

IDENTIFYING STUDENTS' NEEDS TO ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF ENGLISH FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract: In addition to the research that has been going on for more than two decades in English language teaching and learning process, the quality of learning English as a foreign language remains a trend of research nowadays. Also, a great deal of research is done to look for the best possible ways in order for teachers to develop as professionally as possible, which is also their primary goal. This issue drives EFL teachers to look after different teaching methods, which effort not only fulfills the students’ individual needs but also enriches the teachers’ professional background. The problem lies in the lack of ability to identify language differences among individuals in a classroom whose absence causes generalization of the teaching methodology and not all students find themselves in a comfortable EFL learning environment. Therefore, this study aims to investigate and verify the factors that influence the appropriate teaching methodology based on the individual needs of EFL learners in order to provide as little as possible the solution to this problem. The study uses the qualitative research method by analyzing data based on two focus groups discussion with students who study English as a foreign language as a mandatory course in the certain program at the University of Gjakova “Fehmi Agani”, respectively Faculty of Education. Furthermore, there are conducted interviews with three English foreign language teachers who teach skills of English as foreign language to students in Faculty of Education. Students are randomly selected regardless of their English language level proficiency, from both preschool and primary programs in Faculty of Education. The findings show that teaching methods based on the individual needs of students are necessary and motivate all students regardless of their English language level proficiency. Concluding that this effort positively affects the quality of English language learning as a foreign language and it facilitates further education of young people in our country, this study recommends that English language teachers should work hard on identifying the needs of each student in the English language learning classroom and then have to immediately adopt necessary innovative teaching methods. The paper also describes the factors that influence in learning style of each individual from early childhood and the factors that impact on ability to learn English as a foreign language in the same way for all learners.

Keywords: EFL learning, teaching methodology, learning styles, innovative methods.

1. INTRODUCTION

Each individual is different from the other individual. When we talk about students in the classroom, the differences in appearance do not have much of an impact on their perception of distinctiveness in learning, as for example length, hair color, eye color or weight are. What makes them different from each other has to do with the differences they have in the way they learn, in the topics they find interesting, in the sufficient time they need to learn, in the necessary motivation they need to have, in a sufficiently appropriate environment they want throughout the learning process, and many other factors that make students different among themselves. All these factors are as a consequence of life circumstances, in the family, in society or community and in school that eventually make one individual different from another. Students come from different family experiences, culture and traditions, societies, economic conditions, social surroundings, different learning abilities, different learning styles, behavioral problems, eating disorders, different characters, different emotional feelings and other characteristics. Leaving all this aside, the goal of learning English is the same ‘to learn English’, only for the fact that the professional development of each individual depends very much on English language knowledge, which can be called the language of the study. Moreover, as pointed by Akbari (2015): “coping with the demands of the era of information explosion and the efficient use of the Internet makes learning English as a necessity”, (pg. 395). In order to meet these learning necessities required despite student differences, the whole focus shifts to effective teaching methodology. Therefore, the only option to improve EFL³ learning is improvement of quality teaching. Obviously, teachers go through difficult challenges throughout the process, as mentioned by Klimova (2015), who claims that teachers can be also discouraged by some of students’ opinions since students might be too critical of their teaching approaches and techniques (174), but we must never give up. According to Klimova (2015), every responsible EFL practitioner tries his best to meet his students’ language needs and thus enhance their performance (pg.172). Hence, in order to be successful teachers, they need to incorporate different learning tools keeping in mind the effective teaching methods

