

Differentiated Instruction and Respective Learning Environment in EFL, ESL and ELA

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Abstract: Some people may think that teaching English is just teaching English whether it is taught in China or in America. They could be right because English teachers always teach listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in both cases. However, the fact is that there are fundamental differences among (English as a Foreign Language), ESL (English as Second Language) and ELA (English Language Arts) students, teachers, classroom instruction, and even classroom management. The aim of this article is to compare and analyze EFL, ESL and ELA teachings in many ways. I used to teach EFL at a China's university for five years and at a Macau high school for over three years and now I have been teaching ESL and ELA at an American public high school for nine years. I would like to share my teaching experience, my classroom observations in both countries and acknowledgment of Chinese basic education and American K-12 education with the Chinese educational counterparts. We can learn from one another.

	English as a Foreign Language	English as a Second Language	English Language Arts
Definition	EFL is taught to the students whose primary languages are other than English in a non-English-speaking country like China.	ESL is taught to the students whose home languages are not English in an English-speaking country like the United States.	ELA is taught to the students whose native language is English in an English-speaking country like the United States.
Classroom Learning Environment	An EFL classroom in a China's high school is packed with about 40-50 students. It is orderly, attentive, respectful and obedient.	An ESL classroom in an American high school is a small class with 15 students. It is supportive, multi-cultural, respectful and safe.	An ELA classroom is loaded with 25-35 students. It is open, dynamic, competitive and self-controlled.
Teacher certification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three-year associate degree in English or four-year bachelor /master degree in English from a teacher college or a normal university • A teacher certificate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four-year bachelor /master in English from the educational program in any American university • A secondary education teacher certificate in English • ESL endorsement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four-year bachelor/master degree in English from an American university • A secondary education teacher certificate in English

Instructional Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rote learning • Knowledge transmission • Grammar/vocabulary-oriented practice • Teacher-centered activities • Low interaction among students • Little real-world practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rote learning for vocabulary • Student-centered activities • Less teaching and more practice • Accommodations and modifications for sub-groups • Grammar-oriented writing • Real-life application 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student engagement • Testing data-driven instruction • Differentiated strategies • Chunking, monitoring and adjusting • Research-based project/presentation • Real-life application
Classroom Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • orderly, structured, organized, and up-down managed • responsible and obedient students • the teacher-student relationship like parent-child one • a mentoring teacher's (banzhuren) job 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • safe, supportive multicultural and interactive • respectful and isolated students • the teacher-student relationship like adult-teenage one • individual teacher's responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dynamic, academic, collaborative and informative • accountable and open students • the teacher-student relationship like counselor-client

The English Language Learners and Learning Environment/Climate:

EFL students learn English to pass exams as a necessary part of their education, to go to study abroad or to improve their job prospects at an organization or business with an international focus in their own countries. They share the same language and culture in the classroom, so they have no culture shock and no language barrier. In most circumstances, an EFL class is a bilingual one, in which EFL students are encouraged to use their strong home language as a scaffold to enhance their EFL learning. In China, English is a compulsory subject since the third grade and it is on all the exams, such as zhongkao (the senior high school entrance exam), gaokao (the college entrance exam), etc. The situation in which EFL students are vulnerable to their native language with a few English words, phrases and sentences is being improved. The learning climate is attentive and respectful, but tense and boring. 40 to 50 students learn all the required subjects in the same classroom all day and all year. The learning environment is packed, static and passive. In such a classroom, EFL students have very few chances to interact with the teacher and their peers in English. Learning English consumes a

significant investment of Chinese students' time, energy and money; however, they get poor return. They still cannot speak English fluently, write analytically and read academically for a number of reasons: (1) the single and static learning strategy (rote learning), (2) learning test-centered and grammar-oriented English without the real world practice, (3) having very few opportunities to apply English to their lives inside and outside the classroom (no English language learning environment), (4) the influence of their native culture, such as being afraid of losing face or being unwilling to challenge the authority, (5) the EFL curriculum, EFL teachers' subject content knowledge (textbook) and instructional pedagogy (delivering knowledge) need to be updated. However, China is undergoing an education reform toward the combination of Chinese Traditional pedagogy (learning with strong resolution and having full interpretation of knowledge) and western teaching methodology (creativity and individuality). The challenge for EFL students is how to acquire five English language skills in a non-native English speaker country.

ESL students learn English as structured English immersion (SEI) because they struggle with English language. Some of them are immigrants, some are foreign students and the others are American born immigrant-background citizens. They speak English fluently, but they are not proficient in English literacy. When they register a public school in America, their parents must honestly take Home Language Survey. If a school finds the student whose home language is other than English, he or she is required to take English Placement test. Based on the composite scores of their test, they are placed in the different ESL classes (pre-emergency/emergency, basic, intermediate and proficiency) of the ESL program. An ESL class is of mixed nationalities. Culture shock brings ELLs psychological depression, physical frustration and emotional irritation. They do not know how to communicate with their peers from other cultures. All these factors affect their acquisition of English. They are exposed daily to English speaking culture so that they can master their listening and speaking skills more easily and quickly. English proficiency is a specific and practical survival skill for them. Everything is taught only in English in the ESL classroom, which has the maximum capacity of 15 students according to the USA educational regulations. In the classroom, the learning climate is positive and encouraging, but sometimes disruptive and distractive because they struggle with English. The learning environment is supportive, multicultural and safe. The ESL students experience a four-hour English intervention class (listening/speaking, literacy coach, grammar/writing, vocabulary/reading) every day so that they can be reclassified from the ESL program by passing the state's English language learner assessment. This way, they can be integrated immediately into the mainstream classroom to fulfill the same graduation requirements as the general students. In fact, they still struggle in the mainstream classroom because they are proficient, but not fluent in English. Due to this, they take the same language assessment every year for two years after they are reclassified for the first time. Then they can completely be released from the ESL program if they pass it every time. The challenge for the ESL students (95% are Latinos) in American public high schools is how to overcome their English language barrier, culture shock, the family and social factors in order to be able to graduate from high school and to be eligible for college.

ELA students study English itself (reading, writing, speaking and listening) in order to be able to be widely, deeply and thoughtfully engaged in high-quality literary and informational text. They also develop their language skills for any creative and purposeful expression in

English and for professional literacy readiness for success in college, career and life. The learning climate is dynamic, self-confident and open, but competitive and challenging. The learning environment is interactive, flexible and informative. ELA students do not have the same difficulties (English oral expression barrier, culture shock) in learning English as EFL and ESL students encounter in the classroom. They are more self-esteemed, more actively- engaged and more openly-expressed than EFL and ESL students in the classroom. As a result, English instruction is advanced, efficient and productive because it includes critical-thinking activities such as discussions, debates, interviews, and projects. At American high schools, freshmen learn genres of literature, such as poetry, drama, fiction and non-fiction. Sophomores learn world literature. Juniors learn American literature and seniors learn British and European literature. They take a 50-minute ELA class every day and in the ELA class, they are mostly engaged in group discussions, individual research and evidence-based projects. The challenge for the ELA students is how to become college-level English literate.

Generally speaking, English has become a universal language. Being literate in English is a competence that all students need in order to be successful in the 21st century competitive global work force.

The English Teachers and Classroom Instruction with Classroom Management:

EFL teachers must have an associate degree from a three-year college or a bachelor degree or a master degree in English from a normal university and a teacher certificate. The quality of teaching EFL varies among regions because of the unbalance of educational resource distribution. In some public schools, EFL traditional teaching (test-centered and grammar-oriented) still prevail while in some other schools, the traditional instruction is combined with technology-integrated modern teaching (knowledge of language and EFL skills). First of all, testing is not the purpose of EFL learning and grammar is not regarded as a skill. EFL students should master five EFL skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating) to get well-prepared for success in the college-level academic content. EFL teachers should connect grammar with writing and translating. An example is analyzing and correcting the common grammatical errors students make in their writings, like spelling, punctuations, capitalization, subject/verb agreement, verb tenses, etc. One more example is to analyze the compound-complex sentences and tell the difference between the attributive clause and appositive clause in order to make the accurate translation. Today, more and more EFL teachers use multi-media to audio-visually present the language difficult points and abstract content knowledge to students. This is very encouraging. In fact, EFL needs students to have more practice in class, but some EFL classes have low interaction among students and are more lecture-focused. Some EFL lectures occupy 30-40 minutes out of a 45-minute period. The recommended allocation of a class period should be 5 minute bell work, 15 minute lecture and 20 minute student-centric activities and 5 minute exit pass. This way, students are provided with multiple opportunities to participate in the group discussion, pair- share, whole class brainstorming, and the oral presentations to

improve their listening and speaking skills. On the other hand, the Chinese EFL teachers pay more attention to classroom instruction than to the classroom management, either because they don't think that classroom management is as important as classroom instruction or because they think that it is a mentoring teacher's (banzhuren) job. Classroom instruction and the classroom management cannot be separated but are interwoven. Students do not only learn and work with the content, but also interact with others about the content due to their cognitive demands (academic and social tasks). The five-minute passing time is critical to teachers and students as well. Chinese students are not allowed to transfer from classroom to classroom. They are fed up with sitting at their desks in the same classroom all day long and even all school year. As a result, they lose many benefits, such as their interest in learning, their responsibilities (picking up the master schedule, going to the right classroom on time), social abilities (socializing with friends in the hallway, making new friends in a new classroom, getting exposed to diversity), relaxing time and refreshing themselves mentally and physically. If these teachers have their own classrooms, they can post expectations for students and decorate the room with their subject content and student work so that students can be exposed to rich information around them in the classroom. Briefly speaking, a motivational, engaging and safe learning environment can reinforce classroom instruction and keep students accountable for learning.

