Techniques of Active Learning for Productive Skills

1. **Pazilova Barchinoy Toxirjon qizi**

2. **S. O. Solijanov**

[1] Andijan state university, second-year student

[2] docent Andijan state university

Abstract: The article discusses the problems of teaching English and the importance of active learning methods for productive skills. It gives information about some techniques of active learning methods.

Keywords: techniques, productive skills, active learning, inquiry learning, problem-based learning, cooperative learning, role plays and case studies.

There are a number of ways or techniques to use active learning in each subject area in the day-to-day classroom situation. There are different names for Active learning methods.

Some call them strategies or techniques, while others refer to them as approaches or methods. Citing other critics, Michel, Cater and Varela, summarize that there are many forms of active learning practices such as pausing for some time during lecture, using short writing exercise in class, using quizzes, and self-assessment exercises, doing laboratory experiments, involving in field trips, applying debates, games, role plays, and group discussions in the classroom session. In relation to productive skills, the techniques could be grouped in terms of speaking skills and writing skills.

In one study exploring the implementation of constructivist foreign language methodology, Boufoy-Bastick reported that active learning was successfully implemented to teach French as a foreign language. Some of the common features of this classroom are the following; the students were made to be autonomous to choose what to learn, how to learn and when to learn; moreover, they were expected to identify their learning style, to use their own language learning strategies and to study the language independently. They were made to be aware of the culture (enculturation) of the language they learn. The teacher designed contextualized learning activities that range from simple rote-learning games to more complex need-driven communication tasks. For instance, some of the tasks were voting in France, argument against nuclear weapons, and becoming

investigative journalist for a problem observed.

Using this method, all the four language skills were taught in an integrated manner. This was identified as a different approach from that of traditional foreign language teaching, which was criticized for its focus on objective aspects of the language knowledge, testing how much the students recall the linguistic content knowledge taught and how they can apply it to similar situations.

However, if the teachers feel that strict control and transmission of knowledge is essential feature in their classroom, they will ask close-ended question since it is easy to pose and give feedback for their students, and they do not apply active learning strategies effectively. Among the varieties of

techniques that can be used by classroom teachers, the most researched and frequently recommended ones are summarized in this review.

Inquiry Learning. The teaching and learning process in a constructivist classroom is based on solving problems; learners ask questions, research a topic, and use various approaches and resources to reach conclusions. This approach can be applied in teaching writing skills as students generate ideas to write the composition in the process approach to writing. Students go through the process and write their drafts, and then they revise their drafts by adding more ideas and asking more questions to generate.

Problem-Based Learning. As a form of constructivist learning, language educators emphasize the role of project-based learning in the EFL instruction. This method has got recognition by many researchers for developing deep understanding, recognizing the relationship among concepts, developing the ability for meta-cognitive and reasoning strategies, and improving teamwork skills, and class attendance.

Ke also lists that it is a student-centred approach in which teachers play a supportive role, students help each other, leads to authentic integration of skills and content knowledge from various sources, which relates real-life tasks, it is motivating, empowering and challenging for the students, and it improves learners' confidence, self-esteem and autonomy. In short, this approach is said to improve students' language skill and cognitive abilities.

Cooperative Learning. This method of learning is helpful to understand a lesson better and improve communication skills of students; Students learn a lesson better when they try to teach their friends. The students may work inside or out of classroom with their group members and they are responsible for their share in the assignment. They help each other in working on the given project or assignment.

In cooperative learning, students work with group members outside the classroom and in class discussion. Here, the students help each other, share responsibility for their individual and group's task, have social skill for their interaction, get feedback. This helps students to maximize their learning within the group's interaction. Felder and Brent say that there are a lot of things that teachers can use in their classrooms and what they can ask students to do in class is limited only by their imagination. There are many techniques that students can engage both individually and in groups. For example, case studies, problem-based learning, inquiry learning, and discovery learning are instructional ways in which students work actively, taking significant responsibility for their own learning.

Some scholars explained that the following are some problems of cooperative learning technique that teachers should be aware of: some students do all activities while others are idle, it could be time consuming without proper procedure, less skilful students are ignored by active students, active students feel they wasted time working with less skilful students, and learning part of a task specialization while they do not know a lot about the other part done by their friends.

Role Plays and Case Studies. Role plays and simulations make students take part seriously in the given task. In that way, students practice more and work hard to achieve the learning objectives. Based on the real world stories or events, students are presented with decision making, analysis or conclusion. The ambiguity of events in the learning experiences and the discussions that follow to make things clear help students to develop many learning strategies such as reasoning and arguments. These are very important elements in the development of critical thinking skills.

Jigsaw. As a form of cooperative learning, jigsaw is important to the teaching and learning process in a language classroom. Mengduo and Xiaoling explain that jigsaw encourages the use of social skill, avoids competitions among students, raises individual and group responsibility for learning, and increases interaction of group members to accomplish the given tasks.

Thus, in relation to the productive skills, like the other language skills, students get the chance to talk a lot with friends and transfer their ideas in writing using English language.

In their study involving EFL college students, Mengduo and Xiaoling concluded that jigsaw increased students' participation, interest and focuses on the language use to achieve learning tasks in the EFL classroom.

Simulations and Games. Here students are given a role play to take part in the simulated situations. In such a case, students engage actively in producing ideas and reflecting to their friends. They become happy to participate. These are important to use in speaking and writing activities. For instance, students can be given crossword puzzle for vocabulary learning, and they can also play roles in simulations of a certain social inequality. This could be used in developing activities for teaching speaking and writing skills.

Panel Discussions. Students could be required to talk on a controversial or thought-provoking topic to their group members turn by turn for a few minutes. This type of task makes students to read a lot and prepare organized research papers. After the individual presentation on the given topic, students get chance to reflect their opinion. This helps them to reflect their ideas before group members and in front of the whole classroom students. Moreover, it helps them to develop self-confidence to use their English for a meaningful purpose. It is not just a simple drilling to practice language.

Poster Sessions. Students are given a task in groups and when they complete the task they present it in a poster display (Haddad, 2006: 40). This is also good for the groups to learn from each other in handling given tasks. They can compare and contrast their posters so that they will be motivated to work hard for next round activities. Moreover, the posters can be oral explanations and prompts for some writing activities. What matters is the creativity of the classroom teacher to integrate these types of activities with the daily lesson.

Debate. This is a type of task in which students take sides either in favor of or against the motion. Students learn formal arguments for a variety of occasions. This technique is good for EFL learners to talk on a subject of their interest. This helps them to develop fluency and confidence when they speak before a group of people.

In conclusion, active learning methods are one of the important aspect for improving not only productive skills but also receptive skills. Active learning allows students to learn in the classroom with the help of the instructor and other students, rather than on their own. Therefore, a process of active learning takes place in which learners can reach their potentials by the assistance of a peer or teachers. It covers all the practical learning activities and teaching methods in which students are able to think about their learning and to use their own knowledge to solve problems.

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