Role of a Game as a Mechanism for Maintenance of Students' Educational Motives When Learning a Foreign Language

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Abstract: The urgency of the need to study the problems caused by the introduction of gaming technology as a mechanism for activating the learning process and stimulation of cognitive activity of students in higher education. The purpose of the study is to give conceptual analysis of games and students'gaming activity, scientific substantiation of the effectiveness of gaming technology in foreign languages teaching at Kazan (Volga) Federal University. During the study, a set of theoretical and empirical research methods were used, with the result that the study lasted two years and involved about 300 participants. The study gives the definition of the concept of "game" from the point of view of psychology, modern didactics and methodology. Particular attention is paid to the need of organizing gaming technology in institutes of higher education. Focusing primarily on the pleasure derived from the process of game, students can be aware to varying degrees of none-player goal incorporated. The role-play directed to development of skills of dialogic and monologic speech, vocabulary consolidation on new topics, interpersonal communication teaching. Materials of the study may be useful for professionals working in higher education institutions, students and all those involved in the education area.

Key words: Game, gaming technology, foreign language, English language teaching methods, student, higher education

INTRODUCTION

Modern teachers have planned deviation from traditional forms and methods of training and introduction of new teaching methods, methods of formation of speech activities: reading, speaking, listening, writing; changing mechanisms of influence on the minds will and emotions of students in order to involve them into the world of rich culture and traditions of the country of studied language. Introduction of gaming technology as mechanism of activation of educational process and stimulation of cognitive activity of students will be considered in this study.

The primary objectives of a teacher are to increase motivation to learn a foreign language, to improve learning and educational activities at foreign language classes. But, when motivation maintains high enough there is a decrease of cognitive interest to study a foreign language language. This phenomenon is observed when a student faces with a seemingly unsolvable problem. It is a difficulty to master material and inability to use the material in practice in natural language environment. Higher education as a direct receiver of school education sets itself the tasks of not only theoretical study material

that corresponds more with specifics of secondary education as a bearer of the fundamental basic knowledge of the studied subject. Speaking of higher education, we primarily focus on applicability of the acquired knowledge, on expansion of existing theoretical framework. This opens up a huge scope for introduction of a game in educational process that is language as a subject of study goes into the background, ceases to be the leading part of training activities. In other words, students receive general knowledge about the culture, traditions, political and social system of the country of the studied language within the language environment created by a teacher. Thus, game activity as one of the methods to stimulate learning and cognitive activity, allows using all levels of knowledge assimilation. Consequently, interest to the use of gaming technology in the foreign language classroom is not by chance.

As follows from the definition by Boltneva (2001), "the conditional nature of a game, use of dramatic techniques (music, singing, costumes) all these contribute to an illusion of reality that is lacking in the language audience. The ability to be active in an illusory reality contributes to the development of different groups of skills including intercultural communication skills".

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The aim of our research is conceptual analysis of games and students' gaming activities, scientific substantiation of the effectiveness of gaming technology in foreign languages teaching. Gaming technology and techniques described in this study are based on a practice of them at the English language classes in Kazan (Volga) Federal University.

The reliability of the results of the study confirmed the methodological validity of the initial theoretical propositions, targeted using the data of linguistics, psychology and methodology; positive results of the experiment.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To solve the problems a complex of theoretical and empirical methods of research was used Theoretical methods used during the research are the following: analysis and synthesis, generalization and interpretation of pedagogical, psychological, philosophical, historical, cultural and methodological literature; socio-pedagogical analysis (analysis of curricula and textbooks, teaching aids).

