

Enhancing Communication in the Efl Classroom: Cooperative Learning Versus Recitation

The article deals with the problem of enhancing communication in the EFL classroom. The comparative analysis of cooperative learning and recitation is carried out. The paper describes some practical expertise of the effective use of classroom space in cooperative learning. An original technique of developing students' communicative skills in cooperative learning classroom has been offered.

Key words: cooperative learning, recitation, effective use of classroom space, cooperative learning techniques, communicative skills.

Foreign language acquisition has always been very complex. **The problem** consists in the fact that there is frequent lament among many former foreign language learners across many cultures that they never really learned the languages they studied even though they spent several years in the classroom. This common complaint leads to reassessment of the theories and methods popular during the last twenty or thirty years.

Several theoretical concepts are currently under consideration by linguists and methodologists attempting to determine what direction we should take to be effective foreign language teachers who are looking for ways of enhancing communicative skills of their students.

The goal of foreign language acquisition has always been meaningful communication when learners gain the ability to communicate in the target language. Beginning with Hymes' distinguishing communicative competence from linguistic knowledge we have had a lot of **research and studies** conducted by foreign scholars which develop the communicative approach to language teaching (Bren, Candlin, Cummins, Moskowitz, Nation, Savignon, Scarcella, Slavin, Widdowson).

Representatives of Ukrainian methodology of foreign language teaching (V. Buhbinder, N. Gez, O. Vyshnevsky, M. Lahovytsky, A. Myroliubov, S. Nikolayeva, N. Skliarenko) have contributed a lot to our knowledge of the aspects of language acquisition.

Theoretical models constructed by applied linguists were followed by more practical but definitely related works written by classroom teachers which have proved that language classes doing communicatively-oriented activities achieve higher levels than classes using audio-lingual approach (Arends, Nation, Rubin, Pometun, Pyrozhenko).

In recent years there has been noted a renewed interest in enhancing communicative approach in teaching a foreign language. Language-teaching professionals continue insisting on making classroom language more communicative.

The purpose of this article is to discuss some features of the communicative approach to teaching EFL with the emphasis on meaningful interaction of learners in the process of learning a foreign language. The paper will demonstrate some ways of implementation of cooperative learning in the EFL classroom. The final part of the article will provide one of the cooperative learning techniques suggesting how group work activities can be used and adapted in order to enhance students' communicative skills.

Main body and the results of the investigation under consideration. Studies and research of classroom discourse have found that basic pattern of communication in the classroom in modern schools is based on recitation – a teaching method when students in a whole class setting are drilled by the teacher using a question-answer format. We can't but admit that recitation pattern which emerged early in the history of formal schooling is still with us today. It has persisted throughout the 21-st century at almost all levels of schooling and across all academic subjects in almost all Ukrainian schools. As far as classes of EFL are concerned, teachers talk most of the time and this is a basic pattern of communication in most EFL classrooms in Ukrainian schools.

Recitation-based lesson is characterized by teacher's dominance and teacher-student interaction. The problem is that in most classrooms two-thirds of the talk in the target language is done by the teacher. Recitation relies on teachers talking and asking questions. Scarcella [9] reported that four fifths of school time is often occupied with question-and-answer techniques. A sample of high school teachers asks 395 questions each day.

Researcher Nation [7] views the classroom as a system of «game» with two players: 1) the teacher; 2) the students collectively. Obviously, as in any game, it is not fun if all players cannot play and some have to sit on the bench all the time. Moreover, the teacher dominates three of the moves in the game (he gives directions, states procedures, suggests changes, then he asks questions, then he evaluates statements made by self or other players).

The idea remains that students are empty containers which teacher fills with knowledge, and all that students have to do is listen to the teacher. We support Arends [2] and Pometun [1] who consider that this approach does not work in today's changing world. We are not teaching creative problem solving. We encourage competition, believing that that this brings out the best in people. Encouraging children to concentrate on getting the best marks destroys motivation and takes the fun out of learning.

Teacher's role is no longer to feed students with information with information. The facts are available in libraries, on CD ROMs and on the Internet. What students need are the skills to find this information, to use it and to think creatively in order to solve the problems of our world.

