

Why objectives in teaching English?

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Abstract: Being under constant political, economical and social change especially after the 90-s our country has had an urgent need to change its education system. So in recent years, the Albanian Government has shown great interest in teaching and learning English in accordance with European standards by amending new laws (law no. 10 307, dated 22.07.2010) to promote English teaching and learning in order to meet the needs and interests of students. In order to make English teaching available for our students it is important to lead EFL teachers towards successful teaching, which means having a well designed lesson plan via well organized objectives. As Agni Malderez and Caroline Bodóczy say in their book (1999, 22), objectives will be addressed concurrently and throughout the course, which means that without objectives there will be no language lesson. So the paper deals with the reasons why teachers need to be upgraded professionally and how objectives help them enhance language teaching in their language classes. The paper also gives answers to the following questions: What principles should the language teachers consider while setting objectives? Why should they follow them? How do students benefit from a well planned lesson plan? Data collection from these questions pointed out the importance of professionalism in teaching English in our schools. Identifying the reasons of the big changes made teachers become aware of their professional development in order to implement contemporary teaching methods.

Key words: design lesson plan, implement teaching methods, objectives, professionalism, set objectives.

Why objectives in teaching English?

Over the last 21 years Albania has changed a lot in all spheres of life, education system included. The opening of Albania to Europe and the world set big tasks to the people to learn foreign languages especially English as an international means of communication. People of all ages and especially young people love to go abroad for different reasons: study, work, research or travel. So learning English as a foreign language has become a necessity for every one by making it a must. Nowadays, English teaching and learning comprise an important part of the school curricula, which reflect the National Strategy for the Development of pre university education (2008) that states

Foreign languages policy of the Ministry of Education and Science are designed and applied in accordance with the development in our country and in concert with the EU policy in this regard, following two basic EU directives, multilingualism and intercultural education.

Being the Government's priority new laws and amendments are passed by the Government and the Parliament in order to further develop English teaching in Albania. According to the Law of the Higher Education in Albania (law no. 10 307, dated 22.07.2010) everyone has the right to be educated, and in 2012 the high school students are not going to do four exams but five, where English is obligatory (Revista Mësuesi no.1, 2010). Therefore, great tasks were set forth to the English teachers to change their way of teaching that leads towards communicative learning.

The need to regulate the Albanian school system to the European standards and to the levels of foreign language competence as described by the Council of Europe (The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) 2002), asks for professional English teachers that meet the above standards. There is a growing demand for well-qualified EFL teachers who are able to teach communicatively but also have the desire and responsibility for growing professionally in order to keep up with the changing needs and interests of their students. This demand can be met if methods of teaching and learning are modified in line with

the curricula and syllabus objectives in order to provide them with language skills. As Don Snow has pointed out (2007, 3, 19) students' learning depends ultimately on their own efforts and the teachers on their own side should be reasonably successful learners of English, which means that they themselves should give their students a better understanding of how to learn and use the language correctly.

In 2005 an analysis of the higher education in Albania was made in order to see which standards were to be fulfilled hence the implementation of Bologna System would be easier. This study concerned the following:

- a) Get sufficient information about Bologna System;
- b) Teaching quality in our schools;
- c) ELP for university and high school students
- d) Language text books and other teaching materials.

In the study, therefore, we, faculty teaching staff made a deep analysis of all the problems we encountered such as the qualification of teaching staff in line with the European standards in education, authentic textbooks, the design of ELP, and improvement of teaching methods. We made a deep analysis on these problems, and after getting the sufficient information about Bologna System, and then afterwards we started to apply it in all levels of high education. These changes asked for teaching quality in English and the best thing to start with was through setting clear objectives and goals in teaching.

Focus on Objectives

The focus of this paper is on the importance the teacher growth has in setting clear objectives and goals during the course planning. Don Snow emphasizes the idea that the goals of the language course serve as the focus around which everything else is built (2007, 37). Through a good planning of the course the teachers know where their students are going. They also lead students to climb up the ladders of the language knowledge towards the acquisition of communicative language skills through cooperative learning, thus making possible the throw out of their traditional lessons (Spencer Kagan & Miguel Kagan, 2009, 1.5, 1.6).

