

# The Project Method as Practice of Study Activation

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Relevance of the problem stated in the article is determined by new teaching approach uniting the traditional teaching experience with that of the modern information technologies, all being merged into a new course of the computer lingua-didactics (the international term of which is “Computer Assisted Language Learning” (CALL) or “Computer Aided Language Instruction” (CALI)) within teaching methodology. The article aims to completely describe and feature the project method at the foreign language lessons. The leading methods are analysis of scientific works, empirical data and modelling method. The author designates the project method as being subdivided into the following categories: the maxi-project, the mini-project, the web quest, the presentation, the video shooting. The method engagement implies the students’ independent work on the subject during a specified time. The method is conjectured to embrace a large variety of problem, investigatory and searching effect-oriented procedures. The author states that this language study approach enables transformation of foreign language lessons into the research club-house, where challenging and practically significant lingua-cultural problems are being solved. The project method foundation consists of study activation techniques.

*Keywords:* computer technology, foreign language study, project method, maxi-project, mini-project, web quest, presentation, video shooting

## INTRODUCTION

### The relevance of the study

The Internet web information resources integration into the educational process contributes into practical didactic problem neat solution. Amongst the problems are: based on authentic sound internet texts audition skills development; based on net material problem discussion monologue and dialogue skills improvement; completion of the active and passive vocabulary with modern foreign language

lexicon which reflects a certain period of the national cultural evolution, the community’s social and political organization; cultural education involving speech etiquette, cultural and traditional peculiarities introduction of the target language

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country.

“The computer allows entire elimination of a cause towards negative educational approach - that is elimination of educational failure, determined by the study material misunderstanding or by lack of knowledge...The student can use different reference books, dictionaries, called onto the screen by just a click. Working with computer the

student is offered the opportunity of the task bring to a close with the help of all the necessary tools.” (Kireeva, 2010)

All these furthers a positive educational approach formation.

The key target of the project method is not different tasks fulfillment, but active mental strain emphasis, which requires a grasp of a certain volume of language tools.

At the same time the students must not only speak good language but also possess intellectual, creative and communicative habits. The intellectual habits imply the ability of information and texts handling; the competence of analyzing the material, focus on the main, make conclusions; working with reference material.

The creative skills mean the idea creation know-how, which demands knowledge in different fields, one task multiple solution ability, conceptual foresight skills.

The communicative skills include habit of argumentation, listening and hearing of the opponent, practice of striking a happy medium with the interlocutor and skills of clear thoughts compressing (Donetskaya et al., 2009).

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Methods of study**

A very significant place in the project methods there take the *discussions*. They perform a successful collaborative work of the students over a project in small groups. The students learn to consider the problem from different angles, to argue and put in words their own standpoint. At the same time, the learners should not just enumerate the facts, but make conclusions on the studied problems. These demands on discussion held help shaping a definite standard of speech, such as like being able to listen to the interlocutor till the end without interrupting, asking him or her questions, refute the judgement, or on the contrary concede, developing the idea. (Vishnevskaya, 2011; Kubiato & Arik, 2014).

*The method of gaming* presents not less interesting practice of study activation, and being organized specifically it allows solving different problem situations of various complication. It can be used both independently and in the project method context, especially in a peculiar form of the project's defense. The students apply the experience of accumulated knowledge and the project's results to the socially meaningful roles implementation. This kind of business cross-cultural relations modelling is effective in growing accustomed into various future activity situations, which can be faced in real life. Through a game projects a problem has a potential to be solved. The learners growing into a role work on the problem, visually demonstrating in the scope of communicative competence, the practical way out of the problem. The game realization is held in three stages: the preparatory, the game itself and the conclusive one.

The aim of the principle stage – of the game itself – is the resolution of the issue, related to the future professional activity of a student, the attainment of a positive result. At that stage, the participants fulfil their speech intention, according to the intended roles, creatively expose their professional and communicative skills, and build up social relationship in the game's desired conditions. The game allows the students against a background of typical business problem, refresh in memory and automatize in speech active terminology, fix speech standards and models of vocal

communication, and also master arguing and persuasion of logical deduction. In the gaming process the participants learn to overcome psychological barriers, such as insecurity, fear of making mistakes, which in the long run, bring to a generated foreign language communicative competence.

