

DEVELOPING EFL LEARNERS' COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the concept of communicative competence from various points of view and defines active forms and methods of teaching English. Communication-based activities help in making classroom situation more interactive and provide as much opportunities for exposure to English as possible. Although there are many activities that encourage practicing the target language, the present paper tends to review information gap activities based on communicative language teaching approach. The correct use of gap tasks helps students to develop speaking skills in a safe and private environment. The outcomes of these kinds of tasks will always be positive as long as they are adequate, relevant, authentic, and achievable.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching; communicative competence, information gap activities.

INTRODUCTION

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method has become very popular in the area of teaching. It is a method that focuses on communication and the accomplishment of students' ability to communicate. The main goal of teaching a foreign language at school is to form communicative competence of students. In order to achieve this goal, CLT recommends teaching English through communication or by using it. Furthermore, CLT emphasizes meaningful communication rather than the achievement of perfect grammar or native-like pronunciation. Communicative competence refers to the ability of learners to communicate their language knowledge effectively.

In methodology the term «competence» is used as characteristics of the achieved level of the language proficiency. This term was introduced by N. Chomsky to define an ability to fulfill some activity. D. Hymes introduced the concept of communicative competence as the ability to use the language they are learning appropriately in a given social encounter. Communicative competence is acquired in the process of natural communication or specially organized training consisting of several components, including language competence, subject competence, linguistic competence and pragmatic competence.[1]

Material and Methods

It should be noted that presenting one's own thoughts, especially in a foreign language, is a rather complicated process, both from a linguistic and psychological point of view. It has been proven that one of the main reasons for the fear of students to speak to strangers in a foreign language is their lack of communication skills. The lack of motivation in the speech activity of students, the mechanical performance of speech actions deprives the speaker of such characteristics as communication, activity, consciousness and thereby prevents the accumulated skills from going into natural speech communication. This is partly due to the fact that the mastery of speech skills, requiring more mental activity, creativity, is postponed to a

later stage. In this regard, training at the initial stage is often limited to exercises in reproduction and the combination of ready-made forms.

Mastering a foreign language as a means of communication is meant to achieve knowledge not only of linguistic forms (mastering grammar and vocabulary), but also an idea of how to use them for the purposes of real communication.

At the initial stage of learning, language should be considered as a means of developing a child's personality, taking into account motives, interests and abilities. Through communication and activity in language and through activity with language, the child develops, learns the world and himself, masters the spiritual wealth that the process of foreign language education can give a child. To develop competence, students have to be involved in a non-structured environment of language. To be precise, learners need the proper conditions to be creative and spontaneous.

Developing the communicative competence in English as a foreign language is an aim that learners struggle to achieve. Achieving such an aim depends on many factors related to teachers, syllabi, teaching situation, environment and learners themselves as well.

It is communicative competence that is considered as a systemic competence, without which it is impossible to ensure the development of either informational, sociocultural, socio-political, compensatory or academic components of education in the modern sense.

The content of teaching a foreign language is filled with various methods and forms of educational activity and in the course of independent work, which develops the communicative skills of students.

RESULTS

The practical needs of teaching foreign languages determine the priority of certain methods.

- Structure-oriented methods aimed at the formation of certain pronunciation skills, the selection of lexical material, the grammatical structure of the statement;
- Communication-oriented methods aimed at the formation of skills to adequately express thoughts in a specific language.

The main principle of communication-oriented learning is speech activity. Communication participants must learn to solve real and imagined problems of joint activities using a foreign language. In this case, learning is carried out through tasks (activities), which are implemented using methodological techniques and exercises.

An example of non-traditional methods of student communication in this case will be tasks of the following types:

- Communicative games;
- Communicative stimulations in role-plays and problem-solving activities;
- Socialization (free communication).

The three-phase frame-work form of communication-oriented tasks is becoming more widespread. Almost any task can be performed in three stages:

- Pre-activity (preparatory);
- While-activity (executive);
- Post-activity (final).

At the same time, it is necessary to create positive conditions for the active and free participation of the individual in activities:

- Students get the opportunity to freely express their thoughts and feelings in the process of communication;
- Each participant in group communication remains in the focus of attention of the rest;
- Self-expression of the individual becomes more important than the demonstration of linguistic knowledge;
- Even contradictory, paradoxical judgments are encouraged, but testifying to the independence of students, about their active position;
- Participants in communication feel safe from criticism, prosecution for mistakes and punishment;
- The use of linguistic material is subject to the task of an individual speech concept;
- The linguistic material corresponds to the speech-thinking abilities of the speaker;
- Relationships are built on empathy and understanding of the experiences of others.

In this case, speech errors should be considered not only possible, but also normal. The above conditions are indispensable when teaching a foreign language.

An important role in the implementation of non-traditional methods is played by the informative competence of students, which includes:

- Informational "frames";
- Established knowledge (schemata);
- Linguistic picture of the world (language representation of the world) in its foreign language form;
- Background knowledge;
- General outlook.

