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THE PERCEIVED ROLE OF FUTURE ENGLISH TEACHERS: A CASE STUDY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MOSTAR

Summary

The aim of this study is to examine how future English teachers perceive their role in the EFL (English as a foreign language) classroom. We have analyzed assumption papers written by 20 seniors at the Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities of the University of Mostar and have made suggestions as to how they see their role in the teaching process as authoritative, facilitative or as a combination of the two. We also offer interesting discussion in the light of the modern education theory.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to try to examine how future English teachers perceive their role in language teaching. Over the last eighty years, different views of language teaching have reflected on different views as to what the role of a foreign language teacher should be. While the traditional view on language teaching sees the teacher as an authority in the classroom, the more modern views see him or her as a facilitator compatible with students' needs and autonomy (Dankić, 2006).

The traditional role of a foreign language teacher as the authority in the classroom comprises the notion that the teacher possesses the knowledge students do not have. To teach means to transmit that knowledge to students. Students are seen as passive recipients. They

must respect the teacher's authority in the classroom. As they do not possess any knowledge, they do not question the input that is controlled by the teacher. The opportunities for creative expression are limited. The whole teaching process is teacher-centered.

The development of a different teaching model "the teacher as a facilitator" was influenced by the development of the communication-based theories of language acquisition. The teacher does not control but facilitates communication in the classroom. This approach to teaching is student-centered. The students actively participate in the teaching process. They have more autonomy than before and they take responsibility over what they are learning. According to this approach: "Education...must now be defined as a lifelong process of discovering what is not known" (O'Dwyer, 2006, 4). The concept of transmitting knowledge to students should be replaced by problem-solving. Students and teachers should cooperate in the learning process. The teacher is seen as "...a procedural technician, resource person, and co-inquirer - he is more a catalyst than an instructor, more a guide than a wizard" (O'Dwyer, 2006, 4).

The way teachers see their role in the classroom largely depends on the methods they tend to use since all methods define the role either through their theory of learning or their design and procedure.

Traditional methods, such as the Grammar-Translation method, imply that a teacher's role is strictly traditional - he or she is the only authority in the classroom. The Direct and Audio-Lingual methods change that concept to a certain extent. The role of the students is less passive as the main objective of learning a foreign language is communication. In order to learn to communicate, students have to participate in the learning process. Thus, the role of the teacher becomes more lenient, but the teacher cannot be termed a facilitator yet, as he or she still directs all the activities in the classroom and is in charge of the teaching process.

Modern methods challenge and change the traditional concept of what being a teacher means. These methods do not offer the same view on the teacher's role in the foreign language classroom, but they share the concept of the teacher as a facilitator and the teaching process be-

comes student-centered. The teacher encourages learners' autonomy by various means: the Silent Way uses the teacher's silence to make students rely on themselves; Desuggestopedia develops trust between the students and the teacher in order to make students less inhibited; while the Community Language Teaching and Community Language Learning methods assign the teacher the role of counselor and adviser, the TPR (Total Physical Response) method uses the role reversal process (students and learners exchange roles) to reduce the stress students might experience. Whatever the means, the goal is the same - to make a foreign language classroom the place in which the students are the center, while the teacher is there to advise, help, support, and direct them.

The objective of this study is to determine how students who are studying English at the University of Mostar observe their role as future foreign language teachers. Their positions on the role of the teacher in the classroom will be drawn from the choice of methods they find most appropriate to use in their future work in foreign language classrooms.

Methods

The study focuses on 20 senior students who are studying English at the University of Mostar. During the fourth year they attend the course of Methods of Teaching English, which helps them gain both theoretical and practical knowledge related to teaching. They are introduced to different methods and approaches to teaching foreign languages, which they also try out within the framework of the teaching practicum. During the course, they are asked to write an assumption paper that is graded. This final paper offers their personal perspective on their particular assumption of teaching and learning and their teaching philosophy. The data analyzed in this study are collected from the assumption papers submitted by the observed students. Twenty (20) such papers were collected and analyzed in the period from January to June 2006.

The assumption papers offer the students' perspective on methods they find to be the most appropriate for our schools and why they would like to use them once they become English teachers.

TRADITIONAL METHODS	- The Grammar Translation Method - The Audio-Lingual Method - The Direct Method
MODERN METHODS AND APPROACHES	- The Silent Way - Desuggestopedia - Community Language Learning - Total Physical Response - Communicative Language Teaching - Cooperative Learning - Multiple Intelligences - Content-based Instruction - Task-based Instruction - Neuro-linguistic Programming

Table 1: Traditional and modern methods

Based on the widely accepted classification (See Table 1) of methods (Richards and Rodgers, 2001), the students'choices of methods were divided into three categories:

1. Traditional method(s)
2. Modern method(s)
3. A combination of traditional and modern method(s)

Students' positions on the role of the teacher in a foreign language classroom (an authority, a facilitator or both an authority and a facilitator) are suggested by determining which teaching method(s) they opted for.

