

“Challenges of Teaching in Mixed-Ability Classes and Strategies EFL Teachers Use – A Case Study in Albania”

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Abstract

Teaching EFL is a very challenging job, especially in mixed-ability classes as it involves planning lessons that include a variety of tasks corresponding to a variety of learning abilities and cultures. Mixed-ability classes are considered a universal phenomenon. Students are set in classes according to their age and year of study. Firstly, this study is made to provide an overview of the challenges faced by teachers in mixed-ability classes in Albania. Secondly, it aims to make some possible suggestions for successful implementations in mixed-ability classes in Albania. The study has been conducted through quantitative and qualitative design and the participants in this quantitative and qualitative study are teachers from the University of Tirana, the Polytechnic University Albania, and Catholic University “Our Lady of Good Counsel” in Albania.

The main results of this study show that the main challenges in mixed-ability classes are different learning styles; lack of confidence of students to communicate in class; lack of teaching materials; teacher training and student motivation. The strategies teachers report to overcome the challenges are using differentiated instruction, working on different topics and materials; applying creative tasks that allow students to work at their levels; pair work, and group work students encouraging them to communicate in English.

This study attempts to aid teachers to respond positively to the demands of mixed-ability and EFL teaching contexts. Teachers need specific competencies to effectively teach in mixed-ability classes and they have a special role in creating a methodology that addresses different levels of students.

Keywords: mixed-ability classes, students, teachers, challenges, strategies, Albania

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching English as a foreign in the modern era of globalization language is a challenge in Albania. Classes are diverse in terms of ability and culture; teachers face the challenge of meeting the needs of diverse students in a mixed-ability setting. Students come from differing backgrounds, with different levels and interests, and the traditional method of instruction may not be effective. Teachers in such classrooms must manage and monitor several activities simultaneously. They must help students in developing basic rules for behavior, give and monitor specific activities and direct the sequence of events in each learning experience. One of the most stable characteristics of any group of learners, whether they are adults or children, is diversity. In higher education in Albania, there are heterogeneous classes by ability but homogeneous by nationality and entirely heterogeneous classes by both ability and nationality. Factors that contribute to heterogeneity include the student’s previous achievement level, previously acquired skills, family, broad affiliation, culture, and origin. With the appearance of mixed-ability classes, the need for new teaching methods to be used in such groups and for further studies in this field is becoming more and more demanding in Albania. In mixed-ability classes, collaborative learning should be supported by a specific education program, in order to have a positive effect on the student’s achievement and attitudes towards EFL learning.

1.2 EFL Teaching in Albania

English teachers’ education and training in Albania began in 1957, when the first university, the University of Tirana, was opened in Albania.

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The number of students was small and English was taught in only a few secondary schools in the major cities of Albania (Delija, Sh, Këçira, R, Shllaku, A, Guli, M, Mine, L2012). After the 1990s, the last 30 years have seen great changes in English teaching approaches and contents in universities in Albania. Since 1992 a foreign language is a compulsory subject of the school curriculum from elementary education onwards. In Albania English is taught at school since third grade at primary school. Students study English for 9 years or more before they enroll at university. The importance of English in Albania is growing more and more with the development of technology. "Foreign languages policy of the Ministry of Education and Science has been designed and applied in accordance with the developments in our country and in concordance with the EU policy in this regard, following two basic EU directives, multilingualism, and intercultural education (MES, 2008)." There is an urgent need to use other approaches to language learning rather than the traditional grammar-translation one which was the only approach used in the past.

Today's students have a diverse range of needs that teachers struggle to meet in the classroom, but there is hope. If teachers take a positive approach and base the curriculum and teaching strategies based on students' needs, then students will succeed in their studies. There is a need to find the right balance of teaching strategies that are both interesting and challenging for the students. Being aware of the difficulties that teachers in mixed-ability classes encounter makes it easier to address any issues and find effective solutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Mixed-ability classes

Mixed-ability or multilevel classes, according to Matthews-Aydinli & Horne (2006), are those classes in which students of various levels are grouped together. They vary in their levels of competence in listening, reading, speaking, and writing. A mixed-ability classroom, according to Chapman and King (2003), is made up of students with varying degrees of learning abilities, interests, and abilities. Another researcher, Ansari (2013), describes a mixed-ability class consisting of learners with different abilities as well as learners with learning styles. It can also be called a variation of student skills in terms of grammatical knowledge, fluency, and accuracy, vocabulary range, receptive and productive skills (Valentic, 2005). Most classes are made up of a large number of students and it is the teacher's responsibility to manage the students and provide effective lessons (AlSubaiei, M2017). This is a very challenging process, as the responsibility for each student's individual needs lies on one teacher. It is difficult to manage lesson plans in mixed-ability lessons because each student has a different level of understanding (Northcote 2006). Hedge (Hedge, 2000) noted that teaching a classroom of mixed abilities is a vital and genuine issue that instructors experience daily. He added that the mixed-ability problem has demanded serious attention from experts in the educational field.

