

Student-Centered Education in Context of Second-Language Learning

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Abstract. Recent higher education policy promotes multilingualism due to the process of globalization in all spheres of our life. The main focus of this article is on “student –centered learning” which claims to be one of the effective tools in the learning process. In this regard, the given research centers on the impact of adopting student-centered education in language acquisition. It is based on facilitating effective learning, which implies strong interaction between the learner and the teacher. This paper examines the structure of student-centered learning which is aimed at creating subjective experience of the learner but not training students` cognitive abilities. The paper aims to consider the notion “multicultural identity” of students which is considered to be the main consequence caused by learning one more foreign language. The authors of the research determined principles and outlined tasks which contribute to effective implementation of student-centered education in second language acquisition..

1 Introduction

Knowledge of one foreign language is not a sufficient criterion for the professional development of a university graduate and does not satisfy the needs of modern society, which is characterized by the constant expansion of international contacts in the sphere of economy, politics, and science. Thus, it becomes necessary to teach future specialists to more than one foreign language, which makes it possible to continuously perfect the languages which have been taught and in the future to learn new foreign languages by self-teaching and self-correction. All this calls for the need to optimize the learning process because of the increasing demands on the level of professional competencies of university students. Theoretical research presented in this paper is based on methodological works of such Russian and foreign scholars as G.I. Bogin, G.V. Elizarova, Y.N. Karaulov, L.P. Krygina, I.N. Khaleeva, V.P. Furmanova, R. Gilroy et. al.

The aim of this study is to examine the notion “student-centered learning” and its implementation in second language acquisition. The tasks of our study include analyzing features of student-centered learning, its structure, functions and factors contributing to its efficient implementation.

The following methods were applied to in this study to meet the objectives. General scientific methods: method of analysis and induction which implies separation of particular factors from general factors, identification of general statements based on analyzing particular factors.

2 Theoretical Framework

We begin with presenting the pedagogical concept of Russian scholars G.V. Elizarova, V.V. Saphonova, V.P. Furmanova et al. that currently the basic goal of learning foreign languages is the creation of the multicultural identity. It is in accordance with P. Gilroy`s view that “we live in a world where identity matters. It matters both as a concept and as a contested fact of contemporary world” [1]. The former goal of learning foreign languages was to develop skills, which are particularly necessary for communication in educational situations and producing correct speech patterns. Today higher education teachers have to face the challenge of developing their student`s multicultural or multilingual competence as a complex ability for culturally sensitive activity in cross-cultural communication. M.M. Bakhtin and V.S. Bibler`s theory about dialogue of cultures has become a methodological basis for creation and development of multicultural identity. M.M. Bakhtin considers culture as a form of communication among people from different cultures. Where are at least two cultures, there is a dialogue. So we can conclude the issue of learning a second foreign language is of great importance today. A second foreign language has become a part of curriculum in Russian universities since 1950s. Russian scholars N. V. Bagramova, N.V. Baryshnikov, N. D. Galskova, B.A. Lapidus, E.N. Solovtsova, S.G. Ter-Minasova, L.B. Cheptsova et al. have studied the issues and specificity of teaching a second foreign language. They agree that learning one

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more foreign language helps to create and develop multicultural identity of students. It is obvious that the more languages and cultures the students learn, the more tolerant and empathic towards representatives from other cultures they become. If they want to understand the culture, they need to acquire its language. Linguistically competent speakers can talk, express their feelings and share their opinions with others. As von Humboldt and Sapir argued, “to speak a given language means to embrace a given vision of reality, because languages differ not just in signs and phonemes but in worldviews” [2].

