

impossible.

References:

- Allwright, D. 1983. **Classroom- centered Research on Language Teaching and Learning: A Brief Historical Overview.** TESOL Quarterly. 16/4: 191- 204.
- Asher, J. 1965. **The Strategy of Total Physical Approach: An Application to Learning Russian.** International Review of Applied Linguistics. 3, 291- 300.
- _____. 1966. **The Learning Strategy of the Total Physical Approach.** Modern Language Journal. 50, 79- 84.
- Curran, C. 1976. **Counseling- Learning in Second Languages.** Apple River, Wisconsin: Apple River Press.
- Ellis, Rod. 1985. **Understanding Second Language Acquisition** Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 1995. In Cuy Cook & Barbara Seidlhofer (Eds). Principle and Practice in Applied Linguistics: **Studies in Honour of H. G. Widdowson.** Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Els, Theo Van et al. 1987. **Applied Linguistics and the Learning and Teaching of Foreign Languages.** N. Y.; Edward Arnold.
- Finocchiaro, Mary and Christopher Brumfit. 1983. **The Functional- Notional Approach.** Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gattegno, C. 1983. The Silent Way. In John W. Oller, Jr., and Patricia A. Richard-Amato. **Methods that Work: A Smorgasbord of Ideas for Language Teaching.** Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House Publishers.
- Krashen, Stephen D. and Tracy D. Terrel. 1983. **The Natural Approach: Language Acquisition in the Classroom.** Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Krashen, Stephen D. 1981. **Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning.** Oxford: Pergamon
- Lozanov, G. 1978. **Suggestology and Outlines of Suggestopedya.** New York: Gordon and Breach.
- McLaughlin, Barry. 1987. **Theories of Second Language Learning.** New York: Edward Arnold.
- Munby, J. 1978. **Communicative Syllabus Design.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nunan. D. 1988. **Syllabus Design.** Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Richards, Jack C. 1985. **The Context of Language Teaching.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stern, H. H. 1983. **Fundamental Concepts in Language Teaching.** Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stevick, Earl W. 1988. **Teaching and Learning Language.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shore, Cecilia M. 1995. **Individual Differences in Language Development.** Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Wanner, Eric and Lial R. Gleitman. 1982. **Language Learning Acquisition: The State of the Art.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wilkins, D. 1976. **Notional Syllabuses.** Oxford University Press.
- Widdowson, H. G. 1978. **Teaching Language as Communication.** Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 1990. **Aspects of Language Teaching.** Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- fields of enquiry. At the same time, students should be encouraged to use the library facilities as often as possible thus reducing their reliance on class notes and lectures.
14. The latest educational technology should be introduced at all levels of language instruction to guarantee that students have immediate and direct access to the information of interest to them and are provided with the opportunity to share their knowledge and experience with the rest of the academic world.
 15. Some research has shown that, formal aspects of teacher preparation programs have less significant effect on the prospective teachers than what the teachers educators themselves informally reveal about their beliefs, attitudes and values in their day- to- day practices. It is imperative, therefore, that, more than ever before, we believe in the profession and practice what we preach.
 16. Practice teaching, one of the crucial components of any language teaching program, should enjoy a prominent position in the total program. So far, unfortunately, it seems that it has been undermined, if not victimized by some circles, as it is apparently less subject to theorizing. One has to remember, though, that while there is nothing wrong with theory, theory which cannot find expression in practice in these programs is of questionable value. Moreover, the language classroom itself is an ideal testing ground for the appraisal and evaluation of theories and models.

Conclusion

The destiny of a nation, to a large extent, rests in the hands of its teachers. Without

teachers to help both the expansion and the transfer of knowledge and experience from generation to generation, man's civilization would not have achieved the status it is enjoying today. Language instruction is no exception, contrary to the views of those who try to minimize its role. If formal instruction did not play an extremely significant role, there would not be so many schools around in the world.

It is through the teaching and learning of foreign languages that different nations can share their experiences, views and thoughts and contribute to the development of knowledge, technology and science.

