

THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES: PROPOSALS FOR IMPROVEMENT

LA ENSEÑANZA DE LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS: PROPUESTAS DE MEJORA

ABSTRACT

In one way or another, teachers who are dedicated to teaching foreign languages in general, and English in particular, are aware of the challenges they face when carrying out their work. This article analyzes some of the main reasons why the teaching of foreign languages should be revised. Focusing on the specific case of Spain, some possible solutions will be presented in order to address deficiencies previously detected. In this sense, it is considered that the proposals analyzed can serve as a reference to address the situation with certain guarantees of success in terms of contributing strategies and positive solutions. It is important to emphasize that the present analysis has been carried out after detecting a series of problems. The result aims to be one of the engines that allows a profound debate. This debate should lead, inexorably, to a change in methodology, training, design, conception, and, ultimately, in the teaching of foreign languages in Spain.

Keywords: teaching, foreign languages, Spain, deficiencies, proposals

RESUMEN

De una forma u otra, los docentes que se dedican a la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras en general, y de la inglesa en particular, son conscientes de los retos a los que se enfrentan a la hora de desempeñar su trabajo. El presente artículo analiza algunas de las principales razones por las que la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras debe ser revisada. Centrándonos en el caso concreto de España, se presentarán algunas posibles vías de solución con el fin de abordar deficiencias previamente detectadas. En este sentido, se considera que las propuestas analizadas pueden servir como referencia para abordar la situación con ciertas garantías de éxito en lo que a aportar estrategias y soluciones positivas se refiere. Es importante destacar que el presente análisis se ha llevado a cabo tras detectar una serie de problemas. El resultado pretende ser uno de los motores que posibilite un profundo debate. Dicho debate debería conducir, de manera inexorable, a un cambio en la metodología, formación, diseño, concepción y, en última instancia, en la enseñanza de las lenguas extranjeras en España.

Palabras clave: enseñanza, lenguas extranjeras, España, deficiencias, propuestas



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INTRODUCTION

If English Language Teaching (ELT), a process that must be taken into consideration is implemented correctly, a foundation of English skills can be built early on. If done incorrectly, the likelihood of mixed-level English students as well as low motivation towards learning English in secondary and higher education becomes much higher (Cameron 2003).

In one way or another, those involved in the teaching of foreign languages has experienced or unfortunately, even suffered at the hands of the failure of foreign language teaching in Spain. Unfortunately, the desired goal of oral skills has not been achieved. In fact, the level of competence reached in oral skills is below that of its counterpart, written skills. In a time when you cannot argue the importance of the English language as a vehicle for communication, nor the need to master a third language, we are faced with a situation that is far from ideal and that requires immense improvement.

Understanding that one of the basic objectives should be to progressively develop the communicative skills of students, and for students to accomplish things in the same manner they would in their mother tongue, it is obvious that we have to ask ourselves what is not working. Students show a marked weakness regarding their oral expression. We need to analyze which aspects are not being adequately addressed and developed in our educational system and provide pertinent solutions to correct this pernicious *status quo* in which we find current language teaching in Spain.

If we propose the question of whether it is possible to teach oral skills within the framework of our educational system, the answer is resounding yes. However, it is required that these skills are taught the right way. Many things must change so that the teaching and learning of oral skills can be

carried out properly. From this premise, we will go through the areas that have a direct relationship with language teaching and where we believe it is necessary to carry out an exhaustive renovation.

METHODOLOGY

In Spain, the failure of foreign language teaching and the challenges that need to be overcome are undeniable, oral testing results being the immediate proof of this. Our findings are based on two processes:

- a) First, our work revising literature recently published;
- b) Second, our extensive experience as language teachers over many years and in many institutions, has allowed us to detect, analyze and suggest possible strategies and solutions to the current situation.

This methodology would not be comprehensive if a change was not triggered afterwards.

Without doubt, the process of English Language Teaching (ELT) (in general terms) for students should be taken very seriously. The success of this process can directly influence learning in future years, and this influence affects both students and teachers.

In one way or another, everyone involved has experienced or unfortunately, even suffered at the hands of the failure of foreign language teaching in Spain.

