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Mastering communicative skills of university students using online programs in English teaching

Abstract. Nowadays, in terms of a pandemic, our contemporary world faces many incredibly arduous challenges, and the education sphere is not an exception. Our Kazakhstani education system had to alter the teaching process and adapt to online teaching. In this regard, there was a necessity to continue teaching English and find out the appropriate and efficient ways in developing all main activities as Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking. It was obvious that teaching speaking became more difficult especially the improvement of communicative skills at distance learning. The main principle of the communicative approach is to use the lexical units and grammatical structures studied in the classroom in speech, both oral and written. Moreover, it was necessary to focus the university students on the various effective online programs. The given article is devoted to the mastery of online programs providing a golden opportunity to improve the communicative skills of university students and delineate the positive results in our contemporary situation. Despite the difficulties dealing with the coronavirus our university students of the Foreign Language theory and practice department do overcome the barriers.

Keywords: Communicative approach, online teaching, communicative skills, online programs.

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Introduction

Our Kazakhstani educational system puts forward fundamental purposes in teaching foreign languages and it is apparent the improvement of communicative competence plays a vital role in higher education. Communicative language learning is one of the appropriate, beneficial, and popular methods of learning a second language throughout the 20th century. It was the prominent linguist Noam Chomsky, who tackled the problem of developing communicative skills as a new trend Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). He claimed that CLT became the dominant methodological approach and it is what underlies many of the criteria. There is a need to focus on

communicative proficiency in language teaching [1, 87]. This is an approach aimed at developing students' notional perception and understanding of foreign speech, as well as mastering linguistic material for constructing speech utterances.

Global real communication is expanding day by day and in some cases rapidly. In this contemporary era, people can easily connect, and even one culture with another culture. Foreign methodologists pay great attention to CLT: "On the threshold of the 21st century, communicative language teaching has become as familiar to discussions about the practice and theory of second and foreign language teaching as the Big Mac is to fast food" [2, 635]. English communicative language learning fulfills a

pivotal role in global communication and therefore teachers and researchers are looking for the best ways to improve communicative competence. In this regard, at the FL theory and practice department in L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, there was a necessity to focus university students' attention on the development of communicative competence using diverse online programs.

Objectives

1. To explore the effectiveness of online program use in developing communicative skills of ENU university students. It is one of the most vital objectives in English teaching.
2. To depict the necessity of improving communicative competence of University students at distance learning.

The theoretical overview of the communicative approach using online programs use.

Our contemporary educational system demands diverse sufficient ways and techniques, which will provide efficient and productive outcomes in developing the communicative competence of university students. Currently, the improvement of communicative skills became extremely pivotal at the FL theory and practice department in L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University. The research of appropriate and effective approaches in developing communicative skills and their usage at distance learning proved to be undeniable and it is unequivocal that foreign teachers tackle the same issue as well. Sandra J. Savignon (a Professor of Speech communication, Pennsylvania State University) claims that online communication facilities are increasing in the 21st century. "Rapidly increasing opportunities for computer-mediated communication, both synchronous—via on-line chat rooms—and asynchronous—through the full spectrum of information and interactions available on the Internet as well as specialized bulletin boards and e-mail—hold promise for increased communicative opportunities for learners worldwide"[3, 126].

Furthermore, it is apparent that to achieve efficient results in improving students' communicative skills at distance learning is possible to use online communicative programs. Most of these online activities can be implemented in pair and group work. Overall, the given applications provide students the opportunity to be involved in real communication. Normally, these activities are fluency-based activities, such as role-plays, games information gap activities, interviews [4, 178].

It is essential to dwelling on the main and efficacious online applications which do encourage students to develop communicative competence as "Speaking Pal", "Learn English with Aco", "Andy" and many others.

Speaking Pal:

The "Speaking Pal" application is created for achieving the pivotal aim in online teaching English as boosting the communicative skills of university students. Undoubtedly, it is extremely interactive, where students have a huge opportunity to interact with native speakers using learning video chats. The prodigious privilege of the given application is the possibility to have feedback on diverse responses and viewpoints. The program recognizes speech and immediately assesses the pronunciation of each word and this motivates students to overcome the difficulties in their speeches. As well as students become accustomed to listening to and imitating different learning activities. In addition, this application contains tests to determine the level of English, hundreds of video lessons, and a progress tracker. Training is available to people with any level of English, from beginners to professionals.

Learn English with Aco:

Aco is the name of the AI chatbot (virtual interlocutor) that is used in the given application. AI is an acronym that stands for Artificial Intelligence. Chatbots are computer programs that can carry out a conversation with real people. This app uses this technology to develop English communication skills. Besides conversations with the chatbot, learners have a great chance to listen to audio, learn grammar and practice their listening skills. The app can also produce jokes

and test students' knowledge with oral English quizzes. Additionally, this application offers a great opportunity to read the news in English. However, unfortunately, "Learn English with Aco" can be afforded by those who have Android programs.

