

МЕТОДИКА НАВЧАННЯ ІНОЗЕМНИХ МОВ У НЕЛІНГВІСТИЧНИХ ЗАКЛАДАХ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ

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STUDENTS WORKSHOPS: ONE OF THE MOST CHALLENGING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING TASKS IN COURSES OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AT TERTIARY SCHOOLS

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Students workshops: one of the most challenging experiential learning tasks in courses of English as a foreign language at tertiary schools

Abstract. The article discusses students' workshops as one of the innovative and most effective, though, at the same time, one of the most challenging and difficult, forms of experiential learning activities in courses of English taught at higher education institutions. The definition of such workshops is given and they are shown to be one of the highest forms of peer-teaching. The level of initial students' command of English is determined for starting to use workshops as a classroom activity and this level is set at B1+; examples of workshops are also given as well as their three principal advantages: enhancement of students' learning motivation, their learning autonomy, and learning outcomes.

Key words: students' workshops, peer-teaching, experiential learning activities, learning outcomes, positive learning motivation, learning autonomy.

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Студентські воркшопи: одне з найбільш проблемних експерієнційних навчальних завдань у вишівських курсах англійської мови

Анотація. Вступ. Експерієнційні види навчальної діяльності вже були описані і детально обговорені у численних публікаціях першого автора цієї статті. Проте існує ще один вид експерієнційної навчальної діяльності, який лише нещодавно з'явився на царині викладання іноземних мов і ще не був адекватно і повно проаналізований у спеціальній літературі, яка розглядає питання, що стосуються цієї царини. Ця навчальна діяльність – *студентські воркшопи* цільовою мовою, які складають проблематику нашої статті. **Мета.** Розробити теоретичне обґрунтування і практичну методику для впровадження студентських воркшопів англійською мовою як постійну частину їх університетського курсу цієї мови. **Методи.** Проведення огляду досліджень, що стосуються обраної теми і проблематики статті, та аналіз власного практичного досвіду авторів у цій галузі з метою кращого і більш ефективного впровадження студентських воркшопів у курси англійської мови у вищій школі. **Результати.** Дослідження показало, що студентські воркшопи можна визначити як специфічну і високопроблемну форму виконання тими, хто навчається, функцій викладача, коли один або декілька студентів організують та проводять якісь екстралінгвістичні види діяльності своїх одногрупників, причому проводять їх цільовою мовою, так що воркшопи імпліцитно стають орієнтованими на вивчення певної іноземної мови. Така навчальна діяльність прийнятна для студентів, які перебувають на вихідному рівні володіння англійською мовою не нижче, ніж B1+, і вона має три найважливіших переваги над всіма іншими формами експерієнційної навчальної діяльності та діяльності, у якій той, хто навчається, виконує функції викладача: 1) вони підвищують навчальну мотивацію як того (тих), хто організує(ють) воркшоп, так і тих, хто беруть у ньому участь, і підвищення мотивації є вищим, ніж в інших формах експерієнційної навчальної діяльності та діяльності, у якій той,

хто навчається, виконує функції викладача; 2) те ж саме стосується рівня навчальної автономії, яка має тенденцію перетворитися на навчальну незалежність; 3) як і всі форми навчальної діяльності, в яких студент виступає у функції викладача, студентські воркшопи мають тенденцію доводити результати навчання до можливого максимуму, але в них ця тенденція підсилюється завдяки двом названим вище факторам. **Висновки.** Все викладене робить доцільним якомога ширше використовувати студентські воркшопи в курсах англійської мови у вищій школі. Проте потрібно ще й експериментальне дослідження, щоб отримати кількісні показники їх ефективності в тому, що стосується результативності навчання. **Ключові слова:** студентські воркшопи, студент у функції викладача, експериментальна навчальна діяльність, результати навчання, позитивна навчальна мотивація, навчальна автономія.