When understanding that one of the basic language objectives is learning to communicate effectively, it becomes obvious that we have to ask ourselves how we can improve. To understand how deep each area of improvement needs to be, we completed a detailed evaluation, specifically analyzing the aspects that are not being adequately addressed and developed in our educational system, then designing realistic solutions

that could be implemented to correct the pernicious status quo in which we find current language teaching in Spain.

Our evaluation revealed that many things must change, from day-to-day teaching in the classroom, to the content and execution of Teacher Training Programs. We believe that a thorough rejuvenation is required, and we have provided our research and suggestions in the subsequent pages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. THE CASE OF SPAIN IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

A great deal of importance should be placed on the appropriate method of instruction for students learning English, i.e. that with a focus on the main goal of communication (Roberts 1998; Green 2011; Richards 1998; Philp, Oliver & Mackey 2008).

When dealing with the evolution of foreign language teaching that most countries have followed in the European setting, one sees how countries that began to incorporate major changes in their curricula about half a decade ago, now have students who show a more than acceptable mastery in second (especially English) and third languages. In this group are the Nordic countries (Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Iceland), as well as, for clearly political reasons, the countries of the communist orbit that made up the former Warsaw Pact, for which the learning of Russian became a priority. In the countries of the western block, the introduction of teaching a second language in Primary Education, for example, did not occur in a generalized way until well into the 1980s (in Spain, it was not until 1990). It was not until the end of the 1990s that the introduction of a second compulsory foreign language became widespread in most European countries.

The late implementation of foreign language teaching in Spain has also led to an absence of definition in terms of the curricula, the implementation of effective methodologies and, above all, the profile of the teacher. Consequently, specific qualifications for training Primary Education specialists in languages was established in the 70's, but a similar qualification was not developed for Secondary Education. While many European countries have had lengthy experience in developing specific programs and training qualified teachers, Spain is still in the prehistory of our journey in language teaching.

Spain's delay in relation to most other European countries has also established a need to expedite the consideration of variables of greatest incidence for the effectiveness of programs. Thus, greater importance is given to the early teaching of a foreign language without taking into account an aspect of greater influence, the profile of the teacher in charge of carrying out this task.

In some autonomous communities in Spain, as part of a pilot trial, students at preschool education (4-5 years old) receive English lessons from teachers that do not need to be specialists in that foreign language. This means that students' exposure to English is anticipated. This example, in which students' characteristics of cognitive development are not taken into account, reflect the false belief that the lower the age of students, the lower level of English knowledge the teacher must possess. It is the wrong assumption and it originates through the absence of planning and design of a broader and more ambitious program. A program that should be designed by qualified personnel, and is not the mere product of admirable desire, coming from the political establishment willing to teach English or another foreign language at all costs.

2. STATE OF THE PROBLEMS

The elements that may have an impact on the conception and implementation of a Teacher Training Program (see Bartlett 1990; Freeman 1989,1990; Oxford 2001; Wallace 1991; Richards 1998, among others) have been evaluated numerous times. Within the following pages and throughout the remainder of this article, we aim to analyze some of these influential features as well as the research conducted by the aforementioned authors.

2.1. NEED TO CARRY OUT A DETAILED ANALYSIS

As a preliminary stage, needs analysis and program evaluations should be conducted in order to detect and identify weaknesses and strengths in the current system as well as to come up with possible measures for further development and improvement. Quality control will also be significant because as Schlaeger (2002:6) says: “the desired creation of a European area of higher education requires constant support, supervision and adaptation to continuously evolving needs”.

As previously mentioned, within the Spanish educational system the teaching of foreign languages in general and of oral skills in particular has clearly yielded unsatisfactory results. These results precede a belief shared by many that it is essential to provide the necessary means to reverse this situation. However, we must first clearly separate what we, as teachers, perceive to be a reality through our experience and the existence of a negatively perceived reality. In order to define, in objective terms, what the real situation is and the actions that we must take to overcome it, we must carry out a thorough analysis of the variables of greatest impact while forming a program that will give the desired results.

To do this, we have isolated the areas which have had the greatest impact in the design of foreign language teaching programs and, therefore, when changed, will have the greatest impact in the achievement of positive results. These include: the distribution of content throughout the curriculum, the instrumental and methodological preparation of teachers, the lack of consideration of student characteristics, the material and didactic resources used, and the necessary involvement of the community.

