The Beneficial Angels of Learner-Centered Approach in Prospering Pupils’ Communicative Competence in English Classes at Academic Lyceums

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Abstract: This article deals with the basic role and successful implementation of learner-centered approach in English classes to develop pupils’ communicative competence, as well as, it also focuses the importance of the approach for interactive and effective learning that leads pupils’ more meaningful, interesting and democratic way of acquiring the English language in context of academic lyceum in Jizzakh region, Uzbekistan. Most of the time pupils work individually on tasks and assignments, and group work or collaborative learning is stimulated. Thus, it will improve the ability of pupils to learn the content and they have to prepare variously for the class in order to enhance effective communicative competence.

Keywords: learner-centered approach, English classes, communicative competence, pupils of academic lyceum, effective classroom activities, instructional methods, English environment, and activities related productive and receptive skills.

INTRODUCTION

In these days and ages, we should up bring highly-educated young generation in order to be equal the pace of competitive world; therefore, the Republic of Uzbekistan pays special attention to the prosperity of all steps of education that is being reformed in innovative ways. For this, the adoption of a new form of the Law “On Education” on September 23, 2020 to further improve the quality of education and the training of competitive professionals will help to update the content of education, develop the effectiveness of teaching, including the wide ranging improvement of advanced pedagogical practices. In addition, the rapid development of science, technology and industry requires the staff of the education system to raise the quality of education to a new level in terms of content, and every employee of the system, especially, teachers assigned responsibilities. Then the responsibilities of each educator are as followings [1]:

- respect for the honor, dignity and business reputation of the participants in the educational process;
- quality of training;
- use of information and communication technologies, advanced and innovative forms and methods of teaching and education;
- take into account the psychological and specific characteristics of pupils;
- Teachers are prohibited from engaging in unethical conduct of pedagogical activities.

It is clear that the development of pupils’ abilities is set to take place at all stages of the learning process. One of our main tasks is to develop the skills of every pupil from pre-school to higher education and to prepare them as mature individuals and staff. It should be also noted that in the process of organizing continuing education activities, serious attention is paid to the support of gifted pupils and further development of their talents. At present, a well-founded mechanism for identifying talented young learners has been developed in the country. This is reflected in the Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated December 3, 2020 “On the
system of selection of talented youth and measures to improve the activities of academic lyceums” aims to create the necessary conditions for the support of the young generation, to systematically implement reforms to stimulate the aspiration of the young generation to science, to realize their intellectual creative potentials [2]. More specifically, in paragraph 2 contains great opportunities for young generation:

- identification of talented young offspring, their selection for academic lyceums, training on the basis of in-depth educational programs;
- developing a broad outlook, intellectual potential, creative and analytical thinking among students, increasing their interests in science, expanding their participation in Olympiads;
- To make pupils active participants in the ongoing reforms, to educate them in the spirit of inquisitiveness, creativity.

Therefore, all facilities are created for pupils to acquire the English language and teachers are in charge of developing pupils’ language skills in high level. For mastering language deeply, nowadays, in the area of teaching the role of communicative competence is significant, because the presence of communicative competence determines the effectiveness of the pupil in conveying any information, appropriate vocabulary, proper choice of language tools in their place, as well as in the process of communication with other people. It is necessary to organize lessons that create an English environment for pupils so that they can learn English quickly and through free and practical communication, thereby improving their communicative competence. In addition, if pupils use each component of communicative competence appropriately during communication, their communication will be successful, otherwise uncertainties may arise in the situation and the speaker and listener may not fully understand each other, therefore, relying on the opinions of research scientist, we realize that communication is not an easy process to follow while adhering to the components of communicative competence. According to Adetugbo, learners should know when to speak and when not, what to talk about, with whom, when, where and in what manner [3].

In general, communicative competence includes the followings:

- socio-psychological forecasting of the basis of the situation in which communication can take place;
- socio-psychological programming of the communication process, with special emphasis on the specificity of the communication situation
- Implementation of the process in a communicative situation with the features of socio-psychological management [4].

