

## **Heterogeneous class**

Heterogeneous classes are class that has different kinds of learners in it and among whom there are evident differences in knowledge of English. In literature we can also encounter the term mixed-ability class. The opposite of heterogeneous is homogeneous class but since no two students can have language background, learning speed, learning ability and motivation, it is unrealistic to think that any language classes could be homogeneous. Because of unequal level of students, heterogeneous classes represent special problems for both learners and teachers. Some of them are (Ur 1996, 303):

- **discipline** – such classes are difficult to control which leads to boredom of students
- **interests** - it is impossible to find activities and topics that would keep all students interested
- **effective learning for all** – the tasks are either too difficult or too easy for most of the students
- **materials** – it is difficult to find suitable materials for all, for example the textbooks might be either too easy or too difficult for many of the students
- **participation** – only the more proficient and confident students are active and respond to the teacher's questions

The differences between students are caused mainly by (Ur 1996, 304):

- language knowledge
- language learning ability
- motivation
- learning experience
- learning style
- social/cultural background

On the other hand, there are many advantages of these classes. Heterogeneous classes provide richer human resources as the individuals have more life experience, knowledge and

more varied opinions, ideas and interests. All these aspects can be used in classroom interaction. Mixed-ability classes support learning tolerance, mutual help among students, and cooperation. For young learners they set up an environment which helps them to prepare for real life. Teaching in these classes is based on co-operation of students and involves many peer-teaching activities.

For teachers, they represent challenge, further teacher's development and provide greater opportunity for creativity and innovation.

There are several teaching solutions which I would like to mention.

First of all the teachers should prepare carefully for their classes. Language teaching materials are usually based on particular topics, which some students might find meaningless while others enjoyable. So it is necessary for the teacher to choose and adapt the materials according to his/her students, their needs and interests. The activities should be interesting and varied in order to keep everyone participating. We should try to personalise the activities; to adapt the tasks for various individual responses which are based on learners' experience, opinion and imagination. There are plenty of materials and activities which can be used in the classroom, e.g. game-like activities, visual materials, humour/drama, and music/rhythm activities.

Concerning the assessment, compulsory and optional instructions can be used in the lessons, e.g. the class is aware that everyone has to do a minimal part of the task and the rest is optional which ensure the effective learning for all. This can be achieved by using instructions such as: *do at least...if you have time.... do as much as you can of...* If there is for example an exercise consisting of ten questions, the instructions might be: *Do at least six questions, do all ten if you have time.* In reading or writing tasks, the instructions might sound: *Read at least half of this passage or write one paragraph about...* (Ur 1996, 307).

In the test, it is recommended to use open-ended questions which allow a range of acceptable answers rather than one single correct solution. We can either adapt the exercises in the textbooks or create our own.

Discipline problems are mainly caused by boredom in the classroom, lack of interesting topics and lack of challenge. This means that the lessons should include a variety of effective tasks and materials.

**References:**

Ur, P. 1996. *A Course in Language Teaching: Theory and Practice*. Great Britain: Cambridge University Press.