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Формирование функциональной грамотности на уроках английского языка

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Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются теоретические аспекты функциональной грамотности, освещаются отдельные аспекты содержательной трансформации категории грамотности в условиях XXI в. и описываются некоторые приемы, с помощью которых формируется функциональная грамотность школьников на уроках английского языка.

Ключевые слова: функциональная грамотность, компетенции, английский язык, основная школа, урочная деятельность.

Methodical article

Developing functional literacy in EFL classroom

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Abstract. The current paper discusses some theoretical aspects of functional literacy. The article highlights certain aspects of literacy transformation in the context of the 21st century. The paper describes functional literacy in methodological aspects and provides some ways of developing functional literacy in EFL classroom.

Keywords: functional literacy, competences, English, secondary school, lesson activities.

Modern world has been experiencing dramatic transformations regarding science, technology, medicine, education, etc. In the 21st century context, with its global shift from an industrial economy to a knowledge economy, globalization, automation and digitalization of almost every sphere of modern life, young people face a range of challenges emerging – unemployment, job insecurity, social insecurity, issues related to their body image, health issues, poor educational attainment, unrealistic expectations, to name just a few. Today's market fails to guarantee life-long stability even to the most highly educated graduates. As Dr. Wagner, Harvard's educational expert, claims, modern schoolchildren are facing a "global achievement gap" [17], which is the gap between what schools are teaching and the skills young people need to learn to increase their chances of greater social stability, regular employment, productivity and innovation while on the job, life security. Cognitive skills are not enough to gain success in vocational, educational and social activities – learners should acquire core competencies that are a part of the

phenomenon of functional literacy. Thus, developing functional literacy skills has to accompany teaching in every classroom.

The term 'functional literacy' has been defined variously in different countries at different times. Prior to 1950s functional literacy had been viewed as an ability to read and write in a native language [4]. In 1958, UNESCO suggested recommendations that stated that only those residents who are able to read and understand the meaning and write a brief narration on their daily life could be considered literate. The term 'functional literacy' acquired a new connotation: the ability to understand written texts and write about one's personal life [14]. Along with this, literacy was seen as one of the crucial indicators of a country's social prosperity as part of its economic development.

Later on, in the 1960s USESCO employed a new implication to the term. Functional literacy was viewed as "the process and content of learning to read and write to the preparation for work and vocational training, as well as a means of increasing the productivity of the individual" [15, p. 23].

In the 1970s, the US National Reading Center redefined the term: "a person is functionally literate when they their reading and writing skills permit them to go about their daily activities successfully on the job or to move about society normally with comprehension of the expressions and messages they encounter" [6].

Later, in order to measure functional literacy worldwide, several international organizations started their campaigns in over 60 countries. Among aforementioned organizations were International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievements (IEA), Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA assessed the level of functional literacy of teenagers aged 15 by measuring skills in three areas: reading, mathematics and natural science [5].

Achievements in the 1990s and early 2000s suggested that functional illiteracy must be more thoroughly understood and assessed from a theoretical, empirical, and pragmatic perspectives [16]. This shift signalized the split in the concept of literacy: basic literacy and functional literacy. Thus, since that time functional literacy focuses on students' cognitive and, most importantly, practical skills – how well they could apply problem solving skills to various tasks based on diversified information from different areas of human thought, represented in linear and non-linear texts.

As technology permeated every aspect of daily life and demanded business and education to evolve accordingly, functional literacy had to be redefined. As S. A. Tangyan claimed, life in the modern society would be incessantly accompanied by a rapid change of technology, it would be impossible to provide young people with the knowledge and practical skills that would remain topical for a sustained period of time [12]. Neither a level of functional literacy, nor economy of the country are able to guarantee the lifelong occupation of a person since the knowledge and education that they possess might become outdated due to technological advancement. However, it would absolutely be possible to instruct people to adapt to changes, train their digital skills and develop their information literacy in order to respond quickly to the challenges of the post-industrial society [11].

Today functional literacy is understood as the ability of a person to enter into a relationship with the changing environment, adapt to it and function within it with a set of life skills [5]. Researchers still discuss the size, the content and the features of this set of life skills, e.g. if it should be age- or job-specific, as well as where and when it should be taught [1].

