

V International Forum on Teacher Education

Innovative Activity of Future Teachers as a Condition for Improving Students' Motivation for Learning a Foreign Language

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Abstract

The relevance of the problem: The professional activity of a modern teacher implies creativity and should be aimed at stimulating students' interest in studying one or another subject. Innovative teaching techniques contribute to the generation of students' interest. In light of this, engaging creative and talented educators who are ready to elaborate, apply and promote their teaching methods is a priority task for any contemporary educational institution. The purpose of the paper: This paper seeks to inform, to motivate and to explore the possibilities of making out-of-the-box teaching a reality. Research Methodology: The method employed for examining the issue under study is interviewing which enabled us to identify challenges that teachers face and specify practical classroom ideas. Results: The authors focus on the following issues: how to generate interest among students; how to make use of everyday objects to bring fun into the classroom; task-based teaching / activity centered teaching; problems that teachers and students face (ESL context); thematic teaching methods – across four skills. Practical Significance: The presented in the paper opinions of students and teachers allow identifying problems with students' motivation for studying a foreign language, as well as their fears when mastering the language. The obtained data make it possible to timely select a particular teaching method according to the level of students' interest and motivation.

Keywords: teacher disposition; professional motivation; achievement motivation; teaching effectiveness.

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Published by Kazan Federal University and peer-reviewed under responsibility of IFTE-2019 (V International Forum on Teacher Education)

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Introduction

The increasing globalisation in education lays a certain responsibility both on teachers and students - future teaching specialists. Today the dynamics of teaching activity has led to a need of updating the content of education aimed at conveying value-based knowledge that can allow students to outpace the socio-economic development and changes in their future profession (Wang et al., 2018). This idea helps to determine one of the crucial tasks for higher education institutions – training of modern teachers who comply with international requirements and can tackle important issues related to the development of modern society in the international context.

The system of higher education should create conditions for students' development enhancing their individuality and creativity. It should also highlight a need for life-long education and real-life experience in the professional activity for further self-identification and self-fulfilment (Menter, Valeeva & Kalimullin, 2017).

Today competencies, the content of which is determined by a specific character of teaching activity, act as a main criterion for the completion of professional education. The current requirements for teachers involve a wide range of competencies. Thus, a qualified teacher should be prepared to perform both professional and socially-oriented functions. This allows educators to be socially and professionally successful and competitive. The demonstration of competencies by university graduates is a condition for achieving a stable social position in changing professional and real-life situations. Competence is a system-forming factor ensuring the idea of life-long education accepted by the world community.

The educational system in Uzbekistan is undergoing a seismic change as we are moving away from tried and tested rote learning strategies and venturing on to advocate creative thinking skills. Responding to the demands of globalization, there is a deliberate effort to depart from an examination oriented system, still prevailing in the Uzbek society, to one of creative learning. In order to encourage students to concentrate and participate in class, teachers need to be creative and innovative. A wide variety of teaching materials and methods should be explored as students have different learning styles and capabilities. But perennial problems plague both novice and experienced teachers. An innovative educator can extract information from texts, audio and visual sources of information for teaching purposes.

However, in our country the problem of training innovative teachers receives insufficient attention both from scholars and practitioners. At the same time, it is fair to note that nowadays a great number of teaching methods and technologies based on quite effective approaches to the knowledge transfer and development of students' cognitive abilities are justified, developed and implemented (Omarova et al., 2018). But does this mean that today's technologies can solve the challenges posed by proactive education, i.e. formation of a competitive specialist who is not content with "recipes" for all occasions, but who is able to find new solutions in optimal ways?

Hence, modern universities should focus not on reproductive teaching methods, but on productive techniques intended to unlock a creative potential of student teachers.

Research Methodology

To reveal insights into the research topic with regard to educational practice, the authors have opted to interviewing, with the help of which the opinions of students and teachers were studied.

In schools and institutes, there are set curriculum guidelines in relation to teaching English as a foreign language. Usually, emphasis is placed on the teaching of four skills i.e. reading, writing, listening,

and speaking. English teaching is made difficult by large classes that we have to deal with.

To make the statement outlined above clearer and more transparent, the following interview results can be cited:

How can I generate interest among students?

What is interest? Ask any student to define interest and he/she will normally associate it with the things that he/she likes to do; never with learning English. Given that most students actually use English within the four walls of a classroom, it is of utmost significance that teachers imbue the students' hearts with an interest in learning English. The power of stimulating such an interest predominantly depends on teachers.

