

Articles

A Lack of Qualitative Leap in EFL

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Abstract

In tertiary education a lack of a qualitative leap in the learning of some Czech students of English has been a phenomenon noted by the authors of the article. This trend has been confirmed by a survey the results of which are presented below. Most students seem to reach a plateau of their spoken and written English (approximately of B2 proficiency level) at the start of their university studies. This article considers the limitations of the prevailing methods of instructions and suggests a change in the approach engaging the processes of confidence, creativity and experimentation. The impact of such changes can be observed to some extent in the students' responses to the survey cited here. The article discusses the didactics of teaching English. However, the aim of the questionnaires applied is not to quantify and evaluate teaching methods. The authors attempted to find out whether these methods offered room to increase confidence and the associated processes of creativity, experimentation and willingness to take responsibility for one's own learning.

Keywords: tertiary education, methods of instruction, a qualitative leap, confidence.

Absence kvalitativního posunu ve výuce angličtiny jako cizího jazyka

Abstrakt

Autoři článku, který se zabývá výukou angličtiny, upozorňují na to, že v terciárním vzdělávání je u některých studentů zřetelná absence kvalitativního posunu v mluveném i psaném projevu. Tento trend byl potvrzen průzkumem, jehož výsledky jsou uvedeny v textu. Zdá se, že většina studentů dosáhne na začátku vysokoškolského studia určité setrvalé hladiny znalosti angličtiny (přibližně na úrovni B2). Tento článek se zamýšlí nad omezeními převládajících metod výuky a navrhuje změnu přístupu, který bude podporovat mj. sebedůvěru, kreativitu a využívat experiment. Autoři se snažili zjistit, zda tyto metody nabízejí prostor pro zvýšení sebedůvěry a s tím spojených procesů tvořivosti, experimentování a ochoty převzít odpovědnost za vlastní učení. Dopad těchto změn, pokud jsou uplatněny ve výuce, lze do jisté míry pozorovat na odpovědích studentů v citovaném průzkumu.

Klíčová slova: terciární vzdělávání, metody výuky, kvalitativní posun, sebedůvěra.

DOI: 10.5507/epd.2023.006

Introduction

For the last two decades we have been observing that after three or five years of university instruction there has been little qualitative change in the language skills and knowledge of students of English, there has been an obvious lack of the expected qualitative leap. They enter tertiary education with a low level of writing skills, low awareness of spoken styles (varieties of language) and negligible theoretical knowledge about the structure of language. This empirical finding has been confirmed both by research among almost 200 English language students reflecting on their English language skills and knowledge, and by Bachelor of Arts, and in many cases Master of Arts final examinations. Our research suggests an adaptation of the prevailing methods used, supplementing them with activities related to confidence, creativity and experimentation is necessary. The students' first reactions to these support activities are mostly positive.

The missing qualitative leap has been attributed by some authors to the prevailing GrammarTranslation Method (GTM) of instruction. The criticism of the GTM is overwhelming; Anderson, Valešová and Duda (2020, 116) suggest that the popularity of the Grammar-Translation approach rests in its relatively low-effort character. Their more

significant observation deals with the efficacy of the GTM for beginners (2020, 116): “Grammar is useful and is an effective approach to language learning – especially for beginners.” In such a case there might be a direct relationship between the GTM and an absence of progress in the student language skills taught consistently by the GTM, or for that matter between the GTM and the numerous “false beginners”. Each rigorously applied method creates its own limitations. This conclusion is confirmed by the practical application of English taught by the GTM Marks (2007) has compiled 10 objections to teaching through translation as a sole method. He lists three main shortcomings of GT methodology: “When I first went to countries where the languages are spoken, I found that: it was hard to understand what people were saying, it was hard to marshal my knowledge and to formulate what I wanted to say at a reasonable speed and there were lots of essential everyday words and expressions that I simply didn’t know”.

The approaches designed to overcome the GTM shortcomings, namely the communication activities, may seem to be successful when the spoken English of the first-year students is considered but it is becoming obvious that these communicative skills have been obtained outside the lower secondary and secondary classrooms. Translation activities in the classroom should not be identified with the Grammar-Translation Method: students make mistakes when writing in English because they translate, Leonardi (26,2010) repeats that “asking students to think into the target language without using their own mother tongue is not natural”. A more complex text is always unique, while spoken English is idiom-based and pattern repetitive. With increased proficiency of spoken English, we just increase the number/variety of patterns that we repeat, while naturally increasing the efficacy of our communication. Translation is different as it is based on linguistic awareness.