2.2. LACK OF ADEQUACY OF THE CURRICULUM

According to Vale and Feunteun (1995), student’s tasks must be organized in a way that the relationship between curriculum and resources can be properly evaluated.

One reason for linguistic incompetence comes from poor attention to oral skills. Although there must be a balance between teaching written and oral skills, the latter are usually given a symbolic role. Students of foreign languages must not only acquire the ability to create meaningful writing through the application of lexical, morphosyntactic, and syntactic knowledge but should also practice this management at a discursive, oral level. At this point, reading aloud is the best they can aspire to learn based on written skills alone.

Though the curriculum itself reflects the need for this balance, we find that teachers will only teach what the skills are but not how to use them. Therefore, the first problem we face when dealing with the treatment of oral skills in the curriculum, is that students’ don’t have the opportunity to perform the necessary interactive practices using language for communicative purposes.

In the organization of conceptual, procedural or attitudinal contents within the framework of oral communication skills, the treatment

of speaking and understanding skills is too individual, and it is often forgotten that in real life the skills appear in an integrated nature and not in isolation. In a conversation, one usually speaks and listens simultaneously, however, in the curriculum there is a separation of these two skills, which results in students' lacking the ability to use these skills together.

A focus on subject knowledge, rather than a focus on the act of teaching itself, can help distinguish the areas of effectiveness for teachers (Richards 1998). According to Green (2011), all areas of subject knowledge interact with one another. Leach and Moon (1999) consider subject knowledge to be the understanding a teacher has regarding the material they will be teaching and they argue that an evaluation of the confidence of a teacher in their subject knowledge begins with pre-existing curricula. Curricula can include various issues and inconsistencies. Realistically, these curricula should balance the areas that support students learning with school and parent expectation. Pedagogic knowledge is another important factor of subject knowledge that involves the way teachers organize a topic to ensure comprehensibility to learners (Shulman 1987).

Regarding the nature of the curriculum, it can generally be concluded that its lack of adequacy is not the most decisive cause of these negative results. Rather, it is the absence of a direct relationship between the content and the practice that takes place in the classroom. The instrumental and methodological preparation of educating foreign language teachers is what ultimately determines the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the curriculum. It becomes the necessary link between the object of teaching and the student. Teacher training, an aspect that will be addressed later, is the factor most directly involved in the formulation of the curriculum and which, ultimately, determines the effectiveness of

teaching.

Another aspect that negatively affects the curriculum is the number of students in a classroom. In a formal teaching environment, regardless of the characteristics of the students, the number of students in the classroom is of crucial importance. It can determine the effectiveness of the program (even with other variables involved). The curriculum for teaching foreign languages in most autonomous communities in Spain is advised by regulations to have approximately 20 students. This is exceeded in most of cases and invalidates the potential success of correct methodological planning.

Additionally, the curriculum does not properly accommodate the number of hours dedicated to teaching a foreign language. With more global hours at an earlier age, students will reap the benefits of early exposure to the language but its current structure of four hours a week over four years of compulsory secondary education and three weekly lessons along two Baccalaureate courses (approximately, as Spain regulations change from place to place) is insufficient.

In most cases, educational authorities have sought to make up for this deficit by introducing foreign language learning at a younger age. In order to address this need, the number of global hours has been increased, but not by stage or course and continues to be seriously lacking. The situation worsens if the majority of this time is devoted solely to the teaching of written skills, rather than offering a balance of written and oral skills.

Finally, it is important to mention the assessment instruments available to the educational system throughout student's education. The level of demand asked of students is reflected in the different tests and exams that must be completed throughout their schooling (tests that in some way, also influence the methodology itself).

There are numerous tests involved

throughout students' schooling but, without a doubt, the most importance test in evaluating classroom materials is the university entrance test, the EVAU/EBAU (terminology varies according to different Spanish autonomous communities). This is a test that, in many cases, is crucial for students when determining their future university studies. By the second year of Baccalaureate the sole objective is the improvement of skills to succeed on the university language test. This is an aspect that notably modifies the methodology used in the classroom, as there becomes a disproportionate amount of attention given to written skills (which are evaluated on the test) and a disinterest in oral skills (which are not evaluated).