As noted above, the aim of the present study is to prove the use of student-centered learning in second language acquisition. As in pedagogical conception, training is a specially organized, goal-oriented and manageable process of interaction between the learner and the teacher, aimed at acquisition of knowledge and skills, shaping the world outlook, developing the learner’s potential, strengthening the skills of self-education in accordance with the goals set in the process of education [3]. Integration of the concept of multiculturalism is related to a student-centered approach. Student-centered learning, as a way of developing education, is one of the key issues in teaching foreign languages, particularly teaching a second foreign language. Its purpose is not the molding of a personality with specified characteristics, but the creation of the necessary preconditions (social, pedagogical) to fully reveal and purposefully develop individual traits of the learner and subsequently to transform them into socially significant forms of behaviour that correspond to socio-cultural norms worked out by society [4]. The core of student-centered learning lies in the fact that the personality of the learner, his/her unique individuality is the main and priority value, which is considered to be the basis to design all other parts of the educational process. The effective functioning of the learning process in teaching a foreign language is based on a number of principles that represent a methodological realization of laws and trends that are used as a regulatory set of rules of educational process [5]. These principles are the following:

- the principle of cultural relevance: the process of teaching a foreign language is based on a dialogue of cultures, which implies students’ interacting with material and spiritual values of native and foreign cultures in real situations of cross-cultural communication. It leads to increasing their lingual-cultural proficiency becoming a part of a new linguistic world image, gaining experience while participating in foreign culture realities.

- the principle of communication and dialogic activity: language learning is provided with the systematized and interrelated teaching process to a foreign language as a means of cross-cultural communication based on a foreign language speech activity, modelled in classrooms and friendly interaction in cross-cultural communication, and the establishment of harmony in the process of interaction.

- the principle of accessibility: training is built up from the known to the unknown; Accessibility is determined by the role of the teacher as a consultant of the cognitive

activity of students in foreign language classes, differentiating the level of assistance to students.

- dynamic principle: the transition from level to level occurs on the basis of simultaneous perfection of the elements of training, with each previous level being the precondition of the next one.

- the principle of facilitation: it is an open form of demonstration of values in action. The role of a teacher is to manage the activities of the group motivating students to work, helping to develop students’ self-esteem working in a group, meeting their need for communication in a foreign language. The teacher, guided by the principle of facilitation, becomes a mediator between the student and the process of education.

- the principle of the organization of the learning environment: application of synergetic approach to create favourable educational environment, the willingness to work with other members of the group who have a unique subjective experience, to increase the effectiveness of cognitive, communication activity [6. C. 50].

Describing the structure of student-centered learning we suggest that it differs from other kinds of developing education as it is aimed at creating subjective awareness but not training cognitive abilities. Highly-developed subjective awareness can have the following features:

- perceiving reality as man’s world;
- self-analysis, reflection, self-esteem, value judgment about yourself;
- ability to cooperation, work in a team;
- values-based approach to exploring the world.

Subjective experience involves three components: cognitive (notions, ideas), operational (method of implementation for mental and practical actions) and ethical (personalized meaning, values). These components are interrelated and create systemic vision of the world. Subjective experience in learning foreign languages is very important as students tend to describe and view other cultures through the prism of their own cultural norms and on the base of their previous experience with representatives of other nationalities. Thus, we can assume that there is simultaneous perception and individual understanding of the language and culture under study.

Student-centered learning is not aimed at moulding a personality with specified properties, but creates sufficient conditions for a full manifestation of student’s personal traits, accordingly, it develops personal functions of the educational process, which predetermine making up of a personality, required by contemporary society. V.V. Serikov identifies the following personal functions: motivation, mediation, collision, reflection, orientation, creativity, self-realization [6]. The effective fulfilment of these essential functions by participants (subjects) of the educational process indicates that learning and teaching process has reached the personal level of its functioning.

In this paper, we will dwell in more detail on one of the main personal functions of the educational process, the basis of student-centered learning – the function of motivation, because motivation characterizes the attitude of man to reality and is associated with a strong need for knowledge. The motive is a need or desire behind the actions of a person. As S.L Rubinshtein claims,

motivation is based on the meaningful thing that is particularly significant for a person, acts ultimately as motives and goals of his activity and determines the core of the individual, and therefore the learning process must be determined by students' specific needs, purposes.

