



THE IMPACT OF INTERACTIVE LEARNING ON THE QUALITY OF COMMUNICATION IN TEACHING PROCESS

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Abstract:

The application of interactive learning is directed towards increasing the quality of communication in the teaching process. The focus of the research in this paper is the influence of the communicative approach on the quality of the teaching process, and the purposeful interaction that has been both the method and the aim of the communicative approach. The authors of this paper argue that the interactive method significantly adds to a successful implementation of purposeful communication in the teaching process. The authors argue that effective communication in the teaching process implies mutual respect, equality of all the participants in the process, honesty and straightforwardness, together with the acknowledgement of both teachers' and students' needs. The results of experimental research relating to the impact of interactive learning on the quality of communication in the language teaching process are presented in this paper. The effects of interactive learning have been expressed through a higher degree of communication freedom and active listening enticement. The overall results of this research point to the significance of further training of teachers in terms of the application of the interactive method in the classroom, thus creating an atmosphere abundant in positive stimuli and challenges for the students.

Keywords: interactive learning, communicative approach, quality of communication, teaching process

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1. Introduction

The authors agree that the application of the interactive method is not always possible and justified. The term *interaction*, in the process of learning, and particularly in the teaching process, may have various definitions, from understanding it as a method of the organization of learning with others to raising the notion at the level of the teaching system. Regardless of the differences at the terminological and notional levels, interactive learning in the teaching process has many advantages compared to traditional learning (Branković, 2005). First and foremost, it should result in achieving better educational outcomes. The initial criteria for designing interactive learning include some significant characteristics of any effective teaching: 1) clearly structured lessons, 2) a large part of actual learning time, 3) an encouraging atmosphere for learning, 4) clarity of learning content, 5) the establishment of meaningful communication, 6) the versatility of teaching methods, 7) individual encouragement, 8) practice work triggering intelligence, 9) transparency of expected outcomes, and 10) a prepared teaching environment (Meyer, 2004). Beside these significant characteristics of each effective teaching process, the interactive learning is distinguishable by some other specific traits, first and foremost evident through the functional unity or complementarity of all three pedagogical strategies of learning: instructing, learning and self-education (Branković, 2005).

The crucial factor for making the effective teaching process implying interaction possible is, certainly, an efficient teacher, who, in the context of the model of interpersonal behavior of the teachers is capable of implementing such learning activities that *"...should reflect the real learning rather than traditional academic tasks and traditional teaching that favoured role of the teacher as the subject of the teaching process, and pupils usually placed in the position of passive listeners and executors of teacher's commands, so that effective learning is constructive and self-regulated, and not merely reproductive"* (Šejtanić and Ilić, 2016: p. 163). Therefore, it is essential that the teacher emphasizes interaction and communication in the teaching process.

Effective communication in the teaching process can be realized in an atmosphere implying the following elements: active listening, establishment and maintenance of a friendly relationship between both the teacher and the students and among the students themselves, honesty; the use of clear formulations and familiar vocabulary; acknowledgement of feedback information in negotiating what is being discussed; consolidation of both verbal and non-verbal information, acknowledgement of the needs and emotions of all the participants in the conversation; expression of emotions, attitudes and needs; a clear formulation of demands; a focus on the

behaviour (and not the personality); the fostering of instruction, and the asking of questions, etc. Effective communication in the teaching process presupposes speech compliance between the source (the teacher) and the recipient (the student) of the information, i. e., the control of the speech production by the source of the information and raising the speaking capability of the recipient.

In order for this to be achieved in foreign language teaching, the teacher should rely first and foremost on the communicative approach and its methodology.ⁱⁱ The communicative approach in language teaching implies a holistic and humanistic approach to teaching that stresses the interaction and communication (Vilotić *et al*, 2015). The main purpose of the communicative approach is to develop communicative competence, at the same time acknowledging the interdependence of language and communication. This implies developing the aspect of competence enabling us to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific contexts (Richards and Rodgers, 2001; Brown, 2007; Larsen-Freeman, 2011). What is an essential and, to a certain extent idealistic prospect in the classroom is for the teacher to be able to establish an optimal level of balance among the individual characteristics of students and their mental capability for doing their best in the process of learning, to create a friendly atmosphere for learning through emphasizing the importance of mutual respect, to prompt motivation, and, finally, to contextualize in a socially meaningful way what is being taught in the classroom.

