

The EFL Teachers' Approaches in Dealing with At-Risk Students; A Focus on the Technology Use

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Abstract: *Learning is a tantamount to a battle for at-risk students. Numerous hindrances are brought by the learners of this ilk to the classroom and these hindrances entail teachers to implement proper ways assist them to succeed. Based on researches on factors affecting at-risk students undertaken to date, “at-risk” students are not provided with challenges in overriding teaching methods. Focusing point for these methods are basic skills. At-risk students need to use complex thinking skills. Achieving this goal requires being motivated and run the gauntlet of difficulties and teachers need to contribute them to boost the progression of problem solving, reasoning and independent thinking as they do for ordinary students [9]. This study explores EFL teachers approaches and experiences in dealing with “at-risk” students and their attitude, methods and amount of Computer and Information technology (CIT) use in assisting “at-risk” learners. The data collected through an open-ended survey through ten experienced teachers in a preparatory school and a language academy in Istanbul in academic year 2019-2020. Results gained from this study show that EFL teachers believe that although using technology with some at-risk students are to somehow beneficial but it generates another learning barrier. Findings indicate that there is a contradiction between the EFL teachers’ attitude and their use of technology in their classes. The EFL teachers hold a positive attitude toward using technology in dealing with their at-risk students but still they are low users of technology in dealing with their “at-risk” students. Educational technology training classes is strongly felt for EFL teachers and students by the specialist of this field as the way that teachers are using technology in their classroom is the key factor. Teachers’ utilizing technology in an effective and alternate way should be a MUST from their authorities and manages as once they were asked to use technology in assessing their students, all of them applied it. From the results achieved from this study, it becomes clear that authorities and policy makers have significant roles in the way that EFL teachers are using technology in their classes.*

Keywords: At-risk students, Computer and Information Technology (CIT), English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

1. Introduction

The term “at-risk” depicts a student who is in the need of ongoing or temporary intervention to succeed academically and shows that the pupil is suffering from a problem. There are diverse predictors that we can take them into account for defining at-risk including; socioeconomic features, health features and school and family features. But typical criteria for putting students in the realm of at-risk in the eye of schools are as following; failing scores, having a low GPA and low attendance of the students in the class [8]. The role of teachers in dealing with “at-risk” students is undeniable. On the other hand, it has been proven that technology can affect at-risk students in countless ways [12]. Technology can boost motivation, individualized instruction and give them the chance of working with their own mode. For example, some benefits with computer-based learning are at once feedback, personalized learning and self-paced learning but technology by its own does not have any significant effect in learning -teaching process and specifically, on at-risk students unless teachers have a positive attitude toward it [7] and use it effectively in the classroom. Recently various studies have been conducted on “at-risk” students and the effect of technology on them in different fields [15]- [1]- [5], however there have been few studies to embark on the EFL teachers experiences and approaches dealing with at-risk students and their attitude, applicable methods and amount of using technology in

EFL classes with the students of this ilk. Having these in my mind, this study explores EFL teacher’s approaches and experiences dealing with “at-risk” students and their attitude, methods and amount of technology usage in assisting “at-risk” learners.

Carrying out this study would be essential since by equipping EFL centers with modern technology, enhancing the technological knowledge of EFL teachers, eliminating hindrances using technology and becoming teachers aware of the significance of using technology effectively on EFL at-risk students, more appealing and student-center milieu can be obtained. Moreover, it would motivate EFL teachers to utilize technology more and in an effective way in their classes and keep them aloof from their traditional way of teaching that students are just respondents and teachers have the jurisdiction to launch their classes, give commands and students just obey their teachers’ instructions (traditional way of teaching involves the active role for teachers and passive role for students during the curriculum). Hence, by detecting the defects, concerning “at-risk” students, personalizing learning, challenging “at-risk” students more and using complex thinking skills through effective use of technology, teachers would achieve better results with less effort. Then the number of EFL at-risk students who are the main challenge of each EFL teacher and school, would be decreased. On the other hand, utilizing technology more in the classroom means that the students are more involved

in using it, so determining the hindrances that exist in using technology in EFL classes and planning to eliminate them not only technology can be used more effectively in teaching EFL and may bring both teachers and at-risk students better results but also, the students will be prepared for the 21st century society and workplace. By interviewing numerous EFL teachers concerning “at-risk” students and exploring their idea in dealing with “at-risk” students, it can be perceived what’s going on in our EFL classes dealing with “at-risk” students and how EFL teachers endeavor to support them. Maybe by having a close look at the methods that these teachers are applying in their classes whether proper or wrong, it can facilitate the conditions for the other EFL teachers to imply the proper methods and try not to repeat same mistakes in dealing with their “at-risk” students. Also, by introducing software, websites, games and different methods of technology use of EFL teachers who are interviewed with, they may apply these technological knowledge in their classrooms and create more appealing atmosphere for their students and of course for themselves.

