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## **THE DIFFICULTIES OF TEACHING ENGLISH TO THE TAIWANESE STUDENTS**

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### **Abstract**

*The objective of this paper is to investigate the difficulties of teaching English to the Taiwanese Students of Cram School (Buxiban) and the way to solve the difficulties of teaching English to the students. The limitation of this study is on the classroom realities in teaching English as a Foreign Language at Cram School (Buxiban). The participant of this research is the teacher of Cram School (a native speaker from England). This research is a descriptive qualitative research. The difficulties faced by the teachers in teaching English derive from the teacher himself, the students and Cram school (Buxiban). Those difficulties are Mother Tongue Use of the teacher, Mix Ability, Lack of Motivation, Continuity, Taiwan's exam culture, Buxiban (Cram School) materials, Monologue rather than dialogue. The ways to solve those difficulties are the use of Experience, Reflection and Creativity, and the rules on the classroom realities.*

## **Keywords**

English, Difficulty of Teaching, Qualitative

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## **1. Introduction**

English is very important for students to communicate to each other in the globalization era. It becomes one of the important lessons in school especially the school which is English as a Foreign Language. Nowadays, most of entertainment, magazine, literature, newspaper, computer language, books, journal, thesis, booklets and others is written in English. According to Khan (2011), English is usually the official language; this is because the computer language, including book, manuals, and literature, academic reported regarding computer and IT is written in English. Therefore, students are suggested to study English in order that each can master his/her lesson at school and in the society.

Teaching English is not that easy, since teachers have their own several difficulties in teaching process. In order to target teaching objectives, the teacher should have some qualities training and expertise. It is expected that the most trained and professional teachers should have any traits in order to be effective and efficient (Khan, 2011). Teaching is not only a difficult process of transferring the information to the students, but also a process about establishing relationships, forming new ideas, finding new ways, and shifting the borders of one's world of knowledge and a teacher is the one who has the big power to push the students (Rosova, 2007).

In this research, the teacher teaches integrated skills which are listening, speaking, reading and writing at the same time in the EFL classroom at Cram School (Buxiban). Cram School is special schools that train the students to achieve the way to pass the entrance examinations of high schools or universities (Wikipedia, 2015). The native English teacher found some difficulties of teaching English to the Taiwanese Students of Cram School (Buxiban) since they come from different background English knowledge, age, profession, religions etc. Therefore, the objectives of the research is to find out the difficulties of teaching English to the Taiwanese Students of Cram School (Buxiban) and the way to solve those difficulties in teaching English to the students.

## **2. Review of Literature**

### **2.1. Teaching English**

There are four skills in teaching English namely, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Listening is the foreign language proficiency. Teacher are suggested to get accustomed with the different contexts in teaching listening to the students because some contexts of listening tests is different. English listening proficiency can be overcome by practice (Grace & Paul , 2010). Listening comprehension is a series of process for EFL students to strive to carry on conversation. In addition, for the EFL students often listen to Western movie, billboard song, and news in English. Listening has some roles in the communication process which the receiver must listen in order to understand the original message. Then the sender becomes a listener to understand the subsequent feedback (Cheung, 2010).

Speaking skill is very important for students to communicate in EFL classrooms. There are two main goals in speaking: accuracy and fluency (Abdel-Haq & Aly, 2013). Accuracy is the ability to speak correctly without making serious mistakes and therefore a greater use of instant teacher's correction within a speaking activity is appropriate. On the contrary, fluency is the ability to speak confidently without irrelevant pauses or hesitation, however, often with making major mistakes (Scrivener, 2005).

Reading provides multifaceted purposes. People read some books for any purposes. They read to comprehend answer questions, to fill in grammar questions, to overcome language difficulties, to increase language ability, to seek happiness and information, to understand the instruction, to find out some countries etc. (Rahman, 2004). Teachers are suggested to adopt the instructional practices from some native English speakers to improve reading comprehension. The effective reading instructional strategies used with native English-speaking students, including vocabulary, comprehension, and phonics, are also important for students (August & Shanahan, 2006, as cited in Jun, 2012).

