Discussion as a Means of Teaching a Foreign Language in High School

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ABSTRACT

The tendency to study a foreign language for oral communication has become acute, so students' ability to speak correctly and fluently is the first consideration of English language teachers. They are in search of effective methods to develop students' communicative competence. The purpose of the article is to analyze a method of discussion, to show its forms and prove its efficiency. The authors conducted the pedagogical experiment on the issue at the lessons of English (senior forms of Gymnasium №36 in Rostov-on-Don). The study examines the theoretical foundations of the communicative competence, explains the concept "discussion as a method" and shows its practical application in the educational process. As a result, the authors suggest their recommendations to the audience of English teachers how to be successful in the arrangement of discussion classes. The method has proved effective: students have very much a mind to discuss something in English during such lessons and it benefits their communication and socialization in general.

Keywords: *Pedagogical experiment, Communicative competence, English, discussion, Effective method.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization, the progress of any state depends on new generations. The formation of an individual capable of intercultural dialogue is currently a priority task that the state sets for education. For multinational countries, such as Russia, where different cultures touch, in our opinion, it is especially important to teach the younger generation to interact with other cultures and be able to establish a dialogue [1, p.3].

That is why the main emphasis in learning a foreign language is on the formation of the ability to communicate in the language being studied. In this regard, there is a need not only to learn lexical and grammatical material, to study phonetic features, but also to develop personal and social skills of students. The task of the teacher is to develop students' ability to think critically, to express their position in a reasoned manner, to listen and understand the interlocutor. This task is complicated by the fact that the effectiveness of communication depends not only on knowledge of the language, but also on understanding the culture of its native speakers, knowledge of speech etiquette and non-verbal signs, the presence of a broad outlook, and many other factors.

Personal-activity and communicative approaches in teaching a foreign language are best suited for the formation of communicative competence, since it cannot be formed without consciousness and initiative on the part of the student and without communication with other people in the language being studied.

The relevance of this research is that today in foreign language teaching, the tendency to learn a spoken language and the ability to communicate in it is becoming the main one. In this regard, teachers are faced with the need to include in the educational process various methods that effectively develop communication skills. The discussion method is considered as one of these methods.

The purpose of the work is to find out how communicative competence is formed when teaching a foreign language, to identify the essence of the concept of "discussion", to consider the types of discussions, and to experimentally confirm or refute the feasibility of

using the discussion method in the classroom for the development of speech abilities in high school students.

The main research methods are the method of pedagogical experiment, comparative, descriptive methods, synthesis, and the method of thematic analysis.

2. DISCUSSION METHOD AND ITS FORMS

The discussion method is one of the most difficult and problematic, but at the same time, it is one of the most effective methods for developing communication skills in a foreign language. It is important to note that it can only be used in working with older students, since this type of activity is interesting for teenagers due to age-related psychology. At high school age, students have a special need for self-affirmation and respect from the team, they already have some life experience, their own view of things and are willing to enter into a discussion of interesting topics for them. When discussing, students learn not just to speak the language they are learning, but to convey their thoughts in it, listen to the interlocutor's position, and defend their own.

In this regard, the main goal of the teacher is to develop students' foreign language communicative competence. There are different points of view about what is included in the concept of communicative competence, which are described by both Russian and foreign researchers [2-4] in the field of language and teaching methods. For example, M.V. Vyatyutnev believes that there are only two competencies – production and perception, that is, generation and understanding of speech [5, p.72]. At the same time, J. Savignon identifies four components: grammatical, sociolinguistic, compensatory, and speech strategy competence [6]. V.V. Safonova identifies three components: language (grammatical, linguistic); speech (pragmatic, strategic, discursive); sociocultural (sociolinguistic, linguo-cultural) [7].

In our opinion, the communicative competence includes language, speech, linguistic and socio-cultural competencies. Let's present the structure of communicative competence schematically at the figure 1.

