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THE IMPACT OF ROLE-PLAYING ACTIVITIES ON IMPROVING BUSINESS ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

The article is devoted to the educational tool of role-playing in foreign language teaching in non-linguistic higher education institutions for stimulating critical thinking, creativity, and speaking abilities.

Keywords: *communicative competence, role-playing game, communication context, communication strategies*

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ВЛИЯНИЕ РОЛЕВЫХ ИГР НА ПОВЫШЕНИЕ УРОВНЯ ВЛАДЕНИЯ ДЕЛОВЫМ АНГЛИЙСКИМ ЯЗЫКОМ

Статья посвящена изучению использования ролевой игры в обучении иностранному языку в неязыковых вузах для стимулирования критического мышления, креативности и развития речевых способностей.

Ключевые слова: *коммуникативная компетенция, ролевая игра, коммуникативный контекст, коммуникативные стратегии*

One of the objectives of foreign language teaching in non-linguistic higher education institutions is to cultivate communicative competence. The introduction of interactive teaching methodologies to promote a competency-based approach shows great promise, especially when implemented through engaging activities like business or role-playing games. Role-playing simulations serve as a highly effective tool for teaching English as they stimulate critical thinking and creativity, enable students to enhance their speaking abilities, and provide a platform for using the target language in authentic scenarios. The role-playing method focuses on replicating common intercultural communication situations, where roles are identified and adapted as necessary during reenactment.

Through engaging in intercultural communication scenarios, this method broadens imaginative horizons, leading to more efficient assimilation of the norms of another language culture.

Successful language acquisition is facilitated when

- 1) students are presented with ample new and accessible materials,
- 2) actively engage in the learning process,
- 3) experience positive emotions within a supportive learning environment.

By participating in a role-playing game using accessible materials, students actively engage in real-life communication by assuming assigned roles. Their involvement and immersion in the game foster a sense of natural communication, allowing them to momentarily forget that they are learning a foreign language.

In this favorable environment students have the opportunity to experiment with new behaviors within a secure setting, which ultimately nurtures long-term motivation for language learning.

Before preparing and conducting a role-play, students should be introduced to its basic concepts. It is quite acceptable, in our opinion, to offer students a definition of role play from a linguodidactic reference book and ask them to explain in their own words what a role play is and what functions it fulfils. "Role-playing is a method of orchestrating collaborative learning activities in the classroom designed to cultivate and enhance speaking skills and abilities in an environment closely mirroring true communication conditions. Role-playing involves assigning students to roles and playing out situations of communication in accordance with the theme. In terms of time, it is a relatively complete cycle of controlled interaction between teachers and students, which consists of three stages: preparation of the role-play, its implementation, and collective discussion of the results." [2, p. 290]. If this definition proves unclear to students, you can emphasize the key word 'role' and recall what it is, drawing on each person's personal experience. Students can be asked to discuss a series of questions to identify their readiness to perform "non-standard" complex speech acts in a foreign language (preferably in the target language), for example: Why do you think all people like to play, but not everyone may be ready to admit it? Do you think that professional activity is also a kind of game with certain rules? Do you play out a predictable situation in your mind when you are preparing for some responsible event: taking an exam, going for an interview, meeting with the dean of the faculty, etc.? What are your typical speech acts (what do you usually say) in most of these imaginary situations? Do you find it useful to "play out" the potential situation, not only mentally but also in reality, involving other potential actors (people who would play the roles of the imagined interlocutors)? The role and organically related actions are an indivisible unit of the game. The main thing for the learner is the fulfillment of the assumed role as well as the implementation of real relations between the participants of the game, expressed in various replicas, remarks, and statements that regulate its course [1, p. 29]. Like a child, an adult, having taken on another person's role, seems to be liberated, stops being shy about speaking out, and is not afraid of contact with partners. This behavior is quite understandable because the participant in the game, like an actor, pronounces not their own words but the lines of a particular character. Consequently, this character "assumes responsibility" for the opinion expressed on his or her behalf, the proposed assessment, and even the speech errors of the speaker [3, p. 133].

Didactic, including role-playing, games should correspond to the age and abilities of a person, be useful and interesting, relevant and not boring, and be different from the traditional class. It is important that the game contributes to the development of speech, trains memory, expands vocabulary, teaches correct communication, and fosters respect for the studied language. Standard traditional classes cannot be completely replaced by game activities, but thanks to the game elements, the classes are enlivened, supplemented, varied, and engaging, thus improving the learning process. Games as a form of questioning can be very diverse: quizzes, contests, knowledge attractions, creating reviews, and role-playing games are the most complex variants of non-standard classes. In these activities, students exhibit enthusiasm towards their tasks, leading to enhanced productivity and improved class effectiveness.

Role-playing can be a highly effective educational tool across different disciplines. For instance, following the completion of the "Countering Corruption" course, students studying in English can engage in role-playing activities like "Offering a Bribe to a Traffic Police Inspector" or "Dealing with an Extortionist," enhancing their practical understanding of the subject matter. The students are offered role-play scenarios where they play the roles assigned to them (traffic police inspector, driver, chairman of the tender commission, or prosecutor). When assigning roles, each participant usually receives a so-called role card with a brief description of the role, the character's view of the situation, and his or her characterization. The student is free to choose the linguistic means they have already mastered. Nevertheless, his or her speech behavior is already predetermined by the instructions in the card because their observance is part of the rules of the game.

It should be explained to students that they need to do this kind of exercise to actualize the learning motive: "I can, I want to, I will, I must." Students will willingly use a foreign language if they have the necessary language and speech material for communication. In addition, students will want to master something if they understand in which situations of real foreign language communication they will be able to use this or that grammatical or lexical phenomenon.

We consider the selection of roles to be a crucial aspect of the role-playing game, as it directly impacts the student's autonomy in choosing language and speech tools and developing the skill of self-presentation in specific situations. While entertainment is not the primary goal of role-playing, it should also not be devoid of engagement. The opportunity for students to embody roles that are unconventional, intriguing, or outside the norm of everyday life – involving elements of risk or requiring special abilities – can serve as a motivating factor for them to fully unleash their "linguocreative potential" (as termed by V.I. Shakhovsky). It is recommended that students create their role-play cards independently, with mutual assistance and guidance from the teacher. The organization and execution of a role play necessitate thorough preparation, including setting up a game scenario. This scenario can be established through various means such as drawings, descriptions, instructions, technical tools, excerpts from literary works, film segments, and other verbal aids. To facilitate preparatory work, students can engage in tasks like explaining terms, describing images, identifying characters, solving puzzles, writing compositions or essays, spotting errors, defining words with limited clues, constructing sentences based on a given structure, completing sentences, and more. Role-playing enhances the development of crucial communicative skills, including those that are professionally significant. A role-play participant should not only be capable of embracing and executing their assigned role but also of being attentive to the roles of their speech partners. It is essential for the student to be able to select language tools that align with the communication context, as well as to articulate and defend their own perspective. The player's capacity to negotiate, prevent conflicts, or find resolutions is also highly valuable. An essential skill for a participant in the game is the ability to identify problems and suggest solutions, adjusting their behavioral tactics based on changes in their partners' speech behavior. This includes mastering communication strategies such as understanding etiquette, employing appropriate speech formulas, expressing gratitude, agreement or disagreement, making requests, and evaluating information received.

"The key defining elements of all role-playing games include: the existence of an underlying problem within the game; the inclusion of distinct characters or roles with varying perspectives on the discussed issue; and the presence of a problem scenario that encompasses conditions of cognitive conflict." [6, p. 218]. These characteristics of the game can be combined by the term "game space," which is understood as an imaginary situation of communication aimed at the implementation of communicatively significant intentions as well as the conditions of communication and participants. In addition, the game space includes the time and place of communication and the social and linguocultural parameters of the situation. Role-playing situational games of problem orientation are games where participants play a specific situation in order to demonstrate in a playful way different possible ways of solving the problem and possible consequences of the decisions made. The participants of the game activity as if let the situation pass through themselves, taking on the roles of the characters who found themselves in this situation. This contributes to a better understanding of the situation and the possibility of finding different ways out of it on behalf of the characters. The student can argue, debate, agree, or disagree on behalf of the character. A person speaking on behalf of his or her character must be able to understand the character's view of the problem. The student should carefully prepare for his or her role and familiarize themselves with the socio-cultural peculiarities of the character's behavior (if the character is a representative of a foreign culture).

