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5.2. Some Ways of Productively Selecting the Activities for Pre-Intermediate Level in English Classes

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Summary
This article focuses on the significance of effectively organizing the class activities as well as some ways to handpick the most appropriate ones to make pre-intermediate level students easily grasp the material.

Резюме

В этой статье основное внимание уделяется важности эффективной организации видов заданий, а также некоторым способам подбора наиболее подходящих из них чтобы обучающиеся ниже среднего уровня могли легко усвоить материал.

> *Anyone who stops learning is old,*
> *whether at twenty or eighty.*
> Henry Ford, American businessman

"Live and learn" they say. We, teachers, look forward to applying something innovative related to methods, approaches and the ways of teaching effectually within the study process. It is obvious that life puts forward its own requirements; we should be ready for reacting to new changes so that to move with the time. Accordingly, we steadily work hard on the approaches to make our lessons more interesting, alive and enable our learners to maximally master everything that is included in the discipline syllabus.

First of all, let's consider what is taken into account by teachers before creating the course program for pre-intermediate level. Surely, the course requirements, description, objectives and key learning outcomes. The given course highlights accuracy and fluency with an integrated skills and strategy-based curriculum that aims at developing the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing.

What about "young learners" definition? "The term covers a wide age range. This can be anybody from the age of three to the age of eighteen. There is a big difference between what a three-year-old child can do and what a child of seventeen can do. We should consider their development too. Some children develop faster; others need more time. Teaching young learners requires the knowledge of all the differences in their development. Understanding these differences can help a teacher to develop methods and a system of work to be used in the teaching process. Of course, it is not possible to say that every teenager knows this and that at the same level. But it is possible to pick out some characteristics which a teacher should know and should be aware of." [1]

Let's highlight some characteristics of teenage language learners.

"The physical changes of the brain that occur during adolescence follow typical patterns of cognitive development. They are characterized by the development of higher-level cognitive functioning that aligns with the changes in brain structure and function, particularly in the prefrontal cortex region. Adolescence is a sensitive brain period, that is a time when brain plasticity is heightened. During this time, there is an opportunity for learning and cognitive growth as the brain adapts in structure and function in response to experiences." [2]

"During adolescence, youth are more interested in real life experiences and authentic learning opportunities; they are less interested in traditional academic subjects. Intellectually, young adolescents seek opportunities to explore the varied facets of their environment. They also tend to be inquisitive about adults and are often keen observers of adult behavior. Moreover, they have an enhanced ability to think about the future, anticipate their own needs, and develop personal goals." [3]

What about characteristics of pre-intermediate language learners?

On the authority of the expert, "At pre-intermediate level, learners need to develop the structures, vocabulary and language forms needed to express the following functions: giving directions, agreeing with statements or opinions, talking about experiences, recommending, asking and confirming, asking for details, expressing obligations, describing people, reporting, describing recent events and predicting the near future, explaining actions, giving advice and making suggestions, narrating past events and stories. In other words, learners must begin to become communicatively competent." [4]

Thus, when selecting various types of activities for the target audience, we are to take into consideration our groups' level, learning style, their perception of the material, language learning ability etc. To make the teaching much more productive, we spend a diagnostic test with the purpose to define our first-year study learners' level of English to assign them into appropriate groups; it is good for learners themselves firstly, also, for teaching staff surely. Otherwise, freshmen will run into anxiety, inconvenience, self-doubt, complexes before peers (in case there are students in one team with different levels of English) at lessons during the study process.

As stated by the author, reading is a receptive skill - through it we receive information. Reading is a highly valuable skill and activity, and it is recommended that English learners try to read as much as possible in English. [5]

In reading, to make our students be able to identify the main ideas, key words/phrases from texts on general and technical topics, and select relevant information as well as summarize, we choose articles in which there are more familiar vocabulary that our study groups have previously focused on due to target terminology. When students recognize more glossary, it results in easy coping with pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading tasks. Based on the educationalist, vocabulary knowledge is knowledge; the knowledge of a word implies how that word fits into the world. [6] Therefore, we try to advance vocabulary in our young generations; they will be able to manage with more complicated activities on maturing the reading skills.

To strengthen the reading skills, we include: scanning, skimming, sentence completion, predicting, matching headings, matching phrases, summaries with word lists (multiple choice), dealing with opinion Yes/No/Not

given, finding the differences in two pictures. [7] We select the given skill work activities mainly in articles on technical topics.

It is apparent that listening has a significant role in people's life as well as in class settings. Without having the productive listening skills, it is not possible to effectively communicate. [8] In consequence, listening skills are dominant for learning motives as owing to the given skill, which is one of the four language domains, our young individuals obtain information and knowledge as well.

Very often to immediately achieve listening comprehension is hard for pre intermediate level teams. Accordingly, in our practice, when organizing the listening part of lessons, the group members are provided with pre-listening handouts on active words/collocations that are available in the text to empower the learners to easily comprehend audio recording. Learners are instructed in detail; what the listening exercise highlights, who participants are, what the purpose of the conversation, interview, monologue etc. is. We mainly select such instructions as "listen to the phone conversations and match them with the pictures; listen and mark the sentences T or F; listen to two people talking about ..., why he/she doesn't agree with their partner related to …; listen to 5 people and answer the questions (multiple choice); listen, say what has just happened" etc. [9] The more they are involved in the similar way of performing, the more they get used to understanding of the heard by them audio tracks within lessons.

As it was mentioned above, speaking is one of the four language skills. We are aware of the fact that speaking is the act of talking. Speaking is considered to be the most foundational skill among the four domains.

"Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information." [10]

"Today's world requires that the goal of teaching speaking should improve students' communicative skills, because, only in that way, students can express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural rules appropriate in each communicative circumstance." [11] We know, speaking skills are skills that permit everyone to effectually liaise; so teachers should pay a special attention to teaching the given skill to make our young individuals become fluent speakers. When we start selecting the activities for speaking, interesting and engaging games come to our mind at once. We try to choose those ones, which cover more than one skill at a time, from speaking to writing and sometimes to listening for example. By the way, such activities are much more productive for our target audience; concurrently they can improve and consolidate the highlighted by them grammar and vocabulary based on the discipline syllabus when moving to writing from speaking. Our learners prefer writing real-life situations from their experience according to 'personalization' technique of teaching. This strategy results in quick remembering the glossary and grammar that are focused on. Also, the given technique gives an opportunity to learners to apply the language to

convey their own feelings, opinions as well as ideas etc. We see that it involves veracious contact.

In accord to the source, "personalized learning prioritizes a clear understanding of the needs and goals of each individual student and the tailoring of instruction to address those needs and goals." [12] Therefore, if we assist fittingly, our students can learn on their own due to 'personalization' approach.

Our students are mainly busy with such communicative activities as "Let me tell you about…", "Could you give me some advice?", "What is your opinion?", "Why do you prefer it?", "What happened when …?" etc. and the ones that are held between two partners as well. It is worth noting that our learners are good at role-games during of which they behave themselves as if they are in actual situations. Very often we select topics that have an educative character; teachers are not just in charge of teaching, they nurture the young generation to foster in them respect and love to close and elderly people, teachers, peers, the ways of getting on well with everyone in various circumstances as well as valuing friendship, money etc.

We face several challenges in teaching speaking to students; first of all, the shortage of lexicon, pronunciation, the difficulty of associating the topic with certain situations, the lack of grammar knowledge, in the result, our learners lose a good chance of practicing speaking a lot. Taking into consideration the mentioned above issues, when organizing the speaking-oriented activities, we try to consider those ones, which leads to effectual acquisition of the given skill. Surely, we must be specific, that is, we are to set a comprehensible, coherent communicative goal. One more moment to evolve speaking practice is a good pre-speaking organization; it is unacceptable not to supply our study groups with a corresponding to the topic glossary; words, collocations that are needed and transitions as well to show the logical consistency in speech. It is improper to make our learners "confine themselves to the stale air of their own being"; in other words, "stew in their own juice." In case of correct planning, if we say informally, it is possible "to keep the ball rolling', that is, speaking will go without stopping. Otherwise, young individuals may be disappointed in the mentioned skill. Establishing the opportunity, giving some aid, setting the time for getting prepared, instructing in a distinct way are necessary.

Actually, we should bear in mind the fact that organizing the pair work, teamwork has some requirements, for instance, according to learners' perception, learning ability etc., group representatives are divided into teams or into pairs with the purpose of making them feel more relaxed, more self-confident and without pressure both from the side of groupmates and the teacher.

Alongside, we remind the study groups to respect each other by listening attentively to show their mutual interest and support in presenters' speech. By the end of various presentations, our students ask questions in conformity with the content of the performance, clarify some details or give

comments and feedback. Due to the discipline syllabus, in "Academic Conduct and Ethics Policy" section, our students are recommended to be tolerant and respect other people's opinions.

Based on the author, "Writing is a medium of human communication that involves the representation of a language with written symbols." [13]

"Pre-writing tasks review and build students' knowledge of relevant vocabulary, relevant grammar points and, most importantly, students' background knowledge, since that is what really generates thoughtful and interesting written work. Pre-writing tasks are a crucial element of successful writing instruction." [14]

We totally agree with the expert; therefore, we make a thorough preparation to organize pre-writing instructions as well as pre-writing activities to meet the learners' needs to make them be successful in writing. Of course, for pre-intermediate level teams, we don't set great requirements to works; we consider everything related to the given skill from the point of the syllabus. The taken grammar structures and active vocabulary are normally incorporated into writing a paragraph that contains a topic sentence, supporting ones and an effectual concluding sentence as well as connectors and linking words.

At the same time, students are in charge of composing situations/stories in written form on describing people, town or city, describing the last holiday, weekend, shopping, teenagers, healthy/unhealthy lifestyle, gossiping, optimists/pessimists, inventions, being decisive/indecisive and being happy. Our students perform writing tasks with pleasure as the topics highlighted are interesting and close to everyday life, which arouse young individuals' interest related to the mentioned skill. Especially, they are good at enumerating the advantages and disadvantages of being, for instance, an optimist or pessimist; decisive/indecisive, healthy/unhealthy etc. from which they gain useful moments for themselves that are needed in life.

In addition to speaking, this skill is a productive or active one too.

"Teaching writing as productive skills requires teachers to direct students to produce their expressions in written form and needs more elements of skills such as using appropriate words, proper sentences and correct spelling that is different from speaking." [15]

As writing and speaking are in mutual relationship, we should plan the lessons in order to practice the mentioned skills beneficially. When writing, participants consolidate grammar, terminology, spelling and requirements to writing of a certain type of writing. It's worth underlying those teachers should provide opportunities for writing, motivate the youth, make them be interested in this skill, also, foster learners' accomplishment in writing. All these moments will result in fair assessment of students' works according to evaluation criteria that contain task fulfillment, grammar use, vocabulary and spelling, coherence etc.

To be short, in teaching English we must always remember the eclectic method that stands for "not students should fit the method but vice versa."

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