



Original Article: IN SEARCHING OF EFFECTIVE METHODOLOGY OF TEACHING ENGLISH IN RUSSIA

Citation

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Authors

Aleksander S. Timin, Ivanovo State University of Chemistry and Technology, Russia.
Marina N. Mileyeva, Ivanovo State University of Chemistry and Technology, Russia.

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Modern processes of globalisation, networking, economic integration and scientific cooperation dramatically increasing nowadays all over the world resulted in vital needs in competitive, highly educated and professionally skillful graduates. The English language has undoubtedly established its strong position as the global means of lingua franca widely spread from the British Isles transforming into ‘new Englishes’ or ‘world Englishes’ [1]. To successfully integrate into existing global surroundings and the world scientific society a graduate should demonstrate fluency in the English language. Thorough and unbiased analysis [2] of conventional teaching methods currently followed in Russia highlighted the vast discrepancy between these final objectives and actual foreign language aptitude graduates obtain during studies. The roots of this problem are rather closely connected with the Soviet education model originated under extremely difficult conditions: both the young Soviet industry and science experienced severe deficiency in qualified and trained people for lack of competent teachers, Humboldt’s academic educational model being proposed as its basis. Fundamental principles of Humboldt’s university –

academic freedom and the unity of investigation and teaching – are still kept as major educational values in the world.

A search of several European countries to solve common European problems in higher education (such as its growth and diversification, the employability of graduates, the shortage of skills in key areas, the expansion of private and transnational education) gave rise to the Bologna process. Its good purpose is to create convergence of European higher education, though avoiding any ‘standardisation’ or ‘uniformisation’ with deep respect to national autonomy and diversity. Thus, the Bologna Declaration was collaborated as a key document to mark a turning point in the development of European higher education [3].

Language teaching methods practised abroad differentiate between two basic models: the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) and the teaching of English as a second language (ESL). The former being largely a 19th-century creation highlighted the importance of emulating native speaker’s language behaviour. Nevertheless, apparent positive trends to imitate natural social situations through typical language phrases and colloquial

word combinations positioned the learner as an outsider or a ‘linguistic tourist’ in a strange country. The emergency of the latter model was predominantly political by its origin oriented on countries where the English language performed the function of a second official state language. In the mid 1990s Finland initiated curriculum innovations known under the acronym CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) when syllabus subjects and English are taught together [4]. The advantage of such an approach is doubled: on the one hand, curriculum subjects are taught through the medium of a language; on the other, it is a means of teaching English through the study of specialist content. In other words, learners gain knowledge to deeper comprehend the major subject by simultaneous learning and using a non-native language. ‘Content’ is the very first key word in the acronym to emphasize the fact that it is the heart of the teaching process that per se causes language learning. This new flexible integrated approach quickly adopted by several European countries is characterized by four important guiding principles called otherwise 4 Cs: content, communication, cognition and culture [5]. Content means the progression in knowledge; communication is accomplished through interactions; cognition involves thinking and understanding, culture revealing self and other awareness.

William Kilpatrick introduced into the education sphere the project method which is students-oriented, their exploring and constructing activities dominating through this technology [6]. Problem-based learning pioneered by Howard Barrows and his colleagues, supplied teachers of foreign languages with another innovative pedagogical tool: they cannot deny the benefits of accumulating flexible working knowledge, developing effective problem solving and collaboration skills, increasing students’ conscious motivation [7]. One more teaching innovation was the introduction of the Reading and Writing for

Critical Thinking Project (RWCT) by David Klooster. This internationally tested and approved technique provides interested party with a mechanism of successful teaching process reforming through increasing students’ responsibility and comprehension [8].

