Original Article

Implementing Interactive Methods in Teaching General English for Future Programmers

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Abstract

The paper is devoted to applying interactive methods in teaching General English for future programmers as ESP which students have at Kazan Federal University one lesson per week is not enough to develop professional English skills. Therefore, developing communication skills in the sphere of professional communication is integrated into General English course. The relevance of the paper is not questioned, as nowadays interactive methods are one of the most effective and actively developing pedagogical technologies in modern education. The paper gives definitions to interactive methods, their classification,emphasizes the difference between interactive and communicative approaches, and overviews various interactive strategies used in General English lessons. In addition to it, stages of managing the educational process by the means of these technologies are considered. Usage of above-mentioned methods in English lessons for future programmers at Kazan Federal University is described. Furthermore, advantages and outcomes of the interactive methods are shown. Finally, it is concluded that interactive methods in teaching General English for future programmers open up new possibilities for language practice on the basis of material studied, as well as simultaneous solution of multiple educational problems, the main of which is developing communicative skills.

Key words: Education, Student, Teaching, ESL, Interactive methods, University, Benefits, Experience

INTRODUCTION

Teaching process is mainly based on both sharing and acquiring knowledge. As we know that a methodological approach in teaching foreign languages may be divided into three groups: passive, active and interactive methods.

Despite the fact that teaching methods may differ from teacher to teacher, interactive teaching methods are one of the most effective ones used in teaching English. Firstly, they motivate students as they promote an atmosphere of attention and participation. Consequently, lessons become more interesting. Secondly, various surveys show that students absorb the least amount of information in traditional forms of instruction.As we know, explaining something at the lesson is not teaching and listening is not learning. Furthermore, they are an effective way to

connect with a generation of students used to consistent stimulation. Finally, the test on defining English language level reveals that students entering at Kazan Federal University need to be motivated to improve their English.

The diagram illustrates the English level of students entered Kazan Federal University to study programming in 2015 and 2016. It should be mentioned that there are two institutes at Kazan Federal University specializing in training future programmers:1) Institute of Computational Mathematics and Information Technologies and 2) Higher Institute for Information Technology and Information Systems.

Overall, it is seen that the levels of the students of Kazan Federal University can be divided into five levels: Low Pre-Intermediate, Pre-Intermediate, Intermediate, Upper-Intermediate and Advanced. It is evident from the chart that throughout the period, that most students are of Intermediate level.

To begin, the number of students of Institute of Computational Mathematics and Information Technologies was higher than for Higher Institute for Information Technology and Information Systems, and this remained

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so throughout the period. The amount of Low Pre-Intermediate students at Higher Institute for Information Technology and Information Systems decreased dramatically from 38 to 14 while Upper-Intermediate and Advanced students gradually grew. As for Institute of Computational Mathematics and Information Technologies, the number of Low Pre-Intermediate students rose rapidly from 64 to 86 as well as there was a significant increase in Pre-Intermediate, Upper-Intermediate and Advanced students compared to 2015 whereas the number of Intermediate students fell from 94 to 72.

METHODOLOGY

The current paper is focused on definitions to interactive methods, the difference between interactive and communicative approaches, their advantages, various interactive strategies used in General English lessons as well as interactive approaches to teaching General English to students majoring in programming at Kazan Federal University.

There applied such methods of investigation as observation, testing, investigating and summarizing the experience of other teachers.

RESULT

Interactive Methods in Teaching General English
It is a generally accepted fact that teaching General English nowadays is becoming more and more interactive, thus allowing innovative methods replace the traditional ones. Interactivity is natural for any English language course, in so far as its main purpose is to develop the learners' ability to communicate in English, that is to interact with each other, in real life situations. Besides, interactive character of the English language classes meets the contemporary requirements imposed on linguistic education, as it allows for a learner-centered and practice-oriented paradigm.

The literature reviewed indicated that despite the growing popularity, interactive approach to teaching English is not clearly defined.

On the one hand, it is often associated with communicative approach, since interactive model of language acquisition involves immediate participation in speech events. On the other hand, it is seen as a modified direct method, which is a conversational method aimed to teach spoken language [1].