Thus, in order to master the communicative competence [8], students need to have proficiency in:

➤ language skills (language competence);

➤ speech skills and abilities (speech competence);

➤ knowledge of national and cultural characteristics of native speakers (socio-cultural competence);

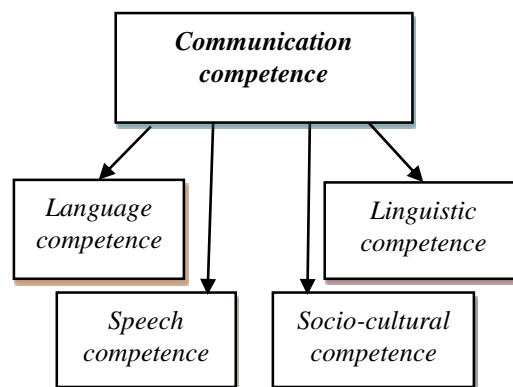➤ ability to understand and analyze texts in the language being studied (linguistic competence).

Figure 1 The structure of communicative competence.

Language knowledge is knowledge of the system of lexical, grammatical and phonetic means of a language. Possession of this knowledge involves knowledge of language units, rules, and ways to apply them in the process of communication.

While teaching speech, the teacher introduces students to various ways of formulating thoughts using speech material, which is a kind of speech pattern – language units that can be used to construct phrases in a given language. Speech skill is an automatic speech activity. Signs of a formed speech skill are:

➤ automatism – integrity and smoothness of speech activity;

➤ flexibility – ability to use learned language samples with new material;

➤ consciousness is the use of language tools that are appropriate in a particular language situation.

However, as mentioned above, knowledge of language alone is not enough to successfully use it in speech. It is also necessary to know the culture of the people who speak the language being studied, which includes:

➤ the presence of common background knowledge with a native speaker, which is manifested in the process of communication in the form of semantic associations;

➤ knowledge of verbal means of communication – rules for writing dates, filling out forms, etc.;

➤ knowledge of non-verbal means – gestures, facial expressions, characteristic of representatives of the culture of the language being studied;

➤ knowledge of communication etiquette – rules of speech behavior that can be expressed in verbal and non-verbal forms;

➤ ability to navigate in real language reality (listen to the radio, understand the content of labels, menus);

➤ getting to know maps and travel guides.

In the course of training, students must learn to work with text. Texts are divided into: authentic, adapted, and educational.

Adapted and educational texts are intended for reading at a certain stage of learning and contain only the vocabulary and grammatical constructions that are being studied at the moment. Thus, educational texts aimed at authentic cross-cultural communication and the formation of students' ability to overcome the communication barrier should provide an objective picture of the foreign cultural reality, without allowing excessive ideologization of information. Texts should show how the phenomena of a non-native language function in speech against the background of a social context, and contribute to the analysis of similarities and differences between the two cultures [9].

Authentic texts are a reflection of the natural language and the cultural characteristics of its native speakers, which is undoubtedly useful for the formation of not only linguistic, but also socio-cultural competence. In addition, during the training process, students learn to create their own texts – write reports, essays, etc.

Thus, teaching a foreign language is aimed at developing students' communicative competence – the ability to carry out speech activity by means of the language being studied according to the goals and situation of communication within a certain field of activity.

Discussion is an effective method of developing communication competence. As a pedagogical method, discussion can be described as a disputing and resolution of controversial issues, the search for truth through "brainstorming". However, unlike educational discussion, training discussion in a foreign language can only be held when all participants have the necessary level of spoken language and vocabulary on the topic under discussion.

Let's take a closer look at what distinguishes a discussion from a simple conversation or argument. Like an argument, this type of activity involves discussing a topic or question that does not have a clear answer. However, the discussion is not based on emotions: the main thing in it is reasonableness and logic of presenting your point of view. During the discussion, students do not try to come to a single decision or find the only correct answer.

The discussion can be *spontaneous, free and organized.* Spontaneous discussion may occur during the lesson and is not regulated in any way. Free discussion differs from a spontaneous one with a pre-determined conversation direction and the order of speeches, but the presenters are not selected. Organized discussion is regulated and planned in advance. After

determining the topic, the presenters and speakers are selected from the students of the class.

In our study, we identified the following forms of discussion that are suitable for the implementation at the foreign language lessons, based on the classification of M.V. Klarin [10]:

Round table – this form involves an exchange of views on an equal footing: each student is given the opportunity to speak out, which is very important for the development of communicative competence.

Panel discussion or expert group meeting – at the beginning of the discussion, the class is divided into one or more small groups, usually 4-6 participants with the chairman. First, the intended problem is discussed within each group, and then they present their positions to the entire audience, without entering into a polemic with it.

Forum is similar to an expert group meeting, but here participants exchange views with the audience after their speech.

Debate is a discussion based on pre-prepared speeches by speakers. A distinctive feature of this form of discussion is the juxtaposition of two points of view: two teams are distinguished, which give arguments in defense of their position and refute the position of their rivals.

Symposium – in this form of discussion, students first make presentations that reflect their point of view, and then answer questions from the audience.

Aquarium is a special form of discussion that involves dividing the class into groups and discussing the problem first within them. After a group discussion, a representative is selected from each group to participate in the discussion with the audience. Team members can help their representative.

Brainstorming is a form of discussion aimed at effectively finding a solution to a problem by offering all participants in the discussion as many ways to solve it as possible.

Role-playing – students are assigned roles that reflect different points of view, such as representatives of different social strata. This form of discussion is well suited not only for the development of communication skills, but also significantly increases the motivation of students. In a role-playing game, students are given the opportunity to use their knowledge gained in the learning process in a specific language situation.

Cross-discussion helps develop students' critical thinking, due to the fact that it discusses a problem that requires evidence-based argumentation of the points of view of its participants.

Any organized discussion consists of the following stages:

I. The preparatory stage, which includes:

1) The choice of the topic – the teacher together with the students selects a topic on which to conduct discussions. The teacher can either suggest several options himself or give students the opportunity to suggest interesting topics themselves and then choose the best one.

2) Selection of the presenters and speakers – after the topic is determined, you need to choose the students who will set the course of the discussion. When choosing a leader, the teacher must take into account the personal qualities of students: the leader must be able to present himself, not be afraid to speak in front of an audience, and be able to speak loudly and clearly. The same recommendations apply to the selection of speakers, but it is still preferable to choose students who have volunteered to speak on this topic.

3) Developing rules of discussion – it is important to explain the rules of behavior during the discussion to all participants and make sure that they understand them.

4) Preparation of the premises, additional materials and means of recording the results of the discussion.

II. Main stage:

1) Presentation of the moderator(s), introduction to the topic of the discussion and designation of the goals of its conduct. This stage should not take more than 5-10 minutes.

2) Discussion progress – speakers' speeches or audience discussion of the problem (depending on the chosen form of discussion). It should be noted that during the discussion, most of the time the students speak, while the teacher acts only as a bystander or listener, sometimes comments on what is happening, expresses his opinion or asks questions to the speakers together with the audience. At this stage, the presenters direct the discussion, announce speakers, and make sure that questions are asked in an organized manner and that participants do not engage in rough polemics.

III. Summing up and analysis stage:

At this stage, the presenters analyze everything that was said during the discussion and summarize the results. You can give participants the opportunity to express their emotions from the discussion, as well as ask whether the goals of the discussion were achieved, whether the participants deviated from the topic, what happened and what did not work out of what was planned.

3. CONDUCTING AN EXPERIMENT

In order to confirm the above provisions in practice, we conducted an experiment among students of the 10th grade, studying according to the textbook Spotlight 10 (English in focus) Afanasieva O.V., Dooley J., Mikheeva I.V., 2012. The educational and methodical complex

"English in focus" is intended for students of the 10th grade of general education institutions and is designed for 3 hours a week.

The purpose of this experiment was:

➢ to analyze the effectiveness of using the discussion method in an English lesson;

➢ to identify the advantages and disadvantages of this method;

➢ to give recommendations on how to use it.

As part of our experiment, a person-centered approach was implemented, since students had to tell about their own preferences and personal experience. This type of activity can be attributed to spontaneous discussion, since it includes only the main stage of preparing this form of task – the discussion itself and a brief introduction in the form of an explanation of the task. The main task of this part was to help the children "talk", that is, stop being afraid of the audience and tune in to speech in a foreign language. In addition, the ability to express their thoughts coherently and correctly was formed, since during the task the teacher made notes for himself and corrected the mistakes made by the students during the statement, and after the student spoke, corrected them.

Before the discussion, we introduced a new lexical material, combining it with a speech warm-up, since the task was for students to answer questions by naming the gadgets shown in the picture in the textbook. The students actively participated in this task, answered quickly and correctly, it was clear that these gadgets are familiar to them and the vocabulary does not cause difficulties.

The goals and objectives of this task were achieved: a friendly atmosphere was created in the classroom, and each student was given the opportunity to speak out. In their answers, the students used new vocabulary and grammatical constructions, were interested in the topic and motivated to speak correctly.

From the results of our experiment, we can see that the discussion finds a lively response from high school students. They are willing to use English in practice and actively participate in discussions. This fact can be explained with the help of age psychology, since in adolescents aged 15-16 years, cognitive activity is realized not only in educational activities, but also in interpersonal relationships: older teenagers are focused on communicating with people of different genders, they actively engage in discussion of interesting topics.

In addition, discussion can be considered not only as a means of developing dialogic and monologic speech, but also as a means of learning new vocabulary and grammatical structures. In the role-playing game conducted by us, the students used not only their existing

knowledge, but also the material of the new topic, and the information from the text they read.

4. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS OF THE EXPERIMENT

Based on our experiment, we can give the following recommendations for organizing discussions at the English lessons:

1) Discussion can be held not only as an extracurricular activity, but also included in the lesson plan.

2) Discussion can be used as a means to consolidate new lexical and grammatical material. For example, before conducting an organized discussion, you can give a new lexical or grammatical material and after analyzing it, fix it, using it in an unprepared speech. However, it is important to note that if you don't spend a lot of time preparing for a discussion, the vocabulary or grammatical constructions should not be very complex. If the teacher wants to hold a discussion on the material that may be difficult to learn quickly, then this task should be preceded by exercises to consolidate the new material.

3) Discussion can be combined with the tasks aimed at developing skills in working with text. The thematic adapted text, read and analyzed with the children before the discussion, serves as a model of speech behavior for students. High school students can take ready-made phrases and vocabulary from the text in order to use them in practice.

4) Teacher does not need to take too active part in the discussion. The main task of the teacher during the performance of this type of task by students is to direct the discussion and correct the mistakes made by the students.

5) Do not interrupt students. The main point in the discussion is the absence of an evaluation component, when the student expresses his/her point of view or plays his/her role. The teacher corrects mistakes not at the moment of speech, but after the high school student has spoken.

6) Be sure to summarize and analyze the discussion. By analyzing what was realized and what was not, students learn consciousness. It is important to give students the opportunity to share their impressions of the work done. Based on this, the teacher can draw conclusions in order to use this type of work most productively in the future.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In our work, we analyzed the types and forms of discussion, considered the stages of organized discussion, and developed recommendations for conducting this type of work at the English lessons.

The main conclusion we came to: conducting a discussion in a foreign language provides invaluable assistance in the development of oral speech, conscious use of a foreign language for practical purposes, and overcoming complexes. In general, the ability to conduct a conversation contributes to the development of skills necessary for the students to be able to socialize, i.e. to communicate effectively and think critically.

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