

SOME FACTORS HINDERING THE TEACHING AND THE ACQUISITION OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: English dominance is observed in every aspect of the Albanian's life specifically in regards to higher Education. Students learn English because it is a "must" if one wants to be able to compete in a globalised labor market. Needless to say, English language displays a major role in Higher Education in Albanian Education System, as part of the curricula. English language is a required course and as such it must be given a priority in order to fulfill all the facilities that teaching and learning a foreign language requires. Therefore, this paper aims to shed light to some factors which hamper the process of teaching and learning the English language in Higher Education. Some classes from public and private higher education institutions were taken into account where the main focus was on the technology and the infrastructure, the method, methodology, number of the students per class, the teachers' ability to handle large classes, students' innate abilities toward a foreign language and unequal level of the students. However, there can be given some suggestions on how to conduct an effective teaching and learning of the English language in Albanian Universities being that the English language in itself is necessary for the student's studies, research, students mobility (a tendency of the recent years of the Albanian Universities which apply Erasmus exchange programs under the students and staff mobility) later career. Hopefully, this paper will give a clear picture for the administrators of Higher Education in Albania so that they provide the necessary conditions to conduct the teaching and learning activity successfully by avoiding the factors which impinge the process of teaching and learning of English, as well it will serve to the teachers of higher education to notice these factors and take measures in order to have fruitful conduct of their job, where the students are the center of focus, and as a result would also benefit extensively if these factors which impede the learning of a foreign language were avoided properly. Therefore, this paper aims to make aware the governing structures, specifically the Ministry of Education in Albania of the importance of having language laboratories and the appropriate devices to conduct the English language classes. In addition, the number of students in the English (foreign) language classes must be reduced due to the interaction it requires in order to develop communicative competences which is really essential for all the 4 basic skill in the language acquisition. Furthermore, the teachers must be observant of the level of the students in the class, as well as the innate ability of the students.

Keywords: teaching, learning, English, factors, hindering

1. INTRODUCTION

English Language in Higher Education in the Albanian Education System is obligatory and part of the curricula, specifically for the students of the 1st and 2nd year of the Bachelor level and the 1st year students of Master. Being a subject that is included in the students' grade list and also having its respective credits (ETC), it is definitely considered important, therefore acquiring it is essential for the student as not only do they get the credits, but they also learn a language, which enables them to find the right literature relevant to their study program, to delve upon materials, information for different subjects they study or research, as most of the information is in the English language.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to make this study efficient the type of research that is used is qualitative as well as quantitative. It has its own restriction to only one public Faculty and one private university college, respectively Faculty of Natural Sciences and University College Wisdom in Tirana, Albania. The findings provided in this study are as a result of the survey conducted in students of the bachelor level at Faculty of Natural Sciences, where the number of students per class is 40 and master level where the number of students is 15 and also from the private university college; the number of students in the bachelor level is 20 per class and of the master classes is 10. This study is also limited as it only focuses on the factors which impact negatively in the teaching learning process of the foreign language in higher education.

3. TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN ALBANIA

Seen from a teacher perspective I can say that teaching English as a second language is really important and teachers need to maximize their attempts in order to have their students learn and improve the language skills. Basically their efforts are focused on 4 basic skills, reading, listening, speaking and writing. Students who finish

a bachelor or a master degree no matter what study program they follow, they are expected to be competent in the English Language.

Therefore, according to the scholar Johnson it can be stated that in every foreign language classroom, language functions as the medium through which teachers teach and students demonstrate what they have learned (Johnson 1995). In Albania, English language teaching at the university level is based on the necessities that these students have, which is definitely related to the field of their study. The lack of scientific books, journals, researches in the Albanian language, definitely forces the students learn English. Therefore, recently most of the universities are using English for specific purpose. This way the students, not only learn English, but they also learn the specific vocabulary which is so much needed to them.

4. SOME FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE NEGATIVELY IN THE ALBANIAN STUDENTS' ACQUISITION OF A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Still there are some factors which hinder the teaching and the learning of English in the university level in Albania. It is true that as Albania is a developing country, thus not all the universities have all the facilities to ensure an effective teaching and learning of a foreign language.

4.1 Technology in English language teaching and learning in Albanian universities

The public universities do not have the appropriate technology which is necessary when learning a foreign language specifically for the listening skill. Devices such as a smart board, a computer or a lab class are present in most of the private universities.