The purpose of the final stage of business game is *monitoring, analyzing and summarizing* of the achieved results. At that point, every individual contribution of a participant is being assessed; his or her role is being analyzed, with the explanation of possible failures or troubles, faced by the students in the process of the game. All these help the learners comprehend the activity's progress and results, warn them about future possible typical mistakes. During the game's discussion, the students consider the contradictions and look for the optimum-scale variants of their surmounting. They focus their attention on both the quality of professional role-playing, and accuracy of linguistic execution of utterance. For the general conclusion of the results achieved, the students are obliged to write some report about the executed work, or a newspaper paragraph, where they usually make suggestions and critical comments.

## **RESULTS**

### **Diagnostic stage**

The course of problem methodology has been developed by John Dewey at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Drawing special attention to the necessity of reflective thinking formation, he stated thinking to be "problem solving". The researcher singled out 5 stages of reflective thinking formation: 1) All the possible decisions and assumptions considerate; 2) understanding of difficulty and formulation of the problem to be solved; 3) putting forward of supposition as an assumption, determining the observation direction and facts collection; 4) argumentation and detected facts organization; 5) practical examination of the put forward assumptions.

In Russian pedagogics it was Dr. E.S. Polat (2000), who developed and popularized the project method for foreign language learning. The researcher would state that the telecommunication project amount to the greatest importance as foreign language teaching concerned, because these projects named lead to the most complicated methodological task solving, that is linguistic environment and linguistic situation establishing, which altogether help creating the necessity for the language practical use.

Dr. E.S. Polat (2000), Oguz and Ataseven (2016) define the communicational projects as collaborative educational and cognitive creative activity of students, which is based on computer communication, having herewith common problem situation or task, or common work methods.

The scientist marks out the following project types:

a) Research projects.

These projects must have coordinated structure, well-defined aims and tasks, the grounded relevance of the research problem for all the project's participants, the analysis of the information resources, reasoned methods and results. This kind of project is an approximate moderate research.

b) Creative project.

These types of projects must always have particular results processing. The projects very frequently carry no accurately analyzed structure of students' cooperation. The project's structure is subject to the students' general interests. The only requirement is primordial agreement about estimated outcome and the text form in articles, essays, etc.

c) Game projects.

This type of projects just like creative ones bears only the outline of the structure, which remains open until the end of the project. All the participants adopt specified roles, which is caused by the contents of the project and by the nature of the task. The roles can be of literary or imaginary characters, as well as social and business relations imitation. The overall results can be drawn either at the end of the project, or outlined at the beginning.

d) Informational project.

The goal of these projects is to collect information about some objects and phenomena; introduction of them to all the participants; general analysis and colligation of facts. The structure may consist of the following entries: the task and the goal of the project, subject of search, the resource of information, the methods of information processing, the summary of the search, the results presentation.

e) Practice oriented projects.

This type of projects always has the individual interests oriented distinct summary and the result of the students' collaborative work. The project requires a collaborative work scheme, as far as clearly stated results, besides every participant must contribute into the design and presentation of the total result. In this case, it is very important to arrange the work in the form of a step-by-step discussion, preparation of the results' presentations and also searching for all the possible ways of putting the results into practice.

The projects can also be divided in terms of the quantity of the participants: individual, paired and team ones. According to the duration of the projects, they can be subdivided into the short-term, average-term and long-term ones.

## Experimental stage

### 1.A role-play.

There exist different types of role and business games. The contents of games can be divided into social and professional ones. The example of such a game serves a role-play "The company presentation", elaborated at the Department of Foreign Languages of Moscow Railway State University for the students of "Advertisement and PR" course (Sadovskaya, 2011). The game is conducted for the second year university learners, when the students are already familiar with the necessary professional knowledge and skills; they are well-acquainted with the company's organizational arrangement, know the functions and responsibilities of staff members, are aware of the reference direction of the company's promotion activity.

Twenty-four roles are developed for the role-play, twelve of which – for the company's staff members, and twelve – for the presentation visitors. Each game is provided with speech recommendation for the students. For example, the speaker starts the ceremony, delivers a speech, which shapes the primary notion about the subject of presentation for the visitors; the speaker also gives the floor for the reporters, invite the visitors make questions, at last adjourns the presentation. CEO announces the name of a company, its contacts, delivers the history of its establishing and development, characterizes the place of the company in the global market. Onwards the CEO speaks about the plans of the company, and responds to the visitors' questions.

There in game are also provided the roles of logistical manager, sales manager, PR manager, designer, marketing manager, advertisement manager and so forth.

