

THE EFFECTS OF THE SYLLABUS, METHODS AND TEACHING STYLES OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE COURSES ON THE ACHIEVEMENTS AND ATTITUDES OF STUDENTS

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Abstract: English is taught as a foreign language nearly in all higher education institutions in Turkey. Though the aim of teaching English is mainly based on communicational skills, it is rarely performed with innovative and technologically up to date methods. Many instructors find it easier to construct courses with a traditional style without using technological devices and materials. English lessons become rather boring and dull, and as a result of this, the achievement and attitudes of students decline.

The aim of this study is to assess the effect of the syllabus, methods and teaching styles of foreign language courses on the achievements and attitudes of students. This research is an experimental study with a mixed group and an attitude test, open – ended questions survey model. The study was conducted on university students in the 2nd grade of the School of Health, Erzincan University. 21 male and 24 female students took part in this research.

As the first step of the research the syllabus design, method and teaching style of the class was defined by an interview with the instructors of English courses. Then the opinions of students on English courses were obtained with a questionnaire using the Likert scale model. Based on statistical analyses of the questionnaires and evaluation of observations on the syllabus, methods and teaching style of the instructor, it was concluded that the achievements and attitudes of the students vary according to the syllabus design, method and teaching style of the class.

Key Words: language teaching, attitude, syllabus design, style, teaching materials

1. Basic Concepts

1. 1. Syllabus in Foreign Language Teaching

In recent years there occurred an expanding interest to define the process of Foreign Language Teaching (FLT). This tendency of understanding and defining the process has led to the emergence of many concepts one of which is syllabus. The simplest explanation of this concept is 'a statement of what is to be learnt'. A syllabus is a more detailed and operational statement of teaching and learning elements which translates the philosophy of the curriculum into a series of planned steps leading towards more narrowly defined objectives at each level (Dubin and Olsthain, 1997). There are many other definitions of the term itself;

- *A syllabus is an endorsement of specific set of sociolinguistic and philosophical beliefs regarding power, education and cognition that guide a teacher to structure his or her class in a particular way (Hadley, 1998)*
- *A syllabus is a social construction produced interdependently by teachers and learners. It is concerned with the specification and planning of what is to be learnt (Candlin, 1984).*

Basic syllabus types are as follow:

- Type A (interventionist) syllabi are concerned with what should be learned. They divide the language into small, discrete units and evaluate the outcomes in terms of mastery of the language.
- Type B (non-interventionist) syllabi are concerned with how the language is learned and how this language is integrated with learners' experiences. Evaluation criteria are set by the learners themselves (White, 1988).

1. 2. Methods in Foreign Language Teaching

There are several FLT methods and those methods have an extension from behavioral methods to communicative – psychological ones. Each method has some challenges over the preceding one. For example Silent Way was born with the notion that though they learn language with ALM (Audio –Lingual Method) the students would not be able to communicate out of the class furthermore language learning can not be a habit formation as human being do learn the expressions that s/he has never heard.

Basic methods are:

- Grammar – Translation Method (GTM)
- Direct Method (DM)
- Audio – Lingual Method (ALM)
- Silent Way
- Suggestopedia (Desuggestopedia)
- Community Language Learning
- Total Physical Response (TPR)
- Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)
- Content – based, Task – based and Participatory Approaches
- Cooperative Learning and Multiple Intelligences (Larsen – Freeman, 2000)

1. 3. Style in FLT

“Every man is in certain respects (a) like all other men, (b) like some other men, (c) like no other man”
(Kluckhohn and Murray, 1953).

This quotation is perhaps the best way of mentioning the difference of each human being both as learners and teachers. Style is the difference of each person from the others. If the subject is an educational setting, then style turns to have two aspects; teacher’s teaching style and learner’s learning style.

A good teaching/learning environment is created only when learner’s and teacher’s styles cover one another. Style has a crucial role on achievement and attitude towards any topic or course.

1. 4. Attitude

Attitude is the mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual’s response to all objects with which it is related (Triandis, 1971). Attitude is a complex term having relationships with many other internal and external factors when the subject is ‘attitude towards learning a language or the language itself’. Language teaching includes all the factors such as teacher, learner, and the interaction of the two, internal and external variables as well as attitude of the learner.