³ EFL refers to English Foreign Language

that are already in use, Pollock (2007). The present study aims to guide teachers in trying to identify the advantages and disadvantages that each student has in learning English Foreign Language. By identifying their individual characteristics, teachers can meet their needs more easily. Using a variety of teaching strategies, being flexible in choosing basic literature and using additional literature depending on the needs of the students and making assessments based on the output of students, we can say that the goal of an effective teaching has been realized.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A large number of research has written about the impact of teaching methodology on the effective learning of the English foreign language. On the same topic, many teachers also shared their teaching experience and the challenges they faced during the teaching process. The challenge for the teacher in this case is how to create connectivity in learning students in mixed ability classes through different activities. Given the situation that every teacher is challenged as a result of mixed ability classes we have to consider and have to be capable in using method, approach and technique that would definitely fit each student in learning English Foreign Language in teaching and learning process in the classroom. According to Richard et al. (1992, p.228), a method, in language teaching is “a way of teaching a language which is basen on systematic principles and procedures” and approach is termed as “ different theories about the nature of language and how languages are learnt” while the technique refers to different kinds of classroom activities based on different methods, (as cited in Samaranyake , W.S. (2015, p.73). Still, even if we think we have found an appropriate method or approach that would be effective in improving learning, we still cannot say that it is the best method to use, based on diversity that students have. The same opinion is shared by Prabhu (1990) who asserts that no single method is best for everyone and that different methods are best for different people or for different teaching context. In this study is used descriptive method, since the research is based on data from discussions among participants. The sample of the research study are 42 students of Faculty of Education in University of Gjakova “Fehmi Agani”. Students are selected randomly regardless their English Language level proficiency. They are divided into two focus groups. Discussions with focus groups are conducted during the February, when students took the January term exams. Moreover, in order to get in depth information about the field of study, there are conducted also interviews with three English Foreign teachers who teach in University of Gjakova “Fehmi Agani”, Faculty of Education.

3. RESULTS

The research used as an instrument a questionnaire with questions for discussions between students in focus groups and questions for interviews with teachers. By leaving them free to discuss the question posed, we can extract more in-depth data about the study. As Creswell (2007) emphasizes: ‘we conduct qualitative research because we need a complex, detailed understanding of the issue. We conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices and because we want to understand the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue’, (p.40).

Based on the responses of eight structured questions (Q1-Q8) designed to conduct the discussion with students in focus groups, the findings are shown as following.

Q1. Do Students in your group study English Foreign Language in the same way? Noway, no student has the same language ability skill as the other and neither of us learn in the same way nor by the same method of teaching of how the teacher delivers the message. We study the same subject, the same level of English language course, we study in the same class, but still we are clearly different in learning English. Some are excellent, some average but we also have poor students in the group. We do not learn in the same way any of us.

Q2. What makes you different from each ther in EFL learning?

“The high school teacher did not offer us communication activities, we were evaluated only with a test that had to do mainly with grammatical patterns”. Behroozi and Amoozegar (2014)'s paper displays the need to reassess the approaches used to teach English language in Iran. The collected data displayed that Iranian students after nearly seven years of education neither are enabled to speak fluently in English language nor interact with other people because of emphasis on grammatical structure.

“I did not have internet access since I live in a rural area, so the only access with English was class work”. “Ever since elementary school, the teacher gave us instructions in English, and that made me confused, so I was always left behind with lessons. I needed additional clarifications in my mother tongue”. But, given that our goal is to practice as much as possible the language the teacher is teaching, the best description is given by (Daugaard & Dewilde, 2017; Hult, 2017; Seltzer, 2019) who emphasize that professional judgement about when to allow students to use languages other than the target language seems to determine language practices in the classroom.

“Individual work always stresses me because I have nowhere to rely on an example from someone else who would give me support for learning”. “I have always been reluctant to speak in class because our teacher corrected us when

speaking rudely, and being shy I never had the courage to speak out because I was afraid that I would make a mistake”⁴.

Q3. Are you motivated by your EFL teacher?

Motivation depends on many factors. In some cases the material provided by the teacher is very interesting and we find ourselves curious to discuss and do classroom assignments on that topic. Also, when the teacher implements various activities that are responsive to the capacities of all students in the classroom and when we find ourselves ready to engage equally in that activity, there is a work atmosphere and involvement of the whole group.

Q4. Do students have the same English Language proficiency?

There was never a group of students in the class who had studied in the same way and who had the same language skills. The foreign language taught earlier by the students of one group is different from one another. Not all students had the same English foreign language teacher in previous studies and not all had the same teacher requirements and assessments as well. But, there are many other social, economic or psychological factors that make such diversity among students.

Q5. Does your EFL teacher use the same techniques for every individual in the classroom? Not always the teacher prepares the different material based on each student’s need. Keeping this in mind, the activities are not too different, and are often offered in the same way to everyone. Therefore, we can say that not everybody responds appropriately to an activity that the teacher offers to everyone regardless of ability.

Q6. How does your EFL teacher fit your needs in the English class? Often the teacher assigns us tasks in the classroom or even to prepare at home a project or presentation considering our language skills. In cases when the teacher offers us the option of choosing the topic or when we do the preparation using our learning styles, then success is inevitable. Moreover, this enables us to express freely based on what is interesting to the student, which is understandable and that we are able to deliver the product in the best possible way.

