

"Yaz Su; A Bridge to Learning"

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One of the early days of the academic year, I was sitting in the school library, contemplating the preparations for the new school year. Suddenly, the principal entered and mentioned that a woman had arrived, originally from Ardabil, speaking Azerbaijani. Apparently, none of us were able to communicate with her, and I was asked to help since I was fluent in Azerbaijani.

The woman had come with her young son, a first-grade student, to register him for school. They had recently migrated from Ardabil to Tehran, and neither of them spoke Persian. The principal asked me to talk to them, and I listened carefully to their concerns.

The principal arranged a meeting and asked three teachers to decide which one would accept the student. The principal and I stood together while two other teachers sat next to us. The mother and son were positioned in the center of the circle. The principal made the request, and the first teacher said, "I have two special needs students, I can't accept another one." The second teacher responded that just a few days ago, she had been introduced to a student with specific problems. Finally, Ms. Rahimi, who had decided not to accept the student, said she could not take him in.

I watched all of this with sadness. The student's gaze shifted from the teachers' faces to their changing expressions. None of them responded, and he anxiously looked at their faces. In that moment, I realized how unfair it was for the teachers to refuse the student simply because they lacked appropriate language teaching skills.

The mother and son quietly left the school, and while I was upset with the teachers' behavior, I said to them, "Why are you treating them this way? What kind of behavior is this?"

However, unlike the other two teachers, Ms. Rahimi ran to the street and returned a few minutes later with the student, saying, "He can come to my class."

The next day, when I was in the library, Ms. Rahimi entered and said, "I took the student to class, but he doesn't understand anything."

I asked, "Which subject does he have the most trouble with?" Ms. Rahimi replied, "Persian."

A spark went off in my mind. I said to Ms. Rahimi, "Would you allow me to come to your class and help?"

The next day, I entered the class. The student was standing at the board, and Ms. Rahimi had asked him to write the word "water" (آب). He simply stared at the board. I said to him in Azerbaijani, "Yaz su," and he picked up the chalk and wrote, "آب" (water).

My hypothesis was proving correct. He didn't know Persian, but with Azerbaijani, he was able to convey his understanding.

The same thing happened with the word "bread" (نان). Now I understood that the student's primary issue was not his ability to learn, but his lack of proficiency in Persian. He made rapid progress and, by the end of the year, completed first grade with a GPA above 19, even managing to speak Persian, albeit with his accent.

Introduction

This story illustrates an educational experience where an immigrant student faces challenges in the learning process due to his lack of proficiency in Persian. A scientific analysis of this event can help teachers and administrators better understand the linguistic and cultural needs of bilingual and immigrant students and develop effective strategies to address them.

1. Challenges and Issues

a. Lack of Awareness of the Student's Linguistic Needs:

Main Issue: The student's inability to speak Persian led to neglect of his linguistic and learning needs.

Negative Responses from Teachers: Teachers avoided accepting the student due to their inability to understand Azerbaijani and the lack of appropriate educational strategies.

b. Discrimination and Lack of Empathy:

Teacher Reactions: Teachers refused to accept the student for various reasons. These reactions could be seen as discriminatory, as they focused on their own limitations instead of the student's needs.

Lack of Empathy: The teachers' negative reactions and disregard for the student's specific situation (immigrant and bilingual) indicated a lack of empathy and understanding of his unique circumstances.

c. Initial Rejection of the Student:

Outcome: The student was initially turned away due to his inability to communicate in Persian and the unwelcoming attitude of the teachers. This could have negative effects on the student's self-confidence and motivation.

2. Suggested Strategies for Teachers

a. Awareness of Linguistic and Cultural Diversity:

Importance: Teachers should be aware of the cultural and linguistic diversity among their students. Understanding the students' native languages and specific linguistic needs can facilitate the learning process.

Practical Suggestion: Teachers can leverage bilingual students to enhance language abilities in the classroom. They can also use translators or language resources alongside language instruction to facilitate communication.

b. Using the Mother Tongue in Teaching:

Importance: Using the mother tongue at the beginning of the educational process can help students familiarize themselves with basic concepts and regain their confidence.

Practical Suggestion: Teachers can use bilingual methods to teach fundamental concepts. For instance, lessons can be delivered in two languages at the start of the year, allowing students to gradually master Persian.

c. Sensitivity to the Emotional and Psychological Needs of the Student:

Importance: Empathy and sensitivity to students' emotional needs are crucial. Failing to attend to the student's individual and psychological conditions can diminish their motivation and interest in learning.

Practical Suggestion: Teachers should establish close communication with their students and offer emotional support. It is essential that students feel valued and supported in the school.

3. Suggested Strategies for School Administrators

a. Provision of Appropriate Educational Resources:

Importance: Administrators must provide suitable educational resources for bilingual students so they can easily engage in the learning process.

Practical Suggestion: Using bilingual textbooks and software or being familiar with local resources for teaching language to new students can help facilitate educational integration.

b. Teacher Training on the Needs of Language Learners:

Importance: Administrators should train teachers on how to approach and teach immigrant and bilingual students, using effective methods to ease their learning process.

Practical Suggestion: Administrators can arrange training programs for teachers, focusing on how to teach bilingual and immigrant students. These programs can help teachers familiarize themselves with effective techniques.

c. Promoting a Culture of Empathy and Inclusivity in the School:

Importance: Creating a friendly and supportive school environment can help foster acceptance and understanding of cultural differences.

Practical Suggestion: Administrators should cultivate a school environment where students from diverse cultures and languages feel comfortable and supported by each other. This can enhance student motivation and academic success.

Conclusion

This analysis demonstrates that dealing with bilingual and immigrant students requires careful attention and awareness. Teachers and school administrators must recognize that language challenges are not just educational barriers but can become opportunities for learning through supportive and empathetic approaches. This issue calls for a change in mindset and the adoption of innovative educational methods, including the use of the mother tongue, creating a culturally friendly atmosphere, and training teachers to address linguistic and cultural diversity.

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