

TEACHING DIALOGUE IN SECONDARY SCHOOL: RESULTS OF EXPERIMENT

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The article focuses on the process of teaching dialogue skills in secondary school. The problems students encounter in the learning process are outlined. The results of the experiment are analyzed, the criteria of assessment are provided.

Communication is an important part of human civilization and it is a means of cultural transformation. Verbal interaction can be conducted in two ways: orally and in a written form. Unlike written language, spoken language involves paralinguistic features such as timbre, voice qualities, tempo, loudness, facial and bodily gestures, as well as prosodic features such as intonation, pitch, stress, rhythm, and pausing. The oral form of a language can be realised in the way of a monologue or a dialogue. To the majority of people, mastering the art of speaking is the most important aspect of learning a foreign language, and success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the language because everyday communication inevitably takes the form of a dialogue. Thus, a dialogue is a communication tool serving as a natural means of communication between members of community that allows people to understand other viewpoints, respect and understand each other.

According to the National Curriculum in Foreign Languages, any school graduate should master a list of required skills including developed dialogue skills at a particular level and of a certain volume. Today, individuals need English in order to communicate with others at an international level. It emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. Another reason for practicing dialogue is that it is an effective way of providing conditions for practicing newly encountered language features. Based on the experience of teaching at secondary school we have faced the problem that pupils do not own a skill of dialogue communication at a required level, have problems with foreign-language communication and do not feel confident while speaking.

Thus, a hypothesis of our research was formulated that the process of acquiring dialogue skills will be more effective if teachers:

(a) use a complex of exercises including their three types: non-communicative (drills), partially-communicative and communicative;

(b) include the so-called «standard» dialogues based on everyday situations in the learning process;

(c) provide a smooth transition from mastering standard dialogues to the dialogues based on any topic, the so-called «free dialogues».

The current textbook for the 8th form was analysed to determine the number of exercises aimed at the development of dialogue skills [1]. The analysis revealed 63 exercises that are supposed to involve a communicative approach. According to Collins dictionary, the word 'communicative' means relating to the ability to communicate [2], so a communicative exercise should give an opportunity to communicate as a result of its accomplishment. The number of the exercises appeared to be enough but their tasks are not aimed at communication. The tasks to these exercises include such definitions as «Discuss», «Interview your partner», «Answer the questions», «Ask a friend from...» but in fact, this is an activity called «Prepared talk» when a pupil makes a presentation on a topic. Such talks are not designed for informal spontaneous conversation. The book lacks pattern-practice drills that are necessary at the initial stages of mastering dialogue communication. There are no activities that are aimed at introducing or providing practice for particular types of interactive exchanges. Teaching dialogue should be based on real-life situations that require communication. Using the textbook only, it is impossible to create real-life communication. In addition, it should be mentioned that there are no dialogue models that are specific for standardized situations, such as «In a shop», «In a café», «At the airport» etc. The analysis of the textbook revealed that the number of the communicative exercises directed towards dialogue skills development is not enough. After the analysis of the National Curriculum in Foreign Languages, it was considered necessary to find and select the appropriate exercises for creating our own complex of exercises aimed at dialogue skills development.

To measure pupils' skills in oral dialogue communication two tests were drawn up. Diagnostic tests and final tests consisted of two parts: written and oral. In the first part, pupils were offered exercises in order to use the correct responses to stimulus phrases, formulate the correct stimulus phrases, put the sentences of a given

dialogue in a logical way. The second part comprised a communicative task aimed at creating pupils' own dialogue in a given situation. To evaluate pupils' skills we have elaborated a set of criteria. It was suggested that the assessment should be focused on such aspects as speaking process organisation, use of verbal means, orientation in the situation of communication and speech tempo.

The diagnostic test revealed that pupils' dialogue skills did not meet the required criteria. There were problems concerning the use of the appropriate clichés, filler words; pupils had difficulties starting the conversation and communicating in logical way. Pupils were likely to make mistakes that included the misuse of language and speech tools, unsuitable lexical units and slow speech tempo. Hesitation pauses were too long so they impede communication, these pauses were not filled with the appropriate filler-words, so the speech tempo was low. The use of appropriate phrases while reacting to the partner's phrase was also difficult. Pupils had problems with asking questions to clear any doubts, gather more information or simply start a conversation using clichés, arranging dialogue components in a logical manner for communication. That was the reason why communicative aim could not be fulfilled, and their communication often reached an impasse. Linguistic and speech means that they chose often did not correspond to the situation and communicative intention. Pupils were shy and not confident while speaking, many of the pupils felt anxious in a speaking class and some were likely to keep silent. According to the test, the indicators of the criteria were quite low. It means that dialogue communication skills were not formed on an appropriate level (See fig. 1). Taking into account that the indicator '0,7' is considered to be sufficient it is seen that pupils didn't manage to reach this level on a single criterion. After the diagnostic test the control group continued studying with the use of the textbook, while the experimental group used our complex of exercises aimed at dialogue skill development. Experimental learning took three terms.

