

Using active learning techniques in a foreign language classroom

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Abstract. The authors study the specific role of active learning methods and techniques in teaching foreign languages. The particular attention is focused on dramatization and theatre techniques to promote learners' motivation, increase foreign language competences, develop their mental functions and abilities through entertainment. Different aspects of implementation of dramatizing are emphasized. The importance of emotional content of theatre oriented tasks in personal academic performance and achievement is pointed out.

Keywords: *active learning, dramatization, theatre techniques, interaction, foreign language learning.*

Relevance of the study. The vast majority of educators, psychologists, researchers support the idea of active learning in terms of successful foreign language acquisition, since active student engagement facilitates effective and meaningful learning and affords greater opportunities for interaction, collaboration, exploration, problem solving, critical thinking, development of communication skills and personal capabilities.

Analysis of recent researches and publications. Some early ideas which have been the most influential on the contemporary conception of active learning were developed by such prominent thinkers as Dewey J., Freire P., Montessori M., Piaget J., Ryley G., Vygotsky L. and others. The scholars believed that knowledge and skills are acquired most effectively through active interaction of learners with other people and things in the world, thus gaining personal experience of finding out something new, combining new information with existing mental models, constructing knowledge in a meaningful way, that enables them to apply this knowledge efficiently when solving any practical or theoretical problems, mastering knowledge and increasing the level of learners' competence in cooperation.

According to L. Vygotsky, social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition and is essential to the learning experience. "Though the teacher is powerless to produce immediate effects on the student, he is all-powerful when it comes to producing direct effects on him through the social environment. The social environment is the true lever of the educational process, and the teacher's overall role is reduced to adjusting this lever. Thus the teacher educates the student by varying the environment [4, p.49]", writes L. Vygotsky. It is also emphasized that only through interactions with others we reach the higher-order levels of thought and learning. Accordingly, the range of skills developed with peer collaboration exceeds what can be attained alone [5, p. 57]. For that reason the process of learning is influenced greatly by the environment students are placed in and by their individual experience of social interactions in which they engage.

Objective of the study is to analyze dramatization as an effective technique in any active learning classroom.

Presentation of the main material of the study. Active learning can be referred to a classroom approach or any type of activity that provides opportunities for students to be actively involved in the learning process and reflect on the content, thoughts and actions.

Active learning is also thought of as a method of learning in which students are actively or experientially involved in the learning process and where there are different levels of active learning, depending on student involvement [6, p.8].

In the process of active learning students are actively engaged in building their own understanding of facts, ideas, and skills through the completion of instructor directed tasks and activities [1]. Thus using active learning methods, instructors can design supportive, creative, and fun learning environment in which individual knowledge is constructed actively through the process of interaction, co-action and cooperation with others.

In promoting active learning in foreign language classroom such techniques and methods as brainstorming, role playing, dramatizing and theatre techniques, simulation, discussion, debates, problem based learning, cooperative learning, case study, peer teaching, etc. are widely used.

The method of dramatization is considered very close to theatre performance techniques and promotes both the development of communicative competence and mental development of the student personality. These approaches can be regarded as direct and indirect means of acquiring a foreign language. The first one is associated with the initiation of adult language learners to an artistic practice. In this case, the theatre activity is performed on an amateur basis outside the classroom mostly within the theatre society, the aim of which is to stage a play in the foreign language. This exciting and original way of reading and interpreting literature samples in the foreign language becomes an unusual and positive linguistic experience for learners. The second approach is more pedagogically pondered and methodically substantiated, and allows to use dramatizing or theatre techniques as one of foreign language teaching methods. It concerns the implementation of theatre activities in the foreign language classroom in order to improve learner motivation, to remove psychological blocks towards difficulties arising especially at the initial stage of foreign language learning and to help students quickly choose effective and appropriate means of communication in different situations.

The main objective at the initial stage of foreign language learning is to form a cognitive and emotional interest in the subject. This issue seems critical as often a willing only cannot always provide sufficient motivation and persevering interest in studies. So if it cannot be formed at the beginning, it may come across many obstacles at the further stages. The effectiveness and results of foreign language learning are known to depend directly

on learner's attitude to learning tasks. The gaps in knowledge may discourage students and impede their successive studies. For this reason the teacher should make the initial stage of foreign language learning exciting and interesting.

We believe that theatre techniques with their principal constituent of dramatic performance or dramatization combined with pure foreign language activities, high motivation and absence of coercion can be really helpful. This approach comprehends a deeply personalized creative work, education and training within and through the group, development of mental functions and abilities through entertainment. At the same time we cannot insist on complete transformation of foreign language classes into a continuous performance. Furthermore we consider it a serious cognitive activity. If a performance is only used as a means of entertainment, relaxation and recreation, its benefits seem insignificant. The endemic game functions shouldn't exceed the educational ones. In the context of foreign language learning the performance is only a wrapping, a mould, the content and purpose of which must be mastering communicative competence and gaining self-confidence and success in conquering a new culture.

However, the dramatization in a foreign language classroom can be used in its various aspects while training pronunciation, choosing appropriate vocabulary and grammar patterns, exposing dialogue and monologue speech. All mentioned above should meet several requirements: to develop a motivational sphere; to be a means of acquiring knowledge and skills; to develop empathy and certain forms of behavior.

The main element of any performance is a role that reproduces a variety of human relations existing in life. It involves emotions which consequently engage activity, attention, imagination and thought. While staging a play we can realize different forms of work: individual, pair, group, collective. Dramatisation can gather and activate a lot of learners at the same time, help teacher to solve one problem (to improve learners vocabulary, grammar, phonetics) or a set of tasks (to form their speaking skills, to develop attention and creativity).

