Innovative teaching methods and techniques of the competency-based language education

S. V. Dubrova

SHEI «Pereiaslav-Khmelnitskyi Hryhorii Skovoroda State Pedagogical University», Pereiaslav-Khmelnitskyi, Ukraine

Corresponding author. E-mail: dubrova_svitlana@mail.ru

Paper received 26.01.17; Revised 30.01.17; Accepted for publication 05.02.17.

Abstract. Innovative teaching methods and techniques of professional future foreign language teachers’ preparation are analyzed in the paper. The most effective methods are interactive, such as brainstorming, problematic tasks, co-education, discussion (aquarium technique, dispute, debate), roundtable discussion, role games, business games, case method. We focus on the language learning programs among innovative software, such as «Rosetta Stone», «LingualLeo», «Livemocha», «The Sky Pronunciation Suite», «Babbel», «Duolingo»; innovative hardware – multimedia projector, multi touch interactive whiteboard, Webcam, graphics tablet.

Keywords: professional future foreign language teachers’ preparation, innovative teaching methods and techniques, innovative teaching aids.

Primary mission of Universities is preparation of competitive specialists, which can satisfy constantly changeable demands of the labor-market. Contemporary society requires highly skilled specialists of new generation therefore the problem of future foreign languages teachers’ preparation is very up-to-date. Students acquire communicative, foreign language, sociocultural and methodical competencies in the learning process, professors have to ensure success and effectiveness of this process. High degree of students’ competencies is a result of the theoretical and practical preparation.

Nowadays are increasingly used innovative teaching techniques in higher schools, because traditional, though time-tested, isn’t always effective and resultative. Innovation in higher education in effect is: 1) a change and an improvement of educational content, established forms and methods of teaching and control; 2) an application of progressive educational technologies; 3) a development of new teaching methods and an improvement of training equipment; 4) an effective combination of innovative teaching methods, forms and aids.

The most popular innovative teaching methods are interactive methods, such as brainstorming, problematic tasks, co-education, discussion (aquarium technique, dispute, debate), roundtable discussion, role games, business games, case method.

Interactive learning is one of the special forms of organization of learning and cognitive activities through which all members of the educational process are in close cooperation. First future foreign languages teachers absorb new theoretical knowledge, then during task performances acquiring skills of applying this knowledge practically and afterwards the consolidation of knowledge and improvement of practical skills follow. Students’ professional competencies are formed in the course of such cooperation. In order to make the process of acquiring relevant competencies successful, it should take place in a supportive atmosphere of mutual support considering that friendly atmosphere stimulates and develops students’ cognitive activity.

Let’s examine each of the interactive methods in more details.

Brainstorming is an activity used to generate ideas in small groups. The purpose is to generate as many ideas as possible within a specified time-period. These ideas are not evaluated until the end and a wide range of ideas is often produced. Each idea produced does not need to be usable. Instead, initial ideas can be viewed as a starting point for more workable ideas. The principle of brainstorming is that you need lots of ideas to get good ideas [3].

The application of brainstorming method in professional future foreign language teachers’ preparation promotes creative thinking and coordinates actions of all members of learning group.

The main stages of brainstorming are:

a) formulation and presentation of the problem;
b) ideas generation and exposition;
c) ideas discussion and its ordering;
d) ideas reduction.

Brainstorming combines a relaxed, informal approach to problem solving with lateral thinking. It encourages coming up with thoughts and ideas that can, at first, seem a bit crazy. Some of these ideas can be crafted into original, creative solutions to a problem, while others can spark even more ideas [2].

The technique of problematic tasks is prompting students to independent search for solution of posed problems. Problematic tasks offer serious potential for discussion and learning. Students explain their ideas, respond to the ideas of others, and allow their thinking to be challenged for finding a right line of attack on the problem.

Professional future foreign language teachers’ preparation is realized by using co-education method in classes. The implementation of this method lies in the fact that the teaching process is organized on the basis of an individual approach to learning. Students master professional knowledge and practical skills during educational process which fit with their individual abilities and skills. Therefore, students are divided into small groups this is done to ensure that team members can work together effectively – cooperative studies, considering their individual characteristics. This is because the success result of the task depends on the individual work of each student and coordinated actions with other group members, in the course of this interaction they learn to cognize, analyze and estimate new for them together.

Discussion methods (aquarium technique, dispute, debate) are very popular teaching methods, which are used in the process of professional future foreign language teachers’ preparation.
The discussion is a «collaborative exchange of ideas among a teacher and students or among students for the purpose of furthering students thinking, learning, problem solving, understanding, or literary appreciation. Participants present multiple points of view, respond to the ideas of others, and reflect on their own ideas in an effort to build their knowledge, understanding, or interpretation of the matter at hand. Discussions may occur among members of a dyad, small group, or whole class and be teacher-led or student-led. They frequently involve discussion of a written text, though discussion can also focus on a problem, issue, or topic that has its basis in a «text» in the larger sense of the term (e.g., a discipline, the media, a societal norm). Other terms for discussions used for pedagogical purposes are instructional conversations and substantive conversations [13]».

