Автор: Метлицкая Марина Александровна

Статья: STUDENT-GENERATED EXERCISES TO ENHANCE STUDENTS’ INVOLVEMENT IN THE PROCESS OF STUDIES

Келлеровская средняя школа имени Героя Советского Союза И.М. Бережного, село Келлеровка

учитель английского языка

STUDENT-GENERATED EXERCISES TO ENHANCE STUDENTS’ INVOLVEMENT IN THE PROCESS OF STUDIES.

“A teacher affects eternity he can never tell, where his influence stops”, Henry Brooks Adams said. This expression reveals the essential role of a teacher. It represents how much influence a teacher has on students’ entire lives. Obviously, successful teaching can be quite challenging for educators. Nowadays, teachers have to imply more and more new creative approaches to get students deeply involved into the learning process. The present article is dedicated to one of the most modern techniques – the technique of using student-generated exercises.

Nowadays educational systems and programs experience more and more changes and innovations. These changes also influence the process of teaching, the structure of a lesson and roles of a student and a teacher on a lesson. There is more and more stress on developing students’ personality and creativity during a lesson. Hence, there is a new trend in educational system which is called “a student-centered class”. In a student-centered class, students do not depend on their teacher all the time, waiting for instructions, words of approval, correction, advice, or praise. They do not ignore each other, but look at each other and communicate with each other. They value each other’s contributions; they cooperate and learn from each other. When, in difficulty or in doubt, they do ask the teacher for help or advice but only after they have tried to solve a problem among themselves. The emphasis is on working together, in pairs, in groups, and as a whole class. The student-centered classroom is not a place where students decide what they want to learn and what they want to do. It is a place, where a teacher considers students’ needs, as a group and as individuals, and encourages them to participate in the learning process all the time. The teacher’s role is more that of a facilitator, than instructor.

One of the first and most sufficient works about implementing active learning into teaching foreign languages was A. J. Romizovski in 2003.According to A. J. Romizovski there are thirteen basic rules the active learning approach followers tend to commit to [1, p. 1]. These rules are presented below:

* Let the student take active part in the process
* Demonstrate a task from the viewpoint of the performer
* Model the problem-solving process for students
* Setting a specific goal of autonomous task making in front of students can lead to more rapid mastery of a skilled activity
* Ensure that students understand what it means to solve different kinds of problems
* In general, “learning feedback” (results information) promotes learning, and “action feedback” (control information) does not
* Letting students complete the problem-solving task before getting feedback about their success promotes learning better than providing feedback at each step in the solution
* In general, feedback is more effective in promoting learning when it transmits more complete information
* Students learning to solve problems need more than just an assessment of whether their answer was correct or not
* Transfer and retention of motor skills are improved by “overlearning”
* The more problems students solve (with appropriate feedback), the more readily they will be able to solve novel problems, a defining characteristic of meaningful learning
* Avoid too fast progression to more difficult tasks
* Present the student with a sequence of problems that moves from easy to hard as their performance improves

These principles characterize active learning approach from the very beginning of its existence. They have been also transferred to specific “sub approach” of active learning – student generated centered approach. Traditional approach to teaching views the instructors as leading actors of the classroom responsible for transferring the pre-planned content of a lesson to the students. In this respect, the learners are expected to be passive objects of the learning process. On the other hand, contemporary approach to learning points out the importance of deep learning and rejects the idea of memorizing the information presented by the instructor.

Applying student generated exercises centered approach is an effective use of class time to bring about desired learning outcomes. Instead of listening to a lecture, students are engaged in tasks that allow them to discover new knowledge, or apply what they have just learned. A barrier to wide usage of student generated exercises is the need to design them, since few are available in textbooks, technical papers, or on the Internet.

Student generated exercises (SGE) centered approach is a student centered approach to learning and it assigns the responsibility of learning to the student [2, p. 2]. SGE are used for developing all the language skills. However, it is impossible to deny the fact that it stresses up reinforcing speaking and listening skills. Nowadays this is even more useful because of teaching English goal orientation. In the era of world globalization, blurring of boundaries between countries, cultures and continents, it is essential to help English learners to break the speaking barrier and to stop being afraid of real communicative situations.

