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EFFICIENT STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH MULTI-LEVEL STUDENTS.

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Abstract

Absolutely, the role of the English language in the world has become very essential in the interim as English has already been known as a chief language for business, worldwide associations, internet and educational achievements. It has already been mutual knowledge that the one who needs toattain accomplishment of his goals in the life has to learn English for his profession. Therefore, attention to teach this language has improved dramaticallyover the years, and of course Uzbekistan is not an exception. To give proof for this condition, according to the decree, since 2013/2014-school-year foreign languages, essentially English, regularly through the state will be educated starting the first year of education in the system of lesson-games and speaking activities, ongoing to learning the ABC, reading and spelling in the second year (grade).

Glossary

Formative Assessment , Summative Assessment, Scaffolded Learning, Bloom's Taxonomy, Individualized Learning Plan (ILP) , Peer Tutoring , Collaborative Learning , Zone of Proximal Development.

There are two terms which are used to define classes with multi-level language abilities. The first one is mixed ability. The word mixed ability is defined as “involving students of different levels of ability” (Cambridge Dictionary). Thesecond one is heterogeneous, which is, by the same dictionary, defined as“consisting of parts or things that are very different from each other”. Both terms are used when talking about classes with dissimilar language abilities. However, different authors prefer unlike expressions. Whereas Luke Prodromou refers to these classes asmixed-ability, Penny Ur (302) favours the term heterogeneous. She finds the term“mixed-ability” confusing, because it does not cover all aspects of heterogeneity as applied toa class of language learners, but relates rather only toan ability to perform.In contrasts, she claims, the term heterogeneous includes

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alsoanother factorsinfluencing language learning, such as different previous opportunities for learning,better or worse previous teaching, higher or lower motivation etc.

Multi-level classes are typically described as classes with learners who havedifferent language ability. However, students differ not only in language acquisition ability, but also in age, motivation, intelligence, self-discipline, literacy skills, attitude and interests (Hess 1). Since all learners are different, we can say that allclasses are mixed-ability.Nevertheless, there are classes where students considerablyvary in their language skills which require a great deal of teaching skills to cope withsuch a class. Teaching in these classes is demanding, exhausting, time-consuming and enriched of many unexpected situations. On the other hand, it is morechallenging. Although teaching in a mixed-ability class represents many teachingdifficulties, it forces teachers to search for non-conventional teaching strategies and teaching solutions.

Mixed-ability classes means classes where students differ greatly in ability, motivation for learning English, needs, interests, educational background, styles of learning, anxiety, experiences and soon (Ainslie, 1994).

All teachers have to face the challenge of mixed-ability classes because, according to Tomlinson (1999), Berry & Williams (2002) and Shank (1995), every class is multileveled. Some classes can be more multileveled than others and therefore more challenging for the teacher, but all classes are mixed-ability classes.

Baker (2002) argues that it is not just the fact that there are many students in a class, but that all of them are at so many different ability levels that provides the biggest challenge. She further claims that in mixed-ability classes it can be difficult to keep the attention of all students. Their motivation can be poor and the teacher can feel frustrated because he/she does not have enough time to help the weaker students.

In addition, to the above mentioned challenges students have their own way of learning,and the weaker ones probably have more difficulties working in a noisy atmosphere since they are usually more easily distracted (Kelly, 1974).

A mixed-ability class can seem uncooperative, the students can get bored easily and this can cause commotion in the classroom. Planning the lesson and making work-material can take too much time for the teacher and the planned material is often too easy or too difficult for the students. This may make the teacher feel inadequate and unable to cope with the class (Hess, 2001).

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A huge problem that we must not forget, according to Bowman (1992), is the teacher's unawareness of the need for a new approach to deal with the mixed-ability class.

As Penny Ur (303-304) suggests, there is a number of problems teachers encounter

in mixed ability environment:

Discipline

According this sphere, Morgan (2009) says the following opinions "The first problem is without any doubt the discipline (classroom management). We often find mixed-ability classes chaotic and difficult to control. The differences inlanguage ability cause either boredom of more advanced learners or disconcertion ofweaker students, whooften are lost in the lessons. For that reason we might feel

incapable of controlling the class; while we are occupied by certain students, usuallyweaker ones, who need more extensive explanations, the rest of the class might beginto feel without being supervised and thus switching intoa mother tongue and discussing issues which are not related to the content of the lesson."

Interests

Another crucial problem of mixed-ability classes is the students' interests. About this issue, www.eflteaching.org gives the following points:"This issueis directly related to different language ability. While more advanced learners prefer communicative activities, discussions, problem-solving tasks etc, weaker students,whoare not confident about their speaking skills, would rather spend time on activities which do not require their spoken interaction or active participation incommunicative tasks. Another problem leading to the conflict of students´ interestsmay occur in language schools. Whereas some students enrol in the course to relax and have fun, there may be people who need English for more important reasons,such as to pass an exam, for work etc. This results in difficulties with the choice of activities too"

Effective learning for all

In mixed-ability classes, it is extremely difficult to provide effective learning for all.The activities to be completed in the lessons may be either too difficult or too easyfor some students. For that reason, there will always be learners who would not take any benefit from some activities. Teresa Hernandez writes that'Expecting a false beginner to produce the same output as an intermediate student is unfair to the student as well as the design and purpose of the curriculum. So rather than expecting all of the students to conform to a static approach of learning, it is

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important to understand each student's contribution as having value and worth in the classroom'

Materials

Another problematic issue is the choice of materials. Since course books are alwayshomogenous – aimed at one kind of learner with nooptions or flexibility (Ur 303), itis necessary toadapt materials to the needs of all learners.

Individual awareness

As Hess (6) says, "we would like toallow each of our students to find his/ herpreferred and unique way and pace of learning." However, teaching a mixed-abilityclass represents a situation, where there are too many differences to be taken inconsideration, which makes it difficult to devote time and attention equally toallstudents.

Participation

A typical situation in a mixed-ability environment is that when only a few people,usually stronger ones, participate. The rest of class tries to look invisible in order notto be asked a question. To be blind to weaker students and not involving them in a classroom interaction only deepen their language deficits.

Tomlinson (1999) argues that grouping students intoone "slow" and one "fast" separate class has been researched, and studies show that students do not improve enough to fit intoa typical class, and that they stay remedial.

There are both positive and negative sides to grouping students. One positive side is that the lesson can be easier to plan and manage in some ways since the teacher does not have such a wide range of abilities to deal with. On the other hand to separate the slow learners can do harm to their social and emotional difficulties because by being placed in a "slow class" they can think of themselves as different, difficult, inferior or other negative terms (Kelly, 1974).

Dörnyei (2001) stresses the importance of a positive attitude among the teachers whoare to teach these weaker groups: This means, for example, that ability grouping is a dangerous practice because teachers who are to teach the low ability groups are bound to be influenced by this knowledge, which may send the children on an ever downward spiral of low achievement and low expectations. (Dörnyei, 2001, p 35)

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