INTERAKTIVNÍ VÝUKA ODBORNÉ ANGLIČTINY S VYUŽITÍM MULTIFUKČNÍCH PREZENTACÍ

INTERACTIVE TEACHING OF PROFESSIONAL ENGLISH USING MULTIFUNCTIONAL PRESENTATIONS

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Abstract

The contribution brings an overview of teaching methods applied in the courses of advanced English for the Masaryk University students. Special emphasis is given to interactively-taught Powerpoint presentations during courses headed by a teacher combined with individual web-based homeworks availabe at the Information System of the Masaryk University. Interactive teaching comprises a lot of students responses and comments to presented images, schemes, audio and video files. Each student is asked to answer at least 30 times per a lesson. The questions relate to typical professional topics ranging from cell stucture to anatomy, physiological processes, professional tools and instruments, practice in a laboratory etc. Fill-in exercises covering numerous aspects of grammar (tenses, adjectives and prepositions), simple- and multiple-choice tests, blind schemes descriptions are taught interactively. The materials used in such multifunctional presentations are compiled from different web-avilable sources, e.g. interactive whiteboards (IWB), online test(Learning English Online), digital resources (Oxford iTools). Conversation covers some 15 min during each lesson. It is held either in couples or a large group moderated by a teacher. Conversation topics are unknown at the begining of the lesson. Students make their choice from three alternatives of different complexity level and demandingness. The conversation starts immediately after the choice to prove actual knowledge and ability to respond. In this way, vocabulary, frequent idioms and dialog phrases are practised. Contrastingly to traditionally-taught English, the interactive teaching brings more self-evaluation for students and feedback for teachers. It also promotes students ability to respond to unknown or unexpected professional topics.

Introduction

Recent information technologies allow to use computer assisted learning (CAL) in daily teaching quite easily. Typical CAL comprise of the following applications that can be optionally used in language courses: PowerPoint Presentations, video files, web conferencing, audio files, and interactive games. English may be a difficult subject for students who are learning it as the second or third language. However, CAL helps to make learning of English efficient

both at basic and advanced level. Application of computers and multimedia allows a teacher to create multifunctional interactive presentations that promote teaching of English (Tsai et Jenks 2009). The contribution brings an overview of teaching methods applied in the courses of advanced English for the Masaryk University students. Special emphasis is given to interactively-taught PowerPoint presentations during courses headed by a teacher combined with individual web-based homeworks availabe at the Information System of the Masaryk University.

Interactive teaching methods

Interactive teaching comprises a large number of students responses and comments to presented images, schemes, audio and video files. Each student is asked to answer at least 30 times per a lesson. The questions relate to typical professional topics ranging from cell stucture to basic anatomy, physiological processes, professional tools and instruments, practice in a laboratory etc.

Fill-in exercises

Several fill-in exercises covering numerous aspects of grammar (tenses, adjectives and prepositions) are typical components of interactive presentations. The students are asked to fill in gaps in sentences just immediately after the reading of individual sentence that arrive to a single slide in 30 seconds interval. Since the emphasis is given to the most problematic parts of grammar in which Czech or Slovak student make majority of their mistakes (for review see Sparling 1990), the number of fill-in sentences does not exceed 15. In such a way, repetion of grammar does not become boring for students and still has substantional educational impact.

Tests combined with images

Several simple- and multiple-choice tests, blind schemes descriptions are taught interactively. Obviously, a picture, scheme or photo are presented together with the question which relates to the picture. Then, after some 5 seconds, the options come to slide and students are asked to find proper answer. After the student´s choice, does not matter whether right or wrong, the student is asked to give some additional information to support his/her choice. Typically, 5-8 slides with tests related to the pictures/photos/schemes are presented within a single lesson. The materials used in such multifunctional presentations are compiled from different web-avilable sources, e.g. interactive whiteboards (IWB), online test (Learning English Online), digital resources (Oxford iTools). The most important parts are taken from the IWP approach since it is considered a modern tool that is able to draw students attention and provide significant educational impact (Levy 2002). The tests combined with pictures represent an

effective way of teaching professional English, especially if more questions (and answers as well) might be related to a single picture covering several closely related aspects of a topic (e.g. components of cross sections of tissues and organs). Right answers are higlighted interactively after each step. Wrong answers are discussed immediately. The level of interaction is high in these tests, however well ballanced by a teacher according to the quality of students group. It was reported just recently that too much interaction did not bring any significant gain (Torff et Tirotta 2010).

Fig. 1 Typical multiple- (left) and single-choice tests (right) combined with photographs of typical professional activities. The sequence of PowerPoint slides starts from top to the bottom. After finding proper expression(s), the other expressions are translated and their use discussed.