This is an important prerequisite for engaging students in communication. The silence of the student in the lesson is often explained by the fact that he does not know the subject of the conversation, does not have a personal relationship to the problem under discussion, is not familiar with possible ways of behavior, although he has learned vocabulary with grammar.

DISCUSSION

Richards and Rogers (2014) and Richards (2006) argued that communicative approach operations are unlimited. These activities assist learners attain the curriculum's communicative objectives, as well as involve students in the process of communication such as interaction, sharing of information and meaning that is negotiated [4]. Pair work and group work regarded as the primary objects for communication language teaching in the framework of school operations. There are many learning strategies or activities that are usually selected for enhancing language learning.

Communication-oriented teaching of the English language can be carried out using the "information gap" tasks. An information-gap task is a technique in which learners are missing the needed information to complete a task or solve a problem, and they have to communicate with their classmates to fill in the gaps [5].

Harmer (1991) described information gap as a gap between the two (individuals) in the data they possess, and the discussion helps to close that gap so that both speakers end up getting the same information [2]. Information gap is an action between two or more students who have information, and to get that information and complete the task, they have to negotiate the meaning. The information gap gives a genuine reason or motivation to talk then they will learn to use the language more effectively.

Information gap assignments can have different forms:

The information gap: This is the classic gap exploited by the communicative approach. Student A has some information, perhaps concerning the prices of food. Student B needs to know these prices, and so asks A questions to find the information.

The information gap is ideally suited to pair and small group work and usually relies upon pre-prepared information cards.

The experience gap: All students in classes have had different experiences in their lives - so this is immediately a gap. In some classes this gap is very marked. For example, a multilingual adult class in the UK provides great difference between the backgrounds of the students. A monolingual primary class will obviously show less difference.

The picture gap (learners have almost the same pictures, some of the images are different, and the differences need to be discovered using questions without seeing the partner's picture - matching tasks);

The text gap (students have similar texts or fragments of the same text of one student, are absent in the text of another student, and the lack of information needs to be filled in - jig-saw reading);

The knowledge gap (one student has information that the other does not have, and it needs to be completed with complete-the-table tasks);

The opinion gap: Most people have differing opinions, feelings and reactions to situations, events and propositions. Finding out about someone's feelings and opinions is all about closing the gap between people. The increase in personalised activities that is evident in many textbooks is testament to the value of this gap.

The reasoning gap (students have different evidence, which is important to collect and compare).

An example of a task of the "information gap" type is any communication game, for example, "Treasure Island." Two participants in the communication ("treasure seekers") have contour maps depicting an uninhabited island. Participants, asking each other questions, try to find all the dangers that lie in wait for them and put appropriate hazard symbols on the empty squares of their cards.

Another example of text gap can be “Complete the Text” activity. The aim of this activity is to create two versions of a story and remove different information from each story. For example, one version of the story might be missing character names and locations (proper nouns) while the other version omits adjectives and adverbs. Teacher divides the students into pairs and distributes a different version to each student. Students must work together to complete the story they’ve been given based on the different information each student provides. To do this, students must ask questions to discover the missing information that their teammate has. Ask the students to write in the missing information.

Example:

Student A: What is the name of the first character?

Student B: Her name is Lisa. What adjective is used to describe the “tree” in the second sentence?

“Draw this” activity can be an example of picture gap tasks. In this activity, **Teacher** divides students into pairs and gives an image or picture to the first student in each pair without showing it to the second student. The first student describes the picture to the second student. The second student then draws the image based on this description. The second student is allowed to ask questions to help them understand what the picture or image is.

Example:

Student A: The background is light blue.

Student B: Okay.

Student A: There is a woman in the middle of the picture.

Student B: What color is her hair?

Student A: Her hair is brown.

“Job Interview” is also a good example of information gap tasks. In this activity students practice talking about experiences, professions and characteristics. Students are divided into groups of two. One student is the interviewer, the other is the interviewee.

The interviewer asks typical interview questions. You can either pre-teach these types of questions to the whole class or provide a list of sample questions to each pair. Provide the interviewee with a profession and short backstory. The information you provide the interviewee can be as detailed or as minimal as you choose and should correlate with the students’ English level.

Example:

Student A: Where did you study?

Student B: I studied at ABC University.

Student A: What did you study?

Student B: I studied medicine.

Student A: What are your strengths?

Student B: I’m hardworking and passionate.

You can come up with a lot of similar tasks, depending on the ingenuity of the teacher. You can invite students to develop such tasks themselves and even hold a competition of "games" and "assignments». One of these techniques in the methods of communication is a communicative task.

CONCLUSION

The development of the communicative competence of students in English lessons is the basic mechanism of foreign language communication, which in the future graduates will be able to develop and improve according to personal needs. By keeping the notion of a gap between students in mind, it is easy to come up with speaking activities that promote meaningful communication. These activities often require very little preparation but can increase the total amount of student talking time in any lesson. It is necessary to plan the lesson so that the students have the opportunity to communicate with each other in the lesson.

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