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THE IMPORTANCE OF INDIVIDUALIZED APPROACH IN THE ESP CLASSROOM

Abstract: Needs of the students and the focus on learning is in the center of every ESP class. Students enroll ESP courses with different linguistic competence so teachers aim at gaining their confidence and finding ways to enhance their linguistic development. It is very important for the teachers to identify how students react to different activities or why they react differently to the same activity. Therefore apart from the awareness of the needs in terms of specialized language the teachers should have in mind the learning styles and strategies that students use when acquiring the language. One of the theories that deals with the abilities that determine learning styles of the students is the multiple intelligences theory. The paper will present the findings of a survey based on multiple intelligences, and how the results can be utilized for preparation of lessons that will suit every individual student.

Key words: ESP, multiple intelligences, learning styles, linguistic competence

1. Learners as individuals

Students come to the ESP classroom equipped with their previous learning experiences, with different interests and talents, which according to Hutchinson and Waters would have an important influence on their motivation to learn and therefore on the effectiveness of their learning (Hutchinson and Waters 1987:8). Students have different personalities which can have an important influence on their success in language learning. Moreover, students come to classes with different expectations, needs and wants, with different motivation – in one word students are different one from the other. Lightbown and Spada argue that language learning is affected by many factors. Among these are the personal characteristics and experiences of the learner, the social and cultural environment both inside and outside the classroom, the structure of the native and target languages, opportunities for interaction with speakers of the target language, and access to correction and form-focused instruction. (Lightbown and Spada 2006:194)

Among all the diversities, ESP students bring to the classroom their previous knowledge of the content area of the discipline they are studying. This existing knowledge can help teachers, by exploiting what learners already know about the discipline, to utilize it for language learning. Using the knowledge students already posses can only boost their self-confidence and thus contribute to their success.

All the students have different expectations and different demands of the ESP course. It is common knowledge that ESP classes are based on the needs and wants of the students. From every aspect, needs of the students in the classroom are the crucial factor for designing the course. Whether needs of the students are perceived as objective or subjective, perceived and felt, process-oriented and product oriented, they all come under the umbrella of needs of the students in the classroom and the responsibility of the teacher to cater for those needs. Every ESP course content is based on the results of a needs analysis. Usually the needs analysis deals with the topics of interest of the students, the vocabulary for certain discipline or the skills required for that discipline. The concentration is primarily based on what language needs to be taught and what skills needs to be developed in order to fulfill the demands of the certain discipline. However, catering only for the students needs in terms of language may not be enough for achieving the desired results. On the contrary, having in mind the above mentioned characteristics of the students one can conclude that many factors influence students' success when it comes to learning a second language.

Students' ability to learn a second language can be influenced by their attitudes towards the target language, the target language speakers and their culture, the social value of learning the second language, and also the students' attitudes towards themselves as members of their own culture (Ellis 1994).

Brown emphasizes that teachers should recognize that all students possess positive and negative attitudes in varying degrees, and that the negative ones can be changed by thoughtful instruction methods, such as using materials and activities that help students achieve an "understanding and appreciation of the foreign culture" (Brown 2000, 181). Furthermore he points out that attitudes are cognitive and affective; that is, they are related to thoughts as well as to feelings and emotions. Attitudes govern how one approaches learning.

Cognitive theory perceives learners as thinking beings who make sense of the information they receive and use it when appropriate. However one of the crucial rules in learning plays the affective aspects of the learner i.e. the motivation to engage in the process of thinking.

Motivation is considered as vital for learning in general. It depends in great extent on what happens in the classroom which could either increase or entirely decrease the effects of it. Motivation is the key factor for successful language learning and positive motivation is associated with the willingness of the student to keep learning. Consequently, motivated students will gain greater self-confidence which would lead to a greater desire to communicate in the second language. Gardner and Lambert (1972) distinguish between instrumental and integrative motivation while Deci and Ryan (1985) identify motivation as intrinsic and extrinsic. Students who are instrumentally motivated acquire the language in order to get a better job, have prestige, learn about target culture, communicate with foreigners, read specialized materials or study in a country where the language is spoken. Students with integrative motivation want to join with "the culture of the second language group and become involved in social interchange in that group" (Brown 2000, 162).

On the other hand intrinsically motivated students are interested in the learning tasks and the outcomes for their own personal benefit, which results in inner feelings of self-determination and competence, while students are extrinsically motivated if they carry out some actions to achieve some instrumental aim, such as earning a reward or avoiding a punishment.

