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Problems of Multilingualism in Teaching Foreign Languages

Abstract

Multilingualism is an important aspect of modern globalized reality, which has a significant impact on the process of teaching foreign languages. In an environment where many people in different parts of the world communicate in several languages, there is a need to understand and analyze the complexities associated with teaching foreign languages in a multilingual context. Issues of bilingualism (bilingualism), trilingualism (three languages) and multiple proficiency in languages pose difficult challenges for teachers and methodologists. However, it is important to note that language interference is not always an entirely negative phenomenon. In some cases, it can serve as a useful tool for students, as it allows them to use already acquired knowledge. For example, knowledge of French can help students learning Spanish learn new words and expressions more quickly due to similar lexical and grammatical structures. However, teachers must be careful to ensure that interference does not become an obstacle to effective foreign language acquisition. One possible solution to this problem is to use specially designed exercises aimed at highlighting the differences between languages and developing skills in switching between them.

Keywords: Multilingualism, Teaching Foreign Languages, Language Barrier, Bilingualism, Teaching Methods

Yabancı Dil Öğretiminde Çok Dillilik Sorunları

Öz



<https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/atdd>

Çok dillilik, yabancı dil öğretimi süreci üzerinde önemli bir etkiye sahip olan modern küreselleşmiş gerçekliğin önemli bir yönüdür. Dünyanın farklı bölgelerindeki birçok insanın farklı dillerde iletişim kurduğu bir ortamda, çokdilli bir bağlamda yabancı dil öğretimiyle ilgili karmaşıklıkların anlaşılması ve analiz edilmesine ihtiyaç vardır. İki dillilik (bilingualism), üç dillilik (trilingualism) ve dillerde çoklu yeterlilik konuları öğretmenler ve metodologlar için zorluklar teşkil etmektedir. Bununla birlikte, dil müdahalesinin her zaman tamamen olumsuz bir olgu olmadığını belirtmek önemlidir. Bazı durumlarda, öğrencilerin halihazırda edindikleri bilgileri kullanmalarına olanak sağladığından, öğrenciler için faydalı bir araç olarak hizmet edebilir. Örneğin, Fransızca bilgisi, İspanyolca öğrenen öğrencilerin benzer sözcük ve dilbilgisi yapıları nedeniyle yeni sözcük ve ifadeleri daha hızlı öğrenmelerine yardımcı olabilir. Bununla birlikte, öğretmenler girişimin etkili yabancı dil edinimine engel olmamasını sağlamak için dikkatli olmalıdır. Bu soruna olası bir çözüm, diller arasındaki farklılıkları vurgulamayı ve diller arasında geçiş yapma becerilerini geliştirmeyi amaçlayan özel olarak tasarlanmış araştırmalar kullanmaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çok Dillilik, Yabancı Dil Öğretimi, Dil Engeli, İki Dillilik, Öğretim Yöntemleri

Introduction

Multilingualism is becoming an important factor that influences the teaching of foreign languages. In the context of globalization and migration, when students often belong to different cultural and linguistic groups, teaching foreign languages takes on new challenges. Every new language students learn is perceived through the lens of their native or second language. This affects both the perception of the material and the acquisition of grammar and vocabulary. Teachers must recognize the importance of adjusting approaches and methods depending on the students' language background.

One of the main aspects that we have to pay attention to in multilingual groups is language interference. This phenomenon occurs when students use elements of their native language or another target language when using a foreign language, resulting in errors. Language interference can manifest itself at various levels: phonetic, grammatical, lexical and semantic. In some cases, it leads to distortions in pronunciation, incorrect forms of words, as well as the use of expressions uncharacteristic of a foreign language.

Bilingualism is the ability to speak two languages fluently, which is becoming increasingly relevant in the modern educational context. However, having two or more languages among students can both help and complicate the process of learning a new language. On the one hand, bilingualism promotes the development of cognitive abilities such as attention, memory and the ability to multitask. Research shows that bilinguals have improved problem-solving skills and can switch between different cognitive tasks more effectively. On the other

hand, having multiple languages can cause certain learning difficulties, especially if teaching does not take into account the specific characteristics of multilingual students.

In the context of multilingual education, it is important to develop methods that support the development of bilingualism while preventing over-reliance on one language. For example, using contextual situations to practice languages can encourage students to apply skills in real-life situations, which helps avoid excessive interference. Additionally, elements of metacognition should be actively included to help students become aware of the strategies their brains use when switching between languages.

