

Innovative Teaching Styles / Methods for Multilevel Foreign Language Learners

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Abstract: *Teaching is to spread knowledge among the students. Teachers try to find the best way to convey all their wisdom. Again the teachers who are creative can bring more to class. To teach a foreign Language there is no alternative to innovate new ideas and techniques of teaching. Teaching multilevel learners requires both skill and sensitivity. The purpose of my paper is to identify the innovative teaching styles used by the teacher while teaching in a multi-level foreign language classroom. Qualitative method has been used for data collection. I hope, the result of this study will help the language teachers to know about the different teaching strategies those can be an essential tool for teaching Foreign Language effectively. By knowing these innovative methods Foreign language teachers may modify their own teaching style and make the classroom more interactive.*

Keywords: Teaching strategies, Foreign Language Teaching, Teaching methods, Multi-level classroom

1. Introduction

No teacher is same. Each and every teacher has their own and unique style of teaching. Techniques or teaching strategies those engage students and let the students think out of the box can be said an effective teaching strategies. The main point of difficulty of a teacher is to grasp students' attention. The language teacher needs to impart the ideas in such a way that the students can take them after they have left the classroom. To teach is to learn twice. Before apply any teaching strategies, a teacher needs to be well prepared for the lesson and willing to answer queries of the students. On the other hand, to be good teacher we need to motivate students towards learning. The teacher should include different aspects of teaching and allow the students to explore new ideas. If the student is willing to learn the teachers also get the motivation to innovate new methods of teaching foreign languages. To arouse motivation among the students it is necessary to know the students. The more a teacher know the students the easier it would be for the teachers to reach them. The students of foreign language classroom come with different educational background. Some students have little idea about the target language some have no knowledge about the target language. Again student's individual personality is another aspect that impact the teaching style of the instructor. If the students are motivated enough to participate in the class and if they are willing to be a part of the class teachers also get the inspiration to innovate new teaching methods and ideas for the learners. Multi-level classroom consist of a group of students whose age is not same and this is even more challenging for a teacher to use a particular style or method. The older students find it difficult to retain information in speaking. However it is not that difficult for the learners who are young.

2. The Challenges in the Multilevel Classroom

Teachers use the term *multilevel* to identify any group of learners who differ from one another in one or more significant ways. Arguably, every class is multilevel because learners begin with varying degrees of competence and then

progress at different rates in each of the language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Bell & Burnaby, 1984; Santopietro, 1991; Wrigley & Guth, 1992). If the foreign language teacher is planning to implement any teaching method he/she must consider the varied proficiency levels of the students and this is the main challenge or constrain of teaching a foreign language in multilevel class.

Above-level: The students who are able to grasp the language soon and more quickly than other students can be consider as above level students. These students can be considered as at risk student too because if the teacher go slowly in the class for other level of students the above level student can lose the motivation to continue the class. They may feel distracted while learning the foreign language.

Below-level: These are the struggling student who are facing difficulties to cope up with the class. They may feel left out inside the class and become demotivated and frustrated because they are not performing efficiently in the class.

At-level: These students belong to the category who are doing good in the class. They are willing to learn and enough motivated.

Needs Assessment: To innovate or introduce new methods or strategies and ensure successful learning environment teachers must need to know what each learner wish to learn. This is accomplished through ongoing needs assessment that includes both standardized tests and alternative assessment, one-on-one interviews with learners, group discussions, and learner observation (Alexander, 1993; Holt, 1995; Isserlis, 1992; Wrigley & Guth, 1992). Throughout the needs assessment process, it is important that adult learners are actively involved in choosing the direction and content of their learning (Auerbach, 1992; Wrigley & Guth, 1992).

After assessing the learners need there are other variety of styles those can be used to teach a foreign language. It is sometime difficult for the instructor to select one specific style for these students. Some methods may not be applicable for the above level students. However same style may be perfect for below level students. Planning for

