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THE PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNICATIVE TEACHING: MEANING AND REALIZATION VIA MOODLE LEARNING PLATFORM

Summary. The article is focused on the study of practical realization of communicative approach principles in teaching Maritime English via the Moodle online learning platform as a means to comply with recent technology development. The study takes into consideration the principles stated in IMO Model Course 3.17 with the view on a language as on a practical tool of communication and students to be active learner involved in the planning of the course and self-correction and assessment. It is also stated that English is to be taught through English and the learning tasks should reflect real life communication. The attempt to answer the question of how an online learning platform can correlate with the basic principles of the communicative approach leads to a conclusion that it is a profitable supplementation to the class work and is a satisfactory means to develop computer literacy and writing skills in future seafarers though not providing enough means to teach speaking and simulate real-life oral communication.

Keywords: Maritime English, communicative teaching, communicative approach principles, online learning, Moodle platform.

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ПРИНЦИПИ КОМУНІКАТИВНОГО НАВЧАННЯ: ЗНАЧЕННЯ І РЕАЛІЗАЦІЯ ЧЕРЕЗ НАВЧАЛЬНУ ПЛАТФОРМУ MOODLE

Анотація. Стаття присвячена дослідженню практичної реалізації принципів комунікативного підходу у вивченні морської англійської мови засобами навчальної онлайн-платформи Moodle як способу імплементації нових освітніх цілей, що виникли завдяки нещодавньому технологічному розвитку. Нові цілі в освіті в цілому, так само як і сучасний технічний розвиток, вимагають нових засобів навчання. З цієї перспективи видається доцільним покращувати технічні засоби, які використовуються на заняттях і в позакласній роботі студентів. Навчальна онлайн-платформа Moodle є одним із засобів у досягненні зазначених цілей. Мета статті полягає в тому, щоб знайти співвідношення між принципами комунікативного викладання морської англійської мови та можливими навчальної онлайн-платформи Moodle. Дослідження враховує принципи комунікативного підходу, викладені в Модельному курсі IMO 3.17, з урахуванням того, що мова є практичним інструментом комунікації, а студенти активно беруть участь у плануванні курсу, оцінюванні та самокорекції. Також зазначається, що англійська мова повинна викладатися англійською мовою, а навчальні завдання повинні відображати реальне спілкування. Спроба відповісти на питання про те, як навчальна онлайн-платформа може співвідноситися з основними принципами комунікативного підходу, приводить до висновку, що вона є рентабельним доповненням до роботи у класі й одночасно задовільним засобом розвитку комп'ютерної грамотності та навичок письма майбутніх моряків, хоча і не забезпечує достатньо можливостей для формування навичок говоріння й моделювання усного спілкування, яке б відображало обмін інформації у реальному житті й професійній діяльності.

Ключові слова: морська англійська мова, комунікативне навчання, принципи комунікативного підходу, онлайн навчання, платформа Moodle.

Problem statement. There has been some time passed when people engaged in the studying process came to the idea that the main purpose to study a language is literally to be able to use it. It led to the polysemy of teaching styles, methods and approaches. The studying goals and process have been changed.

Major changes in approaches to language teaching include a lot of. Firstly, it's learner autonomy which means giving learners greater choice over their own learning, both in terms of the content of learning as well as processes they might employ. Still, learning is not an individual, private activity, but a social one that depends on interaction with others. Learners learn in different ways and have different strengths. Teaching needs to take these differences into account rather than try to force students into a single mold. In language teaching, this has led to an emphasis on developing students' use and awareness of learning strategies. The teacher is viewed as a facilitator who is constantly trying out different alternatives. Moreover, English is not seen as a stand-alone subject anymore, it is linked to other subjects in the curriculum.

Now the focus is given to the meaning which is viewed as the driving force of learning. Language should serve as a means of developing higher-order thinking skills, also known as critical and creative thinking. In language teaching, this means that students do not learn language for its own sake but in order to develop and apply their thinking skills in situations that go beyond the language classroom.

New forms of assessment are needed to replace traditional multiple-choice and other items that test lower-order skills. Multiple forms of assessment (e.g., observation, interviews, journals, portfolios) can be used to build a comprehensive picture of what students can do in a second language [2, p. 25]. In these terms, a lot of attention is paid at a communicative approach to teach English as a non-native / second language.

But it's not only the goal which is changed. New goals as well as technical development nowadays require new means to study. From this prospective, it seems practicable and moreover profitable to follow the flow and improve the technical means used at the lessons and for students' extra-curricular activities. The learning platform Moodle is one of the options.