Although all the methods mentioned above have obvious similarity, namely the focus on communication skills, they are apparently different. When using an interactive
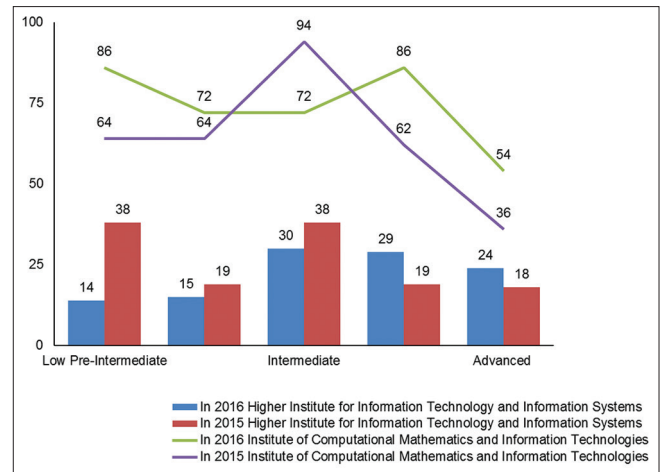

Figure 1: Students' level of English at Kazan Federal University

approach in English language teaching, the emphasis is placed on the process of communication in the classroom, while communicative learning accentuates the communicative function of the language. The principal difference between interactive and traditional methods of teaching English is that interactive model is primarily aimed at studying new material, while traditional approach is focused on consolidating what is already learned [2].

In order to identify the distinguishing features of the interactive teaching methods let us first consider several definitions of interaction. Longman dictionary puts it as following: the activity of talking to other people, working together with them [3].Rivers defines interaction as an elicitation of willing student participation and initiative which requires a high degree of interpersonal communication skills [4]. According to Ellis (1993), interaction within the classroom leads to many advantages for language learning such as comprehension checks, language practice [5].

Swain (1985) underlines that "interaction allows the learner to practice the target language, thus enhancing fluency; to notice or trigger a particular structural form that needs modifying; to test hypotheses about structural points and to reflect metalinguistically" [6]. Brown (1991) and McLaughlin (1987) point out that interaction provides opportunity for the non-native speaker to practice structural components, increasing the likelihood of automaticity of such components [7][8].

Brown (1994) indicates that interactive classes have the following beneficial features:
- There is a large amount of pair and group work;
- Students engage themselves in spontaneous and authentic conversations;
- Students work for actual audiences and purposes, not artificial ones;

- The task-based activities prepare students for the real world outside of the classroom[9].

Through interactions, students can improve their language level as they listen to or read authentic texts, or just exchange their opinions in conversations, discussions, debates, project-based or game-based tasks.

All things considered, interactive methods used in educational process fulfill certain requirements:
- Active, creative, and proactive participation of students in the learning process;
- Development and accumulation of linguistic skills;
- Simulation of the real life activities;
- Collaboration between the students and the teacher at all the stages of the learning process.

There is a variety of interactive methods that have special effectiveness in teaching English language, such as role-playing, brainstorming, discussion, case study, debates, and others.

At the moment there are several classifications of interactive methods. Arutyunov(1983) divided them into two groups: 1) problem-based learning, including practical exercises, seminars, discussions, conferences; 2) game-based learning: for instance, business games, projects, role-playing, simulation exercises, following the instructions [10].

Anisimov (2004) offered a function-based classification, according to which there are:
1. Traditional methods: lectures, seminars, practical classes, trainings (provide a translation function);
2. New methods (simulation) –they develop thinking ability and motivation of trainees;
3. Innovative methods –different kinds of educational games which provide the formation of the intellectual culture and self-development skills [11].

Interactive training is aimed primarily at the development of interaction between students. The teacher in this case acts mainly as a coordinator, guiding the communicative process. Teacher's main role is to provide students with proper conditions for comfortable interaction in order to solve specific educational problems by engaging their own social experience.

The ARMA International Center for Education offers the guidelines for teachers sticking to interactive teaching model. Teachers should encourage students' participation asking them questions that stimulate response and discussion. Moreover, it is a good idea to use teaching aids that press for answers, capture and hold the students' attention [12].

Jeyasala(2014) stresses that successful interaction on English lessons can be achieved under certain conditions. Firstly, teachers must create the desirable atmosphere and good relations among students. Secondly, individuals must appreciate the uniqueness of every person and be tolerant and respectful to each other. Above all, classrooms should not be teacher-directed and dominated [9].

