Constructivism And Dialogic Learning In Online English Training: English IATELS Case Study

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Abstract

This paper is aimed to describe the experience of training English communicative skills online based on the principles of social constructivism and dialogic learning. The study was conducted in the framework of the project "English IATELS English Worldwide - Learn to Speak with All the World". The study refers to the principles of the social constructivism, which became a methodological framework of developing the project contents and teaching approaches. Demonstrating its benefits over the traditional approach to teaching English online, the paper highlights the need to reconsider traditional practices of English online learning and develop new contents and strategies which are targeting students' needs, reinforce social collaboration and research, interaction and collaborative learning. The research is a qualitative study providing an analysis of the feedbacks received from the project participants on the training content, training strategies and their influence on students' further development, self-confidence, creativity, digital competences and communicative skills.

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1 Introduction

The time of the global lockdown made it clear that despite decades of online education being in practice, the majority of educational establishments, teachers and students were not ready to transfer to the online learning environment (Sekret, 2020).

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It became also obvious that the matter of poor quality of online learning services is neither the technical infrastructure nor the availability of applications and online learning platforms, but absence of a clear understanding of the difference between teaching / learning online and traditional education.

Attempts to transfer literally the strategies and techniques of teaching / learning of a traditional classroom to online education fail, ruining the motivation to learn as well as to teach.

The classical methodology where a teacher is the center of knowledge and a transmitter of information is no longer relevant either to modern education or online learning (Hruby, Sekret, 2018; Williams, Sekret, 2018).

Moreover, in the conditions of the absence of observable physical and emotional contact between a teacher and a student in an online learning environment, the methodology which is based on such kind of interaction, i.e. traditional education, is no longer valid for online learning.

To cope with the limitations of the global lockdown and create opportunities for enhancing English communicative skills in an international community, the educational group of English IATELS Academy launched a project "English Worldwide - Learn to Speak with All the World".

This paper describes the experience of teaching English communicative skills online, gained from the project, with the reference to social constructivism as an alternative to the traditional pedagogy of teaching and learning and an optimal solution for developing effective online learning practices and approaches.

Therefore, this paper is aimed at describing the practices and solutions of teaching English online developed on the basis of the social constructivism principles and dialogue as a methodological concept within the project "English Worldwide: Learn to Speak with All the World" by English IATELS Academy.

2 Methodological Background

2.1 Constructivism as a Learning Theory of Social Learning and Co-Creation

Constructivism is a learning theory based on the idea that people actively construct or make their own knowledge, based on their learning experiences.
Learners develop new knowledge using their previous knowledge as a foundation.
It is important to develop teaching practice, coming from the statement that a learner is a personality with their own unique experiences and these experiences should receive their ways to be brought to the learning environment and be developed with new knowledge and skills.
Students' background and previous knowledge impacts the way they learn and what they learn.
Principles of Constructivism:
- Knowledge is constructed on the foundation with previous experiences and knowledge. The student's knowledge, experiences, beliefs, and insights are all important foundations to continue learning. Due to them, each student learns in a unique way, quickly absorbing what easily fits into the frame of their previous experience and struggling to get completely different notions.
- While learning, students learn to learn, i.e. processing information, analyzing, memorizing, retrieving, etc. At the same time, while learning one topic, students develop their other skills and acquire other knowledge, accompanying the main topic which is in focus.
- Learning is an active process, which involves sensory input to construct meaning. Though the sensory input is not enough to learn, students must do something in response. The more actively students are involved in processing the sensory input, the better learning results they will gain.
- Learning is a social activity, directly associated with our connection with other people, being shaped, directed and streamlined in social communities. Social interaction is a moving force for learning.
- While interacting, we need to process information, analyze, find analogues, compare the given, retain and bring something to the conversation timely and in the right place.
- Learning is contextual and grounded in real life and experience. New notions are learned better if they are connected with the students' real worlds, ideas, beliefs.
- Knowledge as a learning result is a personal formation because it is based on the personal experience, passed through individualized filters of processing and understanding, and brought to the community through the filters of one's beliefs, values, aims and motives.

- Though learning exists in the mind, hands-on experiences, physical actions are required as, on the one hand, a way to project the work of mind, translate ideas to peers, and, on the other hand, get ideas reshaped, enhanced and returned in the form of the mental work with additional personal processing and analysis. That is why reflective activities are important to include into every experimental part of learning.
- Motivation is the only key to learning. No learning can happen without opening one's mind to new experiences and a wish to learn more. Intrinsic or extrinsic motivation, but it must be created to open ways to learning.

