

Debates As One of the Most Effective form of Interactive English Language Learning for Medical Students

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Abstract--- *The article deals with peculiar type of interactive learning in the form of debates. The theoretical justification of this approach in the context of solving some specific educational objectives is observed. The potential of communicative approach in teaching medical university students an English language is explored.*

Keywords--- *Language, Teaching, Interactive Method, Communicative Method, Debates.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the modern world, knowledge of the English language is equated with elementary, background knowledge. At the end of 2012, Uzbekistan adopted a Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On measures to further improving the system of learning foreign languages", which defined new tasks in teaching foreign languages. [1] It is needless to note the importance of English language in contemporary world realities. In this regard, the degree of students' language acquisition may determine their future career growth. However, a number of difficulties arise among medical students due to the following factors:

1. The emphasis of teaching on the large extent is made on fundamental clinical disciplines which exclude English language out of the primary subjects
2. Students with different levels of English language proficiency study in the same group (since this discipline isn't involved in the list of compulsory subjects while entering the university) which reduces the motivation of «strong» students, and contributes to the lack of interests of «weak» ones.

Dörnyei maintains that motivation is one of the most important concepts in psychology and language education, which is commonly used to explain learners' success and failure in learning [2]. Highly invested and motivated learners with more extended social networks, experienced greater linguistic gains [3]. Proceeding from the opposite, students with low English level knowledge are less expected to attain high results in studying process due to little motivation.

In this context, it is almost impossible to organize a traditional lesson that would be equally interesting for both groups of students due to different English knowledge levels.

In order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of knowledge, the learners should be involved with the new knowledge that cannot be achieved only through hearing information [4].

The main goal of learning English is to develop students' communicative competence, which is the basis for mastering the language. Classroom interactions between students and between students and lecturers are considered by Bartlett and Ferber to be more effective than traditional teaching strategies [5]. The communicative method

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provides maximum immersion of student of different levels into the language process. The primary objective of this method is to teach the student to speak English fluently. Thus, the significance of the role of interactive methods in language learning shouldn't be neglected, namely, manifested in the form of debates as a creative process of conducting a lesson that is fundamentally different from the traditional one, which can increase both interest in the language and the quality of knowledge. K. Rogers understood the creative process as the creation of a new product in the course of activity, related both to the uniqueness of the individual and to his social environment. The main motive for creativity, he considered the desire of a person to realize themselves, to show their capabilities. Thus, creativity is expressed in the search for trends to meet needs [6].

'Interactive learning actively engages the students in wrestling with the material. It reinvigorates the classroom for both students and faculty. Lectures are changed into discussions, and students and teachers become partners in the journey of knowledge acquisition.' [7] The essence of the debate as a form of interactive learning is that the learning process involves all students to the maximum in the studying process, so that each participant has the opportunity to understand and reflect on own knowledge and thoughts. Zare and Othman believe that the use of debates has expanded to students in many differing subject areas [8]. Since special subjects are the medical base of students, the topics of the debate are chosen exclusively for the relevant (medical) topics to increase the level of student engagement.

Public discussion of an important problem of interest (medical) with the formulation of different points of view on it allows students to speak the language, even if the student has particularly low level. The level of «embarrassment» is reduced to zero since the goal is set by the given topic and not by knowledge of the language. Students subconsciously follow the «children's» way of learning to speak first, and afterward to speak correctly. The language is most effectively mastered when comparing a child who is learning to speak his native language as he does not learn complex grammatical structures, does not remember incomprehensible names, does not cram texts and does not get a bad grade for incorrectly constructed sentences, but in the end the goal is achieved successfully.

Learning a foreign language is a process of direct development and self-development of the student, for this reason, a foreign language should be treated as a discipline that develops practical skills, moving away from the grammatical and translation approach in teaching [9]. Student debates are effective ways to foster cooperation, critical thinking, and enthusiasm for learning among middle school students. Teachers can use debates in almost any discipline, include students of all reading levels, and, when properly orchestrated, help students comprehend important and complex issues [10]. The process of expressing thoughts and different 'for and against' perspectives in a debate structure encourages interaction amongst peers [11]. Expressing the problems, protesting and presenting critical designs should be welcomed by the participant in order to solve all problems and overcome all weaknesses [12].

