

Chapter III : Teaching English as a Foreign Language in the Algerian Secondary Schools

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Introduction

This chapter looks at the teaching of English as a foreign language within the Algerian secondary school syllabus

In particular, the discussion focuses on the officially set objective, the approach used, and on particular side the second year official textbook.

III.1 -The Status of English in the Algerian Educational System

Nowadays, the necessity to know languages is increasingly recognized, as the world joins together in a 'global village'. Taking into account that the role of English in this ever-shrinking global community is becoming increasingly important. English is primary the language of New Media (e.g. Satellite TV, and Internet). It is spoken by about 1,5 billion people and is the language of international communication in business, diplomacy, technology, sports, travel and entertainment. (Tiersky and Tiersky 2001)

Therefore needless to say, the emphasis on teaching English is becoming a vital part of education all over the world.

In the specific case of Algeria, the recognition of the Ministry of Education of the growing importance which English, nowadays plays in the world can be noticed .

In 2001, The Ministry of Education announced the educational Reform and numerous changes have occurred concerning the situation of teaching English.

While, English is still considered to be the second foreign language in the Algerian Educational System after French, it has received considerable attention within the educational Reform.

Above all, English is introduced at the level of first year middle school (i.e. at the age of 11). It covers seven years - four of which at the middle school and three at the secondary school. This as part of a whole process consisting of designing new syllabuses, devising new textbooks and accompanying documents.

As a matter of fact, a new methodology of work was adopted which is the competency Based Approach.

As mentioned before, English is taught as a compulsory course starting from the first year middle school. However, being a second foreign language in the educational system, and due to historical and social reasons. English is primarily learned for educational reasons as to pass exams. It is mostly used in the formal classroom environment and there are few opportunities, other than in school, to use it for daily communicative purposes.

III.2- Finalities of Teaching English at the Secondary School

Within the introduction to the English Syllabus of second year approved by the Ministry Education (2006), the document presents a series of aims which, hopefully, can be achieved within a three years period.

The following statement makes it clear that the previous narrow conception of language learning that consists of merely acquisition of linguistic items is extended to include methodological and cultural objectives .

Indeed it is stated that, *“The aim of teaching English is to help our society to get harmoniously integrated in modernity through a fully complete participation within a community of people who use English in all types of interactions - this participation should be based on sharing and exchanging ideas as well as experiences being scientific , cultural , or civilisational – this participation will help for better understanding for oneself and the other”*p88.

The teaching of English is also intended:

- To help learners promote self learning and critical thought .
- To Promote learners' intellectual capacities of analyzing evaluating, and synthesizing .
- To enable learners to exploit English documents, in new situation at work
- To encourage learners to accept other culture, to initiate the spirit of tolerance and broad -mind ness

It is worthy to mention that these aims set by the Ministry of Education offer opportunities for teachers willing to make use of intercultural study and to encourage tolerant attitudes among their students

In sum, the teaching of English at the Algerian secondary school is not only concerned with general aims of teaching but also universal, human and national values are promoted, students are expected to learn how to speak about their country and its cultural values in English, as well as to be open to English, universal, and human values which are essential elements of modernity and globalization.

III.3- The Competency Based Approach

As mentioned earlier in chapter one and two , since its introduction into foreign language teaching literature in the early 1970's, communicative language teaching (CLT) had gained popularity .It has been widely used in the 1990 's as it describes a set of general principles grounded in the notion of communicative competence being the goal of language teaching .

Moreover, CLT has continued to evolve giving rise to new approaches and methodologies which continued to make reference to CLT and that take different routes to achieve the goal of developing the learners 'communicative competence . (Richards, 2003)

III.3-1. Definition of the Competency Based Approach

According to (Richards, *ibid.*) the Competency Based Approach (CBA) is one of the current methodologies that can be described as an extension of communicative language teaching movement.