Speaking of science, if science is evolution in permanence, then in foreign language education we seem to be moving in that direction, that is, the profession, following the other disciplines, is becoming more and more scientific. As a result, paradigms and rival paradigms have become abundant and change is becoming the rule rather than the exception in the field. In these circumstances, if we expect the prospective English language teachers to be able to meet unpredictable challenges in their future educational activities, every effort must be made to guarantee that those who are admitted to teacher education programs enjoy the needed level of originality, inventiveness and motivation, in addition to an acceptable level of language proficiency. While in school, they should be expected to receive the kind of education which is tantamount with their future commitments and responsibilities. Teacher education programs should also undergo periodic assessment and evaluation to see if they can cope with these challenges and objectives. These goals are, of course, difficult to achieve, but, certainly, they are not

responsibility of the English departments is to teach English. This has not been the case in some courses offered more recently. While there is no objection to the teaching of content, content should not be allowed to overshadow language learning. One possible solution is for the first two years of the program to concentrate heavily on the teaching of the skills, strategies and abilities needed for effective communication, both orally and through writing, and also prepare the students for better appreciation of the more conceptual materials presented in the second half of the language program.

8. To decide whether or not all student teachers have reached the intended proficiency level, a proficiency test can be administered at the end of the first two years of the program. In the same vein, a more comprehensive exam at the end of the four - year program can determine whether or not the graduating students have attained the expected levels and whether they are capable of comprehending and integrating the concepts to which they have been exposed in different courses. At the same time, the results obtained on both exams may be used diagnostically to decide if new changes and/or adjustments need to be introduced in the program.
9. The courses offered should undergo close scrutiny in the light of the program objectives, both long term and short term, to determine the role of each in the realization of the stated goals. The process of assessment should include such factors as nature of the course, number of the credits, course content, course requirements and the order in which they are offered.

Obviously, there is nothing magical in the sheer number of "133" course credits that at present most students are required to pass in order to qualify for a BA degree, nor in the two- hour a week courses, or eighteen-week long semesters. A careful reappraisal of these elements can help increase the effectiveness of EFL programs.

10. In case curriculum planners have serious limitations for expanding the program in terms of time, resources, space, or financial support and are thus forced to overbalance one goal or objective over another, care must be taken to guarantee that proficiency in the language receives the highest priority. A review of the exams administered so far, however, may reveal that it has been content rather than form which has dominated the program.
11. Teacher- centered classes should be replaced by the more student- centered ones not only to provide the learners with the opportunity to use the language but also to help them discuss and share their views with their teachers and peers in a more constructive way. If collaboration and shared decision making have to be encouraged among the members of the language community, they have to start with the teacher training programs. Unfortunately, so far the balance seems to be tilted heavily in favour of lecture classes in many TEFL courses.
12. Similarly, classes should become research oriented, encouraging students to work out their own solutions to the problems that they meet. In other words, critical enquiry should constitute an essential component of every course offered on the program.
13. Libraries must be expanded to include the latest books, journals and other sources of information available in the EFL related

teacher training programs, including materials development and also time, amount, and type of instruction.

2. Upon entering the university, students of English as a foreign language should be required to take a placement test in order to decide whether or not they have to take a certain number of prerequisite courses. These courses should assist the students in improving their knowledge and skills in the language and thus pave the way for meeting future challenges with less frustration and more confidence.
3. In order to keep abreast of change in the field of foreign language teaching, teacher education programs should be subjected to continuous appraisal in relation to the needs of both the individuals and the society and the means of their realization. Since language teaching today is borrowing extensively from a wide range of disciplines, such as second language acquisition, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistic, pragmatics, artificial intelligence, cognition, parapsychology, to mention just a few, care must be taken to ensure that the programs offered provide the prospective teacher with the needed skills, knowledge and experience.
4. Regular and systematic contacts should be established among the different departments responsible for the education of the prospective teachers to determine the goals and objectives that should be pursued and also the particular contribution of each department for the realization of these goals. Needless to say, such concentrated efforts can also help to identify the problems and ways to solve them.
5. Within individual departments, attempts should be made to enhance a better sense of direction concerning the realization of common goals set by either the local or national policy-makers and syllable designers. Current practices seem to indicate that each subject matter is treated independently of the others, regardless of the general goals that the EFL program intends to pursue.
6. There should be closer contacts between foreign language teaching departments and local high schools to:
 - a. receive the necessary feedback concerning the applicability of the theories and practices advocated by the academia and, if necessary, take the appropriate measures to bridge the gap between the more theoretical issues and the realities of the classroom.
 - b. offer any professional assistance that might be needed for the promotion of the local language teaching programs.
 - c. arrange seminars, conferences, workshops and book exhibitions to familiarize teachers with the latest ideas, practices and alternatives in the field.
 - d. provide any assistance that might be needed for carrying out research activities of interest to teachers.
 - e. assist in the regular evaluation of the EFL programs and offer suggestions for any possible adjustment or change.
7. As it is imperative for the student teachers to become proficient in the language in order to understand and use the ideas presented both in class and in the various English publications, including books and journals, some of which have recently become highly technical, English language proficiency must receive the highest priority throughout the four year program. Let us not forget the fact that the main

theory and practice, between abstract ideas from various enquiry and their actualization in the achievement of practical outcomes (ibid: 30)".

