PhR 2019
Philological Readings

OPTIMIZING POTENTIAL OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The article studies theoretical, methodological and technological aspects of using information and communication technologies in students' communicative skills development in a foreign language. The author defines such notions as «communicative skills», «optimizing potential», «information and communication technology», reveals resources of modern information and communication technologies in students' communicative skills development and summarizes the experience of using flip-teaching and crowd-sourcing in communicative skills development of Orenburg State University students who specialize in foreign languages and foreign literature. The research is based on the methodology of subject-oriented approach which provided the realization of pedagogical conditions necessary and sufficient for effective students' communicative skills development by means of modern information and communication technologies. The approach ensured an independent students' orientation activity on the basis of orientation points system (aims, principles, knowledge, experience, stimuli). Students' orientation activity was carried out in the course of subject-oriented methodology testing which included three consecutive stages: organizational, pragmatic (practical) and reflexive-evaluative. Implementation of the orientation system together with information and communication technologies means at three stages of the methodology made it possible to organize students' communicative skills development as a process managed by a teacher with its transition into a self-managed process. The validity of subject-oriented methodology has been proved in the course of pedagogical experiment which presented a positive dynamics in communicative skills' development.

Keywords: Communicative skills, crowd-sourcing, flip-teaching, information and communication technology, orientation points.

1. Introduction

Political, economic, social and cultural processes of today's world encourage the development of cross-cultural communication, extension of international cooperation and increase of professional contacts between people of different nationalities and cultures. It demands from a future professional to possess a communicative competence which manifests itself in the ability to use a foreign language as a means of business and interpersonal communication. One of the most important tasks in this field is the development of students' communicative skills providing abilities and readiness to speak a foreign language spontaneously and serving a basis for effective professional communication.

2. Problem Statement

In Russian pedagogical and methodical scientific literature communicative skills are defined as an ability to communicate interactively, state and reconstruct correct mutual relations with communication partners, ability to behave properly and manage the behaviour according to the communication tasks (Passov, 2000). Communicative skills are also treated as a complex of acknowledged, intermediated by the language and determined by the situation purposeful acts which ensure the solution of informative communication aspects, designing of partners' corporate communication strategy and their mutual perception (Zimnyaya, 2010). Foreign scientists regard communicative skills as an integral part of social and social behaviour skills. Some of them understand communicative skills as ability to co-operate (Widdowson, 2011).

We are of the opinion that the following skills should be refereed to communicative: listening skills, the skill to react to verbal behaviour and body language of the partner immediately, to conduct a talk, to respond to the partner's question or statement adequately, to choose consciously and use correctly the linguistic means helping to affect the interlocutor and ensure problem solving of interpersonal and cross-cultural communication (Osiyanova & Vdovichenko, 2016).

The diagnostic assessment of communicative skills held by us with philology students of the Orenburg State University showed that 58,5% of students find difficulties in speaking English spontaneously. Some of them (35%) are at a loss for proper words and have a limited vocabulary; 8% have problems with sequence of tenses; 8% find difficulties in *what* to say. As a result 52,7% of our respondents feel at a loss and wait for the partner's suggestion while solving original, non-standard communication tasks. When this happens, some students finish interaction and leave the problem unsettled (19,5 %), other ones try neither ask nor answer questions. Admitting of authoritarian manner in communication (46,3%), inability to self-analysis and failing to judge the interlocutor (36%), refusal to admit errors in communication (31%), unwillingness to solve problem-based tasks, reluctant starting a conversation even in the mother tongue (38,8%) also indicate an insufficient level of students' communicative skills development.

3. Research Questions

The insufficient level of communicative skills development of students learning a foreign language and literature defines the actuality of searching for efficient methods and aids used in the classroom-based

and extracurricular work for their progress within the university learning process. Here for methodology of teaching a foreign language and language pedagogy appears the problematic field of research connected with theoretical and methodological comprehension and technological support of students' communicative skills development process.

4. Purpose of the Study

The present article deals with the problem of students' foreign language communicative skills development through the use of modern information and communication technologies whose optimizing potential in the current context of technical communication means extension, widespread computerization and digitization with regard to the philology students learning process in our opinion hasn't been studied enough yet. The process of communicative skills development can be considered optimal in case it helps achieve the proposed educational outcome by the most effective way.

5. Research Methods

In order to solve the tasks set before the investigation it needed a complex of research methods: theoretical, empirical and mathematical. The research was held with appliance of the following methods and procedures: analysis of psychological, pedagogical, linguistic, language pedagogical and instructional literature; studying of educational teachers' and personal experience; watching; questioning; testing; pedagogical experiment; statistical procedures and methods of mathematical analysis of the obtained results.