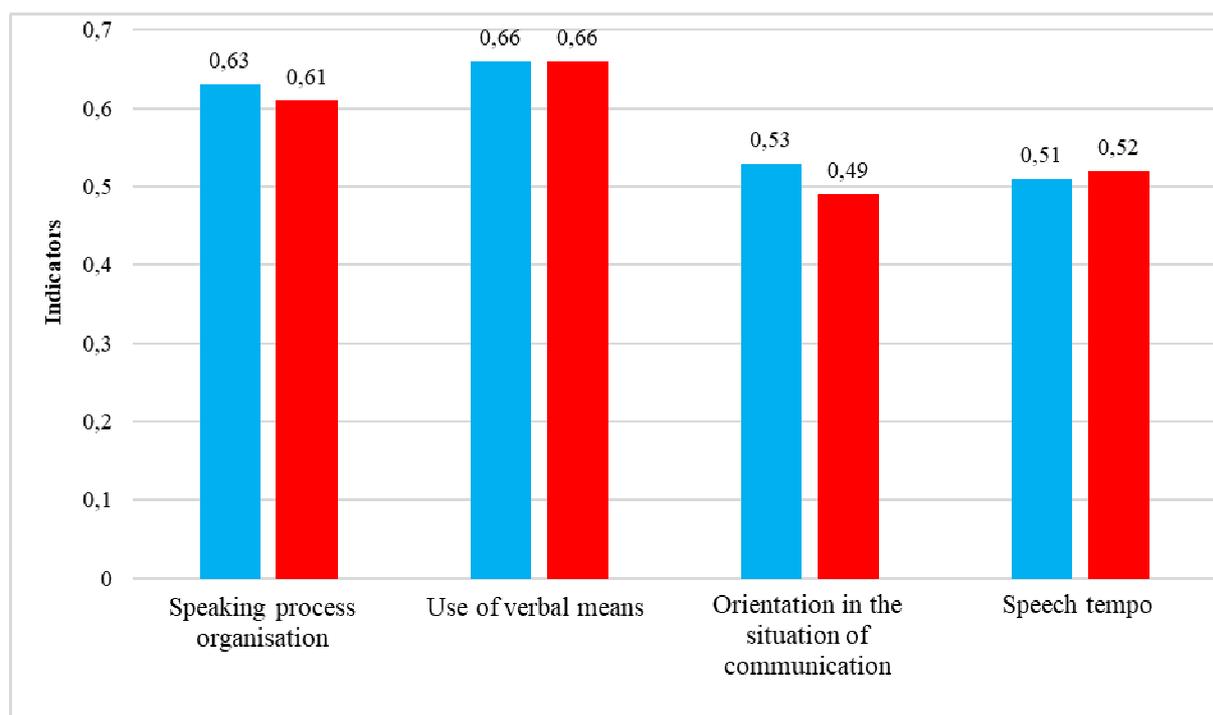
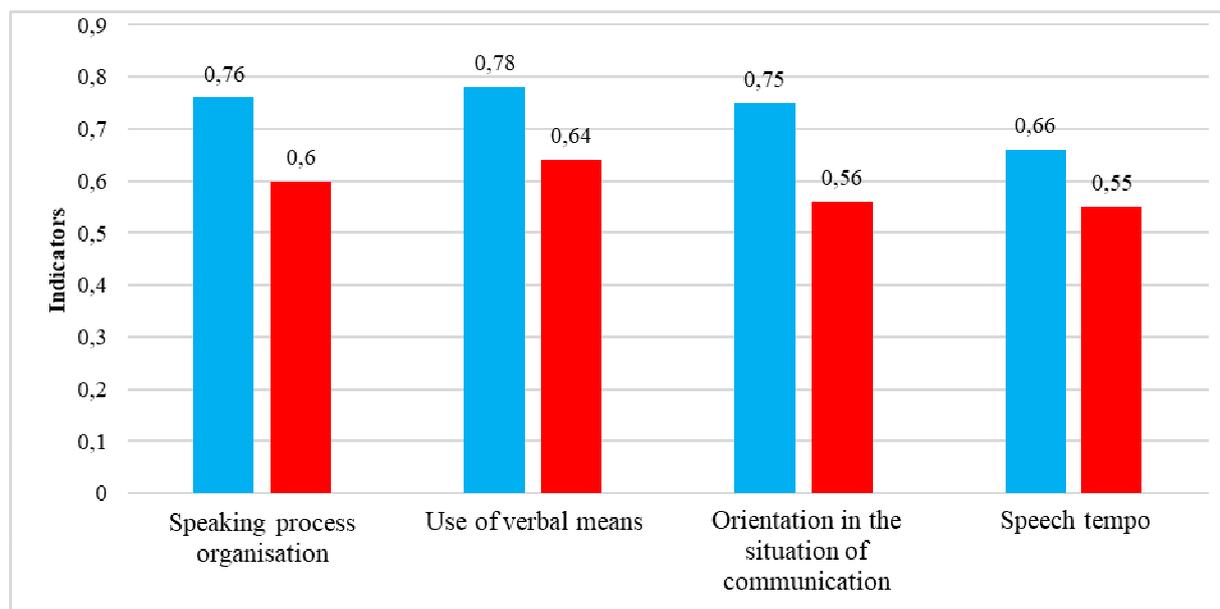