Furthermore, Canal and Swain classified communicative competence into the given principle strands:

- Grammatical Competence
- Sociolinguistic Competence
- Discourse Competence

Pupils should acquire all principles of communicative competence to master English perfectly. For this, there are various ways of prospering pupils’ communicative competence in English lessons at academic lyceums. One of effective ways is based on learner-centered approach to learn English deeply. The implementation of learner-centered approach is considered to be reflective of modern society where choice and democracy are essential concepts. Several researches indicate that it is effective approach to learn the language, as well as, it develops pupils’ communicative competence successfully. It is more interesting, exciting and it boosts pupils’ confidence. Besides, there are many different reasons why teachers can choose to use learner-centered approach in the classes. Firstly, it is enjoyable. Secondly, there is a growing set of results on how this approach leads to improve pupils learning. Here, pupils do not only focus
on the grade and examination, rather they pay attention to acquire the language. Thirdly, it motivates pupils they can copy to fulfill tasks as it is involved. According to Hamza, R.A., Al Kharusi, H. learner-centered approach reinforce the involvement of pupils in class more than studying alone [5]. This approach helps to learn the content. It can increase the opportunities to demonstrate mastery of content course so pupils will be more focused on mastering the language rather than only improving grade or passing the exams. Learner-centered approach creates a climate for optimal learning, because teachers do less telling, pupils do more investigating. If we investigate other scholar’s researches, the scientist Siddarth Rajgarhia suggested 7 ways to create a learner-centered classroom [6]. They are explained as:

- Allow for pupil choice and autonomy (teacher gives pupils classroom or homework assignment options, let them opt for own choice to fulfil the task. Here main goal is to do the given task effectively);
- use open-ended questioning techniques (it stimulates pupils to communicate with each other and encourage their critical and creative thinking);
- engage in explicit instruction (teacher is passive, only gives clear instruction, pupils are active participants to do the given tasks);
- encourage pupil collaboration and group works (pupils work together and learn from each other, they share various ideas and create a better piece of art in a group collecting all thoughts);
- encourage pupil reflection (reflection stands an opportunity to make pupils’ brain work better and improve their abilities);
- create individual self-paced assignments (some pupils are not good at mastering a new topic at once, so appropriate tasks are created to improve their language skills);
- Get pupils involved in community-based activities (communication activities make pupils active and involve all pupil participation in the given task at the same time).

This approach leads more in-depth learning and facilitated pupils’ development into independent learners in both productive and receptive language skills.

Based on Jones research, it can be implemented in reading like pupils are given a text, then they comprehend reading text through discussion activities where they can help each other and share ideas [7]. However, teachers are suggested to instruct learners to read the text before the start of the lesson. By doing this, much time can be saved and discussions can be held more successfully. Moreover, one of the widely spread effective techniques is “Reader’s Theater”. It is suitable all stages of education due to encouraging new readers to improve reading confidence, fluency and comprehension. At academic lyceums, it is effective technique for stimulating participation of pupils, particularly from quiet pupils who may be shy and lack of confidence in their own knowledge. Reading a short passage or text is relatively low-stake activity where a quiet pupil’s voice can be heard or a pupil who lacks of confidence can make a valuable contribution to the class. Reader’s Theater technique helps to promote active listening by the non-readers. It is a way to encourage and demonstrate why focusing, note taking, and careful listening are critical skills for success [8].

In listening, most activities such as: listen to the tape or podcast and discuss the given questions can be fulfilled within the pair or group work context. Pupils share their ideas, as a consequence, they realize their drawbacks during discussion or answering the questions. It is considered that teachers often use learner-centered approach to improve pupils’ listening skill in the classes.

This approach can be also effectively implemented in developing writing skill. Most writing tasks specifically, essays, letters are given to home as homework. The classroom activities for writing can be fulfilled in the form of discussion. Such activities can include such things as brainstorming and mapping ideas. The advantage of using learner-centered approach in writing is
the writer knows who his reader will be. Moreover, “Minute Papers” techniques is mostly used at the end of the class for writing a quick summary what pupils have learned in the class. This technique is effective for pupils to assess the day’s lesson before they leave the room. It encourages pupils to identify key points, and questions as a regular exercise. Moreover, it is a well-known technique of repeating, summarizing and reviewing information as effective components of learning, as well as, it can decrease impersonal, unidirectional nature of traditional lessons. It shows teachers how pupils understand the topic. All of them have an accessible opportunity to raise questions or a safe way to admit confusion [9].