2.2 Dialogue as A Key to Learning

Dialogue had already been one of the key elements in Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development, which set the roots for educational psychology of today, placing social interaction at the center of the learning and development processes (Vygotsky, 1978).
With Vygotsky's contributions, research in the field of educational psychology shifted from studying children's cognitive development as intra-mental activity to analyzing it as inter-mental activity, acquiring a sociocultural approach (García et al., 2010, 2015, 2018; Mercer and Howe, 2012; Littleton and Mercer, 2013).
Language is the most important tool to think, learn, and develop, which takes place first at the social level and then at the individual one (Vygotsky, 1978).
Language serves as both a cultural (promoting intermental activity) and a psychological (promoting instrumental activity) tool through which children interthink, that is, think and create meaning together, achieving higher mental functions which are central in cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978; Mercer, 2000; Wells and Arauz, 2006).

2.3 Observations and Challenges

Apart from the theoretical background, the project was developed as an attempt to find answers to the questions asked by all English teachers who had to start teaching online. They are as follows:
1.   How to organize an English speaking environment online?
2.   How to teach a language online as it is not only speech but behavior, interaction, experience?
3.   How to manage the classroom (students' engagement, attention, organizing different activities, materials, motivation, etc)?
4.   How to make students speak?
At the initial stages of teaching English online after a traditional classroom, it was obvious that the methodology and teaching strategies applied traditionally do not work in an online environment. By observing teachers and students' behaviors in online classrooms and comparing them to traditional education, a set of significant differences were highlighted. They are laid out below:
In the traditional learning environment:
- The information comes from the teachers, though the students' attention can be dispersed within the classroom, it is limited by the classroom environment;
- The teacher can "read" students' moods from body language and adjust the voice, manner, etc accordingly to keep control;
- The peers studying in the same class add to the learning atmosphere;
- Students have to control themselves as they are constantly observed;
- While listening, the students can take notes, etc, their performance is observed too, in this way, they are kept busy and their involvement into the classroom processes remain approximately at the same level.
In online environment:
- Students' concentration usually falls after 5-10 minutes of listening;
- Being away from the learning environment, students can be easily distracted by things and processes around (e.g. home environment);
- Nobody observes the students' performance and it also brings to the lowered self-control and self-regulation;
- Psychological features (hyperactive students, attention deficit disorders, students who need attention, sensitive students, low self-esteem, interpersonal relations in the class, etc.) are usually not considered in an online classroom.

To meet the methodological challenges and practical needs to develop an effective system of teaching English online in the conditions of the restricted personal interaction and global lockdown, the concert of the project was developed and implemented accordingly. The project continued to be shaped and reshaped in a course of its implementation, in a course of meeting students and teachers from different countries and training them to speak English.

3 Methods

This paper is a reflective study based on the author's personal experience of teaching online as well as developing and implementing the project "English Worldwide - Learn to Speak with All the World" under the umbrella of English IATELS Academy.

This study is also qualitative research, considering the students' feedback from their participation in the programs and courses of the project. It also refers to the comments coming from the parents and teachers of the young learners who participated in the project.

3.1 Project "English Worldwide - Learn to Speak with All the World": Aims and Content

The project was designed and implemented with the aims to:
- Develop a new concept and approach to online EFL education, overcoming stereotypic traditional approaches automatically transferred from face-to-face classroom to online environment;
- Establish an environment which would embrace participants from different countries and create a community to meet, talk, learn and share in order to enhance their English communicative skills and broaden the idea about other countries and cultures;
- Create opportunities to master English skills with communicative purposes and break psychological barriers of using English for communication in an international community;
- Experiment with methods and techniques of teaching online and shape such a methodology of teaching English which would be based on the principles of social constructivism and dialogical learning;
- Develop guidelines for effective teaching English online and enhancing the quality of online learning.

The project lasted for one year and embraced the following courses and programs:
- "Meet & Greet" Communicative Program for Adults - 2 hours weekly (6 months): Levels - Elementary, Intermediate, Advanced in separate groups;
- "English and Science" Summer School for Teens - 2 hours weekly (4 months);

- "All About People" Communication Course for Teens - 2 hours weekly (3 months);
- "English in Education" Communication Course for English Teachers - 2 hours weekly (4 months)

The topics of the communicative courses and programs were defined based on the learning interests of the participants, their age and educational background.

The sample of the syllabus for the program "All About People" can be checked in the table below (Table 1).