This is no small undertaking. It requires that the teacher possess the necessary knowledge, techniques and tools in order to study, evaluate and apply different theories or models in the classroom situations to determine their relevance and effectiveness. Obviously, all this is impossible, unless he/ she is already equipped with a sound theoretical and experiential background through his/ her preservice education program.

In order for these aims to materialize, I suggest that policy makers, teacher training programs, and teacher trainers in the country, more than ever before, take the following interrelated and down-to-earth recommendations into serious consideration.

Student Selection

- a. In view of the serious challenges lying ahead of the novice language teacher and the prominent role he/ she is expected to play in the realization of the students' individual and societal needs it is only imperative those who enter the profession rank among the most talented and highly motivated students. To achieve this goal, socio-psychological factors affecting candidates options for future careers should be taken into greater consideration so that a larger pool of students can be attracted to the profession.
- b. Higher passing grades should be expected of candidates wishing to enter the fields of foreign language education, English literature, or translation studies. According to available university records, however, at

present the scores of some students in English allowed to enter language programs are even below the scores obtained by some taking the same test but planning to join other fields.

- c. Candidates' higher scores on subjects such as Persian or Arabic should not be allowed to compensate for poor performance on English tests. So far, students' better performanc on the first two can increase their chances of admission to the English departments. No doubt, knowledge and skill in these fields is of great value, but the contribution of each should be carefully studied to guarantee that mastery in one area does not unduly tilt the balance in favour of another.
- d. It is recommended that an interview session be planned for each individual candidate to decide whether he/ she meets the standards already determined by competent educational authorities. (Final decisions can be made by individual departments, if, initially, a larger body of candidates are introduced to them.)

What Can Teacher Education Programs Do?

Considering the new developments in the field of language teaching/ learning, the following practical suggestions, which are by no means comprehensive, can hopefully help to improve the effectiveness of teacher education programs.

1. In order to guarantee that college- bound students receive the desirable language education at the guidance cycle and the high school levels, their language teaching programs should be critically evaluated to:
 - a) determine the extent to which their stated objective are realized and,if necessary,
 - b) offer guidelines for possible changes in

can science generate art out of itself? If teaching is both science and art, what is the optimal contribution of each, then? Have the more "knowledgeable" language teachers proved to be equally "competent and effective" teachers? Does theory translate readily into practice?

23. Is there only one single competence which is used for purposes of both comprehension and production, or are there different competences?
24. Speaking of different competences or subcompetences, what is the relationship between receptive and productive skills? Listening and speaking are natural processes but reading and writing are not. How can skill in one area contribute to good performance in another?
25. What does it mean to be proficient in a language? What is the frame of reference and who are the judges and what the tools? To what extent does a reading comprehension test, for example, measure one's linguistic knowledge as opposed to his world knowledge?
26. What has the contribution of research been in settling the controversial issues in the language teaching domain? Does the present state of the art still agree with the views of Allwright (1983) described in the following terms?

We do not yet have, and cannot expect to have, in the foreseeable future, a situation, where teachers can, with confidence born of a background of solid experimental results, tell the trainee what techniques to use and what not- to.

with these and many other questions in mind, the young foreign language teacher may

find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to bridge the gap between these opposing poles unless properly prepared for the challenges ahead.

Need for Change

The complexity of the nature of teaching in general, and foreign language education in particular, calls for the contribution of related fields, including, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and applied linguistics in addition to a high degree of expertise, insight and intuition on the part of the foreign language teacher. Considering the facts that:

- a. According to several authorities in the field "at least in the present stage of development of our knowledge, it seems premature to argue for the "truth" of one theory over another" (McLaughlin 1987: 6),
- b. practices at the classroom level have not been sufficiently revealing, especially for purposes of generalization,
- c. research at the present state of the art can throw only a dim light on learning processes, and
- d. teachers under the pressures of expediency cannot be expected to wait for the dusts to settle, it only follows that teacher training programs should equip the future generations of teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities needed for the meeting of various academic challenges confidently and independently.

