

Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Remedial Application in a Preparatory Class Programme

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Abstract – The aim of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the remedial class application integrated to the preparatory class programme at a foundation university depending on focus group interviews and questionnaires. The evaluation of the focus group interviews and the questionnaires made it possible to identify the internal and external reasons for the failure of the students; and internal factors were observed to play more effective role compared to the external ones in learning English. Final grades of the remedial class students showed that majority of the students were not successful enough to pass the preparatory class, which may indicate the inefficiency of the remedial programme. However, the discussion made in the paper is hoped to provide insights into the significance of identifying the interactive factors playing an important role in curriculum development and programme evaluation from the point of view of the students and the teachers.

Keywords: programme evaluation, remedial application, individual variables

I. INTRODUCTION

Language learners vary greatly in their abilities to acquire their second or foreign language, and they have certain characteristics which lead to more or less successful learning. It is also observed that in the same classroom setting, some students improve rapidly while others struggle along making very slow progress. This subject has always been a matter of curiosity, and researchers have found out some elements which have influence on the act of learning.

A number of personality characteristics and variables such as self-esteem, empathy, dominance, talkativeness, responsiveness, and motivation are considered to affect language learning though it is difficult to identify and measure them (Lightbown and Spada, 1993: 38-39; Walker and Green, 2009: 463).

The issue of learning styles is another aspect which has an important role on learning. It is suggested that different learners approach a task with a different set of skills and preferred strategies (Lightbown and Spada, 1993: 40-41).

When identifying students' difficulties in learning language, the other factor that must be considered is the effectiveness of the curriculum application. The main issue to deal with is related to different levels of planning and development in developing a course or a set of instructional materials, which entails identifying the learners' proficiency levels, analyzing

students' problems, and making ongoing assessment and evaluation of the programme applied (Richards, 2001: 145-151).

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the remedial class application in the light of the research which points out the need to consider sources of students' difficulties in language learning and the role of the interactive factors in programme evaluation.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Subjects

The participants of focus group interviews were 5 remedial class teachers and 6 remedial class students. The teachers of focus group interviews whose work experience was ranging between 3 and 23 years had been assigned by the institution to teach remedial classes. 184 remedial class students and 15 remedial class teachers were also applied a questionnaire.

B. Instruments

One of the instruments was focus groups where the stress is laid on the interactive aspect of data collection. Focus groups are used as a method on their own or in combination with other methods – surveys, observations, single interviews and so on; and as simulations of everyday discourses and conversations or as a quasi-naturalistic method for studying the generation of social representations or social knowledge in general (Flick, 1998: 122-124). In addition, focus groups may have some advantages over the more laborious and opportunistic aspects of observational fieldwork. Bloor et al. (2001; cited in Barbour 2007: 36) claim that focus groups provide “concentrated and detailed information on an area of group life.” In this study, focus group interviews teachers and students were asked two main questions. The first question was about the reasons of students' placement in remedial classes. The second question was aimed to reveal their ideas about the application of remedial classes and to learn if they thought this programme was effective or not.

The other instrument was a questionnaire applied both to remedial class students and teachers. Questionnaires are intended to facilitate communication, usually brief, but always driven by the researcher's own agenda (Davies, 2007: 82). In this study, the questionnaire given to the remedial class students was composed of three parts and 32 items. The first part was about their foreign language educational background. The items in the second part were about the reasons why they were placed in remedial classes. The last part included items designed to find out their ideas about the effectiveness of remedial class application. Likewise, in the questionnaire given to the teachers, they were required to identify their ideas in relation to the reasons of students' placement in remedial classes and the effectiveness of the programme. Before designing the questionnaire, the remedial class students were given blank sheets on which they were requested to write what they thought about the reasons of their failure and remedial class application. In the designing phase of the questionnaire the items were evaluated with a statistician in terms of wording and content, and 4-likert scale was decided to be used. The gathered data were evaluated using The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 17)

which helped the researcher to summarize descriptive statistics. The data were analyzed by means of correlation analysis.

III. FINDINGS

A. Evaluation of the Focus Group Interviews with Teachers and Students

The questions directed to the teachers were as follows:

1. Why do you think the students were placed in remedial classes at the end of the first semester?
2. Can we say that exams matched up with the subjects dealt with in the class?
3. What do you think about the curriculum in the first semester? Can it be a reason for students to be placed in remedial classes?
4. What do you think about the remedial programme? Did this programme help students to improve?
5. What do you think about the *Compiled Book*?