multilevel classes requires the ability to juggle many different elements teachers must provide activities that address the learning styles, skill levels, and specific learning objectives of each individual (Bell & Burnaby, 1984; Wrigley & Guth, 1992). Teachers can use a variety of techniques and grouping strategies and a selection of self-access materials to help all learners be successful, comfortable, and productive for at least a portion of each class time. The planning is time-consuming and the classroom management is exhausting. However, the alternative to this effort planning and using activities that meet the needs of only those learners whose skills fall somewhere in the middle will frustrate those with lower skills, and bore the more advanced learners (Boyd & Boyd, 1989; Wrigley & Guth, 1992). So a passionate language teacher may try to innovate a new style from a number of teaching styles those are appropriate for the multilevel classroom. Again Planning for the multilevel class must also include strategies for managing the group, pair, and individual activities. The teacher may work with one small group at a time while the other learners or groups of learners are engaged in independent work (Berry & Williams, 1992). The instructor may create Cross Ability groups. Cross-ability grouping allows stronger learners to help others and maximizes complementary learner strengths (Bell, 1991). Activities suitable for cross-ability groups are jigsaw activities; board games; and creating posters, lists, art, and multimedia projects. Cross-ability pairs work best when partners are given different roles and heavier demands are placed on the more proficient learner (Bell, 1991). For examples are interviews where one questions and one answers, and role plays where one learner has a larger role than the other etc.

3. Some Specific Teaching Styles

Lecture style: This style is one way communication and based on a lengthy lecture session. If a teacher uses this style the classroom becomes teacher center. Students do not have the option to interact with the teacher. On the other hand they are expected to digest information.

Coach style: This style is the combination of lectures, multimedia presentation and demonstration. This style of teaching gives the students a scope to learn from different medium but this style is not effective for the larger classroom because teachers cannot reach the need of the students.

Group style: This style encourages the students to work in a group to achieve a common goal. The teacher gives students a problem and encourages to work in a team and solve the problem. Here the students get the chance to interact with the whole class and ultimate language exposure occurs if this style is followed by the teachers.

Activity style: Self learning is the motto of this style. Through this style facilitators encourage students to ask questions and help the students to find appropriate answer.

Bended style: This is the combine method of facilitator's interest and students need. Here teachers try to provide support according to need of the students.

Apart from these teaching styles there are some other techniques those can be used to teach Foreign Language. For example the mnemonics words method is one of the innovative teaching methods. In this method the teacher do not talk on a particular concept for a quite a long time. But to make anything clear she/he continue to say mnemonics or its associated meaning in words. Here the teacher continue to say only words instead of sentence, and if the students start understanding the meaning of a specific concept, then the teacher will explain in sentences. While teaching a foreign language this technique can be used to develop word power. Moreover role playing is the innovative method for language teaching. Here in this method the language teacher encourage the students to learn something by doing. On the other hand here it is teachers' role to explain something for the students which is not only fun but also the chance to take part in the learning process. Sadow (1987) has given an interesting example of student and teacher activities in a simple role play. The teacher tells the class that they are extraterrestrials who, for the first time, are coming into contact with earthly objects such as toothbrushes, watches, lightbulbs and keys. Without reference to human civilization, the participants must draw conclusions about the objects' function. This role play, or similar creative, imaginative activities, will stimulate students to use their imagination and challenge them to think and speak as well. Learning a new language is sometime stressful. The sense of humor can also be considered as an innovative teaching method. It is humor which can strengthens the teacher student relationship. Humor reduces stress of the students. According to Krashen (1985) there is an emotional barrier which prevents learners to receive any kind of input from the environment. This emotional barrier may be caused by negative attitude towards language, lack of motivation or just negative emotional/ physical states e.g. stress. There are many medium with the help of which teachers can teach effectively. These methods involves learning through delight. E.g. the games like word-antakshari, Spin-a-yarn, Role-Playings etc. These can be very effective in developing their linguistic competence. If this method is used properly, language-learning becomes more interesting and easy. Numerous studies in the field of language have noted that humor is the most effective tool for enhancing recall of information.

4. The Purpose of the Research

The focus of this study is to identify the teaching styles used by the teacher while teaching in a multi-level foreign language classroom. If a teacher uses blended style where he/she concentrate on his/her students need and instruct them accordingly that might be a great idea to enhance target language learning. If the language teachers get the idea to launch different teaching style for a target language they may get the inspiration apply their own tricks to reach the students. However this paper may give the language teachers an insight into the innovation of the various teaching methods in the foreign language classroom.

This study aims to answer following question:

Research question:

Which teaching styles or methods are appropriate for a multilevel Foreign language Class?

Research Method: Qualitative method has been used for data collection. Qualitative method includes interview (from both students and teachers), and Classroom observation.

