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The effectiveness of teaching a foreign language through mass and electronic media

Much of our time as language teachers are taken up teaching vocabulary, phonetics, grammatical structures; presenting them, testing and so on.

But when our students have learnt them, we have the problem of getting them to use their knowledge for purposeful oral communication. Instead of the idea that students should use language until they have mastered its structures to a high degree and only then begin to talk freely, it is now accepted that alongside with oral practice we should include mass and electronic media methods at the English lessons right from the beginning. Most courses now emphasize the importance of fostering learners' ability to communicate in the foreign language rather than their skill in constructing correct sentences. It is however worth noting that if communication practice is one of the most important components of the language learning/teaching process, it is also one of the most problematical. It is much more difficult to get learners to express themselves freely than it is to extract right answers in a controlled exercise. The most natural and effective way for learners to practice talking freely in English is to use the modern electronic media and to discuss information in the classroom.

At my English classes I also never fail to use an opportunity to emphasize the value of newspapers in language teaching and learning or if not available to use news from Internet because the use of electronic mass media is becoming more popular nowadays. I conclude my lesson with the advice for my students to read newspapers and always add that they will enrich their English. I would like to share some ideas about usefulness of reading newspapers in teaching English. During my teaching experience I soon realized that newspapers can be used to teach many aspects of language and communication skills. Editorials and gossip columns, serious and lighthearted newspapers can be used to teach formal and informal varieties of English. Editorials and feature articles can provide passages for summary and comprehension; letters to the editor can demonstrate good features of letter writing; reports on court proceedings can illustrate questioning techniques; and various articles can provide direct and reported speech for grammar samples of study. Of immediate benefit is the fact that one issue of a newspaper may contain material for teaching various types of writing; description, analysis and synthesis, comparison and contrast, and process description; and they pro-

vide models of good written form: paragraphing, topic sentence, introductions, conclusions etc.

Homework assignments requiring students to list and bring to class the vocabulary items and expressions they encounter in newspapers have become immensely valuable. I have used authentic newspapers and electronic media extensively because they have certain qualities that make them effective as teaching tools. There are different kinds of activities which you can creatively use at the lessons involving the whole class. One of the most interesting activities for students is „Political discussion club” when discussing breaking news articles students enjoy expressing their own point of view on different political issues. Various word games facilitate quick memorizing of newspaper vocabulary. At our English lessons we use TV and watch BBC and CNN news. After that, I make my students write a newspaper article with a special commentary on it. Availability; a teaching tool has no value if it is not available. In the absence of other materials newspapers are the most readily available English language teaching aid. Relevant parts of newspapers can easily be multiplied by photocopying and made available to the class.

Of course we have to use different newspapers at our lessons: authentic and local newspapers, which are published in English in different cities of Ukraine, news from Internet BBC or CNN. The higher the quality of newspapers the better the language teaching aids they make. There is certainly no better agent of good language teaching than the language teacher himself. The teachers should take the papers to class and show his students the unacceptable elements of language in them, be they misspelling, ungrammatical constructions or wrong form of words, emphasize some specific structures, concentrate on newspaper vocabulary and so on. The mass media can facilitate English language teaching and learning and we educators have to seek for new ways and methods how to make our classes more interesting and challenging for our students. We should also encourage our students to find and use more information from Internet, electronic media because they contain the newest information and provide the students a wide choice of information they need for making their presentations or just use it for different purposes in order to improve their language.

Most newspapers are linguistically up-to-date and provide valuable linguistic data. They may be used for the wide variety of text types and language styles, not often found in textbooks. At the same time, newspapers provide a natural source of many of the varieties of written English that become very important to students, and valuable for language study as the students progress. So, they may be used as supplementary material and examples in text analysis while analyzing different types of texts. The variety of subjects and topics makes newspapers interesting and motivating for the students to work with. Newspapers report real-life events, and this arouses students' curiosity. Newspaper-based activities in the classroom may engage students in enjoyable activities and encourage their

further reading. Newspapers are an invaluable source of authentic materials. The more students read, the more they want to explore.