The following question arises: To what extent is the current teaching process effective? Thus far the results of pedagogical and psychological research indicate a lack of interaction and communication in the teaching process, and the domination of one-directional communication being realized from the teacher towards the students, together with an absence of communication among the students. The relevant research in the area of Southeastern Europeⁱⁱⁱ shows that about 80% of time spent in the teaching process goes to receptive-productive activities, i.e., listening to what the teacher talks about, then watching the illustrations and reading lessons in textbooks, whereas only 5 to 10% of the time is spent on productive-creative activities, i.e., planning and organizing individual work, looking for relevant information in various resources, and so on (Havelka, 2000). What has been established is that the teacher himself uses over 90% of the time available for monologue presentation of lessons (Vlahović, 1995), while

ⁱⁱ The communicative approach of language teaching developed in 1970s, as a reaction of educators who had grown dissatisfied with the traditional audio-lingual and grammar-translation methods of foreign language instruction. They felt the students were not learning enough realistic language, applicable in various social contexts, in the countries they studied.

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the results of the research of verbal communication between the teacher and the students show the most common model of communication being one-directional, i. e., more than 80% of the class is being spent in a frontal form of teaching (Ševkušić-Mandić, 1991). It is, therefore, necessary to strive for two-directionalism in the teaching process, and for the consolidation of communication and the psychophysical age of the students, the fostering of their thinking skills, the developing of their speaking skills, providing opportunities of choice, giving new pieces of knowledge, understanding relevant ideas and emotions, and fostering the process of resolving the problems (Jovanović, 2009).

Using qualitative analysis of teachers' talk, Nenad Suzić (2002) came to results that are considerably consistent with the results of experimental research relating to the effectiveness of interactive learning in the teaching process, or, experimental verification. The author emphasizes that interaction as a teaching method proved to be very effective in terms of memorizing the facts and differentiation between the relevant and irrelevant and schematic presentation, i. e., that the teaching process is of a high quality; but, at the same time, it needs the implementation of interaction for the purpose of further enhancement.

In the context of foreign language learning, the above-mentioned can be accomplished through the application of several methods within the communicative approach. Richards and Rodgers (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: pp. 38-40) state that the Oral Method and Situation Language Teaching are of vital significance for the effective interaction in the classroom. The main characteristics of the approach are as follows: 1. Language teaching begins with the spoken language. Material is taught orally before it is presented in written form. 2. The target language is the language of the classroom. 3. New language points are introduced and practiced situationally. 4. Vocabulary selection procedures are followed to ensure that an essential general service vocabulary is covered. 5. Items of grammar are graded following the principle that simple forms should be taught before complex ones. 6. Reading and writing are introduced once a sufficient lexical and grammatical basis is established. Regarding speech, which is the basis of a language and its primary manifestation, Situation Language Teaching emphasizes the oral practice of language structures as the principal classroom activity in language teaching and learning. It is thus possible to link the orally practiced and drilled language structures to any social situation and make the context-dependent use of language purposeful.

The research conducted within the project ORACLE (Galton, Simon and Croll, 1980) showed the disproportion between the work and the amount of talk with the teachers and the students. Elementary school teachers spend up to 78% of the time on

verbal communication, whereas the students up to 84% of the time do not actively participate in the class (Neill, 1994).

In the context of foreign language teaching, interaction within the communicative approach, which implies the use of language as a means of developing creativity, communicative competence, freedom of communication, and critical thinking, can certainly be seen as a powerful tool for preparing the students to be professionally useful members of a community. As it has already been mentioned, what is vital here is a skilled teacher, capable of creating a friendly and comfortable learning atmosphere in the classroom and engaging the students in conversation.