Interactive exercises

Interactive teaching emphasizes the multiple uses of language. It must be people-oriented, with well developed classroom-based organization. The main goal of interactive teaching is to provide students with communicative occasions, and support their creativity and free expression. There are many forms of interactive exercises used in the lessons. The most frequent used in the lessons comprise: (1) Description of what is presented on photograps coming to the screen that relate to some professional field, (2) Fast reading of a list of homonyms with a special attention devoted to proper pronouciation followed by a detailed explanation of the Czech equivalents given by students, (3) Finding pairs of words and pictures, (4) True/false statements about what is presented on the picture – student are asked make their choise between the two statements. Then, they are asked to to support their opinion by additional arguments. There are also some non-professional topics that use the interactive exercises as a teaching tool. They involve e.g. geographical items, pieces of history of UK and the USA, social life, „how to behave at an international conference", students life, leisure time activities. All the interactive exercises are moderated by a teacher so that each student has an equal chance to answer and participate in fre discussion which is desirable.
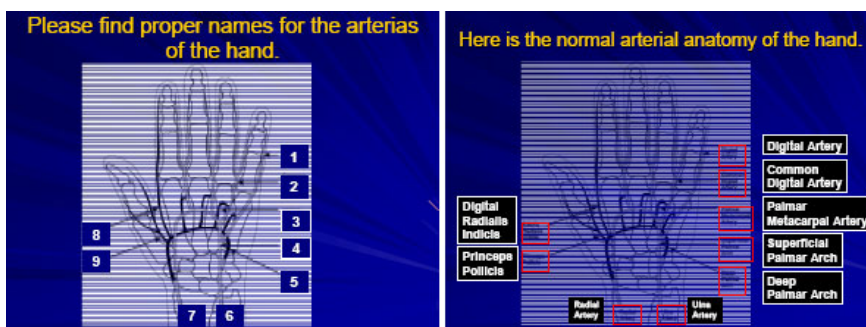

Fig. 2 Interactive description of blind scheme of arterial anatomy of the human hand (from left to right). Each successively numbered item is discussed with students first and then the label disepears to show right answer.

Conversation

Conversation covers some 15 min during each lesson. It is held either in couples or a large group moderated by a teacher. Conversation topics are unknown at the begining of the lesson. Students make their choice from three alternatives of different complexity level and demandingness. The conversation starts immediately after the choice to prove actual knowledge and ability to respond. In this way, vocabulary, frequent idioms and dialog phrases are practised.

Listening

Short video files (1 to 3 minutes) are presented during each lesson. The video files cover a large variety of topics. Typically, it represents a speach of a single person describing typical features or pecularities of some professional topic. The emphasis is given to understanding spoken professional English of native speakers. Students are asked to repeat as much as they have caught after the first listening. Then, they watch the video file for the second time and, immediately after the second listening, they are asked to repeat again. In this way, students ability to reproduce is tested and evaluated.

Reading and pronouciation

Reading is included into a single lesson in the form of two to three paragraphs of professional text of middle complexity. The text of the paragraphs reflects the central topic of the lesson, e.g. Anatomy, Physiology. The text is read first sentence by sentence while the orded of students is random. Each student reads one sentence and translate it immediatelly. Wrong pronouniation is corrected immeadiately and unknown expressions are explained as well. In this way, all students are forced to be concentrated on the topic.

Self evaluation

At the end of each lesson, the students are asked to evaluate themselves individually. Then a teacher asks them about the share of new vocabulary/phrases/ professional expressions/abbreviations they learnt during the lesson. If it reaches the range between 25 and 35 %, it represents a good starting point for the next lesson. In the next lesson, some words and phrases from the above-specified share are repeated so that they would be well fixed by the students.

Conclusion

The interactive teaching using multifunctional presentations increases versatility, however, must be applied in groups of students not larger that 15, so that frequency of questions that a single student is asked to answer remains high.

The interactive teaching allows a teacher to exploit and present numerous web-based and other electronic multimedia resources more efficiently then traditional teaching methods. It is, however, time demanding for a teacher to prepare such a multifunctional presentation because many resources must be browsed through before final decission on what fits best to the lesson topic.

Compared to traditional teaching, it undoubtedly brings more oportunities for interaction with students and stimulates discussion. Since a wide spectrum of teaching techniques is used within a single lesson, interactive teaching increases enjoyment of such lesson for students and enhances students motivation. It also increase interest in learning the subject. Interactive PowerPoint presentations encourage and ultimately improve student-teacher interaction.

Contrastingly to traditionally-taught English, the interactive teaching brings more self-evaluation for students and feedback for teachers. It also promotes students ability to respond to unknown or unexpected professional topics.

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