Our assumption about a lack of qualitative leap in EFL refers to the resources that would have been difficult to obtain twenty years ago. We believe that contemporary academic debate must take into account respected blogs and popular websites produced by language educators. Their resources are currently reflecting a variety of aspects of the EFL practice. This apparent concession to the academism of resources may significantly enrich and accelerate theoretical efforts.

Kaye in an article at www.teachingenglish.org.uk points out: “Translation in groups can encourage learners to discuss the meaning and use of language at the deepest possible levels”. For Czech learners a mindful translation into English is necessary because e.g., of the syntactical typological differences explained for Czech by the functional sentence perspective and the historically fixed word order in English. Kaye (n.d.) stresses that “few coursebook writers offer ideas and materials for this area”. Obviously, however well-designed the generic English coursebooks are, they cannot be language specific. Without going into detail here, only through translation e.g., the intrinsic relationship between the English category of determinism and the Czech word order can be explained.

Since translation must be a frequent strategy for Czech students, they should be made continuously aware of the lexical and grammatical consequences of the typological differences. The favourite translation exercise of metaphors is less relevant for learning English and more relevant for accenting the language as a cultural phenomenon. Some useful translation activities used independently of the Grammar-Translation Method suggested by Kaye (n.d.): the project work when learners translate the script of a scene from a film and dub over the scene itself in the L2, or develop a webpage or blog with their own translated work have been practised voluntarily outside the classroom with rogue scripts or "fansubbing" for at least two decades now.

Having analysed the obvious shortcomings of the translation-based teaching as a method Anderson, Valešová and Duda (2020, 116) discuss Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasising situational and social contexts with Task-based learning (TBL) and the CLIL as some of the teaching methods resulting from the CLT. Frost (n.d.) compares the advantages of the TBL to the still prevalent traditional Present, Practice, Produce method of instruction (PPP). The three steps of the PPP, presenting an item of language within a specific context, practising it and finally producing the target language item in a free practice seem not to raise the plateau barring the qualitative leap. As Frost suggests and our teaching practice and coursebook experience confirm, students a few lessons after a PPP lesson are not able to assimilate the previously learnt item to produce the language correctly, they tend to overuse the target structure and most importantly they find they are able to communicate in their existing language paraphrasing or rephrasing the previously practised new item.

The Task-based Learning is discussed by Anderson, Valešová and Duda (2020) as one of the widely popular teaching methods within the general Communicative Approach. The TBL advantages according to Frost (n.d.) is its natural context, an absence of students' language control, a wide exposure to a whole range of lexical phrase and to what Frost calls "patterns" and intensive communication among students. The TBL, as interpreted by Frost, overlaps with the Lexical Approach (Harmer 2015, 62) based on learning quantities of formulaic expressions.

The discussion concerning the Lexical Approach must include language typology. Analytical languages can benefit from teaching by the LA, e.g., most English verbs need to be taught as formulaic expressions with prepositions determining their valency, the arguments controlled by a predicate. One of the authors studying English in the late 60s had been exposed to syntactic and lexical drills, the methodology expected the learners to contextually adapt memorized archetypical utterances. He can still remember and properly pronounce the sentences like *"The sun makes water evaporate"* or *"It is useless to insist on drinking fresh water in the town,"* but there does not seem to have been an occasion for using or adapting them. The obvious limitations of the Lexical Approach are non-existent comparison with the mother tongue and a potential lack of creativity. Both may prevent the student from achieving the qualitative leap.

This article deals with commonly known methods and approaches to EFL teaching. In fact, the authors suggest that any methods, even proven ones, may be the cause of the barriers preventing a qualitative leap. Our article focuses on the practical employment of activities that can remedy these limitations.

2 The plateau of communicative methods

The Task-based Approach seems to be in direct contrast with the presented regimental PPP instruction. However, they both seem to lack the ability of achieving the qualitative leap. Although, the TBL supports communication, it is less concerned with the students' conscientious effort to overcome the plateau of the previously acquired language skills. Only too often it has been a case of a sudden drop in motivation and interest when a "sufficient" level of communication has been achieved, effectively becoming an obstacle for further learning.

