

## **STRATEGIES FOR PREPARING FUTURE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES OF MIXED-ABILITY CLASSROOMS**

**Maxammadjonova Shahnoza Orifjonovna**

English teacher, school № 5, Angren city

shahnozaolimjonova534@gmail.com

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17053182>

**Annotation:** This paper discusses how future teachers of foreign language can be trained to meet the demands of mixed-ability classrooms. In the mixed ability classes, varying linguistic abilities, cognitive abilities, motivation and socio-emotional qualities are present and it necessitates that teachers have a wide range of pedagogical skills in order to accommodate these differences. The study identifies such innovative strategies in preparing teachers that go beyond the usual methods and such strategies as pedagogical planning, peer coaching, classroom simulation, guided interaction, mentorship, socio-emotional awareness, and a feedback mechanism that is a guarantee of continual improvement. It also addresses methods of professional development that can produce flexible, assured, evidence-based practitioners who can effectively handle heterogeneous learning contexts.

**Keywords:** foreign language teacher preparation, mixed-ability classrooms, teacher professional development, pedagogical planning, peer coaching, guided interaction.

Contemporary classroom is highly differentiated and includes learners with a wide spectrum of abilities, motivation, learning styles and previous knowledge. The diversity poses a special challenge to the foreign language teacher, especially in mixed-ability classrooms, where the distance between the underperforming and high-achieving students can have a significant impact on the learning results. Training the future foreign educators on solving these issues is essential to inclusive, equitable and effective school experiences.

Teacher preparation programmes can no longer afford to operate on a solely theoretical interpretation of the language pedagogy and include strategies that help teachers grasp abilities, knowledge and attitude they require to work with heterogeneous groups. Pedagogical content knowledge, as defined by Shulman (1987), is the core of teacher effectiveness; it is a combination of the content knowledge together with art of teaching that is at the centre of teacher effectiveness. [1] According to Darling-Hammond (2006), the individual preparation of teachers has to be immersible, context-based, and sensitive to real classroom issues in order to develop applied competency. [2] The particular

problems posed by these classrooms, suggests new dimensions that can be used to overcome them, ways of professional development to prepare teachers, and explains implications to teacher education programmes. Mixed-ability classrooms are tricky to achieve and both the teaching practice and the outcome of the students. These challenges include:

- different linguistic competence: students usually come to the foreign language classes with different background knowledge, vocabulary and grammatical skills. Such discrepancy complicates the work of teachers who must provide attention to both students with high language proficiency and those unable to understand the basics.

- cognitive and learning styles: it may differ with learner information processing and internalisation. There are auditory learners, there are kinesthetic learners, and there are also visual learners. Educators need to be aware of these variations in ensuring that they keep everyone engaged (as well as) having meaningful learning experiences.

- motivational gaps: the mixed ability classes are usually characterised by students having different degrees of intrinsic motivation. High performers might feel bored by too easy lessons, whereas low-performers might feel frustrated when they cannot get the content. This is a major pedagogical issue to maintain motivation at the spectrum.

- complexities in classroom management: it is harder to keep behaviour in control and the learning process productive when the abilities and the level of engagement among students are uneven. Educators should be in a position to introduce measures that facilitate cooperation without isolating any category of students.

- problems with assessment: classic evaluation strategies tend to paint a false impression of mixed-ability classroom learning. Diverse educators should be in the position to assess student progressions in fair and meaningful manner to avoid underrating or over challenging learners.

- equity issues: to make sure every student can access meaningful learning experiences, it will be necessary to design the instruction deliberately. Leaders in education are empowered to detect and address system-wide differences that have the potential to amplify a gap in achievement.

According to Hattie (2009), the effectiveness of the teacher in handling heterogeneous classrooms is one of the most decisive issues affecting student performance. [3] There is the complexity of the mixed-ability classroom environment, which requires a thorough approach in teacher preparation, which

involves a mix of theoretical and practical strategies. The future teacher will be required to equip his or her lesson planning skills to take into account the variety of abilities in the classroom. Freeman and Johnson (1998) explain that a good teacher planning process anticipates the possible problems to be faced by the learner, is strategic and offers the learner alternate ways of understanding the material. [4] The teacher education programmes ought to offer a lot of experience in lesson plan design that should incorporate tiered objectives, varied activities, and flexible pacing.