To put it another way, interactive learning solves several educational problems:
- develops communication skills, helps establish emotional contact between the learners;
- teaches to work in team, cooperate and collaborate;
- provides students with the information necessary to implement learning activities;
- develops learning skills and intellectual abilities (analysis, synthesis, goal setting, critical thinking, etc);
- helps get rid of stress and the language barrier;
- enhances learning efficiency.

Interactive Methods of Teaching General English for Future Programmers

At Kazan Federal University we use various approaches of teaching, including different types of games while teaching EFL to students specializing in information technology [13]. At KFU English is a prescribed general education course for freshmen. Students specializing in information technology have this course for two years. It should be noted that due to the choice of their major future programmers are mostly characterized by creativity and preferences to group work and interaction. One of the most universal techniques to work with students is brainstorming since it is typically performed in group sessions and is useful for generating creative thoughts and ideas [12].Another advantage is that it helps students to pull together what is particularly useful for freshmen when they do not know each other yet. It also works well as a warming-up activity or a lead-in to the topic. At the beginning of the class students might be given three newspaper headlines (*HP Inc lays the foundations for a digital future. Intel pushes business benefits of 4*th *generation ultrabooks. Board presentations on IT risk: Don't make these five mistake*)and asked to think in pairs or in groups about the story behind each heading [14]. As another type of interactive work students can be asked to come together in session groups to focus on a single topic (on the headlines in this example). Within each group, every student contributes thoughts and ideas. Teachers should encourage discussion and collaboration among the students within each group. Everyone should learn from one another's input and experiences. Interactive method is a great instrument of teaching students various skills. This type of work besides improving language skills develops students' team work and collaboration skills which are essential for future programmers.

Our students like to study quotations especially the ones that are funny, witty or related to programming. Our teachers try to use this love to quotes in interactive activities. For example, in the class we ask students to paraphrase and discuss in groups the following IT related quotations: *1. It's hardware that makes a machine fast. It's software that makes a fast machine slow. 2. Adapting old programs to fit new machines usually means adapting new machines to behave like old ones. 3. For systems in which you already have a lot of hardware and software, change is difficult. That's why apps are so popular*[14].

Interactive approach is of great help to teach students vital communication skills, teach them to work in a team, express their own opinion and listen to other opinions. With our students majoring in information technologies we often practice the following work described by Kevin Yee, a professor at the University of Central Florida and assistant director of the university's Karen L. Smith Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning [15]. In the class we section students into different teams, each with a separate goal to accomplish during the period. At the end of planning, the teams come back together and teach the other teams about the topic they researched. For instance, *students are suggested to think of one of the latest inventions (devices, technologies) in the field of computing and IT. They are to prepare a short speech providing details about them such as key dates, inventors, the areas of application, the usefulness, etc.*[14].Another option is to remix the teams by including one "expert"on a different topic within each team, who then has to teach his or her new group. When students know they will be responsible for teaching their friends, they are more likely to go into greater depth in their own research.

DISCUSSION

The teaching style discussed in the paper involves a case study format, but the process is not so rigid as a full case study training session. For future programmers, case study is of particular importance since students while studying real life stories learn the experience which will probably help them in future not to make the same mistakes. The focus is on learning how to solve real problems that involve real people. Small groups of participants are provided details from actual incidents and then asked to develop a workable solution. Such activities in the English language classes prepare students for work with clients, dealing with IT support issues, making presentation of their products.

Interactive approach provides teaching new vocabulary as well as practicing it, enhancing students'skills in the usage of word collocations, development of communication skills, memory training.

CONCLUSIONS

The present paper presents analyses of interactive approaches in teaching English for general purposes as well as distinguishes between communicative and interactive approaches. It overviews how teaching General English for future programmers can benefit from interactive strategies.

Thus, interactive teaching implies mutual activity of the interaction of participants, aimed at developing different language and communication skills, and the ability to search for information. Interaction helps students increase their vocabulary as well as use their knowledge in situations resembling real life that are so essential for programmers.

The article also demonstrates the positive experience of the English teachers at Kazan Federal University on implementing interactive approaches to teaching English to future programmers.

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