



BIOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS AND SURVEYS

**BLENDING THE TEACHING OF ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS AND ENGLISH AS A SECOND OR FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN MACEDONIA**

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English language teaching, Environmental education, students, Environmental awareness in Macedonia.

**Ključne riječi:**

engleski jezik, ekološko obrazovanje, nastava engleskog jezika, studenti, ekološka svest, Makedonija.

**SYNOPSIS**

This paper's aim is to examine how environmental education could be integrated into teaching English as a second/foreign language (EFL/ESL) in R. Macedonia.

We are of the opinion that shared processing curriculum has advantages for both learning English and learning environmental education. We cannot call our English teaching successful if our students, however fluent, are ignorant of world problems, have no social conscience and use their communication skills for international crime, exploitation, oppression or environmental destruction. For this reason, there is a growing interest for introducing environmental education in teaching EFL/ESL. The purpose of the incorporation of environmental education into teaching EFL/ESL is to raise the environmental awareness of global environmental problems

**SINOPSIS**

Cilj ovog rada je da ispita kako bi ekološko obrazovanje moglo da se integriše u nastavu engleskog jezika kao stranog/drugog jezika (EFL/ESL) u R. Makedoniji.

Smatramo da zajednička obrada nastavnog plana i programa ima prednosti i za učenje engleskog jezika i za učenje o životnoj sredini. Ne možemo reći da je naša nastava engleskog jezika uspešna ako naši učenici, iako tečno govore engleski, ne znaju ništa o svetskim problemima, nemaju socijalnu svest i koriste svoje komunikacione veštine za međunarodni kriminal, eksploataciju, ugnjetavanje ili uništavanje životne sredine. Iz tog razloga, postoji sve veće interesovanje za uvođenje ekološkog obrazovanja u nastavu EFL/ESL. Svrha inkorporacije ekološkog obrazovanja u nastavu EFL/ESL je podizanje ekološke svesti o globalnim ekološkim problemima.

## INTRODUCTION

According to Babcock (1993) successful learning of a language involves equally successful combining of acquired micro and macro skills in terms of appropriate communication and environmental issues which are a rich source of material for communication. Re-thinking and expanding the objectives of teaching English as a second or foreign language is another reason for the inclusion of environmental education in this instruction. Cates (1997) points out that "We can't call our English teaching successful if our students, however fluent, are ignorant of world problems, have no social conscience by using their communication skills for international crime, exploitation, oppression or environmental destruction". According to Cates, this explains the growing interest over the last decade in incorporating environmental education in teaching English. Brown (1991) believes that teachers of English have a mission to help everyone in the world to communicate with each other and solve global problems. Of course, this is so because of the global status of English.

It can be said that environmental education represents concentrated efforts organized responsibly to teach or draw the attention of human beings to how natural environment functions and how human beings can manage and protect them. Along with teachers of environmental education, EFL/ESL teachers can also greatly contribute to raising environmental awareness in individuals.

Environmental education deals with a great variety of issues concerning the endangerment and protection of the environment due to human activities. Some of such issues are: global warming, greenhouse effect, ozone depletion, species extinction, poaching, endangered species, habitat destruction, air and water pollution, nuclear fallout, genetically modified foods, excessive use of pesticides and herbicides, intensive farming, soil pollution and desertification, soil erosion and contamination, water crises, deforestation... the list is much longer.

### **Teaching English in order to raise awareness of environmental sustainability**

According to Tang (2009) the aim of incorporating environmental education in teaching English as a foreign/second language is to raise the awareness of students about global environmental crises. Environmentally conscious activities may include the following (adapted from Jacobs and Cates (1999)): writing letters to organizations, governments and businesses, planting trees and plants, reducing the use of paper, plastic and energy, re-using of materials – e.g. glass jars and bottles, recycling materials and buying products made from recycled materials (e.g. paper), collecting funds for environmental actions, participating in environmental actions, educating others on boycotting environmentally unacceptable products, avoiding consumption of meat of endangered species etc.

### **Teaching materials for EFL/ESL and environmental education**

For such simultaneous teaching materials can be prepared by teachers and students. For example, students can create and develop materials in some of the following ways:

- They can bring articles or audio/video clips from newspapers, magazines, radio and TV shows or the Internet into the classroom;
- Songs in English with environmental themes performed by artists devoted to ecology. The contents of these songs can be used as topics for debate;
- Conversations about environmental issues related to some events at the local level (e.g. illegal logging, killing of endangered species, burning grass, etc.)
- Developing surveys for classmates dedicated to environmental issues whose results will later be analyzed in terms of whether they are environmentally acceptable or not.

The inclusion of critical thinking skills in the classroom where English as a foreign language is taught can help in further development of communicative abilities of students and their analytical thinking; it also allows them to apply communication in various situations when debating on global environmental issues (Yukiko Ishikawa et al., 2007). Critical linguistic awareness is an approach to language awareness which emphasizes ideological aspects of language use and the ways in which language is related to social issues such as power, inequality and discrimination.

Critical thinking is differently defined and its role in the learning process (behavior change) is frequently emphasized. Dowden (2002), for example, believes that to think critically, among other things, is to be honest and have an open mind when considering what to do or what to believe. For Scrivener and Paul (2004) to think critically involves:

“...that mode of thinking – about any subject, content or problem— in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully taking charge of the structures inherent in thinking and imposing intellectual standards upon them . . . in short, [critical thinking is] self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking..“

Similarly, Wesche (1993) believes that a critical thinker is the one who "... is constantly asking questions, trying to distinguish between facts and opinions. Stroupe (2006) quotes Ennis (1978) who introduces critical thinking as "process incorporating the skills necessary to decide what to do and believe".