Among 4 language skills, learner-centered approach is mostly used in speaking skill. Most speaking activities such as: discussions, role-plays, problem solving, storytelling are usually implemented in the classes. More specifically, “Jigsaw” technique is often used during the lesson to develop pupils’ speaking skill effectively. A class is divided into groups. The teacher gives a slightly different but well-defined task with clear instructions each member of the group will do to represent the group at the end of the work. Originally it was developed by Aronson for reducing racial conflict and promoting positive relationships across ethic boundaries [10]. The beneficial side of this technique is naturally gets every pupil in the classroom talking and interacting with peers. It also provides a burst of physical activity that can help maintain attention. Another effective technique is “Roundtable” that the teacher asks pupils to collaborate in small groups on a specific prompt that can generate multiple responses. Pupils share a single piece of paper that gets passed around their circle rapidly. The main purpose is to generate many responses as possible from all members of the group in a given time. Every pupil add their ideas and contribute to a discussion simultaneously. It is particularly well suited to brainstorming exercises to collect multiple responses, as well as, pupils make the list as many key words or concepts that think they should prepare for upcoming exams in advance. Besides, most common successful technique is “Think-Pair-Share” that creates an opportunity to think quietly communicates all pupils are expected to think about the given issue [11]. Within given time pupils make attempt to solve the problem and each pupil should express their ideas to their peer, vetting their thoughts, and revising. Here one-on-one conversation is often much more comfortable for pupils than if the same question has been posed to the class and a single volunteer response elicited. With every pupil talking, the “pair” phase inevitably brings a burst of activity to the classroom – this phase alone can provide a quick and important change of pace to a class where energy or engagements are lagging. Pupils who cannot talk in front of the full class are actively articulating their thoughts to a peer. In the “share” phase of this activity the teacher randomly calls on pupil pairs to report out. They illustrate ideas which they have collected from their peers. Not only, pupil’s speaking skill improved, but also their outlook is enlarged. In all given techniques, learners are on the stage and learn with fun, enjoyment and the teacher acts as a facilitator.

METHOD

This study was carried out using a qualitative research design in which the purpose was to answer the following research questions:

1. How well can pupils prosper their communicative competence in a learner-centered classroom?
2. What are the difficulties faced by pupils’ in applying learner-centered approach?
3. What are the beneficial sides of learner-centered approach in English classes to develop pupils’ communicative competence?

A. Research site and participants

This study was conducted at Jizzakh academic lyceum where the researcher is currently carrying on an experiment as an Independent researcher in October, 2021. Two classes of pupils consisting of 30 majoring in Exact Sciences were involved as the participants. These pupils started to learn English since 5 th grade at school. Two English teachers handling the class were
also suggested to become the participant of this research.

B. Procedure

This study found out the use of learner-centered approach for enhancing pupils’ communicative competence. So, all learning activities related to the topic. Two times teaching were performed where the teaching times was 80 minutes. The researcher followed the criteria of learner-centered approach. In terms of content for instance, the researcher collaborated with the participants. At the beginning, the researcher showed the materials to the participants and asked them if they were happy with the materials particularly the topic to be discussed and level of difficulty. Then, concerning the role, the teacher acted as a facilitator to ensure that effective learning where the focus is on learners would take place. The processes of teaching and learning were undertaken in accordance with learner-centered approach.

C. Techniques for collecting and analyzing data

Questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were used as the means for data collection. Questionnaire was held to know pupils’ attitude and interests towards to the beneficial sides of learner-centered approach to develop their communicative competence and what challenges they come across in learner-centered classroom. Then, interview questions which were developed by considering the approach to hear the voices of the participants concerning their experience in learner-centered classroom. 8 participants were carefully selected from 30 pupils involved in this study. The selection was based on the results of the questionnaire. Participants showed the actions (e.g. showing enthusiasm, lack of interest, etc) were considered to be recruited for the interview. Two teachers were also interviewed. All the participants were notified that their participation was voluntary. To analyze the interview data, the transcripts were carefully checked and observed to search for common topics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first part done in this study is investigating the implementation of elements of learning-centered approach in the English classes, as well as, the framework of learner-centered approach for questionnaire focused on 5 practices that need to alter to use learner-centered approach in practice, more specifically, the balance of power, function of the content, the role of the teacher, the responsibility for learning, the process and purpose of evaluation. This study also applied interview to collect the data. The interview data were achieved from eight participants who were chosen based on their questionnaire. They were opted for giving detail information about the topic and they presented their various understanding and experiences about the approach. The findings from the questionnaire and interview are explained in the following subheadings.