Q7. How do you learn EFL? What is your learning style?

The students answered this question differently. Everyone showed their learning styles and the easiest way for them to acquire English as a foreign language based on their abilities. They are visual, kinesthetic, verbal, physical, solitary, social, etc.

Q8. Does your teacher use the same literature/learning and teaching material for all students in the group? We study based on the same literature or the same student’s book that the teacher has already suggested in the designed syllabus. But, often the teacher provides additional material printed from the Internet for a more thorough explanation of a certain unit. Students find it very helpful.

While during the interviews with three English language teachers in the Faculty of Education, these results were revealed.

Question	Teacher	Responses
How often do you implement differentiated instruction in teaching-learning process	T1	I often provide additional material for students
	T2	I believe that always I try to meet their needs.
	T3	Usually, I try to meet the demands of students.
Do you consider differentiated instruction when planning the syllabus?	T1 ⁵	As the syllabus acquires the literature provided for the course it is difficult to be flexible on the content.
	T2 ⁶	There is not specifically mentioned about the strategies to be used, but however, the learning outcomes intend to summarize activities to be implemented.
	T3 ⁷	The designed syllabus is presented to students at the beginning of the semester and we often offer opportunities to get advice or remarks from students so we can improve or add something during the semester.

⁴ Statements in “quotes” are students’ attitudes taken from focus group discussions. Cited statements from the students.

⁵ Teacher one; Prof.ass.Dr. Sh.H.

⁶ Teacher two; Prof.ass.Dr. N.T.

⁷ Teacher three. Dr.sc. E.V.

How do you understand students' learning styles in the classroom?	T1	I always try to meet student's necessities in order to improve my teaching first of all and at the same time to develop their learning as well.
	T2	I have tried to do pre-test and through it somehow to be familiarized with the way that best work for them but I did not manage to test them in the best possible way because it was based on writing.
	T3	I try different teaching strategies time by time in order to include everyone in learning activities in the classroom.
What are the challenges you face when dealing with students of different English Language leve proficiency?	T1	I feel challenged when I have to change the teaching approach while other activity is already planned.
	T2	I feel embarrassed when I offer two or three opportunities for how to develop a classroom activity because the three methods will be required by different students trying to adopt their learning styles.
	T3	I feel in doubt when I am in the situation if I should allow them to work individually or in groups.
How do you think differentiated instruction impact on students' learning?	T1	Undoubtedly these instructions have a positive impact on the quality of learning even though the implementation of DI really does require great dedication.
	T2	Since modern teaching is trying to dominate over the traditional one then we should at all times strive hard to use these instructions.
	T3	This affects students' motivation to learn. By implementing a student-meeting approach, each of them demonstrates readiness to meet the requirements of the subject and the teacher.

4. DISCUSSIONS

In this study we can highlight some findings which were discussed about the topic of the study. From the answers given by the students it was discussed that learning is a process that varies between individuals. Students are motivated if the learning topic is of interest to them and that they learn more easily if given the opportunity to use their own learning style. Also, in some cases the same material is not suitable for all students because they have different levels of English language ability, so it is very welcome the way the teacher offers different opportunities for activities to everyone. On the other hand, teachers face many challenges when it comes to effective teaching in a classroom where students have different interests or learning styles, or come from a different socioeconomic education than others. Regardless of the professional development of teachers and prior training related to meeting the individual requirements of each student in a group where each individual differs from the other, the teacher should enrich the teaching methodology in accordance with their requirements throughout the experience. This should be a "must" rather than a "should" if we are to achieve our goal of being a good teacher to all regardless of their ability to learn.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Concluding that this effort positively affects the quality of English language learning as a foreign language and indispensable for the further education of young people in our country, the study drew some conclusions.

- English language teachers should work hard on identifying the needs of each student in the English language learning classroom;
- If the teacher identifies students' learning styles and topics that are interesting to them, it will show positive effect in learning;
- The teacher must be flexible in using different teaching methods;
- The use of modern technology helps in learning English;
- If the teacher knows the individual capacities of the students it will be easier to prepare the lesson plan, based on students' requirements;

- Socio-economic factors affect the level of English language learning;
- Learning English during pre-school education makes students in the faculty have English language proficiency;
- Motivation is one of the main factors that affects the effective learning of students;
- Teacher's code switching from first to second language remains one of the helping strategies for low level language ability students.

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