Students at Wisdom University College have the chance to access many materials in English and listen to different real life situation and hear native speakers and work on many exercises related to the material they hear. On the contrary, the students at the public university do not have such an opportunity. Students do not have the chance to listen to native speakers, so they face difficulties when they listen. To both students it was given a test on the listening skills where they had to find the right answer from the four options given. The result is as follows:

LISTENING TEST	
Private University (Bachelor + Master)	83% right answers
Public University (Bachelor + Master)	75% right answers

Students of the public university had less answers right because they do not have the chance to practice the listening in their auditoriums as they lack audio-visual devices. Whereas students in the private university not only practice the listening by listening to the CD, but they also watch the speakers speak. In addition, listening involves an active process of deciphering and constructing meaning from both verbal and non-verbal messages (Nunan, 1998). Therefore there is a good reason why students who did not practice and due to a lack of auditory experience with native accents, their competency in listening suffer.

4.2. Method and the methodology used in teaching and learning English

The method which teachers use to teach English must be appropriate, resourceful and must take into account the learner's specifics. As it is widely known there are two types of approaches for teaching which are classified as teacher centered and student centered. English cannot be taught using the teacher centered approach because it such an approach where students are passive and acquire information via the lectures and the information provided by the teacher, but it is mainly taught by making use of the students centered approach. The teacher facilitates the process of learning for the students, he/she guides them, specifically when learning a foreign language, involves them in different activities, making them be involved in student- student interaction. This type of approach is called differently as collaborative or cooperative learning by Richards (2001) in which learners use cooperative activities, such as pair work or group work, to: express their viewpoints and opinions; share their ideas, information and experience; and discuss and debate with each other. Jacobs and Hall (2002) also put an emphasis on this approach, and state that by using cooperative learning activities in language classrooms, teacher talk should be reduced and students' talk should be increased. In addition, collaborative learning aims at interactive tasks that can help students enhance their communicative competence (Richards, 2001).

Recently it is noticed that Albanian English teachers prefer student-centered collaborative approach which is different from the traditional approach and of course it is applied the "Communicative Language teaching, which comprises interaction, authentic communication, understanding English through active student participation, role plays, games, information gaps.

However, it can be stated that there are different methods of teaching and learning English in Albania, but it is the duty of the teacher which method to choose as there is **not one single method for everyone** in all contexts, though each method has a specific focus.

A suggestion for the Albanian teacher would be to make use of the **Principled Eclecticism** – fitting the method to the learner, not the learner to the method and also making use of the learner's specific objective. In Albania in the bachelor level, first year students study with a general method but the second year the students undergo ESP methods, which focuses mainly on texts, materials that are related to the specific area of the students' studies, paying special attention to the specific vocabulary. In the Master level, it is employed ESP method in the major study programs such as Law, Economics, Psychology etc., but for some study programs it is hard to have an ESP method available in the market such as the electric engineering, construction engineering etc. Teachers have to find different text themselves in order to help the students with the specific English language in their study program.

4.3 The importance of the limited number of the students per class when teaching and learning English as a foreign language

Though, humanistic approach of teaching are being used by most of the Albanian teachers who teach English as a foreign language, still when it comes to the size of the classes, it can be emphasized that all of them face trouble in the bachelor level specifically in public universities because most of the public universities have a bigger number of the students; this number goes from 30 to 35, whereas in private universities the number of the students in a class is basically 20 to 25.

Specifically, for this study as it was taken into consideration one private and one state university in both study cycles it can be emphasized that the number of the students per class is optimal. There are 15 students of the Scientific Master in the state university and 15 students in the private university in the Scientific Master and it is a pleasure for the English teacher to develop their classes with such a number of students because each student has the opportunity to be involved and be active, the only thing that lacks, is the technology and the devices to make the listening skill more productive by listening or watching real life conversations, hearing lectures by native speakers. The computer is provided by the lecturer, but it only a laptop and it does not have the effects of a smart board or of a video projector.

However, for a teacher when they hear the number of the students is big they immediately picture in mind how difficult it is to manage this class and for most of them it represents many challenges apart from the teaching process like maintaining the discipline as it is stated by Kennedy and Kennedy (1996) that it is difficult to control what happens when the number of group passes a certain number, as well as organizing the students in different tasks, and the time it requires to successfully finish in time and covering all the things planned.

As mentioned previously the interaction between students is really important to make them speak the language so there must be a lot of practice in order to use it, but in large classes it a challenge because they would not rather speak in a foreign language, they need encouragements. In addition it is crucial to provide feedback to learners, be it positive or negative, but specifically for the mistakes they make in order to improve their speaking skills.

