

Developing oral proficiency via creativity in EFL classroom

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Развитие разговорной компетенции с помощью креативности в классах АИЯ

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Abstract: *the research paper considers the issue of boosting oral competency in EFL classrooms based on the creative content which comes from the teacher and learner. The improvisation techniques suggested in this article entail student-centred and task-led communicative approaches. Not only individual performance is demanded in activity completion, but also pair and team works are encouraged to realize a verbal act by exploiting specific lexis and novelty. It proves that creativity plays an utmost role in teaching and learning a foreign language since it frees especially verbal language from strict frames and patterns.*

Аннотация: *данная статья рассматривает вопрос о повышении разговорной компетентности в классах АИЯ на основе креативного содержания, которое исходит от учителя и ученика. Методы импровизации, предложенные в этой статье, влекут за собой личностно-ориентированный и задача-возглавляемый коммуникативные подходы. Не только требуются индивидуальная работа студента, но и рекомендуется работа в парах и командах для реализации словесного акта путем использования специфической лексики и новизны. Статья доказывает, что креативность играет исключительную роль в обучении и изучении иностранного языка, поскольку она освобождает устную речь от строгих рамок и форм.*

Keywords: *creativity, oral discourse, improvisation, visuals, communicative approach.*

Ключевые слова: *креативность, устная речь, импровизация, наглядные пособия, коммуникативный метод.*

Creativity is a catchword nowadays in language teaching environment as it proves being an enthralling phenomenon which motivates both educators and learners to think great, generate fresh, unpredicted and original ideas. Creativity as an activity involves contemplating, searching, trying, failing, analyzing and succeeding. This entire process is 'associated with a high degree of mental agility, flexibility and, ultimately perhaps, exceptional intelligence' [1].

Currently the education sphere is experiencing continual changes in classroom structures and teaching patterns which anticipate potential threats to creativity in foreign language learning. The new standards are mostly competency-based, outcome-led and self-regulated focused mostly on test results. Beyond these incessant reforms there lies strong emphasis on communication, oral interaction, participatory competence and skills. Even the coursebooks, especially designed for ESP courses, present a selection of task-driven and learner-centred communicative activities, so called *Outputs* or *Transferable Skills* (The Business Advantage) intended to engage and motivate learners in oral interaction by using improvisation in target language.

Nonetheless there is often very little room for learners to voice their own ideas and thoughts, exercise the target language in authentic contexts. This problem is explained, first, by the pre-planned and organized lesson structures, which look quite orderly in terms of teacher instructions, learner responses, and teacher feedback. Secondly, in most EFL classrooms in higher institutions educators teach pre-experienced learners who lack sufficient work practice, language skills and overall subject related knowledge. Hence, learners expect to follow a completely teacher-led procedure, to interact in a pre-arranged way. In such contexts there is very little space for spontaneous communication, improvisation and experimenting.

However, for creating successful and dynamic teaching and learning environment in the second language classroom educators should enrich the teaching materials with novelty, flexibility, unpredictability and creativity which would increase peer interplay, oral competency and student engagement. Viewed from this perspective, lesson planning and improvisation are equally central to instruction.

To foster oral proficiency in learners is possible only by careful listening and tactful treatment. This means that it is of paramount importance to be tolerant to grammar and vocabulary mistakes, pronunciation errors, and misused forms. Rather the conveyed message should be of core importance in the learners' speech, than the formal aspects. Only such approach can foster creativity, willingness to risk and speak of one's own accord and freely. I even encourage my students to use gestures and mimics as they give the speech natural sense and fluency.

The presented sample creative tasks, always pursuing goal-specific design and prospective effects, are generated for every level of EFL learner and examined through my teaching experience among higher institution

learners and during private tutorials. The tasks represent flexible instructional frameworks and scenarios which are easy to realize by adapting to special communicative goals and cultural contexts.

Level *Intermediate*

Aim / Task - *Celebrities' album* (Individual work)

- Prepare a 3-minute pitch characterizing a celebrity

Practice *Personality / Appearance*

Procedure

- Educators find and cut photos of celebrities from newspapers, journals or internet sources.
- Learners choose a photo with closed eyes thus giving them a chance to play on a level field.
- Three minutes are given to note down prompts, speech forms and key points.
- Students present their speech focusing on the particular lexis.

Outcome

This model of creativity is to stimulate spontaneous speech which proves to be very captivating and tricky. First, sometimes it appears that students even do not know the celebrity, in this case they are encouraged to surf the net on spot and find some information. Secondly, they are instructed neither to show the photo, nor name the person. Thus, peers need to be careful and guess. Moreover, the speaker should use at least 10 new phrases from covered theme.

Level *Upper-intermediate*

Aim / Task - *Matching odds* (Pair work)

- Present an improvised use of incompatible objects

Practice *Technology / Functions*

Procedure

- Teachers give learners 2 minutes to write on small pieces of paper names of electronic appliances and furniture items or outfits.
 - They mix the sheets and welcome each pair to take a piece per word pile. These objects can be quite odd for matching and using as one (e.g. boots and microwave oven).
 - Learners need to improvise new functions of such unusual stuffs by drawing some visuals.

Outcome

It is a challenging activity which triggers unpredictable fly of mind and provides huge space for imagination, creativity and flexibility. Learners invent completely new things with novel functions and present it supported by speech and illustration. Hence, the level of peer collaboration surges, especially in case of multicultural classrooms, as they need to socialize and brainstorm mainly in target language within limited time and specific word stock [2]. Learners bring to existence completely innovative ideas being deeply interested and motivated by foreign language use, imagination and active vocabulary implementation.

Level *Advanced*

Aim / Task - *Promotional pitch* (Group work)

- Present a persuasive speech to promote a website

Practice *Advertising / Branding*

Procedure

- Educators assign a task for a group of students of 3 or 4 to prepare a persuasive speech promoting an imaginary website related to a particular product or service.
 - Learners are given 5 minutes to brainstorm various ideas and make choices.
 - They form teams, if possible multinational ones, and prepare presentations by using digital means.

Outcome

Such a team work is really helpful to generate fresh and authentic ideas, since in the advanced level learners already have some perspectives to start up their business. This activity also develops critical thinking and communicative skills, as students collaborate closely in the foreign language, create and endorse the product or service by persuasive pitch and visual support. They become rather motivated and engaged as a result of autonomy given to them which is a core element of any creative act.

The role of creativity in EFL or ESP classrooms is indispensable as it fosters a culture of participation, cooperation and commitment. It helps to encourage good improvising, brainstorming and speech-making skills [3]. The act of creation in the frames of foreign language learning enhances both educators' and learners' competencies as they step on untapped routes of language acquisition which are more learner-led and communication focused. Integration of oral and visualized discourse patterns makes the thinking and communicating process physical and visible bearing the individual impact of every learner [4].

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