

## DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION SKILLS: COOPERATIVE APPROACH IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Globalization processes and growth of information value caused changes in the economic, social and public spheres over the past decade, and led to changes in the labour market, a general reevaluation of values, transformations in the institution of the family. The information society, which dominated media and the changing family structure creates different conditions for the maturation of the younger generation. In today's world young professionals need the ability to communicate effectively; the ability to live in an international society and to work in a multinational team; ability of self-organization and control their own emotions, responsibility and self-confidence; the ability to solve conflicts; ability to make judgments and take decisions; willingness to independently acquire knowledge throughout the life. Therefore, today's education system needs to be sensitive to change conditions of life and to be ready to accept a new student.

Currently, the job requirement necessary in 70 percent of all vacancies in the labour market is to know and use a foreign language for making international contacts in the area of professional expertise. A modern specialist should not only communicate with partners from other countries but also use international and cultural experience in his work. In this environment foreign language proficiency is a key to success in a career of a modern specialist. We must admit that at this stage the university education is not always able to provide the student with the necessary level of knowledge and skills in foreign languages for the specialist to remain competitive in the labour market as a member of multinational society due to the fact that first-year students have actual multiple levels in a foreign language and this difference usually increases in the course of further tuition. Moreover, the idea that students are empty containers which the teacher fills with knowledge and all students must listen and write, no longer works in the modern changing world. The teacher trains students to creatively solve problems, and encourages competition, believing that it will bring the best results. But it does not work. Encouraging children to concentrate on getting the best ratings destroys motivation and deprives the learning process of interest. The solution we consider is cooperative learning. The introduction of the forms of cooperative learning into the university tuition can contribute to developing different skills both in language learning and effective communication.

Cooperative learning is a technology of learning in small groups, which appeared as an alternative to the traditional classroom system. This brand is new and totally opposite to the traditional approach of teaching. In cooperative learning classrooms even the physical location of students is changing. They no longer see the backs of their colleagues; now all of them sit round the table to see the faces of each other and can have eye contact. A teacher is not opposed to the class, and is an assistant, mentor, who sets the topic and shares his knowledge.

Cooperative learning can be defined in a variety of ways [1], though, according to [2], the following common characteristics of cooperative learning can be distinguished:

- Teacher supervision: the teacher should always monitor group activity to ensure that students are not veering too far off task. The teacher should also be available to answer student questions and guide discussion if necessary.
- Heterogeneous groups: the teacher creates groups of diverse ability levels and backgrounds.
- Positive interdependence: by setting group goals and working towards a reward or final learning outcome.
- Face-to-face interaction: students are encouraged to use verbal and nonverbal communication to solve problems and explain learning material.
- Individual accountability: students are accountable for their tasks and for assisting the whole group meets learning goals. This accountability is enforced through student roles.
- Social skills: the teacher needs to establish rules so that all students are respectful, speak in a manner appropriate to the classroom setting, and utilize their time wisely during group interaction.
- Group processing: students engage in reflection on how the group functioned during activity.
- Evaluation: all activities should include both individual and group assessment.

Cooperative learning can be realized in the class through its three basic types which are formal cooperative groups, informal cooperative groups and cooperative base groups. The formal groups last from one class period to several weeks. The informal as the name suggests last a few minutes to one class period. The latter ones are long-term and last at least a year.

H. Coffey, a teacher specializing in cooperative learning [3], lists well-known strategies that have been successfully used in multiple grade levels and professional subject areas.

Jigsaw technique. First, teachers create small heterogeneous groups with students representing multiple ability levels. Then, the teacher appoints a group leader to be in charge of the group's tasks. Next the teacher assigns the group several tasks, depending on the number of students in each group. Each student is in charge of completing a separate task. The teacher gives a certain amount of time for students to complete their tasks or become familiar with material. Then, students from different groups who have the same tasks work together temporarily to become "experts" on their topic and fill in any gaps in their information. Original group members come back together and each member presents his/her own information and provides an opportunity for rest of group to ask questions. While students are teaching each other about the topic, the teacher moves around the room monitoring progress and answering any questions that students have about the topics. Finally, students are assessed on the material they have all learned through their cooperative learning. It should

be noted that this technique is applicable to a wide range of various grades topics and, especially, professional courses in different content areas.