2.3. THE INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STUDENTS

The didactic interactions are evident in classroom environments. The investigations (Ríos, Bozzo, Marchant & Fernández 2010; Gallardo & Reyes 2010; Soares, Almedia & Guisande 2011; Tabera, Álvarez, Hernando & Rubio 2015) highlight that the behaviour and attitudes of teachers affects their relationship (be it positive or negative) with students.

Emotional Intelligence (term coined by Salovey and Mayer in 1990 and later developed by Goleman in 1995) is necessary in the teaching-learning process. The evidence gathered by studies carried out in recent years demonstrates this (Mayer and Salovey 1997; Salovey, Mayer and Caruso 2002; Parrot 2002; Tamir, Mitchell and Gross 2008). Though it is not a topic that is frequently addressed both in initial and in-service training of teachers, we have seen that teachers need this training and the implications it has on education.

We want to mention the monographs in the following journals, *Teacher Trainer* (2005),

Anxiety and Stress and Coping (2006), *Psicothema* (2006) and *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology* (2008). The conclusions derived from the various national and international conferences held in Spain in recent years are also very relevant.

The material covered in the I International Congress of Emotional Intelligence in Education (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria 2004), the I International Congress on Emotional Intelligence (Málaga 2007), and the I National Congress of Emotional Intelligence (Mérida 2011), show very interesting facts about the state of research and the application of Emotional Intelligence in different educational settings.

As we have seen, the representation of various types of content in formal education suffers from inadequate attention to oral skills. Additionally, the necessary adaptation of the curriculum to the individual characteristics of the students as they progress in their educational life does not take place. An example of this lack of adequacy is the teaching of foreign languages in the second cycle of preschool education and first year of primary education. These children have just completed the brain maturation process (which ends at around five years old, depending on the individual).

Due to this biological and cognitive development, exposure to language must predominate, in order for children to benefit from the mental processes of structuring their own language as well as a second one. Formal instruction, especially of a linguistic nature, is out of place and subjects children to a cognitive effort for which they are not yet equipped to handle.

This exposure to a new language also requires that the model that children are presented with is as authentic as possible; therefore, teachers who are going to be in contact with children at this stage must have adequate instrumental knowledge of

the language. If this is not the case, all the benefits derived from early exposure to the language are invalidated.

Another aspect of the curriculum that is not efficiently dealt with is the need to appeal to the psychological and emotional development of adolescent students. For example, seeking the benefit derived from their personality types, their curiosity about new topics (whether of a scientific or humanistic nature), their tendency to imitate certain icons or attitudes, and their internal motivation to achieve an objective i.e. necessary attention to instrumental motivation.

Special attention is not paid to the development of intrinsic motivation as an instrument that will inevitably contribute to making teaching more productive. According to Gardner (1983), motivation is the sum of the effort to achieve a goal plus the sum of the necessary attitudes to achieve it.

Therefore, interest is a factor necessary to foster motivation and is especially important to the improvement oral skills. It is the key element that allows interaction to occur in the communication process. The balance between attitudes, motives and perceptions forms a conglomerate on which decisions must be based, as they have an undoubted dominance in the development of any learning.

2.4. INSTRUMENTAL AND METHODOLOGICAL TEACHER TRAINING

As Kant said in 1781, “[a]unque todo nuestro conocimiento empiece con la experiencia, de ninguna manera significa que se origine de la experiencia” (Müller & Vera 2015:35). It is clear that for real learning to exist, it requires a metacognitive process that requires knowing the fundamental processes, such as

reasoning, critical analysis, and motivation. These will achieve an optimal result.

Teachers share two main attributes; perceptions (varying views on the language teaching process) and input (provided from previous teaching experience) (Freeman 1990). Freeman defines teachers as individuals who facilitate the learning process. This reinforces the fact that teachers do not have a responsibility to determine the methods of effective language teaching. Teachers must focus on equipping students with the skills needed for everyday life.

In most classrooms and, by extension, for most students, the teacher is the main and often the only form of contact with the language they are learning, especially in the early stages. Thus, the expertise of the teacher becomes the key to the presentation, introduction and further improvement of students’ linguistic competence.

With this being said, it becomes contradictory that there are degrees, such as Preschool Education, Primary Education, or even English Studies, that specifically perform the task of teacher training, but do not properly prepare their students and do not promote the necessary measures to ensure that their graduates, who will ultimately become language teachers, possess adequate knowledge for the educational stage in which they are going to practice.

Any control measure that assures us that students already have the knowledge at the beginning of the studies, or acquired it throughout, is irrelevant. Likewise, there is no corrective measure within the regulated studies that allows future teachers to acquire the necessary useful competence to perform their task as teachers.

As far as the methodological training of future teachers is concerned, we find ourselves in a similarly discouraging situation. The curriculum for the degrees of Preschool Education or Primary Education is full of general didactic and methodological

subjects, but rarely do they contain content specifically related to the methodology of teaching foreign languages. Thus, the subjects of English Language didactics are in the minority and are at a disadvantage in relation to those of a general nature. The panorama for the degrees in English Studies is not much better.

They offer a catalogue of linguistic and literary subjects, but there is little room for methodological ones. However, in a few universities and degrees, we find that there is a relatively good effort in preparing students in the field of foreign language teaching. They include subjects related to the acquisition of languages, the methodology of teaching foreign languages, or even subjects that offer teaching practices in educational centres.

In short, the curriculum for degrees directly related to graduates who will eventually become language teachers has not been designed for its students to achieve an adequate command of foreign languages; nor does it ensure basic knowledge that will allow the future teacher to professionally develop in the field of education.

It is important to note that the responsibility of this unfortunate situation does not fall on the Faculty, but, instead, on the political decision-makers. In fact, the reality shows that a high percentage of foreign languages teachers are very aware of the lack of instrumental and methodological training and try with all means at their disposal to fill the gaps in their training.

2.5. MATERIAL AND DIDACTIC RESOURCES

Tasks are another important factor (Ellis 1991). According to Philp *et al.* (2008), a well-designed task has positive effects on student response. They also acknowledge that using a variety of tasks combined with the use of different contexts or audiences

will provide students with the opportunity to apply a wide range of language, both spoken and written. Teachers must also be aware of student's cognitive growth, meaning an activity should incorporate an element of malleability to ensure a well-rounded understanding of content.

At present, almost all of the publishing companies of textbooks and didactic material in the field of foreign language teaching offer teachers the opportunity to obtain materials perfectly adapted to their needs. In fact, there is an appreciable improvement between the materials that were used in classrooms at the beginning of the 1980s and the ones that became available to teachers in the second half of the 1990s.

The proliferation of specific publishers and the implementation of publishers with vast experience in the field of language teaching throughout the world has resulted in a host of specific materials in our country. We find variety and quality in textbooks that are used for organizing and properly sequencing the contents of a specific curriculum and a wide variety of materials specifically designed for the teaching of a particular skill, linguistic or discursive element, or the didactic use of new technologies and the Internet.

There are also multiple resources (for example, manuals) available for methodological preparation should a teacher feel they did not receive sufficient education during their university studies. Additionally, there are teacher associations that strive to organize seminars of a pedagogical nature to bring the most productive methodological approaches to teachers in practice and in training.

However, it's not all positive. For example, even with the expansive inventory of resources available, there is still a clear lack of adequate materials and resources with regard to certain specific skills, such as pronunciation as the basis for productive oral skills or encouraging reading as a key

element in the development of linguistic competence.

What is worse is that written texts are given a disproportionate importance in the curriculum by making them the first and almost only form of student contact with the language. It is perhaps here that we can find one of the greater causes of inadequacy in the teaching of oral skills, the fact that the written word is ubiquitous from first contact with the foreign language in the classroom.

In the acquisition of your native language, the ability to understand the orthographic language (literacy) does not precede the establishment of phonological competence, but rather follows it. The learning of a second language must occur in the same way. It has been demonstrated that combining orthographic signs and the sounds of the new language in the initial stages of language learning greatly harms the acquisition of the correct pronunciation and, therefore, the overall oral skills.

The child receives oral exposure to their native language for at least six months before beginning their babbling stage and receives another six months of exposure before they begin to pronounce their first words (at around one year old). It is not until the approximate age of three, that their attention is drawn to the grapheme symbols of sounds and letters. It is not until the culmination of their cerebral maturation occurs, that we can say that they have reached an acceptable ability to associate letter and sound.

