TED TALKS AS A TOOL TO DEVELOP COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN EFL BACHELOR STUDENTS

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Abstract

The paper examines the use of educational videos from the TED-Ed platform for the development of communicative competence in students who study English as a foreign language (EFL). The article also provides two samples for the communicative competence development procedure. The paper aims at revealing the dual methodological potential of educational video (as a source of information and as a sample of a monologue / dialogue utterance), considering the features of video from the TED-Ed platform from the point of view of communicative competence development (features of TED-talks). The significance of the paper lies in a) opportunities to increase student involvement in the educational process through the use of educational videos; b) creating technology to work with a completely free and regularly updated educational platform – TED-Ed; c) the prospect of increasing the efficiency of the process of developing the communicative competence of EFL students.

Keywords: Ted Talks, communicative competence, EFL.

1 INTRODUCTION

Communicative approach to language teaching has been widely recognized in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) over past decades. Currently, in various types of language institutions over the world, including universities and colleges, language teachers and curriculum researchers have advocated communication-oriented teaching syllabus, admitting that it is more effective ways for improving students’ communication skills. The successful language use for communication presupposes the development of communicative competence in the users of that language and that the use of language is constrained by the socio-cultural norms of the society where the language is used. Effective communication is critical to building and maintaining healthy relationships. It is about how to keep your audience engaged when you deliver that presentation, a way to connect more authentically with others. TED Talks are seen as a quick way to learn from experts, and from the people who are brave enough to share what they have learned with the rest of audience.

The problem of using educational videos is relevant in connection with the need to adapt and use the positive developments of EFL teachers, high priority of communicative competence in teaching English, the need to take into account the increasing role of the didactic principle of clarity as well as greater methodological potential of educational video compared to audio recordings. Some foreign researchers, for example, B. Bal-Gezegina and L. Bajrami examined the problems of using educational videos in general [1, 2]. J. Keddie and M. Mallinder have proven the effectiveness of using TED-Ed materials for overall development [3, 4]. Anyway, at the moment there is a lack of technology or procedure for using TED-Ed video, which is adequate to the degree of communicative competence development in EFL students of different level.

2 METHODOLOGY

The TED-Ed platform is one of the most universal and advanced platforms for teaching EFL, which, according to its design, provides for a constant replenishment of the video library. The platform contains thousands of educational videos that present factual information and samples of public speeches. TED-Ed is completely free, provides ample opportunities for independent work; it has a flexible lesson builder. TED-Ed content is characterized by one of the most important benefits of educational videos – novelty. The platform contains thousands of videos that reveal hundreds of topics – including directly relevant sample program. The curators of the platform collect videos of similar subjects in playlists. For example, on TED-Ed you can find about a hundred videos about global warming.

One of the major advantages of TED-Ed materials is their integrity. TED videos have a clear structure, contain accented transitions between subthemes / ideas and they are complete. These characteristics
allow a teacher to make a complete set of exercises with any TED video per lesson, even if the material is shown in class, and not previewed by students at home. Another significant advantage is the academicism of speech. Speeches from unadapted authentic sources are often too fluent and / or contain a large amount of colloquial language. TED speakers predominantly adhere to scientific and journalistic styles, their intonations can be traced with clear intonation patterns.

Materials from TED-Ed also comply with the principle of feasibility. Statements in TED videos rarely go beyond the educational level, to which the curators attributed the recording, and some videos are created specifically for educational purposes.

TED talks may contribute to class discussions. Speakers and authors of materials on discussion topics convincingly offer arguments in favor of one point of view (for example, they unequivocally call for downshifting), but at the same time leave their supporters an opportunity to expand the idea, and opponents to express arguments in favor of the opposite point of view. As a result, students receive semantic support for preliminary statements and broad topics for discussion with free speech. Additional materials and internal criteria contribute to the rapid and high-quality selection of video materials. Subtitles are attached to each video, and the internal functionality allows learners to download them as text-decryption. This helps to correlate the content of the video with the level of development of foreign language communicative competence, highlight the difficulties, avoid them, in other words – do all the standard steps to work with the video before offering it to students to discuss [5].