Andy:

Andy is another chatbot that encourages students to make English advanced. The distinguishing feature of this program is the ability to improve student's English level by talking to "amicable robot Andy" [5]. Students study English by utilizing it in a conversation. This app provides an opportunity to learn how to greet someone, talk about common interests, ask and respond to questions. The chatbot uses a question-and-answer format to assist them to learn more about how to conduct a conversation in English. "Andy" can also read messages so that learners can practice English listening and pronunciation along with reading and writing messages. Moreover, the app supports conversations on specific topics like movies, travel, art, etc. It tests their English language skills with live chat tests. They can also request additional clarification of difficult words or grammar rules. There is even a reminder function to practice newly learned words. Moreover, Andy also corrects some deficiencies in students' conversations. The main advantage of practicing chatbots is students' aptitude to create a real and applicable English ambiance.

Miro Platform

"Miro" platform is a contemporary tool that is aimed at expanding possibilities to collaborate remotely. "Miro" is an endless online whiteboard where people can pull pictures, documents (pdf and Google docs), and take notes - draw, write, glue stickers - saving the results in real-time. It is widely called a Real-time Board platform [6]. The main benefit is the opportunity to invite pen friends and colleagues to communicate from anywhere in the world.

The amount of the facilities is prodigious: the usage of many media files - pictures, videos from YouTube and Vimeo, PDF files and documents from Google Drive, as well as the possibility to

underline important details with colored markers and stickers, geometric shapes, and links. Moreover, such feasibilities as discussing boards in real-time, adding comments, collaborating on any projects, and editing with the team, to use text chat, voice, and video chat are the main real privileges in teaching foreign languages.

In terms of online education, it is extremely convenient to use the interactive board "Miro" in the English classroom instead of the blackboard as a faithful friend and teacher's supporter. The discrepancy between "Miro" and a blackboard is that "Miro" is an interactive whiteboard and everything is implemented via the Internet. It is apparent and proved that the "Miro" is a virtual analog of the classic whiteboard.

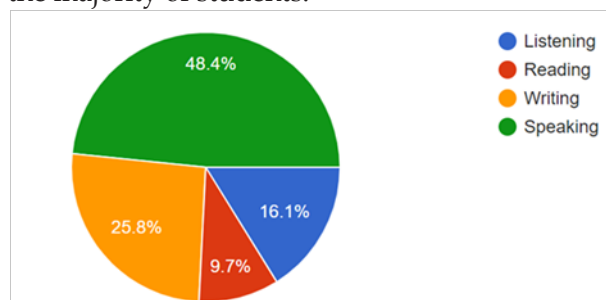
An online whiteboard is a great tool for mixing online and offline learning while keeping the benefit of each format. With its help, it is possible not only visually demonstrate something to students, but also organize activities on improving communicative competence providing the visualization of a certain process. In addition, it is to arrange a brainstorming session and, finally, conduct an exciting, interactive lesson. The convenience of "Miro" is in its visual presentation and ease - when we study online, we immediately observe what is happening there: who has already posted the review, to whom the teacher responded, where new comments emerged.

Methodology

Having outlined a theoretical view of the communicative approach it was necessary to depict the effectiveness of this method at distance learning by using contemporary applications. Our experiment was conducted among the 3rd year students studying at the Foreign Language theory and practice department, in L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University. Researchers of L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University had to change the traditional way of teaching and learning focusing on the appropriate and effective teaching methods corresponding to distance learning. Disciplines were taught remotely on

the Microsoft Teams platform, and such a vital discipline as “English for Specific Purposes” was known to be obligatory as well. This discipline is pivotal because it takes into account the improvement of 4 basic skills, listening, reading, writing, and speaking.

It was apparent the use of the communicative approach along with online applications in this lesson was inevitable, and the experiment was carried out in the fall semester, more precisely, from September to December 2020. Moreover, in early September, it was required to survey third-year students. The objective was to single out which skills were really challenging for them to improve, and according to the questionnaire, as it could be observable below, it was quite tricky to develop speaking and communicative skills for the majority of students.