**Student team achievement division.** In this learning model, teams are arranged after a teacher-led lesson. Team members tutor one another in order to achieve mastery of new concepts. Then, students take individual quizzes, but the team evaluation is based on individual scores. Student team achievement divisions encourage students to be responsible for members of their group as well as themselves.

**Think-pair-share.** In the think-pair-share strategy, students think on their own about a topic and then pair with another student to discuss their thoughts. Finally, the pair shares their thoughts with the rest of the class. This structure facilitates independent thinking and fosters a sense of confidence while engaging students in revising their hypotheses based on others' opinions.

**Numbered heads together.** Numbered heads together is a cooperative strategy that offers an alternative to the competitive approach of whole-class question-answer, in which the teacher asks a question and then calls on one of the students with a raised hand. In the numbered heads together approach, the teacher has students number off (e.g. 1-4), asks a question, and then tells the students to "put their heads together" to develop a complete answer to the question. When the teacher calls out a number, the students with that number raise their hands to respond. This structure facilitates positive interdependence, while promoting individual accountability. It also gives confidence to lower achievers because they know they will have the correct answer to give to the class.

**Three-step interview.** The three-step interview takes the place of the traditional group discussion because each person in the group must produce and receive information. In the first two steps of this cooperative learning structure, students interact in pairs, interviewing each other about a topic. Then, in the third step, students take turns sharing what they have learned from their partners with the rest of their cooperative learning group. This step promotes equal participation, where only one person in the whole group or class is talking at once. The three-step interview helps students develop listening and language skills while promoting individual accountability.

Teachers are often afraid of implementing cooperative learning in the classroom because it requires them to give up some control. However, this method of instruction has been shown to increase student communication skills and academic achievement if done correctly. These are tips for effectively implementing cooperative learning into the instructional program. At the engagement stage, the teacher «sets the stage» for the activity presented. At the exploration stage, students work on the «initial exploration of ideas and information». At the transformation stage, students gather all of their thought about the information. At the presentation stage, students present their information to the other students. At the reflection stage the students analyze what they learnt and identify strengths and weaknesses in the learning process [2]. Though there are various methods for implementing cooperative learning techniques into classes of all subject areas and grade levels; however, the underlying concept requires all students to work together and be responsible for each other's learning. Through the review presented in [4], three concepts were identified that are fundamental to all cooperative learning techniques:

- Students are rewarded as a team but are graded individually.
- The team's success is not conditionally based on individual performance of one student. All students must help each other to achieve learning goals.
- All students are expected to improve based on their own previous performance, thus ensuring all students are challenged to do their best.

Despite obvious benefits to the student's social skills mastering, the approach is subjected to a lot of criticism, since there are some drawbacks which may be important. First of all, a group of students is usually small, not more than 8 persons; time for teaching the same material increases as compared with the traditional method; conflicts between group members are still possible (at least when developing team work skills at the initial stages); it can take a long time to create a cohesive, close-knit team.

All in all, compared to its disadvantages, it can be very useful method for the development of professional and communication skills. In this approach each group member has its own task, in the accomplishing of which it is necessary to convey the material to everybody, thus, to understand this subject thoroughly enough through interaction and coordinate group activity. Besides, it develops the ability to search for information in large quantity. Personal responsibility of each member develops because of the technique of "feedback", i.e. in the process of learning in entire group as a whole and each participant receives feedback about his progress in the learning process. Work in a heterogeneous group which consists of students of different achievement levels, different abilities and skills trains students in collaboration and leadership skills. Mutual support abilities are developed since group members help and support each other to optimally carry out each task. Thereby, this interaction develops tolerance and the ability to help people or helpfulness. Successful cooperative work requires a range of social skills: the ability to listen, to respect the opponent, to express criticism and correct errors. Student participation, teacher encouragement, and student-student interaction positively relate to improved critical thinking. An impressive collection of studies has shown that participation in well-functioning cooperative groups leads students to feel more positive about themselves, about each other, and about the subject they are studying.

