



## EFFICIENCY IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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**Abstract:** *The objective of this paper is to formulate an acceptable definition of teacher quality based on effective use of time during the teaching process. Assessing teacher quality is hampered by the complexity of intersecting criteria in teaching profession. Quality is often defined broadly and in general concepts isolated from the actual classroom processes. Society, politicians, parents, educators proclaim that the quality of teachers matters, but it is difficult to come to a consensus, which markers of teacher quality can be measured reliably and which of these elements do have crucial impact on teaching. The major goal of this paper is to clarify what efficiency means in the teaching-learning process if time is taken as the main criterion; how knowledge can be defined and how teacher efficiency can be used as an objective marker of quality in teaching profession.*

**Keywords:** *efficiency, teacher training, quality, time*

## 1. Concepts of Teacher Quality

There are multiple explanations of teacher quality in available literature partly because of the complexity of the field and partly because of the interdisciplinary character of the teaching profession. This paper concentrates only a very narrow segment of language education – teaching English as a foreign language and accepts the fact that different authors emphasize different areas in teaching processes, which results in an eclectic explanation of the concept of quality too. Depending on the point of view of the analyzer an ‘effective teacher’ can be an educator, who *always* produces high achievers and is evaluated positively by the controlling authorities and by the school administrators (Stronge 2007). Others suggest that a good teacher is somebody, who is able to provide information to students in a way that is clear, understandable, and motivating. As Kennedy (2010:2) points out there are at least two areas which hinder objective evaluation of teacher quality: “One is that teacher assessments routinely overlook the role that students play in their own learning” and the fact that “the task of teaching is not well understood.” It leads to the situation where quality of teachers is assessed from a variety of subjective standpoints and is greatly dependent on the assessor’s approach, experience, and prejudices regarding the teaching profession. As Kennedy underlines:

“For some, it [teaching] is simply a matter of imparting knowledge... For still others, it is a matter of skillful behaviors.... We argue about whether the qualities that lead to successful teaching lie in teachers’ knowledge, actions, character traits, or beliefs and values, and the reason we argue about this is that we

really do not know how these different qualities influence student learning and consequently are not sure which qualities should be assessed” (2010:2).

Others (de Vries et al. 2015) see teacher quality as a focal point in which different ‘effective teaching behaviors’ intersect and the quality of these interacting behaviors define teacher quality. The six behaviors include the ability of the teacher to create a safe and stimulating environment, the ability to effectively organize lessons, the use of clear and structured instruction, the ability to activate students, the ability to adapt instruction to students’ abilities and the ability to teach thinking and learning strategies. The authors also underline in accordance with other researchers (Fenstermacher 2005:465) underline that “effective teaching and good teaching should not be confused with each other”. The contrast between good and effective teaching reflect the differing view over the teaching activity as such. One has to differentiate whether the results of any teaching activity are products or teaching is a process. The first view emphasizes measurability of knowledge and the ability to apply this knowledge at the highest possible level in standard objective environments – tests, whereas the second view underlines the educational character of the teaching-learning process and introduces humanism, tolerance and allows for subjective evaluation, where the benchmark is not an external scale but the individual development of the learner from an earlier level to the actual state. The first approach uses rigid tests of knowledge and compares the learners’ knowledge and skills among each other, whereas the second approach compares the learners’ earlier knowledge to the achieved new level. Since the first publication of E. L. Thorndike: *The Principles of Teaching Based on Psychology* in 1916, however different pedagogical approaches come and go, we still can accept that at the bottom-line, the overwhelming majority of student assessment is tests of knowledge, which observe the educational results as products. This allows us to assume that the most important requirement that teachers have to fulfill is *imparting knowledge*. However, by accepting this assumption two questions emerge:

One problem is connected with the duality of teaching-learning process. Quality of teaching cannot be assessed without a thorough analysis of the quality of learning (Thomas J. Lasley II 2006). Almost always, achievements of the students, not the personal qualities of the teacher(s), play a crucial role in assessing the teachers’ quality. Therefore, tests of knowledge designed to assess teachers, which are commonly applied in the Anglo-Saxon countries, predominantly in the USA, cannot guarantee the quality of teacher-learner interaction neither the learners’ success, since these tests are designed to test only one side of the teacher-learner interaction. Encyclopedia Britannica describes Tests of Teaching Knowledge as “any of various tests used to assess teachers' knowledge before, during, and after teacher preparation programs” (Encyclopædia Britannica 2015).

“Tests of teaching knowledge are designed to identify an individual's degree of formal teacher preparation ... and to predict teaching success...there are three types of tests used to measure teacher knowledge: tests of basic skills, tests of content knowledge, and tests of professional knowledge.” (Encyclopædia Britannica 2015)

Tests of basic skills usually test reading comprehension, mathematical reasoning, verbal reasoning and logical reasoning so they should provide an overview about how “intelligent” a teacher is. While content knowledge tests are typical general knowledge tests that measure the teachers’ knowledge about facts. These tests are designed to map how the candidate teacher is informed about the fields of knowledge such as culture, language, history, knowledge of basic mathematical operations, geographical data, constitute. Professional knowledge tests are tests

designed to measure the candidate's factual knowledge about pedagogical areas such as student development and learning, instructional planning and management, as well as professional environment. These tests are designed to measure the candidates' knowledge and preparedness in connection with teaching techniques and methods as well as management issues such as classroom work or curriculum planning. We may define these tests as tests of professional jargon, and as situational judgement tests that are supposed to answer the question to what extent is the candidate aware of the theories of learning, their application in the classroom and the issues connected with planning and curriculum design. Tests of basic skills answer the question how 'clever' the teacher is; tests of general knowledge show how is the teacher 'informed about the world and the cultural realm of a certain society', and professional knowledge tests measure to what extent is the teacher able to remember facts about the profession and apply acceptable or recommended procedures in the teaching process. The candidate teachers therefore are required to remember a number of facts and present these facts in a standardized and professionally acceptable way. Do these tests, however, tell us how good the teacher is in building relationships with other people; whether a teacher is an introvert and morose person or a cheerful, open-minded character? Do we learn anything about the teacher's values, ideas, hopes and dreams? Do these tests reveal what are the motifs, traumas, joys and priorities in the teacher's life that may influence his or her decisions? It is beyond doubt that general knowledge, intelligence and professional knowledge are necessary for a well-prepared professional, but these seem not to be sufficient indicators of teacher quality. Consequently, it is required to find some other marker of teacher quality that is not influenced neither by IQ nor by EQ.

## 2. Definition of Knowledge

To obtain an objective overview, it is unavoidable to examine the question of teacher quality from the student's point of view as teacher quality is often judged by the academic results of the students (Milbery W. McLaughlin 2006). It is possible to assume that the quality of a teacher can also be measured in relation to the growth of students' knowledge, skills and competencies, however it is crucial to highlight that the *concept* of 'knowledge' needs further clarification. It is necessary to underline that the concept of knowledge as we use it in everyday context is not compatible with the concept of knowledge that is used in pedagogical work. Let us build our argument with the statement that knowledge is any piece of information stored in the memory of a person, which can be utilized in any moment without any external help. There are certain limitations to this statement: One problem is connected with the fact that knowledge is hard to define as a 'single' piece of information since it always manifests itself as a set of phenomena in the complexity of the human mind. There is connection among the facts, feelings connected with these facts, the attitudes of the individual towards these facts that make it almost impossible to isolate knowledge as a single piece of information, but for the needs of the present work we consider the definition sufficient to work with.

The second element, utilization of knowledge, also needs clarifications since memories are not isolated elements in the brain but mostly stored in a complex fabric of a subjective consciousness built by our brain from conscious and unconscious elements. Consequently, recalling of any memory cannot appear isolated from other memories and experience so there must always be 'some help' that contributes to the recollection of knowledge at the psychological level. The suggested definition therefore does not intend to ignore the importance

of psychological processes, but underlines that any piece of information that manifests as knowledge in a teaching-learning environment must have the characteristic that the individual is able to recall it from his or her memory without the use of external means such as books, dictionaries, Internet-based search engines, etc.

To further clarify what knowledge means in this paper we would like to draw a parallel between our definition and Bloom's (Bloom 1977) explanation of learning. We would like to point out that Bloom's lower-level knowledge correlates to the behaviorist understanding of learning and training. Lower-order questions are aimed at testing facts. It is striking in modern pedagogical streams how little importance is assigned to testing facts about the world. It is a general trend that our school practices tend to overemphasize the ability of the learners to perform high-level cognitive processes such as analysis, evaluation and creative activity, whereas factual correctness is taken as obvious. If we accept Bloom's view over knowledge, however, it is important to underline that higher cognitive processes cannot produce usable output without the ability to remember key facts about the surrounding world – which is manifested in language learning as the ability to remember meaningful units: words, idiomatic expressions, collocations, phrases, etc.