Prodromou (Prodromou, 1989) suggests that different teaching methods, teaching materials, and learning styles will always result in different levels of progress, even when students are grouped according to test scores. Therefore, the teacher is an important factor in reaching all the students in the class. Differences that cause problems in heterogeneous classes are language learning ability, language skills, cultural background, learning style, attitude towards language, native language, intellect, world knowledge, learning experience, foreign language skills, age, gender, personality, level of confidence, motivation, interest and/or education (Ur 1996, 304).

2.2. What has been done in the field so far?

Valentic, (2005) pointed out that students differ in their language proficiency, and they even differ in their attitudes towards learning a language and they differ in their self-discipline. However, in real teaching contexts still, little attention has been paid to preparing and training teachers on how to cater to the different ability levels. They are not given many guidelines to help prepare for proper fitting according to student needs (Al-Shammakhi, F., & Al-Humaidi, S. 2015). Furthermore, in another study, Morris (2008) found that most teachers face challenges in their mixed-ability classes and recommended more training for teachers to apply various strategies such as designing different activities and games. Students will be eager to help each other if they have qualified teachers who can teach and apply appropriate strategies (Hernandez, 2012). Moreover, Matthews, Aydinli & Horne (2006) pointed out in their study that teachers, regardless of their gender and experience, need in-service training. They need to acquire strategies that enable them to deal with different students.

In addition, Hess, (2001) in her study mentioned that mixed-ability classes can seem uncooperative, the students can get bored easily and this can cause problems in classroom management and planning the lesson can take too much time for the teacher. The material is often too easy or too difficult for the students and this may make the teacher feel inadequate and unable to cope with the class.

Baker (2002) claims that it is not just the fact that there are many students in a class, but that all of them are at so many different ability levels that provide the biggest challenge. She claimed that in mixed classes it can be difficult to get everyone's attention. Teachers can be frustrated because their motivation is low, and they do not have enough time to help weak students. Dörnyei (2001) underlines the importance of a positive attitude among the teachers who are to teach these weaker groups: 'This means, for example, that ability grouping is a dangerous practice because teachers who are to teach the low ability groups are bound to be influenced by this knowledge, which may send the children on an ever downward spiral of low achievement and low expectations. (Dörnyei, 2001, p 35).

Alton-Lee and Nuthell (1998) in their study have defined quality teaching as 'pedagogical practices that facilitate for heterogeneous groups of students their access to information, and ability to engage in classroom activities and tasks in ways that facilitate learning related to curriculum goals'. Finally, Alton-Lee (2003) stated that heterogeneity of class groupings is not a fixed characteristic as careful observation of the students indicates that the differences between them are rather fluid and quality teaching is necessarily a response to heterogeneous groups of students.

2.3 The Role of the EFL Teacher in a mixed-ability classroom

Becoming a good teacher who can meet all the needs of different students is not an easy task. However, the first important step in performing this task is to recognize the challenges. The teacher's role in a mixed-ability classroom is to provide students with proper materials and design a structural systematic teaching strategy (Chen, 1999). To ensure effective learning and teaching it is suggested that the teacher should be well-organized in the MAC. According to Dörnyei and Csizer (1998), to ensure that students are intrinsically motivated, it is necessary to:

- a) plan more interesting classes;
- b) create a comfortable class environment;
- c) develop a good relationship with the students;
- d) increase students' confidence;
- e) allow students to have a positive image of themselves;
- f) teach in a way that the students see that what they learn is relevant, valuable, and useful;
- g) the teacher should be able to transmit his motivation to the students by showing them how important and interesting the content of the subject is;
- h) the class environment must be safe and pleasant.