Nevertheless, Frost (n. d.) describes the TBL as "a strong communicative approach".

According to Anderson, Valešová and Duda it belongs to the strong version of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) "promoting learning through communicating in the classroom with less emphasis on traditional teaching principles" (2020, 117). The weak version of the CLT, more frequent in course books, instead of exploiting natural context and practising minimum students' language control, designs didactically approved themes and topics and creates specific situational contexts to support learning. The generic English language course books with specific themes and topics, a specific situational context, may become restrained by the demands to use materials that are culture sensitive and context-appropriate. Abd Rashid and Ibrahim (2018), the authors of *English Language Textbooks and Portrayal of Culture: A content analysis* dealing with the texts that relate to Muslims and Islam in selected textbooks recommend that publishers consult experts on the cultures depicted in their textbooks so that they can be suitable and do not come across as offensive to certain groups. They add that another option that these particular publishers should consider, and many today have done so, is to publish local editions of their textbooks in order to make the contents more culturally responsive to students' needs. Although religious and cultural concerns need to be observed, the contents of course books are easily amendable and the potential local editions should be primarily revised from the view of the language typology and possibly the prevailing local teaching conventions.

It has been suggested that textbooks with authentic texts creating "meaningful classroom situations" may effectively present "false realities" (Anderson, Valešová and Duda 2020, 117). We believe that the most relevant learning context is not the context of the course book but the learning environment of the classroom, the context of the study group. Designing tasks and situations "bringing the outside or real world to the

class" (Anderson, Valešová and Duda 2020, 118) has a low efficacy in the digital environment. "The historic centrally-controlled classroom with the textbook as its major instrument has been made obsolete by the Internet deleting spatial and temporal limitations, the electronic environment has made the textbook archaic with most pupils permanently involved as fulltime authors, photographers and players" (Řeřicha, and Práger 2018, 25). They show there is strong evidence of students developing bias against the traditional classroom and the attempts to modernize it are not only counterproductive, but manifestly destructive. The distrust of traditional education has been also confirmed by research carried out among secondary school graduates / university freshmen with regard to their experience with learning English in and out of a school classroom (Práger, and Řeřicha 2019, 14).

The attempts of adjusting the approaches to language learning to the digital environment, from revising the contents of course books to writing with a clear purpose and publishing on websites (Kaye n.d.) and integrating ICT in e.g., the British Council CPD framework for teachers are the last gasps of English instruction based on the learning methods of the previous lineal text environment. Although significantly more advanced and efficient than GT and PPP methods they do not implement the desired qualitative leap.

Having discussed context, mostly viewed as motivation, we had mentioned the learning environment of the study group. As the qualitative leap is difficult to achieve by the lineal text environment-based approaches we need to focus on individual students and study group dynamics. In English programmes writing is the most difficult subject to teach. Paul Kaye (n.d.) accents its low attractiveness for both learners and teachers, students find writing difficult even in L1. Most of his "ideas for communicative writing tasks" are concerned with finding the audience, readers. He mentions, however, that writing is "more fun" by doing group writing activities and group correction and editing of work", in principle, Kaye turns the "writers" into "readers" and vice versa.

Most of the described methods of the English instruction at tertiary level have a common purpose, to practice different ways how to make students repeat, remember and reproduce specific parts of the L2. Kaye's suggestion of making writing more interesting deviates from these methods by creating a learning context involving the whole study group. Group writing activities and group correction and editing of work, we have been applying in our courses last two years, have a number of consequences. Kaye (n.d.) does not enlarge on them but they might contribute to the implementation of the missing qualitative leap.

Based on the long-term experience of teaching writing in the L2 we will describe some of the five processes that we have been trying to develop to overcome the plateau preventing the qualitative leap. The processes can be described as Creativity, Reflection, Exploration, Confidence and Responsibility.

3 Methods, their specific techniques – and processes as agents of change

This article aims to show that when teaching English as a foreign language there is another level/layer of processes besides the GT, PPP, CLT and Lexical Approach and the techniques/activities they use. Each of these approaches and their specific techniques should be continually considered from the viewpoint of the five more generic processes of Creativity, Reflection, Exploration and Responsibility with the central process of Confidence. If these are not implemented consciously, if the awareness of their all-pervasive presence is missing in teaching, the passive acceptance of the traditional methods prevails, the progress of learning may be slow or completely absent and the character of the learning environment will not be changed.