The questions directed to the students were as follows:

1. Why do you think you were placed in remedial classes at the end of the first semester?
2. Did the exams match up with the subjects?
3. What do you think about teachers' communication with you?
4. What do you think about the teaching style of your teachers? Can it be a reason for you to be placed in remedial class?
5. What do you think about the course book you studied in the first semester?
6. What do you think about the curriculum in the first semester?
7. What do you think about the programme applied in the second semester and *Compiled Book*?
8. Can you evaluate yourselves? Are you able to progress?

Preliminary analysis of focus group interviews with teachers and students was made by grouping their ideas expressed as an answer to the questions stated above. Then teachers' and students' evaluation of the remedial programme related to a) the reasons why students were placed in remedial class; and b) effectiveness of the programme was classified as follows:

Teachers' Evaluation:

a) Reasons Why Students Were Placed in Remedial Classes

Internal Reasons:

- Lack of intrinsic motivation
 - a. not liking English
 - b. being against English
 - c. considering themselves not capable of learning English
- Not being able to succeed although studying
- Having insufficient educational background
- Having difficulty in adapting the university environment

External Reasons:

- Limit of absence (240 hours) being too much
- Passing preparatory school not being obligatory
- Classes being crowded
- Families who do not give importance to education
- Curriculum being fast especially for zero beginners

b) Effectiveness of the Remedial Programme

- It was not helpful
- It was helpful until students restarted studying *Success*
- It depends on students' personalities
- *Compiled Book* did not have enough speaking and listening activities, and it was boring for a remedial student

Students' Evaluation:

a) Reasons Why They Were Placed in Remedial Classes

Internal Reasons:

- Lack of intrinsic motivation
 - a. not liking English
 - b. not studying
 - c. stopping studying after failing in the exam

- Having insufficient educational background
- Not being good at time management
- Having difficulty in memorizing new words

External Reasons:

- Limit of absence (240 hours) being too much
- Exams which did not match up with the subjects
- Teaching styles of teachers

b) Effectiveness of the Remedy Program

- It was helpful
- It was helpful at the beginning but it got worse
- There could have been more speaking activities in the *Compiled Book*

B. Evaluation of the Questionnaire Applied To the Students and Teachers

Evaluation of the questionnaire applied to the students:

The first question in the first part of the questionnaire was designed to learn how long the students had been learning English. The results show that 109 out of 184 students have been learning English less than a year. The period is between 2 and 4 years for 35 students, more than 7 years for 21 students and between 5 and 7 years for 19 students. The second question was about their grades at the end of the first semester. The number of the students whose grades were between 10.1 and 12.5 out of 12.5 was 65 out of 184 students. There were 46 students whose grades were between 8.1 and 10. The number of those indicating that their grades were between 6.1 and 8 was 44. Lastly, 29 students' grades were between 3 and 6. The third question was designed to obtain information about the students' absenteeism. 80 out of 184 students reported that their hours of absenteeism ranged between 61 and 121 hours. 67 students said that they did not come to school less than 60 hours. The number of the students not attending classes between 122 and 182 hours was 32. Finally, 5 students reported that their hours of absenteeism were between 183 and 240 hours.

The analysis of the second part of the questionnaire revealed that students' lack of foreign language education background (mean: 3.0815) was the main reason of their placement in remedial class. The other dominant reasons were their lack of learning strategies (mean: 2.4239) and intrinsic motivation (mean: 2.0625). Besides, Pearson correlation coefficients indicated some relationship between students' failure and its reasons. Results show that there is a high positive relationship between their failure and intrinsic motivation ($r=.692$ $p<0.01$). There is also a high positive relationship between students' failure and their lack of learning strategies ($r=.554$ $p<0.01$).

The analysis of the third part of the questionnaire indicated that majority of the students regarded the teachers and their teaching styles as successful (mean: 2.6649). The students also emphasized that they found the remedial programme useful (mean: 2.5924). The last point to be considered is that students thought that the exams matched up with subjects dealt with in the class (mean: 2.5707). Pearson correlation coefficients indicated some relationship between the effectiveness of the programme and the teachers, the course book and the exams. Results show that there is a high positive relationship between the effectiveness of the programme and the *Compiled Book* ($r=.859$ $p<0.01$). A high positive relationship is also clear between effectiveness of the programme and the teachers' performance ($r=.815$ $p<0.01$), and the exams ($r=.765$ $p<0.01$).