Empirical methods are methods of survey (conversations, questionnaires, interviewing students); self-assessment method, pedagogical experiment, included in educational process methodological basis of the research are the main points of works of Russian scientists in the field of:

- Psychology (Elkonin, 1987; Mukhina, 1985)
- Psycholinguistics (Vygotsky, 1996; Galperin, 1976; Zimnyaya, 1978)
- Pedagogy (didactics (Galskova and Gez, 2005; Derkach and Shcherbak, 1991)
- Methods of foreign language teaching (Bim, 1977; Zimnyaya, 1978; Utehina, 2000; Leontiev, 1989)

Experimental research base is the following: 2014-2015 academic year: students of first and second courses of the Institute of Computational Mathematics and Information Technologies, the Higher Institute for Information Technology and Information Systems, Institute of Physics, the Institute of Fundamental Medicine and Biology were involved 2015-2016 academic year: students of first and second courses of the Institute of Computational Mathematics and Information Technologies, the Higher Institute for Information Technology and Information Systems, the Institute of Fundamental Medicine and Biology were involved. The study was conducted in two stages in the 2014-2015 academic year, in the 2015-2016 academic year. The number of students participated in the experiment of the two academic years includes about 300 people.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Psychological concept of a game is defined as an activity, object and motive of which are in the process of its implementation. According to Elkonin (1987) "human game is an activity in which social relationships between people are renewed outside directly utilitarian activity conditions". In the "Great Encyclopedia" a game is considered as "activity that has no practical purpose and serves for entertainment and fun as well as practical application of some Arts (play on the stage, playing musical instruments)" (Prokhorov, 1974).

The most acceptable for us is the definition given by Derkach and Shcherbak (1991) educational game is a game used in educational process as a task, containing educational problem, problem situation, a solution of which will ensure achievement of a specific educational goal. In any case we cannot say that involvement of students in educational game is a new idea and has not been previously described, on the contrary, emerged in education of the Soviet system a theory of upbringing education intensified the usage of games in didactics of preschool systems. Leontiev (1989) in his study "Improving the methodology of foreign language teaching in a secondary school" determined gaming activities in the following way: during child's activity there occurs a "contradiction between rapid development of his need for action with objects, on the one hand and development of operations performing these actions (i.e., modes of action), on the other. This contradiction can be resolved only in a single type of activity, namely, in gaming activities, in a game".

In modern didactics and methodology a concept "game" becomes broader and has general scientific sense. A game covers many areas of life and is understood as a serious scientific category, requires careful analysis and study. In Russia, pedagogical value of a game was proved by Ushinskiy (1990). Referring to various schools of educational thought, it is possible to identify a number of related features in the concept "game":

- For children, in general, a game stands as independent kind of developmental activities
- Children's game is the most free form of activity where visual environment is realized and studied. It offers a wide scope for personal creativity, activity of self-discovery and self-expression

- A game is the first activity that a child learns. It forms a stage of his behavior. It is normative and equal in rights activity, changes its goals and objectives as students get older
- A game is practice of development. Children play because they develop and develop because they play
- A game is freedom of self-realization and self-discovery, self-development based on subconsciousness, intellect, creativity and practical skills
- A game is a main sphere of children's communication. Interpersonal problems are solved through a game, experience of human relationships are adopted or newly acquired

A game by its nature is very close to real life situations, and sometimes cannot be separated from them (Berne, 1988). Due to the dichotomy, a fictitious problem but real efforts to resolve it, a game allows to model socio-cultural context, to play a variety of behaviours, to adjust them if necessary or to focus on correctness of a choice of a particular behaviour of the route and then to play again for fixing or finding right versions of events. Aspects that in real life are not subject to change or require enormous resources to apply (intercultural conflict or intercultural shock), in a game they can be played again and again, producing strategies needed to avoid the conflict.

Being focused on group activities that fully meet the needs of modern methodology a game can be easily transformed into different forms of individual activity, allowing each student to try themselves in different roles, and show individual abilities. Due to the nature of a sign a game gives you opportunity to build on its base almost inexhaustible set of fictional situations, problems, incidents and conflicts, all that requires verbal and non-verbal activity and that is absolutely necessary to develop the skills of intra and intercultural communication.

Talking about a game as an integral part of a foreign language teaching process, in the first place, we consider it as a mechanism for foreign language communication in the process of joint activity that has personal significance for each participant of this activity. Thus, referring to a game in a class, we create conditions for a powerful jump in the level of motivation of mastering language, speech, communication.