Table 1.
"All About People" - Sample of the Syllabus

Date	Topics
25.09.2021	Introduction - Meeting and Acquaintance
02.10.2021	"Hi, It's Me and I am Unique"
09.10.2021	"Like Two Peas in a Pod" - Parents and Children: Appearance
16.10.2021	"Like Two Peas in a Pod?" - Parents and Children: Character
23.10.2021	Things which make me happy - Experiences and Emotions

30.10.2021	In good days and not only - Experiences and Emotions
06.11.2021	Habits That Make Me Fly
13.11.2021	Friendship
20.11.2021	"We are so different, and so similar" - Differences and How to Cope with Them
27.11.2021	"Breath In, Breath Out" - Coping with Emotions
04.12.2021	Conflicts and their Resolutions
11.12.2021	Meeting New People
18.12.2021	The Most Important in Communication
25.12.2021	2021 is coming to the end: Summing-Up and Reflections

The topics of the classes could change depending on the students' interests and logic of the conversation started in the virtual class.

All classes were conducted online in live mode via ZOOM. Adding to the ZOOM platform, LMS "Easy Class" was used where the students could open their accounts, received home assignments, follow the teachers' comments and leave their own reflections about the topics and assignments.

The selection of the ICT tools for developing the project programs, teaching and learning online was conducted based on the principles of effective online tutoring (Sekret, 2016; Smyrnova-Trybulska, E. et al, 2017, Sekret et al, 2019).

The courses of the teens were designed with the elements of the project-based education, which implied conducting local research, observation and reporting, keeping diaries etc with the aim to encourage the participants to explore their local places, their nature, climate and other features concerning the topics of the course.

The detailed syllabus of the Summer School "English and Science" with the topics for online classes and off-line assignments can be found in Table 2.

Table 2.
Summer School "English and Science": Syllabus

Month	Topic	Online Session	Off-line assignments	Reporting form / result
June	Science in English: Introduction	* **Introduction:** overview of the syllabus, topics and assignments, also: - Students' experience in science and research; - Launching a weather diary (sunrise, sunset, temperature, precipitation), calculation and short summary every week; - Launching an investigation into a natural object (animal, insect, tree, plants, etc, chosen individually) and record daily observations (diary: notes and pictures every day / week - measurements, behaviours, changes in size, colours, etc)		2 sets of short summarizing reports and pictures every week posted on the platform - 2 reports for each week (12 weeks x 2 reports)
			* Introduce yourself and tell about your studies	1 Video or a report of 50 - 250 words
	Geography of my place	**Landscape and natural objects:** vocabulary, maps and how to explain them		
			- Present a physical map of your country and give an oral explanation - Draw a bird's eye view map of your place	* 2 Video or reports of 50 - 250 words each; 1 drawing; 1 map
		Landscape and natural objects: reports and group discussion of the assignments done and previously uploaded on the course platform		
			* Summing up reflective essay on the topic	* Essay/ paragraph 50 - 250 words
		Infrastructure of my city: vocabulary, sample analyses, maps		

			Research the infrastructure in your area (up to 50 km) and draw a map, representing all important objects and distance from each to your house	1 map; 1 video / report 50 - 250 words
July		**Infrastructure of my city:** reports and group discussion of the assignments done and previously uploaded on the course platform		
			Summing up reflective essay on the topic	Essay/ paragraph 50 - 250 words
		Focus on nature: Plants (vocabulary, sample analyses, etc)		
			Research trees and plants in your area (up to 5 kilometres from your house). The questions to answer: the most common plant species; average density of plants; the tallest trees, the shortest trees, blooming species, fruit-bearing species, the oldest species, the newest species, etc	1 video or report 50 - 250 words
		Focus on nature: Plants (reports and group discussion of the assignments done and previously uploaded on the course platform)		
			Summing up reflective essay on the topic	Essay/ paragraph 50 - 250 words
		Focus on nature: Insects (vocabulary, sample analyses, etc)		

			Research insects in your area (up to 5 kilometres from your house). The questions to answer: the most common species; average density; behaviour; special cases if any; dwellings; correlation with human activities and other natural objects / processes	1 video or report 50 - 250 words pictures
		Focus on nature: Insects (reports and group discussion of the assignments done and previously uploaded on the course platform)		
			Summing up reflective essay on the topic	Essay/ paragraph 50 - 250 words
August		**Focus on nature: Animals** (vocabulary, sample analyses)		
			Research wild and domestic animals in your area (up to 5 kilometres from your house). The questions to answer: the most common species; average density; behaviour; special cases if any; dwellings; correlation with human activities and other natural objects / processes	1 video / report 50 - 250 words pictures
		Focus on nature: Animals (reports and group discussion of the assignments done and previously uploaded on the course platform)		
			Summing up reflective essay on the topic	Essay/ paragraph - 50 - 250 words
		Living in my community: Population, Education, Economy, Traditions (vocabulary, sample analyses)		

			- Research the population: city, country, nationalities, languages. - Make a survey with at least 8-10 people from different families in the age of > 20 years old: age, education, marital status, children, job, travelling experience, domestic animals, leisure activities	2 tables with the data; 1 video report as the data overview;
		Living in my community: (reports and group discussion of the assignments done and previously uploaded on the course platform)		
September			Summing up reflective essay on the topic	Essay/ paragraph 50 - 250 words
		Summing up: all vocabulary, weather diary, observation diary, reflections, feedbacks, evaluations, etc		
			Summing up reflective essay on the topic	Essay/ paragraph 50 - 250 words
				Final grading and certification

All the students' assignments were evaluated according to the criteria announced beforehand. The evaluation guidelines were put as follows:

* When writing Summing up reflective essays, the students should pay attention to everybody's reports, summarize the info and give their personal opinion;

* Videos were graded and evaluated based on their content and quality. The main criteria were:
  1) At least 1 minute duration;
  2) Answering the main question of the assignment;
  3) The volume of speech should be at least 20 words and more;
  4) The speaker must explain the topic orally, not reading from any resource.

Extra evaluation criteria, if any, were also specified before the assignment.

* Essays / paragraphs were evaluated according to the students' English level.

The main evaluative criteria were:
1. At least 50 words (the volume requirements were dependent on the students' initial English levels, learning capacities, etc);
2. Answering the main question of the assignment;
3. The sentences were complete;

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4.   The student used the vocabulary introduced in the topic;
5.   The student used the information received from their peers and their reports.
Extra evaluation criteria, if any, were also specified before the assignment.
Apart from the topics of the courses which varied depending on the students' English levels, age, educational background and learning interests, the methodological approach to teaching and organizing conversations together with the designing assignments was characterized by the following features:

1.   The teacher is not the center of the process but an organizer and facilitator. The teacher should be rather called a coordinator who is leading and facilitating communication during online sessions, providing language tips where it is necessary, introducing games and quizzes, theoretical inputs as a subject of the following talks and discussions, etc;

2.   More than one teacher were leading online sessions. Involvement of 2 or more international teachers / trainers allowed to break teacher's centeredness of the class and create an atmosphere of informal conversation;

3.   The participants of the programs were from different countries that is why English was the only means of communication. At the same time, belonging to different cultures created a gap for natural curiosity about places and people, traditions and lifestyles. In this way, the participants learned about cultures from the first hands, being actively involved in question-answer activities and discussions.

4.   The focus of the class was laid upon the subject of the conversation. In many cases the topics for the following online sessions were defined by the participants themselves, highlighting what they would like to learn, what can be done about the topic to make it more interesting and what assignments they could do individually or in mini-groups before the session.

5.   The online sessions and offline assignments were connected thematically while online sessions were of a conversational manner with elements of presentations, games, competitions. The off-line assignments were of practical character and involved such activities as conducting research, observation and reporting, keeping diary, video presentations, poster and slides elaboration. Most of the off-line assignments were designed according to the principles of the project-based learning and were conducted either individually or in small groups of the students coming from different countries. To make a project in a group entailed contacting in the time between online sessions, setting the theme and its plan, sharing responsibilities, coordinating, and reporting at the online session either synchronously or with a video presentation prepared beforehand. In this way, timing for conversion, communication and collaboration with international peers was extended beyond the time of online sessions and allowed more personal contact between the participants.

6.   The discussions were often of personal character where the students shared their personal experiences, views, life stories, personal pictures, etc which was of the additional value for all the participants to feel their personal involvement into the learning process, importance of their participation and establishing an emotional contact with the peers and the session leaders.

7.   The conversation was allowed to flow in a natural way, following the logic of the participants' talks and questions, encouraging all the participants to ask and answer, sharing from the places of their location. The language tips were introduced in the time and places of immediate need i.e. immediately in the situation of the language knowledge gap to fill it in with necessary language means for the students to continue using them in a conversation.

3.2 Participants

The programs and courses were participated in by more than 600 people in total, joining online from such countries as Indonesia, Albania, Turkey, Ukraine, Ecuador, Czeck Republic, Australia, Egypt, Pakistan, together with the instructors from Ukraine, USA, Turkey, Iran, Sri Lanka and other countries.

The age of the participants varied from 7 till 65, being students of the primary-secondary-high schools, universities, English teachers, people employed in different areas of work and business (academicians, doctors, engineers, computer engineers, businessmen, etc).

The main criteria for the group formation was the level of the participants' English competences and a sphere of their interests. Thus, the school students tended to be in the same group but split into several sub-groups according to their English level. The employed participants were grouped separately according to the level of their English proficiency and professional profile.