A teacher is responsible for ensuring that all students in a classroom understand his/her lessons in class. A good teacher sees conversations with individuals, classroom discussions, student work, observation, and formal assessment just to gather a little more insight about what works for each learner.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Purpose and research questions

The purpose of this study is based on knowledge and recommendations for improving teaching in mixed-ability and multicultural classes. Firstly, this study is made to provide an overview of the challenges faced by teachers in mixed-ability and multicultural classes in Albania. Secondly, this study aims to make some possible suggestions for successful implementations in mixed-ability classes in Albania. The research questions of this study are:

1. What are the challenges of teaching English in mixed-ability classes?
2. What strategies do EFL teachers use in mixed-ability classes to enhance student motivation and achieve better results?

3.2. Research design

The study has been conducted through quantitative and qualitative design. A questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews conducted with teachers in Albania have been used in this study. Quantitative and qualitative design is chosen to find the challenges and strategies, make them measurable, and know the main problems faced by teachers and students in a mixed-ability class to make the proper suggestions for future interventions.

3.3 Sample

The research population consisted of 16 teachers at university educational institutions who teach English as a foreign language. The institutions selected in a non-probabilistic manner with convenience, to be included in the research, which offers the subject of English language are the University of Tirana, Catholic University "Our

Lady of Good Counsel” and Polytechnic University. While in qualitative research, the same 16 teachers were interviewed in in-depth interviews.

3.4 Data Collection Method

In order to check the comprehensibility of the statements for the quantitative and qualitative instruments, which were translated individually and are not validated in our country, the instruments were piloted with a sampling group of 2 teachers who teach the language. English at the University of Tirana, “Our Lady of Good Counsel” and the University of Medicine in Tirana. Administration. The collection of quantitative and qualitative data took place during the period March –to September 2021. Due to the pandemic period, the data were collected online using the self-report method.

3.5 Instruments

In this study, there are used two instruments were: a questionnaire for teachers and in-depth interviews. The questionnaire, a quantitative and self-reporting instrument, is divided into four sections and in total there are 117 closed questions. Teachers have been asked 11 questions in in-depth interviews regarding their experience of teaching in mix-ability classes.

3.6 Data analysis

Quantitative data from teachers were analyzed with the statistical program “Statistical Package for Social Sciences” (SPSS), version 23. Initially, descriptive statistics were derived: mean value, standard deviation, frequencies, and percentages for questionnaire statements. To obtain more information about the challenges and strategies used by teachers in mixed-ability, 16 teacher interviews were done.

To collect data for the study, the researcher has followed a mixed methodology. The research design, sample, instrument, and data collection procedure of the study are described below.

IV. RESULTS

4.2 Findings of teacher’s questionnaire

The quantitative questionnaire for teachers has been distributed in three universities in Albania as described below. The questions for the teacher cover a wide range of issues starting with the overall teaching challenges and then focusing on specifying challenges in students’ motivation, teaching materials, in classroom management. Secondly, there is a description of the strategies that teachers use to overcome each of the challenges identified in the first section of the questionnaire. The following paragraphs show the quantitative data of teachers, collected by 16 teachers at the University of Tirana, Polytechnic University of Tirana, and Catholic University “Our Lady of Good Counsel”.

4.2.1 Demographic data

Teachers were asked at which university they work. From the collected data it results that 62.5% of teachers work at the University of Tirana and Polytechnic University of Tirana. A smaller percentage of teachers work at Catholic University “Our Lady of Good Counsel” which is a university with mixed-ability with multicultural classes.

	Frequency	Percent
The University of Tirana, Polytechnic University of Tirana	10	62.5
Catholic University “Our Lady of Good Counsel”	6	37.5
Total	16	100.0

Table 1. Teachers disaggregated by the university where they work

The teachers included in this study are mainly teachers who have 10 -15 years of work. This category of teachers is represented by 43.8% of the teachers included in the study. Likewise, a significant percentage of teachers (25% of them) have over 25 years of work at university.

	Frequency	Percent
5 – 10 years	1	6.3
10 – 15 years	7	43.8
15 – 20 years	2	12.5
20 – 25 years	2	12.5
25 + years	4	25.0
Total	16	100.0

Table 2. Years of work of teachers involved in the study

1/2 of the teachers included in the study have a Doctorate (50% of them) and 25% of the teachers included in the study have received the title of Professor. An equal percentage of teachers have only a Master's Degree (25% of them). Teachers are asked in which course of study they teach. Most of the teachers taught in the field of Medicine represented by 18.8% of the teachers included in the study.