Trilingualism is the ability to speak three languages, and for many students, especially in countries with multilingual environments, this ability is a reality. The problems that arise in trilinguistic groups have their own characteristics. Firstly, students often face the difficulty of choosing the right language to communicate. This can lead to confusion when using vocabulary or grammatical structures. For example, students speaking Azerbaijani, Russian and English may make mistakes in choosing the correct forms depending on the context (Voskresenskaya, 2009). Teachers working in such groups should pay attention to students' language preferences to minimize interference effects. It is important to develop flexible techniques that promote a better understanding of the structure of each language and also help students develop the ability to effectively switch between languages. The problem of trilingualism is also related to cognitive load, since multitasking in a language requires significant effort from the brain to maintain the linguistic autonomy of each language. An important part of teaching foreign languages in multilingual groups is the development of intercultural competence. Language does not exist in a vacuum; it is closely related to the culture, history and social contexts in which it is used. Foreign language teaching should include elements of intercultural communication to help students understand not only the lexical and grammatical features of the language, but also its cultural and historical roots. This aspect becomes especially important in multilingual groups, where students may have different cultural backgrounds and different perceptions of the world. For example, words or expressions that have one meaning in one culture may have a completely different meaning in another. Foreign language teaching that focuses on intercultural understanding promotes respect for other cultures and helps students build connections with native speakers, as well as develop communication skills in different social and cultural contexts. Motivating students in multilingual classrooms is one of the biggest challenges facing language teachers. In environments where students already speak several languages, they may not feel the need to learn another one. This is especially true when the

language they are learning has no clear practical value in their lives. For example, in Azerbaijan, students who speak Azerbaijani, Russian and English may not perceive the need to learn other European languages as important for their careers or everyday life.

One way to solve this problem is to use innovative teaching methods such as gaming technologies, project-based learning and the use of real-life problems. It is important not only to show students how learning a language can be useful, but also to create an environment in which learning becomes fun and meaningful for them. The use of practical situations, such as projects that relate to real-life problems and situations in students' lives, can increase motivation and engagement (Mamedova, 2020). The future of foreign language teaching in multilingual countries is associated with the need to integrate innovative methods and technologies into the educational process. The use of methods based on active learning, an individual approach and digital technologies will improve the quality of teaching and take into account the specific characteristics of students. It is important that educational institutions consider the unique needs of multilingual students and develop programs that not only help develop language skills, but also promote critical thinking, creativity and intercultural competence. The challenges associated with multilingualism include both cognitive aspects and cultural and social ones that need to be taken into account in teaching practice.

Multilingualism has a significant impact on human cognitive processes. It has been proven that speaking multiple languages develops cognitive abilities, improves memory and attention, and also contributes to the development of analytical thinking. However, in practice, teaching foreign languages in a multilingual environment faces a number of difficulties. One problem is that repeated use of different languages can cause them to interfere with each other, which is called language interference. This phenomenon involves the borrowing of grammatical structures, vocabulary and phonetic features from other languages, which sometimes makes it difficult to understand and use foreign languages.

For example, a study by M. Thomas (2006) confirms that students who speak two or more languages often have difficulty choosing the correct vocabulary, grammatical form, or pronunciation. This phenomenon is explained by the fact that the brain strives to conserve resources and often activates more familiar language structures, which can lead to errors when using a foreign language.

The language barrier is one of the most common problems in teaching foreign languages. In the case of multilingual students, this phenomenon may be amplified due to the fact that each new language is learned through the prism of languages already mastered. In some cases, students begin to think in the language that is most comfortable for them, and are not always

able to adapt to the new language context. This can make it difficult not only to understand, but also to develop speaking and writing skills.

Problems associated with language barriers can be especially pronounced in a classroom where students speak different languages. In such situations, educators are faced with the challenge of how to adapt teaching methods to accommodate students' multilingualism while promoting the development of language skills in a foreign language. In a paper on this issue, M. Cook (2003) notes that teachers must take into account the diversity of students' linguistic backgrounds, which requires a special approach to teaching and the selection of effective methods.

Multilingual students tend to come from mixed cultural backgrounds, which can create additional challenges in the language learning process. It is important to take into account not only lexical and grammatical differences, but also cultural characteristics. Language is closely tied to culture, and many linguistic expressions and phrases cannot be translated word for word without taking into account the context. Therefore, teaching a foreign language should include elements of intercultural communication so that students can understand not only the language itself, but also the culture of its speakers (Rozina, 2018). Teachers must be aware that students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds may perceive the same word or expression differently. For example, the word “respect” can have different connotations in different cultures, which is important to consider when teaching.

