare the teacher's communication skills with that of a native speaker. However, the teachers of English must practice their speech and discourse with native ones in order to improve them that is why if they do not practice it they might be included within the interlanguage process which is neither English nor Portuguese (learner language) instead. The teachers should lead student's verbal interaction within a cultural context, "role play", for instance, through the use of idiomatic dialogue within a classroom setting, as related to social interaction with tourists, for example which may lead to further linguistic competence and in turn future employment opportunities, that is to say the development of social inclusion.

It is really important teachers use innovatory and motivating methodology in order for English language teaching to assume the social role determined by Curriculum guidelines. According to Prabhu (1990):

To begin with, an important consideration for language teaching methods is the quality of learning to be promoted, as distinct from the quantity. It is when a teacher's sense of plausibility is engaged in the teaching operation that the teacher can be said to be involved, and the teaching not to be mechanical but, more basically, whether it is active, alive, or operational enough to create a sense of involvement for both the teacher and the student. We can then say that a distinction between "real" and mechanical teaching is more significant for pedagogy than any distinction between good and bad methods.

Based upon Prabhu's view, it is clearly possible to perceive that most of the teachers in state schools are more worried with their classes quantity rather than quality through a mechanical teaching. According to Miguel Nenevé and Michela Santiago (2007) in their article entitled "Rethinking Foreign Language Teaching in State Schools : Contexts, Perspectives and Goals", they point out that Oliveira and Paiva from the Federal University of Minas Gerais seem to focus their thinking on teachers and affirm that "the teacher of English should have, besides political consciousness, a good mastery of the idiom (oral and written) and solid pedagogical formation with a deep knowledge of Applied Linguistics" (OLIVEIRA; PAIVA, 1997). They still claim that a curriculum should be a dynamic instrument that reflects the educational objectives and the needs of the learners, considering the place they live (and work). According to a Canadian writer, Tara Goldstein (2003), from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, contends that sometimes people are afraid of changing their practice and their way of developing their classes. Such a declaration is a real truth about some teachers in Salvador that is why most of them neither show nor make something different in order to make clear to their students that studying a language is much more than to make out the linguistic structure, that is teaching it as communication through an appropriate "use" (which provokes communication) and not only "usage" (which makes evident student's knowledge of linguistic rules) according to Widdowson (1978). Salvador is an important tourist city in Brazil within which is concentrated by many tourists from all over the world during the whole year. Therefore, it is fundamental to produce a greater quantity of people who master the English language even to defend their own space in order to see the social role of that language executed in the practice of the social context as well.

The curriculum is also involved in such a process. In Fenwick's point of view (2001), the curriculum benefits only the high society.

It is clearly observable in state schools a precarious teaching that is the reason by which is fundamental to reflect on a public policy. Otherwise, the teachers of English must make their best in order to change their teaching methodology as well. Fenwick and Betty (2001) affirm that:

The third challenge to positivism assumes that the curriculum is an agent of social control and that curriculum development is an inherently political activity in this respect. From this perspective and through the lenses of socialistic and Marxist ideology the functions of schooling have been criticized. One socialist critic observed: "The historical record of the rhetoric of public school leaders is an embarrassing testimony to this limitless capacity for self-deception". We are beginning to understand more clearly how cultural and economic apparatuses are linked in such a way that cultural and educational institutions act as means in the social reproduction of an unequal society.

The world is in a process of becoming dominated by liberal politics and the globalization of trade and industry, which includes culture and language. We have been globalized and sometimes we do not perceive such a thing.

According to Sklair (1995), transnational practices impact on the global system is patent for everyone, within which the EUA is not only interested in dominating the world with their culture and language but also with their powerful industry in order to control everything and everyone by imposing English which is truly their hegemony language. Nevertheless, such an imposition must be accepted in order to protect ourselves and learning their language would certainly be our weapon.

In Featherstone's view a "McDonaldização" process has actually taken place in the society by reinforcing English as a universal idiom of the consumption culture.

Ianni affirms that the world is in an occidentalization process cycle in which English language became an international one through a linguistic and economical policy. It is possible to imagine that it is fundamental the mastering of such an idiom even as a new cultural element, however it does not mean that another culture is being more valorized. Therefore, it is important to compare them by preserving our own identity, besides teachers of English need to perceive that the culture is present in the language is being taught, for instance, a sentence like "It is their impressive language teaching material", we can see the presence of a possessive determiner before the nouns which is a typical inversion of the English language and it is part of the culture as well. It should be shown to the students that such an inversion usually occurs when there is the specification of some noun. Meena Singhal points out that culture teaching is necessary in a second language classroom for effective language acquisition to occur.

For Candau (1988) a concrete pedagogical practice should be reflective of a social transformation perspective in order to build up a new societal model. The new educators must be those who are in fact worried about the common people. It is necessary to deal with the relationship between theory and practice continuously. Such common people are in the state schools, therefore it is crucial to emphasize the importance in order to educate them of the best possible way in order for a more fair and less violent society.

According to Veiga (1994), it is fundamental that the teacher changes his/her teaching practice for a more democratized teaching. That is to say, teachers should change their mind for a real teaching.

In Lopes's thinking (1990) the teachers should have a pedagogical awareness as well as action for transforming minds with positive results within a dialectic action. The teacher has a fundamental responsibility not only with linguistic structure but also with such a transformation

According to Fávero (1991) Brazilian educational preoccupation is based only on the teaching of formulas in order for students to enter into a university. Actually the social role of education is not executed within the classroom context and outside. It is clearly observable in state schools. Socialization of the teaching has actually disappeared, therefore, teachers of English should change such a situation. However, they must mobilize themselves for it.

