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FORMING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE OF FUTURE TESOL TEACHERS BY MICROTEACHING (BASED ON BRITISH EXPERIENCE)

ABSTRACT

The article deals with the analysis of the process of forming communicative competence of future TESOL students by means of microteaching based on the experience of leading British higher education institutions. It has been specified that the phenomenon of communicative competence in scientific discourse originated in the 1960s and connected with the prominent British, German and American scientific researchers (L. Bachman, R. Campbel, M. Canale, J. Habermas, M. Halliday, M. Swain et al.), who have produced their own implications on communicative competence. Based on their views it has been specified that the communicative competence should be acquired in all areas, namely, speaking, reading, listening, and writing. Therefore, it has been justified that microteaching is of significance, as it allows future TESOL teachers to develop the high level of communicative competence. It has been found out that microteaching was developed by Stanford University specialists and became adopted by many teacher education institutions in the world. The model of microteaching acquired in British education institutions has been described. It has been outlined that microteaching is seen as a simplified form of teaching, the main peculiarity of which means it is evaluated by peers/supervisors to provide a feedback. It has been indicated that the main aim of microteaching is to allow future TESOL teachers to determine their level of communicative competence most objectively. It has been clarified that future TESOL teachers should undergo three stages to form their communicative competence. The advantages and disadvantages of microteaching in the context of forming future TESOL teachers' communicative competence have been presented. The most prominent advantages have been analyzed. The perspectives for further studies have been determined.

Keywords: *communicative competence, TESOL teacher, microteaching, British experience.*

INTRODUCTION

Despite outstanding innovations in learning, namely, student-centered and computer-based, the significance of the teacher's role in the education process has not been diminished. The teacher still performs many crucial roles in the teaching-learning context, being a facilitator (a mentor and a learning facilitator), a role-based model (a teacher as a role model), an information provider (a lecturer and a practical (clinical) teacher), a resource developer (a study guide producer and a resource material creator), a planner (a course organizer and a curriculum planner), an assessor (a curriculum assessor and a student assessor), etc. E. Haertel (2013) indicates "the teachers matter enormously. A classroom full of students with no teacher would probably not learn much – at least not much of the prescribed curriculum" (p. 5). The teacher is considered to be the most powerful influence the education process, which is why teacher education is being rapidly



developed in education policy in many countries of the world. While teacher education traditionally presupposes mastering subject-specific skills, it should aim to form communicative competence as it is the core ability future TESOL teachers need to build the communicative process that is based on the exchangeable interaction (Kearney and McCroskey, 1980; Houser, & Hosek, 2017). The content includes knowledge (definitions, explanations, facts, principles, etc.) skills, values and attitude, which the learners must develop. It is also associated with those unique experiences that schools offer their students. The content of curricula contains those important subjects, which the student is supposed to master. Mastering the content is achievable but the teacher must possess communicative competence in order to be able to transfer their content. Thus, communicative competence becomes of great significance since the combination of content competence and communicative competence enhances teaching effectiveness. However, it is first necessary to find out how to distinguish effective teachers from ineffective ones. The answers would differ and imply four groups of crucial components such knowledge, skills, behavior and motivation. In our opinion, personal and professional development including motivation, self-confidence, the ability to establish and maintain relationships, to communicate are the most important facilitators of communicative competence that can be developed while microteaching, since it assists future TESL teachers in eliminating the complexities of teaching within a real teaching environment and obtaining valuable teaching experience.

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

Our study is aimed at analyzing the process of forming communicative competence of future TESOL teachers by means of microteaching based on the experience of Great Britain.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS

Scholars should select manuscripts that are to be involved into theoretical framework of the study extremely carefully, since its success depends on originality and authenticity of these chosen ones. We have considered the works of many outstanding scholars, mostly British and American, as they were first to cover the problems of communicative competence and microteaching. Thus, theoretical framework of our study is based on works by such scholars as L. Bachman (1990) (fundamental considerations in language), M. Berns (1990) (communicative competence and intelligibility), R. Campbell & R. Wales (1970) (language acquisition), M. Canale and M. Swain (1980; 1981) (communicative approaches to second language teaching; theoretical framework for communicative competence), N. Chomsky (1965) (some aspects of linguistic theories), F. Dubin & E. Olstain (1986) (linguistic courses design), M. L. Fernandez (2010) (the phenomenon of microteaching), M. Halliday (1973) (language functions), J. Habermas (1970) (the theory of communicative competence), E. Hartel (2013) (inferences about teachers), M. Houser & A. Hosek (2017) (instructional communication), D. Hymes (1972) (insights on communicative competence), P. Kearney & J. McCroskey (1980) (teacher communication styles), T. Lillis (2005) (foundations of communicative competence), J. Richards & R. Schmidt (2014) (language and communication), E. Seidman (1968) (microteaching in English education), J. Slabbert (2013) (some aspects of microteaching), H. Stern (1992) (issues in language teaching), J. Stoddart (1981) (microteaching practice in Britain). In addition, we have applied to the experience of some universities in Great Britain (the University of Ulster, the University of Leeds, the Cardiff Metropolitan University and the University of Manchester), which implement MA curricula in TESOL, in order to analyze the process of forming communicative competence of future TESOL teachers by means of microteaching.



Methodological framework of our study is based on such methods as theoretical analysis, generalization, systematization, interpretation, comparative analysis.

RESULTS

The term “competence” is derived from the concept of “performance” firstly proposed by N. Chomsky in the 1960s. He used it to indicate that underlying the concrete behavior or performance of the language user, there is an abstract rule system of knowledge, and the user just uses the rules that govern his language without having any detailed awareness of the underlying system. The underlying knowledge of the grammar of the language by the native speaker is his “linguistic competence” (Chomsky, 1965).

It must be noted that the term “communicative competence” appeared in the early 1970s as a significant theoretical notion explaining the connection between language, culture and society. British (Campbell & Wales, 1970), West German (Habermas, 1970) and American (Hymes, 1972) scholars applied the term in various contexts. Despite the fact that each context has greatly contributed to the crucial role the notion has played in a number of interpretations, D. Hymes’ application of the term to prevailing linguistic theory, has most significantly influenced linguistics and language teaching worldwide, including Great Britain.

Thus, R. Campbell and R. Wales (1970) pointed out that N. Chomsky’s competence omitted the most important linguistic ability: “to produce or understand utterances which are not so much grammatical but, more important, appropriate to the context in which they are made”, and by “context” they mean both the situational and verbal context of utterance. J. Habermas (1970) also criticized N. Chomsky for his view and gave his own understanding that “in order to participate in normal discourse, the speaker must have – in addition to his linguistic competence – basic aspects of speech and of symbolic interaction (role-behavior) at his disposal, which we may call communicative competence. Thus communicative competence means the mastery of an ideal speech situation”.

D. Hymes (1972) was generally in consensus with the view of R. Campbell and R. Wales by arguing that, in addition to linguistic competence, the native speaker has another rule system without which the rules of grammar would be useless. That is, he knows intuitively what is socially appropriate or inappropriate and can adjust his language use to such factors as the topic, situation, and human relations involved: in short, he possesses “communicative competence”.

M. A. K. Halliday (1973) developed a socio-semantic approach to language and the speaker’s use of language. He proposed a notion of “meaning potential” which relates behavior potential to lexico-grammatical potential: what the speaker can do – can mean – can say. These stages display systematic options that are at the disposal of the speaker. That is, a social theory determines behavior options (what the speaker can do), which are translated linguistically as semantic options (what he can mean), which are encoded as options in linguistic forms (what he can say).

After D. Hymes, the concept of communicative competence continued to develop. Though not all would do it in exactly the same way, a generally accepted definition began with the idea that communicative competence entails knowing not only the language code or the form of language, but also what to say to whom and how to say it appropriately in any given situation. It deals with the social and cultural knowledge that speakers are presumed to have which enables them to use and interpret linguistic forms (Dubin & Olshtain, 1986).

M. Canale and M. Swain (1980) included linguistic competence in communicative competence claiming that “there are rules of language use that would be useless without rules of grammar (p. 5). Their concept of communicative competence distinguishes four



competence areas: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence. *Grammatical competence* includes knowledge of phonology, orthography, vocabulary, word formation and sentence formation. *Sociolinguistic competence* includes knowledge of sociocultural rules of use. It is concerned with the learner's ability to handle for example settings, topics and communicative functions in different sociolinguistic contexts. In addition, it deals with the use of appropriate grammatical forms for different communicative functions in different sociolinguistic contexts. *Discourse competence* is related to the learner's mastery of understanding and producing texts in the modes of listening, speaking, reading and writing. It deals with cohesion and coherence in different types of text. *Strategic competence* refers to compensatory strategies in case of grammatical or sociolinguistic or discourse difficulties such as the use of reference sources, grammatical and lexical paraphrase, requests for repetition, clarification, slower speech, or problems in addressing strangers when unsure of their social status or in finding the right cohesion devices. It is also concerned with such performance factors as coping with the nuisance of background noise or using gap fillers (Canale, & Swain, 1980; 1981).

It must be noted that the latest and most comprehensive theory of communicative competence comes from L. Bachman (1990) who argued that: 1) language competence includes the acquisition of both the knowledge of grammar rules and that of how to achieve communication; 2) the use of language is a dynamic process that is enhanced by the components of language competence. L. Bachman held that language competence is composed of two parts: organizational competence, which includes grammatical competence; textual competence and pragmatic competence, which include both illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence.

The issue of communication competence has been analyzed extensively, yet it remains rather fresh and calls for sharp discussions. A clear and comprehensive definition of the concept of communication competence has not been identified. In addition, constituent elements of a holistic model of communication competence have not been distinguished. Different interpretations of this concept often cause misunderstandings among researchers and practitioners who investigate communication competence on the theoretical level or practically develop it. On the other hand, as the structure of society changes, and a multicultural society forms, information and communication technologies (ICTs) are constantly being spread in all life spheres, the concepts and models of communication competence also change (Berns, 1990; Lillis, 2005). The concepts become more complex, even more polysemous, contextual, and situational. Thus, it demands additional explanations and specific interpretations.

So, based on theoretical analysis performed on the notion of communicative competence in the context of leading scholars, we can conclude that communicative competence should be acquired in all areas, namely, speaking, reading, listening, and writing. Therefore, future TESOL teachers should develop their communicative abilities and strategies to achieve the high level of communicative competence by the end of their university studies.

As part of the aim our study, we are to analyze the process of forming communicative competence of future TESOL teachers by means of microteaching based on the experience of Great Britain.

Thus, Dwight W. Allen and his colleagues at Stanford University were first to develop microteaching as a teaching technique (Fernandez, 2010; Seidman, 1968; Slabbert, 2013; Stoddart, 1981). Since its inception, microteaching has been adopted by a number of teacher education institutions, in particular, in Great Britain, that have committed to it as a



powerful tool in teacher training. It should be mentioned that each institution has developed the concept of microteaching in its own way. The model we shall describe in our study is the one acquired by most British universities, offering MA in TESOL, namely, the University of Ulster (2017), the University of Leeds (2017), the Cardiff Metropolitan University (2017) and the University of Manchester (2017).

So, microteaching is understood as a simplified form of teaching conducted in a controlled environment (with sound and video recording) and aimed at modifying the student's behaviour, that is, practicing their professional skills before they get into the complex real teaching and learning environment. A short lesson is taught to a group of 4–6 students/peers for a period of 10–20 minutes. The emphasis is on how to teach rather than what to teach. Teaching is evaluated by students/peers/supervisors using the checklist so as to provide a feedback on the deficiencies noticed in one's teaching (Fernandez, 2010; Slabbert, 2013).