The basics of good writing are paragraphing, ideas, grammar, spelling, punctuation and handwriting. Writing is used by native and non-native students which are so important to fulfill the education requirements. Academic writing assignments require students to master the knowledge of good writing. The basics of good writing are paragraphing, ideas, grammar, spelling, punctuation and handwriting since the evaluation judgments of the different fields of

learning are mainly based upon writing (Iman , 2014). Writing English is very often done in the classroom, the most important thing is that the students should get involved personally to achieve the learning experience in writing in order that the students can achieve a great value as well (Dana & Ayda , 2013).

## **2.2. Principles of Teaching English**

Teachers should integrate the four skills which are reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills in teaching. Teachers should be wise enough to see the English language developmental levels and the appropriate instructional strategies for the class. Teachers should adopt the instructional practices they use with native English speakers to improve EFL classroom. Teachers should encourage students' ability to use oral English. EFL should communicate with teachers rather than their English speaking peers. A curriculum designed for the EFL should include not only basic skills and basic thinking, but also higher level thinking. Teachers should make sure that they keep the standards for academic content to make it more accessible to students and all the teaching materials should be authentic and culturally relevant (Jun , 2012).

## **2.3. Teaching Methods**

According to Richard (2010), one of methods in English teaching is direct methods which forbid the students to use his or her mother tongue and the rules of grammar in order that students can be focus on good pronunciation. Another method is about Translation that it means the way to form the source language to the target language and Grammar that it means the way to commit to memory about vocabularies and some sentences formula. Again Richard suggest about the Audio Lingual that it means acquiring habits and then suggestopedia that it suggested the students to feel that the language is easy to learn.

## **3. Methodology**

This study was designed to address the main questions about what the difficulties of teaching English to the Taiwanese students of Cram School (Buxiban) are and the way to solve those difficulties.

### **3.1 Participant**

The participant in this study is a native speaker from England who teaches English to the

Taiwanese students of Cram School (Buxiban). The object in this study is the reality classroom activities of teaching English to the Taiwanese students of Cram School. One native speaker was recruited for an in-depth face to face interview. In this study, the identity of participant was pseudonyms as presented in table 1.

**Table 1:** *Participant’s Background Information*

| <b>Name</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Nationality</b> | <b>Teaching Experience</b>  | <b>Education Level</b>  |
|-------------|---------------|--------------------|---|---|
| Tram        | Male          | English            | 14 years<br>Taiwan,<br>Manchester<br>(UK), and Sierra<br>Leone, West<br>Africa. | University of<br>Cambridge,<br>Certificate in<br>English<br>Language<br>Teaching to<br>Adults (CELTA),<br>2013<br><br>Diploma in<br>Newspaper<br>Journalism,<br>University of<br>Central<br>Lancashire, 1994<br><br>BA (Hons.)<br>Degree,<br>University of<br>Liverpool, 1989 |

**3.2 Research Instruments**

The writer used descriptive qualitative research design in which it only purposed to describe the difficulties faced by a native teacher in teaching English. The instruments used are interview and observation. Observations were conducted and field notes were taken in order to find more about the difficulties of teaching English faced by a native English teacher. Interview was conducted to find more about the difficulties faced by a native teacher in teaching English speaking.

## **4. Data Analysis**

Data obtained from observation and interview was analyzed qualitatively. In data analysis, the researcher did tape recording with the participant's consent and then the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim analysis.

## **5. Results**

### **5.1 The main difficulties in teaching English to Taiwanese students at Cram School.**

The data collected on this issue revealed that there are four major difficulty of teaching English speaking to Taiwanese junior high school.

#### **5.1.1 Mother Tongue Use of the teacher**

He finds out some of the children that cannot pronounce the words specially the difficult ones properly so he must spend a lot of time to train them till they are able to pronounce the words the way he does. The teacher does repeatedly to pronounce those words. Some of the students have speaking problems in pronunciation. It takes time to get them to see the movement of the teacher's tongue, and feel the air of the sound. Sometimes a child is shy and reluctant to speak up. It's really hard for them to do it right since the teacher comes from England who speaks in British style of pronunciation.