Still, the size of the class must not discourage and hinder the teaching and the learning process, it is important to provide more chances to the students in order to participate through individual work, pair work, group work and whole class work.

4.4. Student innate ability in foreign languages

Considering many discussions with the students who want to learn English, it can be assessed that some of the students seem to have no difficulties in learning a foreign language and some others really strive. It can be stated that the humanistic approach in teaching and learning a foreign language is applied as it is considered as one of the mainstreams of contemporary educational theories and practices, which emphasizes the significance of the inner world of the learner and places the individual's thoughts, feelings and emotions at the forefront of all human development (Williams & Burden, 2000). In addition, this is also declared by Rogers (1969) who agrees that human beings have a natural potential for learning.

From all the students observed for this study, there are only a few who really find it hard to learn a foreign language and they do not understand the reason why they cannot learn it even they struggle hard enough.

Nevertheless, this is also another factor which sometimes influences negatively in the process of teaching and learning of a foreign language as these students need more time to grasp things and they delay the whole process.

However, these students must be encouraged because learning will occur when the language they are learning is perceived to be of personal relevance and when it involves active participation.

This is the case in Albania, in public and private universities; what is observed it is the desire that these students show and the will they have to learn English because of the advantages that this language displays for them in their future career/life.

4. 5. Student's unequal level in English

The high schools in Albania have in their curricula English and it is expected that the level of the students who win the right to further their studies to obtain a bachelor degree is almost the same. However, in some high schools there are other languages which are primary and English is a second foreign language and thus the amount of classes per week are less than of the first foreign language which might be German or French. This is the reason why there is an unequal level in the English language in the bachelor level. Whereas, in the second cycle Master of Science it is obligatory for students to have a B1 level of one from 6 foreign languages, but as the universities in the Bachelor level offer only English as a foreign language (only the Polytechnic University offers to its students the opportunity to choose the language they would like to attend in their bachelor studies) students would rather take a certificate of English to meet the prerequisites in order to be enrolled for the Master studies. Going back to the difficulties encountered when teaching and learning English the unequal level does have an impact. It is difficult to keep the work going if there are students who have a quite different level especially when in the same class there are some who have a B2 level and some have a A2 level of English. Here, the problem is to get the attention of those who have a better knowledge of English on one hand and on the other to encourage and involve those who do not have a good command of English because they do not have self confidence. Nevertheless, the teacher must involve everyone and there must be established a student to student interaction. There must also be a warm and cooperative atmosphere, where one must benefit from the other. According to Johnson the atmosphere in the classroom should be rather cooperative than competitive and students' feelings should be dealt with as well as their differing perspectives (Johnson 1995). Teachers must choose carefully various activities which should be appropriate for different levels. Students who know English more can help the others who don't and at the same time they themselves practice even more extensively and take advantage of every chance to communicate in the English language without switching to the Albanian language. Therefore it must be emphasized the importance of student-student interaction if we take into account that there is an unequal level of student's knowledge in English. Choosing the right types of activities where the students to student interaction is in the central of the teaching and learning "enables learners to initiate interaction, control the topic and, last but not least, challenges students to operate beyond their current level of language proficiency by participation in the negotiation of meaning and performing different language functions" defines Johnson (Johnson 1995).

5. CONCLUSION

This paper tried to bring light to some of the factors which somehow obstruct the teacher to have an optimal conduct of teaching the English language, consequently affecting the student's learning as well. Basically there have been taken into consideration students of a public and a private university who attend bachelor and the Master level due to the differences they bear in regards of infrastructure, number of students per class, language labs they possess or the devices used to facilitate the teaching and the learning process. There were noticed that there are many aspects to be improved, to which there must be a special attention by the educational structures, universities, teachers and the students themselves.

Firstly, once the students are enrolled they must enter a level assessment test in order to put the students in the right class, or in case there is only one class the test that the teacher may conduct the very first class will help him/her group them according to the level they have and at the same time it will be an assessment indicator for the future development of the students respectively. Secondly, the government must equip at least 2 language labs per study programs at the public universities because the private universities offer the necessary infrastructure. Also, based on the number of the students per class there must be a division for the foreign language classes which must be divided accordingly. In addition when it comes to teachers they must select appropriately the method they will be using, plus the methodology must be student oriented, where the students are at the center of the teaching and learning process as it would help them in their communicative competence.

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