2. Method

The aim of this research study was to identify and analyze the impact of interactive learning on the quality of communication in the teaching process, with a special reference to English language teaching. We started with the hypothesis that interactive learning significantly influences the quality of communication in the teaching process.

The sample in the research had characteristics of group sample and adequate sample. It comprised 224 students in total: 112 students in the experimental group and 112 students in the control group. Psychologists emphasize the fact that the age of the ninth grade of the elementary school students is characterized by numerous changes in physical growth and development, intellectual development, social development (the living space is being widened and differentiated, the number of available social roles is increasing, there is a possibility of active experimenting with various social roles), and emotional development (increasing autonomy, seeking emotional sources out of the family). The research was conducted with selected classes of the ninth grade that were not distinguishable in terms of school success and conduct in either a positive or negative context; with the aim of their being similar according to sex, achievement, and motivation (statistical variations of the arithmetic means are negligible).

The teachers used in the experiment were of the same sex, level of education, approximate age, and years of service. They successfully passed the practical training for the application of interactive learning in the teaching process.

Methods and Techniques used in the research were the experimental method and the method of theoretical analysis and synthesis. The experiment lasted for 3600 hours.

Instrument. For the purpose of the research in this study, we used the Scale assessment of the quality of communication in language teaching. The final version of the scale of the quality of communication in the teaching process (freedom of communication and active listening in the teaching process) is divided into fifteen sections, with the format

of the response in five gradations (always, often, occasionally, seldom, never). The application of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test has shown that the distribution of the responses on the scale for assessing the quality of communication in the teaching process matches with the standard distribution ($p > 0,05$).

Table 1: Results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test on the Scale assessment of the quality of communication in language teaching

St	df	p
0,07	200	0,20

The calculation of Cronbach alpha coefficient resulted in the coefficient of reliability $r = 0,74$, and it is taken as a satisfactory reliability.

Process of Research. The experiment was realized in two elementary schools in East Sarajevo (in eight classes - four of which were experimental, and the other four controls). Experimental and control groups were working under similar circumstances. The difference is reflected in the fact that the experimental group (four classes) was introduced to the experimental program, interactive learning in foreign language teaching.^{iv}

Techniques of statistical data processing. The parameters calculated were: the mean, standard deviation and t-test.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 2 shows the results of the quality of communication in the initial assessment.

Table 2: Quality of communication in initial assessment

Group	No. of Students	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	t	p
E	112	25,94	6,33	0,60	0,76	0,45
K	112	25,21	8,98	0,85		

What can be concluded on the basis of the results obtained is that the difference between the means in the experimental and control group is statistically insignificant in

^{iv} In the process of designing the experimental program *Interactive learning in foreign language teaching*, we used the syllabus for the ninth grade of elementary school. The syllabus was adapted to the needs of the research, and retrieved from the official website of *Pedagogical Institute in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (www.rpz-rs.org). It can be found in *Appendix 1*.

the initial assessment. The resulting t-value (0,76) is statistically insignificant at p level 0,05 ($0,45 < 1,96$), i. e., is not significant at level 0,01 ($0,76 < 2,58$).

During the final assessment, after interactive learning as experimental factor had been introduced, we found a statistically significant advantage in favor of the experimental group. The obtained results of the final assessment are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Quality of communication in final examination

Group	No. of Students	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	t	p
E	112	28,15	4,74	0,45	2,68	0,00
K	112	25,72	9,00	0,85		

The results of the research show that the students in the experimental group realized, in the overall results of the final assessment of the capability of judgment in moral situations, an arithmetic mean of 2,43 points higher than the same parameter in the control group. The data in Table 3 show the calculated t-value (2,68) to be statistically significant at both levels of reliability, i. e., at levels 0,05 ($2,68 > 1,96$) and 0,01 ($2,68 > 2,58$). On the basis of the calculated t-value, it can be argued with the probability of 99% and with the risk of 1% that interactive learning in the language teaching process contributes to a higher quality of communication than in traditional teaching.

