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CHALLENGES IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND POSSIBLE WAYS OF OVERCOMING THESE OBSTACLES

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Abstract

Teaching foreign languages to non-native students can present various challenges. This article delves into the obstacles that may arise in such situations, including linguistic barriers, cultural differences, limited exposure outside the classroom, lack of motivation, and difficulties in assessing progress. These factors can impede the effectiveness of foreign language instruction and impact learners' overall language proficiency. To address these challenges, this article explores potential solutions and best practices. These include implementing learner-centered approaches that focus on communicative competence, incorporating cultural context into language instruction, providing ample opportunities for language practice and exposure, and utilizing effective assessment methods that measure both linguistic and communicative skills. Overcoming these challenges is essential for improving language acquisition outcomes and fostering global communication. By implementing effective strategies and best practices, educators can help non-native students achieve their foreign language learning goals and become proficient communicators in multiple languages.

Key words: linguistic barrier, cultural diversity, limited exposure, lack of motivation, assessing progress, learner-centered approach, language practice, effective assessment.



Linguistic barriers are simply obstacles that arise during language use. These barriers can arise due to many reasons, including limited language proficiency, poor grammar, spelling, punctuation or not having a language in common with your interlocutor. For example, if someone moves to a new country, they will obviously face a linguistic barrier if they do not know the language of that community. Sometimes, even if they know the language, they might not be able to communicate well enough in it due to limited proficiency or a really pronounced accent. This is considered to be one of the main problems of teaching foreign language to non-natives. Another major problem is cultural differences. Cultural and ethnic groups demonstrate unique language usage patterns, which can lead to misunderstandings between the teachers and students in educational settings. Consider these examples:

The impact of cultural variations on communication styles and their repercussions for language learning are profound. In certain cultural contexts, speaking only when one has substantive contributions to make is esteemed as a mark of intelligence and politeness (Minami, 2002). Conversely, casual conversation or trivial talk, which serves to affirm personal bonds, may be perceived as immature or intrusive. While this practice can instill in children the value of not interrupting others, it may also inadvertently cast them as unfriendly or standoffish. Eye contact customs present another area of divergence across cultures. For instance, in numerous African American and Latin American communities, it is customary for children not to maintain direct eye contact when adults address them, considering it a sign of respect (Torres-Guzman, 1998). However, within educational settings, teachers often emphasize the importance of sustained eye contact as a means of demonstrating attentiveness and respect. Consequently, a deviation from this expectation may lead teachers to interpret a lack of eye contact as an indication of disinterest or disrespect. Furthermore, social distance preferences vary significantly across cultures. While some cultures endorse close proximity during conversations, others favor more substantial physical distance. This discrepancy can manifest as a challenge in educational settings,



where mismatches in social distance expectations between teachers and students may arise. Students accustomed to a closer physical proximity may inadvertently appear overly familiar or intrusive, while those accustomed to a greater distance may be perceived as overly formal or hesitant. Another critical aspect influenced by cultural divergence is the concept of “wait time” in communication. Wait time refers to the interval between the conclusion of one person’s statement or query and the subsequent response or answer. In certain cultural contexts, wait time may be relatively extended, lasting several seconds (Tharp & Gallimore, 1989). Conversely, in others, it may be considered acceptable, if not expected, for individuals to interject before the conclusion of the preceding comment. Within classroom environments, the customary wait time is typically brief, often lasting no more than one second. Deviations from this norm, such as a preference for longer wait times, may lead students to be perceived as hesitant or reticent. Conversely, a predisposition towards a negative wait time, where interruption is tolerated or encouraged, may be interpreted as over eagerness or rudeness. Overall, cultural disparities in communication styles pose significant challenges for language learning, necessitating an awareness of the cultural backgrounds of language speakers. Moreover, these variations underscore the importance of incorporating cultural sensitivity and inclusivity into language education practices to foster effective communication and engagement among students. Lack of motivation and difficulties in assessing progress are considered another main problematic situation. Students learning foreign languages lose their hope when they see people speaking better, in this case they think they can never learn the language, some of them even give up. If teachers are not professional, they can assess their students with low marks which make them even feel worse.

First and foremost, one of the key solutions to address these challenges is to adopt a student-centered approach that prioritizes communicative strategies. By placing learners at the center of the educational process and empowering them with a sense of ownership, they are more likely to be motivated and strive for excellence. Central to this approach is fostering strong communication skills between teachers and students.



Effective communication, particularly in the target language—such as English in an English language class—encourages students to immerse themselves in the language without relying on their native tongue. This not only deepens their language acquisition but also benefits teachers, as they consistently practice their speaking skills, aiming to achieve fluency akin to that of native speakers. Through this interactive and language-rich environment, both students and teachers can enhance their linguistic abilities and create a more engaging learning atmosphere conducive to overall progress. Another effective approach to language learning involves integrating the cultural context of the language being studied. For example, when learning English, it is beneficial to also study its associated culture. This includes aspects such as social norms, eating habits, communication styles, as well as similarities and differences within the culture. It is important to recognize that meanings of words can vary across cultures. For instance, in Uzbek, the word “cat” is predominantly used literally, whereas in British English, it can also have the connotation of “an unpleasant woman.” (Longman dictionary of English language and culture, 1993) Understanding cultural nuances like this can greatly aid both the teacher and the student in language acquisition. By incorporating cultural lessons alongside language instruction, learners can gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the language, making their learning experience more enriching and comprehensive.

Language practice, furthermore, is crucial for effective communication. When teaching foreign languages, it is essential to incorporate practical exercises that immerse students in real-life scenarios. For instance, if students are learning about shopping or cooking in another language, engaging in role plays can enhance their understanding and ability to apply the language in context. By encouraging students to actively practice every word they learn and integrate this new vocabulary into their daily conversations, teachers can facilitate a more comprehensive language acquisition process. Educators must support students in applying language skills, monitor progress, and provide feedback for improved proficiency and communication skills. Assessment of teachers in both teaching and learning a foreign language plays a more significant



role than we might realize. If a teacher underestimates their students, it can lead to feelings of inadequacy and depression. On the other hand, using modern assessment criteria and providing regular feedback can help students succeed by giving them useful guidance and building trust between students and teachers. It is important to recognize that making mistakes is a natural part of the learning process, and constructive feedback can help students improve and grow. In conclusion, it must be concluded that teaching foreign languages to non-natives can have really hard challenges, especially if even the teacher is non-native she/he will have to work twice more to learn the topics they are going to teach more deeply. Importantly, cultural diversity must be taught and the similarities and differences must be clear. With the help of regular practice, effective assessment methods, taking full responsibility, students can learn the language productively which makes students feel happy when they see their students speaking fluently not only in exams but also with natives with confidence.

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EFFECTIVE APPROACHES AND WAYS OF OVERCOMING TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES PROBLEMS FOR NON-NATIVE STUDENTS

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