As the project was of humanitarian character and was not intended to be thoroughly analyzed from the research point of view, the participants' feedback was collected randomly. The feedback was coming both from the students themselves and some parents who also followed the sessions with their children and could observe the students' actual emotional reactions, a degree of their involvement and changes in their behavior or knowledge if there were any. At the same time, the students' behavior during the online sessions and their activeness in doing the off-line

assignments were constantly observed and analyzed by the session leaders to tune the topics, manners of conversation, strategies of teaching, learning materials, activities etc in order to respond to the students' actual learning needs, interest and motivation to continue their learning within the project programs.

4 Results and Their Analysis

The project lasted for one year embracing more than 600 participants joining the courses at different times.

As the programs were free of charge and openly available, the students were not forced to join the programs by any factor, that is why their attendance as driven by their own will and it was a good indicator of the quality of the courses and programs.

Thus, it was remarkable to note that more than 90% of all the participants attended online sessions more than once. 80% of the participants who signed up for a certain program or a course completed more than 50% of the planned sessions and assignments. 70% of the participants who registered for a certain program or a course completed 100% of the plan. 50% of all the participants joined another program after completing the first one. 30% of the participants were joining all the programs of their level till the end of the project. 10% of the participants who completed all the programs were interested in joining new courses and programs under the umbrella of the project for another year.

While the students' behavior, their involvement and reactions were observed and analyzed during each online sessions to make improvement in the teaching styles, learning materials and selection of the topics, the feedback from the participants in fact was not collected in the end of the programs. The students could talk about their experience orally, which was not systematically collected. That is the limitation of this study. Though some students' reactions were noted as posts on the social media platforms and in personal messages to the program leaders.

From the comments in the social media (Reactions after participation):

Parents (Albania):
Thank you very much to English Worldwide for this opportunity for my kids! They love and enjoy summer school with other people around the world and they are learning so many things, not only language

"English Worldwide":
Thank you very much for your appreciation! it's our pleasure to meet them and see their persistence and curiosity to learn. With such attitudes to learning, they will definitely succeed in their life. From our side of English IATELS Academy, we work to give not only an opportunity to practice Engish, but also knowledge they would need for their education, personal development, enhancing their skills of analysis, critical thinking and creativity. We are looking forward to seeing their further progress and new achievements!

English teacher (Indonesia):
Great program! Very good opportunity to develop English speaking skills and meet friends and colleagues from other countries.

English teacher (Turkey):
What a great opportunity for them! Well done!

English teacher (Turkey):
It was awesome with the participation of great partners and students. And I want to thank Iryna Sekret and Reuben Musgrave for their great contributions! We had a great memory thanks to you !!!

"English Worldwide":
(To the English teacher from Albania) Thank you and also many thanks to your very active and enthusiastic students! All the sessions were recorded and a full video will be shared with you very soon. We will also need a list of the students' full names and their school's contact to sign out certificates for them.

A Teen Student (Albania):

Congratulations teacher! I am very happy that you have opened so many courses for everyone. Through the time I spent learning English with you, l also learned technology skills, being sociable and showing my true self online... I have a million reasons to thank you and I miss you! Yours truly

Comments concerning the topics and assignments of the online sessions:

The session leader ("English in Education" for English teachers):
You can come up with your experience and observations of how it (students' mother tongue) is in your classroom and with the students, if it is helpful to teach or it's an obstacle, which techniques to use to avoid translation or to bring it more to the classroom, depending on your experience.

Participant:
I'm Jo from Bangkok, Thailand. Hopefully, I can join in the zoom later tonight.

The session leader ("Meet & Greet" Elementary level of English):
Our next session is going to be on Saturday. The topic is "Welcome to my World". The students are going to participate in the discussion with the pictures, telling about their environments and things they like around them. You can start preparing too!

The parent's gratitude letter to the program's leader:
Thank you very much for all your hard work that you do with students. Dea and Ami this year not only learned English, but you inspired them to explore themselves doing things they didn't know before.
I'm a teacher of "Albanian language and literature" and like a linguist I had heard you explaining words that Dea didn't know even in Albanian (like introvert etc).
During this time Dea learned to make projects, improved technology skills, she believes in herself that she can do things and she finished them.
Before she had been a close child, and now she speaks very good English with people, she has begun thinking in English.
And in the end, thank you for all your support and unconditional love that you give to my girls!

"English Worldwide" (The key program leader's response):
Thank you very much! it's my greatest pleasure to hear about all these changes, the best praise to receive! In my turn, I would like to say that your girls are really amazing and extraordinarily clever! My sincerest admiration of them both, for their curiosity, determination and everything they were doing! It was my big pleasure to see them both supporting each other, working together, Ami's speaking English with other girls! Your girls are really outstanding! They must have a great future ahead !