4.2.2 Challenges in mixed-ability classes

One of the main questions of this study is “What are the challenges faced by teachers in mixed-ability classes?” In this paragraph, the challenges in teaching, motivation, teaching materials and challenges in classroom management will be analyzed from the perspective of the teachers studied.

The biggest challenge that teachers face in teaching is the difficulty to follow all students in a mixed-ability class ($m = 3.81$). This challenge is followed by two other challenges such as the difficulty in planning a balanced lesson that suits all students with different abilities ($m = 3.69$) and the activity in the books (assignments) that do not suit all levels of students ($m = 3.44$). The least appreciated challenge by teachers is that students are unable to use English in communication, so they have low achievement.

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teaching mixed-ability classes is difficult, as I cannot follow individual students	3.81	0.911
Many students are unable to communicate using English especially low achievers	3.38	0.806
There is a wide gap among students' levels in different skills	3.44	0.892
The course books' activities do not suit the different levels of the students	3.44	0.892
It is difficult to plan a balanced lesson that fits all students with their different abilities	3.69	1.014

Table 3. Teaching challenges regarding the teachers

The teachers in the study report that they face challenges in the low motivation of students while learning English. Teachers find it difficult to make all the students interested and motivated during the lesson ($m = 3.88$). Also, teachers value the same low self-confidence that students have to communicate English in class ($m = 3.88$). According to teachers, some students lose interest in answering in class due to low skills in learning a foreign language.

	Mean	Std. Deviation
The lack of confidence of some students leads them not to communicate in class	3.88	0.619
Some students quickly lose interest as they have very low language ability	3.63	0.500
Simplifying the lesson for low ability students decreases good students' interest	3.63	0.619
There is a lack of motivation among some students in the class	3.19	0.655
Low-level students find it most difficult and have the idea of being treated unequally	2.88	0.806
High-level students feel they are treated unequally in mixed-ability classes	2.69	1.014
It is difficult to ensure that all students are challenged and interested in the lesson	3.88	0.885

Table 4. Challenges in motivation regarding the teachers

Teachers involved in this study report some challenges in teaching materials. The most salient challenge from those in teaching materials is that lesson plans are not suitable for mixed-ability classes ($m = 4.25$). Teachers also rate the books as designed for an average number of students and not for students with more or fewer skills ($m = 4.13$). Teachers find it difficult to use activities during the lesson and achieve the goal for all students. Also, different materials are difficult to adapt to mixed-ability classes.

	Mean	Std. Deviation
It is difficult to design different activities for different levels to achieve the same goal	3.50	0.730
Fixed plans are not suitable for mixed-ability and multicultural classes	4.25	0.856
The coursebook is designed for average students, not high ability or low ability students	4.13	0.957
It is difficult to find appropriate teaching resources for different levels	3.06	1.124
Different materials are difficult to be adapted to mixed-ability and multicultural classes	3.50	0.730

Table 5. Challenges in teaching materials regarding the teachers

The biggest challenge for teachers in classroom management is to work individually with each of the students. Classes with a large number of students make it impossible for teachers to work with each of the students and respond to their needs. Planning a curriculum to fits all students is difficult for a large number of teachers ($m = 3.81$). Coping with student differences in mixed-ability classes is seen as a very difficult task by teachers ($m = 3.75$) and all these challenges affect the classroom management.

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Mixed-ability classes affect the quality of my teaching and influence useful monitoring /evaluation of lessons	3.25	.683
It is difficult to plan a lesson that fits all students with their different abilities	3.81	.981
The course books' activities do not suit the different levels of my students	3.63	.957
It is difficult to work individually with each student	4.00	.632
Lack of involvement leads some students to cause problems in the class	3.13	.619
My students do not listen to me, and they have lack attention	2.75	.856
Devoting equal time to all students in mixed-ability classes is not possible	3.50	.816
Advanced students are likely to be neglected, as the focus is more on elementary students	2.56	.964
It is difficult to organize appropriate grouping in the class	3.31	1.138
It is a demanding task for me to deal with the students' differences in a mixed-ability class	3.75	.931
The behavior problems can disrupt the teaching and learning processes	2.75	.683
Dealing with behavior problems has a dramatic impact on a teacher's job and takes more time	3.25	.775
My students can obtain the same level of learning in a mixed-ability class	2.69	.946

Table 6. Challenges in classroom management regarding the teacher

4.2.3 Strategies in mixed-ability classes

In these paragraphs, the strategies used by teachers in mixed-ability will be examined. Teacher strategies will be measured in terms of teaching, motivation, use of materials, and classroom management.