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Студенческие воркшопы: одно из наиболее проблемных экспериментальных учебных заданий в вузовских курсах английского языка

Аннотация. В статье обсуждаются студенческие воркшопы как одна из самых инновационных и самых эффективных, хотя и одна из самых проблемных и сложных, форм экспериментальной учебной деятельности в курсах английского языка для высших учебных заведений. Приводится определение таких воркшопов и они позиционируются как одна из высших форм работы студента в аудитории, когда он выполняет функции преподавателя. Определяется уровень исходной подготовки студентов по английскому языку, начиная с которого можно использовать воркшопы в учебном процессе (B1+), приводятся примеры таких воркшопов и три их основных преимущества: повышение положительной учебной мотивации обучаемых, их учебной автономии и результативности обучения.

Ключевые слова: студенческие воркшопы, студент в функции преподавателя, экспериментальная учебная деятельность, результаты обучения, положительная учебная мотивация, учебная автономия.

Introduction (problem statement). In a number of preceding publications by the first author of this article and by some Western authors experiential learning as the basis for implementing the innovative constructivist approach to English language teaching and learning has been thoroughly analyzed and interpreted both theoretically and practically (Тарнопольский та ін., 2011; Jerald & Clark, 1994; Kolb, 1984; Kohonen et al., 2014; Tarnopolsky, 2011). In these works, it has been defined that experiential learning in teaching and learning English as a foreign language is implemented by way of modeling extra-linguistic activities in the classroom and organizing learners' communication in the target language related to those activities. That communication is used as a means for achieving the goals of the extra-linguistic activities being done, and it is in the process of doing such activities and using the target language as a means of achieving their goals that the target language itself is subconsciously acquired (Tarnopolsky, 2012, p. 25). The quoted works also provided the list of learning activities in the language course that can be considered as the experiential ones. They include:

1. Role playing real life situations in the target language;
2. Simulating real life (mostly professional) activities in the target language;
3. Project work (when students do different learning projects using the target language for doing such projects);
4. Brainstorming some problematic issue(s) in the target language;
5. Case studies concerning some problematic issue(s) and done in the target language;
6. Discussions of some problematic issue(s) conducted in the target language;
7. Students' presentations on some real life issue(s) delivered in the target language;
8. Students' search for extra-linguistic information through target language sources (Internet, audio, audio-visual, and printed ones), that search being undertaken for finding some particular information required for doing some learning assignments;
9. Students preparing some written works (essays, summaries, abstracts, short articles, etc.) mostly summarizing the results of their other experiential learning activities (Тарнопольский та ін., 2011; Tarnopolsky, 2012).

The experiential learning activities listed above have been described and discussed in details in our preceding publications, including the ones already quoted in this *Introduction*. However, there is one more experiential learning activity that has only recently been introduced into the realm of foreign language teaching but has not yet been fully and properly analyzed in professional literature related to this realm. This activity is *students' workshops* in the target language which make the subject matter of this article.

The analysis of recent research and publications. A *workshop* in our case is certainly does not mean “a room or building where tools and machines are used for making or repairing things” (Longman exam dictionary, 2006, p.1775). The second meaning of the word listed in dictionaries is much closer to the notion that we are analyzing: “a meeting at which people try to improve their skills by discussing their experiences and doing practical exercises (Longman exam dictionary, 2006, p.1775). Actually, workshops in the just cited second meaning have become spread only in the later part of the 20th century and proved so effective that at scholarly conferences they are now sometimes even more popular than traditional talks/presentations and often attract wider audiences than the latter ones. Such conference workshops are understood as a group discussion or a group practical work on a particular subject which is conducted by a workshop organizer/leader and where participants share their knowledge or experience with the aim of solving some problem or problems under consideration.

Workshops have even entered the field of education where they are usually understood as a short but always intensive teaching/learning programs that focuses on skills in a particular field. Only a limited number of students take part in such a workshop: a small group of 10-15 but not more than 20 people Wikipedia (Training workshop) calls these educational workshops *training workshops* defining them as “... a type of interactive training where participants carry out a number of training activities rather than passively listen to a lecture or presentation.” It is just such training workshops that will be further considered in this article under the name of *workshops* without adding the specifying term “training” though the latter is in fact meant implicitly.