Newspapers are also a great source for ESP teachers. They can be used as teaching materials to develop students' language skills. They can be used effectively with a wide range of levels from elementary to advanced, either interpreting them or using them as they are. The committed teachers can design exercises to develop reading comprehension, critical thinking skills, writing skills, grammar skills, vocabulary, map/chart reading skills, geography skills, social study skills and more. Having a lot of newspapers and information the teachers should be careful with the way how to organize a certain activity using them. So, they are particularly suitable for mixed-ability classes, depending on the activity, questions etc. In planning a lesson using a newspaper, the teacher should take into consideration the length of the article, paragraph, the complexity of the language, the density of information, the time available and the level of the students.

Nowadays, we are living in a period of rapid technological changes in mass communications. Through Internet, we are now able to access thousands of newspapers and magazines worldwide. Internet has increasingly become a major source of newspapers and magazines for language teachers; just find the web site and use it. But we should be very careful in choosing suitable newspaper materials to use with our students. Another very important issue about newspaper use is materials collection. It is an on-going process and worth doing it. Choosing and collecting short articles, weather forecast, advertisements, headlines etc. is a hard task, but we may use them at a later time and more than once for different students. So, it is necessary to be very careful in organizing newspaper materials. Once we start collecting them we should begin thinking to organize them, put under certain categories, systematize them etc. It is good to categorize the materials under certain titles, headlines, advertisements, etc. or under topic titles, sport, cinema, relationship, according to language level of students etc. Of great importance are the use of the photographs and illustrations. We should be careful to prepare these materials in good quality to use them again and again, and with every passing year we create folios and enrich them, then photocopy what we want for students' use.

We should not avoid using newspapers in the classroom only thinking that they are difficult for our students. It is true that the language there is difficult, but after all it is authentic. There are several ways of making newspaper materials usable for the various levels of students, by selecting interesting newspapers and the students will be interested in reading them and would skip some difficult expressions. 'Grade the task – not the material' is a well-known maxim in language teaching. In spite of the difficulty of the texts, the task should suit the level of students, this is more important than the difficulty of the text. The involvement of students in pre-activity, while-activity preparation techniques, in the selection of materials and in carefully designing the tasks are the key to success.

The newspaper activities might be a lot, interesting and multidimensional. They might be about the headlines, headline combinations, articles, categorizing articles, news flash, putting it back together, exchanging the news, ranking articles, press conference, filling in the gaps, news in brief, photographs, famous faces, photo stories, moving pictures, putting the picture in the story, advertisements, classifying ads, role-plays ads, job interviews, horoscopes, problem page letters, TV guides, cartoons and acting out cartoons, strip cartoon stories, weather forecast, predicting the weather, matching weather forecasts, newspaper reading corner, newspaper puzzles, crosswords, and many many others. There are different kinds of magazines.

As with newspapers, magazines are resources for different subjects, cutting out pictures and passages associated with particular topics. Magazines are also sources in language development in providing pictures to stimulate verbal or written stories. For example, they may be used for introducing colors and clothes, means of transport, short stories, stimulating picture discussions and for other supplementary materials as well, which cover a topic that may be under discussion in a language class. As for the ways how to use magazines in the classroom we can refer to the ideas and clues given for the newspapers. Both newspapers and magazines have a lot of things in common.

Using various kinds of media in the classroom has always been a challenge, and how to bring these media in the classroom is more than a challenge. Students and teachers should be able to use in their classrooms different media through different technologies. Media provide teachers and students with creative and practical ideas. They enable teachers to meet various needs and interests of their students. They also provide students with a lot of language practice through activities using newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, movies, books, Internet etc., and tasks which develop reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. They entertain students and encourage reading English in general, both inside and outside the classroom, promoting extensive reading by giving the students the confidence, the motivation and the ability to continue their reading outside the classroom. Media „inform, amuse, puzzle, anger, entertain, thrill, but very seldom leave anyone untouched”.