Results

None of the students chose the first category - exclusively traditional methods.
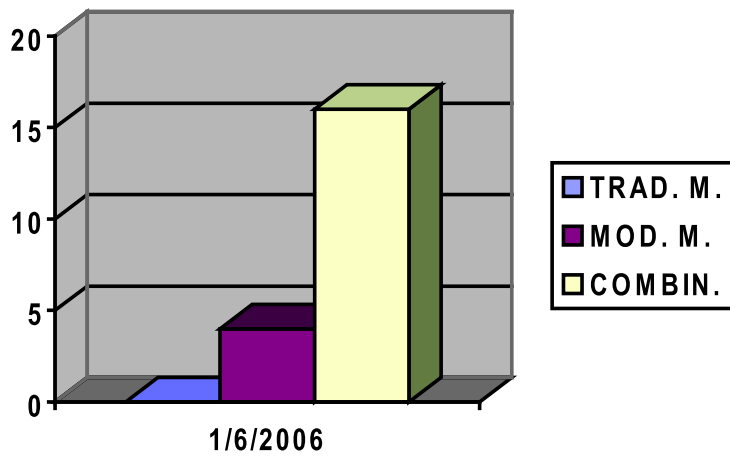
Figure 1: Selection of methods students would use in teaching (traditional methods, modern methods and a combination of methods)

Four students (4/20, 20%) opted for category 2, choosing a modern method as the predominant method they plan to use in their future occupation. One student chose Desuggestopedia; another chose the Community Language Teaching; the third chose a combination of the TPR and Community Language Teaching methods; while the fourth student opted for the MI (The Multiple Intelligence) method (Table 2).

MODERN METHODS	Number of students
Desuggestopedia	1
Community Language Teaching	1
Multiple Intelligences	1
Total Physical Response and Community Language Teaching	1
TOTAL	4 (20%)

Table 2: Modern methods students decide to use exclusively in teaching

Sixteen students (16/20, 80%) opted for a combination of traditional and modern approaches. The traditional approaches of their choice were: The Direct method, The Audio-Lingual method and The Grammar-Translation method (See Table 3).

Seven students (7/16, 43.75%) would combine the Audio-Lingual and Direct method with modern methods. Six students (6/16, 37.5%) would combine the Grammar-Translation and Direct method with modern methods. Among the modern methods they would like to combine with the traditional ones, TPR and Desuggestopedia were the most popular: Seven students reported they would use the combination of the TPR method and Desuggestopedia (7/16, 43.75%), two students opted for Desuggestopedia only (2/16, 12.5%), two of them chose Communicative Language Teaching (2/16, 12.5%), two more were in favor of Community Language Learning (2/16, 12.5%).

Three students (3/16, 18.75%) did not choose any specific method but stated that they would combine traditional and modern approaches to teaching.

COMBINATION OF METHODS			
TRADITIONAL METHODS	**NUMBER OF STUDENTS**	**MODERN METHODS**	**NUMBER OF STUDENTS**
AUDIO-LINGUAL & DIRECT	7 (43.75 %)	TPR AND DESUGGESTOPEDIA	7 (43.75 %)
GRAMMAR TRANSLATION & DIRECT	6 (37.5%)	DESUGGESTOPEDIA	2 (12.5 %)
NON-SPECIFIC TRADITIONAL	3 (18.75%)	COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING	2 (12.5 %)
		COMMUNITY LANGUAGE LEARNING	2 (12.5 %)
		NON-SPECIFIC MODERN	3 (18.75%)

Table 3: Combination of traditional and modern methods students decide to use in their future work as English teachers

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that the majority of the observed students plan to use a combination of traditional and modern methods. None decide to use traditional methods and only four plan to exclusively use modern methods. If we have in mind that different methods recommend different roles for language teachers, it is obvious that by selecting modern methods the observed future teachers tend to see themselves exclusively as facilitators and the ones who decide to use a combination of methods tend to see themselves as a combination of an authority and a facilitator.

It is interesting to consider the observed students' views in the light of modern language teaching theories which do not advocate exclusive reliance on any method (Brown, 2003; Richards and Renandya, 2003). The Post-method era considers no method perfect; they are thought to be too prescriptive, which makes it difficult to adapt them to the needs of different teachers and students around the world. Instead, teachers are encouraged to develop their own approaches by adjusting the principles of different methods to their students' needs and the conditions they work in. Motivating students is considered to be the secret of successful foreign language teaching - if students are motivated enough, they will find a way to learn a foreign language, regardless of teachers' methods and approaches (Chomsky, 1992, 181-182).

Although modern foreign language teaching has abandoned methods and introduced individual teachers' approaches defined by the situation in the classroom, it is interesting that our observed students see their role as a bridge between the traditional and modern views on teaching. They are familiar with the difficult situation in our schools where access to modern teaching materials is limited and what most teachers have at their disposal are blackboards and textbooks. The classes are too large and the teachers have very little freedom in adapting prescribed curriculum to the individual needs of their students.

It is positive that despite the present situation in our schools, the majority of observed students decide to try to introduce modern approaches and put students in the center of their teaching. Desuggestopedia

and Total Physical Response were the most popular modern methods. As far as Desuggestopedia is concerned, the students emphasize the importance of the teaching environment as the main reason they would like to use it in their future occupation. They feel that their students would profit from the friendly and cheerful environment, which would prompt peripheral learning. They also point out the importance Total Physical Response gives to movement, which, in their opinion, makes lessons more active and involves the element of fun. All of the observed students report the stress-reducing factors as the most important components of the modern methods they chose.

In the light of modern trends, some experts suggest that the authoritative role of modern teachers should be reintroduced since students are not capable of independent learning without an authority capable of transmitting all types of knowledge. Therefore, the findings of this study contribute to these discussions, indicating that despite generally adopted theoretical implications teachers do not plan to abandon their authority in the classroom.

This is a case study limited to the analysis of only twenty future English teachers and therefore its findings could not be applied to a large population of those individuals who are preparing to face the challenges of modern English teaching. It is a great starting point for those who would like to research what happens to new teachers once they enter English language classrooms and whether the teaching philosophy they defined as students changes.

Literature

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