Methods of teaching foreign languages in multilingual groups must be flexible and take into account the diversity of linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students. One of the most effective approaches is a communicative technique aimed at developing communication skills in real situations. In the context of a multilingual classroom, it is important to actively use methods that promote language understanding and acquisition through communication, interaction, and practical use. Problem-based learning also helps solve problems associated with language barriers, as it focuses on actively involving students in the learning process, solving real-life problems and using language for practical purposes. It is also important to consider the role of modern technologies and the Internet, which can provide students with access to numerous sources of information in foreign languages.

In multilingual classes, students often come from different cultures, which also poses a challenge for teachers. Cultural differences can be expressed in the way learning material is perceived, in approaches to learning and in the personal attitudes of students. In this regard, it is important for a teacher not only to know the language, but also to be prepared to work with

different cultural contexts, to take into account cultural characteristics when constructing a course and interacting with students (Thomas, 2006). Viewing language as a cultural tool helps students not only master communication skills, but also broaden their horizons and develop respect and understanding for other cultures. This becomes especially relevant in the context of globalization and migration, when educators often encounter multilingual and multicultural groups. Azerbaijan is a multilingual country where the official language is Azerbaijani, but Russian and English are often used in everyday life. The existence of such linguistic traditions imposes certain features on the teaching of foreign languages in educational institutions of the country.

The multilingual environment in Azerbaijan contributes to the development of bilingualism and even trilingualism, which, on the one hand, opens up new opportunities for students to learn languages, but on the other hand, creates additional difficulties in the educational process. Schoolchildren and students in Azerbaijan, as a rule, speak several languages, which requires teachers to take a special approach in order to avoid language interference and prevent difficulties in learning a new language.

In Azerbaijan, all educational institutions use Azerbaijani as the main language for teaching, but in a number of schools and universities other languages - Russian and English - are also actively taught. This results in many students being multilingual, and their foreign language learning faces a number of unique challenges associated with switching between languages. Research shows that the use of Russian in teaching in Azerbaijan (especially in scientific and technical fields) has a significant impact on foreign language teaching, since many lexical and grammatical structures of the Russian language can influence the perception of foreign languages, especially English (Cook, 2003). One of the key problems in teaching foreign languages in Azerbaijan is language interference. For example, when teaching English, Azeri- and Russian-speaking students often use elements of their native or second language, resulting in errors related to grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Thus, the influence of the Russian language on Azerbaijani (for example, in phonetics) can sometimes be a source of difficulties for students when mastering English phonology.

Foreign language teaching in Azerbaijan also faces challenges related to bilingualism. Most pupils and students speak Azerbaijani and Russian, and are also beginning to learn English. This creates a unique situation where students already have experience switching between two or three languages, which on the one hand can be an advantage, as it develops cognitive abilities, but on the other hand, it can complicate the process of mastering a new language if teaching does not take into account the specifics of a multilingual environment.

An important part of teaching foreign languages in Azerbaijan is the need to teach not only language skills, but also the development of intercultural competence. In a multilingual country, it is important to take into account the cultural characteristics of the different peoples and languages in which students study. Teaching foreign languages in Azerbaijan cannot be limited only to grammar and vocabulary; It is necessary to introduce elements of intercultural communication so that students can understand and respect the culture of other peoples, especially when studying European and Oriental languages.

The education system in Azerbaijan is actively developing methodological approaches in teaching foreign languages, but the country still has problems associated with insufficient training of teachers, lack of teaching materials and differences in educational standards. It is also important to note that despite significant efforts aimed at developing language competence among young people, there is a shortage of highly qualified foreign language teachers, especially in rural areas. At the same time, the modern educational system in Azerbaijan is actively introducing new methods, such as a communicative approach, the use of technology and interactive materials for teaching foreign languages. These methods help create a more dynamic and inclusive environment that respects students' multilingualism and improves language skills. Language interference, as one of the main phenomena of multilingualism, is the impact of one language on another when learning it. This is especially evident in such aspects as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. In countries where several languages are actively used, students often face difficulties in borrowing elements from one language, which can lead to errors in the use of a foreign language. In practice, in Azerbaijan, where Azerbaijani, Russian and English are widely used, the influence of the Russian language on the perception of English grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary is often observed. An example is the use of Russian prepositions and case forms that creep into English speech, making it difficult to master correct constructions.

One method of combating language interference is to create a specific language environment in which students focus on purposeful use of each language in its own context. This requires integrated learning approaches in which students recognize the differences between languages and understand their unique structures and rules. Thus, teachers should design activities that aim to increase awareness of differences and deepen knowledge of each language. It is impossible not to note the cognitive benefits that come from mastering multiple languages. Research has shown that multilingual people have better problem-solving skills,

higher levels of analytical thinking, and an increased ability to switch between different tasks and contexts.

