
THE ROLE OF THE ENGLISH TEACHER IN FACILITATING CLASS DEBATES

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Дебати на заняттях англійської мови являють собою потужне знаряддя, яке дозволяє викладачеві створити активну атмосферу під час дискусій. Організація і проведення цих дискусій потребують вдосконалення навичок та вмінь моделювання дебатів, спонукання студентів до висловлювання власної думки, підведення загальних результатів обговорень.

Ключові слова: викладач, посередник, сприяння, дискусії на заняттях, комунікативні функції.

Nowadays the process of class debates is a powerful procedure in teaching English which makes the lessons active and alive. Organizing and facilitating class debates is not an easy task to do. Teacher should perfect his/her teaching and communicative skills and design the class activity, encourage students to argue for their existing position on an issue, make use of student's thinking.

Key words: teacher, facilitator, facilitation, class debates, communicative functions.

Teaching foreign languages at technical University poses for foreign language teachers a number of problems. The students should acquire practical knowledge of foreign language within a limited curriculum hours. On completion of the learning course they should develop main language skills in speaking on everyday and professional topics, listening and reading comprehension, writing for professional purposes. It is a hardly achievable task if to take into account that majority of technical students have poor initial receptive and productive skills in language, suffer psychological barriers such as shyness and diffidence when they are asked to stand out and answer before the class. For attaining goals set by unified state educational program it is necessary to perfect language teaching skills, organize effectively extra-

curriculum work of language learners, rationalize teaching by combining well-established traditional pedagogical methods with innovative learning techniques, integrating them into overall teaching process.

One of the methods is debate. Debate as means of teaching English is an excellent activity because it engages students in a variety of cognitive and linguistic ways. The process of debate allows participants to analyze the similarities and differences between different viewpoints, so that the audience can understand where opinions diverge and why. The teacher is not only an outside observer or a mere prompter of the class debates, but also an active participant and a thorough designer of the class activities, facilitator. Facilitation involves identifying areas of agreement and disagreement, seeking consensus, acknowledging students' contribution, prompting discussion and assessing its usefulness [1].

Teacher's task is to help debates flow more smoothly, be more productive. The facilitator is the one who organises the group, offers a variety of possible ways to approach problems, and waits until an agreement on a particular issue is reached.

Some faculty chose to have students decide who won and others prefer to focus on the analysis that comes out of the debate. Both approaches are useful because both require students to think about what sort of criteria should be used to decide a question, which is often another debate. Much of the style of the facilitator depends on the personality of the individual, the situation and the nature of the group. Since the role of the facilitator is based on flexibility and accommodation to the needs of the group members, there is no real step by step procedure to follow.

First of all, the facilitator's main concern is to create a non-threatening environment. Students must feel at ease in order to perform their tasks appropriately. Secondly, the teacher/facilitator makes sure that all the students in the group have equal status and opportunities. Thus the facilitator's main task is to make all the students take active part in the debate, to actively explore the topic and share the information they have got. He/She has to encourage all participants to listen to what others are saying. In any group some individuals will be less inclined to speak up. A very important task that the facilitator has to perform is to awaken and maintain the students' curiosity and interest during the debate.

In the process of facilitation, teachers perform three types of communicative functions: contextualizing functions, monitoring functions and meta-functions [2].

Contextualizing functions:

- Opening the discussion

The facilitator/moderator must provide an opening comment that states the topic of the discussion and establishes a communication model. The moderator may periodically contribute «topic raisers» or «prompts» that open further discussions within the framework of the general topic.

- Setting the norms

The teacher suggests rules of procedure for the discussion and makes sure that all participants agree with them.

- Setting the agenda

The facilitator selects an order and flow of themes and topics of discussion or guides the students in setting the agenda themselves.

- Referring

The teacher can refer to other materials on the discussed topic available both online or offline: web sites or textbooks.

Monitoring functions:

- Recognition

The facilitator refers explicitly to participants' comments and assures them that their contribution is valued and welcome, or corrects misinterpretations about the context of the discussion.

The teacher can ask questions or address requests for comments to individuals or groups.

- Prompting

The teacher can ask questions or address requests for comments to individuals or groups.

- Assessing

Participants' accomplishments may be assessed by tests or review sessions in a following class.

Meta-functions:

- Meta-commenting

The facilitator may refer to context, norms or agenda or to solving problems such as lack of clarity, irrelevance, and information overload. Meta-comments play an important role in maintaining the conditions of successful communication.

- Weaving/Interworking

The moderator summarizes the state of the discussion and finds threats to coherence in the participants' comments. He/She prompts the students to continue.

- Delegating

Some moderating functions can be assigned to individual participants to perform for a shorter or longer period (e.g. if the students are organised in groups, a student can be assigned to each group to monitor its activity and make notes about it).

Facilitation is an essential part of the teaching process, which involves, besides knowledge, emotional and behavioural components that are more difficult and delicate to deal with. The goal of facilitation is to help a group to its best thinking, to encourage and guide participants' discussion, to elicit information from the group, make use of students' thinking. The teacher seems to be the least involved in the class debate activity, but actually he/she is the key that leads to a successful outcome. Class debates can be a great motivational tool for creating meaningful interactions and discussions with language learners. They provoke students to speak spontaneously and express themselves freely. Giving students the opportunity to stand up for an opinion or idea can make the class material actually come to life.

References:

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