Richards and Schmidt (2002) define Competency Based Approach as,

“An approach to teaching that focuses on teaching the skills and behaviours needed to perform COMPETENCES . Competences refer to the students ability to apply different kinds of basic skills in situations that are commonly encountered in every day life.” p 94

The authors stressed that Competency Based Education is based on a set of outcomes that are derived from an analysis of tasks learners are typically required to perform in real -life situations.

The application of the principles of this approach to language teaching is called Competency Based Language Teaching (CBLT), which is believed to improve the quality of teaching and learning because of its focus on learning outcomes.(ibid. p95)

III.3-2. Main Characteristics

Auerbach (1986 cited in Richards, 2003:37) identifies eight features involved in the implementation of Competency Based Approach (CBA) programs in language teaching:

1- A focus on successful functions in society .The goal is to enable students to become autonomous individuals capable of coping with the demands of the world .

2- A focus on life skills-rather than teaching language in isolation Competency Based Language Teaching (CBLT) teaches language as a function of communication about concrete tasks .Students are taught just those language forms / skills required by the situations in which they will function .These forms are normally determined by needs analysis.

3- Task or performance oriented instruction. What counts is what students can do as a result of instruction . The emphasis is on overt behaviours rather than on knowledge or the ability to talk about language and skills .

4- Modularized instruction language learning is broken down into meaningful chunks. Objectives are broken into narrowly focused sub-objectives so that both students and teachers can get a clear sense of progress .

5- Outcomes are made explicit . Outcomes are public knowledge, known and agreed upon by both learners and teachers .They are specified in terms of behavioural objectives so that students know what behaviours are expected from them.

6- Continuous and ongoing assessment . Students are pre-tested to determine what skills they lack and post-tested after instruction on that skill . If they do not achieve the desired level of mastery, they continue to work on the objectives and are retested .

7- Demonstrated mastery of performance objectives . Rather than the traditional paper and pencil tests, assessment is based on the ability to demonstrate pre-specified behaviours .

8- Individualized student centred instruction . In content, level, and pace, objectives are defined in terms of individual needs; prior learning and achievement are taken into account in developing curricula . Instruction is not time based; students progress at their own rates and concentrates on just those areas in which they lack competence .

These features reflect a tendency towards learner centeredness. Hence, the focus on the specific language skills that are needed to function in a specific context in addition to that in Competency Based Language Teaching (C.B.L.T) more attention is given to learning outcomes rather than methodology or classroom process .

Despite that, Critics see that Competency Based Language Teaching is not always feasible, and it seems to be more suitable for technical teaching programmes for adults .

III.4. Teaching English As a Foreign Language to Second Year Secondary School Students

III.4.1 General Objectives of Teaching English as Foreign Language to Second Year Classes as Defined by the National Syllabus (2006)

Objectives of Teaching English as Foreign Language in second year are considered to be part of the general goals, which have been drawn up in accordance with the principles set forth in the Educational Reform (2001), and which subscribe to a Competency Based Approach to teaching English as a foreign language.

Therefore, second year syllabus, is intended to consolidate, and develop the learners' acquired competences, as well as to ensure a continuation to the first year objectives . Which set communication as an ultimate goal of teaching English.

Actually, teaching English to second year students turns around three main Objectives:

-Linguistic Objectives

* To provide the learner with the basic linguistic material (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and the four skills)

That are necessary to pursue further education or employment

-Methodological Objectives

* To consolidate and develop learning strategies aiming at autonomy, critical thinking, and self assessment .

* To enable students to use and exploit various documents and feel interested in subjects that are not treated in class.

-Socio-cultural Objectives

*To ensure interdisciplinary coherence as an attempt to integrate the overall information acquired by the learner.

*To stimulate the learners curiosity and to encourage the students broad mindness to gain access to cultural values brought by English.

III. 4.2. The Second Year Textbook " Getting Through " :

"Getting Through " is the students' current textbook in their second year of secondary education, it is the basis of the course in the classroom .

