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Marijana Dimitrova Kroteva*
Goce Delcev University Stip, R Macedonia

AN ASPECT ON THE CHALLENGES IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

***Abstract.** This paper is focused on the challenges in the teaching English as a foreign language, and the various practices that come out of the experience of the teachers. Considering the fact that English today is referred to as an universal language, the teachers combine the linguistics, the pedagogy and the analyses of the needs of their students in order to re-adapt the syllabus and to satisfactorily respond to the specific necessities of the students, thus helping them to become fluent speakers of English. Therefore, the aim of the paper is to present the various challenges and issues that the teachers are facing at work, as well as, to point out to solutions. Within the paper, chapter two refers to the criteria of the quality education and the introduction of the critical thinking within the methodology of teaching a foreign language. Chapter three gives an overview on the positive results due to the change in the study programs which are inevitably linked to the practical benefits from implementation of the new technology devices as a compulsory tool for work. Chapter four provides conclusion and recommendation.*

***Key words:** teaching, motivation, foreign language, demanding students, study programs*

Introduction

The teachers of English as a foreign language constantly strive to combine the linguistics, the pedagogy and the analyses of the needs of their students in order to re-adapt the syllabus and to satisfactorily respond to the specific necessities of the students, thus helping them to become fluent speakers of English. All this could be easily achieved by including the problem based teaching in the methodology.

* marijana811@gmail.com

The problem based teaching enables the students to acquire new knowledge by individual problem solving while they train themselves for a problem solving situation in many aspects of life. From another side, the activity of the student is enabled together with his individuality and subjective position. Eventually, the creative as well as the productive potentials of the student are stimulated. Thus, the students which are part of the problem based learning become efficient in the problem solving, individual learning and team participation.

In brief, the need of problem based teaching depends on the fast development of the science and technology, the changes in the society and the new pedagogical approaches. Due to these reasons, the learning in the modern world should be more than simply memorizing, and it should encompass understanding, identification, transformation and application of the acquired knowledge. In that context, the stress is not on the encyclopedia knowledge, but on the processes and generalization. This leads to a rationalization of the teaching process, modified position of the student, increased thinking activity as a precondition not only for the student personality but, also for the society as a whole.

These are only a few aspects on the importance of including the problem based teaching within the English language curricula for overcoming the issues of effective and efficient knowledge of the foreign language.

Some didactical aspects of the problem based teaching for a quality and efficient education

The problem based teaching aims at student affirmation as an active cooperator, participant in the teaching process, a researcher, and in that it is a crucial factor for an individual and productive personality. This kind of teaching prepares the student for a direct communication with the course materials, motivation as well as ensuring conditions for application of the obtained knowledge.

The creativity of the student is particularly enhanced within the problem based teaching. The problem solving leads him to a productive approach towards knowledge but also to an application of the previously acquired knowledge and its linkage with new situations. With it, this kind of teaching increases the level of success in learning. One of the objectives of the problem based teaching is to develop a positive attitude towards work, but also initiation, persistence, responsibility, punctuality and other human characteristics towards individual and team work and an admiration of the science, the arts and the creation.

It can be concluded that the problem based teaching:

-contributes to the development of the intellectual capacity of the students;

- develops internal motivation and interest;
- decreases the student passivity in the teaching process by providing conditions for his subjectivity;
- provides individual student activity;
- is one of the forms of individualization in teaching;
- with its application a rationalization of the teaching time is achieved, especially during presentation of the new course materials and application of the previous knowledge;
- as a way of organization of the contemporary teaching influences the opinion towards logic and creativity¹.

All these facts point to the final objective of the problem based teaching which is a development of individual, critical and creative thinking, things that in the same time makes it a basic efficient exercise of the logical thinking.

In this paper we will refer to the teacher and the text book as the most significant agents for effective problem based teaching.