One of the most efficient strategies in the repertoire of an EFL teacher who is looking for meaningful ways to empower his students in the foreign language is implementation of interactive approaches which, in their turn, are based on a special learning strategy – cooperative learning. Implementing cooperative learning in the EFL classroom provides the basis for communicative language learning in the classroom when students work in small learning groups.

Alien to all those who were taught the traditional way, cooperative learning is unique among the models of teaching because it uses a different task and reward structure to promote student learning. It requires students to work together on academic tasks in small groups. The reward structure recognizes collective as well as individual effort.

Mc. Donald [6] states that the intellectual roots for cooperative learning grew out of an educational tradition emphasizing democratic thought and practice, active learning and respect for pluralism in multicultural societies. As far as good relationships are the key to effective learning, cooperative learning is the future of education and the best way to encourage responsibility, tolerance and helpfulness towards others.

Pupils learn to work first in pairs, then in threes, and finally in teams. Students are required to participate actively in discussing and sharing their own knowledge. The teacher, who is still very important to the process, becomes the helper rather than the master. What is necessary to take into account is that it is the incorrect assumption that cooperative learning is that it is merely group work. It is much, much more.

Scholars Johnson [3], Long [5], Shaw [10] define a small learning group, as that members of which are bound together through the common purpose or learning. In a small learning group, members (usually six to nine) not only work individually in each other's presence but make cooperative efforts combining their work with the purpose of completing a learning task. In a learning group, members strive to achieve the learning aim by learning together in the process of communication. Learning groups are often called continuing small groups, the members of which meet more or less regularly in face-to-face interaction, who possess a common purpose, and who share a set of standards governing their activity.

More practically, small groups usually consist of three to seven members, occasionally more. This seems to be the ideal range, with five as an ideal number if members possess sufficient knowledge and skills to do the job facing the group and have a diversity of perspectives and information relevant to the task. The more members, the more likely there will be inequity and communication overload for some members.

According to M. Shaw, the communication that occurs in small groups is different from the communication that occurs in other contexts, such as dyad, public communication and interpersonal communication. The scholar states that small group communication is more complex than that in a dyad. For instance, in a dyad (two-person group), only one interpersonal relationship is possible, but in a five-person group ten unique interpersonal relationships exist. He concludes that dyads function differently. They do not form networks or leadership hierarchies. Groups have continuity that dyads do not. If one member leaves a dyad, the dyad disbands, but members often leave small groups, sometimes to be replaced by new members, and the group itself continues [10, p. 37].

Similarly, the main reason people form groups is to get something done, to accomplish a task. Small group communication is more informal and spontaneous than public communication such as giving a speech. In a public speaking situation, usually the speaker's role (speaking) is clearly differentiated from the audience's role (listening), but in a small group these roles are interchangeable. In addition, a public speaker

usually has planned his or her remarks in advance, whereas a small group member responds relatively spontaneously to the group interaction.

The goal of the EFL teacher is to provide students with the variety of meaningful activities that will encourage them to search for communication whenever they cooperate. It is also important for the teachers, to motivate students to learn and develop more positive attitudes about learning. The answer is that teachers have to create a language-rich environment in which students feel free to express themselves and share their ideas and feelings.

Researchers [2; 4; 8] have found that effective strategies for developing language-rich environment is organizing cooperative / collaborative learning groups and having students work with partners in cooperation. In the classroom where cooperation and collaboration are encouraged students are active participants in the learning process. A spirit of team work is apparent here. In a language-rich classroom responsibilities are shared, reading, writing and speaking are shared, learning space is shared, experiences are shared and above all learning is shared.

Cooperative learning is beneficial for the teacher too. In cooperative learning he is adviser to a network of learners, leader to an orchestra, and coach to a hardworking team. The concept of cooperative learning offers his students the adventure of finding their own answers.

Considering cooperative learning to be an efficient learning strategy, scholars [4; 6] give a host of reasons. In particular, working cooperatively students have more resources, including information and methods; they can get more investigative research and other work done; they also can think of more suggestions, ideas, and alternatives from which to create or choose a solution; group members accept the solution more readily; satisfaction of working together is higher.