The instructional competence has been shown to enhance through peer coaching in which trainee teachers observe each other and provision of feedback [5] Through collaborative training opportunities, future teachers will gain skills to consider instructional strategies, discuss the best practices, and differentiate the lesson to accommodate diverse students. Role-playing exercises and simulated classroom experience allow the trainee teacher to use in a controlled setting, simulations of how they would have reacted to real-life challenges. These exercises would be capable of simulating situations like mixed-ability classes, mis-understanding with students and differences in motivation. Simulation helps teachers test their strategies and allows the teacher to give feedback and come up with adaptive skills to solve problems. Guided interaction involves modelling the linguistic input, breaking down conversations, enabling the interaction between peers to allow learners with different skills to be involved constructively. Trainers can know how to make their input and output balanced, such that no one is left behind, through guided interaction. Mentorships, where an aspiring teacher is mentored with an experienced practitioner, are priceless in bridging theory and practice. Mentors have the opportunity to model classroom management strategies, differentiated engagement strategies as well as effective communication with students. Mentorship promotes introspection, practical wisdom and confidence.

Mixed-ability classes are not only academically heterogeneous, but socially complicated. Educators have to be trained to approach socio-emotional learning (SEL), student empathy, and exclusion of emotional regulation techniques. Effective instruction implies an understanding of student emotions, positive relations, and the development of the psychologically safe learning conditions. Continuous feedback should be trained to be used not only by the teachers on the students but also on themselves. Teacher-oriented feedbacks, video analysis of teaching, peer-review, supervisor analysis, etc. should help educators recognize the aspects of development and optimize the approach towards

settling mixed-ability education. Future foreign language teachers should be trained professionally to:

- experiential and practice-based: teachers gain through practical experiences, micro-teaching, and internships that allow them to get exposure to different classrooms;

- cooperative, introspective: group meetings, observation, discussion groups give a teacher an opportunity to learn alongside their colleagues, share creative methods, and collectively solve problems;

- evidence based: programmes: based on research about language learning, classroom management, and pedagogy. According to research conducted by Ellis (2008), teacher training based on empirical studies promotes the effectiveness of instruction. [6]

- context-specific: training teachers to work with mixed-ability classrooms needs to be context-specific in terms of the social, cultural, and linguistic context that the teacher will practice. Adaptability and responsiveness should be considered in the context of professional development.

- long-term and sustainable: career development is to be continuous with the possibilities of further education, seminars, and advanced certification. Darling-Hammond (2006) points out that sustained development programmes are very effective in enhancing teacher retention and outcomes in the classroom.

All the approaches described above equip teachers to manage the complex mixed-ability classrooms. Planning in pedagogy provides the teacher with a vision of the future, peer instruction, and training partnerships enable learning of practical skills, and classroom experiments can be conducted safely and explore the method of teaching. Mentorship and social emotional awareness training make sure that teachers are capable of dealing with mixed academic and relational complexity that may be encountered in the diversified classrooms. The studies show that educators who receive training in these methods are more confident, involved with their students, and their learning outcomes are more effective. Hattie (2009) candidly highlights the importance of teacher competency in determining student achievement where teacher readiness becomes the most important factor that defines classroom success. With the integration of evidenced-based approaches, technical training of teachers can give birth to not just well-informed but also adaptable, thoughtful and receptive to the needs of learners with their multifaceted demands.

In addition, lifelong learning can be said to promote the current professional development of the teachers whose practice is refined as the years

go by through experience, observation, and consistent feedbacks. The research-supported instructional experience together with mentoring and practical practice is a solid base towards managing the issue of mixed-ability classrooms. Blended classrooms introduce challenging pedagogies that involve a multifaceted skill base of future foreign language instructors. Strategic lesson planning, collaborative practice, guided interaction, social-emotional awareness, mentorship, and perpetual feedback are a combination of strategic lesson planning, to prepare teachers to meet these challenges.

To conclude, the problem of mixed-ability classroom needs to be addressed through deliberate, evidence-based, and context-specific teacher preparation. Through the adoption of the strategies presented in this study, through the teacher education programmes the future teachers of foreign language can be prepared to develop inclusive, engaging and effective learning experiences in which all students are able to learn to their full potential despite their ability.

#### References:

1. Shulman, L.S. Those Who Understand: Knowledge Growth in Teaching // Educational Researcher. – 1987. – Vol. 15, No. 2. – P. 4-14.
2. Darling-Hammond, L. Powerful Teacher Education: Lessons from Exemplary Programs. – San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006.
3. Hattie, J. Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement. – London: Routledge, 2009.
4. Freeman, D., Johnson, K.E. Reconceptualizing the Knowledge-Base of Language Teacher Education // TESOL Quarterly. – 1998. – Vol. 32, No. 3. – P. 397-417.
5. Richards, J.C., Farrell, T.S.C. Professional Development for Language Teachers: Strategies for Teacher Learning. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
6. Ellis, R. Principles of Instructed Language Learning. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.