

Elements for Optimizing the Communication in EFL Classes

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Abstract

Optimizing communication is a fundamental objective of education, since this is also an instrument of educational interaction and supports the personal development of everyone involved in this process. In order to begin the steps towards optimizing communication, the teacher should know the elements that can affect communication, the relationships among them, the effects and their evolutionary trends, but also the individual characteristics of the students, the characteristics of the school group, the general context of communication. But optimizing communication in EFL classes cannot be achieved through formal interaction, but requires the voluntary, conscious involvement of the partners. The teacher has a duty to initiate, to support, to motivate and to stimulate the communication interactions, but also to guide them and to give a value character, while the student must also get involved so that the goals should be achieved.

Keywords: educational communication, verbal communication, educational message, educational relationships, communicative competence

The verbal communication in the EFL classes is an object of practice, study and training that combines intellectual, psychological, linguistic resources. Also, it is a mirror of the self, which represents and defines the people and, out of these considerations, it must be marked for accuracy, especially in the educational practice and in the teaching communication.

In the oral communication, as a particular form of realization of the verbal, the two characteristic processes of it (speech and hearing) are necessarily interrelated. It is circular and permissive because it allows the recovery of information and the development of unforeseen breakdowns when the message was intended.

Whatever it be the form of transmission of the message, Ferreol (46) considers that each participant in the educational communication must take into account the following:

- to find appropriate terms;
- to form sentences correctly;
- to speak or write grammatically correct;
- to have a nice style.

Mastering the oral and the written expression, the art of dialogue, of argumentation and self presentation are essential in the communication in the EFL classes. Valuable ideas and information can escape unnoticed if they are expressed in too complex, excessively boring forms. Conversely, mediocre ideas may find credit if they are expressed clearly, accessibly, with talent.

Also, for an adequate and an effective verbal communication, positive attitudes and verbal functional behaviours, skills related to speech should be adopted (Ciobanu 43):

- The pleasure of speaking - the effort to have a friendly, polite tone;
- Naturalness - the natural expression, without exaggeration,
- Clarity – the systematic, concise exposure, easy to understand;
- Correctness – to comply with the rules of grammar;
- Accuracy - the use of those words and expressions that are necessary for understanding and facilitate the communication;

- Harmony - the use of words / phrases that cause to the audience representations that fit to the speaker's intention(s);
- Fineness - the use of words / phrases through which thoughts, feelings and ideas may be expressed indirectly;
- Brevity - concentrated expression of the subject, without unnecessary digressions.

A teacher who has the qualities of a good speaker will be perceived in a broader measure prepared by his students, who will try to follow his example by imitation.

From a personal perspective, in order to increase the student's capacity of receiving oral messages, the selection of the lexical field, the connection between the teacher's and the student's repertoires, and the use of the support elements for understanding the educational message are fundamental.

The selection of the lexical field. The word is a way to communicate and a means of action whose use gives a real power for those who know how to use it. Searching for the right word is not a useless exercise, according to Ferreol and Flageul, if it requires the precision of language, the refusal of incorrectness, the concern for the diverse terminology.

Pragmatically speaking, the word is the most powerful tool that we can use to achieve our educational goals (Prutianu 47). The teacher should use an appropriate language according to the knowledge level of the students in order to be understood correctly and completely. Thus, the teacher should carefully choose his vocabulary according to the educational objectives, to the nature of the message. The educational message must be as much as possible attractive, understandable, accessible. Also, the teacher's message must be adapted to the audience characteristics (age, educational level, attitude towards the presented ideas etc.) and to be circumscribed to the proposed aims, without being charged of redundant elements.

The teacher must always be interested in knowing if his message was received correctly, to take measures to improve emissions if he found dysfunctions in the communication. As a speaker, to find if the message was received correctly, Cosnier believes that teacher should be concerned to know the answer to four questions:

"Am I heard?"

"Are they listening to me?"

"Am I understood?"

"What is the opinion of others?"

The teacher's task is to promote a genuine educational dialogue, to take care of training active listening skills in students, to encourage emotional empathic relationships with the students, to show a flexible, responsive, cooperative and always appropriate to the situation attitude in the students.