Another important aspect to consider in cooperative learning classroom is space arrangement. Space – which has to do with the arrangement of materials, desks and students – is an immensely important source managed by the teacher. The way the space is used affects the learning atmosphere of the classroom, influences classroom dialogue and communication, and has important cognitive and emotional effects on students [2, p. 301].

It is important to highlight that the form of the classroom should match its functions. First thing the teacher should take into consideration his or her own style of teaching. A thoughtful teacher should bear in mind that the way in which the furniture is arranged in the classroom can influence academic learning time and, thus, students' learning. That's why a major decision the teacher should make relates to the configuration of the furniture in the room.

According to R. Arends [2], the most used seating arrangements are column arrangement, row arrangement, circle, semicircle and seating clusters.

The «**column**» arrangement is the most traditional formation when the desks are attached to the floor in rows which is often the case in most Ukrainian schools. This formation is best suited where the teacher wants attention focused in one direction, for example on him or her during lecture or recitation, or during independent seatwork when students are doing tests or individual work without any contact with each other or with the teacher [2, p. 301].

«**Row**» arrangement is the horizontal row formation in which students sit quite close to each other in a fewer number of rows. This arrangement is used for demonstrations because the students are sitting quite close to the teacher. Here the teacher can see all the students at once.

In both formations mentioned above the teacher can maintain eye contact with all students in order to supervise all activities at once. Neither of these arrangements is conducive to class discussions or to small-group activities. They can also lead to student withdrawal. The front and center of the classroom with «column» and «row» arrangement are called «active zone». Students seated in the «active zone» normally get more attention than those seated elsewhere.

«**Circle**» and «**semicircle**» arrangements are useful for class discussions and independent seatwork. Though they are not the best arrangements for presentations or demonstrations because some students will inevitably face the teacher's back, these types of arrangement encourage more participation than the previously mentioned ones but they can lead to off-task behaviors. In a circle or semi-discussion session, students may be encouraged to speak out without raising their hands. Procedures for moving from one arrangement to another must also be taught and practiced [2, p. 302].

«**Seating clusters**» of four or six are useful for cooperative learning: group discussions or other small-group tasks. If this arrangement is used, students may have to be asked to move their chairs from frontal teaching position to cooperative learning groups in a very brief period of time. It allows the students to «to

swing» from frontal teaching position which is good for lectures or demonstrations to clusters which are the seating arrangement encouraging small-group work and student involvement into the cooperative activity [2, p. 302].

Though teachers should be flexible and experiment with different seating arrangements, it is significant to highlight that too much experimentation can confuse students who have just learned the rules from a proceeding form which can lead to disruption and cause management problems.

We strongly believe that the teacher determined to employ cooperative learning techniques has to think how to arrange a room for the most effective learning and management in his class even with more care and foresight. In cooperative learning classes, the traditional classroom physical layout is abandoned. Children do not sit in straight rows of desks facing the teacher, but rather face one another to make it easier to share ideas.

Our intention is to share our experience in implementation of cooperative techniques in the EFL classroom. Let us proceed with some sample activity offered by O. Pometun and L. Pyrozhenko [1] we successfully use in our cooperative EFL classrooms. «*Carousel*» / «*Merry-go-round*» activity allows students to develop their skills of speaking and listening in communication. Preparation to the activity presupposes that the teacher should prepare handouts with learning materials and instructions for the students and their team leader. The technique under consideration is used with the purpose of collecting information on any topic, checking each other's knowledge and developing communicative skills.

1. The class is divided into two groups of equal size and the chairs are arranged in two circles. Students are asked to make two circles. The inner circle is facing outwards; the outer circle is facing inwards, so that two students from opposite groups sit / stand facing each other.

2. All the students sitting in the inner circle receive handout A. All the students standing in the outer circle receive handout B.

3. Students in the inner circle remain steady. With the signal of the teacher students in the outer circle move to the chair on their left and continue with the new partner.

4. While moving round the circle every student sitting in the outer circle collects maximum information, points of view on the problem, etc. Participants have to do a lot of talking discussing issues with a lot of different partners before they are able to come out with the summary of everything which was found out and learnt.