The presentation visitors may put professional questions to the officials, using the following clichés: *May I ask you where ... ? Might I inquire if you ... ? I should be very much obliged if you would tell me ... Would it bother you, if I asked you a question about ... ? I suppose ... I wonder ... I'd like to know whether ... Could you tell me whether ...? I want to ask you if ... May I ask you whether ... ? I hope you don't mind my asking you but I wonder if you could tell me whether ... I beg your pardon, but... ?*

In the process of this questions and answers making vocal activity there, professional competence is being shaped.

A similar kind of a project allows not only see an obvious outcome, but also assess the level of mastering of the language material. For example, the subject of the "Modern Robinson Crusoe" project has a ring of one of the "Word Class" textbook's themes – "Islands" (Mordvintsev & Gorin, 2013). The realization took about eight lessons (16 academic hours). The practical outcome has to be the so-called traveller's diary, who had found himself on an isolated island. As the result, the students did not only wrote the diaries on behalf of imaginary characters, but also prepared on the basis an interactive book, which proposed various ways of reading, and was illustrated by the travelers portraits and maps of desert islands. The final stage of the project dealt with the meeting of the travelers, who presented their diaries and fulfilled many play-tasks, in which they could demonstrate the mastery of the material studied.

### *2. A presentation lecture.*

Nowadays such method as presentation is increasingly incorporated in the educational process, because it is an efficient way of presenting information on the basis of multimedia technologies.

The presentation may be the final semester work and held in the form of micro-conferences, and students with the best works participate in regional conferences. Students will be prepared individually or in groups, in which someone is responsible for the oral presentation and the text on the slides and someone is responsible for creating the slides. This work on the presentation consists of preparatory phase, the step of creating the electronic and oral presentation and defense of the project itself. In the first stage, students decide on the theme and purpose of the presentation, select relevant material among the large number of information sources. During processing of the material, students develop and improve different reading skills: scanning reading that is to extract the desired information, skimming reading is for the purpose of obtaining certain details, facts and detailed reading is for complete understanding of the text, i.e. a literal translation. Reading as means of teaching speaking is to prepare students for the next steps.

When creating a presentation in addition to the themes and objectives students need to determine the volume of material (number of slides) and its organization (content and logical sequence of slides). Electronic presentation is the visual support of an oral presentation (speech presentation); it must include only basic information and illustrative material. This should be considered when creating the slides, i.e., the text on the slides should not duplicate the text of the report. The slides should include a brief and important information difficult to perceive by ears (numbers, dates, proper names, terms) and visual objects (graphs, charts, figures, tables).

### *3. Video shooting.*

Shooting the video for training purposes can be a very interesting process, both for students and for teachers. The student can apply this knowledge in practice and analyze the formation of speech skills. In the process, it is important to give students the opportunity to learn a foreign language in context, to compare the phenomenon of language culture with the culture of the native language, to understand its use in relevant real life situations. The bases of the work are exercises in commenting and discussing the above issues. As for interviewing, discussion, role play, expressing your own opinion about the issue – they are of particular interest. For example, Russian and foreign students of Tomsk Polytechnic University have shot video about living and studying at the University for a competition of short films in a foreign language. All movies have been filmed in a foreign language the authors' language being English, Russian, German and Chinese (TPU.ru, 2014). Topics of the videos were: "Tomsk – a city of contrasts", "Students' hostel of my dreams", "My free time".

In these films, the students told about the success and challenges of studying. Russian students told about the motives of Chinese language study, foreign students showed how difficult it was to learn all subjects in a foreign language and also to find friends in another country.

#### 4. The method of mini-projects.

This method is not less interesting than all the others considered. Here we can find the so-called cinquain technique (Kireeva, 2010). This is a five-line poetic form, originated in the USA in the early 20th century under the influence of Japanese poetry. Cinquain is constructed according to certain rules:

- 1 line - one noun (the name of the topic/problem),
- 2 Line – two adjectives (description/problems),
- 3 line – three verbs (description of their actions on the topic/issue),
- 4 line- four or five words of any part of speech (their attitude to the topic/issue),
- 5 line - one noun (synonym to the topics/problems).

Here are some examples of cinquain, compiled by students in English:

Generation gap  
Difficult and serious  
Understand, explain, forgive  
Part of my daily life  
Problem

Friendship  
Important and necessary  
Help, support and understand  
The most important thing  
Happiness

#### 5. Web quest method.

Web quest is a didactic structure, where a student can plan an exciting search activity using the Internet and other media resources. A web quest is a website in the Internet, where students can find some information to perform a particular learning task. Themes of the web quests can be very diverse, problematic tasks can vary the degree of difficulty. The results of the web-quest implementation, depending on the material can be represented in the form of oral and computer presentations, essays, web pages, web site, etc. A lecturer, making up the task, picks up information on the Internet, providing students with necessary hyperlinks. Students work in teams or individually on assignments web quest, the completion of which will present their own web pages on this topic, or any other creative work in electronic, printed or verbal form.