The connection between the teacher's and the student's repertoires. The educational communication necessarily involves a transfer of information, opinions, attitudes that constitute the message of the communicative act. So that the entire communication process should be effective it is necessary that the message received by a student to be identical or at least very close to the message that the teacher intended to send. This requires *mutual connection or adjustment to the partner, relative harmonization of the repertoires of the communication partners*. The communication act must be based essentially on the teacher and the student's common repertoire. Therefore, it is claimed that the person who initiates the communication to be flexibly adaptive to the real possibilities of the partner and to possess enough ability to direct the messages in such a way as to develop a motivation for learning and intercommunication.

Good knowledge of the students gives the teacher the opportunity to build a speech adapted to the audience. The image of class audience must be as close to reality as possible.

Creating an appropriate image is the result of experience and of the direct contact with the students. Depending on teacher's image about the class, he / she will choose the necessary tools to build the educational message: the appropriate language, the most profitable discursive techniques, the most powerful arguments.

In the educational discursive construction, Sălăvăstru (218) considers that the requirement to maintain the identity of the message passing from the teacher to his / her students means:

- ensuring a high degree of receptivity of discursive sequences by using appropriate terms, whose meaning is known to students, choosing the most convincing arguments to support or to reject an idea, assuming the adequate explanations, which will result in understanding of the processes, the situations, the relationships;

- providing conjunction and balance between the logical-discursive means used, so that the discursive rationality to become binding in achieving the goal of the didactic communication: the appropriate reasoning techniques (inductive, deductive, analogical), the argumentative procedures capable of producing cognitive and attitudinal changes in relation to the desirable educational ideal.

In conclusion, the teacher should harmonize his / her action with the cognitive and the linguistic experience of the students. The educational message should be structured, processed and presented in accordance with their repertoire possibilities. Therefore, it is a matter of the teacher's ability to adapt the communication to the student's intellectual maturity. And, of course, the students must make a continuous effort to adapt to the teacher's communication. Increasing the common part of the two repertoires means a long term learning process for students, a development of the horizon of their general education and the creation of solid premises for intercommunication.

The students must be educated to listen to the speech or the statement, to listen to the dialogue partner, to seek supporting evidence from the context in order to understand certain words, to formulate responses relating to the topic of discussion, to ask questions. Thus, the effectiveness of the communication depends on the personal involvement of the communication partners, in this case the students, and their need for knowledge. Students who show interest for knowledge gladly engage in communicative interaction situation, in intense cognitive activity, to assess the semantic content of the message, while students with reduced knowledge do not make efforts to penetrate the meaning and do not reflect too much on the message content. That is why the encouragement to become involved in intercommunication is particularly beneficial in terms of personal development, but also of the group.

The students must be trained and educated in the spirit of a culture of the dialogue, of the intercommunication. The school must cultivate the pleasure, the desire to communicate with others in order to discover the truth of things. This culture of dialogue must be real, meaning that the student should be familiar with the situation of proposing alternative ways to an idea advanced by the teacher or by the peers. The arguments must be advanced as a basis for different points of view and their criticism to be made only if the evidence in their favor is inconclusive. Thus, the student should note that the educational dialogue is a contraposition of arguments and counterarguments and that finally the standpoint of one who has the strongest arguments wins (Sălăvăstru 218-220).

Support elements for understanding the educational message. The language in which a message is constructed must be easily perceived and understood by the student. *Clarity* of the message can be achieved only if the meanings of the terms are precise and are understood by the students. To be clear in expression means, first, revealing explicit meanings, either by definition or by placing the terms in contexts indicating better the senses. When the terms used

are new to the audience, the teacher's task is to define them clearly and distinctly. Also, nuanced language, without ambiguity, the art to support one's ideas, are major requirements of an effective educational communication in the EFL classes.

To be correctly and completely received, the teacher's discursive approach should include both *data, facts, observations, experiences of everyday life and explanations, interpretations, arguments*. *Examples* help the students understand abstract ideas, with high level of generality. It captures attention, keep the students focused, clarify ideas, customize and emphasize important issues to give students time and space to understand and to assimilate the information. Short or developed, factual or hypothetical, in order to be effective, the examples must meet the following conditions: be relevant in the context, representative for the fact that they exemplify, plausible, rooted in reality, avoiding approximations. The optimization of the educational verbal communication can also be supported by providing multiple ways to understand the educational message: *ideas, plans, tables, charts* etc. that make it understandable and credible.