We should admit that English has already become something more than just a school subject as it solidly holds the position of a lingua franca. The English language is now some very important communication tool, which helps to systematize dramatically growing information and exchange it all over the world [9]. Moreover, it has become one of the principal assets in getting a global leadership in books and films industries; comes to our aid in commercial transactions throughout the globe; is the language of the latest business management in the world [10, 11]. As the working communication instrument in the area of globalization the English language has become mandatory for all those who want to participate in these processes and take advantages in terms of culture, jobs, travel, technical knowledge and practice [12]. As a result, the English language acquired some specific instrumental purposes causing the teaching of a special discipline named English for Special or Specific purposes (ESP). Several authors [13, 14] identify the impact of English in various areas such as science, medicine, art. As a result, it is absolutely necessary nowadays to design special courses to teach English for science, medicine, agriculture, engineering, tourism where the content of the course is limited by the specific vocabulary and grammatical structures. During the two last decades, there appeared a great amount of English courses focused on the developing of the language practical skills suitable in different professional areas such as business, science, cultural art. International Business Communication course was designed for people who wish to improve their business language and professional commercial skills, Cambridge BEC Higher

course being useful for people mastering international business area. The Perth Institute of Business and Technology (PIBT) developed several English Languages Courses for some native groups with a wide range of programs, which help students from any country to develop their English skills for further study, work and life. One of such course was successfully introduced in Malaysia the education system of which was reformed. Malaysian teachers began to teach science and mathematics using English as the medium of their instructions [15]. These teachers indicated that English vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation were paramount for their concept following which it is available to enhance both science education and the English language skills. To sum it all up, the programs mentioned focus mostly on developing practical language skills that makes them really relevant in modern life. Positive results obtained caused a new method of teaching English using a CLIL approach [16, 17]. The main aim of CLIL is to introduce new ideas and concepts in traditional school subjects using a foreign language as a means of communication. In the CLIL course learners have the possibility to gain new knowledge and understand the major subject through simultaneous learning and using the target language. Therefore, we can combine the study of any school subjects with English using the concept of the CLIL approach. It helps the students to learn how to use the language accurately and, on the other hand, involves them into understanding both materials and physical world.

Nowadays teachers of English in Russia have still been used to traditional teaching methods, which appeared ineffective in our modern life, general textbooks based on learning different grammatical structures and vocabulary being preferable among the most of them. One cannot help accepting that it makes scholastic English lessons very bored and absolutely useless. Meanwhile, to develop and improve students' foreign language aptitude is the

aim of any method, either in traditional or modern approaches. However, conventional methods never involved integrated processes in teaching a foreign language considering it as sub-sets of discrete skills and areas of knowledge [18]. As a result, most of the students cannot apply the obtained language knowledge in communication or in practice. The traditional teaching methods interpret the English language as a set of grammatical rules and a vocabulary book [19]. In fact, this thesis has a point because if a student knows all the rules and has a large vocabulary he is able to easily translate any English text and generate simplest sentences in English. However, unfortunately, the traditional methods of teaching English do not bear in mind that the language is a means of communication. Students are taught only to produce sentences in English but not communicate with other people because their language skills obtained refer mostly to the knowledge of separate building blocks (parts of speech, tenses, phrases) and structure of sentences (clauses and sentence patterns). Moreover, the most irrational thing in traditional methods is the impossibility to apply this set of rules in practice while translating from one language into another, another disadvantage concerning the lack of speaking and pronunciation practice. Therefore, it can be concluded that the traditional teaching English technologies used in Russia produce generations of non-speakers: many learners realized that they are not able to speak English in common life situations. It might be ascribed to the fact that traditional methodology focuses on the written language as the most important part in learning a foreign language. However, writing is thought of as a very unpleasant experience demotivating the students even try to speak English: why will they make an effort to explain some English terms, if they can write? Therefore, traditional technologies of teaching English are expected to teach the rules and items of

lexis, which may be approved by the students being able to use the language; but in fact, most of the students explore only narrow route of their language.

Having been entered the Bologna system of education (the world in 1999, Russia in 2003) Russian authorities faced the strongest necessity to reorient its educational sector due to new objectives proclaimed. The Russian educational system desperately needs to be completely rebuilt in order to correspond to the world's standards and requirements. It should be noted that the process of education, especially in higher educational institutions, has been already transformed into a three-level structure with newly introduced European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. Nevertheless, these are all mostly external changes while there still exist many other internal points to be modified or varied, methodology of teaching being the most serious and urgent among them.

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