6. Findings

6.1. Information and communication technology

Information and communication technology is understood in a modern information society as a complex of methods, industrial processes, software, hardware and linguistic resources integrated for the sake of collection, processing, storage, spreading, reflection and usage of information in its users' interests (Hokhlov, 2009). Information and communication technology in an educational process of a higher school is a pedagogical technology which uses special means, programming and technical aids (films, audio, video, computers and telecommunications) designed for operation with information (Andreev, 2001; Chuvashova, 2017; Goncharuk, 2011; Kargina, 2014; Kontsevoi, 2015; Popova, 2016). Its optimizing potential with regard to the problem under study consists in the abilities of information and communication technologies to ensure maximal results in students' communicative skills development at minimum cost of time, efforts and aids.

Substantial contributions to the field of computer-assisted language learning in the educational process of schools and universities was made by such Russian scholars as Andreeva (2014), Aleksandrov, Golubeva, and Aleksandrova (2014), Fokina (2015), Lizunova and Chernyshkova (2016), Metelkova and Maksimova (2015). Scientists studied the didactic potential of various web resources, services, mobile applications, etc. They agreed that reflecting real situations connected with students' activity various information and communication technologies create conditions for a life-like foreign language use.

Stimulation of a real spontaneous situational foreign language communication by means of information and communication technologies provides an intensive development of communicative skills because the whole process of the problem-based situation release occurs in a foreign language and increases learning motivation immensely.

These days of special interest for Russian and foreign methodology of teaching foreign languages is learning capabilities of self-directed learning, flip-teaching, crowd-sourcing, simulations, mobile technologies (Hulme, Norris, & Donohue, 2015). The present study has revealed the optimizing potential of flip-teaching and crowd-sourcing with regard to students' foreign language communicative skills development.

6.2. Flip-teaching

Flip-teaching – is a kind of the so-called reversed or blended learning which changes the traditional learning environment, combining classroom activities with online students' independent study outside the classroom. It is an information and communication technology which allows students to work at their foreign language skills with modern gadgets online watching lectures and movie tutorials, studying additional sources of information from Internet content, participating in online discussions and also conducting their investigations at home. Attained results are discussed and analyzed in the classroom together with a teacher who explains students how to apply the information properly or solving practical tasks. Teacher's mission here is to organize an interactive students' activity in the subject. In such a way flip-teaching focuses the learning process upon students giving them an opportunity to study the content in various forms. Teacher-students interaction becomes more personalized and less didactic; students participate actively in getting knowledge estimating their progress.

In our research flip-teaching technology was used in the practical course of the English language with the first-year philology students learning topics "Travelling", "Home", "Daily Routine", "Family Life", "College Life" and "Travelling". So, for example, using social networks resources related to the topic "Travelling" flip-teaching technology was used for designing a game «One Day». First students shaped a list of English speaking countries and cities out of class and then acted as tour guides in the classroom.

6.3. Crowd-sourcing

The term "crowd-sourcing" is made up of two English words – "crowd" meaning a set of persons associated in some way and "sourcing" – using resources. By crowd-sourcing we understand an information and communication technology which uses the potential of broad public audience for definite task solving. The task solving is conducted to the benefit of the participants and considers their knowledge, experience and creative skills. Crowd-sourcing is based on online activity of a group of people on Internet who get mutual benefit of the results obtained. A great advantage of this technology for a foreign language learning process consists first of all in a network cooperation and ability to share the ideas with other people in the course of a task solving process. Another important advantage of the technology is information relevance. Open online platforms, libraries and communities help exchange innovative methods and content.

In our pedagogical experiment we asked philology students to organize online group discussions in order to settle some problem-based situations. For example:

Your friend is going to build a house. Give advice about the place where to do it, about the materials, rooms and design.

Your friend is organizing a party. What will you include in the shopping list?

You have a chance to move to the country with any climate. What climate will you choose?

The research proved that flip-teaching and crowd-sourcing technologies serve as affective means of students' communicative skills development where they meet a complex of pedagogical conditions developed on subject-oriented approach methodology (Osiyanova, 2018).

6.4. Subject-oriented methodology

Subject-oriented approach insured students' orientation activity on the basis of orientation points system including aims, principles, knowledge, experience, stimuli (Osiyanova, 2018). It was carried out in the course of the subject-oriented methodology testing. The methodology supposed 3 subsequent stages: organizational, pragmatic (practical) and reflexive-evaluative.

At the organizational stage we formulated aims and tasks, explained how to use the orientation points system, what kind of knowledge and skills will be necessary, which means of information and communication technologies will be used, which experience could be based upon. Pragmatic (practical) stage was responsible for the performance of communicative tasks oriented at communicative skills development by means of information and communication technologies. Here we used flip-teaching, crowd-sourcing, on line simulations, Internet resources, social networking services. Reflexive-evaluative stage was dedicated to monitoring and assessment the results.

In the context of the subject-oriented methodology realization 22 practical classes on 6 topics of the English language practical course were conducted («Choosing a Career», «Shopping for Consumer Goods», «Daily Routine», «Family Life», «Weather» and «Travelling»). All classes were given using flip-teaching, crowd-sourcing, on line simulations, etc. About 80 students took part in the experimental part of the research devoted to the examination of information and communication technologies potential in students'communicative skills development.

Implementation of 3 subsequent stages of students' communicative skills development on the orientation points system basis by means of information and communication technologies made a great contribution to the development of the following communicative skills: to initiate and support a conversation, to express one's view, to join communication spontaneously, to put questions and respond to the partner's questions or statements adequately. The use of orientation points provided the necessary conditions for students' self-instruction. The development of their communicative skills by means of information and communication technologies advanced from the activity managed by the teacher to the independent self-managed work with web resources. Methods and techniques of modern information and communication technologies helped philology students in active acquisition of knowledge, communicative skills development and adequate self-esteem.

The theoretical analysis together with the experimental part of the research helped formulate the conditions necessary for optimizing potential manifestation of information and communication technologies:

– integration of classroom and extramural students' work in a foreign information and learning environment;

– improvement of information literacy on the part of teachers and students.

In the experimental part of our research held with philology students learning English their activity in the classroom and extramural work in the information and learning environment was characterized by enthusiasm for communication, by their eagerness for a teamwork and self-esteem. As a result of classroom and extramural students' work integration in foreign information and learning environment formulation and solving of problem-based tasks was getting more successful. The experience of interaction in the classroom and the use of virtual learning environment in extramural work motivated students to take their own decisions in the process of solving communicative tasks on the points of orientation system basis.

6.5. Subject-oriented methodology realization

Here is the example of subject-oriented methodology realization based on the potential of flip-teaching and crowd-sourcing in practical English class with philology students.

While discussing the topic «Daily Routine» the 3^d year students were asked to debate how to spend their joint weekend. The task was aimed at the development of such communicative skills as discussing, arguing, negotiating, justifying and persuading. At the organizational stage students were divided into 3 groups and informed about the role of orientation points (aims, principles, knowledge, experience, stimuli). Stimuli were responsible for creating favorable conditions at the beginning of the communication, principles took into consideration students' personal interests, knowledge served as an information basis in the course of the discussion. Then at the pragmatic (practical) stage using Twitter outside the classroom students worked out the route and developed the plan of spending their weekend (discussed, commented, fixed questionable and controversial positions). For the sake of convenience each group used its own hashtag. Groups discussed and suggested their plans meeting the following conditions: group 1was to define the necessary sum of money, group 2 – choose the destination, group 3 – justify the most relevant transport. Using the previous experience students distributed roles all by themselves and presented their developed mini-projects in class. Here is one of the extracts from students' project:

Group 1. "… So we have 1000 rubles and we are going to have a picnic in the countryside. We shared responsibilities with each other. Irina is responsible for food. Diana deals with our transportation .At first we need to buy some food. We decided to spend 600 rubles on food. We'll buy some vegetables, fruits, two bottles of water, a loaf of bread, some sausages and biscuits. We asked Mary's father to drive us to the place. We decided to make a stop not far from the city…".

At reflexive-evaluative stage students evaluated their participation in the discussion, informed about the difficulties occurred and summarized the most important and useful things.

7. Conclusion

The results of observations and applying of special diagnostic methods displayed a positive dynamic in the level of student's communicative skills development within a university educational process. For instance the data of the reproductive level students has dropped from 43% to 35%, the number of standard level students has dropped from 47% to 35%. The number of creative level students increased from 10% to 30%. It proves that the use of information and communication technologies in the process of learning English helped philology students in the development of their communicative skills: to start a conversation, to listen to the interlocutor carefully, to take into account the partner's opinion, to react to verbal behaviour and body language of the partner immediately, to conduct a talk, to interrogate, to respond to the partner's question or statement adequately, to stand one's ground, to choose consciously and use correctly the linguistic means helping to affect the interlocutor and ensure problem solving of interpersonal and cross-cultural communication. Reliability of the results was verified by statistical procedures and methods of mathematical analysis of the obtained results.

The research proved that the use of information and communication technologies in a foreign language learning process not only increases considerably the learning efficiency but helps improve different learning techniques and interest in a profound studying of the syllabus which also proves their optimizing potential.

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