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Казахский национальный педагогический университет имени Абая
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ХАБАРШЫ ВЕСТНИК BULLETIN

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G.H. Bekkozhanova¹, Zh.Abykenova², B.Utepova³
Docent¹, Senior-lecturer², Senior-lecturer³, Al-Farabi Kazakh national university,
Almaty, Kazakhstan

PROBLEMS AND STRATEGIES OF TEACHING AN FL OF MIXED-CLASS ABILITY STUDENTS

Abstract

Education process in Kazakhstan has been developed for the last twenty years and educational programs have changed a lot. One of them is teaching language foreign languages. Teaching FL has different challenges as for the teaching English has become one of the important tasks in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Teaching English as a foreign language has become compulsory at schools and higher universities, because of trilingual and polylingual policy of the country. English is accepted as an international language for entering and raising economic and political conditions of the Republic of Kazakhstan alongside with the state languages –Kazakh and Russian.

In this regard teaching English language process has been developed in its methodological aspect. The concept of teaching foreign languages has been developed and strategies of teaching has been also affected a lot. Methodologists and teachers of EL faced with new problems and issues of teaching technologies and strategies. Almost all people now try to learn English: with different levels, age and social groups in Kazakhstan. Almost every class has mixed ability students. Because of polylingual system of education in Kazakhstan teaching English is considered to be faced with great many challenges. This aspect of teaching is threefold: while teaching FL we consider three main principles according to learners' age, level and psychological activity.

Key words: strategies, teaching English, innovative, methodological aspect, method.

Г.К. Беккожанова¹, Ж.Абикенова², Б.Утепова³
¹Әл-Фараби атындағы Қазақ ұлттық университетінің
доценті, ф.ғ.к., аға оқытушы², аға оқытушысы³

ӘРТҮРЛІ ДЕҢГЕЙДЕГІ СТУДЕНТТЕРГЕ ШЕТЕЛ ТІЛІН ОҚЫТУ СТРАТЕГИЯЛАРЫ МЕН МӘСЕЛЕЛЕРІ

Аңдатпа

Соңғы 20 жыл ішінде Қазақстан Республикасында білім беру үдерісіндегі оқу бағдарламалары көп өзгерістерге түсті. Олардың бірі – шетел тілін оқыту үдерісі. Қазақстан Республикасында шетел тілін оқытудың маңыздылығының артуына байланысты көптеген өзгерістер пайда болды. Барлық университеттер мен мектептерде шетел тілін оқытудың міндеттелуі – мемлекеттің көптілділік және үштілділік саясатына байланысты орын алуда. Мемлекеттің экономикалық және саяси аренаға енуі үшін және елді дамыту үшін қазақ, орыс тілімен қатар, халықаралық тіл ретінде ағылшын тілін оқыту аса маңызды болып отыр.

Осы бағытта ағылшын тілін оқыту үдерісі әдіснамалық тұрғыдан да жоғары деңгейге жетті. Шетел тілін оқыту тұжырымдамасы дамытылып, шетел тілін оқыту стратегиялары даму үстінде. Шетел тілін оқытуда көптеген оқытушылар мен әдіскерлер оқытудың жаңа технологиялары мен стратегияларын қолдануда көптеген қиындықтарға тап болды. Қазақстан халқының барлығы дерлік әртүрлі жастарына, деңгейлері мен әлеуметтік топтарда болуына қарамастан ағылшын тілін үйренуге тырысуда. Шетел тілінің барлық сыныптарында әртүрлі деңгейдегі студенттер

отыр. Сондықтан Қазақстандағы көптілділік жүйесін іске асыруда ағылшын тілін оқытудың өз қиыншылықтары мен шешілуін қажет ететін мәселелері баршылық. Бұл мақалада шетел тілін оқытудың ұшжақты аспектілері тұрғысынан, атап айтсақ: білім алушылардың жасы, деңгейі және психологиялық ерекшелігіне байланысты қарастырамыз.

Түйін сөздер: стратегия, ағылшын тілін оқыту, методикалық аспект, инновациялық, әдіс.

Беккожанова Г.К.¹, Абикенова Ж.², Утепова Б.³
к.ф.н., доцент¹, старший преподаватель², старший преподаватель³
Казахского национального университета имени аль-Фараби,
г. Алматы, Казахстан

СТРАТЕГИИ И ПРОБЛЕМЫ ПРЕПОДАВАНИЯ ИНОСТРАННОГО ЯЗЫКА ДЛЯ СТУДЕНТО В РАЗНЫХ УРОВНЕЙ

Аннотация

За последние 20 лет учебная программа в учебном процессе значительно изменилась в Республике Казахстан. Один из них - процесс обучения иностранному языку. В Казахстане произошло много изменений из-за важности преподавания иностранных языков. Обязательство изучать иностранные языки во всех университетах и школах объясняется многоязычием государства и политикой трехязычия. Преподавание английского языка как международного языка, как казахского, так и русского, имеет решающее значение для вступления страны в экономическую и политическую арену и развития страны. Процесс преподавания английского языка в этом направлении достиг высокого уровня методологии. Разработана концепция обучения иностранному языку и разработаны стратегии обучения иностранному языку. При обучении иностранным языкам многие преподаватели и методисты сталкиваются с множеством проблем в применении новых технологий обучения и навыков. Почти все казахстанцы пытаются изучать английский язык по разному возрасту, уровню и социальному статусу. Есть студенты разных уровней на всех занятиях иностранного языка. Поэтому проблема преподавания английского языка в реализации многоязычной системы в Казахстане имеет свои трудности и решения. В этой статье мы рассмотрим трехмерные аспекты преподавания иностранного языка, а именно: возраст, уровень и психологические особенности учащихся.

Ключевые слова: стратегия, преподавания английского языка, методический аспект, инновационный, метод.

Introduction. Teaching FL has different challenges. Teaching English has become one of the important tasks in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Because of polylingual system of education in Kazakhstan teaching English is considered to be faced with great many challenges. While teaching FL we consider three main principles according to learners' age, level and psychological activity.

According to the level of learners we face some problems. One of them is mixed ability classroom level.

According to Archer C.A.: "Mixed ability as used in ELT usually refers to the differences that exist in a group in terms of different levels of language proficiency" [1, 2 p.]. *Mixed-ability grouping* means within the same context randomly chosen students gathered in one class regardless of their abilities or achievements in the subject concerned.

The differences of age and knowledge level which cause problems in heterogeneous classes are in language learning ability, learning experience, mother tongue, cultural background, preferred learning style, motivation and others.

The term *mixed ability* is defined as "involving students of different levels of ability" [2]. Holladay S. and Coombs W. suggested a range of learner characteristics such as beginner, intermediate or advanced learners; young children, teenagers or adult learners; learners' goal in learning the target language; how motivated learners are; the use of the target language outside the classroom; how heterogeneous or homogeneous the class is and how big the groups are [3].

Galskova A. considers that this is a very common problem. Most, if not all, language classes contain students of mixed abilities. According to her perception this happens for a number of reasons, but mainly because of different learning styles, different learning speeds, variations in motivation and, very frequently, as a result of logistic decisions [4]. Very often the teacher is faced with a class with two or more distinct levels of ability and has to tackle the problem of how to meet the needs of everyone in the class. Naturally, this is not an easy problem to solve and it would be wrong to suggest that there are any simple solutions.

Experiment. A fundamental step, however, is to talk to the class about the situation and to present it to them as a normal situation and one that the class as a whole has to deal with. This is probably best done in the mother tongue of the students. As most of the solutions to the problem depend on cooperation between

the members of the class, it is essential to stress the need for teamwork and for the class to use English whenever possible in classroom communication.

Some distinguished scholars suggest teachers need to recognize that a class is mixed ability because children have different strengths and weaknesses and develop at different rates. They have different preferences for learning and displaying their work. A mixed ability class does not just consist of a range of abilities but also a range of learning styles and preferences. All pupils will show strengths at different times depending on the topic being studied and the learning style being used. When pupils are working out with their preferred learning style then they will not perform as well. All classes even those that have been set are mixed ability to certain degree. Therefore the following strategies are valid for all classes [2].