As Spolsky points out motivation is a key component of a model of language learning (Spolsky 2000, 158). Because of its importance to language learning, there is growing interest in the creation of a motivation model that can help develop methodological applications to improve the the teaching and learning of a second language.

From a number of differences mentioned above for us as teachers maybe the most striking is the linguistic competence of our students. As Hutchinson and Waters argue, the most fundamental problem of second language learning is the mismatch between the learners' conceptual / cognitive capacities and the learners' linguistic level. In mother tongue learning they develop together. In the second language they are grossly out of focus: the second language learner is someone who is conceptually and cognitively mature, but is linguistically an infant. This is a particular problem in ESP, where the learners' knowledge of their subject specialism may be at a very high level, while their linguistic knowledge is very nil. (Hutchinson and Waters. 1987:129) Before coming to university, students go through years of formal language instruction. Moreover, if we add the years of informal language instruction that most of the students nowadays have, we will come up with at least 10 years or maybe even more, of students practicing English language actively. However, the level of English of our students when they enroll to university ranges from A2 to B2 and many of them do not have the required language skills to build upon at university level.

2. Mixed classes

Considering all the individual traits and diversities of the students mentioned so far, what we encounter at first year at university is quite a mixed class or classes of students. Most classes, or we can argue even that all language classes consist of students with mixed abilities. This situation can bring us to another trait which is the anxiety that students experience due to the new environment. They meet new colleagues and sometimes are joined together in mixed classes in terms of different disciplines which can only contribute to their stress. Classes could be too crowded and that could make students uncomfortable. Consequently those with poor linguistic competence would feel nervous to speak in order not to make a mistake, be ashamed in front of the whole class and consequently being laughed at for their English. At this point students lack confidence and fear that classmates would make fun of them if they make mistakes or spoke incorrectly. Mixed ability classes can in great deal impede the learning of the second language.

However, there are some advantages of mixed classes, since students can share different ideas and interesting life experiences. Coming from different backgrounds students can complement themselves and develop team work in order to respond to the tasks. They can discuss and learn from each other, and the teacher can contribute to the positive atmosphere by promoting cooperation rather than competitiveness in the classroom.

3. Learning Styles

Teachers' awareness should go beyond of what students need to learn in terms of language and investigate how they can learn it successfully. Dudley-Evans and St. John argue that in addition to the ESP situation we also need to activate and build on the learning styles and strategies which have been developed through the specialist field, that is through the academic and professional culture. (Dudley-Evans and St. John. 1998:191)

In the past teaching used to be conducted as if all students were the same, without trying to identify strengths or weaknesses of the students in one area or another. So in order to design an ESP course we should direct our attention to the learning styles and strategies our students employ in order to acquire the language more rapidly. Learning styles are various methods and approaches that students use to make most of their learning. They are under the influence of students' previous experiences in learning, their culture and society where they live in. The extensive research done in the XX century, put emphasis on learning styles and raised the awareness of students individualism. The idea of individualized learning styles originated in the 1970s and throughout the years, educators and psychologists have identified a very long list of learning styles (Ausubel 1968; Hill 1972; H. D. Brown 1973; Gardner 1983; Hartnett 1985; Dunn et al. 1989; Trayer 1991; Ehrman & Oxford 1990). Some of the dimensions of learning styles researched are multiple intelligences, perceptual learning styles, field dependence/independence, analytic / global learning styles and reflective / impulsive learning styles. Information about students' learning styles are valid because they are one of the key factors that help teachers to find out not just how but also how well students learn a second language so that they could adapt their classroom methods to best fit each student's learning style. Learning styles help teachers to determine the particular willingness of the student to work according to different methods that the teacher applies.

There is no unique methodology that matches all the disciplines when it comes to ESP because students have a great spectrum of preferences in terms of learning styles and strategies. That is why it should be made a comprehensive analysis that will help in determining the best methods that the ESP teacher can use and which would be effective for successful ESP acquisition. In that way the teacher can help students to become aware of their own learning styles.

3. Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory

Students are not always aware of their individual cognitive or perceptual learning styles. Multiple intelligences theory is one of a number of models of student learning styles. It was developed by the American psychologist Howard Gardner (1983) and it is based on the idea of natural human talents and the notion that different individuals possess different kinds of intellectual strengths which can help them be successful in different areas. This theory utilizes aspects of cognitive and developmental psychology, anthropology and sociology. It was first proposed in 1983 and the original list included seven intelligences; however, in 1999 Gardner added one more intelligence called naturalist (or naturalistic) intelligence. So to date Gardner has articulated eight basic types of intelligence, without claiming that this is a complete list.