The five processes may be implemented by different specific techniques, in some cases two or more of the processes make use of a single technique as e.g., a small group work. We believe that any techniques, from e.g., small groups, multiple choice and translation to free communication, will not contribute to the qualitative leap if not becoming an integral part of the layer of the generic processes. This layer then becomes the agent of the qualitative change. We are very well aware of the different quality and usability of the “techniques” (cf. Aryanto 2020, Řeřicha and Práger 2020) and their different acceptance but to accent the importance of the agents of change we find it useful to refer to a) techniques, b) (didactic) methods and c) the processes.

4 Small group work technique

There is a common agreement with Hamann, Pollock and Wilson (2012, 65) assessing student perceptions of the benefits of discussions in small-group, large-class, and online learning contexts that “small discussion groups elicited the highest student satisfaction and scored highest in critical thinking skills”. The group collaboration benefits are relevant for our seminars focused on writing.

The approach of “writing-for-writing” (Harmer 2015, 369) has been applied since the seminars are focused on building the students’ writing skills rather than on writing for language practice. Of the roles of the instructor the one of “feedback provider” (Harmer 2015, 369) has been predominant but not exclusive, because of the recent teaching having to be mostly supported by digital media. The prevalent corrective feedback was suppressed and the priority was given to the feedback developing the processes Creativity, Reflection, Exploration, Confidence and Responsibility.

Small group work is just a part, a tool in our overall approach to learning and creating the safe environment from which we work. The dominant model used in our

practice is based on Tuckman's group development model (Tuckman 1965, Tuckman and Jensen 1977, Tuckman and Jensen 2010.).

The process of forming small groups is as varied and complex as any individual group member. Small groups have been traditionally described to move through four developmental stages: forming, storming, norming, and performing.

Our research and practice are simultaneously a reaction to Tuckman's and Jensen's comment (Tuckman and Jensen 2010, 43) about a lack of empirical testing of existing models of group-stage development and their "discovery that recent research posits the existence of a final discernible and significant stage of group development – termination. Because the 1965 model was a conceptual statement determined by the literature, it is reasonable, therefore, to modify the model to reflect recent literature" (Tuckman and Jensen 47, 2010). The completed model includes forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning

Tuckman developed the 4-stage model that influences the way we work with students today. However, the 5th stage he refers to as "adjourning" introduced in 2010 is not relevant for our practice as the groups are not *single task or project specific*. Rather, we see our groups as permeant or at least semi-rigid. However, we do recognise that there are times when the cohesion of the group could be disrupted, triggering the adjourning stage Truckman refers to. i.e., half term breaks, transitioning from 1st to 2nd or 2nd to 3rd years. Consequently, we recognised some time ago that ours is a practice-based working methodology not a therapy and as there are times when group members could feel uncertain about the future we have implemented an element of continuity assurance; i.e., we inform and regularly re-enforce information to students even if they are satisfied with this methodology we can continually review its effectiveness, make any alterations as the small group may deem necessary and continue to use a model with a proven record of success as a part of the bigger picture we have outlined throughout this article.

5 The experience of small groups

Our practice in the school years 2019–2021 since the establishment of the small groups has shown that new groups are unclear of their purpose and members don't know what to expect, they need time for introductions to get to know each other and to deal with and establish issues of trust.

Therefore we spend the first 2 or 3 lessons talking about their expectations, what areas / language skills would they like to practice, and prioritising them; how this can be achieved, and who would be responsible for the learning that takes place (for many students this is a totally new educational experience in itself).

The aims and objectives of the instructor had to consider the following:

1. Are they task, outcome, objective driven?
2. Are they person – centred, geared towards the personal growth and development of individual members?
3. Are they equally balanced from the viewpoint of ability, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity?
4. Are they prescribed or freely chosen?

When we decided to establish the small groups in the winter term 2019 in our English language seminars, we planned for five to seven groups of four to six students. In the forming stage it had been suggested that initially students form safe social, friendship groups, this often avoids the caution that the social, group norms and dynamics individual team members would feel whilst establishing their position in a new group. It also reduces issues of conflict (storming, the second stage of group development). With minimal training the small groups were functioning and the response to small group work was mostly positive. The following students' quotes amplify the learning that is taking place:

Andrea; Brings the group together; we now talk together in English, even on Facebook.

Jakub; We can share the work and produce a better presentation.

Klara; We all have our task but always help each other, it is more demanding, more fun, less stressful.

Barbora; We practiced our pronunciation together which made us look more proficient.

As alluded to above, with our approach, the difference between stages 1 and 2 is small as members of the small groups themselves were ready to target their energies towards working together to achieve the task, be it group presentations as per the course curriculum, or peer evaluation of other groups' presentations. Again, it has been reflected by students in a continuing vein:

Nikola; Because I knew more about the subject I took the lead, then we decided we should take turns being lead and share the responsibility.

Libuše; When we know the task we can plan, prepare and deliver it in our own way (we know we can come to you if we get into trouble) but we like to resolve it ourselves. We can also ask other classmates.

The 3rd stage, norming, may be the most complex of the 4 stages of group development. It is at this stage where explicit or implicit norms of behaviour are developed and members identify with their groups and develop acceptable ways to complete assignments, resolve differences, make decisions and solve problems. It is at this stage where we can negotiate the inclusion of a new member from other groups that have been through a similar process in their class, so you can expect them to reach agreement on roles and

tasks, and norms of behaviour, where you can expect individual members to shift from power struggles to affiliation; from confidence to clarity; from personal advantage to group success; and from detachment to involvement. The following short case study demonstrate the ease in which the transition of new members can be made.

We asked one group (containing Klára and her friend Klára) to invite Tereza to join their group, gently get her to communicate and get to know a little about her. Tereza is a girl who always sits alone, when asked to join a group does not communicate or contribute, if we go to talk with her, she immediately wells up and becomes emotional. After two classes we know she enjoys writing, her parents had her in their 50s when her other three siblings had left home and she has no friends and prefers to be alone. We will see if she participates in a group presentation.

By stage 4, performing small group work takes on a whole different meaning; because the groups have successfully moved through issues of membership, purpose, structure and roles, they will now be able to focus their energies on group performance: completing tasks and solving problems together. This is where the initial investment in time, preparing the students pays dividends to the instructor who now has a coherent and fully functioning unit equipped for making that qualitative leap. Our role after four semesters of group work is largely symbolic, the quality of students' work and understanding has increased dramatically, as has their teaching style, technique, confidence and ability. Students' reflections as deliverers and as recipients are indicated below. The quotations, come directly from student feedback to questions in the evaluation questionnaire (cf. the description of the survey in the Chapter 6, on the results of the self-evaluation questionnaires).

Jan; It is a lot more work, because there are three people who must agree that it is good enough. *Katka*; Peer assessment was a terrifying concept but in reality, proved to be very informative, helpful and interesting (people wanted to help).

Lenka; It is like having 27 teachers to help you.

Lenka failed to mention that she was the 28th teacher, which is another qualitative leap.

6 Self-evaluation questionnaire confirming confidence as a central agent of change

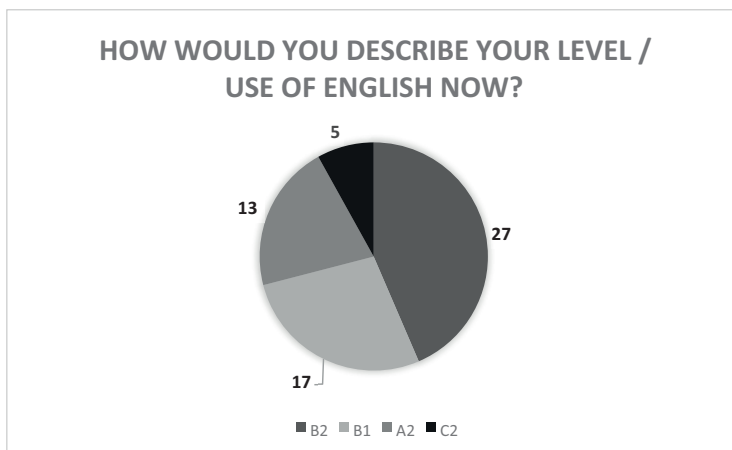
To verify the effectiveness of the set system incorporating the small group technique, we have been systematically applying feedback with the help of relatively simple questionnaires. The sample is representative for the students of English courses at the Department of Foreign Languages of Silesian University in Opava.