ESL teachers are required to have a bachelor degree, the secondary education certificate in English subject and the ESL endorsement. Even ESL content teachers are also required to get an ESL or SEI endorsement because teaching ESL students is a daunting task. In an ESL classroom, English language proficiency, academic history and culture vary significantly. Some ESL students speak English as fluently as a native English speaker, but they have no literacy in English while others cannot speak English at all and cannot read and write in English. This is why they are offered ESL curriculum including phonology, morphology, phonetics, lexicology, semantics and syntax with the standard accommodation support (simplify language in English, use bilingual dictionaries, take more breaks and several shorter sessions, etc.) on the daily-basis. These accommodations are also applied to all the standardized tests. When ESL teachers prepare their lesson plans; they should consider the varied levels of ELL's English proficiency (pre-emergency and emergency, basic, intermediate and proficiency) and incorporate the differentiated instruction into their classrooms so as to be able to meet each individual student's needs. For example, when they require their students to write a persuasive essay, they can design three types of writing assignments. One is for slow learners to write a three paragraph essay (introduction, body and conclusion) and meet three writing criterion like idea/content, organization and conventions), so they can get full points on this essay; another one is for middle learners to write a five-paragraph essay (introduction, three bodies and conclusion) and meet five writing traits, such as idea/content, organization, word choice, sentence fluency and conventions, so they can get full points; the other is for advanced learners to write a six-paragraph essay (introduction, three bodies, one counter-argument and conclusion) and meet six traits of writing including idea/content, organization, word choice, sentence fluency, voice and conventions), so they can get full points. If ESL students' needs are satisfied, their learning contributions are

valued, their cultures are respected and their learning environment is safe, they can become more self-esteeming and more successful in school. A typical ESL class is composed of 95% Latinos (Mexico, Cuba), 4% African refugees (Somalia, Kenya) and 1 % Asians (Vietnam, Iraq). ESL classroom management is more difficult and complicated than EFL's and ELA's. ESL teachers have to deal with ELL's physical frustration, emotional irritation and psychological depression. In order to ease these issues, an ESL teacher creates a multicultural and engaging learning environment, decorates the room with the national flags of the countries where his or her students came from and with a bookcase filled with bilingual dictionaries, thesaurus, English dictionaries and textbooks, posts ESL standards and objectives, all types of student work and vocabulary words posted on the wall. Parental involvement in their child's education is also a crucial part of classroom management, including regular calls to parents, parent conferences, parent teacher association meetings, school orientation, open house, and so on. Differentiated instruction and effective management improve ESL teacher's practice and ELL's language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and behavior for success in the mainstream classroom.

ELA teachers teach not only English Literature, from Shakespeare to Hemingway and from Leo Tolstoy to Chinua Achebe, including American authors and writers from any other country whose works is written in English, but also literacy in a variety of content areas, such as social studies, science and technical subject. They must obtain at least a bachelor of Art in English and the secondary education certificate in English subject. ELA curriculum covers reading comprehension, reading strategies, literary analysis, research, grammatical instruction in the context of language use, writing process, types of writing, study skills (Cornell Notes) and test taking. High school ELA is mainly taught with American literature and the world literature, which have relevant social studies themes. This is why common core state standards require the cross-curricular lessons, also called interdisciplinary teaching. For instance, when teaching a piece of African literature named "A Chip of Glass Ruby" by Nadine Gordimer, ELA teachers and Social Studies teachers work together to prepare the cross-curricular lesson plans because this work is relevant to South African Apartheid. In the interdisciplinary program, a World History teacher builds this background information and then an ELA teacher focuses on language skills and literary analysis. Their collaboration and their interdisciplinary teaching fashion benefit students in their academic literacy for college, career and life. Clearly, insights from multiple disciplines can deepen their thorough understanding of the real-life problems and also develop their synthesis and integration of insights – high order thinking skills. ELA classroom management is comparatively easy because ELA students are mentally matured, self-esteeming, responsible and respectful. ELA teachers spend very little time disciplining them, unlike ESL teachers. An excellent teacher can become a sophisticated diagnosticians, thoughtful organizers, integral facilitators and constructive evaluator. They engage students in their carefully-designed, orderly-organized and student-centered activities, like independent study (online research-based thesis), group collaboration (literary analysis), pair-sharing (peer-evaluation in writing), class discussion (brainstorm), etc.

Conclusion

EFL, ESL and ELA students are all learning the English language through listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. EFL is part of non-native English speaking students' academic requirements in the school system. It emphasizes the relationship of listening, speaking, reading, and writing and translating as one more skill; ESL acquisition is a survival skill in an English-speaking country. It also stresses the relationship of speaking, listening, reading and writing. ELA is for the study and improvement of English language skills and also for literacy in multiple disciplines. Its emphasis is reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing as well. Whatever type of English language you are teaching, EFL, ESL or ELA, you should go through the teaching process (curriculum – pretest – data analysis – lesson plan – differentiated instruction – student engagement – posttest – data analysis – constructive feedback/reflection – adjustment and improvement). Generally speaking, an effective teacher studies what students need and utilizes different strategies and differentiated learning to meet their individual needs.

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