#### **5.1.2. Mix Ability**

Although the classes are graded (Elementary, Upper-intermediate, Advanced, and Superior). The system has very little meaning as the Upper-intermediate classes focus more on conversation and fluency. So sometimes able students attend them to get communication practice. Other (weaker) students will attend based on the advertised Upper-intermediate grading of the class, and their speaking skills are often much weaker. Also some students just turn up at the school randomly, and attend whatever class happens to be on at the time, regardless of its level.

In many ways, in that Buxiban (an English shop as the teacher calls it). The problems are unavoidable. In Taiwan, more than in other countries, the customer is always right, and people come to class with the attitude of being a customer, not a student. They do not seem to understand that the teacher-student dynamic is a relationship that they should invest in the class and contribute. They tend to be very passive, and seek and expect only input from the teacher,

rather than (more natural) two-way interaction.

### **5.1.3. Lack of Motivation**

The first, the motivation from the teacher can be seen that the standard of teaching at Cram school (Buxiban) can vary wildly from one teacher to the next, from one class to the next. There is no minimum standard. Most of the teachers are not teachers. They have no teaching qualifications, aptitude, or real commitment to teaching. This means that sometimes classes can be mediocre. Teaching is about more, so much more, than making money. But the school does not help in this regard. It offers no support or training which demotivates teachers massively. Teaching tends to take an ironic tone, as though there is a shared understanding that many of the students are pretending to learn, and most of the teachers (foreign ones at least) are only pretending to teach. The second, the motivation from the students can be seen that motivation and energy levels differ greatly from one student to the next. Many students come to the Cram school at their parents' behest, and after long days at school they are often tired in the evening. By their own admission some students come to class simply to kill time, which challenges the motivation of the teacher because he or she (the teacher) must still drive himself or herself to produce an interesting and excellent class. Students of this kind show no improvement from week to week, from month to month, even from year to year, and they can have an extremely corrosive effect on a teacher's commitment and enthusiasm.

### **5.1.4. Continuity**

Students attend classes voluntarily and sporadically. There is no register or attendance record. For example, maybe seven students will attend the teacher 'business class on Tuesday November 10, but maybe only one of the same seven will attend the business class on Tuesday November 17. This makes it impossible to look at any topic in depth. Every class has to be stand-alone, meaning that each topic is covered only on a shallow and superficial level. Of course when students do not attend regularly, it is impossible to review anything. In addition, it's very often that students do not preview the material. So the students come to the class 'cold'. This slows the pace of the class. It increases the amount of Teacher Talking Time (the teacher has to explain the topic), reducing the amount of time students have to think for themselves and to practice their speaking skills.

### **5.1.5. Exam Culture**

Another reason for student passivity is Taiwan's exam culture, which produces students with very poor English pronunciation and communication skills. Communication is reprioritized in the Taiwanese system, it is not rewarded, and so students do not value or seek to practice it. Test scores come first, and this is clear when the teachers put students in pairs or groups and give the students a handout with questions to answer. They tend to give "yes", "no", and "maybe" answer, and the exercise is over very quickly. They have neither the skills nor motivation to look at issues or ideas in depth. It is not their fault. It is the system, which leaves their creative ability completely untapped.

It is important to note that the teacher does not blame students for the social and cultural environment in which they live. The teacher tries to understand it and to work within it, to support them, but the teacher also actively look for opportunities where teacher and students can positively and constructively move beyond it.

### **5.1.6. Buxiban (Cram School) materials**

Buxiban materials do no help the teacher to be a good teacher; they force the teacher to fight hard not to be a bad teacher. Cram school Buxiban (and all similar cram schools across Taiwan and Asia) could help by providing the teacher with a new CD player that works properly instead of one that sticks and jumps. It could revise, update, vary, and invigorate its teaching materials, and make a real effort to grade materials properly. But as the teacher mentioned that Cram school is a business, and a successful one, and there is no financial profit in improving materials.