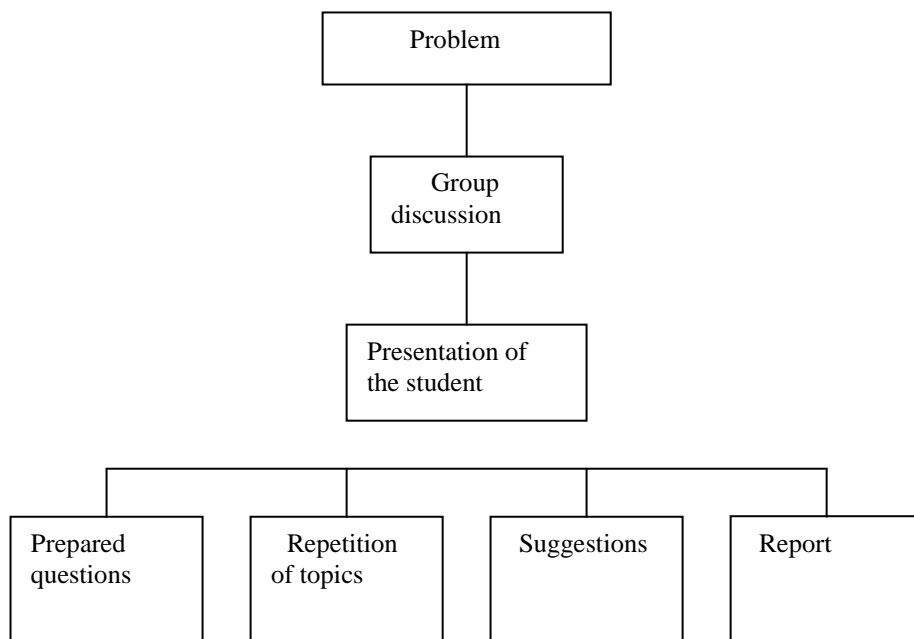
The teacher as an indirect participant in the education process is very significant for the practicing of the problem based teaching. He is one of the subjects in the teaching process, its leader, organizer and realizer. His position and role is changed with the changes in the overall education process. In the contemporary teaching, the teacher is envisioned as a cooperator and a consultant. He teaches the students in a way which helps them consciously, actively and with understanding to acquire the course material and to develop their abilities. Consequently, the role and the function of the teacher is changed in the problem based teaching as well. While in the traditional teaching, the teacher was the central figure in the teaching process, an informer, an active and dynamic subject; within the problem based teaching he radically changes his role into an assistant, initiator and organizer of the teaching process, a kind of a manager of the student activities. He has to be professionally competent and qualitative. From a pedagogy – psychology aspect this refers to the didactic-methodological characteristics, profound knowledge in the work, ability for a pedagogical approach towards the problems; from an organizational – technical preparedness it refers to the organizational and technical ability which he will transfer to the students. The personal preparedness encompasses development of some individual, primary character features like honesty, objectivity, justification, stability, life optimism, strategically oriented person, etc. The studies have shown that the students believe more in a teacher who is open, honest and kind, and they highly evaluate the teacher who is dynamic, flexible and constant. This means that the teacher should

¹ Zbornik *Problemsko ucenje u nastavi*, (1984) Loznica, str.50

be didactically and personally developed, sufficiently motivated for the work, which is a significant supposition for the realization of the problem based teaching.

Another supposition for efficient problem based teaching is the text book, as one of the most common and primary teaching means. In that regard the following could be emphasized:

- there is a connection between the book and the curriculum;
- the book is written upon the study program ;
- the book is directed towards practical realization of the set aims and tasks;
- it influences retroactively upon the improvement of the syllabus and its revision and verification;
- the book is in between the student and the curriculum
- it is connected with the teaching process and as its integral part it influences the course and organization of the teaching itself;
- the tasks and questions within the book are in direct correlation for the individual work of the student.



Modell: A sample of a problem based teaching practiced in South Korea ¹.

¹Tang, lai & Tang, Developing a Context-Based PBL Model

Critical thinking and the problem based teaching

The problem solving is a special learning method, therefore it is considered as a method of learning. It is both a special form of learning and expression. It is a critical aspect of the learning, a highest form of learning which is characterized by a balance between the means, ways and methods from one side, and the solving of the tasks from the other. The problem solving is also defined as a form of efficient learning which consists of a problem, news to the situation and directed thought of the student activity towards finding new ways of solving the situation. Although there are many explanations for the process of problem solving, it can be concluded that the presence of the problem and the activity of the subject to solve it is what makes the core of the problem based teaching.