More than any thing else, language teaching, as Widdowson (1990) points out, can be viewed as a problem- solving activity which is involved with finding solutions to different kinds of problems. In order to succeed, therefore, the teacher must work out "a reflexive, interdependent relationship between

12. Should language instruction start earlier or later in the total education programs? What are the arguments for and against each position? If the foreign language is introduced earlier in the program, will there be no over-loading, and will there be sufficient means and manpower (see Els et al. 1984)?
13. If two different foreign languages, such as Arabic and English, have to be taught in the same total education programs, should they be introduced at the same time, or should one follow the other? What are the educational, social, psychological and cultural imports of each?
14. Should the emphasis in class be placed on form or should the teaching of functions occupy most of the instruction time? Is it possible to teach function without form? If not, how can the two, form and function, be best reconciled?
15. What kind of syllabus should be adopted? Structural, Functional/ Notional or Communicative (Munby, 1978; Nunan, 1988)? What are the fundamental differences between these syllabi? Is it the syllabus as such which matters, or is it what is done to the syllabus which counts (Widdowson, 1990)?
16. Should the syllabus be predetermined or should it be allowed to evolve out of the students' interactions in their attempts to communicate meaning? If the former is the case, the teacher may have a text to rely on, but if the latter is opted for, how can he guarantee the direction and the systematicity or the comprehensibility of the materials taught?
17. Should instructional materials be adapted to the learner's level of linguistic proficiency, or should they remain intact for reasons of authenticity? If adapted, which aspects of the texts used should be addressed, linguistic, conceptual, or both?
18. Should the teacher be concerned with products, as many have been in the past, or should he show more interest in the learning processes and strategies used by the learner? How much information is so far available about the nature of these processes and to what extent are "the good language learner's strategies" teachable (see, e. g. McLaughlin, 1987)?
19. Which is more effective, a language based-course or a content- based one? (see Krashen 1983). If the second choice is opted for, who should be responsible for the teaching of the course? The language teacher, or the teacher of the particular content area? What if the language teacher is not familiar with the content and the content teacher is not comfortable with the language?
20. What is the role of formal instruction? Is it minimal, as some scholars would want the young teacher to believe (see Krashen 1983) or is it, on the contrary, highly crucial? What are the main differences between naturalistic second language acquisition and classroom second language acquisition?
21. Should the teacher regard himself as an authority and a knower in class, as is the case in methods such as Suggestopedia or should he adopt the role of a counselor treating a client, as in CLL? or, still, should he play the role of the leader of an orchestra, as observed in the audio- lingual approach or be silent most of the time?
22. Is teaching a science or an art? If science,

spite of their serious shortcomings, have been taken for granted too soon instead of being subjected to careful conceptual and empirical appraisals (see, e. g., Widdowson, 1990).