Evaluation of the questionnaire applied to the teachers:

The analysis of the first part of the questionnaire revealed that the main reason of students' failure is that they did not attend the classes regularly (mean: 3.4). Another dominant reason is their lack of foreign language educational background (mean: 3.1333). Other reasons are students' lack of intrinsic motivation (mean: 3.0833) and learning strategies (mean: 2.8222). Furthermore, Pearson correlation coefficients indicated some relationship between students' failure and its reasons. Results show that there is a high positive relationship between their failure and intrinsic motivation ($r=.804$ $p<0.01$). There is also a high positive relationship between students' failure and their lack of learning strategies ($r=.752$ $p<0.01$).

The analysis of the second part of the questionnaire showed that majority of the teachers agrees that the exams matched up with the subjects dealt with in the class (mean: 3.0333). The other issue to be pointed out is that more than the half of the teachers regarded the *Compiled Book* as suitable to the students' level (mean: 2.9333). Pearson correlation coefficients indicated some relationship between the effectiveness of the programme and the course book and the exams. Results show that there is a high positive relationship between the effectiveness of the programme and the *Compiled Book* ($r=.552$ $p<0.05$). A high positive relationship is also observed between the effectiveness of the programme and the exams ($r=.742$ $p<0.01$).

C. Evaluation of the Exam Results of the Students

606 students who enrolled at the Preparatory School took the Placement Test at the beginning of the fall semester and they were placed in preparatory classes according to their test results. These students took three quizzes, three achievement exams and an oral exam, and those 235 students whose grades were below 50 points were placed in remedial classes at the end of the fall semester. They followed a different course book entitled *Compiled Book* for four weeks (28 hours a week) and then followed their original course book called *Success*. These remedial class students took three quizzes, three achievement tests and an oral exam in the spring semester and had a final exam in the end. Out of 235 students, 193 students could not pass the final exam and they went on their education in the summer term. In the exam which was given at the end of the summer term 49 remedial class students were able to be successful. In conclusion, 91 students out of 235 students managed to succeed in the Preparatory School.

This can be regarded as an indication of the ineffectiveness of the remedial class application. However, this result can also be seen as an indicator of the interactive factors playing an important role in providing for effective teaching, such as the influence of the internal factors resulting from the students' educational background and lack of their intrinsic motivation. Therefore it is not possible to claim the inefficiency of the application by depending on the majority of the students failed. The results could have been different if the application had lasted for more than a month.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the remedial application integrated to the preparatory school programme at a foundation university. The evaluation of the programme was made a) by conducting focus group interviews with the students and teachers of the remedial class programme; b) by designing questionnaires for the students and teachers of the remedial class programme; and c) by analyzing the exam results of the remedial class students.

Evaluation of the focus group interviews made it possible to identify the internal and external reasons for the failure of the students; and internal factors were identified as having a more effective role compared to the external ones in language learning. In the light of the evaluation of the questionnaire made with the SPSS programme, students' and teachers' ideas were identified in relation to the reasons for the students' difficulties in coping with the intensive preparatory programme and different aspects of the application of the remedial class programme. The evaluation of the questionnaires revealed parallel results to the ones obtained from the focus group interviews in terms of indicating the significance of internal factors in language learning. These results were in line with Lightbown and Spada (1993: 38-39) who view individual characteristics as the major factor in the process of language learning.

The majority of the students who were not successful enough to pass the final exam may not be seen as an indication of the inefficiency of the programme itself when the whole process of the application is evaluated in the light of the criteria suggested by Richards (2001) for language curriculum development and evaluation. These are related to identifying the learners' proficiency levels, analyzing students' problems, and making ongoing assessment and evaluation of the programme applied.

Evaluation of the preparatory class programme and the remedial application in the light of the factors that should be taken into consideration in curriculum design reveals three main issues in relation to the inefficiency of the remedial class application. First of all, to determine the students to be exempted from preparatory class a placement test was given at the beginning of the academic year. However, the students who were placed in the preparatory school followed the same programme despite the differences in their level of proficiency ranging from beginner to pre-intermediate. Secondly, analysis of students' foreign language education background was not taken into consideration in making decisions for the placement of the students to the preparatory classes. Finally, remedial class application was put into practice in the second term and for a month for the students who had difficulty in coping with the intensive

preparatory school programme, and these students had to take the same final exam with the students following the regular programme although they were behind the programme.

Depending on the results of the study, it can be concluded that identifying the strengths and weaknesses of a teaching programme from the point of view of the students and teachers makes it possible to have an understanding of the interactive factors playing an important role in programme evaluation.

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