The elements of using learner-centered approach in English

Having observing pupils’ participation in the lesson, it is true that all elements of learner-centered approach were implemented effectively while fulfilling tasks. Most common elements are given as:

- Being clear about how pupils will promote, measure, and celebrate understanding
- Modeling for pupils how to “think”
- Helping pupils understand what is worth understanding
- Collaborating with pupils to create the rubric or scoring guide
- Letting pupils choose their own way of expressing ideas
- Starting class with a story
- Placing struggling pupils in a circle that gives them an authentic role that they can be successful in, allows them to hear oral fluency and speed modeled, and keeps them from feeling “broken”
Think feedback

Choosing what is graded carefully and considering other work as practice.

The frameworks of learner-centered approach were also observed in the action of pupils in practice. Here, pupils are active recipients of knowledge. Initially, it creates opportunity for pupils to learn according to their interests, personal abilities and learning styles. Pupils are naturally different from each other either in their interest in learning material, their respective intellectual abilities. Some pupils can learn independently by listening, reading, seeing or presentations, but other pupils need to interact with other pupils in pair or group works. So, in learner-centered approach pupils work cooperatively to do tasks and achieve their goals. Secondly, content functions as a means for skill development, that is why, not only teachers are the creators of the content, they take into consideration pupils’ choices. Teachers help pupils to analyze information effectively, to write with accuracy, to develop critical and analytical thinking. Teachers are facilitators to build pupils’ knowledge. Thirdly, teachers know all pupils’ names. They treat according to their personal characters in terms of physical, intellectual, spiritual, social-emotional, cultural background. It is actually one of the forms of teacher’s caring of their pupils. Teachers are flexible and know when and how to apply materials and media in different situations. Moreover, teachers can control their emotions in various situations. The last thing is how to use evaluation to promote learning in the framework. Self-assessment and peer assessment are widely used during the class. Besides, teachers use various formative assessment techniques such as group work and act on those assessments to improve pupils’ learning. According to assessment, the pupils believe that assessment techniques measuring higher order thinking skill are also used so pupils are not only able to know, understand, implement, but also to analyze and evaluate. Form interviewing two teachers, it was found that in this approach pupils are fully engaged and interested in every task. This helps to develop skills with positive emotion, attention, effort. Besides, pupils are independent to fulfill the task. It motivates them to go ahead. The main thing that teachers bring materials that are suitable to the demands of pupils, as a result, pupils want to do tasks themselves. Pupils learn English in collaboration, in real communication, so they achieve their goal quickly.

Teacher’s role in learner-centered approach

The second part done in this study is investigating teacher’s role in learner-centered approach. Having interviewed with 2 English lyceum teachers several findings were revealed. In this approach, teacher’s role is guides, facilitator and coaches.

As a guide, teachers provide different ways and forms to access learning materials because pupils have different abilities. Some materials are only related to some pupils, so teachers suggest various materials for pupils in order not to be bored and participating actively in the class to acquire the language effectively.

Acting as a facilitator, teachers help pupils to learn materials. Teachers make the class more lively and passionate. Teachers are required to have the ability to communicate and interact with pupils. This is very necessary that effective communication skills can make it easier for pupils to develop their language skills.

In terms of coaches, teachers play an important role to create environment that foster pupils’ learning successfully, as well as, motivate pupils to obtain their goals. Teachers have to prepare everything very well, because learner-centered approach does not mean that it is without teacher, however, teacher is the one that play an essential role to create an effective class.

CONCLUSION

The present study examines a learner-centered approach in English classroom at Jizzakh academic lyceum. It is obvious that learner-centered is an effective approach to foster pupil’s language skills that lead to develop their communicative competence. Pupils are active recipients of knowledge on stage. For this, teachers create an environment that pupils are engaged with
their needs. Then, the findings, as a set of conclusions, are drawn as follows:

1. Pupils are active in the class and they are given autonomy, responsibility to material that they learn and their own learning. Teachers use highly engaging content that is appropriate to the necessity of pupils to improve their communicative competence which stands opportunity to communicate freely with each other in practice in various context.

2. Several roles of teachers are as guides, facilitators and coaches help pupils to support in different situations to obtain their goals. It is true that pupils are independent to fulfill tasks and express their ideas in the learner-centered approach that it does not mean without teacher; however, teachers create an effective class for them to act in high level.

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