Educational workshops in the given understanding of the term have already been extensively used in teaching quite a number of disciplines in higher education courses. But those are the disciplines of economic, technical, medical, biological, and such like cycles. Workshops have practically never been used in foreign language courses taught at tertiary schools though we believe that in such courses their potential is no lower (or maybe even higher) than in courses on Economics or Technology. However, there is no professional literature on using this learning tool (*meaning workshops in the target language conducted by students themselves, not their teacher*) in foreign language instruction at tertiary educational institutions which makes an obstacle in the way of introducing such workshops into the teaching/learning process. To eliminate that obstacle, in 2017 we started the regular practice of organizing students' workshops in English conducted by themselves in courses on that language at Alfred Nobel University in Dnipro, Ukraine – with the purpose of later sharing our experience in that respect with other language teaching practitioners and scholars involved in English language teaching instruction at higher schools.

The purpose of our study, as is clear from everything said above, was developing the theoretical substantiation and practical procedures for introducing Ukrainian students' workshops in English as a regular feature of their university course in that language.

The results of the study. We have defined tertiary students' workshops in their classes of English as *a specific form of learner's peer-teaching experience [8] in which one or several students organize and guide some meaningful extra-linguistic activities of their group-mates, those activities being done in the target language (in this way, students' workshops implicitly become language-learning oriented)*. Before illustrating this definition with examples and giving some theoretical explanations, the notion of peer-teaching should be interpreted as the central one for conducting students' workshops in English.

In one of our articles (Tarnopolsky, 2017, p. 17) peer-teaching is treated as a specific way of foreign language learning in which students in the language classroom, in turn, play the roles of teachers (under the supervision of their regular teacher) organizing and controlling the language learning activities of their class-mates, helping and monitoring their learning efforts, giving them the required explanations, correcting their mistakes, providing them with new information, etc. The great advantage of peer-teaching activities for language studies becomes evident from the famous *Learning Pyramid* developed by the National Training Laboratories in Bethel, Maine (the USA). It is shown in Fig.1.

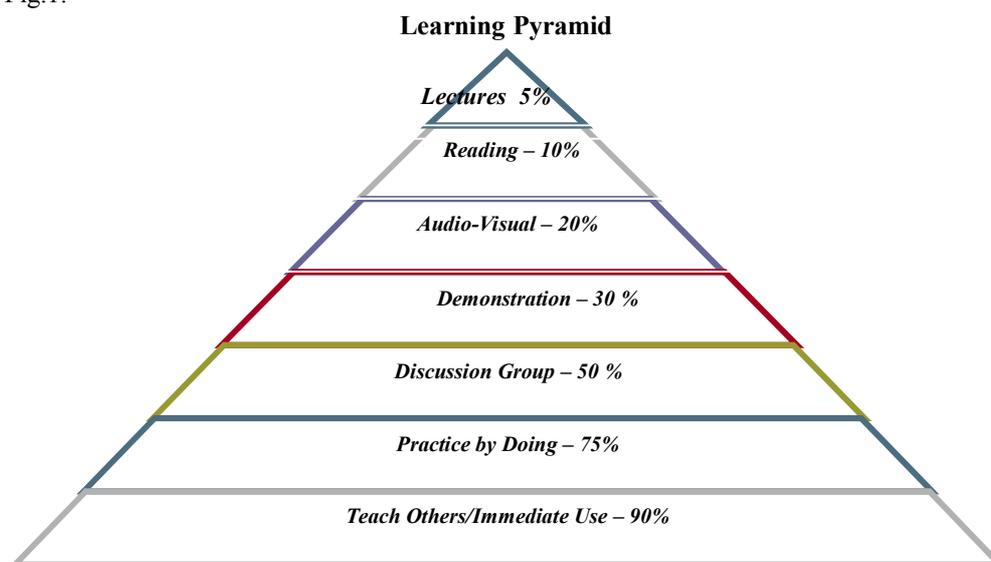


Fig. 1. Average student retention rates (Source: National Training Laboratories. Bethel, Maine, USA; drawn on the basis of the Internet source at [http://images.yandex.ua/yandexsearch?ed=1&text=Pyramid of Learning](http://images.yandex.ua/yandexsearch?ed=1&text=Pyramid%20of%20Learning) as retrieved September 11, 2011)

