

## CHALLENGES OF TEACHING AND PREPARING FUTURE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS AND LINGUISTS

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**Abstract:** This paper aims at focusing on some empirical data and observations during the process of teaching students of bachelor and master programs at the University of Tirana, Faculty of Foreign Languages, English Department. UNESCO/ILO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers of 1994 and the Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel of 1997, are two important tools of empowering teachers and encourage their freedom in teaching, but also bringing into the conversation the teaching personnel at Higher Education Institutions.

Our Higher Education Institution, a long established one in the area of preparing future teachers, linguists, translators/interpreters, operating under Departments of English, German, Italian, French, and Slavic-Balkan (Turkish, Greek and Russian) Languages, is making ongoing efforts to face the challenges lying in front and meet the demands of future generations who need to get prepared for the labor market.

**Keywords:** Future English teachers, university lecturers, university students, teaching/learning environment, multifaceted function, etc.

### METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

The methodology of research is a combination of empirical observations, opinions, discussions, results, conclusions and recommendations.

### INTRODUCTION

Teaching is a profession that cannot be performed by every individual. It requires skills, knowledge, passion, talent. It is a profession that prepares and educates younger generations for their future careers. Moreover, it is a profession that needs meticulous research and assiduous work.

The job of a university lecturer is well-liked. It sounds admirable, convenient, fancy, but the truth is different. Being a university lecturer is a job associated with challenges, difficulties, hardships, efforts. It is a never ending process of learning, getting prepared and researching.

From the perspective of a university lecturer at English Department, our task is associated with many roles such as interacting, participating, cooperating, discussing, commenting, and enjoying our teaching/learning environment.

This paper contains empirical observations on the way we try to motivate students and make them learn more and get better. English language and the culture associated with it is a challenge in its own right. Our multifaceted function is accompanied by unstoppable efforts to improve, progress, achieve, excel if not perfect. By doing so we encourage ourselves to enhance our level of intellectualism, do more research work, engage in exploration, innovation and discovery pursuits.

The paper is divided in six parts: methodology of research, introduction, discussion, results, conclusions and recommendations, and references.

### DISCUSSION

Teaching students of English language is a challenging profession. Our society is developing and changing rapidly. The Recommendations of EU on Pre-Accession Phase reinforce the idea of excelling in higher education. Our task is prepare more professionals for national and international labor market. We are no longer an isolated country. Transfer of knowledge, globalization, openness to the western and eastern countries, print and electronic media, new technologies, social media, all these contribute to an enrichment of vocabulary and embracement of foreign cultures. The question is how to make students of English language department benefit from all these facilities? How can we motivate them to achieve higher?

One of the difficulties we have to face is our students' level of preparedness. What steps can be taken to improve it?

Students have the chance to go abroad and practice English. Is that experience sufficient in terms of grammar, lexicology, history, culture?

As university lecturers we need motivation in return. What indicators do we have to measure our achievements in teaching a foreign language and culture?

Quality assurance is among the most discussed issues in our teaching environment. What do we do in our daily job to have it?

Advisors are more and more needed for diploma thesis. What is our role in this?

Projects and grant schemes involve both professors and students. Are we improving in terms of partnerships with foreign higher education institutions?

Conferences organized for students of English language are very much welcomed. Do we have this tradition in our teaching environment?

These questions and others related to teaching and preparing students of English language need answers and solutions.

## RESULTS

Students preparedness and their motivation can be improved in many ways. There is no need to lower the bar on course expectations. What is needed is understanding and cooperation between professors and students from the moment of explaining the tasks and the expected outcomes. Students' performance can be enhanced by combining different skills and assignments, especially with students of English. Class work based on set rules such as allowable time and participation raises the interest of everybody to share and learn from each other. Group work is very much encouraged. Homework is another way of improving. Setting deadlines and not accepting essays, projects, or research papers beyond the time limit is a strategy of raising awareness and teaching students with disciplinary and organizational skills. It is part of their motivation and assessment. Attendance is obligatory and is a way of motivating the students to take active participation in lectures and seminars.

We compare our current progress with the previous one becoming great critics of ourselves. Our higher education has gone through many changes and reforms. Our students of English are the future teachers, translators, interpreters, tour guides, public relation officers, project managers, researchers, advisors, diplomats, politicians, etc. We make use of technology especially in terms of teaching English language and culture by making frequent use of visual aids, projectors, video and audio facilities, etc. We assign essays, raise discussions, involve role-play activities, critical thinking. We encourage the use of contemporary dictionaries, both monolingual and bilingual.

We advise students to benefit from engaging themselves in part-time jobs dealing with English language teaching, translating or tour guiding. We invite them to conferences organized by our institutions. We try to include best students in exchange programs or projects. We share with them our expertise.