#### References

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## ERASMUS MUNDUS AS ACADEMIC MOBILITY PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS

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Internationalization of higher education is one of the consequences of globalization in today's world. Internationalization of education is commonly understood as a process in which the objectives, functions and organization of educational services acquire an international significance. The concept of internationalization in higher education in the international practice traditionally includes two aspects: the "internal" internationalization and "external" internationalization, or it can be called as the education abroad [2]. This issue has received much attention mainly because foreign universities are the most attractive for students, teachers and researchers from other countries.

In recent years there is a tendency of the international university activity around the world. It is indicated by the increase in the number of students studying abroad as well as student and teacher exchanges. In addition, the practice of attracting foreign teachers to work is greatly extended. The international activity is used by many universities to expand their research and educational opportunities and improve the quality of teaching, competitiveness, university's prestige, establish useful contacts and develop cooperation.

The student mobility, i.e. an increase in the number of students studying abroad, can be referred to one of the known forms of the internationalization of higher education [2]. It should be noted that the student studying in other country is not a new and unknown phenomenon. The process of student mobility in a number of countries has been ongoing for a long time. However, according to UNESCO the level of international student mobility has increased over the last 25 years by 300%. The phenomenon of mobility is rather young but not new to our country. It has quite firmly consolidated its position among the students due to the wide prospects [1]. The student mobility is stimulated by various state and regional programs (such as "Erasmus", "Komet", "Lingua"). Many countries enter into bilateral and multilateral agreements in this field. National differences in the education access, quantitative restrictions in the recruitment of students to certain specialties make students look for opportunities to study abroad. Language and cultural concerns attract students to educational programs of Great Britain, France, and the USA. The dominance of the English language as the main language of modern science, and as the most frequently studied second language, led to the fact that, along with the US and Britain, hosting the largest number of international students, Canada and Australia entered into the list of countries hosting foreign students [4].

Gradually foreign students' flows have been perceived by the majority of host countries more as trade rather than aid, since in many cases foreign students pay full tuition fees. In many educational institutions hosting students, especially in English-speaking countries, the income received from foreign students' full payment is a significant increase to the annual declining university budget. Without this additional income, many universities could not simply exist [3].

One of the most famous academic mobility programs is Erasmus Mundus. This program was established by the European Union in 2004 as the extension of Erasmus program existed previously. The Erasmus program has been intended to support the inner European students' exchange, and also aims to support the development of economic, political and university cooperation between the EU and Russia. In the framework of program the scholarship is allocated to Russian postgraduate and PhD students to participate in six-month internship, research and academic programs in European universities.

The Erasmus program provides for students, teachers and other university staff new mobility opportunities that are implemented in an appropriate direction. The mobility of students and teachers is important not only in terms of the development and improvement of employment opportunities of individuals, but also in terms of the development of universities, where the mobility becomes a stimulus for comparison and refresh of teaching programs, improvement of the teaching quality and international and student service activities. The mobility is useful not only for students but also for the quality of higher education in general as well. This contributes to the development of the internationalization strategy and has a positive impact on the education system.

The program is implemented in three ways:

- collaborative Master and PhD programs, providing scholarship support;
- partnership of universities,
- increase of the attractiveness of European higher education.

Academic programs are intended for Master level students who have studied at the Russian university and have already had a bachelor's or specialist's degrees. An applicant must either already have this diploma by the time of documents submission or get it before the program starts.

Students can choose the most appropriate program in the list of Master's degree programs. Maximum 2 students from each country are accepted for each Master's program. Applicants have the right to apply for three Master's programs to have a greater chance of success.

Master Erasmus programs are implemented by a consortium of educational institutions and are characterized by: