

TANDEM AS AN ALTERNATIVE WAY OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT

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Modern changes in educational system determine the necessity of educating a new type of person that is ready for constant self-development and self-studying. We consider that tandem-method is one of the most productive and effective alternative methods of English language teaching and culture studying. Tandem-method is a way of learning foreign language while two partners with different native languages are working in pairs [1]. The main aim of tandem is to study partner's language in a situation of real or virtual communication. Learning a foreign language in tandem, the representatives of two different cultures and languages work together in order to:

- improve their communicative ability in their partner's mother tongue;
- get to know each other better, learn about partner's cultural background;
- get benefits from their partner's knowledge and experience.

Language exchange in tandem allows establishing a close and informal relationship with students of the same age, to discuss topics they both consider interesting. This communicative context tends to increase students' motivation as they can check that they are capable of using the target language to communicate with native speakers, and they have more freedom to deal with the topics so they become more self-confident and autonomous learners and strive to progress in their learning.

Tandem-method is characterized by two main principles:

- reciprocity;
- individual autonomy.

The principle of reciprocity means that each participant receives the same benefits from interaction and mutual learning. Language learning in tandem occurs in a learning partnership, to which each partner brings certain skills and abilities which the other partner seeks to acquire and in which both partners support each other in their learning. The mutual interdependence between the two partners demands equal commitment in such a way that both benefit as much as possible from their working together.

The principle of personal autonomy is based on the fact that each partner is responsible for their own learning. Each decides what they want to learn, how and when, and what sort of help is needed from their partner.

It is possible to say that studying in tandem is one of the most perspective directions based on self-learning and self-development. The main features of this method are the following:

1) Roles of partners in tandem-course. While in most learning contexts, learners and teachers' roles are distinct, in tandem both roles are carried out alternatively.

2) Relationship between partners. Classroom relationship is often described as asymmetrical (teacher-student) or symmetrical (student-student). During each lesson each partner can play both roles: the role of language expert and the role of learner. It helps to avoid negative consequences of asymmetry between the less and more proficient speakers that may induce feelings of inferiority, fear of error, shyness.

3) Intrinsic motivation device. In addition to their internal and external motivations, each student is well-motivated by the tandem self-regulating mechanism.

4) Pleasure of intercultural interaction. Intercultural interaction may include sense of humor, emotions and getting pleasure from experience exchanging, as well as negative feelings of tension, frustration, irritation and even anger [2].

Thus, we believe that the organization of learning in the bilingual environment based on the tandem method will contribute to the formation of intercultural and linguistic competences.

All in all, foreign language learning is an active process, in which learners should not only acquire the grammatical and phonological features of studying language, but they should also be aware of the way people live and behave inside the target language community. Once the learner is able to recognize differences and similarities between the native and the target languages and benefit from this knowledge, they become more critical, reflective and autonomous learners.

We created some pieces of advice that can help tandem-learners achieve good results in studying.

1. Participants should have their lessons regularly because only by regular learning it will be possible to make progress.

2. Both students play alternately 2 roles: a learner and an adviser. During every meeting it is necessary to speak both languages. It is especially important in the tandem method to give each participant an opportunity to decide what they want to learn. Besides, would-be teachers are not really welcome in the tandem, as everybody is responsible for their own learning.

3. All participants should split the time fairly and speak only one language in each phase. This is one of the most important and the most difficult feature of studying in tandem.

4. Participants should not succumb to temptation and use easier language more often, it can lead to the situation when the dialogues become increasingly skewed in one direction and one of the participants loses out.

5. Avoid the inclination to correct every mistake immediately, and concentrate only on outstanding errors which lead to considerable confusion (e.g. in vocabulary or grammar) – such mistakes should be corrected at once.

6. It is better to correct mistakes indirectly by questioning, or by correct repetition of the expression instead of painstakingly pointing out the errors.

7. It is better to write down the errors and then deal with them at the end of the meeting. This phase can also serve as a way of evaluating the whole course of the meeting together.

8. Record the conversations; it will be useful for later review.

9. It is possible to create discreet gestures to point out mistakes.

10. For adult learners it is better to sign a learning contract in order to be in control.

Using the pieces of advice presented it is possible to create a project based on the studying using the tandem method, where the dynamics of all components of intercultural competence will be revealed.

Thanks to the tandem-course students will be able to learn a lot of new information about their own culture and about their partners' culture. It will help them to understand similarities and differences of their cultures, have an opportunity to learn how to interpret cultural aspects competently.

In addition, learning in tandem can help participants to develop the ability to identify potential intercultural conflicts and to find ways to resolve them and prevent them in the future. Thus, the formation of the cognitive component of intercultural competence turns to the formation of social and cultural components. Taking part in such a project can help student to develop the ability to represent their native countries and cultures; the ability to evaluate, understand and accept cultural values of different countries. In order to simplify this process tutors and tandem partners should explain some cultural aspects that are difficult to understand.

To sum up, it is necessary to underline the effectiveness of using tandem-method. Despite emerging difficulties in understanding certain cultural characteristics, participants will get an opportunity to learn how to become more tolerant and friendlier to each other, how to express their thoughts and emotions.

Литература

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