Microteaching eliminates the complexities of learning to teach in the classroom such as the length of lecture, content of the matter, need to teach for an hour and to face a large number of students, some of them are hostile temperamentally. Microteaching is also called the "component skills approach", i.e., the activity of teaching as a whole is broken down for learning purposes to its individual component skills. These individual skills which go to make teaching are: 1) lesson planning – to have clear-cut objectives and an appropriate planned sequence to take the lecture; 2) set induction – to gain students' attention at the beginning of the lesson; 3) presentation – to explain, narrate, give appropriate illustrations and examples (planned repetition where necessary); 4) stimulus variation – to avoid of boredom amongst the students by gestures, movements, focusing, silence, changing sensory channels, etc.; 5) proper use of audio-visual aids; 6) reinforcement – to recognise the students' difficulties, clarify and encourage them to be active and participate; 6) questioning – to develop fluency in asking and adapting questions; 7) closure – method of concluding a teaching session so as to bring out the relevance of what has been learnt, its connection with past learning and its application to future learning (Houser, & Hosek, 2017).

The main aim of microteaching, which involves playing back micro-lessons, is to provide future TESOL teachers with the opportunity to determine the level of their teaching competence, including communicative one, with maximum objectivity through feedback (which, in particular, provides the opportunity to analyze this or that lesson repeatedly).

Forming communicative competence of future TESOL teachers includes several stages, namely: 1) forming a complex of professional and methodical skills; 2) preparing and conducting a microteaching session (microlesson) based on application of the data of professional and methodical skills; 3) conducting the second microteaching session (Cardiff Metropolitan University, 2017; Manchester University, 2017; Ulster University, 2017; University of Leeds, 2017).

At the first stage, future TESOL teachers receive the necessary information about professional and methodical skills with the help of a film, containing fragments of microteaching sessions based on which the lecturer demonstrates them. In addition, future TESOL teachers study relevant guidelines. The film is accompanied by commentaries that focus not only on the theory of the issue, but also on the practical sides of developing professional and methodical skills. At the second stage, future TESOL teachers conduct a microteaching session, which is videotaped. After that, the videotaped microteaching session is shown again, and future TESOL teachers analyze and evaluate it using a special questionnaire. At the third stage, future TESOL teachers review all the training materials



dedicated to forming communicative competence, take into account the mistakes made and prepare the second microteaching session. The video is also subjected to analysis, in which their peers may participate, too.

Thus, the process of forming communicative competence of future TESOL teachers by means of microteaching schematically represents the following sequence: 1) studying the necessary information on this issue (in particular, watching relevant training videos); 2) preparing a microteaching session; 3) conducting the microteaching session that should be videotaped; 4) demonstrating the video of the microteaching session so that their lectures and peers can analyze it; 5) preparing a second microteaching session taking into account the mistakes made; 6) conducting the second microteaching lesson that should be videotaped, too; 7) analyzing and evaluating it.

With the help of microteaching, future TESOL teachers may form or improve such skills as:

- the ability to address the same question to several students;
- the ability to ask common questions, that is, questions that require an ambiguous response and, therefore, involve several students into the participation in a discussion (conversation);
- the ability to ask problematic questions that require not just a revision of the studied material, but are thought-provoking, encourage them to analyze, evaluate, compare, etc.;
- the ability to correct / clarify wrong or inaccurate responses;
- the ability to ask clarifying and suggestive questions, etc. (Stern, 1992; Richards, & Schmidt, 2014).

In addition, microteaching sessions and their analysis, undoubtedly, can contribute to identifying and analyzing the actions of the teacher and the student at the lesson; determining the tasks of the analyzed fragment of the lesson; evaluating psychological and pedagogical factors of teaching and learning (Slabbert, 2013).

It is necessary to outline advantages and disadvantages of microteaching in the context of forming communicative competence of future TESOL teachers based on the material presented.

So, the advantages of microteaching are the following:

- a) microteaching provides the students with the opportunity to undergo necessary training and thus use all advantages such a teaching situation can offer;
- b) microteaching is not so complex as school practice that allows the student to better understand educational environment;
- c) microteaching allows the student to practice teaching skills more easily;
- d) microteaching allows the student to systematically practice their teaching skills and learn how to combine theory and practice;
- e) the student who holds a microteaching session is dared to communicate with their so-called “students” about the teaching content at the learning level appropriate to them, even though they present the microteaching session to their peers;
- f) microteaching allows the student to practice communicative skills until they are mastered in order to be prepared for more complex situations that may occur in real teaching;
- g) microteaching provides for conducting analysis on students/peers’ interactions in order to objectively define particular activities that should be improved;
- h) microteaching allows the student to meaningfully improve teaching skills, in particular communicative ones, of their peers;
- i) microteaching allows the students to as far as possible put themselves in the position of their future students.