5. Result and Discussion

After observing three separate multilevel foreign language classes where the researcher has noticed Dialogue and role-playing activities are normally used in the foreign language classroom. Participants showed a strong interest in blended style of language instruction where the teacher uses methods or style according to the need of the students. Although it was a bit challenging for the teacher to use different methods but through the blended method the person could reach the students. The teachers walked around the classroom and facilitated students during individual and group works. For example, sometimes the teacher guided students in their assignments: corrected mistakes, motivated, clarified things to the students who did not understand fully, etc. Reading aloud and repetition were found in many activities, such as reading text and Dialogue. This technique enabled students to practice their pronunciation and understand the meaning of words more easily. Therefore in the classrooms the researcher found some other strategies like role-playing, pair work, group work etc. Again an instructor also gave real life example which sparked the interest of the learners and made them bound to involve in the class. Incorporating real life examples enriched classroom learning. Students looked motivated and interested towards learning. These activities provided the students more opportunities to communicate and share ideas. It was found that teachers of multi-level Classroom were knowledgeable about skills and had the ability to teach target language by using a variety of language activities e.g. group-works, or other techniques and fun activities. Brain storming was a best component of the class. All most all the teachers encouraged the learners to think about the previous class content and also generate new ideas. If multiple brains concentrate on a single idea the idea will be generated numerous ideas. The Learning environment of each class was positive and the teachers' instruction was differentiated to meet the needs of individual students. During the interviews, the teachers expressed their belief that teaching a foreign language is always challenging but different teaching strategies may make the class less difficult. They said there is no alternative to create a positive learning environment for the language learners. From the interviews, it was generally found that an ideal FL instructor for multi-level language learners should be a professional with knowledge of the language, skills and ability to apply many different activities to classes more importantly an ideal FL instructor should be a good model to students and should also have a positive attitude toward the teaching profession. In addition, the instructor should be humorous to strengthen the teacher student relationship. On the other hand according to the 28 out of 40 students said they like blended style of teaching, that is mixed tasks e.g. group work, dialogue, role playing etc. Some of the students (15 out of 40) said they feel bored when the teacher go slowly for the below level learners. Most of them said (35 out of 40) they feel less

stressed if the teacher if friendly with them. All most all of the students said they enjoy activity based class rather lecture based class. They said group work or pair work is more interesting than solo or independent activities.

6. Conclusion

Teaching a multi-level classroom is both challenging and rewarding. Teachers should introduce new instructional styles that is effective in multi-level FL classroom. Effective teaching methods both engage the students who are fast and as well as slow learners. And also those with attention deficit tendencies. The teachers who participated in survey said one specific methods do not work in multi-level foreign language classroom. This is where differentiated instruction and a balanced mix of teaching styles can help to reach all students in a classroom - not just the few who respond well to one particular style of teaching. It is also necessary to assess the need of the learners. The teachers should not overloaded themselves with so many teaching strategies. If the instructor is able to select an appropriate method it would be easier for her/him to engage the students. Teacher may explore as many teaching style they can but he/she should choose the best method of teaching for his/her students. They should try different styles to meet different objectives, and always challenge themselves to find ways to reach each student. Teachers' motto should be not to teach but to reach the students. It has also been identified that students enjoy students centered classroom rather than Lecture based classroom. Motivation is important to learn a foreign language. If they get the chance to participate they get the motivation to learn. From the research it has been also found that making group can be a great medium to encourage students to participate. If the students are not willing to learn, it would be even more difficult for a teacher to manage the class or achieve the lesson aim. However qualified and properly trained teachers can play an important role in developing learners Target language skills. If the teachers are trained they can blended method of teaching and can attain targeted Lesson aim.

7. Future Scope

Any kind of research requires much time. Undoubtedly the issue of innovating new ideas and strategies needs more rigorous research and much time. For this research the researcher did not get enough time, this was the main obstacle. It was really difficult to observe the classes because teachers usually do not like to be observed during lecture sessions. Therefore, the researcher tried her best to overcome the specific limitation and gave full effort to make the research relevant from the point of view of the question raised. Apart from that each teacher can innovate new ideas of teaching. To reach the students there is no alternative to give the students a comfortable learning environment. There is always scope for doing research in this topic. Action research can help a teacher to identify appropriate methods of teaching.

8. Recommendation

In the light of the research and survey that has been conducted on the specific issue the following suggestions might be relevant in this context:

- Blended style of teaching can be effective for multilevel foreign language learners.
- As students like to participate in the class, teachers can introduce group work to create motivation among them.
- If teachers are friendly students get a sense of security and language exposure occurs.
- Finally, teachers can innovate any kind of method to make his/her class interactive and successful.

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