It should be mentioned that language material of performance must meet the language abilities of learners. When the chosen material causes problems or difficulties, learners may quickly lose interest in this activity. Not all learners can be active participants in the dramatization, but everyone willing should take part in it. This type of active methods develops in learners a sense of teamwork, teaches them to cooperate.

Any act of communication in a foreign language in some extent means a performance of a role depending on various circumstances and individuals. We know how to contact with others in our native language in accordance with established social norms. But when we speak a foreign language we are on the totally unknown stage. We learn, experience not only "the foreign text" but also gestures, facial expression accompanying it. That's why the work on vocabulary, syntax and phonetics using blackboard or computer is insufficient to perform this new role, because the language isn't just a set of rhythm and sounds, but also views, gestures, emotions, performance and creativity. At this point, communication takes place

through exchange of sights, gestures and words. It should be noted that even at the initial stage of foreign language learning communication in the native language must be minimized. At the painstaking stage of student's interpretation of a role the teacher should ensure that the learner comprehends it, is able easily to imagine manners, voice and intonation. At the stage of dramatizing the play is performed during the general rehearsal. Practice shows that during the general rehearsal "actors" repeat not only their own roles but also effortlessly remember the partners' words, and even the entire text of the play. After the general rehearsal it would be useful to perform the play in the changing setting.

Learning a foreign language as an adult is associated with the expectation of failure, fear of negative reaction from the part of others and negative evaluation of the teacher. So theatre techniques can help learner to overcome any psychological, linguistic and corporal constraint. To dare say a word, imitate facial expressions or tone is an integral part of learning new languages. The theatre performances allow learners to feel at ease and therefore trust the environment as willingness for cooperation, collaboration, flexibility and improvisation depends precisely on the ability to trust somebody you work with. According to A. Payet, nothing is impossible in the classroom when the group cohesion is achieved [2, p. 54]. So in order to motivate learners, teachers must first try to create an environment where it would be pleasant to listen to each other, to share ideas, to learn.

Properly designed theatre oriented tasks create emotionally based learning environment which plays a great part in personal academic performance and achievement. From an educational perspective, task-related positive emotions, such as enjoyment of learning and excitement about learning materials are important because of their influence on learning outcomes [3, p.12].

If emotions are focused on the learning task itself which becomes an object of these emotions student's attention will be highly concentrated on the task performance. Deep involvement and complete immersion in the activity can bring enjoyment and self-satisfaction. According to the multisensory approach in learning a foreign language, students repeat not only the pronunciation of sounds or words, but also feel their own bodies. For example, the internal vibration or diaphragmatic movements while pronouncing certain foreign sounds allow learners to realize that tuning up your own body as a musical instrument they can "play" with euphony of a language. Gradual adaptation of speech apparatus and mastering foreign sound sequence makes new language less unusual and more familiar to the body of the speaker. One of the most effective techniques is a game of statue characters. The teacher says a word and learners like statues should demonstrate it. For a very short time, other students should guess this encoded word, visualize and explain it with their own gestures, posture, facial expressions, by means of their bodies. This mechanism allows students to memorize the given vocabulary for a long time. The next step of learning presumes the introduction of role-playing games. Despite the fact that students mostly enjoy these activities, the traditional role games lack authenticity and closeness to real life, while dramatizing them gives a new meaning through learners' own vision and reaction to a

situation, their life experience as the main goal of the task is not simulation but interpretation.

On the other hand, the teacher should realize that if positive emotions are not directly related to the task, they can distract attention and discourage student activity.

However, the dramatization of emotion provoking tasks, and even if they are completely focused on the game, should not be considered merely entertaining in the context of foreign language learning. Provided that it is appropriately introduced into the foreign class structure, it becomes an effective learning technique. The complexity of theatre based activities in large groups of students is overcome by proper distribution of roles depending on the level of knowledge and psychological willingness of learners to the aforementioned type of activity. The ideal number is 10 students in the group. Introducing such techniques can obviously cause failures as not all goals are always achieved. But everything depends on the teacher, his willingness to bring changes to the educational process, to vary from time to time traditional approaches. The preparation to dramatization itself takes time so

teacher must prepare staging according to the level of knowledge, distribute roles and make numerous repetitions to make this activity a success. To play a role means to win yourself, to be reborn on the stage and gain some new and unusual experience. It results in the pleasure that brings the engine of learning into motion and becomes a powerful tool for motivation.

Conclusions. Using theatre techniques in class means to apply new teaching approach, to overcome routine training, to motivate students and to allow them to express themselves by means of a foreign language. Dramatizing the learning material gives a way out for something that would be still hidden in a student. It is believed that the involvement of theatre techniques in a foreign language classroom is not possible at the initial stage of training. But we think that beginners take language initiation from gesture to word, and the accumulation of words takes place gradually. So even on A1 level we recommend to introduce dramatization elements for better assimilation of both vocabulary and grammar structures.

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Использование методов и приемов активного обучения на занятии иностранного языка

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Аннотация. Авторы исследуют особую роль методов и приемов активного обучения на занятии иностранного языка. Акцентируется внимание на использовании драматизации и театральных приемов для создания мотивации обучающихся, усовершенствования иноязычных компетенций, развития их умственных способностей посредством игровых элементов. Подчеркиваются различные аспекты использования драматизации. Указывается важность эмоционального контента театрально-ориентированных заданий для успешности обучения и личностной реализации.

Ключевые слова: активное обучение, драматизация, театральные приемы, взаимодействие, изучение иностранного языка.