In their introduction to Teachers ' Book .B. Riche et al (2005) stress that " Getting Through " implements the National Curriculum for English issued by the Ministry of Education in December (2005).It follows the guiding principles which frame the curriculum, and which take into account the social and educational background of our learners, as well as the cultural values of Algeria(p.3)

The authors of the textbook put its major aim to make both the teacher and the learner come to a fruitful interaction.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that the authors of the book make it clear for teachers that the textbook does not inhibit them from creating activities or using various supplementary materials during their lessons other than those included in the textbook.

III.4.3 Description of the Textbook

" Getting Through "textbook has been published in (2006-2007) by the O.N.P.S It complies with the curriculum designed and issued by the Ministry of National Education in December (2005). It relies on the Competency Based Approach, which is both Learner centred and project oriented.

The course book contains eight units, each unit is meant to be completed in a maximum of 15 hours. Each unit comprises five main parts, which are entitled and described by the authors of the book as follows:

-Discovering the language : The students in this rubric will discover the vocabulary, spelling pronunciation and grammar as constituents of the language to be dealt with in each unit .

-Developing skills: Here the students will build basic language skills as well as intellectual skills (thinking , guessing) ,anticipating, making , analyzing, synthesizing, planning ,etc). These skills are required for initiating work on projects and class presentations based on these projects .This enterprise naturally integrates the three competences described in the syllabus, i.e., interacting orally, interpreting messages and producing messages.

-Putting things together: Here the students come to the project itself as an outcome of the constituents of language and the skills acquired in each unit. The students find guidance on how to get the project materialized .They have the opportunity to combine primary and social skills and thus display their individual achievements.

-Where do we go from here? :This part deals with students' self assessment, i.e., checking their own progress through various means, including filling grids and keeping portfolios.

-Exploring matters further: In this part of the unit students will get an opportunity to learn more about the topic dealt with through extensive reading. They will acquire more vocabulary and improve their knowledge of grammar. They will also be made aware of spoken and written language registers.

The texts in the book are selected in relation to the themes dealt within each unit .Some texts are authentic taken from a wide range of different sources, such as newspapers, interviews, and magazine articles. But many have been adapted in order to suit the level of the learners.

The textbook has a clear approach to grammar . Grammatical structures are initially introduced in context , with exercises that encourage the students to work out the rules .The learners can refer to the " Grammar Reference " at the back of the book, which is a useful tool that may be taken advantage before, during or after the lesson.

Furthermore, the course book has a useful teacher' s book. It includes a clear explanation of the methodology and guides the teachers through the lessons. It enables them to use the activities. Therefore, the textbook means comprehensive help with useful suggestions for setting up pair work, group work and lesson planning .The teachers ' book also provides keys to the suggested activities, so that teachers have a wealth of support

The table below shows the units and topics included in "Getting Through" text book:

Unit number and Title	topic	Project
"01" - Signs of the Time	Life styles	-Writing a lifestyle profile
"02" - Making Peace	Peace and conflict resolutions	-Writing a statement of achievements
"03" - Waste not, Want not	World resources and sustainable development	-Making a conservation plan
"04" - Budding Scientists	Science and experiments	-Writing report on scientific experiment -An ABC of dreams
"05" - News and Tales	Literature and media	-Writing a collection of stories
"06" - No Man is an Island	Disasters and solidarity	Making a survey
"07" - Science or Fiction	Technology and the art	-Writing miscellanies -Writing a repertory
"08" - Business is Business	Management and efficiency	-Writing a business portfolio

Table n°1 :Second Year Programme “**Getting Through**” Textbook

Conclusion

This chapter was set up to clarify some issues related to the teaching of English as a foreign language in the Algerian secondary schools. Firstly it outlined the syllabus in terms of its objectives .being linguistic, methodological or sociocultural. Then , it described the methodology chosen to teach the syllabus which is the competency based approach.

This was done with specific reference to the population addressed in the current study i.e. second year classes .Therefore, a description of the textbook currently used was provided.

Broadly speaking, learning English seems to be of a great benefit to any Algerian students by offering him opportunities to participate in modernisation communication with others and tolerance to cultural differences.