During the Discussion of the Topic, the Students Must

become an active participant in the educational process relate to the given issues consciously navigate in random and non-planned situations in English as well as bear individual responsibility for the quality of their professional preparation (constructive speech prepared at home).

As an encouragement students not only learn the language, they also get additional special knowledge related to their future work in the process of mastering the language promoting:

- Personal creative activity;
- Activity of the subject is determined by personal professional (medical) interest
- Ability to work with various sources of information, look for and investigate the subject of interest (medicine) in English;

In the process of conducting debates, students adopt frequently used phrases and expressions from other groupmates, as one of the key goals of the debate is not only to reproduce ones' own previously - prepared speech, but also to express the opposition after careful listening to the opponent's argument. This way, listening, speaking, creative and critical thinking are aroused. Even students with a low initial level of English language acquire far more knowledge in the process of attending and participating in debates than in a traditional lesson. Frequent repetition of lexical units from other participants is a prerequisite for successful language acquisition. Kennedy believes that the debates can help in "...defining the problem, assessing the credibility of sources, identifying and challenging assumptions, recognising inconsistencies and prioritizing the relevance and salience of various points with the overall argument" [13].

Apart from the main obvious language advantages, the purpose of the debate is also to develop students' general and professional competencies, which play a significant role in the formation of future specialist of the highest level of qualification.

The medical thematics of the selected topics provide students the motivation and aspiration for achieving appropriate results. Spolsky said —the more motivation a learner has, the more time he or she will spend learning an aspect of a second language [14]. In one of the earliest statements on motivation in second language learning, Gardner defines motivation as referring to a combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitude towards learning the language [15].

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Every month, debates in English language are organized at the Tashkent Medical Academy, on a mixed student basis. That is, students of different language levels proficiency and courses are combined into a single group. At least one foreign student who understands neither Russian nor Uzbek language is added to each group to exclude the possibility of using local languages.

Before the debate took place, students of 3 groups (36 people) were selected, divided into 2 categories of "strong" English speakers (15 people) and "poor" English students (21 people), and interviewed using a questionnaire that allows us to identify commitment to the debate and the underlying reason for chosen decision. After receiving the results of the study, on January 15, 2020, a decision was made at the meetings of the Department of Languages on the organization of conducting ostentatious debates among students of different levels and courses on a monthly basis (Table 1), as well as within each group.

A group of 12 people was selected for the first demonstrative debate (Table 2). The group, in its turn, was divided into 2 teams. Participants embraced different levels of English.

Subsequently, they were offered a list of medical topics (Table 3) and one of them was affirmed in custody.

After organizational measures were finished, both the teams and the topic were determined, followed by the preparatory moments directing to the debate itself.

Both teams were presented with debate rules that should be Accurately Followed

Rules of debates (adopted for English Department of Tashkent Medical Academy)

There are two teams, each consisting of 6 speakers. All students are gathered from different groups and courses. Each team involves minimum one foreign student which doesn't know Russian or Uzbek language.

Each team has six constructive speeches approving command's side of the issue which are presented sequentially and by turns. Each team has 6 arguments proving the position. Constructive speeches are triggering "flame" which are thoroughly prepared beforehand (at home) after careful study of the problem.

Each affirmative speech is entailed with contradictory rebuttal argument from opposing team. Points for teams are added only if any random participant of opposite team can find contradiction and present it. The debate of the argument continues until the idea is exhausted and afterward the word is given to the opposite team for presenting its affirmative speech. Therefore, the cycle goes on and on.

No new constructive arguments may be introduced in the rebuttal period.

The speaker must advocate the position. No revision of position of a team is permitted during the debate.