Table 4: Overall results of the initial and final examinations of communication quality in the teaching process with students in both the experimental and control group

Group	IS	No. Of Students	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	t	p
E	I	112	25,94	6,33	0,60	4,28	0,00
	F	112	28,15	4,74	0,45		
K	I	112	25,21	8,98	0,85	1,75	0,08
	F	112	25,72	9,00	0,85		

How is the progress of the experimental group students manifested with respect to the initial phase? The results obtained clearly indicate the progress of this group of students in comparison to the results in the initial phase of the experiment. The overall results clearly show that the difference in arithmetic mean before and after the experiment is 2,21; the t-value (4,28) is statistically significant at p level 0,05 ($4,28 > 1,96$), i. e., 0,01 ($4,28 > 2,58$). The control group manifested negligible progress, so the difference in arithmetic mean at the beginning and the end of the assessment is statistically negligible at either level of reliability, i.e., at either level 0,05 ($1,75 < 1,96$) or 0,01 ($1,75 < 2,58$).

The overall results of the research suggest the significant influence of the experimental program on the quality of communication in the teaching process. The students in the experimental group were less exposed to labeling, judging, and analyzing of either themselves or the others; belittling of personality; denying of individual responsibility; ordering and criticizing; confronting; imposing of their own opinion or will; using vague formulations and expressions; exaggerated criticism; or advance-formed superstitions and premises about the conversation topic or the people participating in a conversation.

Interactive learning in language teaching seeks two-directionality in the classroom, then compatibility of communication with the psychophysical age of the students, fostering of thinking skills, speaking skills development, freedom of choice creation, ideas and emotional exchange, as well as enticing the process of problem resolving. The teacher in the experimental group acknowledges the student's individuality in conversation; in other words, the effective teaching process implies mutual respect, equality of all participants in the teaching process, honesty and straightforwardness, together with the acknowledgement of both students' and the teachers' needs. The lack of active listening in the control group inhibits the realization of feedback (whether the message between the students and the teacher is being negotiated). Active listening in interactive learning represents the process whereby the needs of the interlocutor have been recognized, thus enabling both the teacher and the student to overcome communication barriers, respect other people's opinions, attitudes and emotions, i.e., the integrity and dignity of all the people participating in a conversation.

Entering the classroom, the teacher establishes interaction with the students first and foremost through non-verbal signs, such as a smile, look, hand movement, the way of using the space in classroom, the clothes he wears, etc. Those non-verbal signs may signal either the teacher's calmness, empathy, enthusiasm, desire to help with learning, joy, eagerness to teach, or all the opposite. The interaction is further being established through the exchange of thoughts, emotions, desires and expectations in the classroom at both a conscious and unconscious level (this being manifested through the glow of joy in the teacher's eyes, his arms spreading towards the students, tilts forward, a relaxed posture, positive vibrations emanating empathy), enticing a good learning atmosphere in the context of serenity and trust.

The teacher's words in such an atmosphere are more powerful and appealing (Bratanić, 2002). The teacher himself is expected to trigger socialization, to motivate the students to learn and express socially acceptable behaviour through creating an environment for the development of the feeling of competence and efficiency at school

(Brophy, 1987; Deci *et al.*, 1991; Woolfolk, 1995). The difficulties in conversation can be neutralized through active listening without grading, and with both the teacher and the students participating. In the control group, the type of communication between the students and the teacher caused the loss of empathy and mutual respect and transformed into some sort of manipulation. Consequently, the possible misunderstandings between the students and the teacher influence whether or not the particular messages are going to be negotiated in the classroom and the feedback evident.

4. Conclusion

The quality of communication in the teaching process is influenced by many various factors, such as: the absence of attention, tiredness and anxiety, labeling, judging and analyzing oneself and other people, depreciating other people, denying individual responsibility, giving orders and criticism to others, lashing out, imposing one's opinion or will, using vague expressions and formulations, exaggerated criticism, and pre-formed prejudices and premises about the conversation topic or the people participating in conversation.