In the school year 2019 -2020 the pre-evaluation questionnaires were submitted to all of 120 students registered in the Practical English course and out of 120 question-

naires 62 were considered (twenty-one students did not return the questionnaires, twenty-six dropped out of school and nine questionnaires were not completed correctly). In the winter term of 2021 the end of term evaluation questionnaires were distributed to all registered students as follows; 116 pre-evaluation questionnaires were sent to first year Practical Language students and 82 were returned. 52 evaluation questionnaires were sent to second year Practical Language students with 30 returns and 16 evaluation questionnaires were sent to third year Practical Language students with 7 returns. The decreasing number of questionnaires is proportional to the number of students in a given year.

When analysing the self-evaluation questionnaire (see below) submitted to the students of the English programme at Silesian University in Opava before the winter term 2019 confidence has kept emerging as central to the processes functioning as agents of change. The questionnaire was focused on their self-evaluation and expectations. The students answered the following four questions:

1. How would you describe your level / use of English now?



Interestingly, 48% of students rate themselves as A2 (13) and B1 (17) which is below the entry requirements for the course. The students who rated themselves A2 describe their reasons as a lack of confidence, finding it difficult to speak in public and being afraid of making mistakes. *Jiří*; I can read effortlessly; I can speak to myself. Speaking to someone like writing is work in progress.

Berenika; I would like to have the confidence to speak, but I get heart attack before I can speak.

Eliška; I am shy and don't have the confidence to speak and talk without the words and vocabulary.

The students that graded themselves B1 offered similar reasons, namely a low confidence in speaking and writing, insufficient knowledge of sentence construction and grammar and not enough practice using language.

Josef; My reading and listening are good but when it comes to writing and speaking, I can't express myself.

Matěj; I think my lack of confidence to speak English is more a fault of social anxiety. *Kateřina*; I consume media daily mainly in English, but I am self-conscious about talking and mistakes and grammar.

Alexandra; I think my English is a little *worser* but I try to speak a little bit fluent.

Students who identified at B2, although more overall confident with passive skills share the same lack of active skills and confidence, the recurring theme is missing self-confidence in public speaking and with foreigners, a lack of practice.

Denisa; I have a B2 certificate, my reading and grammar are good but I don't have the confidence or vocabulary to speak English.

Aneta; I don't have a problem speaking English with friends but have a great problem speaking in public (I avoid it whenever possible, I have even said I can't speak English).

Jakub; 'If I could speak without the stress, shame and nervous, I would be more confident.

Surprisingly the same lack of confidence is identified, with a few exceptions, by students of C2 who may have better language skills but cite the low confidence as an obstacle for their development.

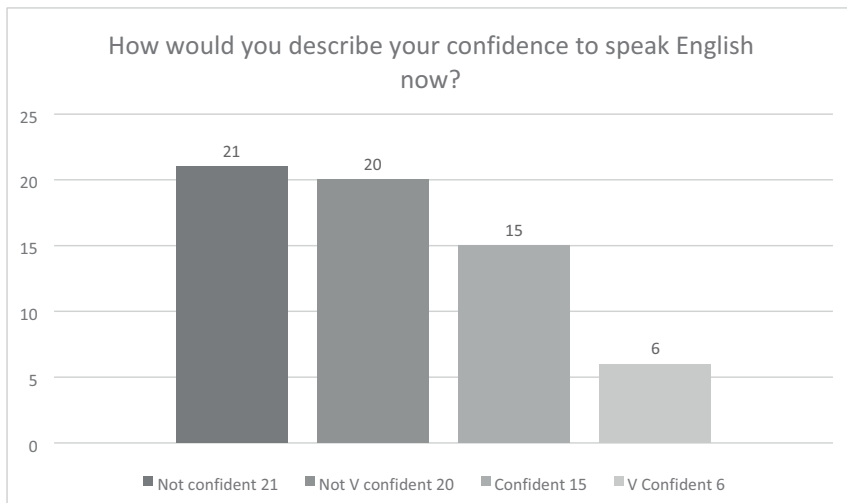
Petra; I'm a lazy person but would like to improve my confidence in starting a conversation.

Petr; I could be more confident, I have a certificate and I don't mind speaking English already.

Michal; When I was in high school I am confident to speak English. But now I know my English is not one of the best and have to practice not to make mistakes.