Each speaker is questioned or countered by the opposite team as soon as he concludes his constructive speech. Any participant from defender's side can take a word and bring points to the team.

In order to reinforce an assertion, the team must support it with enough evidence and logic to convince the opponents to believe in credibility of the words. Facts must be accurate. Visual materials are permissible, and once introduced, they must be relevant to the topic and proving the presented arguments. They should involve grounds for the interpretation of the terms or assertions.

The Judge is assigned in advance for adding points for rebuttal arguments, . Slogans, comments or rhetorical question are not encouraged with the points, but only proofs even if it can have subjective basis expressed by personal point of view . The judge must base his decision entirely on the material presented and arguments presented, without taking into account of the personal worldview.

After the presentation of the rules, the teams have some time to prepare for the day of the debate. During this period they:

1. Find all the information regarding the topic of debate and carefully study it. Moreover, topics should be studied from both sides, in order to have information for rebuttal speech and be prepared for contradicting.

2. Students within their team split the topic into arguments so that they do not coincide with classmates and each person prepares his own speech
3. Define the responsibilities of each participant for the preparation of visual aids and other supporting materials (for example, a poster)

The next step is the debate itself.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Wang Chuming supposed that motivation was considered as one of the significant factors impacting foreign language learning. For medical students, instrumental motivation is pursuit the knowledge in medicine. We are trying to combine both perspectives [16]. Below questionnaire will show the commitment of medical students to their future profession. As Snyder notes the more involved students are during the debate the more they will gain from the learning process[17]. Therefore is is very important to find point of contact that will be integrating for all students.

Table 1

Totalnumber: 36	“Poor” English students: 21	“Strong”English students: 15
Statements:		
I want to have an ordinary lesson	80 % (17)	20 % (3)
I want to have debates practice on the lesson	47 % (10)	93 % (14)
I want to discss relevant medical topic on debates	85 % (18)	100 % (15)

Accordig to table 1, we can see that the questions are arranged in specific order with the goal of narrowing down the topic of interest involving the students of both types. Since Tashkent Medical Academy is not a linguistic university, it is impossible to divide students by levels of English knowledge. It is necessary to adapt a mixed way of teaching a language that will be interesting and effective for both language groups.

The first question reveals that students with “poor” knowledge of the language initially prefer to have a standard lesson because they lack motivation and interest in studying process. Due to insufficient knowledge, they don’t strive for any way out of the usual educational framework. However, we can observe a directly proportional situation with “strong” students. Ordinary lesson seems boring for the reason that the grammar rules they are studyng are already known to them and even the interesting topics they learn in the lesson are not studied with full dedication and interest due to inhibition of the poor level students. In this regard, intragroup dissonance takes place to be.

Considering the results of the second question, we see that the indicator of interest of “weak” students has increased and almost half of the students are ready to transform the style of the lesson to a more interesting one. The remaining half of these students is still not motivated by the lesson. As for strong students, almost everyone are concerned in debates. They are confident in their abilities, want to use their knowledge of language and they are ready for experimentation.

As for the third question, we are close to the final distination. As soon as the medical topic has appeared in the statement, it’s become possible to increase the interest of “weak” students by almost twice accounting for 85%,

which is a good indicator of the amount of language interest among students who know language poorly or do not know it completely. Regarding strong student, indicators also showed an increasing trend in the amount of 100% student interest.

Thus, we understand that by combining the interactive method of debate and the general profile of medicine, we can achieve maximum interest from the majority of students.

Table 2

Total number of students	12	
Number of teams	2	
Names of teams	A	B
Team structure	1 foreign student (Pakistan)	1 foreign student (India)
	1 foreign student (Turkmenistan)	1 foreign student (Tadjikistan)
	1 “strong” student of the the first course	1 “strong” student of the first course
	1 “weak” student of the the first course	1 “weak” student of the the first course
	1 “strong” student of the the second course	1 “strong” student of the the second course
	1 “weak” student of the the second course	1 “weak” student of the the second course

The first demonstrative debates were deliberately arranged on a mixed basis. Each team included:

1 foreign student who does not understand any local language. This phenomenon limited the temptation of party members to speak a language other than English, both during the debate and before, in preparation for the debate.