Studies have shown that schools usually have prejudice toward changing their prevailing practices [16]- [10] and technology would be successful only under the shallow of consistency between the schools’ culture, structure and precise uses of technology. It would make principles and managers of EFL schools institutions thinking of getting these hindrances more serious and try to decrease obstacles and therefore have a different look and prepare better milieu regarding their low achieved students. Through interviewing with EFL experienced teachers, this study attempts to explore the EFL teachers’ perspective and approaches regarding “at-risk” students and also, their attitude and methods of technology use on EFL at-risk students. By investigating and defining the hindrances that EFL teachers encounter using technology dealing with at-risk students, their suggestive ways for overtaking these hindrances and the allotment of the ideas, believes and the ways that different teachers use technology dealing with at-risk students in the classroom, a prototype would be provided for the other EFL teachers in dealing with utilizing technology with at-risk students to reduce the number of these students in EFL classes. Although it is obvious that reducing them to zero is a burdensome. The results that will be brought by this study, may make teachers more motivated to take some classes to enhance their technological knowledge and use the experience and effective ways which the other teachers are utilizing in concern with technology with their low achieved students in their classes and therefore keeping aloof from their traditional way of teaching “one style fits all”. Therefore, they would engage, assist and motivate their at-risk students more in learning English Through an open-ended interview it will interrogate the experiences and approaches of EFL teachers using technology in their classes to instruct struggling students and to explore the difficulties that teachers encounter while using technology with at-risk pupils.

This study will scrutinize the following research questions;

1. What are the most significant reasons for EFL at-risk students’ failure and how did the EFL teachers try to assist them?
2. What is EFL teachers’ attitude through utilizing technology with at-risk students?
3. In what skills (receptive or perceptive) do they think technology would help at-risk students more/how come and how?
4. What are the most significant hindrances in utilizing technology effectively and sufficiently in EFL classes and with at-risk students?

2. Literature Review

The term “at-risk” induces the sense of exigency. It can convey the meaning that urgent attention is required or something somber might be taken place. The term at-risk student depicts a student who is in the need of ongoing or temporary intervention to succeed academically and shows that the pupil is suffering from a problem. These at-risk students need to be fitted in the educational system but without being cognizant of the origins of the problem and what facet the “at-risk” pupil is at-risk; it would be an abortive attempt [13]. Robert Donmoyer (1993) argues that well-meant policy makers and teachers exacerbate the situation rather than healing it. As at-risk students’ domains of problems are sundry and traditional social science methods are not able to cover this multiplicity and peculiarity. “One style fit all” method go away from a student-center class. A student-center school seeks for a more malleable and modifying method in which learning contingencies are supposes to boost learning results and meet the disparate students’ needs [2]- [3]- [7]. To have the miscellany of the nature of at-risk students in mind, one source that can be perceived as a substitute method for teaching and learning is technology. Technology can affect at-risk students in countless ways [12]. Technology can boost motivation, individualized instruction and give them the chance of working with their own mode.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this study eight open-ended questions were posed to ten teachers. These questions embarks on teacher’s idea about the most affective factors on EFL at-risk students’ failure, the most problematic skill or skills of their “at-risk” students, teachers’ techniques assisting EFL “at-risk” students, the most significant hindrances they encounter using technology with the students of this ilk, their attitude toward using technology with them and their recommendations for other EFL teachers dealing with “at-risk” students. These answers were analyzed through descriptive analysis.

3.2 Participants

This study was conducted in preparatory school and in a language academy in Istanbul, Turkey, In the academic year, 2019-2020 among EFL teachers and the information was compiled through open-ended questions. The number of teachers who were teaching in this preparatory school

was about 70 and 22 respectively. The number of whole students was 1268 and 180 respectively. In the last phase of the study 10 teachers were selected from both centers to be interviewed with which means 5 teachers from each center. These EFL teachers had the minimum experience of 5 years teaching.

