QR – Issue   QR – Article

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PROBLEMS FACING EFL TEACHERS IN MIXED ABILITY CLASSES AND STRATEGIES USED TO OVERCOME THEM

Abstract: The article presents the challenges a teacher faces working with multi-level groups when teaching English at university. While learning in multi-level groups students lose their interest. The article describes a learner-centered approach to teaching foreign language students of non-linguistic educational programs that help improve their motivation and language skills.

Key words: multi-level groups, individual characteristics, motivation, micro-group, forms of work, model of lesson, assessment of knowledge.

Language: English

Introduction

UDC 802.0

Recently, special attention has been paid to the study of foreign languages and knowledge of a foreign language is a competitive advantage of any modern person. E.A. Mikhaleva notes: "in modern ethnocultural conditions characterized by bilingualism and multilingualism in the work environment, knowledge of languages is an essential component of the intellectual capital of employees" [1, C. 92].

English in the modern world is a fairly popular means of communication. M.V. Volosova points out that: "the awareness of this led to the fact that English language training is given great attention not only in language schools, and the applied teaching methods are aimed at developing writing, reading and, of course, speaking skills" [2, C. 11].

But in spite of these in teaching a foreign language in a non-linguistic university, the teacher always faces with the problem of organizing work in a group, which includes students with different levels of language training. This is due to a number of criteria as at school student learned other language or lack of teacher, moreover it can be psychophysical, sociocultural and individual factors. The task of the university teacher at the initial stage is to organize the educational process in such a way that each student has the opportunity to master the educational material depending on its individual characteristics and abilities. In the pedagogical process the introduction of foreign language in multilevel group allows implementation of both individual and differentiated approach to students. A differentiated approach is of great importance, since in any educational process the teacher has to work with students who differ in their needs, inclinations, capabilities, interests, motives, temperament, thinking and memory. The organization of the lesson involves not only the exposition of knowledge, but also the recognition of the identity and uniqueness of each student, the formation of personal characteristics of students. The methodological basis of multilevel training is individualization, a differentiated level of requirements, a high level of the proposed material, a multilevel system for testing

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knowledge, skills. It allows students to really assess their capabilities; increase interest in the subject, create the necessary level of comfort in class. Partnerships are established between the teacher and students, psychological stress is reduced, the quality of knowledge and activity of poorly performing students are increased, the fear of knowledge testing disappears. The organization of work in the lesson involves the formation of micro groups, which may include students of one or different levels which depends on a number of factors:

• goals and nature of tasks,
• level of a foreign language,
• personal qualities of students,
• friendly relations within a group of students,
• factor of "random choice" of a partner

In planning certain types of foreign language speech activities student's abilities in a multilevel group should be also taken into consideration. For example, when selecting texts for reading on technique topics, it is necessary to highlight multilevel didactic material, which should be designed so that students can choose tasks for themselves, not only of different difficulty levels, but also with qualitative characteristics that would meet the student's cognitive style. The teacher selects materials that contain the necessary lexical units on the studied topics. A student with a low level of language training should be offered an adapted text, more trained students can choose a popular science article. The organization of independent work of students, the selection of individual tasks and subsequent control is another not an easy task facing the teacher. The main feature of multilevel education is a sharp increase in the time for students to work independently in the classroom. Each teacher may have a lesson model, most importantly, after teaching everyone, the students start their individual work. With multilevel training, another factor is important - knowledge assessment. The criterion for assessing knowledge should not be the level of assimilation, but the effort spent by the student to achieve a given level of requirements in different subgroups. It is necessary to rebuild the idea of the nature of the student's educational activities. Not to check what he remembered, but to teach his activities, direct his efforts, learn from his individual mistakes, find the reason for their occurrence. It is impossible to reach everyone to the same level, it is necessary to give everyone the opportunity to go from level to level paying attention their strengths and abilities.

It should be noted that there are several reasons for this situation.

Firstly, not all students are motivated to learn a foreign language. Some consider a foreign language a "superfluous" subject, which only takes time and effort. As a result, in connection with such an attitude, the possession of foreign language remains low or improves only slightly. A.N. Leontev emphasizes

that: "in order to not formally learn the material, you need not to "leave" the education, but to live with it, you must love it, you need the education to come into life, so that it makes life sense for the student" [3, P. 378].

The formation of motivation to learn a foreign language depends on many factors. The personality of the teacher and the educational environment plays an important role in this process. Seliverstova A.E. considers "the educational environment as one of the leading conditions for motivating students to learn foreign languages" [4].

In higher education, the student's attitude toward learning a foreign language can change. Students strive to master FL, first of all, in order to further use FL for professional purposes [5, P. 202].