Anna; I am pretty confident speaking English, quite fluent and capable in most situations.

2. How would you describe your confidence to speak English now?



Again, it is significant to see that two thirds of students consider their lack the confidence to speak English. The students' quotes below show the dramatic mixed ability range (approximately 50% of students consider themselves below average), but they are beginning to accent the importance of the layer of agents of change with the central process of confidence.

Barbora; Poor, I do not like to speak English in front of people, so I think I will have to improve my speaking skills.

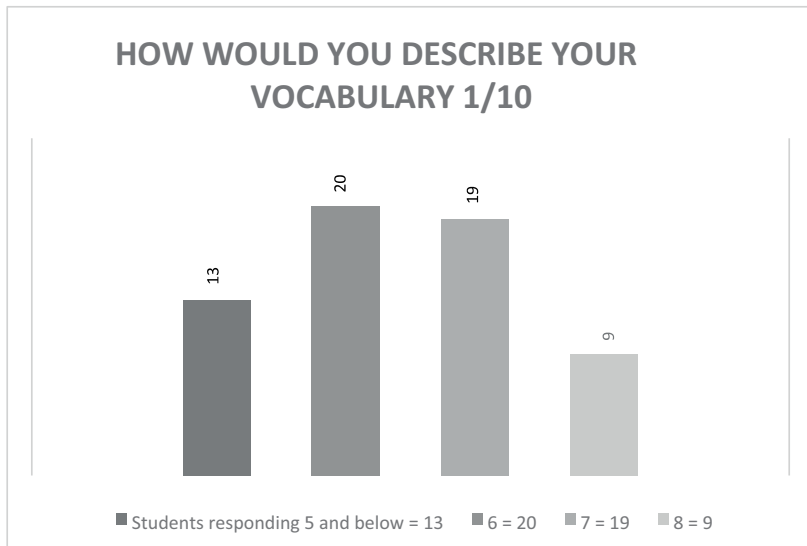
Krystýna; I think my confidence is really bad because in my head all possible things can go wrong.

Jakub; My confidence and my English has improved because I felt safe being pushed out of my comfort zone.

Ivana; I was always afraid of making mistakes and people would make fun of me, I am now getting better because we can all learn through our mistakes.

Tereza; My speaking and confidence is not sufficient for what I would like because of the new speaking practice I am improving, I do not have to concerned about mistakes.

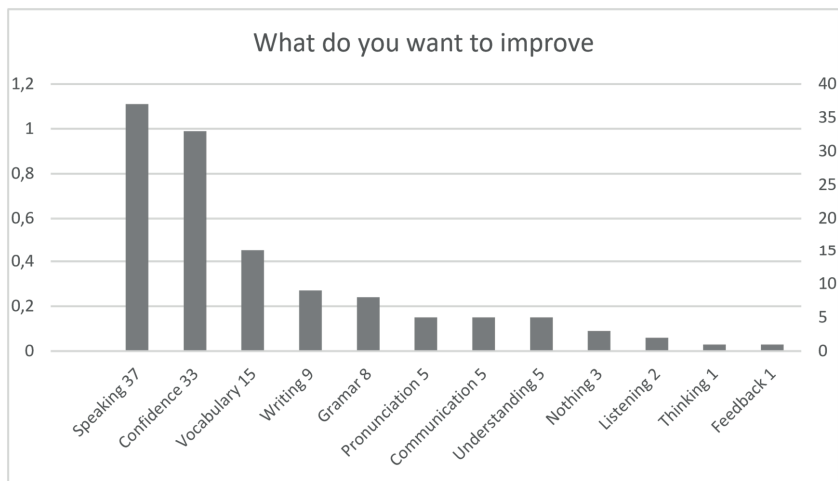
3. How would you describe your vocabulary 1/10



Listening to the students in the classroom we are aware of their extremely limited vocabulary. Although the term *vocabulary* as it is used in the questionnaire has to be necessarily subjective, it confirms our assumption about the limitations of the prevailing Grammar-Translation Method whose low-effort character may be the reason for developing false beginners who are unable to achieve the qualitative leap. The students' vocabulary remains limited because at a certain level it seems to become sufficient for their communicative needs. Even a relatively simple level of communication in a foreign language can fully meet the language needs of its participants. Achieving a qualitative leap is complicated by the fact that complex issues can be discussed at a simple level if specific terminology is not needed. Most teaching methods do not force participants to leave this

(comfortable) level. However, the process of reflection (the learner becoming aware of the limitations of their own language skills) can become a possible agent of change.