Although we do not follow the graduates in the labor market, via informal channels we get informed that our best students graduated from the respective master programs available in our institution, are working in foreign organizations as translators/interpreters. Some are running their own translation/interpretation companies or agencies, some others are running English Course Centers. Some have made it abroad; some are involved in media as translators, editors, journalists or proofreaders.

English is becoming more and more appraised and required in the market and is a must for everybody. Although there are new trends in teaching at the university such as avoiding the so-called "archaic" forms of lecturing, there is still some necessity to guide students and provide them with information by lecturing them on different topics. They have a chance to grasp the topic with ease and interest. The way how we lecture them is very important. Their curiosity needs to be kept alive by starting the lecture with raising some interesting questions and looking for their reaction. By identifying the amount of information they have we add more. We extend and expand. Our task is to explore, surf the net, be well-informed in advance about current developments going on in the target culture. Students are always one step ahead in terms of new technology. By assigning them tasks and projects they learn in a more independent way.

One of our biggest struggles is to learn if we are doing well with our students and what is needed to be improved. The best indicators and parameters to measure that are our students.

When we get that warm greeting in the street by our former students (although it is difficult to recall their names) we become aware of having hit the point. When we receive cordial emails at Christmas or New Year, we learn we are remembered and our students have seen a great example to follow in us. They show respect and gratitude for our noble profession.

One of the great challenges with our students is the role of advisors. For many years we have been advising many students in writing their master thesis. We cooperate a lot on their preferences, the choice of the title, the narrowing down of the topic, the arrangement and enlisting of chapters, sections and subsections, conclusions and recommendations, bibliography. We prepare a guiding outline and send it to all students we are advising and tailor it to the topic they are considering. Then there are notifications on group or individual meetings to discuss, revise or correct parts of their work and provide the recommended notes. Some students fail to show up

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in these meetings due to different commitments and they lag behind with their work. But we need to focus on working with the interested ones.

Rendering knowledge as an expert in the area is another challenge. There will always be conceited students who claim they know a good deal about the topic. You are there to educate students, to show them you are the competent authority on the subject matter. There are always cases when some students have temporarily been abroad either in UK or US. Focusing on the topic, making it sound interesting, you grasp the attention of the whole group and regardless of their almost-perfect accent we know what to share, what to say and how and these students realize they are there to learn and benefit from our experience. Sometimes we realize that those students visiting UK or US have a great accent but their grammar is weak. By encouraging them to focus more on grammar patterns besides their interesting accent they start admiring our teaching classes and become more cooperative.

Teaching students makes us great psychologists. We try to suit to every preference, every personality, every request. We are the manipulators of the language. We need to find the right word to make everybody interested and captivated. Challenges are various. We have students of master programs coming from other state universities around Albania. Sometimes their age is an issue because they may be older than their professors and the worst scenario is that some cannot endure this fact. When we become too considerate they start abusing with our kindness. When we are too harsh they start protesting and calling us too young in the profession. But these are fewer cases and most of the time they pass unnoticed.

Recently we are more and more informed on calls for projects, conferences at home and abroad, partnerships with national and international higher education institutions and agencies. These are becoming priorities in the conduct of daily work.

A novelty to be complimented upon and very much welcomed is the first junior conference to be held in June, “New Dimensions and approaches in English Studies”, inviting students of master programs to submit proposals for papers on EFL Teaching, Translation Studies, Cultural Studies and Communication Studies.

Our students of English are in general very much motivated. At times, there are some who are lazy. We tell them our experience as former students was different compared to theirs. They have more possibilities now in the changing society, in the era of globalization and digitalization. They have many opportunities to listen to word pronunciations online in real time.

We need more activities targeting our students. They like their learning environment. However, when their classes are developed in a different setting they feel more relaxed. There are some practices of using American Corner, a book resource room inside our national library sponsored by the American Embassy. Some involve students in cultural event of reciting poetry in English or attend conferences organized by our department. Some invite them to different events organized by the centre for openness and dialogue inside the prime minister's office, either to watch a movie in English or get involved into discussions with professionals or foreigners.

Other projects should be encouraged in the English teaching environment. A very good initiative is inviting native speaker peers teaching different courses. Students get an insight of different methods used by American or British lecturers.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is our duty to teach students of English language and prepare them for the labor market.

Our task is to motivate students learn by best practices. Students will never forget their best professors and they will try their best to follow the best examples in their future careers.

We are always trying to improve and achieve higher in our profession. We want to feel proud of our values and manifest them to our students. We want to leave traces in the academic history of our institution and we want to deserve the good name we have been working for.

Our student-oriented classrooms should always have a combination of skills and innovative ideas, the use of technology and other resources. Discussions, critical thinking, essays, are among the tools that enable students of English to attain and acquire the language more easily and provide them with self-confidence and motivation. All these contribute to the shaping of the future English teachers, translators, interpreters, linguists.

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