In preparation for the game, students engage in various activities such as reading relevant texts, listening to thematic audio recordings, watching video clips, and participating in language and

communicative exercises. The process of preparing students for games should be gradual. It is recommended to start by analyzing solutions to specific situations where the models of the object and relationships are already provided in a ready form.

Introducing polemical situations in the classroom holds significant didactic potential for organizing and conducting role-plays. A polemical situation represents a real-life scenario where one or more individuals engage in argumentation. Such situations typically involve participants in argumentation (subjects), their respective positions or viewpoints, and the topic under discussion. An audience may also be present in a polemical situation, with the discourse often guided by established rules. Based on the participants' objectives in the argument, polemical situations can be categorized into three main types: cognitive, adversarial, and instructional. Cognitive polemics (congresses, discussions, round tables, scientific disputes) aim to seek or establish the truth. Adversarial polemics (high-level negotiations, business negotiations, domestic disputes) focus on achieving specific outcomes, such as winning a dispute, reaching a favorable agreement, or finding a compromise. Educational polemics are designed to enhance argumentation skills and abilities, serving as a preparatory stage for the other two types of polemics.

A business game as a kind of role-playing game can be used in teaching foreign language speech to non-language students, which has features inherent only in this type of learning activity. Its main characteristics are: modeling the conditions of real professional activity of students; step-by-step interconnected development; the presence of conflict situations; joint activity of game participants; description of objects of game simulation modeling; regulation of game time control; a pre-designed system of game evaluation and its rules; and the element of competition. The educational business game allows to set in training the subject and social context of future professional activity and so to model more adequate in comparison with traditional training conditions for the education of a skilled specialist.

In these conditions:

- 1) assimilation of new knowledge is superimposed on the frame of future professional activity;
- 2) learning acquires a joint collective character;
- 3) the development of a specialist's personality is carried out as a result of subordination to two types of norms: norms of competent subject actions and norms of collective social interactions.

For example, students of all specialties in the Business Foreign Language course, whose aim is to use English as a means of communication in the sphere of professional activity, study the topics "Networking and Socializing", "Negotiations", "Meetings and Discussions." The use of role-playing games in such a context makes learning more visual, effective, and motivating. Role-playing games, widely presented on official resources [4, 5], contribute to the improvement of skills and abilities to conduct presentations, meetings, gatherings, negotiations, and telephone conversations and study the structure of various forms of business communications, mastering the culture of business speech and learning the psychology of business communication. The following role-playing situation can provide a vivid example how to improve argumentation skills and find a compromise:

Student A: You have an annoying co-worker who puts all her/his calls on speaker, spends a lot of time discussing personal problems, invades your personal space, peeks on your computer screen over your shoulder; and jumps into your conversations without invitation. You have tolerated this behavior long enough and now you will talk to your co-worker and make an end to it.

Student B: You work in an open space office and share a cubicle with an older co-worker. You have a feeling that your co-worker does not like you but you have no idea why. You are friendly, laid back, and chill. You spend a lot of time on your mobile phone, talking to your family, checking your Instagram because you usually finish your work fast and are bored soon afterward. Your co-worker wants to chat.

In such "contextual" teaching, the achievement of didactic and educational goals is merged into a single stream of social-nature activities of students, implemented as a game activity.

One significant aspect of game activities is their ability to enhance students' awareness of their peers' emotional responses and interpersonal dynamics within the team. Through game participation, students develop a heightened sensitivity to their own emotions and a desire to accommodate others.

Each player gets an opportunity to feel the mechanism of collective activity, to recognize feedback signals (evaluations and reactions of others), to actualize the ability to use non-verbal means of communication, and to improve personal culture related to the ethics of business relations.

Typically, the teacher assumes the role of a judge or arbitrator during the game. It is crucial for students to adhere to one of the fundamental rules of the game: the judge's decision is final for all players. The judging process should be conducted with integrity and impartiality, as disputes arising due to the referee's errors are unacceptable. The teacher must remain unbiased, meaning they should apply the rules consistently to all participants. The teacher's objective assessment of the progress and outcomes of the game activity is vital for the successful organization and execution of future business games. Evaluation criteria include assessing the level of each student's communicative competence, the engagement of each participant in the game, the design skills demonstrated through graphic images and photographic materials, and the students' ability to collaborate effectively within a team.

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