Considering the methodological potential of TED-Ed as a means of developing communicative competence, it is first of all worth paying attention to the visual aspect of TED videos. Video sequence resonates with audio text: either shows the described phenomenon, or supplements the information about it. The video sequence also reflects the structure of the audio text and facilitates its perception with the help of diagrams, arrows and so on. Moreover, the video recording of the speech contains information about the nature of the audience and its size, demonstrates non-verbal communication techniques and ways of holding attention used by the speaker.

Another significant advantage of TED videos is their capacity. Most of the video lasts less than five minutes, which, on the one hand, allows them to be used at different stages of the lesson, and on the other hand, contributes to their successful perception [6].

Videos from the TED-Ed platform are characterized by their relevance. On the one hand, many videos cover topics on which the material does not undergo significant changes over time (basic concepts of science, cultural phenomena of previous eras, etc.). On the other hand, the production cycle of one video is no more than a few months, so the authors can create videos for the current information channels. So, on December 10, 2018, TED-Ed released a video about attempts to reach Antarctica (The dangerous race for the South Pole), timed to the ski race to the South Pole between Colin O'Brady and Lewis Rudd. C. O'Brady came to the finish on December 27th – much later than TED published a video.

Another favorable aspect of TED-Ed videos is the sterility of the video sequence. The authors use only frames drawn by artists, so there are no distracting details in them, such as unusual interior elements, etc. This allows students to focus on audio text content and video itself.

TED videos are unique: TED conference speakers are often among the best experts in a particular industry or people with unique life experiences. For example, on the platform one van find Dennis Hong’s monologue Making a car for blind drivers, in which a Korean engineer talks about creating a complete passenger car for blind people.

And the final advantage if the authenticity of TED materials. According to K.S. Krichevskaya, authentic materials are “authentic literary, folklore, pictorial, musical works, objects of reality, such as clothes, furniture, dishes and their illustrative images” [7]. According to this definition, the TED video, featuring the person speaking to conference attendees, is an authentic source, while the audio materials that some EFL Coursebooks have mainly consist of monologues and dialogues, played out specifically for educational purposes.

3 RESULTS

This part of the article will provide an example of how TED videos can be used as a tool to develop communicative competence in Bachelor students (aged 20-21, the final year of University study).
3.1 The procedure

The first step is to select the appropriate video. Selected TED-talk or animated videos should:

- Comply with the level of development of foreign language communicative competence of students. Information on the educational level on the TED-Ed website can help the teacher in the assessment, but the most reliable way is to study the decoding of the video and analyze the prosodic features of speech.
- Correspond to the age of students.
- Do not stand out from the logic of the calendar-thematic plan, be consistent with the topic being studied at the time of the lesson.
- Bring novelty.
- Meet the authenticity criteria discussed earlier in this paper.
- Reflect contemporary reality.
- Meet scientific criteria.
- Be recorded in 16:9 aspect ratio to show individual fragments on a dashboard in a classroom. All videos on the TED-Ed platform meet this criterion, and when using external TED-talk recordings, you need to make sure that the video quality on YouTube is not lower than "480p".

The next stage is to create tasks for the video. The teacher needs to prepare while-watching and after-watching activities. The experience of teaching EFL at Moscow City University showed that when using video from TED-Ed it is relevant to give the tasks to follow:

1. Exercises to drill the vocabulary (e.g. Look at the words and find the equivalents to them in the video).
2. Exercises to verify understanding (e.g. Say whether the following statements are true or false).
3. Exercises to deepen understanding with elements of monologue and dialogue speech (e.g. Do you agree? Why?).
4. Exercises on free discussion of the affected problem (round table discussion, role play, etc.)

Students might be asked to watch a video at home and complete assignment 1-2 or they can watch and do activities in class in time allows.

The final stage is actually working with video in the classroom.