The discussion goes usually through several stages:

a) introduction;
b) formulation of the problem;
c) discussion – giving a problem one’s careful consideration;
d) results.

Teachers have to take into consideration the practical experience and the level of general and professional preparation of students using the discussion methods. The success of the discussion depends on the fixing of the productive interaction and psychological contact between its members.

We examine an aquarium technique, a dispute and a debate as types of academic discussions. The aquarium technique works in practice in the following way first of all a teacher divides students into two or four table groups, seating them in the circles and gives the task. The discussion continues for 10-15 min. among the participants then the spokesperson is elected (person who defends a common position concerning the solution of the problem). After that begins the active discussion between the spokespersons. Meanwhile, the other students are monitoring how the participants complying with the rules, without interference in the very process of the discussion. Also they can pass notes with explanations and instructions if some spokesperson requires a break for explanations he gets it. The discussion ends after the adoption of the final version of the problem solution.

Another type of discussion which is nearly allied to the aquarium technique is the dispute. Applying this method the teacher also puts before students a problem task that needs a solution. The main difference from aquarium technique is that all students take part in the open discussion. All of them are engaged in the dialogue-dispute and each of the participants expresses, justifies and defends his point of view, proves the correctness of his judgment, but doesn’t impose it.

Besides the aquarium technique and dispute in the process of future foreign language teachers’ preparation is used the debate.

Debating is structured way of exploring the range of views on an issue. It consists of a structured contest of argumentation, in which two opposing individuals or teams defend and attack a given proposition. Debate engages learners in a combination of activities that cause them to interact with the curriculum. It:

- forces the participants to consider not only the facts of a situation, but also the implications;
- encourages participants think critically and strategically about both their own and their opponent’s position;
- encourages engagement with and a commitment to a position, by its competitive nature;
- encourages students to engage in research;
- develops listening and oratory skills;
- provides a method for teachers to assess the quality of students’ learning [4].

A debate offers an opportunity for students to move beyond the acquisition of basic knowledge in a subject matter and progress into the types of higher order critical thinking skills that good debate requires. Debaters must analyze, synthesize and evaluate the knowledge they have acquired in order to propose, oppose and make competing choices. Debaters apply course material through the use of well-reasoned arguments that are capable of being understood by not only their professor but also their peers. This process develops and improves oral communication skills, and at the same time, hones students’ listening skills as a necessity to make effective rebuttals [9].

The roundtable discussion is a very effective interactive teaching method. The main point of method is that all participants are placed facing each other at the table, it’s creating a favorable working atmosphere where every student is activated, interested and motivated in the discussing process.

The roundtable discussion format gives all participants a fair chance to contribute. The format encourages spontaneous conversation due to minimal facilitation. When every participant is allowed a fair chance to contribute, there is a greater chance that the discussion takes into consideration all the important points. Spontaneous conversation encourages participants to resolve issues of disagreement at a convenient time. These benefits increase both the quality of decisions and the speed of the process [11].

The most popular gaming techniques successfully using in educational process are the role and business games. These techniques activate students’ oral activity and form their communicative competence. The essence of the role and business games is that the teacher should create a certain situation, as close to real-speech communication in which students could demonstrate acquired knowledge, skills and abilities.

Games have a great educational value and it can be used in the classroom to make learners use the language instead of just thinking about learning the correct forms. Games encourage learners to interact, cooperate, to be creative and spontaneous in using the language in a meaningful way. Learners want to take part in activities; to play games and are generally quite competitive. In order for them to take part they must be able to understand and communicate in the target language. Games also encourage learners to keep interested in the work and a teacher can use them to create contexts in which the language is useful [12].

According to the game students «try on» the specific roles and «hold» them throughout it – a situation that is played. Some of the students improvises, adds something of one’s own, but only under the situation.
The process of organizing of the business game consists of following steps:
- game development (script writing) – the creation of professionally oriented situation;
- instruction – the explanation of the purpose and general script of the game, casting among the students;
- gaming – playing of the situation;
- summary and analysis of the game results;
- use of experience in future professional activity.

The teacher acts as an organizer, consultant or equal participant during the business game. He gives weight to the game itself – how students perform the role assigned to them, how interact with each other, how use the professional vocabulary (independently or with help) and how choose the solutions of the problems.

Teachers using gaming techniques in classes have to take into consideration that:
1. A game must be more than just fun.
2. A game should involve «friendly» competition.
3. A game should keep all of the students involved and interested.
4. A game should encourage students to focus on the use of language rather than on the language itself.
5. A game should give students a chance to learn, practice, or review specific language material [12].

The main purpose of realization of the case method is to model real situations of professional activity in which students perform various production functions and make their own decisions.