The critical thinking arises as a very important issue in present time. The approach towards the informatics era focuses on the issue for the good thinking as an important element for a success in life¹. The definition for the critical thinking changed a lot through the decades, yet is it based on:

-the possibility to analyze facts, to generate and organize ideas, to define thoughts, to make comparisons, to make conclusions, to evaluate arguments and to solve problems². Furthermore, the critical thinking is a way of thinking which involves analytical thinking and is a very conscious process which is used for interpretation and evaluation of the information³.

The critical thinking is based on the reason not the emotion, and it seeks for evidence neglecting the unknown but focusing on the best explanations for the problem. Out of this, the link of the problem based teaching with the critical thinking is very clear. Unless there are questions, some fields may never be developed and researched. In order for the thought to arise, to think and to reconsider, questions are needed which will stimulate the thought. The art of the Socratic dialogue is based on a very systematic and profound way through which an interest is shown for what is accepted as truth. There is a particular linkage between the Socratic dialogues as a part of the problem based teaching and the critical thinking for they share the same purpose. The critical thinking provides understanding for the subject, while the Socratic dialogue uses the possibility for

¹ Huitt W., (1992) problem solving and decision making: Consideration of individual differences using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. *Journal of Psychological Type*, 24, 33-44, преузето од www.edpsycinteractive.org/files/prbsmbti.html

² Тама С., (1989) Critical thinking has a place in every classroom, *Journal of Reading*, 33, 64-65

³ Hickey M., (1990) Reading and social studies : The critical connection. *Social Education*, 54, 175-179

asking questions in order to formulate the most important parts for the problem solving¹.

Another linkage of the problem based teaching and the critical thinking in reference to the teaching of the English language is in the text processing in literature when the idea of the writer, the suppositions, the hypothesis and the conclusions need to be set. In aspect of the affective field, the linkage moves to an individual thinking, developing the sense of egocentrism and socio-centrism, developing of the intellectual courage, the integrity, the confidence and the intellectual curiosity².

Some didactical aspects of the problem based teaching of the English language

The problem based teaching appoints the place of the language in the reality. During the interrogation process through which students go in order to get to the answers they need to use the language to obtain information about communication, expressing opinions, negotiation, as they would if they worked well. As they document the discussions and the decisions, consult materials, talk among themselves, represent their discoveries, they learn to listen, speak, read and write effectively. They thus develop vocabulary, learn grammar rules and forms of everyday language and apply the various systems of signs. In brief, they create an understanding of the language as it is used in the real world.

In the teaching of English language, the objectives are defined as a development of the ability of the students to be understood while expressing on the foreign language, and to develop a positive attitude towards the foreign language as well as to increase the interest for the language and the culture of the people who are the native speakers of that language³. The problem based teaching is oriented towards the objective and is an excellent means for strengthening the motivation of the students. It offers the students authentic materials and opportunities to use the language and motivation for learning, which are very important conditions for the learning of language. Many studies have shown that the problem based teaching helps the students of foreign language to develop various skills because of the possibilities for them to talk among each other and to improve some skill. The

¹ Richard P., (1995) *Critical Thinking, How to Prepare Students for the Rapidly Changing* Foundation for Critical Thinking

² Richard P., (1995) *Critical Thinking, How to Prepare Students for the Rapidly Changing* Foundation for Critical Thinking str. 123-132

³ Bloom B., Englehart M., Furst E., Hill W., Krathwol D., (1956) *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The classification of educational goals. Handbook I: Cognitive Domain*. New York Longmans Green

purpose of the teaching of foreign language is to teach the students to use the foreign language as a means for communication and accumulation of knowledge. In the problem based teaching of the English language a particular aspect is put on the age of the student, the language aspect, the type of verbal activities and the phases of the teaching process.

Application of forms and methods in the teaching of the English language in a function of an individual work of the student

The basic organizational forms of teaching a foreign language which could be found in the literature are: frontal, group, tandem and individual form of work.