1. The teacher controls the implementation of tasks 1 and 2. For the development of sociocultural competence, it is important that the teacher explains the vocabulary from the first task with examples from life in the countries of the language being studied. At the same stage, one can partially or fully solve the educational task of the lesson (for example, to compare foreign and Russian perceptions of separate issues).
2. The teacher activates the general knowledge of the students and the information obtained from the TED video displaying individual video fragments. Students use them to discuss questions from assignment 3 in a pair or group. The teacher also draws students' attention to non-verbal communication techniques used by the speaker (if you work with TED-talk in class).
3. The teacher interviews individual students on questions from task 3, invites other students to comment on them.
4. The teacher offers a final task that summarizes the content of the video and allows students to speak in their own words about the problem addressed in the video.

3.2 The class sample 1

Topic: Man – the Child of Nature

Video: Conscious consumerism – time to shop & live – our values (TED-talk)

Pre-watching

Answer the questions and share your view on the topic.

1. Which (social) facts influence consumerism? Are there any benefits in consumerism?
2 Do you believe special occasions like Christmas or Easter have become too consumeristic?
3 Do you think there are more consumerist women than men? Why?
4 Are teenagers and children becoming consumerists earlier?
5 What is conscious consumerism?

While-watching

Task 1. Look at the list of words you will hear in the video. Put down the context in which they were used and find Russian equivalents to them. Be ready to explain the meaning of the words in English.
- sweat shops
- apartheid [ə pɑːθeɪt]
- to wield
- to hold accountable
- corporate social responsibility
- to pledge
- to source
- fair trade
- carbon monoxide [məˈnɒksaɪd]

Teacher's questions:
- Do you think we have a problem with big Russian companies producing goods in sweat shops?
- Have you heard about any corporate social responsibility initiatives from Russian companies?
- Is it possible to help the environment by introduction a CO2 tax?

Task 2. Say whether the following statements are true or false.
1 Another person got the speaker into conscious consumerism
2 All “consciousness boycotts” made sense to the speaker
3 Women make an overwhelming majority of purchases across the globe
4 Men stick to conscious consumerism more often than women
5 The speaker proves that conscious consumers can make a company change its policies
6 The speaker is entirely happy about her daughter picking up conscious consumerism at a very early age

Task 3. Look at the following question related to the talk. What’s the speaker’s position on them? Do you agree?
1 Is it okay to have your conscious consumerism views affect what your family members can eat, wear or buy?
2 Is it true that one conscious consumer can make a difference?
3 Is it right to strongarm companies into changing their policies by applying group effort to decrease their profits (boycotting)?

After-watching

We’re going to have a round-table discussion. You are split into two-groups supporting either pro-conscious consumerism or anti-conscious consumerism views. You will have several minutes to come up with arguments to support your position and convince the other group as well as everyone present that your position is the way to go. You may use statistics on your role cards to build up your case. One of you will be a moderator facilitating the discussion. Here are your cards.

+ Card 1

Pro-conscious consumerism. You need to convince your peers and the audience that everyone should either stick to conscious consumerism or pick it up. Mention how good it is for both the individual and society. You may use the following data to support your position:
According to Nielson’s report from 2015, 66% of consumers are willing to spend more on a product if it comes from a sustainable brand.

The 2017 Cone Communications CSR Study revealed that 86% of American consumers expect companies to act on social and environmental issues.

Colmar Brunton’s Better Futures Report 2016 suggests that 83% of New Zealand customers will stop buying a company’s products if they heard about them being irresponsible or unethical.

Card 2

Anti-conscious consumerism. You need to convince your peers and the audience that we shouldn’t be limited by the boundaries of conscious consumerism. Mention how these limits affect both the individual and society. You may use the following data to support your position:

According to Halina Szejnwald Brown, professor of environmental science and policy at Clark University, consumerism makes up most of the GDP (ВВП), so governments are not interested in you consuming less.

KQED suggests that only 2% of clothes sold in the US are made within the country. The situation is similar in other western states.

Nielsen says that 55% of global online consumers are willing to spend more if the company is committed to the positive impact, yet only 15% of Canadian households buy completely recycled products.