Bearing in mind all these features and positive input of media in education I thought to undertake this study to give my modest contribution to the enhancement of teaching and learning English. I undertook a lot of surveys, questionnaires and interviews to make this issue more persuasive and more practical for the students. Based on my experience and the study in this field I also aimed at giving some practical advice and tips how to use media in the classroom. As classroom teachers it is necessary to bring mass media in our classrooms exactly for all these reasons mentioned above. We should understand the media, the messages they give and their influence upon us, how to explore this abundant

information and set up liveliness media create in the life of people and why not in the classrooms where students spend a lot of their time.

It has been almost five years that the following questions have always been in our mind :

1. How can mass media help my students speak more?
2. How can classroom mass media presentations help my students speak fluently?
3. How can I help my students not to forget what they learn through mass media?
4. How can we exploit a piece of learning material offered by various mass media?

From my own teaching experience I know that there are many other ways, hundreds to maximize the use of electronic media in the classroom. Here are some answers to the questions:

1. Media provide huge information, they motivate students to speak and help them integrate listening, reading, talking and writing skills, through various kind of activities.
2. Power Point is a good example for making presentations which help students speak freely and, organize ideas. Through Media Presentations there is more communication and collaboration among students, while working with the pages of a book is more individual, less collaborative and less interactive.
3. At the click of a mouse you can find a lot of information but at the same time you have the feeling that there is little memory space in the brain and students may forget everything, so, try to select the most important things and review and review till they are located in the long-term memory.
4. We can use a piece of learning materials offered by various Media in several different ways through: analyzing a text on the screen, reading and generating ideas from a text in the newspaper or magazine, watching and discussing a TV program or a movie, classroom presentations, exercises and activities using various kinds of Media, pair and group work, reconstructing the text based on the above information brought from different media, engaging students in useful writing and revision activities, etc. Once we mention the phrase „Multimedia in Education” it comes to our mind technology, computer, Internet etc.

Media education is important especially in learning a foreign language because it develops students’ creative powers for those images, words and sounds that come to the students from various media. Thus, creating more active and critical media users, who will always be more demanding in the future. Media education has to do with film and television, press and radio, their impact on the students’ progress. It has to do with what to teach through media, when and how. Its aim is to enable students to develop critical thinking, analyzing and reflecting on their experiences while using various means of media.

Media today have an enormous impact as well as electronic media. They have become so important that it is rarely that we can live without them. Every morning we may wake up with the radio music in the background, or we play a tape while having shower or being dressed. Someone may run to the PC or

laptop to check the mail on Internet or the news. On the way to school or work we may grab a newspaper and have a look at the headlines. At school we may go to the library and consult a lot of books and magazines for our research project. At home we may watch television for a while, etc. Each of these experiences puts us in contact with a medium, or channel of communication. Radio, books, records and tapes, newspapers, magazines, movies, television, on-line media, new media, all these are called mass media, they reach many people at one time. In the years to come, media will become more pervasive. Understanding them and their influence will be crucial to wise use.

Literature

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Abstract

At present, during teaching foreign languages much emphasis is put on communication skills, speaking, listening and secondly on linguistic and grammatical correctness. The article presents author's considerations on using mass media e.g. daily newspapers and magazines as well as electronic media e.g. Internet, computer programs, written television programmes broadcast in English and their positive impact on developing communication skills in learners.

Key words: mass media in teaching, electronic media in education, language teaching.

Skuteczność nauczania języka obcego z wykorzystaniem mass mediów oraz mediów elektronicznych

Streszczenie

Obecnie w nauczaniu języków obcych kładzie się nacisk przede wszystkim na umiejętności komunikacyjne, umiejętność prowadzenia rozmowy i rozumienia napływających komunikatów, a dopiero w drugim rzędzie na poprawność językową i gramatyczną. Prezentuję tu swoje przemyślenia na temat wykorzystania mass mediów, np. prasy codziennej i czasopism oraz mediów elektronicz-

nych, np. Internetu, programów komputerowych, audycji telewizyjnych pisanych i nadawanych w języku angielskim i ich pozytywnego wpływu na rozwijanie umiejętności komunikacyjnych uczących się.

Słowa kluczowe: mass media w nauczaniu, media elektroniczne w nauczaniu, nauczanie języków.