We assume that the above described tendency of ignoring lower-level (factual) elements of knowledge may be in connection with the digital boom in our society that is characterized as knowledge-based and information-oriented, which mainly manifests itself in the form of the easy access to electronic information databases. This, however, is also able to create the false feeling that the learners 'know' facts, which are required for correct use of higher-cognitive processes, but in reality they 'know only the procedures' how to obtain these facts via more and more sophisticated search engines of the World Wide Web, but these facts are not stored in the learners' mind. We are living in the age of digital amnesia when we use more our gadgets to obtain information from the global database than our brain to store data in our memory (Kaspersky Lab. 2015). Thus, our view of knowledge can be further refined by accepting the statement that we can consider a piece of information stored in the learner's mind knowledge when the learner is able to persuade us that he or she is able to recall the given piece of information without external help (without looking up in a book, dictionary, on the Internet, etc.).

### **3. The Concept of Knowledge in TEFL**

In the context of foreign language learning, learners are required to know words, phrases, and acceptable language patterns in a wide range of communication situations. If the learner is able to reproduce these units in spoken or written form, we can accept that he or she knows them according to the above-described model. According to Bloom (1977), this level is the necessary first level of knowledge but not sufficient to understand all aspects of low-level knowledge, since humans are able to imitate almost any pattern of aural or visual input that may, but not necessarily must represent words (meaningful utterances) in a given language. We may assume that every learner of English can produce patterns of sounds or signs such as dog, ogd, dgo, and god, but only some of these patterns have meaning for us.

The second level of knowledge, suggested by Bloom, includes comprehension – the ability to mentally (re)organize information. When the learner understands the concept, this means that the produced pattern appears in the learner's mind as a meaningful unit through a series of associations (part of which may also be translation). Thus, from the above, overtly simplified list,

the learner will probably choose dog and god as meaningful words and ignore ogd and dgo as useless patterns at the second level of Bloom's scale.

This is still not sufficient to consider the information represented by the patterns dog and god knowledge in the TEFL environment. Bloom's taxonomy further suggests that the learner should be able to apply the patterns (in our case the words dog and god) in a complex system let it be the target foreign language. This level requires the learners to connect new patterns with previous knowledge, experience and patterns already present in their minds and create various contexts. The sentence 'The dog bit the postman yesterday.' is a pattern, which possibly produces a picture in the mind of a learner that may recall feelings of sorrow or a picture of a comic situation depending on the actual setting.

To conclude, the word dog can be considered a piece of knowledge from the point of language learning only when the learner can recognize the pattern that represents the concept, understands this word fully and is able to associate the sound pattern or the written symbols with the actual object (in our case with the picture of the animal) and can use it in a meaningful context so is able to correctly place it in a structure of concepts.

Higher-order, cognitive processes do not test the learner's ability to simply remember, understand, and use a given piece of information, but require from him or her to interact with the given piece of knowledge and develop a personal attitude towards the problem in question. Analysis, synthesis and evaluation appear at this level, which actually enable the learner to formulate a relationship with the subject of learning. Here we assume that the learner knows the information, i.e. is able to perform the lower-order procedures and expect that the given information will be utilized for further use. The learner will be able to answer questions for example 'Why did the dog bite the postman?' Was it the fault of the postman or the dog's owner? What should or can be done to avoid similar accidents? Is it possible and necessary to discuss this question in public and come to a reasonable solution? For these processes, the learner must compare and contrast complex sets of information, analyze the available sources and formulate a personal attitude to the question. These processes require more than the bare lower-order functions of remembering, understanding and usage of any information.

Therefore, the above described cognitive processes are not connected with the concept of knowledge which can be tested by classical tests of knowledge but require a more complex evaluation system, which is naturally more time consuming and demanding also for the teacher. The key area, which is predominantly analyzed in higher-level cognitive processes, is the quality of presentation of the concepts; their logical structure, harmony with the generally accepted norms, the aesthetic value of the presentation and the overall impression the learner is able to make on the assessor, just to mention a few. Consequently, assessment of higher-order cognitive processes is more subjective and less reliable, however in learning practices highly preferred and required.

#### **4. Time Management as an Objective Quality Marker**

Teacher quality and teaching quality is a complex realm and we cannot avoid a certain level of oversimplification when analyzing it. We argue that professional quality of any teacher can be more precisely measured when we emphasize the term efficiency in the teaching profession. *Efficiency in pedagogical work may mean achieving maximum productivity (acquiring of knowledge) at a minimum wasted effort, time or expense.* Thus we suggest that the key measurement for teacher quality should be the ratio between the invested time and effort and

the quantity and (at higher levels of cognitive processes the quality) of production on the learner's side. Using this method of measurement, may be possible to eliminate obstacles that would lead to subjective and therefore not universally applicable procedures in assessing teacher quality.