The most used strategies by teachers to face the challenges in explaining the lesson are the application of differentiated instruction, using various creative tasks such as stories, opinions, diaries, etc. ($m = 4.56$), and the summary of the lesson with the students at the end of the lesson ($m = 4.56$). Writing the purpose of the lesson and explaining the course assignments are the other two strategies most used by teachers to achieve a good explanation during the lesson. Other strategies utilized by teachers are monitoring students and giving additional tasks to some students in order to fill the gaps during teaching.

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Regular observation of all students	4.38	0.806
Writing the aims of the lesson regularly	4.44	0.727
Differentiated instruction, applying various creative tasks that allow students to work at their levels (story, opinion, and diary)	4.56	0.629
Encouraging students to reconstruct stories	4.44	0.512
Mixing compulsory with optional tasks	4.31	0.602
Giving extra lessons for some students	4.00	0.365
Giving homework to some students depending on their need	4.19	0.655
Explaining the purpose of homework for the students	4.44	0.629
Summarizing the lesson with the students	4.56	0.629
Exchanging ideas with other teachers	4.13	0.619
Planning to monitor 4-4 students each day	3.50	0.516
Giving extra exercises to some students for gap activities	3.81	0.655
Encouraging students to write sentences, mini-stories (low-achievers), and long stories (high-achievers)	4.25	0.683

Table 7. Strategies in teaching-learning regarding the teachers

As teachers faced challenges in student motivation and interest, they were asked about coping strategies for these challenges. Encouraging students to express their expectations regarding new issues is the most valued strategy by teachers ($m = 4.38$). Working with interesting topics for students is a good strategy to increase their motivation ($m = 4.31$). Another strategy used by teachers is that students communicate with each other about how they can achieve their goals during the lesson ($m = 3.56$).

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Students design their own glossaries to write new words and definitions	3.63	1.025
Students interview each other to complete questionnaires or to talk about themselves	3.63	0.957
Working on interesting topics	4.31	1.078
Encouraging students to express their expectations about the new units	4.38	1.088
Encouraging students to put suggestions or complaints about the lessons in a box in their classroom	4.00	1.095
Students discuss together how they can accomplish their goals	3.56	1.094
Encouraging students to set goals for themselves	3.94	0.772

Table 8. Strategies to motivate students

The teachers interviewed in the three universities of Tirana, faced many challenges with the materials used during the lesson in mixed-ability classes.

The three strategies most measured and used by them to cope with the difficulties in using the materials were: 1) Using technology appliances in order to make them more motivated; 2) Adapting open-ended tasks (summary, analysis, and express opinions); 3) Using more communicative activities like (games, puzzles, etc.) (m = 4.50).

Other effective strategies used by teachers to face challenges in teaching materials were: using simplified materials that are not demanding for low-level students (m = 4.00) and using more authentic materials besides the course book (m = 4.13; Table 21).

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Using simplified materials that are not demanding for low-level students	4.00	0.516
Using a bank of materials with activities of different levels	4.44	0.512
Using technology appliances in order to make them more motivated	4.50	0.632
Adapting open-ended tasks (summary, analysis, and express opinions)	4.50	0.516
Using more communicative activities like (games, puzzles, etc.)	4.50	0.632
Group discussions in order to set targets and how to achieve them	4.25	0.856
Using more authentic materials besides the coursebook	4.13	0.806
Using lesson plans effectively and the teaching aids that fit all students with different abilities	4.44	0.629

Table 9. Strategies to overcome the challenges with teaching materials regarding the teachers

Properly managing mixed-ability classes is one of the most important issues for teachers in order to achieve the benefit of knowledge and achieve the objectives of a lesson. According to the teachers surveyed, the most cost-effective classroom management strategies are: 1) Ask questions to get students' attention (m = 4.81); 2) Make use of eye contact, voice control, body language, and distance management to maintain large class's control (m = 4.81) and 3) Giving time to the students to copy important information or finish the tasks (m = 4.75).

Forcing students to keep their desks tidy in order to be more focused and focused is the least used strategy of teachers to manage the classroom (3.25). Another strategy less appreciated by teachers is giving extra activities to the group or the students who finish earlier (m = 3.63).