Actually, students with different levels of knowledge needs to solve language teaching strategies and teaching materials. It is difficult to find activities that involve all the students without some getting bored and others being confused, insecure or discouraged. Weaker students not being able to follow the classmates. It is really difficult for them to understand information or to express their ideas and stronger students not being tolerant to them may result in classroom management problems.

Thus, teachers need to have a range of strategies for managing mixed ability classes. There is a temptation for the educator to focus on the more advanced students. Even though students are grouped according to their placement test scores, their progress rates are bound to be at different levels. Due to the mentioned differences students react to the teaching material and teaching methods individually.

Actually, whole-class instructions and standards as well as a single interpretation of ideas are common in a traditional classroom. On the contrary, in differentiated teaching we need to offer multi-level approach by adjusting the amount or type of input, by altering timing and type of teacher's help, by varying support materials and by adapting the expected outcomes [2, 56 p.].

In this regard we, also have to the topics which are in their interests and level. In the lessons, we have to provoke student engagement with material which is relevant and involving. We also should take a respectful attitude towards students, be open to their needs and wishes, and try to boost their confidence and self-esteem.

According to this concept, people do not possess a single intelligence, but a range of intelligences, which Gardner called *multiple intelligences*. They are:

1. Linguistic.
2. Visual.
3. Musical.
4. Logical/ mathematical.
5. bodily/feeling.
6. Interpersonal (contact with other people).

7. Intrapersonal (understanding oneself). People possess all these seven intelligences, but we tend to use preferably one or two over the rest.

Analytic students focus on grammar and tend to avoid free-flowing communicative activities. They concentrate on contrastive analysis between languages, on rule learning and careful study of words and sentences. They do not favor guessing, using synonyms or paraphrasing when they are not sure about a correct meaning of a particular word.

Some Kazakh methodolists G.Amandikova, Sh.Mukhtarova, B.Baimukhanova, A.Bisengalieva analyzed teaching in Kazakhstan, and pointed out the main problems of mixed ability classes are grammar materials. They suggest to teach grammar in comparison with the foreign language [5].

Karpenko T. E. is against to this statement, because global students enjoy communication in which they can emphasize the main idea [6]. They do not like to spend time on grammar, analyzing words and sentences. They prefer guessing the meaning of the word, using synonyms and paraphrases. Bremner S. States the most important strategies of teaching English [7]:

- *Intuitive/ Random and Sensory/ Sequential Learning* are described as learners who think in abstract, large-scaled and random ways. They are able to work out the main principles of how the new language works. They are bored by concrete, step-by-step learning. In contrast, sensory/ sequential learners prefer concrete facts, presented in an organized ways, step-by-step. They are usually slow learners who make

progress at their own pace, but who always achieve goals. They do not like randomness and lack of consistency in language classrooms.

- *Orientation to closure* may be characterized as a degree to which the person needs to reach decisions or clarity. It is associated with flexibility in learning styles – the ability to shift styles when necessitated by the task.

In general, students, who are oriented towards closure, need clarity in all aspects of language learning. They want the grammar rules to be clearly presented. They do not favor spontaneous conversations and games, unless they have time to prepare for a task. Such learners are hardworking students who are great at planning, organizing and self-evaluating. Students who have less of an orientation towards closure are sometimes known as “open learners”. They take learning as fun, often not worrying about deadlines. They prefer having a good time in the classroom over hard work.

So, in our turn we offer the most important selected strategies of teaching an FL of mixed ability students. They have been selected according to their effectiveness and importance:

Classroom management – By managing classes effectively, teachers can ensure that learners will be involved as much as possible in the lesson. Classroom management techniques include organising the classroom layout for maximum learning potential, involving all students, learning and using learners’ names, teachers cultivating a positive attitude through their own attitude to the class, praise and encouragement, grading and using relevant teacher talk, using the board effectively and managing learning activities by giving good instructions, asking concept checking questions, using pair and group work, setting time limits, monitoring the activity and including feedback on the activity.

