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PROBLEMS IN MIXED-ABILITY CLASSES AND EFFECTIVE METHODS OF SOLVING THEM

Olimova Matluba
University of Tashkent for Applied Sciences Faculty of History and Philology,
Teacher of the Department of Foreign Language and Literature
olimovamatluba686@gmail.com

Abstract: Working with pupils who have diverse personalities, aptitudes, interests, and learning requirements is known as mixed ability teaching. Even though most classes are multi-level, teaching such classes may be quite challenging and demanding for teachers, especially those with little or no experience, as it requires lesson planning that includes a wide diversity of tasks according to a range of learning styles and abilities. Language learning ability, language knowledge, cultural background, learning style, attitude toward language, mother tongue, intelligence, world knowledge, learning experience, knowledge of other languages, age, gender, personality, confidence, motivation, interests, and educational level are among the differences that lead to issues in these kinds of classes. These differences, meanwhile, could manifest to varying degrees throughout courses. Therefore, the instructor must recognize these issues and address them appropriately if they hope to guarantee that every student reaches their full potential.

Keywords: Mixed-ability classes, mixed-ability students, random calls, Defensive Clustering, Assigning Roles, cultural background, ESL, EFL, multilingual, mother tongue, intelligence, world knowledge, learning experience, knowledge of other languages, age, gender, personality, confidence, motivation, interests.

1 INTRODUCTION

You may be faced with a single class full of pupils who have varying degrees of language proficiency as the school year begins. ESL and EFL instructors frequently encounter this scenario, and they may feel overwhelmed by seeing beginning students who have very little communication skills mix with advanced students who can handle nearly any communicative situation and students at any point on the continuum between those extremes.

Teachers are pushed to devise strategic methods in the mixed-level classroom (MLC) so that every student has an equal chance to learn. Use the following tactics to be ready for such a complicated issue when the new school year arrives. Finding a single, consistent definition can be difficult, even in cases where the MLC is claimed to be universal. The phenomena has been interpreted in a variety of ways, with some emphasizing certain characteristics of students and classroom learning, such as styles, skills, and competence levels. I discuss the topic of learner language proficiency level in this essay. Task differentiation [1], material adaptation [2], open-ended tasks [3], and emotive recommendations [4] are some of the strategies used to try to lessen the challenges brought on by the MLC. In addition to this, using forceful grouping strategies can help students with their emotional difficulties, which can be brought on by the anxiety that comes with having classmates with varying degrees of skill in the same language. In this post, I offer specific instances of how to reduce the MLC by carefully organizing student involvement and grouping. The degree and kind of participation of language learners are typically correlated with their skill level. Students typically experience differences in the amount and quality of engagement in MLCs. Higher proficiency students might participate more actively in class, while lower proficiency students might behave more passively, which reduces participation and impedes learning. According to this theory, identifying deliberate and strategic methods to encourage student participation can guarantee more equitable and less restricted student participation.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

Method 1: Making Orders One by One
This kind of spontaneous calling involves calling on kids in a sequence so they may anticipate who will be called on next. One concept is to begin with a pupil in one corner and call on students one at a time for each subsequent activity or question in a predetermined manner (e.g., clockwise, row-by-row). Because they are aware of their scheduled call time, students can prepare ahead of time [5]. This procedure can be aided by giving each student a code, either a number or letter, at the start of class. Keep track of involvement on the board when it is requested. Students will be prepared to participate and aware of when their turn is coming in this way.

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Students might also gain from allotted participation that is due a day or a week in advance. The duration and objective of this kind of involvement are different from those of an assigned presentation. Allotted involvement ought to be brief and easy. Although this notion encourages less spontaneity production, more linguistic practice is needed. Its efficacy depends on keeping it straightforward and speaking in a conversational tone to avoid giving the student undue anxiety or need for extensive preparation.

Method 2: Assigning Roles
Assemble students into groups for a report or presentation, and assign each group member a distinct duty. This encourages engagement from each learner at their own level.Furthermore, leadership is decentralized, and each learner receives customized attention based on their unique behaviors, preferences, working styles, and linguistic abilities. Rotating jobs and groups is crucial to ensure a variety of duties.