Children growing up in a multilingual environment develop stronger cognitive skills such as attention, memory and problem-solving abilities. This is due to the need to frequently switch between languages and adapt to different linguistic and cultural contexts. For example, when learning foreign languages, students are exposed to differences in syntax, vocabulary, and phonetics, which develops their flexibility in thinking (Sheng, 2011). In addition, multilingualism improves neuroplasticity—the brain's ability to adapt and rewire itself in response to new linguistic and cognitive challenges. As a result, learning foreign languages, especially in a multilingual environment, contributes not only to the improvement of language skills, but also to the development of students' mental abilities.

An important aspect in teaching foreign languages in a multilingual environment is taking into account cultural differences. Language is not only a means of communication, but also a carrier of cultural codes, traditions and worldviews. When learning a foreign language, students not only learn words and phrases, but also master the system of meanings and cultural realities that lie behind these words.

In Azerbaijan, where not only local and Russian languages are studied, but also English, French and other European languages, teaching foreign languages must take into account not only lexical and grammatical features, but also cultural differences. For example, when teaching English, it is important to emphasize differences in intercultural communication, such as communication styles, nonverbal cues, and traditions. It is also important to understand that students from different cultures may perceive the same words and expressions differently. For example, the word "friendship" may be perceived differently in different cultures, depending on the social context. Teachers must be prepared for their students to interpret language expressions according to their own cultural understandings. Methods of teaching foreign languages in multilingual classrooms must be flexible and take into account the diversity of students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. One of the most effective approaches is the communication technique, which focuses on developing practical communication skills in real life situations.

In the context of a multilingual classroom, teachers should actively use a variety of techniques and approaches that promote language skills, such as play-based methods, group work, and project-based assignments. This allows students not only to practice the language, but also to develop skills in interacting with others in a multilingual environment. It is also important to develop students' self-study skills and independent work with materials in a foreign

language. This may include the use of technology such as online courses, language apps, and the creation of virtual language communities where students can communicate in the target language (Johnson, 2015). Azerbaijan is a country with pronounced bilingualism and trilingualism, which has an impact on education and especially on the teaching of foreign languages. Problems associated with language interference and the need to switch between different languages often arise during teaching, especially when students begin to learn English, already speaking Azerbaijani and Russian.

At the same time, the development of bilingualism and trilingualism is a great advantage, as it exposes students to different cultural and educational backgrounds. Students who speak multiple languages have greater opportunities for career advancement, as well as for participation in international projects and research. The development of bilingualism in Azerbaijan also helps to strengthen ties between different countries and cultures, which is important for the country in the context of globalization.

However, in order to effectively use bilingualism in the educational process, it is necessary to create conditions for sustainable and consistent learning of several languages. This requires, first of all, updating teaching methods, improving the qualifications of teachers and improving educational materials so that they meet the needs of a multilingual environment.

Modern technologies play a key role in teaching foreign languages in multilingual groups. With the development of the Internet and digital technologies, teachers can use various resources such as online courses, interactive platforms and language applications that promote active student involvement in the learning process. The use of technology not only improves access to learning materials, but also creates a more inclusive learning environment where students can interact with the materials and with each other. This is especially important for multilingual students who may have access to information in multiple languages, which helps develop flexibility and ability to process information (Rozina, 2018). The introduction of virtual language classes and online platforms allows students to interact with native speakers, which contributes to better language acquisition and improved communication skills. Also, modern technologies can help overcome language barriers by providing access to automatic translation and various language reference books.

Conclusion

Multilingualism poses a significant challenge in language teaching, but it also offers new opportunities for developing students' cognitive and cultural skills. Teachers must take into account not only linguistic differences, but also the cultural characteristics of their students, and

develop flexible teaching methods that will ensure effective language acquisition and successful integration of students into multilingual and multicultural groups. It is important to remember that multilingualism is not only a problem, but also a huge resource for the educational process, which, with the right approach, can lead to better results. Education in Azerbaijan, where several languages actively interact, reflects multilingualism in both cultural and educational contexts. The challenges faced by language teachers, such as language interference, bilingualism and multiculturalism, require flexible teaching methods and an integrated approach. It is important to develop the education system so that it takes into account multilingualism and contributes to improving not only the linguistic, but also the intercultural competencies of students.

Multilingualism is not only a challenge, but also a huge resource for the educational process. Teaching foreign languages in multilingual classrooms requires flexibility and innovative approaches that take into account both the cognitive and cultural backgrounds of students. It is important that teachers use methods that promote the development of not only language skills, but also intercultural competence, which will enable students to become more successful and confident in a multilingual and multicultural world.

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