The problem lies in the question of how an online learning platform being one which is lacking possibilities for oral communication can correlate with the basic principles of a communicative approach.

Recent research and publications. It's needed to state that in this article the concern is about teaching Maritime English at Kherson State Maritime Academy adhering to the principles of the communicative approach. As the last is a global approach in teaching, its basics are widely described in recent researches. Directly in this publication, the attention is paid at the statements of Jack C. Richards [2] and John T. Roberts [3] in the terms of defining what the communicative approach is. The principles of teaching Maritime English communicatively are fully and elaborately stated in the IMO Model Course 3.17 [1]. The ways of implementing the mentioned approach at Kherson State Maritime Academy are described by the teachers working at the English language departments of this educational establishment and Valentyna Kudryavtseva [4] in particular, being a coordinator and facilitator of this process.

All the assumptions about using the means of the online learning platform Moodle are based on my experience of teaching Maritime English and steering two Moodle courses for three groups of students different in their age and level of communicative skills and language knowledge.

The purpose of the article is to make an attempt in answering the question stated above. It's needed to mention that in the article there are intermediary results presented. The research of various aspects in working with the Moodle platform is being conducted by the group of scientists. In this particular article the main aim is to find the correlations between the principles of communicative teaching of Maritime English and possibilities provided by a number of Moodle activities.

Presentation of the main material. Communication as the process of sharing thoughts, ideas and wishes remains one of the main goals students want to achieve while learning a foreign language not depending on the sphere. Even from professional point of view, most people communicate either with other people or with computers where the knowledge of a language is still being needed. To try to teach people to communicate linguistically and interculturally is a decent thing to do. So far, the question has been topical despite decades of applying new methods and techniques. We need to cast around again and again, refining the solutions.

John T. Roberts states: "Despite the current opaqueness and even helplessness in many respects, what is clearer than ever is that the pursuit of communicative goals entails the cultivation of both fluency and accuracy. Fluency which is inaccurate can be treacherous and accuracy which wants of all spontaneity can prove to be a complete block to communication with more proficient interlocutors" [3, p. 27].

The scientist lists several principled techniques appropriate to the implementing of the new type of syllabus needed for modern schools which include [3, p. 18]:

1. Information-gap (whereby a "knowledge vacuum" is deliberately created between different pairs or groups of participants who then have to fill it with information variously at their disposal. Information gap is a claimed pre-requisite for communication).

2. Learning by doing (not in itself a new idea, but in the modern context to be interpreted as engaging in tasks representative of those of the "real world").

3. Use of authentic materials (highly ambiguous, but often interpreted as materials written or spoken for consumption by native-speaker interlocutors or audiences).

Jack C. Richards thinks, classroom activities should typically have some of the following characteristics [2, p. 23]:

1. They seek to develop students' communicative competence through linking grammatical development to the ability to communicate. Hence, grammar is not taught in isolation but often arises out of a communicative task, thus creating a need for specific items of grammar. Students might carry out a task and then reflect on some of the linguistic characteristics of their performance.

2. They create the need for communication, interaction, and negotiation of meaning through the use of activities such as problem solving, information sharing, and role play.

3. They provide opportunities for both inductive as well as deductive learning of grammar.

4. They make use of content that connects to students' lives and interests.

5. They allow students to personalize learning by applying what they have learned to their own lives.

6. Classroom materials typically make use of authentic texts to create interest and to provide valid models of language.

The techniques and characteristics stated above are met by the communicative approach in teaching a language. The syllabus itself is innovative and based on careful consideration of what type of language is involved in communicative events. The approach draws together different directions of various methodological strands. Though the idea of "teaching for communication" was not new, the very naming of an approach or method focuses attention upon this concept for the first time creating a shift of a paradigm. The attention is drawn in debate to the concept of "authentic materials" and the concept of communicative competence allows itself to be conflated easily and productively with the communicative approach. Again, though imported from "other directions" rather than being inherent in the approach, attitudes towards teachers and learners changed rapidly, the teacher is becoming a facilitator and the learner is being regarded as a highly active participant [3, p. 25].

At Kherson State Maritime Academy, the valid principles of the communicative approach are those stated by IMO Model Course 3.17. These are the following [1, p. 206]:

1. *Language as a practical tool of communication.* Learners need to be competent in each of the skill areas (listening, speaking, reading, writing) in order to combine and utilize language systems effectively.

2. *Student-centred teaching* that encourages *active learning via student involvement* due to involving the student in the planning of the course, raising awareness of personal goals, encouraging self-correction and assessment, organizing learning (for example in a portfolio), showing students techniques for recording new language. For many students, an individual learning plan (ILP) is essential to measure their progress.

3. *English taught through English* is establishing an English-speaking environment in the class.

Instead of using the students' first language to talk about English, the teachers explain in English.

4. *Learning tasks reflecting real life communication.*

Speaking about the Moodle platform and its possibilities to practically reflect the basic principles of the communicative approach, it is needed to mention that the experience of using Moodle in evaluative purposes is not taken into account. They are exclusively the tasks for learning which we talk about.

The first principle *Language as a practical tool of communication* means that a student has to gain knowledge and practical skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening skills can be trained via posting audios and videos by means of such activities as File, Page, URL, etc., as there can also be added various types of tasks following this audio / video. The texts for reading can either be added by mentioned means or copied into the text section of any task. Writing may be trained by means of Essay, Forum or Chat. In my opinion and considering my experience it's impossible to train speaking skills on Moodle as there is no activity, resource or task including at least an element of oral communication. I would probably state that Moodle can partially satisfy the needs of teaching the second language as a practical tool of communication.

The same is with the next two principles combined which are *Student-centred teaching* and *Active learning via student involvement*. On one hand, a teacher can edit the course to add the icons of completion which would put a tick at every task performed to give the appearance of raising personal goals awareness, s/he can set the possibility to redo the tasks in order to encourage self-correction and assessment, and the teacher can even share any resources to show students techniques for recording new language; but on the other hand there still is a problem with involving the student in the planning of the course. The point is that I consider planning of the course being an active student-teacher cooperation when a student can firstly outline the needs of his learning the language and secondly request and get responses. In my opinion it's still challengeable to be implemented even in class work and surely more challengeable to do via online platforms due to the same reasons: 1) a student may literally not know why and what level he needs to know language in his professional life due to some personal negligence or wrong vision of what his duties are going to be; 2) a teacher must always by "on standby" to react to any student's request and moreover provide the class with the tasks immediately which usually require some time to prepare. In the view of what has been mentioned I would likely consider involving the student in the planning of the course to be a challenge for the entire teaching process (not only the Moodle platform), the one to work on.

As for the next principle, *English taught through English*, the only and the best way of establishing an English-speaking environment is to set up the forced language in your course settings. Any time a student logs in the course, he will have no possibility to read even the sidebar in his default language, everything will be presented in English or any other language a teacher chooses. It might seem minor or not worth attention but it influences the students' ability to work with English software as sailors (both navigators and engineers) have to freely utilize the equipment with likely English language interface. And sometimes this has to be done automatically, especially in emergency situations when the lives of crew depend on their quick reaction.

The last but not the least is *Learning tasks reflecting real life communication*. This one is quite disputable and I would probably say that the way you see the solution depends on the way you look at the task itself. By this I mean that surely the Moodle platform cannot provide the means to train the skills of VHF or internal bridge team communication, it either cannot substitute the real-life exchange of information. But students can possibly practice writing e-mails to a company or anywhere. And one should not forget that half of a seaman's home time spending is spent by fulfilling courses and passing newer test which require firstly some level of computer literacy and secondly some practice which can also be trained via Moodle.

Conclusion. Second language learning is facilitated when learners are engaged in interaction and meaningful communication. Communication is a holistic process that often calls upon the use of several language skills taught. And of course, learners develop their own routes to language learning and have different needs and motivations. But at Kherson State Maritime Academy the students mostly study English for their professional need which does not nullify the need to be competent in each of the skill areas (listening, speaking, reading, writing). Having analyzed the means provided by the Moodle platform and its most common usages I have come to the conclusion that this online platform partially complies with the principles of communicative approach. It gives the possibility to practice listening, reading and writing skills; raise awareness of personal goals, encourage self-correction and assessment; establish a kind of English-speaking environment by means of setting a default; and even in some way reflects real life written communication. Still, I have not discovered yet how to teach speaking skills via Moodle as well as I have not found a possibility to train the skills of VHF or internal bridge team communication or any other real-life exchange of spoken information.

Considering this, I would surely not tell that the Moodle platform is an option which can substitute traditional class work but it is a profitable supplementation to what teachers and students get used to do in the classroom if only because it is a way to develop computer literacy in seafarers so strongly needed nowadays.

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