

TASKS AS A WAY OF EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN HETEROGENEOUS CLASSES

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All students who study English for Specific Purposes (ESP) at tertiary level are different in terms of their levels of language proficiency, intelligence and abilities. Being in the same language group, this poses some challenges to both students and teachers. The most effective way to cope with this problem is to introduce clearly structured and scaffolded tasks.

Teaching through tasks that are relevant to students' future profession, increase motivation and do not focus on the language at the primary stage creates favourable learning conditions for learners. Learning is fostered through performing a series of activities as steps towards successful task realization.

Jane Willis offers the following criteria to what a task is:

1. It engages students' interest.
2. There is a primary focus on meaning.
3. There is an outcome.
4. Success is judged in terms of outcome.
5. Completion is priority.
6. The task relates to real world activities.

In other words, a task is an activity 'where the target language is used by the learners for a communicative purpose in order to achieve an outcome'.

If students are clear what the outcome should be, they are more likely to engage with the task. Successful task achievement will greatly increase their satisfaction and motivation. After completing the task, it is necessary to have a closer look at language forms.

Willis lists six task types:

- listing includes brainstorming and fact-finding;

- ordering and sorting include sequencing, ranking, categorizing and classifying;
- comparing includes matching, finding differences and similarities;
- problem solving includes analyzing real or hypothetical situations, reasoning and decision making;
- sharing experience involves narrating, describing, exploring and explaining attitudes and expressing opinions and reactions;
- creative tasks cover brainstorming, fact-finding, sorting, comparing and problem solving.

Their corresponding outcomes are:

- listing includes - completed list or draft mind map;
- ordering and sorting - information sorted according to specific criteria;
- comparing - identification of similarities and differences;
- problem solving - finding solutions to problems;
- sharing experience - exchanging opinions and attitudes;
- creative tasks - end product – can be appreciated by audience.

The main advantage of using tasks in heterogeneous classes is that the language is used for a meaningful communication. Other advantages of using tasks are the following:

- there is no language control in production stage;
- learners use their language knowledge;
- this approach offers reflection on language usage.

What is more, fulfilling the task presupposes that students are working in pairs or small groups, which can be of a mixed level. Thus, in order to actively participate in doing the task and complete it successfully students can share their responsibilities depending on their strengths and weaknesses.

The tasks that reflect the students' specialist world should be meaningful, relevant, motivating, challenging, have a clear purpose and clear instructions, meet students' needs, make them think and share their opinions and own experiences, and allow to develop their confidence and fluency.