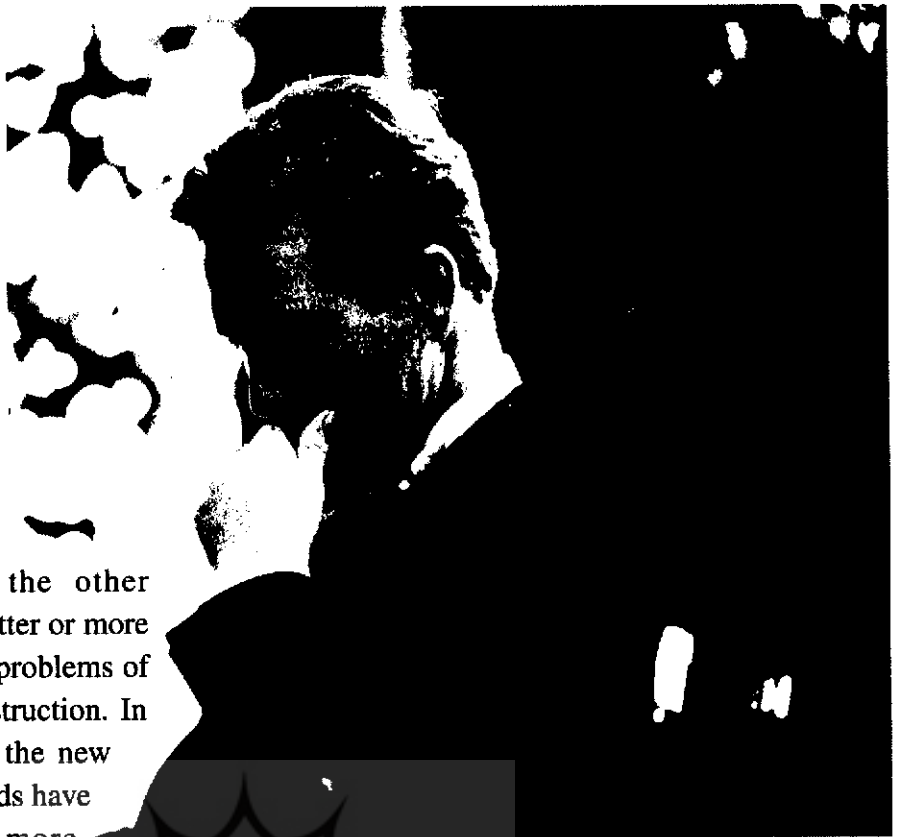
2. Is it the case that some theories are all wrong and some others all right, or is it safer at the present state of the art to assume that certain aspects of language learning or teaching are more compatible with certain aspects of one theory and some others more in line with another view?
3. What is the relationship between theory and practice? Should the relationship be one-sided or should it be reciprocal? Is it the theorist or the practitioner who should be regarded as the final arbiter in settling the controversial issues? According to Stevick (1988), it is the theorist that is lionized in the professional meetings and not the teacher. The situation being so, the teacher is duly advised by Stevick to listen to the theorist with independence and save some of the respect for himself/ herself. Can a healthy state of reciprocity, then, be established between theory and practice in language teaching in a near future?
4. Do changes in methods necessarily reflect changes in theories, or do factors such as fashion, support networks, and politics also play their roles (see Richards, 1985)?
5. To what extent is the selection of a particular method congruent with the actual needs of the learners? How can the individual's present and future needs be identified and addressed accordingly?
6. Is there a natural order to the acquisition of a first language, and if there is one, does that order play the same function in the acquisition of a foreign language?
7. What is the role of Universal Grammar in the learning of a foreign language? Do all children use the same pathway or different pathways (see, e. g., Shore 1995)? Is there such a phenomenon as Universal Grammar to begin with, and if there is, is it completely available, or partially accessible, or definitely inaccessible to the adult learner? What is the role of individual differences in the acquisition of L1 or L2?
8. What is the contribution of each hemisphere, right and left, to the learning of a foreign language? What types of activities address the right hemisphere and which the left? How best can the two domains be optimally activated for the facilitation of ideal learning and retention?
9. What is the role of the learner's first language? Does it hinder or help the process of second language acquisition? Should L1 be avoided at all costs, or should it be used when needed? If the latter is the case, under what conditions and to what extent should it be utilized?
10. What is the role of translation in language teaching classes? Does it assist the learner to become more familiar with the subtleties of the two languages involved through the comparison of the two tongues or does it hinder?
11. Should language instruction aim at accuracy or fluency? That is, should the habits of good pronunciation, intonation and grammar be inculcated in the learner from the very beginning through different kinds of exercises and drills and the avoidance of errors, or should errors be tolerated and even regarded as signs of student's gradual development in the process of language acquisition?

Language Learning (Curran, 1972), the Functional/ Notional Approach (Wilkins, 1972; Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983), the Natural Approach (Krashen and Terrell, 1983), and Communicative Language Teaching (see, e. g., Widdowson, 1978).

Yet, none of these competing methodologies has succeeded in supplanting the other approaches or providing any better or more generalizable solutions to the problems of second or foreign language instruction. In reality, these innovations and the new developments in the related fields have mostly resulted in raising more questions than can they possibly answer. This state of the art clearly shows that at present we are going through a period of constant change and without any clear paradigm to guide practices in language instruction. Consequently, the young students preparing to enter the profession today are left with the impression that they have to find their way in an uncharted land. The large number of apparently contradictory dichotomies, issues and practices, some of which mentioned below, can easily lead one to great disappointment and frustration, unless one is well- informed and properly trained.

Major Issues Confronting the Language Teacher

In order to have a better understanding of the nature, magnitude and the diversity of problems confronting the novice EFL teacher, this article takes a look at some of the more challenging questions common to the more



theoretically oriented EFL / ESL writings-questions which are also central to any discussion of methodology, whether traditional or innovative. These questions, while by no means exhaustive, might help provide a clearer picture of what is at issue in the present state of the art in language education and, at the same time, serve as a reminder for the introduction of the much needed changes in the teacher education programs.