3.3 Instruments

As it has been proven that one of the main factors with technology use in the classes is teachers' idea toward technology and one of the ways that "at-risk" students can be challenged is utilizing technology effectively in the classroom [14]- [15], the study is conducted by posing eight open-ended questions to the teachers of both language centers in Istanbul and their voices were recorded by cellphone. The audio recording of the interview was listened to a number of times for the precise transcription. To gain knowledge about EFL teachers' approaches regarding at-risk students, the interview was embarked on the topics including: the teacher's idea about the most affective factors on EFL at-risk students' failure, the most problematic skill or skills of their EFL "at-risk" students, teachers' techniques and techniques assisting EFL "at-risk" students, the most significant hindrances they encounter using technology with the students of this ilk, EFL teachers' attitude toward using technology with them and their recommendations for other EFL teachers dealing with "at-risk" students.

3.4 Data Analysis

This was conducted by posing eight questions to the teachers and recording their voices by cellphone. The audio recordings of the interview were listened to a number of times for the precise transcription and the data collected from this phase were analyzed through descriptive analysis.

4. Findings

4.1 Introduction

This study tried to investigate the source of problem of EFL "at-risk" students and the methods that EFL teachers imply to assist these students. Also, this study tried to uncover the most problematic skill for at-risk students and also the role of technology on improving that skill EFL from the teachers' point of view. Furthermore, the hindrances that EFL teachers encounter using technology with "at-risk" students were revealed.

4.2 Findings from open-ended survey

Based on the findings achieved from this study, EFL teachers believe that being bashful, the atmosphere of the classroom, not having any background of English and transferring grammar from mother tongue to the target language are the most affective factors for EFL "at-risk" students. EFL teachers attempted to help their "at-risk" students by providing a cozy and comfortable milieu, Cooperative learning, paying more attention, having a good rapport, motivation. Just two out of 10 teachers,

believe in using technology in assisting "at-risk" students. Most of EFL teachers believe that the most problematic skills for "at-risk" students are productive skills. Although all teachers have a positive attitude toward using technology in their classes but most some of them directly confess that they are not doing anything special with their "at-risk" students in their classes and in another word, they are following their traditional ways of teaching. It is worth mentioning that among 10 teachers who were studied in the interview, none of them had participated in technological classes and all of them confessed that they prefer to have face-to-face teaching instead of online one. Some other teachers declared that they are using technology because their students are attracted toward it more. The most common software and website that EFL teachers are using are Plicker, Kahoot, My teen, Pearson and internet. EFL teachers mentioned that depriving students from accessing to the technology and as a result not having the sufficient knowledge to use the technology, low knowledge of using technology for those who have access to the technology, misusing technology by "at-risk" students while they are doing their assignments, loading teachers with materials and therefore not having enough time to allocate to other technological material are some barriers and hindrances in using technology effectively in their classes. From the results gained from this study, the most problematic skills for EFL "at-risk" students were productive ones. The results indicate that teachers are not using technology in an appropriate way as they are not using technology to make their "at-risk" students involved in critical thinking and problem-solving exercises. Also, they do not challenge their "at-risk" students. The type of technology that they are using in assignments, are just like the traditional assignments with a slight difference in at once feedback but these assignments are not challenging ones

5. Conclusion

This section embarked on to the conclusion of the current study referring to the research questions. From the results achieved from this study, it becomes clear that authorities and policy makers have significant roles in the way that EFL teachers are using technology in their classes. As some EFL teachers mentioned, one reason that EFL teachers are not using technology in their classes is that they are not trained and aware of software and effective methods of using technology in their classes especially with their "at-risk" students. Teachers' being illiterate, not being aware of technologies benefits, students and teachers' laziness in taking apart in technological classes and using it and as a collusion sticking to the traditional ways of teaching and learning are the most hindrances in using technology effectively in their classes are the other reasons for this problem. So, technology training classes is strongly felt for EFL teachers and students. EFL teachers' lack of technical educational technologies knowledge is felt in this study. so, providing EFL teachers with related educational software and knowledge from the specialist of this field in order to challenge students and make them think critically can have significant effect in changing the atmosphere of EFL classes from the traditional to the modern and interesting ones. Teachers 'utilizing

technology in an affective and alternate way should be a MUST from their authorities and manages as once they were asked to use technology in assessing their students, all of them applied it. Later on, by using technology in order to personalize learning, encourage learner autonomy, utilizing technology in the direction of increasing critical thinking on “at-risk” students and by the positive effects that they gain from utilizing technology effectively with the students who are “at-risk” of failing, they the number of “at-risk” students can be decreased.

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