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Foreign-Language Professional Project-based Method as a Means of Forming Socio-Cultural Competence in Non-Language-Majoring Students

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Abstract

The paper deals with the analysis of the process of the formation of socio-cultural competence through the course “*German for Professional Communication*” for the students of economic specialties. A foreign-language professional project-based learning method is considered as a means to achieve the educational goals. Two professionally oriented projects are described in terms of didactic implementation of the authors’ approach to teaching.

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1. Introduction

Due to globalization in all spheres of human activity, participation of Russia in the Bologna process, a growing number of international contacts, the possibility for Russian specialists to compete in the European labor market and an increase of linguistic contacts there is a real demand for new psycho-pedagogical and methodological decisions aimed at “expanding” the borders of educational process by placing the student into the real intercultural communication context. These decisions involve establishing conditions for their practical use as a means of social and cultural interaction (Galskova & Gez, 2004).

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In modern society, a well-qualified specialist should be equipped with both a good interdisciplinary training, and communication and social competence to successfully establish social and professional contacts. Galskova (2000) considers it necessary to include in the professionally focused foreign language learning process such topics, situations and speech material, which would take into account the students' professional field. In addition to linguistic material the course content should reflect the system of national and cultural peculiarities and realities of the country where the language is spoken. According to the "Foreign language for non-linguistic higher educational institutions and departments" discipline program, students must have sufficient command of communicative competence to solve social-communicative tasks in various aspects of everyday, cultural, professional and research life while dealing with foreign partners, as well as for further self-education. In this article we consider the way the process of acquiring social and cultural competence to meet the challenges in the professional field goes in the classroom for the German language students of economic specialties.

The aim of this work is to develop socio-cultural competence of students of economic specialties during the lessons of "German as a language of professional communication." The question is how to create specific conditions in learning a foreign language that would make it possible to achieve this goal, what methods to choose. In our opinion one of the methods that can be applied is the method of foreign language professional project-based learning (PBL).

2. Theoretical foundations of PBL for socio-cultural competence formation

2.1. Socio-cultural competence

Langaker (1991) notes that continuous interacting with the culture and mentality forms a native speaker as a person belonging to a given socio-cultural community, imposing and developing the system of values, morals, behavior, attitude to the people. According to Edward Sapir (1993), each cultural system and every single act of public conduct explicitly or implicitly implies communication. The system of values as an element of culture, in turn, is made up of socially significant sets of subcultures determined by group and target goals and interests. For example, it is possible to be quite fluent in general German, but to be functionally illiterate, if after completing a Higher Educational Institution course "Professional communication" the person is unable to fulfill the functional role of a candidate for a vacancy at a university, to participate in a training course or to take a job abroad, does not possess the communicative culture skills and does not follow the standards in the field of job, does not know how to search job and apply for recruitment. These problems may appear because the program of the course might lack focus on socio-cultural aspects of professional communication in German, which brings to a rising barrier to successful social adaptation of the graduates in the labor market in the context of globalization of the economy and education. Skalkin (1991) emphasizes that for a long time the Russian national methodology was dominated by the approach when students were to acquire the ability to perform in a peculiar to us (native culture) socio-communicative position, but in a foreign language code.

We can achieve a radical increase in the level of communication and interaction between people of different nationalities only with a clear understanding and real consideration of the socio-cultural factor. The European Council identified *socio-cultural competence* as a component of communicative competence and defined it as knowledge of cultural peculiarities of native speakers, their habits, rules of conduct and etiquette, the ability to understand and use them appropriately in the communication process, remaining a bearer of another culture at the same time (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, 2000).

Analysis of research papers suggests that the social competence as individual awareness about socio-cultural context of the language use is socially significant, and includes socio-cultural processing by the native speakers of fragments of reality, concepts and means of their linguistic consolidation and expression, the mechanisms of which are imprinted in their minds in the form of language and speech preferences. If we consider socio-cultural competence development as a goal of studying a foreign language at a Higher Educational Institution course (Safonova, 1996), it should be noted that it may comprise the development of socio-cultural knowledge in students on the one hand, and socio-cultural skills – on the other. Lupach (2000) believes that the principles of socio-cultural direction include the principle of learning a foreign language in the context of dialogue between cultures; methodical authenticity on the basis of socio-cultural content of teaching material; problem solving and the priority of creative

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