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SIMULATION AS A WAY TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

The article is devoted to language –learning simulations. It explains the essence of simulations as a problem-driven activity. The article briefly covers some of the main issues by answering a series of questions. It describes what a language-learning simulation is, looks at some of the problems, and suggest how teachers might overcome them. In particular, it shows how a simulation is organized, how to prepare students for a simulation and how a simulation is run. It also states the principal advantage of the simulation technique for language learning.

Keywords: *simulation, communication, interactive learning, discussion, simulated environment.*

Латигіна Алла, Латигіна Наталія. Симуляція як засіб покращення комунікативної компетенції.

Статтю присвячено методу симуляції, як інтеракції при вивченні іноземних мов. Проаналізовано сутність симуляції як активатора для вирішення проблемних ситуацій. Розкрито багатоаспектний характер симуляції. Запропоновано рекомендації для викладачів щодо подолання складнощів при виконанні стимуляційних завдань. Надано приклади організації та проведення симуляцій. Виокремлено головній переваги методу симуляцій для вивчення мови.

Ключові слова: *симуляція, комунікація, інтерактивне навчання, дискусія, середовище симуляції.*

Relevance of research topic. Most teachers realise that the best strategy to encourage communication in a classroom is to remove the classroom. By creating learning situations that interest students we weaken the constraints of the classroom and encourage the development of communicative language use. This is the basic principle of language-learning simulations.

While teachers often use roleplays, some may feel that simulations will be too difficult to organise or too demanding for their students. This reluctance is understandable but ill-founded. While simulations require thought and planning, they come in all shapes, sizes, and levels of complexity and can be tailored to match the individual circumstances of a particular group (1, Allwright R.L., 2014).

Formulation of the Problem. Basically, a simulation is a problem-driven activity that occurs in a clearly described realistic setting. In a simulation students are given a task to perform or problem to solve together with the necessary background information and environment in which to do it. The learner responds to the task and acts within the constraints of the environment to complete it.

Most teachers are familiar with roleplays, and simulations share a lot in common with this technique. Both are interactive learning events, but generally roleplays involve learners taking on characters that are not their own, while participants in a simulation behave as themselves. They therefore apply their own background and first-language experiences to a situation. In addition, roleplays are often set up to practice particular language functions in a highly controlled context and are relatively simple and short (2, Bullard N., 2016).

Simulations, on the other hand, provide a realistic setting for more extensive interaction in which students can get more personally involved.

All simulations centre on an explicit structure of information and require participants to assess and respond to a specified task. Students act as themselves and use their own judgements and linguistic resources while engaging in a variety of activities such as resourcing, discussing, and analysing over a period of time.

Analysis of the Latest Researches and Publications. The comprehensive research of the problem of simulation was done by Ken Hyland, head of the Department of English as an International Language at the International Pacific College in New Zealand.

Publications of such researchers as Allwright R.L., Bullard N., Crookall D. and R., Nunan D., Sturtridge J. are devoted to some aspects of language-learning simulations as well.

Presenting main material. The essential elements of a simulation are summarised in Figure 1.

<p>A simulated environment – the action takes place within a self-contained world with no contact with the outside.</p> <p>A structure based on explicit «facts» – these are given to participants and do not allow invention or change.</p> <p>A reality of function – participants have to accept the duties and responsibilities of their roles as if they were their own</p>

Figure 1. Elements of a Simulation

There seem to be five main advantages to language-learning simulations:

1. Motivation. Simulations encourage motivation because they ensure that communication is purposeful rather than artificial. Participants are involved as they identify with their roles and have the freedom to choose the meanings they want to express. Because students can bring their background experiences into class and make their own decisions, more interest and excitement is created in learning.

2. Fluency development. Fluency is encouraged in simulations because learners are immersed in a language-rich environment where language use is centred on immediate communicative needs. The context requires that language is subordinate to an activity, and so attention is focused on the situation rather than form – the communication of meaning taking precedence over the practice of language elements such as grammar and pronunciation. In a simulation, language use is an aspect of the communication necessary to perform tasks and not a test of correctness.

3. Integration of skills. Simulations provide the opportunity to learn the pragmatic skills of using language appropriately, to develop the nonverbal components of language, and to acquire intercultural and interpersonal competence in a second language.

4. Active participation. Simulations provide a unique means of encouraging learners to respond actively and to participate with their fellows. Learning is more effective the more it engages the learner and simulations seek achieve this.

5. Reduced anxiety. Simulations reduce the stress associated with learning and using new language. This is due partly to the shift in classroom roles and partly to the low cost of making errors compared with error consequences in the real world. Not only do simulations offer a relatively safe environment for making mistakes, but they also promote an egalitarian atmosphere because there is no error correction to undermine confidence and divert attention to utterance form. Students are not judged, corrected, or evaluated, and this reduces their anxieties about linguistic performance, with a consequent improvement in achievement. Moreover, there is less stress involved in playing the role of someone else (3, Crookall D. and R., 2015).

In sum, simulations motivate learners, encourage interaction, and provide opportunities for purposeful communication. In doing so, they encourage active participation in learning, assist retention, and give students a better understanding of communicative choice and linguistic complexity. In addition, the familiar focus on linguistic elements is replaced by an integration of linguistic and reasoning abilities.

Simulations have a four-part structure: preparation, introduction, activity, and debriefing.