The *Learning Pyramid* in Fig. 1 clearly demonstrates the greatest advantage of peer-teaching. If a person is teaching another person or several persons, his or her personal retention rate (and, therefore, the acquisition) of the material being studied/taught is the highest possible, making the “student-teacher’s” (peer-teacher’s) learning outcomes also the highest possible. And since, when the peer-teaching approach is introduced, all the students in a group are supposed to be involved in turn in peer-teaching activities, each of them benefits from the opportunities of enhancing his or her learning results to the utmost when he or she conducts his/her peer-teaching sessions. Such enhancement of learning outcomes for peer-teachers may, as our experience shows, even cross the borders of the curriculum requirements because when learners are preparing for their peer-teaching sessions (and those cannot be held without such a preparation), they often find additional, sometimes unknown even to the regular (“real”) teacher, materials and information to interest and motivate their students (usually called “tutees”) making them like and appreciate the peer-teacher’s efforts.

And this brings us to the second greatest advantage of peer-teaching clearly visible to every regular (“real”) teacher using the approach in practice. It is its motivational impact. Peer-teachers become highly motivated because they want to “look” their best (intellectually, socially, in what concerns their abilities to interest and attract other people, etc.) in the eyes of the other people – their group-mates. Besides, they, as our experience also shows, usually start to compete, often unconsciously,

with other peer-teachers who gave their sessions before the current one or are planned to give them after it. This competition demonstrates the eagerness to stand out, to be a better peer-teacher than all the others, thus gaining especial prominence in the group and winning greater regular (“real”) teacher’s respect than the other peer-teachers.

The learning motivation enhancement is characteristic not only of those students who teach their fellow students at any given moment of the teaching/learning process but also the tutees who are being taught. Being taught by your peer encourages you to be at your best not “to look stupid in his/her eyes” – the attitude considerably increasing the learning efforts and the one which rarely emerges when you are taught by a regular teacher in front of whom it usually does not seem stupid or shameful not to do something right.

These advantages of peer-teaching enhancing students’ learning motivation and outcomes seem to be especially pronounced in such a form of peer-teaching as students’ workshops. The reason is the fact that in a properly organized workshop the topic *absolutely must* be interesting and attractive to all the students in the group, thus enhancing their motivation much more than in the case when the subject matter of peer teaching is doing some training exercises, reading and discussing a text from the coursebook of English, or talking on the topic suggested by the teacher or the authors of the coursebook. Not infrequently such exercises, a text or a topic *must* be dealt with and discussed in the teaching/learning process in view of the curriculum requirements, however, they do not interest students very much. But in students’ workshops the appeal of each of them to learners’ interests is an indispensable condition because, if there is no such appeal, the workshop will not have any positive impact at all.

This characteristic of all students’ workshops requiring them to be interesting and attractive to all participants may be illustrated by two examples of workshops organized by our second and third year students majoring in Philology at Alfred Nobel University in Dnipro, Ukraine.

The first example is the workshop organized and held by one of our second year students (philological specialization: “Translation from and into English”). It was devoted to trends and genres in modern music listened to and enjoyed by young people. The workshop started with a 5-minute presentation by the organizer who introduced such most important and popular trends and genres (rock, heavy metal, rap, and some others). After that, he played musical extracts from different genres and asked the participants to recognize them and say which genre of music was played in every particular case. Then, the organizer divided the students into sub-groups: those for whom rock or heavy metal or rap or any other genre of modern music was the favorite one. Every sub-group was given a short time for preparing and delivering a 3-minute presentation on their favorite genre explaining to the other students why they preferred it to all the others. Presenters were requested to answer questions of the students from the other sub-groups. The presentations were followed by the whole-group discussion, each sub-group striving to prove the advantages of their music taste. Finally, the organizer summarized all the formulated ideas and opinions and drew some conclusions. The workshop took the time of one entire English class (two academic hours of forty minutes each).