According to S. Kagan, the components, or elements, of functional literacy are

divided into four core groups and those groups comprise life skills that are interconnected and relate to different spheres of human activity:

1) thinking skills refer to the mental processes of an individual;

2) working skills (employability skills, job-related skills) are those skills that are valued and required at a workplace;

3) learning skills assist an individual in acquiring new knowledge or experience, the skills that an individual needs for effective learning throughout life;

4) social skills correspond to competences facilitating interaction and communication with others where social rules and relations are created, communicated, and changed in verbal and nonverbal ways [8].

In Kazakhstan functional literacy is identified using the four-dimensional learning model: Cognitive Dimension (thinking skills), Instrumental Dimension (performing skills), Individual Dimension (personal skills), Social Dimension (soft skills). Functional literacy approach is at the core of modernized education and is employed in school curricula [13].

Russian scholars and educators consider the concept of functional literacy within the framework of a competence-based approach. According to this approach, there has been the paradigm shift in the system of Russian education from learning for life to lifelong learning. Researchers define seven groups of core competences: global value competences, cross-cultural competences, cognitive and educational competences, informational competences, social and employment competences, communicative competences and personal competences [10]. One can say that the structural parts of functional literacy can be viewed in terms of the core components of competences. Thus, educational-cognitive competences require functional literacy in the following core aspects: measuring skills, analytical skills, problem-solving skills and critical thinking skills.

Though most secondary schools in Russia are not provided with specific programs aimed at functional literacy skills acquisition, there are certain schools that have employed functional literacy approach, integrating development of learners' financial, digital and informational literacies in the general curriculum, e.g. in Kaliningrad region. Regardless of the problems, educators see its positive impact [9].

According to the Federal State Educational Standards, a competence-based approach to teaching should be employed in foreign language instruction [3]. The phenomenon of foreign language communicative competence was introduced within the competence-based education (CBE) approach that was implemented in the 70s in the USA. Western researchers define communicative competence as a learner's ability to use language and communicative strategies to communicate successfully [2].

D. Hymes views the structure of communicative competence as a set of four components: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence. Linguistic competence comprises the knowledge of phonetics, grammar and vocabulary of a particular language in their oral and written representations. Sociolinguistic competence is the knowledge of the culture of the language studied, i.e. learners' ability to give appropriate responses, knowing taboos and rules of another culture as well as being politically correct. Discourse competence deals with organizing words, phrases and sentences in order to create oral utterances or written texts. Strategic competence refers to learners' ability to avoid communication breakdowns and deal with those if they do occur [7].

The Russian Federal State Educational Standard names six core sub-competences

within foreign language communicative competence: linguistic, speech, sociocultural, compensatory, learning and cognitive competences [3]. Thus, linguistic competence is based on the rules and principles that constitute a language that a learner should be able to apply. Speech competence implies the knowledge of rules of everyday communication and implementation of this knowledge in real-life situations. Sociocultural competence involves the ability to function adequately in the global communicative network. Compensatory competence correlates with the strategic competence and lies in the ability to overcome language difficulties in everyday communication. Educational and cognitive competences imply learning and informational skills, providing learners with ways and strategies of self-education that contribute to their lifelong learning.

We suggest that training programs in foreign language communicative competence should be designed in accordance with functional literacy. It is of vital importance to create a certain environment in EFL classrooms that model real-life situations and raise learners' cultural awareness, develop their cognitive and learning skills, as well their personal and social skills, contribute to learners' successful functioning in everyday life and provide them with employment skills for the future.

In this sense, functional literacy-based tasks can become a distinguished tool for the development of foreign language communicative competence as they are tightly bound to using realia and authentic linear and non-linear texts produced by the English-speaking world. Functional literacy-based tasks are learner-centered and are aimed at the development of their learning skills as well as their life skills, without focusing on abstract language tasks or some information that learners cannot relate to.

Activities based on functional literacy agree with a functional approach to EFL teaching and learning, communicative approach, task-based approach, problem-solving approach, case-study approach and interdisciplinary approach as the skills developed are transferable and can be applied not only in other disciplines taught at school but in life situations outside classroom.

Thus, the following principles should be taken into account while designing tasks and activities for EFL classroom that are aimed at developing learners' foreign language communicative competence and functional literacy in the context of the 21st century.

The tasks and activities should:

1) be based on authentic, up-to-date materials;

2) be from real-life contexts to give learning a purpose;

3) correspond to learners' interests, their age, their level of language proficiency and be applicable to real-life situations;

4) involve a critical thinking approach to decision-making and problem-solving;

5) be aimed at forming transferable skills that are socially- and professionally-oriented;

6) engage students in exploring and encourage them to learn more.