Pie chart 1. Skills that are difficult to improve in online learning

Taking into account the given data, the usage of diverse online programs as “Speaking Pal”, “Learn English with Aco”, “Andy” and others turned out to be undeniable. Therefore, all attempts were made to continue developing the communicative skills of students at distance learning. Two subgroups were involved in our research and it was visible that the 3rd year students did consider the current challenges quite serious and implemented the online activities with great interest. There were two subgroups: subgroup A and subgroup B, on average 11-12 students in each subgroup. Due to the requirements of the experiment, at distance learning subgroup A was trained by utilizing online applications in mastering communicative competence while the 2nd one subgroup B was taught online using traditional methods of teaching English and the

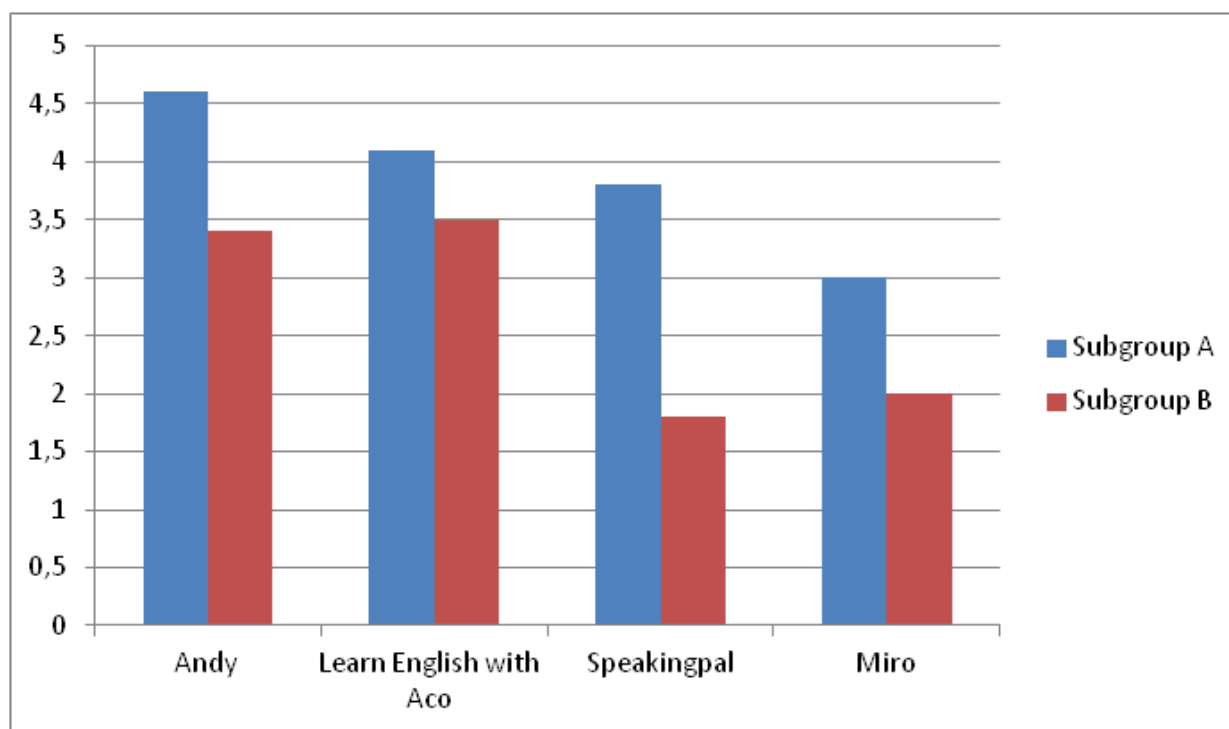
use of some applications which did not compile the activities on improving communicative skills.

Taking into consideration the “Andy” application it was noticeable that the 3rd year students were immediately motivated by communicating with it. Students interacted with Andy chatbot on a variety of topics, such as «Education technologies», “Professional development for language teachers”, etc. and learned new words to improve their vocabulary. Andy provided a short explanation of grammar and then offered a comprehension test. Furthermore, if the student was wrong, Andy could announce the correct response, and at the same time could explicate it. The most essential peculiarity in using this application was unlimited time, and the student could communicate with Andy within 5 minutes or 5 hours. In addition, while communicating, the student had an opportunity to turn on audio recordings of the message and listen to how a native speaker pronounced the phrase.

Studying online, the “Learn English with Aco” application primarily demonstrated a role-playing game where a virtual assistant “Aco” as an interlocutor did advocate students to learn conversational English easily. Undoubtedly, it did increase students’ engagement and motivation.

“SpeakingPal” application provided a possibility for students to watch conversational videos where native speakers talked to each other. Students could speak English using video characters, and automatic speech recognition assessed students’ speech supporting them with constant color feedback. Fortunately, students could record and compare with the authentic speech and were engaged in diverse thematic dialogues.

Nowadays, “Miro” is a very popular tool in the teaching process. It is necessary to focus on the real capabilities of using it for developing the communicative skills of university students. The experimental group was engaged actively in the activities dealt with its operation. The aim was to conduct the English classes on the “Miro” platform to change the monotonous learning process. In terms of collaborative activities,



Bar chart 1. The use of online applications by the 3rd year students in experimental and control groups

the given interactive board was suitable for organizing brainstorming, discussing diverse topics as “Insight into the profession”. “Cross-cultural view on teaching foreign languages”. “Teaching the foreign languages through the IT- technologies” and many others. During the classes, students could add uploaded files and documents to the board, draw, take notes and insert stickers that helped them to keep active until the end of the classes.

Furthermore, to create a board, it was beneficial to use ready-made templates from scratch.

Collaboration on the “Miro” platform was carried out by using text voices and video chats sharing and viewing the board in real-time. The 3rd year students could design their drafting projects as an individual activity. Additionally, they could use the “cursor tracking” function, where the user could illustrate the actions of the interlocutors. The 3rd year students were interviewed on a variety of topics through this platform; it depicted the achievement of the

purpose tackled in the research, namely, the development of communicative skills.

Overall, it was evident that the 3rd year students permeated into the implementation of activities dealing with online applications and delineated the efficiency of application usage.

Conclusion

Summarizing the information, it is explicit that the use of diverse online programs is incredibly crucial and beneficial. It is proved that online applications do encourage university students to develop communicative skills even at distance learning. Improving communicative competence online is arduous. Taking into consideration the results of the experiment and its data, it is visible that the 3rd year students of subgroup A depicted higher outcomes in their aptitude to master communicative skills at distance learning. Due to the usage of online programs students do not lose abilities to develop their communicative skills.

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Ағылшын тілін оқытуда онлайн-бағдарламалар арқылы университет студенттерінің коммуникативті дағдыларын қалыптастыру

Аңдатпа. Қазіргі уақытта, пандемия тұрғысынан біздің қазіргі әлемде көптеген қиын міндеттер тұр, соның ішінде білім беру саласынан да айналып өтпеді. Қазақ елінің білім беру жүйесі оқыту үдерісін өзгертіп, онлайн режимінде оқытуға бейімделуі керек еді. Осыған байланысты ағылшын тілін оқытуды жалғастыру барысында тыңдау, оқу, жазу және сөйлеу сияқты барлық негізгі іс-әрекеттерді дамытудың қолайлы және тиімді жолдарын табу қажеттілігі туындады. Қашықтықтан оқыту кезінде коммуникативті дағдыларды жетілдіру қиындай түскені анықталды. Коммуникативті тәсілдің басты қағидасы - сабақта оқытылатын лексикалық бірліктер мен грамматикалық құрылымдарды ауызша да, жазбаша да қолдану. Сонымен қатар, университет студенттерін әртүрлі тиімді онлайн-бағдарламаларға бағыттау қажет болды. Бұл мақалада университет студенттерінің коммуникативті дағдыларын жетілдіруге және қазіргі жағдайдағы оң нәтижелерді анықтауға жоғары дәрежедегі мүмкіндік беретін онлайн-бағдарламаларды игеруге арналған. Коронавируспен күресу қиындықтарына қарамастан, біздің университеттің Шетел тілі теориясы мен практикасы кафедрасының студенттері кедергілерді жеңіп шықты.

Түйін сөздер: Коммуникативті тәсіл, онлайн-оқыту, коммуникативті дағдылар, онлайн-бағдарламалар.

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Овладение коммуникативными навыками студентов университетов с помощью онлайн-программ английского языка

Аннотация. В настоящее время в условиях пандемии наш современный мир сталкивается с множеством невероятно сложных проблем, и сфера образования не является исключением. Наша казахстанская

система образования была вынуждена изменить учебный процесс и адаптироваться к онлайн-обучению. В связи с этим возникла необходимость продолжить обучение английскому языку и найти подходящие и эффективные способы развития всех основных видов деятельности, таких как аудирование, чтение, письмо и устная речь. Было очевидно, что обучение устной речи стало более трудным, особенно с улучшением коммуникативных навыков при дистанционном обучении. Основным принцип коммуникативного подхода - использование лексических единиц и грамматических структур, изучаемых на занятиях, в устной и письменной речи. Кроме того, необходимо было сосредоточить внимание студентов университета на различных эффективных онлайн-программах. Данная статья посвящена освоению онлайн-программ, дающих прекрасную возможность улучшить коммуникативные навыки студентов вузов и обозначить положительные результаты в нашей современной ситуации. Несмотря на трудности борьбы с коронавирусом, наши студенты факультета теории и практики иностранных языков преодолевают препятствия.

Ключевые слова: коммуникативный подход, онлайн-обучение, коммуникативные навыки, онлайн-программы.

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