However, we have outlined certain disadvantages of microteaching, too. They are the following:

a) the interactions taking place during a microteaching session are mainly artificial. Therefore, the students are unable to perceive real teaching situation;

b) the students-pupils may be demotivated to “master” the learning content, they already know well;

c) the student who holds a microteaching session might be uncomfortable to speak with their peers if they are “pupils”;

d) the students may not be willing to criticize their peers.

So, it is clear that microteaching is only one of the many techniques of teacher training. One must overcome trends in oversimplifying the aspect of microteaching. This can become the whole image of the interactive event and the personal dimension can become lost. Therefore, microteaching should be viewed as an integral part of total teacher education and always function within this context.

CONCLUSIONS

So, we have analyzed the process of forming communicative competence of future TESOL students by means of microteaching based on the experience of leading British higher education institutions. To achieve this aim, first we have specified that the phenomenon of communicative competence in scientific discourse originated in the 1960s due to N. Chomsky’s insights’ on linguistic competence. The scholar’s developments caused rather an active discussion among prominent British, German and American scientific figures, who eventually presented their relevant views to the scientific community. Thus, D. Hymes’ use of the term “communicative competence” significantly influenced linguistics and language teaching, in particular. L. Bachman, R. Campbel, M. Canale, J. Habermas, M. Halliday, M. Swain et al. did not agree on the matter and produced their own implications on communicative competence, however we were able to agree on the following: communicative competence should be acquired in all areas, namely, speaking, reading, listening, and writing, which is why microteaching is of significance, as it allows future TESOL teachers to develop their communicative abilities and strategies to achieve the high level of communicative competence by the end of their university studies.

Thus, we have found out that microteaching as a teaching phenomenon was developed by Stanford University specialists. Gradually, it has become adopted by many teacher education institutions in the world, in particular, in Great Britain. Therefore we have applied to relevant experience of the University of Ulster, the University of Leeds, the Cardiff Metropolitan University and the University of Manchester. We have described the model of microteaching these education institutions acquired. We have justified that microteaching is seen as a simplified form of teaching, namely, a ten twenty-minute session taught to a small group of students. The main peculiarity consists in the fact that a microteaching session is evaluated by students/peers/supervisors using the checklist so as to provide a feedback. We have indicated that the main aim of microteaching is to allow future TESOL teachers to determine their level of teaching competence, especially communicative one, most objectively. We have outlined three stages future TESOL teachers should undergo to form their communicative competence, namely: 1) forming a complex of professional and methodical skills; 2) preparing and conducting a microteaching session (microlesson) based on application of the data of professional and methodical skills; 3) conducting the second microteaching session. All these steps lead to such consequences: future TESOL students improve their ability to address those common questions that require



an ambiguous response and, therefore, involve the students into discussions, correct/clarify wrong or inaccurate responses, etc. Most important are defined advantages of microteaching as these positive aspects may motivate Ukrainian educators, especially those who prepare future TESOL teachers. There are many of them, but, in our opinion, the most prominent one is “the student who holds a microteaching session is dared to communicate with their so-called “students” about the teaching content at the learning level appropriate to them, even though they present the microteaching session to their peers”. It is important, indeed, to allow future specialists to try “semi-real teaching environment” and see “from inside” how important is communication, since without it, without the high level of communicative competence, it is impossible to reveal one’s professional potential and achieve the main teaching aim.

Nowadays, not many Ukrainian universities implement such practice into TESOL curricula, yet we believe that under the modern conditions of globalization and integration process, we all are in need of modern competent specialists, teachers, who are able not just to “teach what”, but to “teach how”.

Further studies should cover the problem of forming intercultural communicative competence of future TESOL teachers in leading European countries.

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