Motivation of using SGE can be also that it allows a teacher to recognize student’s effort and celebrate his or her success. This approach demonstrates a lot more opportunities for it as there are more opportunities for students to demonstrate how well the material is acquired. In comparison to student-generated exercises centered approach traditional methods of teaching foreign languages do not place such a high value on promoting effort attribution. Nowadays more and more teachers recognize the importance of the students’ effortful engagement in the learning process.

Active learning including its strategies such as using SGE also puts even more stress on the generally accepted principle in educational psychology that the way students perceive or judge their own ability has a significant effect on the effort they are willing to devote to completing a task. This also represents the high endorsement of this strategy. Educators do recognize the significant role they can play in generating a “can-do-spirit” in the students.

Using SGE in the classroom promotes learners’ autonomy. This can also be distinguished as a motivational aspect of applying them while having a lesson. Using SGE also creates a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere in a classroom.

Using SGE, while having a lesson, promotes group cohesiveness and sets group norms. In social psychology, there is an active research domain, group dynamics, which focuses on how the group’s collective behavior influences its members’ development of beliefs and actions. While introducing self-designed tasks to each other, students learn to listen and to hear each other. They come to respect each other and give opportunities to fit the class. Such interaction also has positive effect on the way students communicate outside of the lesson. This motivational aspect is essential because of its educational implications.

Using SGE in the class also can be helpful in teaching students to present their attitudes and opinions properly. Each teacher knows that presenting tasks properly guarantees their successful accomplishing [4, p. 7]. There is no doubt that the way a teacher presents the learning tasks bears a strong effect on how students perceive the assigned activity. If a teacher implements such techniques of active learning as SGE while having a lesson, students get this role of presenting their designed activities to the rest of the class. It requires a student to be precise about what he or she is going to introduce to the audience. Unconsciously each person’s speech intention is to be heard and understood. This explains the fact why students try their best in being careful in conveying exactly what is required of the learners’. Indeed, no matter how capable a student is, it is unreasonable to anticipate that other learners will understand the tasks if the instructions lack clarity. Each moment of practicing introducing a task to the class practices beyond language learning skills. It prepares students to be clear and sharp in discussing any topic in their future.

To some extent, SGE can make the learning tasks more stimulating. Applying SGE while having a lesson can be quite a powerful strategy to get students more involved in the lesson and doing tasks. Humans are willing to invest a considerable amount of time and energy in activities that interest them. Accordingly, in educational psychology, arousing the learners’ curiosity and sustaining their interest as the course goes on has been one of the focal issues when addressing the topic of motivating learners. Not surprisingly, the idea of “interest” has also been regarded as a prominent motivational component in a number of motivation-related models, yet as the low ranking of this strategy in local educational systems indicates, most teachers for some reasons do not deem adopting interesting learning tasks a significant component of motivating learners [1, p. 3]. The idea is that applying SGE in the classroom is a two-way involvement into the lesson both for a teacher and a student. Getting students into working out their own tasks during a lesson, as it was said above, is not an easy task for a teacher. It also requires a teacher to choose the material for a lesson even more properly. Students will not show that much of interest towards material that is not interesting for them. This factor stimulates teachers to adopt more authentic texts, listening blocks and other teaching material. Such interaction inevitably leads to what we said earlier – pleasant and relaxed atmosphere that is essential for getting students more involved into the lesson.

Introducing authentic language material helps to familiarize learners with the target culture and related values. This strategy is in line with the notion promoted by R. Gardner that the language learners’ dispositions towards the target culture and its people have a considerable influence on their learning achievement [5, p.9]. Over the past few years raising learners’ cross-cultural awareness has become a key objective in several language programs across the world, including Kazakhstan. Introducing such subjects as cross-cultural communication into education or implementing more and more language material connected with target language culture proves this tendency.

Student-generated activities are productive and useful during a lesson; however, they cannot prevail and displace guided practice. An ESL teaching lesson cannot be based on student-generated exercises only. It might take more time which is mostly unavailable during a lesson. Besides, there should be a dozed amount of guided practice during a lesson which introduces students into the topic of discussion or grammar pattern. SGE can be used as a supportive technique for letting students go beyond language learning. It can help students to take more responsibility during a lesson. Besides, involving SGE can help teachers to check students’ material comprehension more carefully. Obviously, there should be a combination of both techniques: guided practice and student generated exercises for more productive information acquiring.

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