

TEACHING METHODS IN MIXED ABILITY CLASSES.

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Annotation: This article offers insights into the utilization and efficacy of mixed-ability classes, a common challenge in many EFL schools, that are prevalent in Cambodia. These private EFL schools have been significant in English education in the country, making it intriguing to explore the difficulties teachers face when instructing students with varying abilities and their approaches to teaching such classes. The study involved 20 male and 30 female teachers from two private EFL schools in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, who were surveyed to collect data on this topic.

Keywords: *Mixed-ability classes, EFL instructors, Challenges, entertainment, higher education, classroom management.*

Аннотация: В этой статье предлагается информация об использовании и эффективности классов со смешанным обучением, что является распространенной проблемой во многих школах EFL, которые широко распространены в Камбодже. Эти частные школы EFL сыграли важную роль в обучении английскому языку в стране, что делает интересным изучение трудностей, с которыми сталкиваются учителя при обучении учащихся с различными способностями, и их подходов к проведению таких занятий. В исследовании приняли участие 20 учителей мужского и 30 женского пола из двух частных школ EFL в Пномпене, Камбоджа, которые были опрошены с целью сбора данных по этой теме.

Ключевые слова: *Занятия со смешанными способностями, инструкторы EFL, сложные задачи, развлечения, высшее образование, управление классом.*

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada Kambodjada keng tarqalgan EFL maktablarida keng tarqalgan muammo bo'lgan aralash qobiliyatli sinflardan foydalanish va samaradorligi haqida tushunchalar mavjud. Ushbu xususiy EFL maktablari mamlakatdagi ingliz tili ta'limida muhim ahamiyatga ega bo'lib, o'qituvchilarning turli qobiliyatlarga ega bo'lgan talabalarga dars berishda qanday qiyinchiliklarga duch kelishi va bunday darslarni o'qitishga yondashuvlarini o'rganish qiziqarli bo'ldi. Tadqiqotda Kambodjaning Pnompen shahridagi ikkita xususiy EFL maktablaridan 20 erkak va 30 ayol o'qituvchilar ishtirok etdi, ular ushbu mavzu bo'yicha ma'lumot to'plash uchun so'rovdan o'tkazildi.

Kalit so'zlar: *Aralash qobiliyatli sinflar, EFL instruktorlari, Challenges, o'yin-kulgi, oliy ta'lim, sinf boshqaruvi.*

Introduction Mixed ability classes provide great advantages, such as the opportunity for engaging in discussions and gaining diverse perspectives and opinions. Furthermore, these classes facilitate increased interaction among students who may not typically have the chance to interact. Mixed ability grouping is an educational system that involves

grouping students with varying proficiencies and abilities together. This approach is particularly common in ESL teaching environments, and as a result, mixed ability groupings are also known as heterogeneous learning environments.

Challenges of teaching mixed-ability classes

The terms mixed-ability and heterogeneous can be misleading because no two learners in a language learning class have identical proficiencies. Therefore, homogeneous classes, where all students have the same proficiency level, do not truly exist, and all classes are inherently heterogeneous. Mixed-ability classes are those in which there are significant disparities in learning proficiencies among students, with noticeable differences in strengths, weaknesses, and learning approaches. In a single ESL class, there are at least nine factors that can influence learners' characteristics.

Apart from the aforementioned issues, EFL instructors encounter additional hurdles. Among them is the issue of maintaining discipline, which is closely linked to effective classroom management. This difficulty often arises when students in a class become frustrated; advanced learners may feel unchallenged and not making significant progress, while less proficient students may find tasks and materials too demanding or feel insufficiently supported by the teacher.

Additionally, student engagement poses a challenge. In a class with varying levels of proficiency, it is common for more advanced students to participate more actively than their less proficient peers are. This disparity in participation may stem from the reserved nature of less advanced students or their awareness of not being the top performers in the class, leading to a fear of making mistakes. The lack of involvement can further hinder the academic performance of less advanced students. Ideally, equal participation from all students is desired, but achieving this balance is often difficult in practice.

Teaching strategies for mixed-ability classes

Students in school groups based on their age typically face the challenges mentioned above. Despite grouping students by age, there is still a possibility of mixed-ability students being in the same class (Kotob & Abadi, 2019). In other words, there are still mixed ability students after grouping them by age. Teachers need to be mindful that students' varying strengths and weaknesses are what lead to mixed-ability classes. This diversity in knowledge levels results in students progressing at different speeds and rates (Ireson & Hallanm, 2001). One effective approach for mixed-ability classrooms involves facilitating open-class discussions where students can engage in conversations with their peers or small groups to explore and share their responses to specific questions. The teacher can then gather this information to create a statistical summary of the main questions and answers. It is important to explain the mixed-level nature of the class to students and provide them with a list of potential teaching and learning strategies. Students can then work in pairs to rank these ideas based on their relevance. By developing and implementing these strategies consistently, the teacher can enhance the sense of inclusivity and belonging within the class (Gwozdz, 2020). This is true that in

mixed-ability classes the teacher mostly make students work in a group to engage all students.

How to work with mixed-ability classes?

The results suggest that teaching in mixed-ability classrooms poses various challenges for EFL instructors. These findings align with previous research that emphasizes the obstacles faced by teachers in such settings. Due to variations in attitudes, motivation, and self-discipline among students, educators often find it challenging to cater to the diverse learning needs of each individual. Designing classes that are engaging and meet the requirements of all students becomes a daunting task. This is often exacerbated by a lack of adequate training and resources for effectively teaching students with different abilities (Lightbown & Spada, 2006) . Teachers who receive regular training can overcome the difficulties they often encounter (Butterworth, 2010). Evidence from this study and earlier research suggests that instructors who receive inadequate training cannot choose the most appropriate strategy for their situation. However, the problem is that most lecturers do not have enough time to prepare and develop their careers. Teachers of mixed-ability classes should receive ongoing professional development to better manage the diverse students they teach (Butterworth, 2010). To exhibit their talent and professionalism, teachers can make use of disadvantages as an asset in the class work. The work involved in different-level classes can be daunting and challenging for young and inexperienced teachers, but the most suitable and appropriate solution is to find a solution.

CONCLUSION

Based on the survey findings, a significant number of teachers in primary and secondary schools struggle with teaching mixed-ability classes. They have implemented various successful classroom management strategies to address this issue. The diverse approaches used in applying these tactics appear to be effective. Educators in mixed-ability classrooms need to focus on the positive aspects of their classes while employing efficient classroom management techniques. The challenges posed by mixed-ability classes can have a detrimental impact on teachers' motivation and their teaching abilities. Teachers encounter numerous obstacles due to the complexity of mixed-ability classrooms and must provide tailored assignments for different proficiency levels. It is also essential to keep students engaged and enhance their learning potential. Limitations are a common aspect of any research. Just like other studies, this current study also has its own limitations, including a small scale involving only two schools and its design. Therefore, a future study could be carried out on a larger scale in various locations. Different research designs, such as qualitative and mixed methods, could be considered. Additionally, exploring students' perceptions of mixed-ability classes is recommended for future research.

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