The analysis of the comments above allows to conclude as follows:
1. The participants of the programs and courses (the English teachers as students and coordinators of the students' groups, student-teens, their parents, program leaders) were genuinely involved into the sessions and their content;
2. The participants expressed satisfaction from the sessions and all the learning process as well as the appreciation of the work on the part of the project organizers;
3. Emotional and personal connections were established between the program leaders and participants as well as those who accompanied the students during online sessions (e.g. English teachers, parents);
4. The students confirmed that apart from the English speaking skills, they developed skills of using technologies, received extra knowledge about different topics, became more self-confident and sociable;
5. The participants of all levels admitted that organizing such programs and courses is a good opportunity for the students to develop English communicative skills, meet peers from other countries, learn new things, develop their outlook as well as enhance their skills of using ICT tools.

To add to the analysis of the results, it is important to overlook the teaching strategies and behaviors which were applied to change the content and atmosphere of the online sessions from the traditional language-driven to the content-focussed, and from the frustrating (as it usually happens when it is required to speak English in an international community of unknown people) to friendly, supportive and encouraging.

Teaching Strategies - Dealing with Language

1. The biggest portion of the language input was on vocabulary as it was in a particular need during the sessions of all levels. The participants usually managed with grammar, using necessary structures to make sentences at their levels. That is why there was no special need to focus on grammar. In some cases, grammar structures were given as an example to follow in the immediate communicative situations. So, new language items (both vocabulary and grammar) were introduced and used on the principle "grab and use it" i.e. they were introduced in the immediate communicative situation to help the students to express themselves. In such a way, the focus was on transferring the meaning or an idea rather than on language itself. While transferring the meaning, necessary language means were actualized for making required sentences. The required items (grammar or vocabulary) were provided immediately by the session leaders. Sometimes the sessions were started with the introduction of new vocabulary as an intro to a new topic. In this way, new words were accompanied with pictures, represented in a coherent manner as a telling / story / explanation. During this word introduction, the students were constantly asked on the topic / things/ / ideas/ experiences to keep their attention and monitor their understanding.
2. New language items were introduced either on an immediate need or as an intro to a new topic. To explain the meaning of the words, the session leaders were using pictures, gestures, objects or any other visual means to convey the word's meaning. As well, they were referring to the students' familiar vocabulary and used synonyms, analogues, antonyms, different types of classification and word grouping. If it was necessary, the students used online dictionaries to translate the words by themselves.
3. The students' understanding of the language was controlled based on the correctness of their reactions, responses, and involvement in the activity.

Teaching Strategies - Dealing with Students' Behaviors

1. A compulsory requirement for all participants was to join online sessions with open cameras and their names written on the screen of their accounts. It allowed the session leaders to set personal contact with all the participants, keep them involved, monitor their reactions and attitudes during the session.
2. The main rule of organizing all the programs and courses was to keep the selection of the topics and all discussions free of any social, cultural, religious or political discrimination. As the sessions were attended by the participants of very different ages and backgrounds, the conversations were kept at highly ethical norms, neutral in topics, referring to pure facts, realities, processes or scientific knowledge to avoid misinterpretations and any conflicts based on the differences between social / cultural / religious / political points of view. The session leaders were working to create an atmosphere of acceptance, support, and encouragement.
3. The students with lower levels of the English speaking skills were encouraged to ask and answer questions, praised for their talks and performance. As the main aim was to convey meanings and ideas, the students even with poor English speaking skills were involved and encouraged to talk at their level, supported by the session leaders. Grammar mistakes were not focussed on until they were rare or did not become an obstacle for creating a meaningful expression understandable by other participants.
4. The students who were not confident to start talking were supported with encouragement, allowed to take their time to watch and speak when they were ready. The session leaders worked to involve them in talks according to their abilities to react and participate. In a course of time, such students became more comfortable to start talking and participate in the activities and discussions.
5. As the focus was on the topic of the conversation, not the language itself, the participants asked questions about their peers' experiences, lives, opinions, preferences and shared their own views and personal pictures. In this atmosphere, the frustration to make a mistake or to be judged tended to disappear, being replaced by the curiosity to understand and eagerness to be understood. The students were happy to share their pictures, things from their environment, notes / writings, videos etc which helped them to make themselves clear for other participants.