Many students are afraid to communicate in English because of the fear of being laughed at by their peers. We teach English because we want to pass on the joy of knowing, understanding and using the language well. The English language is certainly more than prescribed texts and objective questions. Therefore, it does not mean that a student getting an excellent mark in a public exam in English has a passion for learning English.

How then can we as teachers inculcate an interest in learning English?

In this regard, we suggest the following: creativity, understanding and encouragement.

How can I make use of everyday objects to bring fun into the classroom?

The environment is a wealth of information that can be used and reused in the everyday English classroom. Trying to make our classes interesting can be an uphill battle. As language teachers we are always foraging for ideas to keep the class 'afloat' in the sea of indifference, passivity and nonchalance. How can we challenge our students to speak and to participate? How can we motivate students who are not able to visualize the importance of the English language in the everyday world and subsequently do not see the need to master it well?

Every teacher and student is creative if he/she is given an opportunity, time and support to express that creativity. Activities for language teaching can be based on everyday materials. We should not be afraid to try out unconventional tools based on personal experience in the classroom. Both students and lecturers have creative potential. Lecturers can incorporate their creative skills into the teaching of oral skills. Students when allowed to explore their creative skills find speaking in the English language interesting, relevant and productive. Some people may have creative potential, but it remains latent unless they manifest it in some observable form, by using creative resources available to them. We are absolutely agree with a statement that creative and imaginative activities help alleviate problems that hinder language learning (Di Pietro, 1987).

What is the importance of the Task-based teaching / Activity-centered teaching?

Students need opportunities to be active participants in tasks that require them to negotiate meaning and practice language in communication with their teacher, peers, and others.

Using projects and everyday materials to teach English is like an adventure. It basically consists of hands-on learning and debriefing. Hands-on learning is learner-based, process-oriented and relational. It involves shared experiences in a particular situation. Through active discussion, students discover language principles at work in the situation. Through debriefing, students are able to sort out and order the information gathered and relate it to the lesson. The teacher guides the students but it is the students

who actually discover what is being taught.

Feedback from students

According to our students, the presence of everyday materials as a learning tool is a novelty. In fact, not using a prescribed textbook for an English lesson occasionally is a refreshing change. Most task-based activities are done in groups or pairs. This further eliminates anxiety and encourages teamwork. If the outcome is good, the team feels proud. If mistakes are made, no individual is singled out. This provides a solution to the problems caused by an Asian stigma of 'losing face'.

In addition to enjoyment, students are more motivated to speak and come out of their 'shells'. They become more confident in speaking the target language, and they learn more new words as their team members help them when they have difficulties in expressing themselves. It is noteworthy that they are more willing to speak and they are not afraid to stammer or stumble in the process of putting their thoughts across.

Group work gives students a greater opportunity in the production of a target language. When students present their projects in front of the class, they are able to produce more spoken target language when compared to a traditional teacher talk lesson. As maintained by Davies (1990), discussion sessions would certainly increase the amount of individual student talking time. According to Genesee (1987), "an activity-based approach provides opportunities for students to experience a much wider range of speech events and to use a much wider range of speech acts than is possible in conventional medium-oriented classes in which the language is taught as a subject, or even in message-oriented classes in which regular content is taught through the second language".

Feedback from lecturers and teachers

In a number of workshops for lecturers and teachers that we have facilitated, participants eagerly searched for everyday resources and brainstormed possible teaching areas.

In the process of developing a teaching material for English language teaching, participants learnt much from each other. They learnt how valuable such resources could be in the teaching of all four skills. In short, participants discovered that there was a limitless source of creativity in each of them.

Results and Discussions

1.1. Overcoming students' problems: Encouragement and Language Teaching

Quite frequently problems arise when students are not motivated to learn English. Both students and teachers get discouraged when they do not know where they are heading, in terms of language taught and language learnt (Finke, Ward & Smith, 1992; Lebedeva et al., 2018; Khuziahmetov & Valeev, 2018).

Understanding our students' setbacks and difficulties goes a long way towards building the teacher-student rapport that is essential for the inculcation of a good attitude towards learning the language (Rozhina & Baklashova, 2018).