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Provide clear instruction and positive feedback to the students for following class rules	4.63	0.619
Using simple materials for low-level students and more elaborate materials for more demanding students	4.19	0.750
Ask questions to get students' attention	4.81	0.403
Giving time to the students to copy important information or finish the tasks	4.75	0.447
Make use of eye contact, voice control, body language, and distance management to maintain a large class's control	4.81	0.403
Making direct contact with students and providing tips and strategies on how to overcome their difficulties	4.69	0.479
When students' desks are arranged in rows, your students tend to stay on task, focus, listen and complete more work	3.25	0.775
Giving extra activities to the group or the students who finish earlier	3.63	0.719
Small group activities in order to make students more involved	4.06	0.250
Personalizing tasks (students talk about themselves and their experiences)	4.06	0.443
Assigning mixed-ability group project (students get different roles while working on the project)	4.13	0.500
Using in-class peer-tutoring	3.81	0.544

Table 10. Strategies to overcome the challenges in classroom management

4.2.4 Need analyses and evaluation as the way to facilitate mixed-ability classes

The teachers involved in this study were asked about needs analysis and evaluation as a way to facilitate teaching in mixed-ability classes. Tables 11 and 12 present the statements that teachers were asked about in terms of needs analysis and how students are assessed in the classroom.

Teachers report that they continuously measure student performance ($m = 4.47$) and use small questionnaires or mini-tests to see their progress ($m = 4.00$). A very small number of teachers report that they prepare video lessons in the classroom ($m = 3.60$). Teachers also consider it important to provide feedback to their students ($m = 4.69$) and encourage peer assessment ($m = 4.19$) and self-assessment ($m = 4.19$) in order to learn from other mistakes.

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Assessing and evaluating the students' performance continuously.	4.47	0.516
Using a checklist for all the students	3.93	0.799
Preparing personal evaluation and targets for each student.	3.73	0.884
Preparing video class lessons	3.60	0.828
Using frequent questionnaires and mini-tests to check progress.	4.00	0.756

Table 11. Need analysis as the way to facilitate the mixed-ability classes

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Making continuously quizzes and tests	4.19	0.911
Providing feedback	4.69	0.479
Making direct contact with students and providing tips and strategies on how to overcome their difficulties	4.56	0.512
Encouraging peer assessment in order to learn from other mistakes	4.19	0.544
Encouraging self-assessment technique	4.06	0.772

Table 12. Evaluation as the way to facilitate the mixed-ability classes

4.3 Findings of teachers' in-depth interviews

Teachers are asked in their interviews whether they encounter any difficulty in teaching a mixed-ability class. In total, 60% of teachers report that “Yes” they encounter difficulties in teaching mixed-ability classes. Meanwhile, more than half of these teachers, face difficulties teaching at the Catholic University “Our Lady of Good Counsel”, so in mixed-ability classes. Teachers responded on specific challenges they emphasize as being most evident in teaching mixed-ability classes such as teaching-learning, motivation, teaching materials, classroom management, and participation. Teachers report that it is difficult to find the appropriate teaching materials and sometimes they must come up with materials by themselves. The most evident challenges of teaching in this classroom context are student motivation, participation, and interest in learning, in this way classroom management becomes difficult. Since the mixed-ability classes are accompanied by a diversity of students in each class of English language, teachers consider it an inevitable method of implementing different teaching strategies in the classroom. There are several factors teachers take into consideration before selecting any teaching methods in their class including age, interest, and ability; level of the class; their reason for learning English, and cultural background.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It can be concluded, from the data discussed above teachers face different challenges in mixed-ability classes. The main challenges from the teachers' view are difficulty in working with individual students; difficulty to plan a lesson that fits all students with different abilities, lack of confidence to communicate in class, and classroom management. Some other challenges are students' different learning styles; lack of confidence to communicate in class; different language abilities, and different cultural backgrounds.

Meanwhile, English teachers state that the most common strategies are encouraging students to make suggestions and using differentiated instructions and a communicative approach. Another strategy is pair work and group work activities that foster communicative skills. Regarding need analysis as the way to facilitate mixed-ability classes, most of the teachers agreed that assessing and evaluating the students' performance continuously, then for use of frequent questionnaires and mini-tests to check progress are effective strategies.

Finally, it can be concluded that teachers deal with a great number of difficulties when teaching English in a mixed-ability class and they need further training to deal with these classes. Teaching English in a mixed-ability classroom requires a lot of preparation on the teachers' part, but it indeed increases a lot of motivation and interest of the students. Therefore, is needed teacher training and new strategies to overcome these challenges.

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