Teaching Strategies - Turning Students into Co-Creators

To increase learning motivation and students' personal involvement, it was important to create an atmosphere of value and respect to all participants. With the slogan that each participant matters and each voice is important, the program leaders conducted discussions, developed sessions' content, projects and assignments to do individually and in the group. For this purpose, the students' learning interests were constantly monitored, and the content was tuned according to the students' learning curiosity. The learning interests were in focus by:

1. Asking direct questions which topics they would like to learn / speak about;
2. Observing their reactions to the content and activities online;
3. Considering the students and their parents' feedback and making amendments accordingly;
4. Suggesting activities and projects to do offline and taking into account the students' reactions and considerations about the content of the activities and ways of presenting them;
5. The aims of the activities were explained to the participants, highlighting the importance / necessity of the topic / skill / activity for their work, education, speaking skills, communicative strategies, etc.

In this way, the students acted as co-creators of the course contents, equally contributing to the development of the ideas, defining the focus and direction of the conversations, the topics of the discussions and skills / knowledge to learn.

It is also remarkable to note that in case some participants were missing some skills (e.g. language skills, technical skills. etc), other participants were eager to help them with their knowledge and experience. In such situations, the talks and questions were generated naturally focussing on the task to ask, explain, solve the issue and continue with the main topic of the class / course.

The main principles and ideas of such an approach to organizing the online learning environment with international participants can be laid out as follows:

1. Guided with a belief that coming from different areas and countries, each participant has something to tell and share that nobody knows, the program leaders worked to create a supportive and inclusive online learning environment to embrace equally all the participants. Differences in educational and cultural backgrounds created natural gaps for learning curiosity and motivation to find out more. As a result, the participants tended to ask more questions, they were more eager to get involved in conversations and discussions. Giving a way to all participants to present themselves, their cultures and countries, supporting their self-presentation and self-realization, facilitating open and free discussions about differences without judgements helped to enhance their feelings of their own value for the learning group, their importance in this project, a feeling of belonging to the learning community and therefore, motivation to learn and continue with the program.
2. The group leaders and participants equally added to the conversation, sometimes changing their roles according to the logic of the discussion. For example, the students could start leading the discussions, or initiating presentations / questioning, etc, the group leader could remain just a silent observer after kicking off the discussion, etc.
3. Teaching each other the skills in an urgent need (e.g. techniques of using ICT for presenting, managing ICT tools, creating digital contents, using resources, etc) allowed to create a natural space for the exchange of experience, learning and communication. As a result, apart from the enhanced English speaking skills, the participants raised their competences in digital tools, the Internet resource usage, digital content development, online presentation and international teamwork.
4. The topics and the framework of the program used to be developed after brainstorming with the participants and discussing their learning interests. After that, the syllabus of the program was framed, uploaded in the LMS of the program to make it available for the registered students anytime and introduced at the first online session. Despite all these preparations and mutual initial discussions, the content of the program and its topics could be changed in the course of the program depending on the logic of the conversations held during online sessions. Thus, during the sessions and topic discussions, the students could be attracted to another aspect of the discussed issue and then that question could be brought into focus either immediately or during next online meetings. Learning interests of all participants were taken into account regardless of their age and background experience. With this approach, still everyone could find something new for them to learn and speak about.
5. When left on their own in their learning interests and being free to choose, students even of young ages become much more curious in serious scientific topics than it is traditionally thought of. It was surprising to note that students in the age of primary and middle school can be naturally interested in learning about nature, environment, space, planets, biological processes, etc. Without being forced to learn, they could bring to the discussion the topics of a serious scientific character and keep the conversations accordingly. In an inclusive and supportive learning environment, the students tend to open their natural learning curiosity and start learning the things which are much beyond their school programs and syllabuses. They do not need a guide from a grown-up but they can lead a grown-up with their curiosity to learn new things and develop new complicated subjects.

With such an approach to organizing the programs and leading online sessions, it was observed that:

1. Most of the participants tended to join the sessions with open cams naturally, maintaining eye contact with the speakers and demonstrating an active interest in the discussions.
2. The participants were free to join the sessions according to their own wish, not being forced by any factors to continue with the programs and in such conditions most of the participants preferred to take part in all the sessions systematically and continue education in new programs.
3. The students who joined the programs once, then brought their friends and family members to participate in the program. Some young learners were accompanied by their mothers / fathers / grandparents / sitting behind the computer monitor or nearby and following the program. They listened to the discussions, sometimes helping their children to speak or joining the discussions by themselves.
4. They shared their personal lives, experiences in pictures, personal videos, recorded videos of themselves speaking English, did research etc and shared in the project group and in their own social platforms.
5. The students felt more and more confident to talk, share, ask and answer.