If, as most of the materials suggest, we introduce words from the new language to a child at the second stage of Preschool Education, we are doubling the cognitive effort required (something that the child is not yet equipped to do). This will ultimately result in very negative consequences regarding the learning of oral skills.

2.6. DIGITAL COMPETENCES

The industrial society, heir to the Enlightenment, began a gradual process of transformation that would lead us to what we now understand as a knowledge society (Drucker 1969). At the same time, scientific knowledge as the basis of knowledge is subject to a process of continuous revision, seeking continuous improvement and greater adaptability within a framework characterized by instability and uncertainty as opposed to permanent syntheses typical of the industrial society (Willke 1998).

A good example of this is the recent advances in information and communication technologies that have permeated all areas of society. Their continuous progress forces organizations into a state of continuous adaptation and causes a permanent need for training in order to respond to these changes and stay up-to-date (Kruger 2006).

Likewise, a key factor that has accelerated our transition into the knowledge society is the generalization of the Internet, an element that has revolutionized communication worldwide (although there is still a gap in access to information, as noted by Castell 2001). More and more people connect to the network and, as a result, connect to the rest of the world.

The computer is no longer the only way to access this network either. The use of new devices has resized the time and space of the information society and caused a kind of ubiquitous connectivity (Brenner 2011). Information and Communication Technology (ICT), referring to all the tools associated globally in the aforementioned concept: information technology, telematics, multimedia, telephone, television, etc., make up the new information society. In fact, all social networks have been invaded by these new tools that are now considered essential if we want to maintain development as a society and as an individual (Montolío 2011).

Given these technological and cultural change, society requires and requests new instrumental and pedagogical approaches that can train upcoming generations. This affects the entire education system. Education, today and always, is affected by the reality of the society that surrounds it. As a process of personal and social development, it must have the precise context in which it is found as a reference, and even try to improve it and transform it. As stated by Sáez (2010), the educational field should take into consideration that children who are growing up today will have to compete in the work field and develop their lives within a couple of decades.

Therefore, the educational system should not remain outside of this process, but rather it should incorporate it, forming individuals capable of searching, selecting, processing, sharing and transforming data into relevant knowledge in any field (MEC 2013).

Given the potential of ICT, specifically mobile devices, to facilitate access to information and create links for learning and professional development, it is considered that the future of education will have a close relationship with digital competences, the competence of learning to learn and personal initiative (Siemens 2006). The nexuses that link these competences stem from the need to develop strategies to obtain, elaborate and share information, as is the case of the competence learning to learn (Martín 2008).

It is equally important to take advantage of the accessibility of information available that fosters ICTs, as well as the knowledge generated to learn to undertake it (Osorio 2013). ICTs provide a way to build learning and, at the same time, establish professional contacts that can lead to entrepreneurship of both business and social type (Broughton 2009).

The Framework for the Development and Knowledge of Digital Competence in Europe (DIGCOMP) is a document prepared by the

European Union in 2013. This framework was updated by the 2016 European Framework for Digital Competence of Citizens (DIGCOMP 2.0) and it has been used as a conceptual reference for the development of The National Institute of Educational Technologies and Teacher Training (INTEF)'s Common Framework of Digital Teaching Competence 2017.

The DIGCOMP 2.0 Framework comprises five areas of digital competence:

- Information and information literacy
- Communication and collaboration
- Creation of digital content
- Security
- Problem resolution

Prado (2017:66) also highlights: *“Contemplar las competencias digitales de los estudiantes como vector de impacto en el diseño de la experiencia digital es un elemento clave para evitar una brecha que puede no ser percibida inicialmente”*.

2.7. THE INVOLVEMENT OF SOCIETY

Learning is an active social process, which means that learning occurs when individuals are actively engaged in social activities (Vygotsky 1978; Inelmen 2011).

The role played by society is an important factor, or rather an amalgam of factors, that is not often recognized. However, the influence of our surroundings determines, to a large extent, the activities of a social nature, and how the learning of a foreign language will occur.