An American Professor of educational technology at the University of San Diego (USA) Bernie Dodge is the developer of a web-quest as a training work. He identified different types of tasks for web quests and here are some of them:

- Retelling – demonstration of understanding the topic based on the submission of materials from different sources in a new format: the new presentation, poster, story.

- Planning and design – development of a plan or project on the basis of specified conditions.

- Creative work – creative work in a particular genre – the creation of a play, poem, song and video.

- Detective, puzzle, mysterious story – conclusions based on contradictory facts.
- Investigative journalism – objective presentation of information (a division of opinions and facts).

- Scientific research – study of various phenomena, discoveries, facts on the basis of unique online sources, etc.

The web quest has the following structure:

- introduction – a brief description of the topic of the web quest;
  - task – formulation of the problem tasks and the description of the presentation of the final result;
  - the process of work and the necessary resources – description of sequences of actions, roles and resources needed to perform the task (links to online resources and any other sources of information), and also supporting materials (examples, templates, tables, forms, instructions, etc.) that allow you to more effectively organize the work on a web quest more effectively ;
  - evaluation – description of criteria and parameters of evaluation of a web-quest implementation, which is presented in the form of the assessment form.
- The evaluation criteria depends on the type of learning tasks that are solved in the web quest;
- conclusion – a brief description of what can students learn by doing this web quest;
  - resources– links to resources used to create a web-quest;
  - comments to the instructor guidelines for teachers who will use the web quest (Karpovskaya, 2011)

Let us consider as an example, “The Olympic Games” web-quest. The introduction gives a brief information about the subject matter. The task lists assignments to be carried out, for instance, “Make an Internet research and answer all the questions”, “Make a map of the Olympic Game Host Cities”, etc. The item “Process” is the essence of the quest, as it contains questions and tasks of the following type: “Who renewed the Olympic movement?”, Find the Olympic symbols”, “Write an essay on the following statement...”. The item “Evaluation” lists the evaluation criteria of your quest.

## **DISCUSSION**

The project method involves students into solving different tasks, different levels of linguistic and communicative complexity; it is always a joint research activity. A teacher, organizing the project, transforms the information into the problem tasks. The project, therefore, aims to enhance cognitive activity of the learners towards the development of critical thinking. This method requires preliminary preparation of students.

Role-play methodology helps to develop skills in the consideration of number of possible ways of solving problems, activating students’ cognition and revealing personal potential of each student.

Electronic presentation in addition to mastering the English language and computer programs requires perseverance and hard work, makes think independently, and also compels to develop intellectual skills, analyzing, comparing and summarizing.

The process of a film shooting is a group activity, and the processes of planning and production involves a considerable amount of debate in addition to studying the language used in the text. The use of video in the classroom is an effective means of formation of the communication competence of students.

Method of cinquain is suitable for working with weak students. This form allows students to organize what they have learned and to express their attitude to the investigated problem. Students can not only develop their own cinquain in a foreign language according to all the rules, but also make them to be shown in the exhibition of their creative works.

Web quests are designed for maximum integration of the Internet in various subjects at different levels of learning in the educational process. They cover a separate issue, subject, and theme. Educational web quest – a problematic task with elements of a role-play, for which students use information resources of the

Internet. The advantages of web-quests are the use of the target language throughout the project work, the development of written communication skills and increasing of social competence. Such web tasks build up students' motivation, develop speech and information competence.

## CONCLUSION

The project method involves students into solving different tasks, different levels of linguistic and communicative complexity; it is always a joint research activity. A teacher, organizing the project, transforms the information into the problem tasks. The project, therefore, aims to enhance cognitive activity of the learners towards the development of critical thinking. This method requires preliminary preparation of students.

The project involves five "P"s: - problems, planning, information search, product, presentation. A problem consists of a formulation of the task, challenges (research, information) and hypotheses. A planning is problems solution activity search. An information search requires research work of students. The product is the output of the project, i.e. a tool that is developed by the participants of the project group to resolve the task. The presentation implies a convincing performance of the product to the customer (Bovtenko, 2005).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The project method is an effective means of learning a foreign language, since it contributes to the realization of important objectives, such as motivation encouragement; thinking skills, creativity and communication development, broadening of the mind.

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