Collision between desirable and valid causes personal pertinence and personal value. This collision gives new impact to great activity as a way to solve it. Controversial unity of available and desirable as the unity of motivational system is the main feature of the impulse. Another motivational contradiction is the one between available trends for activity and objective possibilities of their fulfilment. Creation and development of personality is characterized by mutual influence of motivation on activity and vice versa. To put it in other words, person's motives can change due to the changes in the field of activity and operating environment.

Psychologists believe that demands and motives are closely interrelated but the latter should not be only understood as person's needs. They highlight that needs are basic but not the only ones and not the number one motive for activity. Clearly, beliefs, feelings and interests can also serve as motives for activity, but only in case each of them becomes a need. P.V. Siminov believes that motivation exists as long as there is a need underlying it [6]. Needs as the source of person's activity are the basis for motives and are determined by them.

Our research shows that when students learn foreign languages, they demonstrate not only more positive motivation for in-depth knowledge of native and foreign cultures from the side of an expert in cross-cultural communication, but also desire for self-fulfillment and personal growth as a highly qualified professional.

British researchers D. Nanan and J. Brindley [7] suggest taking into account two factors in order to choose the right tasks. These factors are divided into those related to students and those related to the kind of tasks.

The factors related to students are the following:

- to what extent an task causes and supports student's motivation. The same task can cause enthusiasm in some students or complete rejection from others;

- whether student's skills allow him/her to do the task. Obviously, definite academic skills can influence the success in implementation of some kinds of tasks;

- how much information students can perceive per unit of time. In fact, the speed of learning is different. So it is really important to divide educational material in such a way that is suitable for each student;

- how good student's speaking skills are. What level of language knowledge can be expected from this or that student according to the teacher's assessment;

- if a student needs any specific linguistic-cultural competence for doing exercises. Can this knowledge be expected from each student?

- how deep language knowledge and skills of students are. What language knowledge is required for doing this task?

- how confident in his/her self-belief and competence a student is.

Factors related to the kind of task:

- if this task is relevant and motivational for a student;

- how many stages this task involves. What cognitive efforts are required from the student? How much information does he/she have to process in order to cope with a task?

- how much practical knowledge, understanding of situation or cultural context is required for doing the task. What kind of preparatory work will help students to deal with a task?

- what kind of help from the teacher, other students, the partner or reference material is required for doing the task;

- how many mistakes might be expected from a student or if his/her partner expects absolutely correct answer;

- how much time a student needs to do a task. Limit of time is an important factor because it creates an environment for practical implementation of skills close to real ones.

3 Findings

As it is common practice to start learning second foreign language in the second or fifth term, we cannot divide students into groups according to their level of knowledge. That particularly concerns the English language because most of the students have got basic knowledge at school or at language courses. There are only a few students have passed Final Exam on English. As a result, the teacher has to deal with a group of students who have not only different levels of knowledge but also different experience in communication, productive activity and life experience. That is why student-centered learning can become a basis that will help a teacher to successfully reach the purpose of the lesson and to involve students in doing various exercises that are necessary for the development of competences in accordance with their level of skills and personal characteristics. As a result, learning foreign languages is gradually turning to conscious progress towards desired results. Students are becoming more aware of what they can achieve and realize their own role in education. Thus, their adequate self-esteem can be easily shaped.

4 Conclusions

Our research has been carried out and we conclude that moving towards student-centered education leads to greater success for students and increased job satisfaction for teachers. It is the aim of the paper to inspire more higher education teachers to use a student-centered approach as their teaching method. Student-centered education in teaching a second foreign language can solve the issues caused by differences among students, can take into consideration a few factors which are based on the knowledge of each student's subjective experience. Today's higher education is determined by developing students' ability to integrate to global market. Multilingualism promoted by education policy claims to meet this demand. But in most cases students have

individual understanding of the language and culture, so, their subjective experience is different.

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