If we make an effort to clarify what efficiency is meant to be in teachers' work, we have to discuss the role of time in teaching profession. Time is a 'universal currency'. Since there is no way to obtain more of it, we should consider ways of better utilizing it. Activities of any teacher include a series of tasks from classroom instruction, through curriculum design, lesson planning and actual teaching, preparation for lessons as well as test design, correction and assessment of students' work and the obligation to continuously train him- or herself professionally. This myriad of tasks is supposed to be done during a working day, which should not be longer than eight and a half hours. This requires a high level of logistics and precise planning to avoid stress and to fulfill the requirements. It is not the objective of this paper to analyze efficiency in everyday activities, but we would like to concentrate primarily on efficiency on a teaching lesson by providing a simple teaching procedure.

The below presented teaching procedure is inspired by the data collected during a five-year-long term observation and analysis of learner teachers, who are preparing for the teaching profession at the Department of British and American Studies at the Pavol Jozef Safarik University in Kosice. The learner teachers are required to produce observation sheets and comment real-life English language lessons at the schools where they are doing their obligatory practice teaching. By analyzing the observation sheets it is possible to discover certain tendencies that hamper effective teaching. The major problems may be summarized as follows:

- Learners often do not know what is the goal of the lesson. Because of the lack of clear lesson objectives, the activities done by the learners (which should ensure variety and should enable the learners to practice in different context) often confuse the learners and are counterproductive.
- The four skills are not connected in the teaching process logically: listening with speaking for example, but often practiced isolated or in a sequence that hamper learning.
- Frontal teaching still dominates the teaching process and more effective forms of work, for example teaching others or practice by doing are mostly not included in the learning process.
- Writing and reading dominates over speaking and doing.
- Learning during the lesson is replaced by doing activities; memorizing is considered equal with rote learning and is deliberately avoided.
- Homework is over dimensioned and fundamental parts of school work are shifted to homework.
- Time management and effective lesson organization leaves much to be desired.
- There is no observable method used on the lesson, but a mixture of many different methods often originating from conflicting approaches.

To answer these problems a teaching-learning model is offered to the learner teachers at our department in which effective time use is emphasized and synergy effect of different activities is utilized for developing knowledge that reflects Bloom's definitions. The following model represents just one segment of a unit of work that is composed of five to six forty-five-minute-long lessons. The presented sequence of activities is not taken from any course book.

## 5. Classroom Management and a Case Study for Developing Knowledge

The forty-five-minute-long period that is called lesson is often considered sufficient for learning one subject a day, but if we analyze the distribution of activities during the lesson, we may discover interesting aspects that reveal a lot about the quality of the teachers' work. Practicing teachers are required to perform a series of tasks during a lesson: let it be administrative tasks, testing, practicing, assessing or teaching. The classical distribution of tasks follows an 'ancient' pattern: the teacher arrives in the classroom and performs administrative tasks – marks the missing students and gives basic instructions; it is then usually followed by oral testing of some student/s while the rest of the class is working on some written assignment. These activities last at least 10-15 minutes. The active part of the lesson: learning and practicing new knowledge must be done in 25-30 minutes if we consider the last five minutes of a lesson suitable for recapitulation and assigning home assessment. How to be effective in such a short time is a contentious question. If we accept that the primary goal for language learning is to learn speaking, we may design a lesson plan that could be effective in a very short time. The following example shows a lesson that may be usable.

Let us assume that the objective of our lesson is to teach a short dialogue that contains five to ten sentences about the topic 'health'. Let it be a description of the symptoms of flu. We would like to concentrate on the development of listening and speaking skills in a group of lower-intermediate students.

The warm up activity in our case would be the *first* listening of the dialogue that may take maximum two minutes right at the beginning of our lesson to take advantage on the primacy effect together with the initial prime-time period (Sousa 2005). After the first listening the students should answer close questions (yes/no answers), for example: 'Is the given dialogue about health?' 'Is headache mentioned in the dialogue?' and so on. This way the students have a chance to get acquainted with the topic of the lesson and discover the target text. It is desirable not to waste too much time with too long warm-up activities and a general mistake made by practicing teachers is that an activity is chosen for warm up that utilizes different skills than we hope to develop: for instance, speaking about illnesses precede listening about the same topic.