Having referred to the method of a game in foreign language teaching we can draw attention to the fact that it is effective not only at school age but also in relation to an adult audience. It is necessary to pay attention to games, implying the elements of competition between individual teams, intellectual games (crossword puzzles, bingo, puzzles) and especially, a role-play. Undevelopment problem of using gaming technology and underestimation of their application in higher education require, in our view, serious attention of linguodidactics. It is about the possibility of integration of techniques and methods used in didactics of foreign languages teaching on initial stage into high school didactics. We believe and it is confirmed in practice, application of a game as a method of foreign language teaching is effective both in children and adult audience.

A game as a method was introduced and successfully used in practice within foreign language classes in many institutes of the Kazan Federal University during two academic years. The total number of participants was about 300 students. Conducting role-play games is always a significant event in the life of a group because on the one hand, each game session as a rule is the final point in great work done by students, on the other hand, it becomes a serious test for students not only in the field of language skills but also of independence and resourcefulness because during a game we have to use not only in advance prepared models of behaviour but also to respond quickly to communicative actions of other characters, often also trained but often completely unexpected for other participants of a game, since the course of role-play games can be scheduled only in the most general form and the final stage of preparation is carried out individually or with the help of a teacher. Such improvisation is just spice up the game.

In addition, it is worth mentioning that the very concept "game" is perceived by students as a sort of promotional item and is found always only positive feedback from students. During the experiment, the researcher has not met any one group of students who refused to play. An average group of students participated in the experiment consisted of students of one course, separated according to their levels of language proficiency. There are three levels: pre-intermediate, intermediate, advanced. The study will be consecrated on the work with intermediate level groups. The average number of such groups is about 15-17 people, the gender composition is approximately equal.

There is a community of social interests in the groups, concerning not only educational activity. It is also noted that groups do not have obvious indisputable leaders as well as social outcasts, this contributed to cohesion and discipline in groups during performing common tasks. Overall level of behavioural discipline is high. Individual violators of discipline are negatively

treated. In fact, breaches of discipline are extremely rare phenomena, they do not violate the overall picture of the experiment, neither affect conclusions. These disorders can be ignored and will not be further considered in detail.

It should also be noted that each student has a free moral and psychological position. All mentioned above were taken into account in preparation and holding games. The word "game" significantly increased the interest and personal involvement of students. It should also be noted that, focusing primarily on pleasure derived from the process of a game, students could be in different degrees aware of non-gaming purposes directed to development of skills of dialogic and monologic speech, vocabulary consolidation on new topics and interpersonal communication teaching.

Role games are held regularly and the students are quite used to them, so at the beginning of a new unit they figured out the prospect of a new game. Psychological and educational literature points that if classes with gaming technology did not bring the desired result, they are potentially detrimental for educational institution and harmful for professional reputation of a teacher. Full and qualitative assessment of educational performance at classes with the use of gaming technology, establishment of a variety feedback to achieve this goal will allow controlling educational results and promptly making necessary changes. Feedback and quality assessment are necessary, first of all, for a teacher-instructor of a game, both during the course of its holding and after that. These methods include a variety of questions in the form of questionnaires or written comments, discussions. Very important, and perhaps the most important point in preparation of feedback forms is not only information that was pleasant in holding the game but precisely something that was not pleasant. It may happen that some activity was too difficult or too easy, it can cause a serious decrease students' motivation.

If students answer questions consciously, it allows seeing the results of the game and approaching the issue of planning much more effectively. Thus, taking into account students' views and interests helped to create an atmosphere of cooperation, which is an important condition for increasing students' motivation to study a foreign language and, in general, increased students' progress in studies.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the study, we conclude that: usage of gaming technology, especially role-play games, is an important method to stimulate motivation of students' learning and cognitive activity; participation in a game develops a number of new mental structures at a student. It is imagination and consciousness which enable him to

transfer properties from one thing to another; formation of character of human relationships, which give a certain value to a particular action of an individual. It arises a meaningful orientation in his own experiences; a student tends to generalize them. Based on these, skills of cultural behaviour may have been formed that allow him to be effectively included in collective and individual activities.

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