Functional grammar should be taught through guided discovery, which implies providing learners with an example of the target language in a real-life context. This way learners understand what words and structures help them express meanings and achieve their communicative goals in real life situations, which trains their grammar, communicative, problem-solving and critical thinking skills and encourages learner autonomy. Lexical approach to grammar and vocabulary teaching which does away with the grammar vs vocabulary dichotomy and focuses on grammar in chunks and vocabulary in collocations and fixed phrases taken from real life English rather than abstract grammar structures and isolated words also helps learners

develop their language proficiency through functional literacy.

Through teaching vocabulary in content-rich contexts learners' skills for life can be enhanced. For instance, while studying target vocabulary for the topic 'Feelings and Emotions' students learn to identify their feelings, predict possible reactions of other people and understand how their reactions influence others, discover cultural aspects and learn how to avoid faux pas, which contributes to the development of learners' soft skills and teachers them to respect diversity. Time management life skills can be developed while studying 'Daily Routine', financial literacy can be enhanced while covering the topic 'Money' and so on.

A wide range of functional literacy skills and cultural awareness can be acquired through reading content- and culture-rich authentic texts, both linear and non-linear (leaflets, graphs, tables, tickets, maps, etc.) from various life spheres (legal documents, medical forms, memes, billboards, etc.). By learning to obtain information from 'real-world' materials students become more familiar with the language and cultural diversity.

Listening activities contribute to the development of a wide range of life skills. Cultural awareness assists students in everyday communication when it comes to functioning within a foreign language environment as students may face various challenges, be it cultural diversity – accents, native and non-native, or discourse diversity – students could encounter airport announcements or small talk in the shop. Obviously, the more students are familiar with the 'real-world' language in their EFL classroom, the more chances for successful real-life communication they have. Flexibility and adaptability among soft skills could be enhanced alongside listening skills. Social skills are developed through learning to listen actively, so that learners could pay attention to speakers'

voices and tone, trying to understand their mood, intention, predict their reactions and guess responses. Learners are well trained in their EFL classroom in different types of reading and listening, e.g. reading / listening for gist, reading / listening for specific information, etc. – which in themselves are life skills as they enhance learners' informational literacy.

Various 21-century functional literacy skills can be boosted alongside writing skills, ranging from filling different legal documents and forms to budgeting money using budget planners or setting diet and nutritional goals with calorie calculators, weekly meal plans, grocery lists and more.

Speaking activities can really contribute to life skills development as well as life skills can assist in speaking a foreign language. It is essential to nurture students' abilities to make choices and decisions in their speaking.

The way assessment is delivered is no less important for developing learners' functional literacy in EFL classroom. Students are more motivated and engaged when they learn how to assess themselves and their peers according to clear criteria for what defines good performance, get detailed, actionable feedback from their teacher. Formative assessment, such as quizzes, self-reflection journals, in-class discussions, social media posts, surveys, clicker questions, teamwork with certain roles assigned, etc., promotes learners' positive motivational beliefs, boosts their self-esteem and supports deeper learning.

With the advent of big data, modern learners are expected to have a set of skills needed to live, work, and thrive in a digital society, i.e. digital literacy, which implies IT proficiency, data literacy, critical thinking and social engagement. Flipped classroom, blended learning, online microteaching, using MOOC platforms and virtual classrooms will integrate digital learning into EFL classroom.

EFL education in the context of the 21st century should foster learner autonomy,

i.e. provide learners with the tools and opportunities they need to find their own path, help them critically reflect on their language learning behavior and strategies used, equip learners to perform more efficiently in a rapidly changing world. Learner autonomy is a core value of lifelong learning. Autonomous learners are able to take responsibility for their own learning, frame a guiding purpose and identify actions to achieve a goal. They are motivated to pursuit knowledge throughout their life for personal and professional growth, which contributes to active social interaction, professional collaboration and economic prosperity.

Thus, teaching EFL through functional literacy facilitates language learning in real-life content- and culture-rich contexts. Skill-based language teaching meets national educational standards and contributes to the development of functional literacy and foreign language communicative competence, as they are interrelated. Functional literacy is in a way a learning compass that helps learners navigate their lives for successful functioning in the changing world.

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