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Research Article

TEACHING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN A MIXED ABILITY CLASS

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ABSTRACT

Quite often in the practice of teaching English, you can hear from colleagues: “Again on this course I got a mixed-ability group!” Is it for good or as a punishment that we are given a situation in which we are forced to work with a group of students of different levels of training? In this article, we'll examine factors that determine how to work with these classes and potential difficulties EFL teachers could encounter, benefits of instructing these students, and advice and tactics for handling these situations.

KEYWORDS

Mixed-ability group, proficiency differences, different levels of training, learning styles.

INTRODUCTION

As a rule, when distributing students into groups, they are offered to take a test, which determines their current level of foreign language proficiency. Based on the results of the test, they come to their first class at the beginning of the semester or course. The term "mixed-ability" is used to characterize courses where

there are noticeable learning proficiency differences in a single class as well as the students' limitations, strengths, and learning styles. It is rather difficult to find a single definition of this term, since all students have different opportunities, different attitudes and different learning styles. However, each teacher faces

a number of problems associated with such a class: strong students' complete assignments quickly, while the rest are just starting; strong ones begin to get annoyed or interfere; strong students quickly answer questions, leaving no time for weak students to even think, etc.

DISCUSSIONS

Students need to be encouraged and supported, no matter how fast they learn. At the same time, you can divide them into pairs so that they support and motivate each other. It is also important to allow time for a specific task, rather than the amount of work. In a class where students have different levels of English, only the second option is suitable, since it does not limit the strong students, but also gives the weaker students an opportunity to show what they know. At the same time, everyone works, but everyone is at their own level.

Factors of Mixed Abilities in the Classroom

The characteristics of the pupils in a single ESL lesson can be influenced by at least nine different variables. These consist of:

Age and maturity (do you have a class with kids that are not just nine but also between the ages of 16 and 38?)

- various intelligences
- learning styles: Do you have a class where some students prefer auditory learning, others prefer visual learning, and the other students prefer kinesthetic learning?
- Language proficiency levels
- Mother tongue: Do you have a class where everyone speaks Uzbek at home or a class where Uzbek is spoken at home?
- Learner autonomy
- Reasons for learning English

- Cultural background

Common Teacher Problems in These Classrooms

There are numerous problems and challenges that EFL teachers will and can face when teaching mixed-ability classes.

Some typical problems:

In addition to the issues above, there are other challenges that EFL teachers face. One of them is discipline, which is closely related to classroom management. This challenge usually occurs when students are frustrated in class. Stronger (or more advanced) students may not feel challenged enough to learn as much as they can. On the other hand, weaker (or more politically correct, less advanced) students may find assignments and learning materials inadequate. Or the teachers don't support them enough. Second, student participation is another matter. In a mixed ability class, teachers will generally find that students with good grades do better than those who are less advanced. This may be due to the shyness of the intermediate and below students, or because they are fully aware that they are not the best students in their class and are afraid of giving wrong answers. Low-performing students can also do worse (or worse) in class. Ideally, all students should be able to participate equally in class. However, this is rarely the case. A third challenge arises from individual perceptions, as EFL teachers may not be able to track and track the progress of all students closely. In mixed ability classes, teachers may find themselves spending more time with stronger students. You should strive to devote more time to helping less advanced learners.

While the difficulties and issues associated with mixed ability classes can seem overwhelming, there are benefits to teaching and learning how to manage these



classes. Carol Ann her Tomlinson writes in her book “The Differentiated Classroom”: In order to address the needs of all learners, it's probably best phrased as: “Safe teachers emerge from today with the belief that today holds the critical problems to be solved overnight and the insights needed to create a more effective tomorrow.” -In the classroom and try different educational approaches to see what works best. In addition, it includes the fact that in a mixed ability class, teachers can draw on students' different experiences, knowledge and ideas to deliver interesting, student-centered lessons. In these classes, students can help each other and learn a lot.

DOs and DON'Ts

- Always have additional tasks for those who finished earlier (fast finishers).
- Consider different learning styles of students, their strengths and weaknesses. For example, some students need to see an assignment in order to complete it.
- Do not use the students' native language. Otherwise, they will ask for a long time to translate tasks/sentence/word.
- Do not write separate plans for different students, you can adapt your class and homework.
- Use open-ended questions so as not to infringe on students' responses. Open questions have multiple answers, while closed questions have only one.

Reading Tips

There are three options that can be used in a classroom with different levels of English among students:

- Adapt the text that is offered to students. (differentiating the input). For example, to

replace some words with easier synonyms for weaker students, or vice versa, to make the text more difficult for strong students.

- Change the tasks that students perform after reading the text (differentiating the process). For example, strong students write complete answers to questions, weaker students can choose True / False, or complete a task with a choice of one answer.
- Change the outcome (differentiating the outcome). It is very appropriate to use open-ended questions here, where each student can show their knowledge and is not limited by the length of the sentence or the number of words. It is important to set a time limit for completing a task, but not to limit the amount of work.

Listening Tips

Listening tips are very similar to reading tips, except for adapting the audio recording. But it is quite possible to adapt the execution process and the end result. For example, lower-level students answer yes or no questions, while stronger students must answer “why”.

- How else can you help with the reading and listening assignments?
- discuss listening/reading response options (guessing, ask to predict);
- give answers to weak students;
- visual support;
- write more than one word in the answer for strong students;
- use words in responses as distractors for strong students.

In general, the analysis of students' needs is the main condition for the correct selection of tasks: what tasks do they like? What skills need to be developed the

most? Is it better to work in pairs or on your own? It is necessary to understand which learning style suits students, taking into account the strengths and weaknesses of each of them. In this way, you show support, and students feel that the teacher is interested in the result of the work.

Although it is not easy to work with students of different levels, we, as teachers, become more experienced, creative, teach our students to be patient and tolerant, and this is especially important for children and adolescents.

CONCLUSION

Working with mixed ability classes may seem difficult, but EFL teachers should see it as a challenge and an experience. As a teacher, you will never grow and learn if you are only taught simple classes. This is of course great and should be valued as such, but working in mixed ability classes is interesting and the challenges which are faced in the process of teaching develops and motivates for teaching.

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