1 foreign student who understands the local language which allows balancing the situation of participants

1 “strong” first-year student who knows English well but yet has minimal knowledge of medicine

1 “weak” first-year student who does not know English well and also has minimal medical knowledge

1 “strong” second-year student who knows English well and already has more advanced knowledge of medicine

1 “weak” second-year student who does not know English well but already has more advanced knowledge of medicine

Thus, we tried to achieve the maximum diversity of students in all categories in order to unite them with one common goal of debate.

The presense of foreign student exposes local students to completely English speaking zone since it is one commong ground. There’s literally no way of avoiding the language they are trying to learn. Real communicative interactions means students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions in the target language[18].

The next step is the identification of the topic of debate by voting among the selected participants. Soraya claims that the debate is meant to explore, and exploring the truths through interactions have a significant impact on the mental aspect of the human mind [19]. That’s why the process of identifying the theme which seems to be interesting for all students is crucial.

Table 3

Theme	Percentage (number)
Branded medicines or generic drugs?	0 %
Should human genome editing be legalized?	0 %
Childhood vaccinations should be compulsory.	16% (2)
Is Euthanasia justified?	33 % (4)
Alternative medicine versus traditional medicine	50 % (6)

Medical topics arranged in a simplifying order "from complex to simple". We can notice that 1 and 2 complex topics were not interested for students of both courses. However, further, the numbers go in increasing order, and as a result, a relatively easy topic is chosen by a majority of votes in relation to the proposed topics. This is also due to the participation of first-year students with non-possessing sufficient knowledge in the medical industry.

Nevertheless, starting from the opposite, we can conclude that when conducting an interactive lesson of debate in their individual groups corresponding to their course, students have equal knowledge in medicine, which increases the chances of motivation and interest in the lesson. For this reason, a problem that cannot be solved with dividing students into levels of language proficiency can be solved by choosing a topic of interest to the whole group, thus finding a common denominator and leverage for all students. This phenomenon makes them forget about all restrictions that arise in their mind, as the only aim is to deliver the information. As Phajoohande notes "multiplicity of ideas and the group collaborative effort causes and explores the new issues because the learners focus on the power of their mindactively" [20].

IV. CONCLUSION

Despite the impossibility of distributing students by levels of English language knowledge due to major speciality of medical students, we tried to find a way out that is common and interesting for everybody without dividing students into levels of knowledge. We tried to move away from the idea that the destination is the language rather implicating their specialization. Thus, English language turned out to be a tool in achieving the goal, shifting the angle from weak zones of knowing it. Neither grammar nor grades were included in this process, but only teamwork that allows to relax the situation and achieve authentic results.

The study found that students' engagement on the use of debates had two distinct perspective:

Preoccupation about the level of the English language become a secondary concern when the topic is chosen according to level of interest.

Debates ensure the active involvement of all students in the process of studying.

Like throwing into the water a child who can't swim, we tried to create an atmosphere with no exit to native language for students in the framework of communication only in English by involving a foreign student in each team. Even when preparing for the debate (during non-educational process), "weak" students were forced to communicate just in the only common language - English, no matter how, with the help of groupmates or online dictionaries. The most important thing is that the connecting point was only in the English language, as it was the real meaning of working as a team and not individually. So, that's why we chose an interactive form of learning in the form of debates that makes students interact with each other inevitably.

However, our work cannot be considered as completed at this point. The next research should be conducted over time, with regular debate basis to find out the progression of English level in "weak" students and the advancement of vocabulary and speaking acquisition in "strong" students. After all, the main goal of the whole work done is still to improve the level of knowledge of the English language, no matter how disguised it may seem for students.

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