Preparation involves the teacher in assessing both student needs and abilities to ensure a suitable scenario and organising materials to provide authenticity. The second stage consists of information input. The participants are told what the task is, their roles, the nature of the situation, and any constraints. Part three is the activity itself. The key activities are decision-making, problem solving, and, interacting, and these are the participants' responsibility. The teacher observes student performances and manages the activity as a «controller.» Stage four, optional when working with elementary learners, consists of a debriefing where the activity is evaluated and the interaction discussed. The teacher helps students understand the exercise, review the language used, and build on weaknesses.

Perhaps the most difficult step is to determine a general objective and the concrete objectives that form the basis of the simulation. An overall objective might be to enable students to perform well in a job interview, develop discussion skills, practise offering and taking advice, write formal reports, or order food in a restaurant. In the simplest terms, simulation design involves answering 13 questions, an approach that can also be used to help students write a simulation. The steps are given in Figure 2 (4, Nunan D., 2010).

1. What do I want my students to know, to do, or to learn?
2. What is the event to be simulated?
3. What is the problem to be resolved?
4. What are the participants' roles and how are they grouped?
5. What goals do the participants have? How do they relate to each other?
6. What information does each participant have? (Often there needs to be an information gap.)
7. How is the event conducted, by whom, and for how long?
8. What background information do the participants need?
9. What particular lexis, structures, or language skills are needed, if any, to make the simulation successful?
10. What materials or props are required, if any?
11. What tasks can be given to early finishers?
12. What questions should be asked in the debriefing?
13. What follow-up work or future simulations are suggested?

Figure 2. Aspects of Writing a Simulation

Students are often nervous or shy when first asked to participate in a simulation, and it is worthwhile considering this problem before it occurs. This kind of reticence can be due to the individual personalities of the students, but is often the result of student expectations about learning and what they consider to be «proper» classroom behaviour. The problem may be addressed in three ways.

1. Discussion and explanation. Proficient students can be convinced by an explanation of the benefits of simulations, particularly in the fields of pilot instruction, and management training. With intermediate-level students a presentation and discussion can have positive effects on participation.

2. Familiarity with interactive learning. Perhaps the best way to minimize nervousness is for students to be at ease with interactive learning methods. A learning environment in which pair work, information-gap activities, cooperative tasks, and discussions play an important part is one that easily accommodates a simulation.

3. Integration. A third way of overcoming the reticence of learners is to encourage them to see simulations as an essential and integral part of their language syllabus. In this way students can prepare for a simulation directly as an ongoing part of their course (1, Allwright R.L., 2014).

Teachers are often more anxious about running a simulation for the first time than students are about participating.

It is true that simulations, like any other interactive learning method, need careful planning and classroom management.

The most important point in running a simulation is to believe that it is going to work! A number of suggestions to assist this are given below.

1. Setting up. The simulation should be carefully planned and chosen on the basis of issues that are likely to maximise motivation and language use. The emphasis is on creating believable situations that emphasise reality of context over language.

2. Getting going. Once the simulation has been selected or written, the students can be introduced to the central ideas of the activity and encouraged to discuss them. Participants must understand the nature of the task and their roles.

Information should be kept as brief and simple as possible to avoid confusion, but can be given as homework texts or in the native language to help speed understanding of what is involved. Assimilation can also be assisted by active involvement. If learners can research the background of the issue in a library, or conduct small opinion polls among the local population, then so much the better. A variety of listening and reading exercises will reinforce the transfer of information and generate motivation, particularly if learners recognise they are developing useful skills. Any specialist vocabulary and expressions should be introduced at this stage.

3. Managing the activity. Fluency work demands that the teacher disengage from the governing role and allow learners to produce and interpret language on their own. Once the simulation is underway, the teacher becomes an activity manager, advising and monitoring the learning environment.

During the simulation the teacher becomes an observer, intervening when requested to act as an informant on the language or scenario, but otherwise simply collecting data to share in the debriefing. Error correction should be avoided and mistakes noted for discussion later.

4. Winding down. The observer role puts the teacher in a good position to provide a systematic review of events at the end of the simulation.

The main contributors to the debriefing should be the participants, with the teacher providing a structure for this. Students can clarify their own parts in the simulation, their perception of the task, and their contributions, reflecting on their actions and mistakes. Who participated? Who didn't? Who performed well? Why did a group make a particular choice rather than another? How could the event be improved? It is important not to allow the negative to predominate. This is another communicative language opportunity for students and should be approached positively rather than critically. During the language debriefing the teacher takes a more directive and teaching role, as this explores what was said and what was not said because the students did not have appropriate language skills.

5. Assessing students. Students can be assessed in a variety of ways, depending on the purpose of the activity. Generally, however, assessment will be based on how students have performed on individual tasks and on their participation, and contribution to the group effort (5, Sturtridge J., 2017).

Where the simulation results in a product, such as a diary, report, oral presentation, news bulletin, etc., students can be allocated marks for this. If this product is a joint effort, a group mark can be allocated to each member, or the group itself can be asked to fairly share an allocated mark among its members.

Conclusion. The principal advantage of the simulation technique for language learning is that it provides students with a realistic environment in which they can develop a range of communicative and interactive skills. Learners need to use the linguistic system creatively and appropriately if they are to obtain proficiency in English, and as a result simulations are particularly useful in contexts where students have few opportunities for contact with native speakers.

Realistic, high-output communication practice in the classroom is essential for all students, however, because it represents a pedagogically necessary stage in the learners' ability to transfer formal classroom learning to the real world.

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