Methodological Outcomes

1. A great number of online teaching techniques and materials were tested and shaped according to the needs of online English learning.
2. Strategies of effective communication, methods of leading online sessions with different types of participants were developed, together with the techniques to cope with technical drawbacks, failures, misunderstandings, etc.
3. 6 syllabus for the courses on training English communicative skills were developed and brought to practice ("English Starters", "Intermediate English", "Meet & Greet" for Advanced Students, "English+Science", "All About People", "Advanced English for Better ESL Teaching");
4. A framework of the course book "English+Science" was designed and planned to be published as a textbook for middle and high school students.
5. The syllabus and learning materials were tested during online sessions and uploaded on the Learning Management System (LMS) of the courses for future usage with new students.

Recommendations for the teachers who plan to work online or those who would like to enhance the quality of online English teaching and learning:

1. The level of emotions and expressiveness of teachers' talks must be higher than in a traditional classroom. It helps to keep students' attention and involvement into the online session.
2. During the online class a teacher should switch between different modes of speech and activities, using direct talks, sharing screens with pictures and videos, demonstrating words and objects, encouraging students to share their screens and make searches, draw and write on the screen using different colors and fonts, etc.
3. The online session must be maximally interactive. The teacher should keep asking questions, encourage students to ask each other, make groups and initiate discussions / competitions / activities and so on.
4. All available visual resources (videos, pictures, objects, personal pictures) should be used in different proportions but according to the logic of the lesson and learning aims. It mustn't be just setting some film / video to watch, but it can be a short episode with some task or assignment to fulfil while watching or after it. It should not be a stream of pictures just to watch but a few pictures followed by discussions or questions / answers, changing turns to show the pictures and / or comment on them, etc. The teacher should remember that the students' attention in online class can easily switch from the class to some nearby subjects or actions. That is why the content, modes, tones, speakers and voices should change quicker than in a traditional classroom.
5. The teachers should encourage students to make some physical movements, demonstrations of their environment, subjects, their pieces of work etc to make the class alive and more personal. They should remember that sitting in front of the screen with the attention focussed on one place can be tiring and draining. That is why some physical movement, changes in the body's position, extra gestures and activities can revitalize the students behind the screen and refresh their attention.
6. The teacher should encourage interaction among the students in the online session by making them ask each other questions, design small quizzes and check each other's knowledge, assigning leaders for some tasks and activities, making groups and letting them work separately on some projects and then report, etc.

7. Different kinds of challenges and competitions work well in online classrooms. They should not be long, but involve all the participants according to the level of their knowledge and the topic of the class. Students can design some challenging tasks for their peers by themselves and such kinds of assignments and activities are perceived with interest and enthusiasm.

8. The teacher should also remember about timing in online classes. It can be setting the time for fulfilling assignments, searching on the internet, preparing to speak, speaking, asking questions within a certain period of time, etc. It helps to keep a pace of the class, maintain students' attention, create new challenges, prepare and react quickly, and enhance speaking skills all together.

9. There should always be a place for creativity, jokes, some funny drawings on the screen, improvisation, mutual creation either orally or in drawing or writing. The teacher can create some stories by drawing pictures on the online class screen, invite students to create their own stories, funny images etc. It helps to make the class atmosphere more personal and alive, develop students' imagination, creativity and facilitate speaking.

5 Conclusions

The project "English Worldwide: Learn to Speak with All the World" was initiated by the international educational group under the umbrella of English IATELS International Academy and was actively implemented during the time of the global lockdown providing opportunities for international academicians and students to enhance their communicative skills in English. It also allowed the participants to learn about other cultures and countries, develop their academic and research skills, skills of presentation and creativity.

The project was developed and launched to cope with the restrictions on in-personal interaction and traveling which are crucial for a new language learning and experiencing new countries and cultures.

Despite the limitations all education systems experienced during the global lockdown, this experimental program proved that teaching English online can be engaging, interactive and develop new knowledge and skills in an interesting way. The students' reflections, reactions of their parents and teachers proved that within the project, the participants enhanced their English communicative skills, raised their confidence as English speakers, developed new knowledge in topics which were discussed during online sessions, improved their technical skills and broaden their digital competences for using ICT and creating digital contents.

The constructivism concepts which became the methodological background of the project development, its pedagogy and content helped to create a learning environment of co-creation, collaboration, mutual knowledge development and acquisition on the principles of inclusion, mutual respect and acceptance, appreciation of any experience and personal vision, support to self-realization and free creativity.

Optimal mixture of ICT tools selected based on the principles of user-friendliness, functionality and accessibility, guided by the methodological vision of teaching English online (focus of the speaking skills, accessibility of the learning contents and materials, interactivity), the teachers' professional competences and their genuine eagerness to support students from different countries in their strivings to learn English defined the durability and success of the project.

The experience obtained within this program, learning materials developed, shaped strategies to teach English online have become a substantial capital for developing new programs of teaching English online and sharing them with other schools and English teachers.

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