The frontal form of work is characterized by a simultaneous work of all the students in the same learning conditions and in direct contact with the teacher. It is widely accepted for the time-saving. The work of the teacher is directed towards the class as a whole. The teacher leads the teaching, sets the objective, presents and demonstrates. In that, the weaker students are exposed to a more intensive working tempo, and the collective working discipline develops. Anyhow, the frontal form of work can hardly adjust to the individual differences between the students. The work is monotonous, and the students are passive listeners and receptors of packed knowledge. The frontal form of work in the teaching of English language does not provide conditions and possibilities for a higher student activity. As a direct teaching method it is not in the function of the students.

The main characteristic of the group work is that the students are divided into groups. The group is an organizational closed unit which has inconsistent communication contact with the teacher and it works individually on the given task. Within the group, the students work individually, but also they cooperate among them. In the group work the student is in a direct relation with the contents and the source of knowledge. The student forms working abilities by his activities and adopts on a coordination of the working activities, as well as develops initiations and individuality. The groups can be temporary and constant, and their forming can be spontaneous or inclined. They are in a function of the individual work of the student.

The work in pairs means mutual working of two students. The pairs could be formed based on a mutual interest between the students or according to the teaching situation. The work in pairs provides a strong cooperation between the students- partners, and a segregation of the functions of activities. Both students are responsible for the organization and the results. Within the work in pair, the student is in a direct contact with the course and the partner, yet he is an active subject who individually envisions and analyses his own values and mistakes. This means that the work in pairs is in function of the student individuality.

The individual form of work refers on the individual activity of every student, as every student works for himself as an individual. He learns on his own, and organizes his learning activities according to his own plan. But, the individual work is closely related to persistence. The tasks that the students is given could be either the same or different for every student, yet adjusted to their abilities. As an indirect form of teaching it enables the student to individually solve and work in order to uncover his working abilities. The individual work is a source of motivation, creativity and self-control.

The teaching methods in the English language teaching are among the primary conditions for organization of effective teaching. The specificities of the objectives, the tasks and the contents in the teaching of English go along with the application of teaching methods which are primarily directed to an individual work of the student. The teaching methods can be divided into three groups:

-verbal-textual

-demonstrative-illustrative

-methods of individual work of the student.

The first group consists of the presentation of the teacher, conversation and text analyses. Although the presentation of the teacher is still seen as important, it doesn't have to mean that it should be absolute and dominant in the teaching of the English language.

The method of conversation is characterized by a mutual participation of the teacher and the student. The conversation activates the thinking process of the student and mobilizes his knowledge. It will entirely accomplish its objective if it is applied in situations when the student has some knowledge prior to the topic.

The method of text analysis is very important for obtaining accurate knowledge. In particular, the individual work with the book is very important. Besides the book other texts could be used like individual student compositions, reports and similar, which are in a function of the individual work of the student.

It can be concluded that the basic imperative for the individual work of the student is the appropriate selection and application of the teaching methods. Therefore the selection should be made according to the teaching materials, the objective and the tasks which are adjusted to the conditions for work and the age of the students. The problem of forms and methods in the teaching of English language should primarily be solved from an aspect of the individual work of the students. Yet, it is only one part of the complex problematic in the teaching of English. The efficiency of this problem depends of the syllabus, the equipment of the school, the literature and the teacher itself. Or in brief, as Chomsky¹ indicates

¹ Chomsky N. (1959) A review of B. F. Skinner's Verbal Behavior, *Readings in the Psychology of Language*, prentice Hall

in his critique to the book of Skinner “Verbal behavior” in the journal “Language” the basic characteristic of the language is its creativity. The language is not a structural habit but a type of creative category and it is based on abstract formal principles and very complex operations.

Conclusion

The need of integrating the problem based teaching within the EFL curricula is more than important. Anyhow, most of the teachers still practice it on an unplanned way. The awareness of the effects and the need of application of the problem based teaching are on a significantly lower level in our region in comparison to the countries abroad. As a conclusion, an aspect on the following should be put upon:

- higher estimation of the problem based teaching among the teaching staff through an appropriate training;
- revision of the curriculum and its modification;
- studying the attitudes and opinions of the students for the problem based teaching;
- studying the role of the teacher during the organization of the problem based teaching;
- larger supply of the libraries with an additional authentic and professional literature;
- additional equipment of the schools and the cabinets with the new technology devices;
- the role of the professional services in the schools for providing conditions for application of the problem based teaching.

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