It would be nice if the school provided the teacher with a working Internet connection, teacher doesn't have a computer, so the teacher does all his preparation in an Internet cafe. Although the Buxiban teaching materials are visually impressive, they are boring and lifeless, and mistakes are common. The writing is poorly researched, and lacks spark. It can be felt and heard the boredom of the speakers and writers in the teaching materials and this transmits itself to the students.

### **5.1.7. Monologue rather than dialogue**

Conversations in the Upper-intermediate magazine often resemble monologues rather than dialogues, i.e. when the teacher puts students in pairs to read the conversations, one student



will have to wait for a long time before it is his or her turn to speak. This is very boring for students, and they are liable to switch off. The purpose of Buxiban is to make money, and they produce monthly magazines, which really contain much too much for most students. In that this is the case, the teacher is forced to rush through magazine articles, so that the students feel that the magazine is being used, and they are getting value for money. As a result, the vocabulary, sentence patterns, and ideas tend to skim off the top of their heads, to bounce off. Not much goes into the long-term memory.

The teacher teaches a news class whose teaching resource is a two-page handout from Reuter's news. Cram school makes no attempt to grade this material and, in spite of teacher's best efforts, many students who come to this class feel intimidated, frustrated, and discouraged. Because no care is taken with the grading or presentation of the material, many students have their passion for English murdered. For example, one week they had an article entitled "Amazon, Google race to get your DNA into the cloud", to be read by students with limited ability and without any preparation. This article included tough vocabulary on IT, biochemistry, and business. Teaching totally ungraded materials like this becomes an almost pointless exercise, and the teacher has to nearly kill himself to lift the class to a level where the students are actually learning something. Very often a new student will come to the class once, and never be seen again. Very often a student, perhaps between 16-20 years of age, will come to class, bright-eyed and bushy tailed at 7pm, but by 8:15pm his or her confidence and enthusiasm have been shot and smashed by the material. Doing this to people should be a criminal offense. The way to solve the difficulties in teaching English to Taiwanese students at Cram School (Buxiban)

### **5.2.1. Experience**

The most valuable asset in the classroom is experience. This can only be gained one hour at a time, but preparing thoroughly for each class, maintaining a high pace in class, looking for opportunities to make the class fun and interesting, putting ourselves in the students' shoes, and noting and responding to student's individual needs can all create a dynamic and meaningful teaching and learning experience. The problem is bigger, much bigger than Buxiban. The problem is with the state education system more generally, which is set up more and more simply to meet the needs of the economy, rather than encouraging self-expression, self-realization, creativity, and the development of leadership, resilience, and personal character. It is

a problem of the co modification of education, and of its individualization away from common goals and common classroom experiences; the new classroom is a competitive and proprietary place, where students compete for knowledge in pursuit of the advancement of their own specific material needs.

### **5.2.2. Reflection and Creativity**

As a teacher, reflection and creativity can neutralize much of the mediocrity. For example, if a student mentions a TV show, novel, movie, issue, or experience this week. Can I do some research and create supplementary materials on that TV show, novel, movie, issue, or experience for next week's class? Personalizing and tailoring classes, using things that students are actually interested in, is a vital and massively successful teaching strategy. Student motivation soars. Of course this means that the teacher spends time and money preparing the materials, but if this is what it takes to create a meaningful, excellent, and lively class (something that students will remember), then it has to be done. Students respond to leadership, and they are quick to identify and respond to teachers who actually remember what they say from one week to the next, and who are really interested in them, and who will do much more than just look tired, preoccupied, and lethargic at the front of the class.

Teaching is both a responsibility and a privilege. The teacher has to try not to bring the in a factory where they make buckets. You can be as boring and jaded as you like, and it doesn't matter if you get things wrong. There are no executive level people in the Buxiban branches, teachers and office staff only. The teacher has given up asking for support from Buxiban, because it falls on deaf ears, and the teacher feels foolish. The teacher tries to solve the monologue problem in the High-intermediate class by asking students to ignore the two people speaking, and just read sentence by sentence, which works pretty well. In addition, reviewing materials is the be-all and end-all of authentic, effective teaching and learning.