2. Methods and Procedures

The aim of this study is to assess the effect of the syllabus, methods and teaching styles of foreign language courses on the achievements and attitudes of students. This research is an experimental study with a mixed group and an attitude test, open – ended questions survey model. The study was conducted on university students in the 2nd grade of the School of Health, Erzincan University. 21 male and 24 female students took part in this research.

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3. Analyses and Findings

3. 1. Views of the Instructor

The instructor of the English courses of the school is a 54 years – old male having B.A. from ELT department. He has been teaching for 30 years. He was interviewed by the authors of the paper and the interview included open – ended questions such as:

- What do you think about the efficiency of English lectures you give in this class?
- What are the aims/goals/purposes of your course?
- How do you plan your courses?
- What are the basic elements of your teaching style/approach/method?
- How do you assess your students?
- What are the materials of your English course?
- How do you evaluate yourself by means of being a teaching professional?
- What do you expect from your students?
- What is the manner of interactions of your class?

The instructor’s answers are as follow:

- I think my English course is far from being efficient enough because of students' attitude towards English.
- My aim is to teach English through rules and habit formation in order to make students understand English for their profession and career.
- I follow the plans that I have shaped through years of experiences without depending on any external planning.
- Basic elements of my teaching style are presentation of the subjects, explanation of the rules and exceptions of each rule, then giving examples of the grammatical structure.
- I use written exams to assess my students.
- I use only printed materials for the courses and I generally present the subject in the board. Very rarely do I use powerpoint presentations because it is difficult to prepare or adapt a prepared one.
- I have spent nearly 30 years as an instructor so I feel confident enough to lecture but I should admit that I am reluctant to learn about and use new technologies.
- I expect them to learn a good English especially grammar and vocabulary.
- Generally I do present the matter and students learn it by listening and note – taking, though I tried to integrate them to the courses actively, they seemed unwilling.

3. 2. Questionnaire

Attitudes of the students were determined by a questionnaire which was developed by Güven (2007) and proved to be reliable and valid after some pre – experimental applications to minor groups.

The questionnaire includes 24 items 12 of which are negative such as:

*Item 2: I feel distressed during English courses
(strongly agree/agree/moderately agree/disagree/strongly disagree)*

*Item 16: English is terrifying course for me
(strongly agree/agree/moderately agree/disagree/strongly disagree)*

12 items are positive such as:

*Item 11: I find it interesting to discuss the topics in English courses
(strongly agree/agree/moderately agree/disagree/strongly disagree)*

*Item 17: I find English as an enjoyable course
(strongly agree/agree/moderately agree/disagree/strongly disagree)*

12 positive questions were designed to determine positive attitudes of the students while remaining 12 questions existed to provide internal coherence of the questionnaire. In order to ensure the validity of the study, only positive questions were taken into account while analyzing the data. Cronbach Alpha validity of the scale was calculated as 0.91 showing that the study has the validity.

SPSS analysis of the questionnaire:

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
ORTALAMA	46	1,00	4,83	2,3696	,94684
Valid N (listwise)	46				

Mean: 2.37 Standard Deviation: 0,95

Mean value of the answers given to 12 questions which are asking about positive attitude towards English courses is 2,37 which means 'disagree' in our questionnaire. The results of statistical data showed that students do not agree positive attitude statements of the questionnaire.

4. Conclusion

As English becomes an international language for nearly all areas (science, communication, interaction etc.) it is not reasonable to go on using old – fashioned methods, strategies and approaches to teach English as a foreign language. Like all other sciences and educational activities, FLT also needs to be revised according to the needs of modern world. As it can be seen easily from these study, it is crucial to think FLT as a whole process along with all components e.g. teacher, teaching style, students and even external ones such as school and materials.

Students learn best when they feel confident and find the topic worth to be learnt by means of their needs. So the courses should be constructed to include technological settings and media so that students will find it interesting and they will be able to learn the language itself rather than set of grammar rules and patterns.

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Teacher has also has responsibilities of being well prepared for the course and equipped enough to be able to use technology and multi – dimensional teaching techniques. Having only one type of teaching style in mind makes the teacher a flat one. As a result s/he will not be able to control the class and teaching/learning process.

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