The second example is the workshop organized by two of our third year students (philological specialization: “Applied Linguistics” – on the basis of English). The topic of the workshop was “Psychological personality tests.” It was started with a ten-minute organizers’ talk who were speaking (with giving examples in their PowerPoint presentation) of personality tests often published in popular magazines, those tests that many people enjoy completing to satisfy their natural aspiration to know their own personalities better. After the talk, the participants were given three personality tests from popular magazines that they were expected to complete. On completion, everyone was requested to comment on his or her own results: whether those results coincided with their own opinions of themselves, were close to those opinions or, on the contrary, were very different. The other students from the group were also asked to comment on the testing results of every individual student: whether

those results matched the idea concerning the personality of that student that the other group members had formed or whether they were in conflict with that idea. As the end-piece, a whole-group discussion was organized with learners debating and making conclusions whether psychological personality tests from popular magazines could be trusted and whether it was worthwhile to try and complete them or it was nothing better than a way of “killing time.” The workshop also took two academic hours, and such time allocations are characteristic of practically all the students’ workshops in our experience,

Holding such students’ workshops has been practiced by us for more than two years already – since 2017. This practice is organized on a regular basis, with one workshop held every two or three weeks in every academic group of students. As to the results of this practice, its effectiveness in comparison with other forms of peer teaching or other experiential learning activities in general has not been checked in any kind of experimental study as yet (though such a study is being planned for the future). However, some conclusions can already be drawn from observing the students’ behaviors when workshops are being held.

First of all, those behaviors demonstrate a very high degree of learners’ interest and motivation. Not only the workshops organizers but all the participants are always very active and enthusiastic and there is never any need for the regular teacher to stimulate their communication in English. Students never complain about the length of the workshops but, on the contrary, resist the regular teacher’s attempts to reduce their duration when that teacher deems it to be expedient. All these facts are doubtless indicators of a very high students’ positive motivation level. Second, there are a number of other facts certifying to the much better learners’ retention of everything they learn in the course of a workshop, especially new vocabulary that seems to be remembered almost effortlessly (involuntary retention) and does not seem to be easily forgotten. Certainly the above statements need to be thoroughly verified in an experimental study but until it is completed, the assertion about the very positive results of introducing students’ workshops into the teaching/learning process in classes of English at tertiary schools seems to be fully justified.

However, it should be emphasized that such positive outcomes totally depend on the proper organization of students’ workshops by the regular teacher. We have not arrived at formulating all the requirements to such a proper organization at once but only after a period of regularly practicing the workshops in the English teaching/learning classroom environment. The full list of those requirements is given below summarizing our practical experience in the area under discussion. Those requirements are:

1. Students’ workshops can be started only after learners gain a certain, and sufficiently high, level in their command of English – not lower than B1+, – being on the way to B2 level. Therefore, at higher linguistic schools where students major in English workshops may be started not earlier than the second semester in the first year of study or even, sometimes, the second year. It is only in such conditions that we practiced our workshops but the question remains whether they can be practiced at non-linguistic higher schools. We believe that the answer to this question is positive when the non-linguistic students attain the level of command of English indicated above. But, naturally, the convincing answer can be obtained only after a special study.

2. Before workshops are practically introduced into the teaching/learning process students should be thoroughly explained and fully made aware of what these workshops are and what their difference from students’ presentations is (not simply the talk of the presenter(s) but making other learners talk, discuss, debate, argue in the target language, etc.).

3. A definite workshop structure should be recommended to students. We have chosen as the optimal one the structure reflected in the samples given above: 1) a very short (not longer than 10 minutes) talk on the topic given by the workshop organizer(s) which is always accompanied by illustrations in the form of PowerPoint presentations, pieces of music, some realia, etc.; 2) challenging tasks given by the organizer(s) to the students-participants in the workshops requiring them to perform

some creative experiential learning activities, such as brainstorming, case studies, discussions, delivering short presentations, reading for finding persuasive arguments to support one's ideas, writing some creative pieces like abstracts, opinion statements, etc.); 3) workshop organizer(s)'s concluding remarks with drawing some conclusions.

