

Differences in SL Learning Styles and Teaching Methods

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Students show their unpredictable learning style and teachers have their own preferred strategies. The ultimate aim of the language instructor is to help students to develop their language learning skills in the best and practical way because a teacher may indeed be highly knowledgeable & Creative, yet still be ineffective in training students whose learning is still developing and need to overcome their learning difficulties.

Learning Style

How an individual student acquires, retains and retrieves information is considered as Particular learners Learning Style.

According to Kneefe (1979) Learning style has the following 3 traits

- ✓ Cognitive
- ✓ Affective
- ✓ Physiological

These traits are stable indicators, they will indicate how learners perceive, interact and respond.

Richard M Felder, North Carolina State University, discussed the learning style issues in his paper "Learning and Teaching Styles in Foreign and Second Language Education". He expressed that, serious mismatches may occur between the learning styles of students in a class and the teaching style of the instructor (Felder & Silverman 1988; Lawrence 1993; Oxford et al. 1991; Schmeck 1988), with unfortunate potential consequences. The students tend to be bored and inattentive in class, do poorly on tests, get discouraged about the course, and may conclude that they are no good at the subject of the course and give up (Felder & Silverman 1988; Godleski 1984; Oxford et al. 1991; Smith & Renzulli 1984). Instructors, confronted by low test grades, unresponsive or hostile classes, poor attendance, and dropouts, may become overly critical of their students (making things even worse) or begin to question their own competence as teachers.

Reasons to know about learning styles

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To initiate an effective training to find the individual learning style of each student is very important. In order to identify the style each instructor should do the action research following Sue Davidoff and Owen van den Berg (1990) four important steps

- ✓ Plan
- ✓ Teach/Act
- ✓ Observe
- ✓ Reflect

The solution of the result will give the positive effects in the classroom teaching.

- ✓ The method used to teach language effectively matches the individual students learning styles, the classroom becomes effective.
- ✓ Another positive effect is that student should feel more comfortable and he /she must feel the learning progress is enhanced.
- ✓ Primary Successful factor is Student-Teacher Interaction.

In common students may learn the language in many ways. Learning can be seeing and hearing; reflecting and acting; reasoning logically and intuitively; memorizing and visualizing. According to the learners traits the teaching methods also vary.

Syllabus

The integration of Subject Matter and the Linguistic Matter designs the language syllabus; the content of instruction is grammatical and lexical form of the language. The major part in language teaching is the choice of a syllabus that must be made very carefully.

This Study

This study explores the following problems by understanding teaching second language to Native Speakers of Arabic.

- ✓ The syllabus
- ✓ The materials
- ✓ The teaching & Learning

Limitations of this Study

This article gives insight into the syllabus and second language learning problem of the students studying in university and university affiliated colleges' Preparatory program with reference to Saudi Arabia.

Revolution in Education

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Saudi Arabia progresses in all spheres of life and with its revolution in education and the expansion of universities all over the kingdom, the growth in the use of English as the International Language of Science and Technology can be detected.

In the last 20 years ELT in Saudi Arabia has undergone a considerable change due to the improvement in developing of language centers and designing of Language Learning syllabus, purposive curriculum, adopting integrated textbooks and qualified teachers.

Though there is a noticeable change in the English Language Learning, there are many issues preventing Language learners not to achieve their 100% language competency. The main barrier of this issue is syllabus design and methodology.

In Saudi Arabia the problem of many students in the preparatory year stems from the methods not from the syllabus. The fundamental skills are taught but not practiced enough and consequently not developed at the school stage. To overcome this issue the universities in the major cities have undertaken the following serious procedures to improve the teaching of English. They have

- ✓ Improvised deanship for preparatory year
- ✓ Increased contact hours for General English
- ✓ Equipped the Labs and infrastructures of the classrooms
- ✓ Employed a good number of language instructors, majority of them are native speakers of English.

Still, in the affiliated colleges students are not fulfilling the expectation of the language teachers.

Syllabus Design in Saudi Arabia

Curriculum design is based on the Western pattern. Preparatory year program syllabus is General English 101. This is the only course taught in English in the Preparatory year. This course is taught for one semester. This has LSRW Skills for three credit hours per week, purely text book oriented teaching. If time permits the faculty may allow the students to do the practice apart from the book in the class room. On the other hand, teachers give the home work, students are allowed to use other sources but they rarely do.

In this context speaking the language effectively is not a prerequisite for the placement in governmental positions, but this is not the case in the private sector. So the students are forced to learn English after they graduate and realize their need for this language in the job market.

The LSRW skills are all covered. Though many reference books and technological aids are available for both teachers and students, prescribed text book is the only source used. The suggested text books are exam oriented but the prescribed hours for

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teaching according to the syllabus differ in Saudi universities. Some allocate six contact hours and teach the four skills, and divide the marks accordingly. Other universities teach the three credit hours and thus only listening; reading and writing are covered during the semester.