This cooperative learning technique is extremely efficient when the teacher aims to encourage all the students to act simultaneously communicating with different partners. In «*Carousel*» / «*Merry-go-round*» tasks each participant is equally important, because each holds part of the solution. That's why these tasks are said to improve cooperation and mutual acceptance within the group.

Thus, cooperative learning techniques serve as effective classroom management tools for the teacher and interesting and effective learning activity for the student. Through cooperative learning, students can become real partners in the learning process. They learn to work together in an educational setting which allows them to be better prepared to meet life's obligations and to perform professional tasks.

In conclusion, cooperative learning described above is of special value for the student and for the teacher who both need and search for communication learning strategies in the classroom. Through cooperative efforts, group work enables the students to communicate in learning. Cooperative learning turns the classroom from a competitive arena into a place where learning facts and life skills is both more fun and more effective for pupils and teachers alike.

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Серняк Оксана. Підвищення рівня іншомовного спілкування: колективні технології навчання іноземних мов у порівнянні з фронтально-класною формою. Стаття присвячена проблемі підвищення рівня іншомовного спілкування на занятті з іноземної мови. У публікації здійснено порівняльний аналіз особливостей використання колективних технологій у навчанні іноземних мов та традиційної фронтально-класної форми організації роботи.

Колективна навчально-пізнавальна діяльність студентів є тим видом організації навчально-пізнавальної діяльності студентів, який передбачає реалізацію об'єктивної потреби студентів у співпраці, їх суб'єктивної потреби в спілкуванні, коли ж фронтальна форма організації уроку створює лише видимість колективної роботи – студенти працюють поряд, але не у співпраці. В умовах фронтальної роботи є загальна мета, але немає колективної роботи й умов її здійснення.

Висвітлено практичний досвід ефективного використання місця та простору в процесі впровадження колективних форм роботи, які спонукають до співпраці й створюють умови для забезпечення іншомовного спілкування.

Запропоновано методику формування комунікативних навичок студентів у процесі колективної навчально-пізнавальної діяльності під назвою «Карусель», яка забезпечує умови для того, щоб навчальний процес відбувався за умови постійної, активної взаємодії всіх студентів.

Ключові слова: колективні технології навчання іноземних мов, фронтально-класна форма організації навчання, ефективне використання місця та простору, формування комунікативних навичок.

Серняк Оксана. Совершенствование общения на иностранном языке: коллективные технологии обучения иностранного языка в сравнении с фронтально-классной формой. Стаття посвящена проблеме совершенствования иноязычного общения на занятии иностранного языка. В публикации осуществлен сравнительный анализ коллективных технологий обучения иностранного языка и традиционной фронтально-классной формы организации работы.

Коллективная учебно-познавательная деятельность студентов является тем видом организации учебной деятельности студентов, который подразумевает реализацию объективной потребности студентов к сотрудничеству, в то время, когда фронтально-классная форма организации работы создает лишь видимость коллективной работы – студенты работают рядом, но не в сотрудничестве. В условиях фронтальной работы есть общая цель, но нет коллективной работы и условий ее осуществления.

Продемонстрирован практический опыт эффективного использования классного пространства в процессе внедрения коллективных форм работы, которые способствуют сотрудничеству и создают условия для осуществления иноязычного общения.

Предложена методика формирования коммуникативных навыков студентов в процессе коллективной учебно-познавательной деятельности под названием «Карусель», которая способствует тому, чтобы учебный процесс осуществлялся в условиях постоянного, активного взаимодействия всех студентов.

Ключевые слова: коллективные технологии в обучении иностранного языка, фронтально-классная форма организации обучения, эффективное использование классного пространства, формирование коммуникативных навыков.

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Галина Сокол

Сленг сучасної німецької молоді як засіб розвитку комунікативної компетенції студентів

У статті проаналізовано деякі тенденції німецької молодіжної мовної культури й доведено потребу ознайомлення наших студентів із мовною картиною соціально-вікової групи молоді. Молодіжна культура німецькомовних країн, зокрема молодіжний сленг, викликають жвавий інтерес у студентів, котрі вивчають ні-