Figure 1. – Pupils' diagnostic test results
(Experimental group is marked with blue, control group is marked in red)

The material was selected according to the topics of the National Curriculum in Foreign Languages and applied in experimental learning. The developed complexes were based on the structure including 3 types of exercises: non-communicative (drills), partially-communicative, communicative exercises. The coursework in the complexes was built in the way that it started from a given dialogue-model of a standard type and continued along with the exercises aimed at choosing appropriate clichés, formulating stimuli, choosing appropriate answers, using correct filler-words and building a dialogue in the logical way. The dialogues were taken from authentic sources; the vocabulary and daily expressions used in them were of high level frequency. A predictable set of phrases like greetings, apologies, clichés used in different spheres of life, invitations and other functions

that are influenced by social and cultural norms were presented in the complexes [3]. There were activities such as getting information or booking tickets, situations where the relationship between speakers and their phrases can often be anticipated. Making the pupils aware of the scripts for different situations is necessary so that they can predict what they will hear and what they will need to say in response. The complexes included visual support in the form of cards. We tried to make them entertaining and motivating the students. The purpose of any dialogue is maintaining social relationships. These activities aimed at providing the learners with opportunities to communicate in a natural situation. The developed complexes were combined with working with the current textbook.

After the experimental learning, the groups were tested again and as it can be seen in the diagram the experimental learning was successful, the pupils from experimental group improved the results by 23% (See fig. 2).



**Figure 2. – Pupils' final test results
(Experimental group is marked with blue, control group is marked in red)**

There is a certain improvement to all the indicators. Concerning the criterion of speaking process organization it should be noted, that pupils did not have difficulties with the usage of correct clichés or filler-words in hesitation phrases. Their hesitation pauses did not break the communication and the appropriate fillers were used in the pauses. Formulating the phrases to start a conversation is no longer a problem because in the work pupils got acquainted and drilled a lot of clichés from different spheres of life. The choice of linguistic and speech means was consistent with the communicative task. In producing their own dialogues pupils put the dialogue components in a logical way and their hesitation pauses were of an appropriate length, so the speech tempo was fine. Communicative aim was mostly fulfilled. Due to the fact that all the drilled dialogues from the complexes were of the «standard» type, it simplified producing «free» dialogues in further learning. Constant practicing made pupils speak as naturally and communicatively as possible. Producing their own dialogues, the self-confidence of hesitant pupils increased, because in role-play and simulation activities, they had a different role and did not have to speak for themselves, which meant they did not have to take the responsibility.

In conclusion it is necessary to say, that it becomes clear to us that dialogue communication is considered an important language skill for language learners even though. Today at school, dialogue skills are not treated as equally important to other language skills. It is also apparent that to speak is not only to convey a message that someone else needs or to get information which has not been known, but, more importantly, to interact with other people. To develop dialogue skills it is necessary to include dialogues of «standard» type to ensure and simplify the process of producing dialogues of «free» type. It is also essential to use three types of exercises to ensure a high level of learning retention.

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