There are two assumptions in this research: Why professionalism in the teaching process and Why objectives help teaching EFL? The first assumption has to do with learning teaching and how teachers could be throughout the teaching career (Jim Scrivener, 2009, 370). They should understand curriculum content and goals, including the subject matter and skills to be taught, and the students' needs as well. Teachers should know their students' needs and interests and at the same time they should know how their students learn and develop during the teaching and learning process within social contexts. The second assumption concerns the way teachers should set objectives in order to accomplish successfully their duty. Course aims and objectives should be: a) explicit and shared, b) knowledgeable and c) practicable (Angi Malderez & Caroline Bodóczy, 1999, 22 – 23). In studies conducted about Teacher Education by Viljo Kohonen (2002, 40) it is stated that teachers should clarify their personal aims and interests for themselves to promote reflective learning. He goes further with the idea of the teacher's portfolio as a tool for teachers to get upgraded professionally (40). To have portfolio teachers need to know how to identify students' needs and interests which help them set course objectives in order to cascade them in objectives for their lesson plans. This assertion was based on research which has shown that without group discussion you cannot come to the right solutions. Providing teachers with sufficient knowledge on teaching and learning objectives results from the research prove that training teachers how to design course objectives should influence professional development of teachers.

Method

In the context of the drawbacks traditional teaching methods have I constructed a study to identify teachers' professional development via the set of teaching objectives that could benefit English language student teachers in Albania. I started with the proposition that teachers' growth could affect better organized course design and lesson plans, which, with well designed objectives, could affect English language learning.

Participants

I did a case-study which was focused on some questions addressed to some student teachers (A), newly assigned teachers (B), and experienced teachers in 5 primary schools in Tirana. I examined the following research questions:

A: What pedagogical skills and strategies should the student teachers need to have in EFL learning and teaching?

B: What methods can be used to create a communicative language environment in your classes?

Both groups of participants of this research (A and B) answered the above questions, which data was used for this study. Group A and B were composed of student teachers and newly assigned teachers, whose goal in life was to become English language teachers in undergraduate levels of schooling. The young teachers teach in 5 primary schools, whereas the student teachers study to become English teachers. There were mainly 10 newly assigned teachers and 20 student teachers, all of them females of 21 – 26 years old. They were selected randomly. There were no male because there are few male teachers in the primary schools in Albania. It has not yet become a profession for men to teach young learners. The study occurred in a six - month period (January- June 2008), in course of which I observed the needs and interests of the respective study groups. I handed out questionnaires and then interviewed the young teachers and the student teachers as well. I had talks with them in order to get sufficient data for my research. I made the interviews once in a month for three months in a row (from January – April). The interviews concerned professional development of the young EFL teachers in Albania. Each interview lasted 15 minutes. There were experienced teachers that participated in this research. They played mostly a shaded role but of student teachers' benefit. The student teachers and the newly assigned teachers observed the experienced teachers' lessons for exchanging experiences.

Procedure

The data was collected at the end of April 2009 from all the actors that took part in the study. I interviewed them randomly. I interviewed the newly assigned and the student English language teachers at different times of the day to get to know better their needs, interests and their mood. I used these techniques for the interview because I wanted to judge them from the psychological point of view and what the effect their mental state at different times of the day gave on the teaching process. I evaluated their background in English as well. I involved these actors in the study in order to better see how teacher professionalism can help learning in the English class. The student teachers also observed 10 English classes in primary schools and attended the classes of experienced teachers in order to see the pedagogy they used. The student teachers talked with the experienced teachers and noted down the skills and the strategies they should have as future teachers to make the lessons effective. After the observed lesson they exchanged ideas about teaching and especially about course design and lesson plan. They were concerned mainly in the setting of course and lesson plan objectives.

During the observation of the EFL classes the student teachers were divided into groups of five because classes are very big in the Albania. As the focus in this study was to find ways to professionalize EFL teaching I asked the student teachers to dot down all the steps that experienced teachers used during their teaching. The student teachers contrasted their teaching with their own theoretical background together with the theory they were provided at the university. So, during the observation 5 student teachers focused on lesson planning mainly on objectives, the next 5 focused on course design mainly on course objectives, the other 5 focused on the objectives of the tests, and the last 5 focused on the objectives the learners have set for their own learning.

I used the following rubrics for the observation, questionnaires, and the interview. The ranking was: "strongly disagree," "disagree," "neutral," "agree" and "strongly agree", and the ranking of "never", "sometimes", and "always". Participants in this study collected data about classroom setting, classroom conditions, the students conduct during the English lesson, the teachers' behavior and their communication in class (gestures, eye contact, and intonation). The use of all these techniques in data collection provided me with evidence from which strategies and teaching tips were identified.

