TEACHING ENGLISH IN HETEROGENEOUS GROUPS

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Abstract

As people from diverse backgrounds, with different levels of language abilities started learning the English language, heterogeneous groups have been formed. Many teachers experience difficulties in organizing lessons for heterogeneous groups as they have to approach each student individually considering their needs and abilities. This article intends to provide helpful advices and methods for EFL teachers to use in organizing lessons for diverse groups.

Annotatsiya. Turli millatlardan bo'lgan, turli darajadagi til qobiliyatiga ega odamlar ingliz tilini o'rganishni boshlaganlari sababli, geterogen guruhlar shakllandi. Ko'pgina o'qituvchilar geterogen guruhlar uchun darslarni tashkil etishda qiyinchiliklarga duch kelishadi, chunki ular har bir talabaga o'z ehtiyojlari va qobiliyatlarini hisobga olgan holda individual yondashishlari kerak. Ushbu maqola EFL o'qituvchilariga geterogen guruhlar uchun darslarni tashkil qilishda foydalanishlari uchun foydali maslahatlar va usullarni taqdim etishni maqsad qilgan.

Аннотация. Когда люди из разных слоев общества, с разным уровнем языковых способностей начали изучать английский язык, сформировались гетерогенные группы. Многие учителя испытывают трудности при организации уроков для разнородных групп, поскольку им приходится подходить к каждому ученику индивидуально, учитывая их потребности и способности. Эта статья предназначена для предоставления учителям EFL полезных советов и методов, которые они могут использовать при организации уроков для различных групп.

Key words: heterogeneous classes, mixed-level classes, different levels of proficiency, task differentiation, grouping

Kalit so'zlar: geterogen sinflar, aralash-darajali sinflar, turli malaka darajalari, vazifani o'zgartirish, guruhlash

Ключевые слова: гетерогенные классы, разноуровневые классы, разный уровень владения языком, дифференциация заданий, группировка.

Globalization of the English language caused a massive interest and encouraged people to learn it regardless of their age, educational background and a level of capability. This condition served as a basis for the formation of heterogeneous classes. Heterogeneous grouping is a distribution tactic in the classroom whereby diverse students, i.e. students with learning disabilities and the students, who possess adequate intellectual skills and abilities are present (Kapur, 2020). From educational point of view, heterogeneous groups are the ones which embrace students with different skills and abilities. In these groups teachers should deal with students who are quick as well as slow on the uptake; who have higher and lower intelligence, who have well-developed and low-developed perceptive skills. However, many scholars claim that heterogeneity is a broad term that indicates to the individuality of every person. ***According to P. Ur, several aspects contribute to the formation of a heterogeneous class, namely, "language knowledge, cultural background, attitude to the language, mother tongue, intelligence, world knowledge, learning experiences, knowledge of other languages…" (Wahedi, 2019).*** Cohen described heterogeneous classes as classrooms where students have a wide range of academic skills and oral and written proficiency in the language of instruction (Cohen, 1994). In some research works, heterogeneous classes are mentioned as mixed-level classes, which share the same meaning.

Three main obstacles for the English language teachers are different levels of proficiency, different learning styles and difference in age. Some methods can be implemented to remove these obstacles.

Task differentiation

Differentiating tasks to meet students` needs is challenging for teachers, as it requires plenty of time and effort. In this process, teachers modify the tasks

according to students` levels of proficiency. While modifying, different texts on the same topic chosen based on language difficulty and information density. The best way to alter the tasks is to simplify the words, instructions. For example, teachers can adapt reading materials for mixed-level class by using basic words for elementary level students or adding academic words for high level students. The type of the task can also vary according to learners` levels. It is preferable to use True-False exercises, gap filling or close-ended questions for lower level learners. Teachers should make sure that clues are provided in the tasks. Matching the headlines, open-ended questions and summary writing tasks are more suitable for high-level learners, as they demand thorough analysis of the text and critical thinking.

Grouping and mixing

Grouping is not the same as groupwork. In this strategy, teachers divide the class by academic criteria so that they can instruct a more homogeneous group. (Cohen, 1994) Grouping learners based on their proficiency level is a controversial topic for debates. This strategy has both advantages and disadvantages. By using this strategy, teachers enable passive learners to be more active and active learners to learn on their own pace. However, it may also discourage learners, as lower level learners may feel discriminated against upper level learners. One of the appropriate methods to utilize in such situations is a jigsaw method. Teachers prepare colorful jigsaw pieces (usually four): each pieces represent a certain level of proficiency. For example, red piece is for beginners, yellow is for elementary, blue is for intermediate and green is for upper-intermediate learners. Materials are distinguished regarding the levels of learners. For instance, if the topic is about public holidays in the UK, a teacher prepares materials about four holidays (New Year`s day, Easter, Spring Bank Holiday, Good Friday) for each group. Students of each group are gathered around a table and discuss the material. After the discussion, all students are rearranged and put together as mixed-level groups. A member of each group tells about what they learned from the materials. This strategy helps to equalize the opportunities of students of different levels. Students feel comfortable when they are among the students of the same level.

Planned participation

Planning the lesson in advance is a crucial strategy to organize a student-centered class. Teachers can plan the participation of students before or during the lesson.

In the former way, teachers prepare and provide students with tasks and materials of a subsequent theme so that students can have some time to search for information, brainstorm ideas and prepare their speeches before the lesson to express in front of the class. In the latter way, they allow students write ideas down before uttering them. Lindstromberg (2004) suggests "increasing the proportion of writing-before-speaking activities" On the one hand, they give fluent students meaningful accuracy practice. On the other, "it increases the likelihood that less proficient students will be able to say something that is interesting and comprehensible." It is also suggested that organizing the order during Q&A section is a good way to make students more alert and conscious. Teachers can come up with any patterns to arrange the order of students. One of the prominent patterns are assigning numbers or letters, clockwise and row-by-row asking. Calling out students by following the pattern helps them to know their turn and get prepared.

Age groups

It is typical now to encounter mature students in classes. There is usually a considerable difference between youngsters and adults regarding their aims, interests, abilities and learning styles. Mature students often don`t show much interest for groupworks or interactive games. They prefer working individually and interacting less with younger learners. One of the reasons of this can be their embarrassment regarding age-difference or not finding a common language. It is preferable to utilize unbiased methods and strategies and excluding "childish" games in these circumstances. The best way is to group them with their peers or allowing them to work individually by providing materials.

In conclusion, as people are individuals possessing certain characteristics, learning styles, abilities and interests, all classes are considered as heterogeneous. There is not the best strategy or method that fit for all learners. Therefore, teachers should always be ready to approach every individual learners and   identify their needs and try to meet them.

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