Supportive learning environment – It is important to create a supportive learning environment in the classroom, where learners feel confident and able to perform to the best of their ability. *Learning to learn* – Teach learners about different learning styles and the different learning strategies for visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learners. Teach learners how to be resourceful so that they know where to find help if they get stuck. Provide learners with the goal for the lesson and encourage learners to review and assess whether they have achieved the goal by the end of the lesson.

Variety – Vary topics, methods of teaching, focus, materials and activities. Variety will generate learner interest and motivation; and lessons will accommodate different learners’ levels, abilities and learning styles.

Grouping – Use a range of interaction patterns in class. Learners should work in groups, pairs and individually. Groupings should be changed often, thereby giving learners an opportunity to work with different learners.

Pace – Teachers must be mindful of the pace of their lessons. Teaching a class too slowly or too quickly may lead to boredom or frustration. A teacher must be aware of his/her learners’ abilities and pitch the pace of the lesson accordingly.

Interest – Teachers need to make the lessons interesting in terms of content, topic and activities. To find out what interests the learners, teachers could find out what interests the learners outside the classroom, allow learners to share their interests with the class through project work and personalization activities, such as ‘show and tell’, or allow learners to choose the content, topics or activities for lessons, where appropriate.

Collaboration – Getting learners to work together and cooperating has a number of benefits for the learners and teacher. Learners develop their learner autonomy and learn from their peers, rather than always being reliant on the teacher. Learners who collaborate on tasks learn how to compromise, negotiate meaning and develop self-evaluation skills. Collaboration tasks can involve project work as well as pair or group activities.

Individualization – (describes individualization as ‘providing opportunities for students to work at their own pace, in their own style and of topics of their choosing’. Individualization can be promoted in the classroom through portfolios, self-access centers, individualized writing or personalized dictionaries [25].

Personalization – suggests including activities which allow learners to respond personally. Such tasks increase learners’ motivation and interest as they are based on something the learners have experienced and can relate.

Blooms taxonomy – Make use of higher order thinking skills by providing learners with problem-solving, analysis, evaluation and synthesis activities, rather than only comprehension tasks.

Open-endedness – Open-ended activities allow learners to respond to tasks and questions which have a variety of possible answers rather than one correct answer. Open-ended tasks allow learners to perform at their level of ability. Such tasks include sentence completion activities, story completion activities, brainstorming, writing own definitions for words, answering questions in a range of ways.

Compulsory plus optional tasks – suggests learners are assigned compulsory tasks with additional materials should they finish the core tasks. By setting compulsory plus core tasks, all learners are engaged and can feel a sense of achievement when completing a task.

Adapting materials – Course books are designed for a particular language level and do not offer much flexibility. As a result teachers may need to adapt the materials to make them easier or more challenging.

Homework – Homework is an excellent tool to provide learners of all levels and abilities with an opportunity to review and consolidate the material covered in class. Tips for good classroom management with mixed ability groups

Grouping. It may seem contradictory to suggest that you group stronger students together and also suggest that you group weak with strong. However, depending on the task and the class dynamics I think there are usually opportunities for both types of grouping. It's a good idea to experiment with mixing up the strong and weak students whilst also giving time for stronger students to work together so they work to their full potential.

Giving Instructions. Giving clear instructions is vital for weaker students to be able to follow the class. Use hand gestures as well as words to explain the tasks and use stronger students to check back the instructions and even explain the task in their own language if necessary.

Error correction. Stronger students can probably stand more correction. Don't over correct weak students as it will affect their confidence. Encourage students to correct one another and demand a higher level of accuracy from the stronger students.

Setting goals. Setting goals for each class or for the whole term will help to focus the students. The goals can be different for each student, depending on their level, but realising the goals will give the same sense of achievement to all.

Results and discussion. In one word a **mixed-ability class** is a class where the students have different [levels](#) and abilities in English. Anyway, this class cause great many problems not only for language teacher, but also learners of the group. So, that we deal with problems of teaching **mixed-ability class** in the next chapter.

Conclusion. In conclusion of this research, we can say that the problem of mixed-class ability cause mostly psychological and practical problems for teachers. In general mixed ability characteristics is peculiar to all classrooms according to their age, level of knowledge and learning styles.

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