Secondly, many students are not ready not only for foreign language communication, but also for communication in their native language. Such students are not ready to communicate with peers and with teachers because of a number of their intellectual and personal qualities. According to S.A. Nurmukhambetova: "in addition to linguistic and speech skills, communicative success also depends on other properties of intelligence and the personality as a whole, which determine readiness for communication" [6, P. 48].

In addition, schools often face the problem of a lack of qualified teaching staff. If the school does not have a foreign language teacher, at least for a period of time, it will be difficult for students to fill the knowledge gap in the subject and it is unlikely that such a training format will cause positive emotions and will be effective.

Due to this difference in the preparation of students, teachers of higher educational institutions are faced with a situation where students with different levels of knowledge of a foreign language study in one group. And even if the educational institution provides for the division of students into groups in accordance with the level of language proficiency, this does not guarantee the creation of a group of one level. Moreover, in recent years, universities and colleges are increasingly not providing such an opportunity.

In such a situation, the teacher must carefully consider the teaching strategies in such an educational environment. On the one hand, weaker students should not experience learning discomfort, on the other hand, students with a higher level of language skills should not stop developing skills.

Our own observations show that often students who are fluent in the language are willing to help other students with a lower level.

In this regard, a form of group interaction may turn out to be effective when a stronger student takes the role of a teacher. For example, he may be given the task to prepare, and then ask questions on the text that the group students read. Also, the teacher may ask

such students to prepare news reports, but at the same time, they must first comment, it is possible to explain the new vocabulary from these messages.

In addition, the teacher needs to choose the right teaching aids used in multilevel groups. Training materials, and especially their levels are of great importance in such an educational environment.

The teacher can use the same text, but with a different level of complexity. Currently, there are many resources on the Internet that provide the ability to vary the level of complexity of the same text. For example, resources such as the British Council, Breaking News English, News in Levels, For the Teachers offer several difficulty levels for the same article.

By using such texts, a teacher can make work in a group with a different level of student knowledge more effective, since weaker students will be able to participate in group work without discomfort. As for students with a higher level of language proficiency, they will be able to improve their knowledge by studying complex lexical and grammatical constructions.

There are other sites on the Internet that may be useful when working with students at different levels. For example, resources such as Rewordify and Text Compactor (**Rewordify** is a free on-line tool that simplifies difficult vocabulary in a written text. In a nutshell, **Rewordify** will analyze an English text (or an entire website) and then automatically highlight all the words it considers are too difficult.) Here, the teacher himself prints or copies the text, and the resource makes this text simpler. Moreover, if using Rewordify you can get one version of simplified text, where complex expressions are replaced by simpler ones, then with the help of Text Compactor the teacher can set the percentage of simplification of the source text himself. **How can this be used in the classroom:** This tool could be used to help students on an individualized basis or to deconstruct a complex text with the whole class. Rewordify works on both tablets and computers. If you teach in a BYOD classroom, this is a great tool for students to have in situations where they need a little extra help to decipher a text on their own. Follow this link from the iLearn Technology blog for more ideas of how to use Rewordify in your classroom or try the live demo if you'd like to see how it works yourself. *For example: Your topic is "The history of Clay" and you have the text according to the book. You can simplify the text as:*

Text -100% **The History of Clay**

The first evidence of the production of bricks dates back to the days of the Babylonians, more than 5000 years ago. At first they were used in their unbaked form, simply left to dry in the sun and it was only in 2500 BC that they began to be baked.

Stone wasn't always available and when it was, the crafting process was difficult and time consuming.

Clay on the other hand, was perfectly easy to mix and mould and, once dry, was a valid support for early constructions.

Right from the start, the brick has always been a parallelepiped with a precise golden relationship between its three dimensions. The length is normally twice the width and the width is twice the thickness. Thanks to the fact that is so easy to mould, clay has always enabled the construction of bricks with different profiles, enabling the builder artistically to enhance the construction, setting different trends in different periods and places.

From the Sumerians to the Babylonians, from the Assyrians to the Egyptians, from the Greeks to the Romans, terracotta bricks represent a material which has been used beyond every national boundary throughout history. There is considerable evidence of the rich medieval architecture in Europe.

The terracotta brick continues to be one of very few products made exclusively of natural materials: clay, sand, water and fire being the elements used in the creation process.

The support provided by the latest technology in controlling the baking process creates a product that represents a choice aimed at guaranteeing durable constructions which are both attractive and economically remunerative in time.