The above definitions analyze critical thinking in terms of the manner in which information is processed and used, and they both emphasize the awareness or consciousness that this process occurs. This emphasis on the awareness is needed in order to facilitate critical thinking in the classroom. Such thinking directs students to focus on environmental protection and calls for appropriate response. Or, more specifically, Halvorsen, (2005) says that when thinking critically about a given topic,

we are forced to look at our own relationship to it and how we personally fit the context of this question.

Tsui (2008) defines critical thinking as "a way of reasoning that examines the inherent structure and logic of one's intellectual functioning", and Tang (2009) says that critical thinking is one of the key goals of education as a whole, and is shaped by the language of our own mind. Therefore students who learn a second / foreign language should also learn and apply critical thinking skills within the context of a second language in order to reflect, evaluate and express their ideas in that language.

The inclusion of environmental education in English language teaching will enable students to enhance their skills and abilities for critical thinking and at the same time contribute to their language development, as environmental issues such as global warming and energy crisis are of particular interest in the present.

Since we had a deeper insight into the positive aspects of cross-curricular approach to these subjects and after our research, we participated in some scientific gatherings with papers associated with this issue (Savin-Kirova and Stavreva-Veselinovska, 2005).

### **Teaching environmental issues in an English language classroom**

The main objective of this paper is to answer, at least partially, the question how to realize teaching environmental issues in English language learning and the question of sources of materials for such teaching and learning. Jacobs and Cates (1999) raise many questions that teachers frequently ask when faced with the inclusion of environmental education in their classrooms for learning EFL/ESL.

- 1) Should each lesson be a lesson about global issues?
- 2) Can we teach languages simultaneously with teaching about global issues?
- 3) How can we gain sufficient knowledge of global issues to include it in our teaching?
- 4) How can we provide materials for global education?

Jacobs and Cates (1999) make an attempt to answer these curious questions. As to the first question concerning the involvement of global issues in all the lessons in English, they argue that the infusion of global education in the teaching of English as a second language does not necessarily mean that each lesson, reading each paragraph and each group discussion should be on some global issues. The recommendation is that environmental education be a regular and permanent part of the curriculum, not just something thrown in or done accidentally once or twice a year.

### **Blending the Teaching of Environmental Matters and ESL/EFL**

Our other focus was on the question whether it is possible to simultaneously teach language and environmental issues. The communicative approach is used by many researchers to describe a great variety of procedures used in the classroom because of the fact that it contains a set of rather general principles that raise no controversy.

Richards (n.d.) sums the principles of communicative approach up as follows:

- 1) The goal of language learning is communicative competence.
- 2) Learners learn a language through using it to communicate.
- 3) Authentic and meaningful communication should be the goal of classroom activities.
- 4) Fluency and accuracy are both important dimensions of communication.
- 5) Communication involves the integration of different language skills.
- 6) Learning is a gradual process that involves trial and error.

Crandall (1987) believes that the communicative approach is dominant in second language instruction and that languages are best learned when they are used to communicate meaning, rather than when teachers concentrate only on explicit learning of grammar and vocabulary. One of the ways of keeping this focus on meaning is through contemporary teaching approaches such as the content-based and task-based teaching which are all applications of the communicative approach.

Since we noticed a relatively large representation of environmental issues in the English language textbooks that are or were in use in the near past in primary and secondary schools on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia (Savin-Kirova and Stavreva-Veselinovska, 2004), we decided to try to connect some of the contents of ecological education and EFL teaching. In our previous scientific-research work we tried to practice this several times at the Pedagogical Faculty in Štip. We taught a number of hours where we integrated teaching contents of English language and environmental education. Since we had a deeper insight into the positive aspects of cross-curricular approach to these subjects and after our research, we participated in some scientific gatherings with papers associated with this issue (Savin-Kirova and Stavreva-Veselinovska, 2005).

### **CONCLUSION**

Our research started with the examination of the attitude of a number of English language teachers towards environmental education. The ignorance of the use of EFL/ESL in raising and sustaining environmental awareness in R. Macedonia learners was a general issue as the examination of teachers' lesson notes and

course books reveal that they do not consciously incorporate environmental education in their English language teaching. They also do not integrate proactive communication that can trigger critical thinking about language tasks that deal with environmental issues.

Treatment of known content, in our case of environmental issues and terminology, not only increases the concentration, but also significantly reduces the tension and fear of foreign languages. This fear is manifested as a feeling of discomfort, tension and uncertainty that overwhelm people when they need to talk, read or write English, or when they need to understand someone who speaks English.

Thus, in English language teaching the positive effects of this blended teaching are:

- It facilitates learning new words and their meaning

If an item is pre-processed in mother tongue, then one of the most important goals of learning new words in the English language is realized, i.e. learning the meaning of these words. By learning some concepts during a class of environmental education such as biotope, biocenosis, eco-system etc., students' understanding of these concepts in English will be facilitated.

- It enhances students' concentration during class

Experiences from practice show that, when the content is re-processed, as in our case with environmental education and English language, it facilitates the prolongation of concentration. Prolonged concentration of learners also means easier learning of new concepts in both native and foreign language. If there is no concentration, the activities that take place during class will be boring, uninteresting and, eventually, everything will be useless.

- It reduces tension and fear of foreign languages

Though the inclusion of environmental education in the English language classroom may seem difficult, it is undoubtedly worth trying if we seriously care about the welfare of our environment whose very existence is under threat.

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