Card 3

Moderator. You need to keep the conversation going. Make sure that the two groups are speaking in turns. Encourage silent students to speak up. If the discussion is dying down, add some fuel to the fire by providing a personal opinion or controversial arguments. You may use the following statistics:

Pro-conscious consumerism.

According to Nielson’s report from 2015, 66% of consumers are willing to spend more on a product if it comes from a sustainable brand.

The 2017 Cone Communications CSR Study revealed that 86% of American consumers expect companies to act on social and environmental issues.

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Anti-conscious consumerism.

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Nielsen says that 55% of global online consumers are willing to spend more if the company is committed to the positive impact, yet only 15% of Canadian households buy completely recycled products.

3.3 The class sample 2

Topic: Man – the Seeker of Happiness

Video: What is depression?

Pre-watching

Discuss the questions to follow:

- Have you or someone you love ever had clinical depression? If so, what helped you get through the worst times?
• What, if anything, positive have you gotten from the experience? For example, did it help you become more humble, more patient, more creative, more authentic, more hopeful, more spiritual?

• If you have experienced depression both as a family member and as a client, how were those two situations different?

• If a loved one of yours was seriously depressed, what actions did you take that were helpful for yourself? For the other person?

• What would you tell someone who you thought was seriously depressed?

• What can your community do to help people with depression? Your social community? Your religious community?

While-watching

Task 1. Look at a list of words you will hear in the video. Put down the context in which they were used and find Russian equivalents to them. Be ready to explain the meaning of the words in English.
  - mental illness
  - high cholesterol
  - a trigger
  - to linger
  - recurrent thoughts
  - physical manifestations
  - neural transmitters
  - intangible symptoms
  - stigma

Teacher’s questions: Is there a stigma attached to mental illness in Russia?

Task 2. Say whether the following statements are True or False, or put down Not stated if the video doesn’t have the information to back up or disprove the statement

1 In the United States, one in five adults struggle with depression.
2 It’s easy to tell whether one is having depression or feeling down.
3 Psychiatric guidelines on diagnosing depression are outdated.
4 There is a fixed number of how many depression symptoms one has to classify for a diagnosis.
5 There are no physical changes indicating one is struggling with depression.

Teacher’s questions: Have you come across any statistics on mental health of Russians? What are the easily accessible ways to get mental health help in Russia?

Task 3. Look at the following statements related to the talk. What’s the narrator’s position on them? Does your experience suggest the same?

• There’s currently a stigma to mental illnesses that makes treating them harder.
• One can make the situation worse by saying wrong things while trying to help a depressed person.
• People treat depression like a regular health problem and not a person’s negative trait.

After-watching

We’re going to have a role play activity illustrating how people can effectively cope with depression. You’ll be split in pairs. One of you is going to be a patient displaying some depression symptoms. The other is a psychiatrist trying to help your new patient. Remember to follow the instructions from your role cards.
Card 1

Patient. You have noticed depression symptoms which started to make your life harder. Name some of them and explain the doctor how your daily life suffers from them. At the end of the appointment, schedule another one with the same doctor. You may refer to the following depression symptoms:

- a low mood
- loss of interest in previously enjoyable things
- changes in appetite
- feeling worthless or excessively guilty
- sleeping either too much or too little
- poor concentration
- restlessness or slowness
- loss of energy

Card 2

Psychiatrist. You need to help your new patient who seems to be struggling with depression. Try to learn more on why the patient thinks it is a recurring problem, encourage the patient to tell you more and agree to schedule a new session. Remember the following:

- You shouldn’t belittle the patients’ problems.
- Don’t try to compare the patients’ struggles with yours.
- Stay positive and encouraging.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The use of educational videos from the TED-Ed platform helps both to achieve subject and personal learning outcomes of EFL in school and university. The proposed technology allows the use of TED-Ed video materials with minimal time spent on teacher training and classroom work and proved to be an effective tool to develop communicative competence in Bachelor Students at Moscow City University.

REFERENCES


[7] K.S. Krichevskaya, “Pragmatic materials acquainting students with the culture and habitat of the inhabitants of the country of the language being studied”, Foreign languages at school. no. 1. p. 47, 1996.