Clay is very fine particles of dirt which float in a stream or river and then sink to the bottom, where they press on each other and stick together. Clay is generally found along the banks of a river or stream, wherever the river is pulling dirt down off the mountains or hills and dropping it in a quiet part of the river lower down. So people who live in river valleys can get a lot of clay.

What is so cool about clay (besides that it is easy and cheap to get) is that it is squishy when it is wet, so you can make it any shape you like, and then it dries hard in the sun, pretty fast, as the water evaporates out. If you dry clay in the sun you can make it soft again just by throwing it in a bucket of water and waiting a week or two.

But if clay pot or sculpture is put in a fire, or in an oven (an oven for clay is called a kiln) and baked it for a while very hot, the clay becomes even harder and it will not get soft again even if you put it in water for a long time. This is called firing. People first began to fire clay about 6000 BC.

The most important thing that people in the ancient world did with clay was to build houses out of it by making bricks and drying them in the sun. They mixed straw with the clay to help it stick together better. This is called mud-brick, or adobe (ah-DOUGH-bee), or pise (pea-SAY). Sometimes builders fired the bricks to make them harder and more waterproof.

But potters also used fired clay to make dishes and plates and cups and cook pots. Builders generally fired their roof tiles, which had to be more waterproof

than the walls. And they used it for statues too. The Etruscans in particular are known for their clay statues.

The same text simplified to 50%: Thanks to the fact that is so easy to mould, clay has always enabled the construction of bricks with different profiles, enabling the builder artistically to enhance the construction, setting different trends in different periods and places. From the Sumerians to the Babylonians, from the Assyrians to the Egyptians, from the Greeks to the Romans, terracotta bricks represent a material which has been used beyond every national boundary throughout history. There is considerable evidence of the rich medieval architecture in Europe.

The terracotta brick continues to be one of very few products made exclusively of natural materials: clay, sand, water and fire being the elements used in the creation process. Clay is generally found along the banks of a river or stream, wherever the river is pulling dirt down off the mountains or hills and dropping it in a quiet part of the river lower down. So people who live in river valleys can get a lot of clay. What is so cool about clay (besides that it is easy and cheap to get) is that it is squishy when it is wet, so you can make it any shape you like, and then it dries hard in the sun, pretty fast, as the water evaporates out. But if clay pot or sculpture is put in a fire, or in an oven (an oven for clay is called a kiln) and baked it for a while very hot, the clay becomes even harder and it will not get soft again even if you put it in water for a long time. People first began to fire clay about 6000 BC. The most important thing that people in the ancient world did with clay was to build houses out of it by making bricks and drying them in the sun. But potters also used fired clay to make dishes and plates and cups and cook pots.

The same text simplified to 20%: Thanks to the fact that is so easy to mould, clay has always enabled the construction of bricks with different profiles, enabling the builder artistically to enhance the construction, setting different trends in different periods and places. From the Sumerians to the Babylonians, from the Assyrians to the Egyptians, from the Greeks to the Romans, terracotta bricks represent a material which has been used beyond

every national boundary throughout history. But if clay pot or sculpture is put in a fire, or in an oven (an oven for clay is called a kiln) and baked it for a while very hot, the clay becomes even harder and it will not get soft again even if you put it in water for a long time. People first began to fire clay about 6000 BC. The most important thing that people in the ancient world did with clay was to build houses out of it by making bricks and drying them in the sun.

Benefits and Limitations: As with any on-line language tool, results are not always 100%. It's a good idea for you and the students to get in the habit of analyzing each suggestion and see if it makes sense in context. That being said, one could argue that this "limitation" is actually a benefit as it will force learners re-analyze the text and vocabulary a lot more closely. Currently, Rewordify only works with English text.

Also, worth noting are TweenTribune and Scholastic resources, which feature texts of varying complexity. The sites are interesting in that the complexity of the text here is given using the text complexity index The Lexile Framework for Reading. The index was developed by MetaMetrics and offers a difficulty scale from 0L to 2000L. When calculating the index take into account, for example, indicators such as the length of sentences and the frequency of words. Teacher can choose the text that corresponds to the level of language proficiency of the student.

Thus, teaching in a multilevel group is aimed at mastering the methods, techniques and strategies for independently overcoming difficulties, at forming a coherent personality of the learner, the ability to quickly adapt in constantly changing situations of professional activity, independently acquire knowledge and apply them in practice to solve various problems; collect, select, analyze and evaluate the information necessary for the implementation of future professional activities. Also, with the help of a properly organized process of teaching a foreign language in groups of students with different levels of knowledge of FL and well-chosen educational materials, teachers will be able to organize educational process to be interesting and useful for students and convenient and easy for teacher.

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