4. What do you want to improve



From the student questionnaire it is abundantly clear throughout (and verified every day in class) that speaking and confidence are re-occurring themes everyone identifies with accounting for over half the responses submitted.

Aleš; I really want to get better at using advanced words in conversation and writing and don't rely on basic English sentences I learned at elementary school.

Michal; My English has already improved just by listening to you and having the confidence to talk with you.

Denisa; I would like to improve speaking, in particular, the fear of speaking.

Zuzana; I would like to have better vocabulary, improve my pronunciation and speak without many mistakes.

Matyas; If my writing would not get better I would be ashamed and mad by myself.

We are aware of the subjective character of the question 3, the purpose of the questionnaire was to obtain a general snapshot of the first-year students' self-evaluation and expectations. In the questionnaire investigating students' expectations before the first semester of their English programme, students mostly indicated language skills. However, in the second place, even before vocabulary, writing, grammar and pronunciation etc., they indicated the need to increase their confidence in English. The need for confidence, self-esteem is repeated in each context investigated by the questionnaire. As we wrote above, confidence emerges central to all the other processes, expected to support the qualitative leap in learning. Some authors dealing with the processes (or methods) may present their experiences with Creativity, Reflection, Experimentation, Confidence and Responsibility without pursuing it further or drawing relevant conclu-

sions for learning. Mumford, and Dikilitaş (2020, 114) describing “pre-service language teachers reflection development through online interaction in a hybrid learning course” offer a short case study of a pre-service teacher Canan and mention that she “is held back by her own lack of faith in her second language ability, which prevents her writing contributions”.

Self-confidence as a specific and important process in foreign language learning is a frequent topic of contemporary research in English studies but one which is rather neglected in the articles written by Czech authors. Self-confidence is stressed by Novotná as an important feature of personal development that “may be supported by teacher’s assessment in students’ written communication” (Novotná 2018, 37). Although self-confidence is referred to in the recent Czech methodology theses as lacking in students or exaggerated in case of some more experienced teachers, very rarely it is a specific topic of research as in Kubalová, K. (2010) with her focus on students’ self-confidence and correcting spoken English. In the cultures where foreign language teaching has been influenced by the English-speaking countries tradition self-confidence is often the main focus of research (Xu 2011, Hummel 2013, Krulatz and Iversen 2020 and many others). Self-confidence may be a more general issue among Czech students, e.g. in Vonkova, Papajoanu, and Kralova, 2022 show that grammar school students significantly underestimate their online communication skills.

The learner’s self-esteem is a vital element of success and the language activities should be examined for their support of self-esteem. “One of the ways of provoking excitement and self-esteem is by increasing the students’ expectation of success” (Harmer 2015, 92). The students supported by the concept of *scaffolding* can move from one “success” to another (Harmer 2015, 151).

Conclusion

More often than not, we take it for granted that our students are self-confident. The other extreme the authors have met with is the attitude that “it is not our job or responsibility; we have a syllabus to complete”. However, in our language seminars we accept that for many of our students the low selfconfidence (or even misplaced self-confidence or chauvinism) may be a real issue of self-doubt, a fear of failing, be passive or submissive, have difficulty trusting others, etc. Yet we know, having high or low self-confidence is rarely related to one’s actual abilities, and mostly based on one’s perceptions, and it is these perceptions, we need to reverse.

We have attributed a lack of a qualitative leap in the learning of some Czech students to the didactic methods that on one hand enable students to reach a certain plateau of language skills, but on the other hand the methods themselves will prevent students from breaking through it. The limitations of the prevailing methods of instruc-

tions as the Grammar-Translation, Task-based Learning, Present, Practice, Produce and Communicative Language Teaching methods and Lexical Approach have been considered and the need of further agents of change has become apparent. The students in the questionnaire below and in the classroom mention a lack of confidence as a major obstacle of further learning. This process of students' reflection on their own learning is the first step to the desired change. The other processes of Creativity and Experimentation result from Confidence and should lead to students' conscious acceptance of responsibility for their own learning. This third layer of processes is not systematically supported by the present-day English language curricula which may be viewed as a significant omission in the foreign language teaching methods.

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