The theory's eight currently accepted intelligences are: (Ref: *Educational Psychology*, Robert Slavin. 2009, 117)

- logical-mathematical intelligence – denotes an ability to deal with numbers and various mathematical operations, logical reasoning capabilities and scientific exploration and an ability for recognizing abstract patterns and carrying out complex calculations.
- verbal-linguistic intelligence – denotes an ability for learning languages very easily due to high verbal memory, an ability to communicate with others, and sensitivity to spoken and written language;
- musical-rhythmical – implies an ability to listen to the music with own mind, displays sensitivity to sounds, rhythms and other musical patterns;
- bodily-kinaesthetic – denotes an ability to use every part of the body in resolving a problem
- visual-spatial – entails an ability for visual representation of the reality with the mind's eye
- interpersonal – denotes an ability to interact with other people and work effectively as part of a group;
- intrapersonal – implies an ability to understand oneself, refer to own strengths and weaknesses, reactions, feelings and motivations.
- naturalistic intelligence – denotes an ability to understand and communicate with the nature.

These different types of intelligences are perceived as personal tools that every individual possesses in one way or the other, in terms to understand new information and store it in a way that would be easy to retrieve it when necessary.

The application of the theory of multiple intelligences varies widely. It runs the gamut from a teacher who, when confronted with a student having difficulties, uses a different approach to teach the material, to an entire school using multiple intelligences as a framework.

4. Multiple Intelligences Theory in Practice

Being confronted with a situation of an ESP class of first year students coming from different backgrounds, displaying versatile linguistic competence and all the other diversities a mixed ability class can have, I have decided to explore the effectiveness of the multiple intelligences model in practice.

The class comprised of students from three different disciplines – economy, information technology and sport management. Since the ESP classes are based on the students' needs, first a needs analysis questionnaire was conducted determining the language needs and wants of the students and the skills they wanted to master during the English class. However, that was not enough for designing the course content since this time the situation required considering not only the needs of students in terms of the language, but also taking into consideration the mixture of the students abilities. Moreover, their linguistic competence as a result of their different backgrounds was very obvious so determining the learning styles of the students was considered a good starting point for a successful class. Having in mind students' diversity from so many aspects I decided to use Gardner's multiple intelligences theory for determining students' strengths in terms of their natural talents.

4.1 Research results

For the purposes of the survey I used a questionnaire and after analyzing the responses from students' questionnaires, I received the results displayed in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Results from multiple intelligences questionnaire

Multiple intelligence	ICT	Economics	Sport Management	Total
Logical-mathematical	9	4	1	**14**
Verbal-linguistic	3	2	/	**5**
Musical-rhythmical	6	3	/	**9**
Bodily-kinaesthetic	4	4	/	**8**
Visual-spatial	1	1	/	**2**
Interpersonal	/	/	/	**/**
Intrapersonal	1	/	/	**1**
Naturalistic	/	/	/	**/**
Total	**24**	**14**	**1**	**39**

According to the results, it can be seen that logical-mathematical intelligence is dominant followed by musical-rhythmical and bodily-kinaesthetic. Linguistic intelligence is on the forth place followed by visual-spatial and intrapersonal

intelligence, while interpersonal and naturalistic intelligence are non existent in this case.

Having discovered the strengths of the students I could concentrate on designing the course content around tasks and activities that could emphasize students talents and nobody would feel threatened to participate to the class. Multiple intelligences theory served as a framework that helped me to give recognition to the holistic nature of the students and address their diversity.

5. Linking Learners to Activity Types

Myriad of different activities, tasks and materials motivate students. Moreover, students' motivation depends partly on how "addressed" they feel in the classroom and on how meaningful they think the activities presented are to them. According to Puchta and Rinvolucri, If the teaching focus is on the linguistic domain only, we will get excellent results with the monitoring of students who are strong in this area. If however teachers regularly use exercises that are designed around different intelligences of the students then we will notice that students whose strengths lie in areas other than the linguistic one will activate themselves more and will develop an interest in the subject and will want to know more about it. (Puchta and Rinvolucri 2005: 16)

Activities which are designed considering students' strengths have better success in appealing students' learning because students feel more comfortable in fulfilling them and gaining self-esteem of success. Consequently students feel more appreciated by the teacher and feel better about what they achieve in the English language class. However, as Gardner points out it is not a question of addressing all the individual multiple intelligences profiles of each learner in every language class but offering a balanced approach where different "windows on the same concept" are incorporated.