As far as the teaching of a new language is concerned, the attitude that a social group has towards its perceived importance, its speakers and, its culture, will play a prominent part in the way that society will

face its teaching and learning process. The attitude felt toward this new language can be found primarily in the educational policies of national governments or the Spanish autonomous communities, but also in written press, cinema, television, radio, or even in the way families approach the raising of their children. Due to their perceived distance from the formulation and implementation of educational programs, the difficulty of identifying and evaluating them in a tangible way, and the idea that these are situations and ways of acting that cannot be changed, these factors are often considered to be of low priority.

The treatment of a foreign language in the media is very important, since its use, correct or not, is transferred directly and immediately to its audience. Given the influence of audiovisual media, it is essential that the use of words from other languages do not reflect an attitude that is too careless in terms of pronunciation, for example.

This perpetuates a vision that is tremendously negative. With that being said, the medium being used to promote the foreign language must be relaxed in its use as this will help facilitate the comprehension of the listener. Sometimes, following this trend, we even go so far as to advise broadcasters to not be too correct in the pronunciation of certain proper names or words so that they can be recognized by the majority of listeners.

Regarding, in particular, the teaching of oral skills, the positive aspects emanating from exposure to the language are determined by two factors: the quantity and quality of the input. Thus, the use of the foreign language, no matter how small it is, must have the maximum possible quality, in order to counteract the low level of exposure.

An example that demonstrates the lack of exposure to a foreign language outside of an educational setting is Spanish cinema. Almost all of the foreign films in Spain are versions that are translated into Spanish.

Only on very rare occasions we can benefit from two hours of exposure to the language we are learning while enjoying a good movie.

Fortunately, today, film (subtitled or not) through video, DVD, the Internet, and satellite and digital television, has become extremely accessible. However, it would be helpful to see a change in social attitude toward the broadcasting of films in their original version, which would greatly contribute to teaching, especially the oral component.

Context factors play a large role in the teaching and learning process (Ellis 1997), thus, the understanding of them is integral (Richards 1998). Teachers must have the ability to not only identify these factors but to work with them. Sociocultural factors of both the native and target language should also be taken into consideration and can be accomplished by integrating these cultural into specific activities.

CONCLUSIONS

We have outlined some of the causes in which the educational system, in charge of promoting the teaching of foreign languages, has not achieved satisfactory results in the past. Any assessment that is made about the origin of these causes must be carried out from starting points that are not based exclusively on intuition and teaching experience. They must begin with an identification and delimitation of the aspects that impact effectiveness of educational programs, and serve to analyze, in the most scientific way, the scope of the innumerable variables involved.

As Parrilla (2013) suggests, it is necessary to foster a new teaching identity: pedagogically competent, able to investigate and reflect on the practice with other teachers and aware of the social and moral aspects of their profession. From this approach some

essential elements are derived, for initial and continuous teacher training. Our goal is to offer a catalogue of actions in each of the areas of importance in order to alleviate the aforementioned deficiencies.

- Adapt the educational centres to the new demands.
- Include an oral component to university entrance exams.
- Adapt the curriculum to biological and cognitive characteristics of the students (especially regarding early teaching in foreign languages).
- Make changes in the design, organization and sequencing of the contents of the curriculum, as well as in the selection process of language teachers.
- Promote instrumental interest in learning a foreign language, positive attitudes and autonomous learning.
- Create specific qualifications for the training of language teachers in Preschool, Primary and Secondary education (compulsory and post-compulsory).
- Modify the current curriculum in the degrees directly or indirectly responsible for teacher training through the introduction of methodological subjects and a program of teaching practices.
- Create a program, within the framework of university education, that allows a stay of no less than six months in native foreign countries of the language being learnt.
- Change in the teaching exams through the inclusion of objective oral and written evaluation of the candidates and their methodological training.
- Consistent update and improved continuing education programs for teachers, firstly, through the courses taught by the centres responsible for teacher training, secondly, by reinforcing the role of the language advisers of highly recognized prestige, and thirdly, by

utilizing the training courses organized by universities and teacher associations.

- Provide adequate digital resources to the educational centres in order to promote on-line teaching.
- Introduce new texts and didactic materials suitable for the different educational stages.
- Formalize agreements with radio and television stations to promote language preparation and to encourage the broadcasting of films in their original version.
- Create specific language courses aimed at parents and conducted through public education.
- Formalize agreements with institutions and associations (national and foreign) for the dissemination of the language and culture of other countries.

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