Listening for warm-up should be followed by at-least one more listening session where the students will have the chance to further discover the elements of the dialogue used. After the second listening the students are supposed to answer open questions such as 'Why did the speaker visit the GP?', 'Which were the symptoms of her illness?' The second listening with the answers should take approximately two to five minutes. Open questions may, but not necessarily have to precede the listening activity. All the answers should be in spoken form utilizing the natural connection between the listening and speaking skill.

During the second phase (via open questions), the teacher has the opportunity to discover unknown vocabulary. The teacher is supposed to teach the new expressions first providing a pronunciation practice, later a translation and finally providing the visual picture of the expression on the blackboard, i.e. write the new word on the blackboard. When teaching speaking a teacher should always start with an aural input since speaking is connected with listening and represents a natural language acquisition procedure. We may utilize the effect of imitation and achieve better performance in a shorter time.

The second, most important phase of this sequence of activities is learning, more precisely memorizing. Unfortunately, right this phase is almost completely missing from our schools as memorizing is generally considered a manifestation of rote learning – which is

naturally not. Practice shows that memorizing of meaningful utterances in a logical, predictable situation (for example in a dialogue in a predictable context) boosts active vocabulary development. Drills – based on audio-lingual method and its variations – provide a reliable and usable activity for fast and effective learning of dialogues. There is, however, little help for learner teachers how to do drilling correctly and effectively. In this model, the teacher should choose one student from the class and, while the rest of the classroom concentrates on the activity, should drill the sentences and teach the student the short text which is supposed to be the outcome of the lesson. Neuroscience proved that repetition contributes to the speed of learning so the correct way of drilling should follow a pattern in which the teacher first produces a chunk of an utterance which is subsequently repeated by the learner. Then the first chunk is repeated by the teacher and a further chunk is added, which is then repeated by the learner. The teacher repeats the two chunks and expands the text with a further chunk, which is repeated by the learner. Such way the learner is able to absorb considerable amount of vocabulary in a meaningful context at a relatively short time. The amount of vocabulary (number of sentences/chunks) depends on the ability of the learner to remember and reproduce the sentences. By time and practice, the amount of vocabulary that is possible to absorb this way can be surprisingly big. We should not forget that during this face-to-face teaching the rest of the class is concentrating on the learning procedure and, however is not directly involved in the drilling process, the learners do learn the dialogue in a passive way, which will be utilized in the following phase of the learning process where the concept of gradual release is applied when the first student who successfully learned the dialogue with the teacher is required to teach the dialogue to his or her partner. The teacher gradually involves further learners in the learning process and the students, who successfully master the dialogue, will continue to teach their classmates too. Such way, the learning process will be dramatically effective, short and provides the maximum involvement of learners. The whole activity is possible to realize in the first (20-minute-long) prime time period of a forty-five-minute-long lesson. Further practice and expansion on the learned task can be done during the down-time period as well as in the final prime-time. This way the teaching-learning process is multiplied and because the rest of the classroom has the chance to hear the target text repeatedly the learning process gains on efficiency. In a very short time, approximately ten minutes, we are able to get from one-to-one teaching to pair work than to total activation of the whole class.

Finally, when the class has reached the required level of proficiency in the target text the teacher can apply role-play activities, simulations, etc. The learning process is very intensive and follows the gradual release model (Murray 2011:4). The whole process fits in the 45-minute long lesson scheme, actually it is possible to do it in 20-25 minutes, and shows maximum efficiency utilizing the best practices of language teaching.

## 6. Conclusion

It was demonstrated how difficult is to describe teacher quality and the complexity of the intersecting areas that influence the teaching-learning process makes it almost impossible to formulate a universally applicable definition. There is great effort, mainly in Anglo-Saxon countries to test the quality of teachers by standardized tests, but these efforts almost completely ignore the fact that teaching-learning is an interactive process and the teachers' quality is not assessed according to his personal qualities, intelligence, knowledge about the world, neither on his or her social intelligence, self-sacrifice or loving attitude. One element that may be



considered as a reliable marker of teacher quality is efficiency. Efficiency is defined as the ability (or proficiency) of the teacher to provide the maximum amount of knowledge in the shortest period of time and at the lowest possible price or energy. Knowledge is understood as the ability to recall stored information from the memory without any help and correlates with Bloom's understanding of lower-levels of cognitive processes in learning: remembering, understanding, and the ability of using the information in a meaningful context. Finally, an effort was made to provide a working and applicable scheme that may be adopted in the time-limited classroom environment and can be applied in the teaching-learning process with maximum efficiency.

The provided model has many limitations and possibly needs fine-tuning, but it can be utilized efficiently in a classroom and fulfills many requirements that language teachers have to meet in modern teaching-learning procedures.

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