

Research Summary

English as a foreign language: What language skills do teachers need?

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Overview of the Study

In Slovenia, a needs analysis was carried out to determine the skills that teachers in English foreign language classes need in order to facilitate high quality teaching. Fundamentally, foreign language English teaching requires teachers to have a strong understanding of English. However, research on how to gain this knowledge is often neglected. The data presented in this study was collected in primary and secondary schools, and the analysis details the in-school, classroom-based environment, as well as non-curriculum related activities, such as further education and communication between other subject teachers.

Research Methods

Over a period of two years, from 2003–2005, the author of the study collected data in the form of interviews (11), case studies (3), classroom observations (48) and teacher diaries and reports (93). This data was evaluated qualitatively using content analysis, which is a research method that examines the content of documents in order to discover patterns within data. This particular content analysis was guided using the Common European Framework (CEF) as a reference for communicative language competence.

Results

The results show that the most important linguistic competence in teaching English is oral production, followed by written reception, written production, and then oral reception. The author points out that, despite these results, teachers surveyed only spend an average of 15 minutes a week practicing speaking. When assessing pragmatic competencies, it was revealed that the mother tongue was only used in a limited capacity. In addition, the analysis indicated that other problematic areas were article usage and indirect questions. Finally, the data collected confirms that skills in the target language must be adapted both to the level and skills of the students, and to the educational context.

Practical Implications/Significance

This study resulted in the following recommendations for the observed English language programs: 1) Intense practice of communicative language aspects, 2) Training in designing and writing materials and tests in English, 3) Additional practice for specific language functions such as explaining, noticing mistakes on the part of the students, and formulating questions, 4) Training in the pedagogical and pragmatic use of the mother tongue in English instruction, 5) Targeted training of the linguistic requirements of English, in contrast to Slovenian, 6) Teacher trainings for teaching different age groups and language levels, and 7) Exercises in reading aloud and reading literature for further education. These recommendations may be applicable to similar teaching contexts.

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