Method 3: Cold calling or random calls
This tactic should only be employed when the instructor has established a safe and encouraging learning environment where students feel comfortable taking chances. When making cold calls, you would just regardless of ability level, select a student at random to answer a question or take part in a certain task. The main goal of this method is to keep pupils from feeling humiliated; shy, ill-prepared, and less skilled students are surely made to feel uncomfortable. Giving them the chance to salvage face is the key to preventing this, though. Allowing kids to respond with "I don't know" as you probe more with pertinent questions is one approach to achieve this.

Language teachers have created a plethora of inventive resources to facilitate cold calling. You might choose cards with the students' names on them at random from a hat or shuffled deck to prevent them from feeling singled out. These days, students can also be called at random by using applications and hand-held computer software (like Random Team Generator). These methods are advantageous because they disassociate the teacher from the choice, and students comprehend that there is no prejudice at play.

The goal for directly addressing planned grouping is to enhance students' opportunities to have equal learning achievement without putting language proficiency in the spotlight. The idea of purposefully planning grouping is to encourage and strengthen participation from all students during all stages of the class. The next section describes a set of strategies to mindfully plan that grouping.

Method 4: Defensive Clustering
Conventional group and pair work classroom setups have been shown to have benefits and drawbacks. Both, in general, encourage student-to-student interaction, make the most of speaking opportunities, and offer a less intimidating means of participating than solo work. The methods you employ to divide students into groups could mitigate the detrimental effects of the MLC.

Method 5: Sorting by Level of Proficiency
This tactic might work well only if you've established a cooperative relationship with your kids in the classroom and taught them how to show respect and encouragement to one another. If not, subgroups may create relationships based on status that lead to conflict rather than cooperation. In a collaborative setting, students might gain from participating as mentors or mentees in each capacity. High competent learners may benefit from the chance to assist less proficient pupils in understanding the course material because it will allow them to develop their elaboration and explanation skills as well as their cognitive capacities. Less proficient students can gain from help, support, and stimulation from students with greater levels of language competency as well as from hearing from and interacting more closely with classmates.

Method 6: Organizing by Age
It may be necessary for language teachers in adult education programs or private institutions to tutor students of all ages. You can use this variable to classify students if age is a consideration in your MLC. Students of comparable ages probably have similar goals and difficulties when learning a language. Their variety of backgrounds, aptitudes, and passions might promote participation in class activities.

Method 7: Assorting at Random
Generally speaking, randomization is seen as an equitable method. Both teachers and students need to be prepared for the unexpected. This method guarantees that every student gets an opportunity to engage with their peers. Here are some methods for assigning students to random groups:
Prepare many card sets featuring various colors or animal sets to use as color and animal codes. When using these cards, distribute them at random to the children before each activity, and ask them to form groups based on whether their colors or animals are similar or distinct.

Alphabetical Order: Assign pupils to groups based on the first or final letter of their given names or surnames. To create a sense of surprise, you can switch up the category such that, in place of names, you can ask students to form groups according to their birth month, neighborhood, country of origin (if your class is multilingual), or any other category that comes to mind.

To play Matching Pairs, cut out slips of paper featuring famous couples, authors and movies, foods (such peanut butter and jelly, spaghetti and meatballs), and sayings (like "It's now or never," "Don't worry, be happy," and "safe and sound"). Tell your students to find their companions after you've dispersed them. There may be a big list of potential couples to match; allowing students to choose which matches will work allows them to feel involved in class decisions and presents chances for cultural education.

Materials

Teachers constantly have to deal with the issue of pupils reacting to language textbooks differently owing to individual variances, as most language textbooks are created for the perfect classroom setting.

To begin with, some students might find the textbook tedious and difficult, while others would find it engaging or simple. Additionally, some students may find the themes boring, odd, or meaningless because language education course materials are now centered on content-based or theme-based syllabi, while others may find them pleasurable, familiar, or engaging. As a result, the instructor must typically assess and modify the contents in accordance with her class.

Engagement

For many foreign language learners, the classroom is their first and only setting, therefore they should take advantage of this opportunity as much as they can. Some students, however, struggle with speaking in the target language for a variety of reasons, such as age, knowledge, or lack of motivation or confidence. Some kids, on the other hand, want to use the new language to describe everything they feel or think. As a result, some pupils might speak throughout the entire lesson, while others might take multiple turns.

3   RESULTS

Teaching at a mixed ability level involves collaborating with students who have various personalities, aptitudes, passions, and educational requirements. Even though most classes are multi-level, teaching such classes may be quite challenging and demanding for teachers, especially those with little or no experience, as it requires lesson planning that includes a wide diversity of tasks according to a range of learning styles and abilities.

Some British schools began dividing their student bodies based on IQ scores in the mid-1930s. It was observed that there were still differences among the pupils in the new groups, and it is not practical to continually alter the curricula and these groupings [6].

Furthermore, according to Prodromou [7], learning style variations, teaching techniques, and/or resources will always result in varying rates of advancement for students, even when those students are categorized based on test scores. In order to reach every kid in a class, the professors become essential. It's critical that educators recognize the issues raised by mixed ability groups in the classroom and use appropriate methods and approaches to address these issues. Language learning ability, language knowledge, cultural background, learning style, attitude toward language, mother tongue, intelligence, world knowledge, learning experience, knowledge of other languages, age, gender, personality, confidence, motivation, interests, and/or educational level are among the differences that lead to issues in these kinds of classes. These differences might, however, manifest in varying degrees among classes. Therefore, the instructor needs to recognize these issues and address them appropriately if they hope to guarantee that every student reaches their full potential. Effective   Learning in Mixed Ability Classes: A Few Issues Reaching every student is our goal as educators. It is widely acknowledged, therefore, that each student learns differently and advances through the educational process at a varying rate. As a result, whereas some students might find the learning job really simple, others might find it challenging to comprehend.

Additionally, what individuals bring to class affects their ability to learn. The multicultural makeup of the class may make it difficult for the teachers to connect with the kids because they all come from various backgroundsdifferent families, different environments, and other countries. This may ultimately lead to inefficient learning. Furthermore, even in small classrooms, it can be challenging for teachers to keep track of every student's activities and learn about them, but in order to achieve effective teaching, it is critical that teachers keep an eye on every student and find many ways to meet their requirements.

4   WANTS ANALYSIS

Variations in students' attitudes toward the material and the teacher, their language proficiency, and their personalities can all lead to interest problems. For example, if the subject matter is unrelated to their hobbies or personal experiences, some students can find the lessons dull. In addition, if the teacher talks too

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much or if the other students take turns speaking during the session, some of the pupils might not be engaged in the material until they have an opportunity to share their own opinions. Instructors must to be cognizant of the diverse interests of their students in order to plan and assign assignments appropriately.

5   DISCUSSIONS

Students that complete assignments more quickly tend to finish them ahead of their peers. They might therefore act out as they wait for the others to finish. However, because they are unable to complete the assignments as quickly as the more capable pupils, the weaker students may experience a loss of confidence or exhibit unruly behavior for a variety of related reasons. As a result, mixed ability groups may cause issues with classroom administration.

CONCLUSIONS

Although there isn't a single optimal method that works for every group or even just one that works for that specific group, you can keep experimenting with different approaches to find which ones your students respond to the best. Recognize and respect your pupils' individual and collective preferences. You can determine the needs of learners by closely observing them and continuously gathering information. You can use class characteristics, strategic involvement, and grouping tactics to connect and engage your students after you have a clear picture of your own teaching and learning environment. Creating a supportive and cooperative learning environment and offering a range of assignments appropriate for varying skill levels are perhaps the two most important teaching strategies for mixed-level classrooms. It is not a solution to act like everything is well and that the pupils are getting along. A teacher should always make an effort to involve the entire class in the learning process and use classroom management strategies to solve mixed-ability issues.

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