Problems in Teaching Listening Skill

This skill should be taught to the students in the labs, if the infrastructure is not available, instructors use the laptop and speakers in teaching listening in the classroom. This skill is included in the final exam. The students are tested in this skill by listening to an audio twice and answer the questions in the exam paper. What are the major problems observed then? The first problem is that the one weekly hour allotted to listening in the course is not enough to train students and at the same time students do not respond to the teacher's request to devote more time for listening at home. Secondly, students listen to the audio, but the majorities of the students are not able to cope up with that, thus "Guessing" and "Randomly selecting the options" are major problems during the course and in the exam.

Speaking Skill

Native Arabic Speakers are forced to speak English in certain environments. They have to communicate with non Arabic speaking foreigners in places like hospitals, shopping malls, and at home with servants and drivers. With a variety of nationalities working in Saudi Arabia English is the international language used. In these situations students usually use some vocabulary in wrong structure to facilitate their urgent needs. This is the real situation, then how do the classrooms enhance their speaking skill? What is the content of the course? What is the method of testing?

In this context the students first read and practice the written conversations in the text book. Then they are given the situation to speak to each other, based on their fluency or effective communication, the instructors evaluate the speaking skill of the students. Many of the students do not participate in any classroom activities. Particularly this skill is tested during the course. i.e., class room interaction, presentation etc., but this skill is not included in the final examination.

On the other hand, the students are given some situations beforehand, the content and question and answers, in this situation they memorize and speak. The problem noticed here is that the students speak in a mechanical method or a robot-like way they speak but with no expression or use of proper body language. This skill is not important for the midterm and final exam thus students do not pay much attention to practicing or developing it.

Writing Skill

This is considered to be a productive skill, but is taught like the reading skill. At school students did not learn writing skills properly. At school students used to

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memorize a number of paragraphs and in the exam they may write one of them. In General English 101, the real expectation of this stage is to get the students to write a paragraph on their own about any topic after learning the writing techniques. Thus, the elementary writing techniques are to be taught first, next writing the paragraph is to be the main concern for the teacher and then letter writing. Other types of writing are not taught because of time limit.

This is the real practical difficulty the instructors face in the Second language class rooms. If the students are given any unknown topic many of them are unable to write even a single simple sentence. Identifying the main problem is the first task to hone their skills effectively. The other major task is teaching method which is to include continuous practicing of writing to enable the students to learn the language effectively.

Grammar

Though there is not a grammar book assigned for students in this course, the course text book includes grammar rules and exercises that could be considered a sort of revision to what they already studied at school. Grammar is included as a section of the final exam.

Real Problem in Learning Second Language

Concerning Grammar students who learnt during their schooling need to change their point of view that grammar exercises have got nothing to do with the four skills and adhere to new attitude that of learning grammar to serve and get the other skills right. Online quizzes and other high-tech strategies can be involved.

The major problem students face in grammar stems from comparing rules in their mother tongue to English. In Arabic, there is a type of sentences that start with the noun or the subject like English but does not include a verb, it is called the noun-sentence. The second example where the verb is the first word but gives almost the same meaning of the affirmative SV in English with more attention to be paid for the importance of the first word.

Example: Usage of verb to "Be"

In English: S be O = In Arabic: Noun + Noun (no be)

Ex. 1. My name is Hala = My name hala

Ex. 2 Ali is a student = Ali student

Ex. 3. Ali is not a student = Ali not student - No be is needed or used with the same meaning.

In English there are both definite and indefinite articles. In Arabic only the definite article is used and nothing before the noun makes it indefinite, for example, This is

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the book you need. In Arabic it is the same. There is a book on the desk. In Arabic :There is book on the desk.

Conclusion

These are only few examples to provide evidence that the course that is really needed in teaching English in the Arab world should be specially designed for Arabic speaking communities.

As for the improvement of English Language Learning and Teaching in the preparatory year, the concentration should be on all four (LSRW) skills. The following recommendations can be followed to enhance the language competency of individual student.

- ✓ General English course can be at least included for both semesters of preparatory year program to achieve the target. Still, it is recommended that English courses be taught for four levels in an undergraduate program.
- ✓ Contact hours of this course might be increased
- ✓ Minimum number of students (20 -25) can be admitted in each section to increase the efficiency of teaching learning process.
- ✓ As Parkinson and Reid Thomas(200;9:11) said in their article, Teaching of literature in a second language provides a good model for good writing, as memorable, non-trivial and challenging. So interesting short stories, simple lyrics and familiar poems /rhymes can be used to stimulate students' creative imagination and improve their writing and reading skills.
- ✓ Also this kind of materials may improve the students' general cultural awareness and provide the opportunity to lean new vocabulary and different writing structures.
- ✓ Audio-Visual Technique can be adopted by all colleges to enhance the teaching methods of both listening and speaking.
- ✓ Integrating two skills i.e., listening & speaking and Reading & Writing can be followed in one class.

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