1. What is the status of theories in the domain of second language acquisition today? Unfortunately, as some scholars have pointed out, there are already too many theories around (Ellis 1995) resulting in the creation of a state of counterproductivity. The diversity of these models, more than seven now (see, e. g. McLaughlin 1987), appearing in a relatively short period of time, has actually stifled research activities instead of enhancing them. Yet, these models, in

than they have answered.

This article reviews a number of the more challenging theoretical and practical questions to which the language teacher must respond in his/ her day - to - day teaching activities and argues that the extent to which language teachers succeed to meet these challenges depends on their prior professional preparation, inventiveness and the adoption of a more critical and problem - solving attitude. At the end suggestions are made for the appraisal of the total language teaching programs, especially at the university level, taking into consideration factors such as student selection, course content and language instruction.

Key Words: Second Language Education; Teacher Education, Second Language Acquisition; Syllabus Designing

Introduction

Until quite recently, the task of foreign language teachers, especially if they adhered to the audio- lingual approach, did not seem to be unnecessarily demanding. Many devote practitioners believed, or were made to believe, that scholars in the related fields of enquiry, mainly language and language learning, had finally succeeded in discovering the secrets of effective language teaching. What remained to be done, therefore, was to follow the directions provided by the experts point by point and step by step. Faithful adherence to these procedures would, as the authorities in the field had assured them, result in immediate success. To his great relief, the syllabus was predetermined and the methodology was also prepackaged. Moreover, in order to enhance the feeling of confidence and harmony among the teachers, especially the novice, there were demonstration classes,

teachers' manuals and instructional aids to accompany the assigned textbooks. As it is perhaps only too obvious, the language theory behind these practices was structural, the psychology behaviouristic and the methodology, in many parts of the world, as mentioned earlier, audio- lingual. This situation was not limited to the practitioners of the ALM only. Teachers using the other related and popular methods of the times seemed to fare almost equally well. To the satisfaction of many a language teacher, in most cases the content and the procedures to be used were all carefully selected, graded and explained.

The present

This utopia, as it seemed to be, was not to last for ever. Later developments in a number of related areas such as linguistics, psychology, sociology and second language acquisition, to mention only a few, revealed that the kind of optimism prevalent at the time has not been, for the most part, justifiable. Theoretically, the teacher is now told, the conceptual backgrounds of methods such as the ALM, both in linguistics and psychology, have been shaken to the foundation (see e.g., Bowen 1985; Wanner and Gleitman, 1982) and, in practice, according to some quarters, the method has failed to produce differential results when compared with other competing methods (see, e.g., Stern, 1983).

Surprisingly, however, with the downfall of the audio- lingual method in the late 60s, and precisely during the same period when many scholars were thinking of breaking away with the method concept in language instruction (see Stern 1983), there appeared many other approaches such as the Total Physical Response (Asher, 1965), Suggestopedia (Lozanov, 1978), The Silent Way (Gattegno, 1972) Community

Challenges Facing Foreign Language Teachers:

Implications for the Teacher Training Programs

M. Koosha (Ph.D.TEFL)
English Department
Isfahan University



چکیده فارسی:

در دهه های اخیر، نظریه های مربوط به فراگیری و آموزش زبان دوم همزمان با پیشرفت های وسیع و سریع در زمینه های وابسته، دستخوش دگرگونی ها و تحولات بسیار شده است. دامنه و شتاب این تغییرات و تنوع و تعدد نظریه ها و کاربرد آنان، معلمان زبان را بناچار با پرسش ها و اغلب چالش های جدی روبه رو ساخته است.

در این مقاله سعی شده است تا در حد توان با برشمردن پاره ای از این پرسش ها و با توجه به نقش کلیدی معلم در امر آموزش، پیشنهادهایی برای اصلاح و پیشبرد برنامه های تربیت دبیر در دانشگاه ها ارائه شود.

Abstract

Foreign language learning/ teaching has been undergoing constant changes for the past several decades. In the area of second language acquisition alone, on which language pedagogy is based, the past thirty years has witnessed the appearance of several models and an equal number of rival methods and procedures, all competing for dominance. These developments, however, although promising, have so far raised more questions