Freire (1981) claims that the teachers should have the responsibility as social transformers for a more democratic world. That is why the true war is against the reigning imperialist policy of the USA in which it is necessary to become enemies of them instead of allied. Too many people think that learning English they would become allied to them, however it is the opposite thing that is why we need to defend ourselves, our country, city and then it would be a way for it.

It was really possible to realize that in state schools almost there is no use of textbooks. Their use is fundamental in order for a logical sequence in student's mind of the linguistic structure which would lead them to master it through authentic and literary texts based mainly on the verbal use. According to Jeremy Harmer (2001) there are nine main areas which teachers should consider in the textbooks which they are looking at: Area, availability, layout and design, methodology, skills, syllabus, topic, stereotyping and teacher's guide. Kramsch's idea is that (1993):

Many of the decisions teachers make are based on compromises between how they perceive the needs of their students and how they view their role and their responsibility as teachers. She believes that language is seen as a skill, social practice and learners have to be given the opportunity to use their skills in communication even before they have completely mastered the structures in drills due to the dichotomy that still exists between grammar versus communication. Teachers should be encouraged to help students not only to read texts for information, but to interpret them by using literature then as a means of teaching language in order to have meaning.

Language use is indissociable from the creation and transmission of culture and that teachers should suggest ways of developing not only the culturally-competent learner, but the cross-cultural personality by suggesting authentic texts. It is very important English should be given a social context through appropriate verbal exchanges. She also claims that literary competence is not one single skill but is variable relative to cultural circumstances and a reader-response approach to reading must take into account the cultural relativity of the reader and that there is the presence of prefabricated artificial language in contemporary textbooks which do not contain authentic texts in order to fulfill a social purpose. Authenticity is encountered in literary texts which are mirrors of a given social and cultural context.

In Bakhtin's words (1986) the fundamental thing is how learners acquire their own communicative competence and Hymes adds that there is no grammatical competence without communicative one. It will depend upon teacher's practice in order to provide such a thing.

The social role of the English language assumes its greater degree when a student of English gets to use such a language in a communicative and written way in the society with tourists, for instance, in order to help them in case if they do not speak Portuguese. It is possible to believe that one day in the future students of the state schools be given the opportunity to do it. The teachers of English need to change their mind about such a teaching. Such a deficiency might change when using a communication methodology and a public policy has been used. Brown (2001) emphasizes that:

Students should be taught to develop their linguistic fluency in order to generate a language performance beyond the language classrooms through communicative purposes that is why as learners interact with each other through oral and written discourse, their communicative abilities are enhanced. Teaching language enables learners to make out a system of social practices that both constrain and liberate. He points out that communicative goals are best achieved by giving due attention to language use and not just usage, to fluency and not just accuracy, to authentic language and contexts, and to student's eventual need to apply classroom learning to previously unrehearsed contexts in the real world. For communicative language teaching in what we might broadly categorize as an EFL context is clearly a greater challenge for students and teachers. Often, intrinsic motivation is a big issue, since students may have difficulty in seeing the relevance of learning English. English is not frequently learned as a tool for understanding and teaching US or British cultural values. Instead, English has become a tool for international communication in transportation, commerce, banking, tourism, technology, diplomacy, and scientific research.

Seidlhofer (2003) reveals the importance of the students to perceive their target language authentic and a real use. It is necessary the teacher provides strategies in order for students to perceive it.

For Tavares and Cavalcanti (1996) some investigators realize that culture is not only present in the classroom setting but also in the language that is being taught as well as teachers should elaborate activities in order to increase student's awareness and to develop their curiosity towards the target culture and their own, helping them to make comparisons among cultures.

The student's discourse has shown a natural tendency to write with his/her mother tongue influence, however the teacher should show the students that some inversions like, for instance, "their public health system", are part of another culture as well as a sentence like "I had been working when I saw the accident" it should be told students that the translation must always be caught in the target language that is because the interlanguage might appear if they think directly in their mother tongue. Brown points out that "As human beings learn to use a second language, they also develop a new mode of thinking, feeling, and acting - a second identity. It is really fundamental to acquire such a new identity that is because the Latin language is totally different from Germanic one. Widdowson (1988) relates the importance that there is between culture and language in order for an effective learning to occur as well.

According to Dias (2008), more than 1 billion of people will travel around the world in 2010 and in 2020. Therefore, Salvador city needs to prepare fluent people in the English language for receiving these tourists and the State School would be a way in order to do it continuously and the tourism would be an alternative in order to get a job as well as for Nunes de Melo (1989) in his article he mentions that the principal role of Education is to prepare students for work field.

In Frischeisen's view (2000) the principle of a social democracy tells us about the obligation of the laws (legislative and executive) in order to develop a public policy (social and economical) in order to promote a more democratic society.

It is possible to believe that the implementation of a public policy made by State Department of Education would solve the problem little by little (in the continuous training of teachers for developing their communicative ability, the use of digital equipments for developing student's oral and writing ability, in the utilization of a curriculum which includes textbooks based on the communicative ability in a logical sequence and smaller quantity of students in class).

It is really fundamental to perceive that despite all the difficulties faced by the teachers of English in state schools in the Salvador region, they might change their mind and to apply a revolutionary and motivational teaching in order to have the social role of the English language (according to Curriculum guidelines) in practice, besides an improvement through a public policy would lead for a better and faster development.

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