Findings and Results

Data collected from the interviews, questionnaires and observations are presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3 in the Appendix. The data were not only in quantity but also qualitative while examining the questions. In examining the collected data either in quality or quantity, there were clear distinctions between what the student teachers get at the university and what they face in the real life in the schools they have started teaching. So the newly assigned teachers confessed that they never face the same situation as they are taught at school. Four of them said that they are sometimes treated well by the senior teachers, and what is very much to be deserved is the training. They never get training at schools, which affect their teaching and especially the setting of the course and lesson objectives. As for their psychological state concerning teaching during the parts of the day they emphasized that they always feel good while teaching in the morning. This shows that in the morning they are fresh and full of energy to give their utmost in their teaching process. This means that they sleep well during the night which according to Gais and Born (2001) sleep debt affects considerably the teachers' thinking and mood, whereas Sirito

(2003) says that lack of sleep brings loss of energy, lethargy and emotional instability. The teachers' mood in teaching is very important during the teaching process. The merrier, the more tranquil, the more organized and the more love they put on their teaching, the better the results are on the students and the teachers' sides.

Class conditions also affect teaching. According to the results of table 1 I may say that classroom environment in the piloted schools does not attract the language learners towards a standardized learning, which needs to be improved.

Conclusion

This study gives evidence on the importance of teacher training at school and outside it. It also emphasizes the fact that EFL course design and lesson plans in terms of clear set objectives are very crucial in teaching in line with the European standards. It is also important to point out what works best in teaching EFL to student teachers and the newly ones in order to give them the possibility to get developed professionally. The collected data provided by all the actors in this study made possible the identification of the actual situation in our schools and what is more important the tasks set for the national trainers in order to apply teacher trainings in the schools. Training EFL teachers and especially the young teachers for professional growth can be applied in all the schools in Albania. This will increase the desire for students to learn English better and at the same time it will motivate the student teachers to teach professionally.

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APPENDIX 1

Table 1. Observation by student teachers and newly assigned teachers

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Lessons are done in lively and comfortable classrooms.	15	-	12	3	
Quotes and posters on the walls inspire teaching.	-	-	8	22	-
Bulletin boards are found in all the language classrooms.	13	14	3	-	
Students are interested in the language lesson.	15	-	10	5	-
Teachers are kind, helpful and do their best to upgrade professionally.	-	3	20	7	-
Language teachers attract their students by using authentic materials in class.	11	-	4	-	15
Teachers use only communicative teaching methods		20	3	7	-
Students are always in the center of teaching.	12	-	13	5	-
Total	66	37	73	49	15

APPENDIX 2

Never

Sometimes **Always**

Table 2 *The interview to the newly assigned teachers*

1 **2**

3 **4** **5**

APPENDIX 3

1.	Are you faced with the same teaching situation you were taught at school?	10	-	-	-	-
2.	Do you find a friendly situation in the school since at the very beginning of the school year?	6	4	-	-	-
3.	Do you exchange experience with the older teachers at your school?	3	5	-	-	2
4.	Do you get teacher training at your school by the senior teachers?	10	-	-	-	-
5.	Do you read professional books in order to develop professionally?	-	2	-	4	8
6.	Have you observed classes from the experienced teachers?	2	8	-	-	-
7.	Do all of you talk about your teaching methods and especially about course objectives?	-	6	-	4	-
8.	Do you find setting objectives to your teaching difficult?	-	-	3	-	7
8.	Do you feel good while teaching in:					
	a. the morning?	-	-	-	-	20
	b. the afternoon?	-	-	-	-	-
	c. the evening?	-	-	-	-	-
	TOTAL	31	25	3	8	37

Never

Sometimes **Always**

1

2 **3** **4** **5**

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1.	Do student teachers study teaching because they have a goal in their life?			14		6
2.	Do they take part in micro-teaching while they have seminars in class?		12			8
3.	Are they conscious of what they study and why they study teaching English?			16		4
4.	Do you find teaching English interesting?	7	3			10
5.	Does teaching make you feel always inspiring?	2		12		6
6.	Are the teaching materials useful for you in the future career?	3	9			9
7.	Do you set objectives easily?			5		3
8.	Do setting objectives help you in your teaching?	12		20		
	TOTAL	-	33	62	-	10