To meet the qualities of effective communication, the teacher should use all his / her resources of persuasion, of open, cooperative and flexible dialogue. Optimizing the communication is also a matter of adjusting the speed, the rhythm and the speech dominance. However, the appropriate adjustments can be reached, within certain limits, through feedback. Although the two processes of emission and reception, chronologically, work at the same time, they are offset against one another. That is why it is necessary that the teacher's exposure rate to be in agreement with the capacity of reception of his / her students.

In order to develop the ability of oral expression it is important to include the students in the communicative interaction sequences. The dialogue is a distinctive form of verbal communication and a form of intercommunication. It realizes the feedback the best and it also provides balance between individual and social, emotional and rational. By submitting the dialogue to a detailed analysis, Leroy lists several courses of action needed to improve it in the educational context and to improve the didactic communication in general:

- The thorough knowledge of the possibilities available to students for the dialogue to be consistent with the ability to receive the messages transmitted in the interaction; in this case we talk about the knowledge that the students have in different scientific fields, the extension and the mastery of the vocabulary;
- Involving students in several activities that allow the assimilation of a considerable body of knowledge, thanks to a personal effort;
- To increase or to stimulate the motivation for the intellectual activity;
- Improving the educational relationship may result into a series of attitudes that the teacher has to manifest in the interaction with his students, such as: emotional stability and self-control, serenity and optimism, patience and perseverance, understanding and insight, interest in the student.

All these approaches, but certainly others, too may convert the "pseudodialogue" specific to the traditional education into an authentic dialogue, which should engage the students in interaction, instill confidence in their possibilities and their capacities, stimulate their sense of initiative and responsibility and, as a final result, to do more as co-participants in the development and fulfillment of their personalities. The dialogue with the teacher or the peers in the context of school activities, of course, favors the achieving of the educational goals and becomes a factor of progress. In other words, "promoting the dialogue and the relations between the students, the school facilitates interindividual communication necessary for the human progress and the social progress" (Leroy 143). A genuine dialogue requires, therefore, to

involve all students in actively listening to different points of view, proposals, comments and to provide prompt, motivated, informed answers.

The teacher should encourage the students to engage in educational conversation, as stated by Cosnier, "to share with the students his / her speech time." From this perspective, students should be involved as often as possible in the intercommunication sequences. Gille (qtd. in Leroy 76) stressed that an important educational task is to teach students to communicate, exchange ideas, opinions, to understand, to externalize, because the dialogue means to assume that the interlocutors can learn something from each other. Therefore, in order to communicate effectively in English and to have communicative competence is not enough that students should know the grammatical and phonetic aspects of the language system or to use a rich vocabulary, but they also need to produce, to develop ideas, to start a conversation, to analyze, to persuade, to argue.

The educational communication is presented as an interaction in which permanent informational and socioaffective exchanges exist and the roles of the transmitter and the receiver are overtaken alternately by the teacher and the students. In this case, the feedback is more than necessary, because the act of educational communication is adjusted and reorientated depending on how the students have received and understood the message and depending on the opinion the teacher has on their understanding. Underlying dialogue and intercommunication, questions have the function of enriching the information, of removing ambiguities and misunderstandings, and, especially, of deepening understanding. Related to active listening, questions are designed to provide feedback on the correct understanding of the transmitted message. From the perspective of the communication, within the educational process, it is important that the questions should be open, so that they leave the children the possibility to express themselves in their own way and at their own pace, to express their emotional feelings, attitudes, interests, knowledge. These questions incite to dialogue and promote language development. Reported to active listening, the questions are designed to provide feedback on correct understanding of the message.

The student wants to receive a response message regarding the quality of the learning tasks. Without this feedback the student will be uncertain, frustrated and unmotivated. Therefore, the teacher's verbal assessments or the assessments in grades or ratings represent a stimulus for the student to further engage in learning situations and intercommunication.

Optimizing the communication is a fundamental objective of the education, since this is also an instrument of the educational interaction and supports the personal development of everyone involved in this process. So, in order to begin the steps towards optimizing the communication, the teacher should know the individual characteristics of the students, the characteristics of the school group, the general context of communication. But optimizing the communication in the EFL classes cannot be achieved only through formal interaction, it also requires the voluntary, conscious involvement of the partners. The teacher has the duty to initiate, to support, to motivate and to stimulate the communication interactions, but also to guide them and to give them a value character, while the student must also get involved so that the goals should be achieved.

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