Teachers cannot create eight learning learning centers in their classes to accommodate the diversity of talents in their students. However, multiple intelligences model can increase the attractiveness of the language learning activities and create an atmosphere that would trigger students' motivation in greater extent.

If we analyze the predominant intelligence type we can come up with appropriate educational activities according to the intelligence type. For example:

    a.   students with predominantly logical-mathematical intelligence thrive best on solving puzzles, estimations, exploring patterns and problem – solving. They learn best by asking questions, categorizing and working with patterns.

    b.   students with predominantly verbal-linguistic intelligence are good at word and memory games, trivia quizzes, telling stories and debating, doing worksheets and writing journals. They cope well with lectures,

reading and writing stories and learn best by hearing and seeing words as well as discussing and debating about what they have learned. They tend to have large vocabularies and are good at languages.

c. students with musical-rhythmical intelligence are good at activities that involve singing, poetry, playing instruments, mood music and drilling. They learn best when there is music on and they use rhythm while studying. Furthermore, due to the strong auditory component to this intelligence, students with musical-rhythmical intelligence may also learn best via lecture.

d. students with bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence prefer "hands-on" activities, activities that deals with miming, realia, crafts and demonstrations. They learn best when moving around, touching things and using body language i.e. doing things physically, rather than reading or hearing about things. They are good at building and making things.

e. students with visual-spatial intelligence are successful when working with charts, organizing graphs, using flashcards, colours, pictures, drawing and activities promoting project work. They learn best by visualizing and using the mind's eye.

f. students with interpersonal intelligence prefer group work, peer tutoring, mingle activities, class projects, debates and discussions. They communicate effectively and empathize easily with others and learn best when working with others, leading groups and mediating.

g. students with intrapersonal intelligence prefer activities like reflection and personal values tasks. They prefer working individually on personalized projects and learn best when working alone pursuing own interests.

h. students with naturalistic intelligence are best at field trips, show and tell, plant/animal projects and so on. They learn best when working outside and observing the nature.

Once the activities designed around multiple intelligences, students find one particular activity or approach more appealing than other activities or approaches.

According to Puchta and Rinvolucri, although you can never predict what kind of thought process a certain activity will trigger in your students' minds, it is safe to claim that using activities designed around multiple intelligences it is likely to activate a wider range of intelligences than if you taught language purely "linguistically'. As students gradually realize that they can approach language from their strength areas, they will feel better in the language class and may become more willing to take risks and begin to develop areas that are not "their own". So you may begin to find it possible to involve students in discussion of perceived cognitive weaknesses and strengths, thus contributing to the students' meta-cognitive awareness – thinking about their own thinking – which is a useful step in mental development. (Puchta and Rinvolucri 2005:16-17)

Conclusion

Language learning is a dynamic process in which learners themselves are actively involved. Today's language classroom is not only about promoting linguistic competence. On the contrary, a good language classroom would involve addressing the holistic nature of the students, recognizing their diversity and promoting personal development and growth in all human dimensions.

Classes conducted with activities designed around multiple intelligences proved to affect motivation and make attitudes toward the language learning more positive. This model proved to be very successful in our case since the number of students throughout the semester stayed the same. Moreover, despite English being an elective subject the attendance did not drop throughout the semester. Therefore we can conclude that the students liked being involved in different kinds of activities which promoted different intelligences.

Teachers should constantly search for effective teaching strategies, as well as for ways to sustain the interest and engagement of students in the classroom. A more student-centered atmosphere in the classroom encourages students to participate more effectively and engender a more positive attitude and greater motivation to learn English.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF INDIVIDUALIZED
APPROACH IN THE ESP CLASSROOM

Summary: The paper elaborates the importance of individualized approach in the ESP classroom. It stresses the need to consider the students as individuals with different characteristics, personalities, needs and wants. It notes the requirement when designing the course content to have in ming not only the language needs of the students but also the learnings styles that they employ in the proces of language learning. From the multitude of learning styles known in literature, in the paper is presented the multiple intelligences model developed by the American psychologist Howard Gardner. It serves as a foundation for a small scale research conducted with first year ESP students. The results presented serve as a starting point for designing activities around different types of intelligences, which have turned out to be motivating and rewarding for the students, boosting their self-confidence and promoting them to dedicated language learners with increased linguistic competence.