Behavioural theorists such as Hull, Guthrie, Thorndike and Skinner focus on the role of reinforcement in motivating an individual to behave in certain ways. Feedback (positive, negative or neutral) and reinforcement (positive or negative) motivate both students and teachers to correct mistakes and develop new plans for language learning.

The power of encouragement as proposed by the behaviourist theorists cannot be understated if we want our students to gain a passion for learning the English language. The ultimate objective of learning a language is that the learner should be able to speak in the language taught (Drovosekov & Sakhieva, 2018).

Every student perceives, conceptualizes, acquires information, forms ideas, processes and memorises and forms value judgments differently. Motivational factors affect the way they react to the classroom environment and to the acquisition of basic educational skills (Collinson, 2000).

Arguing that “attentiveness and involvement” are necessary for successful communication, Gass and Seliger (1991) maintain “it is precisely active involvement that is the facilitator of communication in that it charges the input and allows it to penetrate deeply” (p.219). In view of this, it is necessary to capture the learners’ interest and attention before any results can be achieved. Anxiety, on the other hand, affects self-esteem and defensiveness (Clark & Fiske, 1982). Anxiety can be reduced when the situation is non-threatening and there is minimal stress, positive feedback and increased opportunities to perform a task.

1.2. *Overcoming teachers’ problems: Applying Edward de Bono’s six thinking hats*

E. De Bono (2010) identified six thinking strategies to overcome problems in general. He theorized that out of six approaches most people used only one or two, and their thinking habits and perspectives of their surroundings are influenced by their limited approaches.

De Bono (2010) believed that if various approaches were identified and a system of their use was developed, people could be more productive in meetings and in collaborating within groups and teams by deliberately using the approaches.

As a result of his investigations, De Bono (2010) was able to describe a process of deliberately adopting a particular approach to a problem as an implementation of Parallel Thinking™, as well as an aid to lateral thinking. Six different approaches are described, and each is symbolised by the act of putting on a coloured hat either actually or imaginatively. This can be done either by individuals working alone or in groups.

The Red Hat represents emotional thinking. The Yellow Hat represents positive thinking. The Black Hat represents critical thinking. The White Hat is purely the facts. The Green Hat is creative thinking. The Blue Hat represents the big picture, sort of looking at it from all the viewpoints.

1.3. *Thematic teaching methods - across four skills*

The use of a thematic approach organizes a subject matter around a unifying theme which allows students to make important connections in their learning and better understand four skills (Birova, Vasbieva & Masalimova, 2017). By planning thematic units, the teacher is able to incorporate a variety of language concepts into an interesting topic area which gives students a reason to use the language. Themes and lessons should integrate language, content, and culture into activities that allow students to practise the language and prepare them to use it in a variety of contexts. Ultimately, students need to be able to interpret the language, express themselves in the language, and negotiate meaning in the language (Savignon, 1997). Visuals and manipulatives, gestures, sounds, and actions all help students understand the new vocabulary and structures.

2. CONCLUSION

Creativity, understanding and encouragement go a long way towards establishing a rapport with our students and towards learning the English language. Using task-based learning to teach English does not fall into the well-tried comfort zone of traditional teaching. A mediocre teacher feels comfortable with a prescribed textbook. The introduction of task-based learning into the classroom may cause the fear that ‘there is no teaching going on’. This unfortunately deprives students of an opportunity to immerse in the English language.

It is necessary that teachers try using other materials as a teaching resource. The language of communication is real-life or authentic and unlike the language in textbooks. By incorporating hands- on

projects into their everyday language classroom, teachers are preparing students to enter the real world. Teachers can create a non-threatening environment to encourage both shy and talkative students to participate. In short, teachers can help students gain a passion for learning English. Wearing De Bono's (2010) six thinking hats can also change the teacher's perspective of facing problems: real or imagined. Teaching English is an uphill battle and a teacher who always tries and experiments is the one who makes a difference.

We believe that the following principles play a key role when teaching students a foreign language:

- the unity of learning and creativity, a combination of compulsory and voluntary creative activity of students;
- availability of constant and variable components in the system of creative work;
- scientific rigour (shaping of scientific thinking and encouragement of scientific activity);
- independence (extending a range of students' independent work, creating a need for life-long education and self-development);
- moral and financial incentives to carry out creative activity.

The involvement of students in creative work when learning a foreign language enables them to develop a skill for conscious and active acquisition of knowledge, establish a new style of learning, and develop a flair for life-long creative activity.

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