Case study promotes the actualization of professional knowledge of future foreign languages teachers. Also it contributes to the development of their inventive minds, abilities to diagnose, analyze and solve professional problems.

The case study method usually involves such stages:
- organization – the case development;
- instruction – the case presentation;
- discussion – the case analysis;
- evaluation of students work with «case».

The case method combines two elements: the case itself and the discussion of that case. A teaching case is a rich narrative in which individuals or groups must make a decision or solve a problem. A teaching case is not a «case study» of the type used in academic research. Teaching cases provide information, but neither analysis nor conclusions. The analytical work of explaining the relationships among events in the case, identifying options, evaluating choices and predicting the effects of actions is the work done by students during the classroom discussion [10].

Basic requirements for the case development:
- the credibility of the situation;
- the completeness of the facts which is necessary for an understanding of the situation;
- the minimum description and lack of superfluous information about the situation.

In a case discussion, students «do» the work of the discipline, rather than watch or read about how it is done by others. By engaging in the case, students apply the concepts, techniques and methods of the discipline and improve their ability to apply them. Case discussions bring energy and excitement to the classroom, providing students with an opportunity to work with a range of evidence, and improving their ability to apply the vocabulary, theory and methods they have learned in the course [10].

Besides innovative teaching methods, innovative teaching aids are used in professional future foreign language teachers’ preparation. Among innovative software we focus on the language learning programs, such as «Rosetta Stone», «LinguaLeo», «Livemocha», «The Sky Pronunciation Suite», «Babbel», «Duolingo»; innovative hardware – multimedia projector, multi touch interactive whiteboard, Webcam, graphics tablet. The new methodology of educational process organization with using innovative teaching aids increases student’s interest in learning subjects.

«Rosetta Stone» is a program that gives funny, intuitive, immersive lessons which teach students to speak and think in a new language, naturally developing their fundamental language skills. The software uses images, text, and sound to teach words and grammar by spaced repetitions, without translations.

Benefits of the program:
- Gain practical conversational skills with lessons based on everyday scenarios.
- Build confidence speaking with our speech recognition technology.
- Practice anytime, anywhere to keep your skills sharp.
- Learn core language skills: speaking, reading, and listening.
- Start a lesson on your tablet and finish on your phone or desktop.
- Download lessons to use offline (Coming soon for Enterprise and Education learners).
- Automatically sync your progress across all your devices, whether mobile or desktop [6].

«LinguaLeo» is an app for practicing English. This program gives the opportunities to expand one’s vocabulary, learn new words, practice reading and listening, do grammar exercises, watch TED lectures with interactive subtitles and read articles in English.

Application features:
- A personal dictionary with individual associations, transcription and audio pronunciation for every word.
- Thematic glossaries with visual associations.
- Effective trainings: translation of words, word builder, listening.
- The possibility to choose one of the best translations or to add your own English word.
- The possibility to monitor the progress of learning English in real time.
- Server synchronization and the ability to work offline.
- A user friendly interface and good technical support.
- The possibility to learn English for free [5].

«Livemocha» is a social networking service providing language learners the opportunity to communicate with native speakers (NSs) of numerous world languages while promoting cross-cultural learning and sharing. Created in response to the expensive language learning software currently on the market, Livemocha’s free web-based language learning social network gives learners a chance to connect with NSs of their target language (TL) by allowing participation in live chats, correspondence
through asynchronous messaging and sharing feedback about learners’ production of the second language (L2) [7].

«The Sky Pronunciation Suite» is the most comprehensive tool for improving pronunciation skills in English. The program is divided into different sections. These include the video-based study and testing of sounds (The Phonemic Alphabet in English), the study and testing of similar-sounding word sets (Similar Sounds), word stress (Word and Phrasal Stress), as well as sentence stress, rhythm and intonation (Stress and Rhythm). In the last part (Rhythms from Rainland), learners can practice listening to and repeating everyday dialogues, poems, funny stories, jokes, etc. [8].

«Babbel» is a powerful app that makes learning languages effective.

Application features:
- 14 languages available (including Spanish, French, Italian, and German).

- 10-15 minute bite-sized lessons fit in your schedule.
- Lessons covering a wide range of topics (including travel, culture, and business).
- Speech recognition technology aids pronunciation.
- Ideal for both beginners and advanced learners.
- Review Manager keeps vocabulary in your long term memory.
- Learning progress synchronized across all your devices and on the web [1].

«Duolingo» is one of the best free online language learning programs. Unique features and a clear structure make it a compelling platform for learning or strengthening skills in several languages.

The most popular innovative teaching methods and aids which used in professional future foreign language teachers’ preparation are examined in the paper. These methods and language learning programs promote the effectiveness of educational process.

REFERENCES


Innovative teaching methods and techniques of the competency-based language education

Dubrova S. V.


Ключевые слова: профессиональная подготовка будущих учителей иностранных языков, инновационные методы и технологии обучения, инновационные средства обучения.