4. It is advisable that the topic of every workshop is chosen totally independently by the student(s)-organizer(s) and remains unknown both to the students participating in it and the regular teacher until the workshop actually starts. First, it greatly enhances the participants' motivation (the element of surprise). Second, it should be taken into account that students' workshops belong to learning activities most conducive to *developing learning autonomy* – which is one of the most important requirements to modern language teaching. Making the topic of this or that workshop a surprise even for the regular teacher raises this learning autonomy even to the level of learning independence, which is all the more beneficial for students' language self-education.

5. However, students' choosing their workshop topics totally independently of the regular teacher and without interference from him/her is not without its risks. It is not so much the risk of some student's choice of the topic for his or her workshop that is totally inappropriate, offensive, or, in general, politically incorrect and impermissible in the English classroom. In all our two-year-long experience nothing like this has ever happened and if it does, the regular teacher always has an option of canceling that particular workshop. The actual problem is of a totally different nature. Sometimes, though it is quite rare, a student may choose a topic for the workshop which is so little known to the other students in the group that they cannot efficiently and adequately participate in completing the tasks suggested by the workshop organizer(s). Just this happened once in our experience when a second year student had chosen as her workshop topic "King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table." So, such a risk is quite real, although it is worth taking – in view of all the benefits of the enhanced learning motivation and autonomy. But because of such a risk, students who organize the workshops should be repeatedly warned that for a workshop to be successful, participants in it must have a more or less clear preliminary idea of its topic and some more or less basic preliminary knowledge of the subject matter to be able to complete the suggested tasks adequately.

6. Just for the sake of enhancing learning motivation and autonomy, it is not advisable to plan for the class in which the workshop is held some other learning activities apart from it because, as our experience has shown, students are reluctant to switch, especially if such switching requires cutting short the time allocated for the workshop. On the other hand, workshop organizer(s) should be repeatedly warned that one class of English (two academic hours) is their absolute time limit because otherwise, as our experience has also demonstrated, students may be willing to prolong the workshop to the following class to the detriment of other planned learning activities.

7. Finally, workshops are ordinarily organized by one student for each workshop. But it is quite admissible to have two workshop organizers, especially at the early stages of using this learning activity. It makes the work not only easier and often more interesting for students-organizers but also frequently provides for the better quality of the workshops. In general, it is advisable to let students themselves decide whether they prepare their workshops totally individually or with a partner (adding more than one partner is unacceptable since it usually disorganizes the workshop).

If all the conditions above are strictly observed, the students' workshops usually become a very useful, instructive, interesting, and enjoyable experience for all the learners in a group.

Conclusion and prospects for further research. This article analyzes an innovative form of experiential learning activity for students learning English at tertiary schools. This activity is designed for learners who are on the level not lower than B1+ in their command of English and is called *students' workshops*. They are a specific form of learner's peer-teaching experience in which one or several students organize and guide some meaningful extra-linguistic activities of their group-mates, those activities being done in the target language. Students' workshops are probably one

of the most challenging forms of experiential learning activities for students, as well as one of the most challenging and complicated forms of peer-teaching. At the same time, they have three very important advantages over all the other forms both of experiential learning activities and of peer-teaching:

1. As our experience has shown, they raise the positive learning motivation of both the workshop-organizer(s) and the students participating in them, and such a motivation enhancement is higher than for other experiential learning activities and other forms of peer-teaching;

2. The same concerns the level of learning autonomy which has a tendency to being transformed into learning independence;

3. As all the forms of peer-teaching, students' workshops tend to bring the learning outcomes to their possible maximum but in these workshops such a trend becomes more reinforced due to the two factors above.

All this makes those workshops a kind of crowning learning activity both in the framework of experiential learning and peer teaching. This emphasizes the desirability of using such an activity as broadly as possible and whenever and wherever possible in courses of English at higher educational institutions.

The prospects of further research in the direction discussed in this article primarily lie in organizing and conducting an experimental study for checking the actual effectiveness of students' workshops to express such effectiveness in figures of mathematically measured learning outcomes in comparison with other learning activities. They also lie in developing other forms of students' workshops in addition to the form suggested in this paper.

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