### **5.2.3. Rule number one**

Rule is number one in teaching. Teacher should never ever take some personal problems, complaints, injustices, frustrations, and bad vibes into the class. The students are not responsible for teacher's professional or personal problems, so they don't have to suffer from them. The classroom should only be a place of fun and sunshine, of hope and opportunity, of creativity and possibility.

## **6. Discussion & Recommendation**

The difficulties faced by the teachers in teaching English derive from the teacher himself, the students and Cram school (Buxiban). The teacher tried to cope these difficulties by using particular techniques and strategies in teaching. The first, the teacher use his own experience to manage the class. Classroom management is not a gift bestowed upon some teachers; classroom management is a skill that can be achieved through training and many years of experience in the field (Bosch, 2006, as cited in Zafer & Aslihan, 2012).

The second, teacher use his own reflection and creativity as it is very important for teacher in the classroom. To reflect means that teacher responds to some difficulties in particularly from students. Richards and Lockhart (1996) represent the first view when focusing on the teaching process of the individual teacher in the classroom. They claim that in reflective teaching “teachers and student teachers collect data about teaching, examine their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and teaching practices, and use the information obtained as a basis for critical reflection about teaching” (p. 1). To teach creatively means that teacher tries to make students encouraged in learning. Guilford (1950) stated that “a creative act is an instance of learning and that a comprehensive learning theory must take into account both insight and creative activity” (p. 446). In addition, doing creatively in the classroom is very useful like providing some media, tools and the like to encourage students. Both punishment and reward are needed to encourage students as well.

The third is about the rule that teachers are not suggested to carry some personal problems, complaints, injustices, frustrations, and bad vibes into the classroom because teachers will have some difficulties in conducting, managing, reviewing, and assessing their teaching reflections because of several obstacles (Rajaratenam, 2012, as cited in Nur, 2014).

Finally, every teacher will face any difficulties in every classroom, the important thing is the way to overcome those problems and focus on the goal of learning. Therefore, teacher is suggested to be patient and flexible, aware of the students’ goals and necessity, smart and creative. This finding confirmed previous research that teachers must be aware of the responsibility in the classroom to achieve the best result on career as well as what their customers' needs. At last, teachers and learners of EFL may make their teaching and learning activities more effective (Homa & Karim , 2009).

## **7. Conclusion**

This study revealed that the main difficulties of teaching English to the Taiwanese Students of Cram School (Buxiban) are related to the mother tongue use of the teacher that make the students get challenged to catch some words from the teacher since the teacher is a native speaker, and then the mix ability of the students as well. In addition, lack of motivation that belong to the teacher and students influenced from some reasons also become some difficulties of teaching English included the continuity which influenced by the students who attend the class voluntarily and sporadically. Taiwan's exam culture itself also make students a bit passive in class, Buxiban (Cram School) materials themselves which use the upper-intermediate magazine for students to read one by one also make student become monologue rather than dialogue.

Teaching English as a foreign language is a challenging. Since English is as a foreign language in Taiwan. Every student has some problems and also every teacher has his/her own ways to deal with. Since teachers get lots of difficulties, feel angry, upset and just give up in teaching English as a foreign language. It is suggested to use other ways to attract students and to release students 'energy, like activities, listening to the music, playing games, watching movie, chatting, contest, internet, so use those to encourage students in teaching English and it is also suggested to create some network with other teachers to encourage students to study English enthusiastically. This study shows that the teacher believes that the ways to solve those difficulties are the use of experience in order to create the class fun, interesting, a dynamic and meaningful teaching. Reflection and Creativity of the teacher can neutralize much of the mediocrity and finally the rules on the classroom realities are number one which means that students are not responsible for teacher's professional or personal problems.

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