Interactive learning in language teaching actually trains the students to both develop and use their own potential, knowledge, skills, and habits, and to discover their own talents and fields of interest. What is evident after the research is the fact that interactive learning creates an atmosphere abundant in positive stimuli and challenges for students, thus contributing to freedom of communication, equality in communication, developing tolerance and social awareness, self-control and practice, communicative competence, the feeling of togetherness, cooperation, understanding and appreciating the others, empathy, and respecting differences.

It is of a high importance to create an atmosphere encouraging students to feel free to ask questions, respecting their freely expressed opinions and attitudes, their personality, and encouraging the students to ask for additional explanations if necessary. The teacher participating in conversation should not underestimate the students, but always opt for a pleasant atmosphere. Furthermore, the teacher should not be overly critical when asked a question, but encourage the students to freely ask what they do not understand. Applying interactive methods in language learning, the teacher is advised to entice active listening in lecturing situations and give interesting examples (favorably connecting them within real life situations), to ask questions to check the acquisition of the lecture, encourage the students to think, motivate them, and

actively listen to what the students have to ask and give his best to provide the answers to the questions.

Finally, the question arises: what is necessary to change the usual mode of teaching in the language teaching process? To what extent is the teacher in the traditional teaching process trained for application of interactive learning in the language teaching process? The overall results of this research indicate the necessity for innovating the approach to the language teaching process, and putting a stress on the application of interactive learning, which altogether assumes continuous teacher training. Consequently, the issues of planning, programming, realization, and evaluation of the professional teacher's training for the application of interactive learning in the language teaching process may be a solid base for further meta-theoretical and empirical research studies and heuristic activities.

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Appendix 1

Experimental program, *Interactive learning in foreign language teaching (English)*

Topic	Curricula	Processes and outcomes of the realization of curricula aimed at fostering communication quality (freedom of communication and active listening) with the ninth grade elementary school students
Learning and education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning to learn, basic vocabulary, e.g.: <i>the importance of education, self-assessment, life-long learning, etc.</i> 	Fostering effective communication implies the students: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) listening to the pronounced text and react: by giving shorter or longer answers; differentiating between general and specific information; connecting the pieces to the whole; predicting the content of the text; filling the gaps and tables; making notes on key words and expressions; doing the tasks: true/false, multiple choice. 2) Doing silent or loud reading of short texts; noticing general and specific information; predicting the context of the text; doing the tasks: true/false, multiple choice. 3) Participating in conversation, debates and panel discussions; structured discussions; play the given roles; express their opinion enumerating advantages and disadvantages in the context of the relevant topic, 4) Writing: dictation, short messages, personal letters, postcards (activities managed by the teacher, based on previous reading, listening or using notes), short stories; various descriptions; making questionnaires; making panels and timetables; correcting errors. 5) Being able to both orally and in writing express their opinion about the given topics; providing arguments <i>pro</i> and <i>contra</i>; liking and disliking; agreeing and disagreeing; providing a detailed description of: people, objects, places, feelings, events from the past, inventions, processes; comparing and contrasting people and objects; asking for instructions and following them (e.g. on how to use appliances); writing applications; using public services: in bank, railway station or telephone booth; expressing their opinion about positive and negative aspects in the context of a given topic.
Travelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Different ways of travelling, slightly wider vocabulary, e.g.: <i>journey, excursion, trip, outing.</i> 	
Spare time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spare time, wider vocabulary, e.g. <i>outdoor/indoor activities, unusual hobbies, etc.</i> 	
Traditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditions, celebrating important holidays, dates and manifestations of different countries: <i>Women's Day, Thanksgiving, All Fool's Day, etc.</i> 	
Legends, Superstitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Old legends, superstitions of various countries, basic vocabulary, e.g.: <i>superstition, belief, knight, dragon, etc.</i> 	

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