

CSIS 2019

11th International Scientific and Theoretical Conference “Communicative Strategies of Information Society”

PRESENTATION OF A JOB-RELATED PROJECT IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE UNIVERSITY CLASSES

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Abstract

New formats of higher education are built upon updated requirements for professional training of university students in order to bridge a skills gap on the labour market. The requirements cause changes in educational technologies that allow applying professional competencies and foreign language skills in professional-like conditions at university. The use of the project-based technology in foreign language university classes corresponds to the requirements but organizing presentation of a job-related project is still under discussion. The authors aim to describe how to effectively organise university students' work on presenting a job-related project in foreign language classes. Using the observation method the authors specify job-related project work by aligning it with a customer's order completion, commenting on its productivity and peculiarities of the project presentation in foreign language skills acquisition. The design method indicates a series of stages used to arrange presentation of a job-related project in foreign language university classes: establishing the theme of the project, planning the project, and working on language preparation. The observation method enables the authors to describe peculiarities of delivering the given project presentation among management and economics students, and explain specifics of the project evaluation. Management students proved to be more motivated to apply their foreign language skills in job-related project work. It can be concluded that doing job-related project work and making project presentations are effective media of instruction in foreign language university classes.

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Keywords: Professional competencies, project-based technology, job-related project, project presentation, foreign language university classes.



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1. Introduction

Education plays a pivotal role since development of society is impossible without imparting knowledge and sharing experience. The status of social development and level of technological advances determine our lifestyle, working conditions, communication, and ability to organise the learning process. The public demand, requirements of the labour market, and needs of consumers of educational services (Pokrovskaya, Ababkova, & Fedorov, 2019) shape different types of developing and implementing the learning process. These types refer to formats of higher education. The market demands bring new formats of higher education which help a variety of learners acquire professional knowledge and skills to contribute to their self-development.

Nonetheless, nowadays experts of the labour market pinpoint a skills mismatch. It means working in a job that demands lower or higher skills than required (Kucel & Vilalta-Bufi, 2019) and affects workers' productivity (Velden & Bijlsma, 2019). According to the Skills for Jobs database provided by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 18% of adults are overqualified and 19% of them are underqualified (OECD, 2019). The number of such employees will definitely increase in the future. Reasons for the skills mismatch vary. The most significant ones embrace new technologies and artificial intelligence, which have already led to disappearance of many professions or a reduction in their lifecycle.

With a view of being competitive and in demand on the labour market, employees have to create and implement their professional and personal development plan. It is especially crucial for people with disabilities who search for high-quality educational services for their professional fulfillment (Zorina, 2018). The plan should include components of upgrading people's knowledge and skills, as well as acquiring new ones. Pushkarev and Pushkareva (2016) highlight these components to show that employees' work will be innovative in a world of rapid changes. These changes, for example, force people to make effective decisions in conditions of uncertainty in the region (Kreer, Petrova, & Yuganova, 2017).

In this regard, there is a new group of consumers of educational services, who promote other requirements for developing and implementing the learning process. The process will not only encourage accumulation of knowledge, but will also lead to transferrable skills acquisition (Hatakka & Merrifield, 2009) and develop universal learning activities (Krupa, Lebedev, Kovalenko, & Anistratenko, 2015). Universal learning activities, which refer to a set of actions and skills to contribute to learners' self-development, enable them to gain the desired experience throughout their life.

Society is also engaged in developing new official and non-official requirements for applying technologies, designing standards, and promoting quality of education. Society also puts forward their requirements for models of professional activity (Zaritskyi & Pavlenko, 2019) as a basis of maintaining the learning process. The official requirements are embedded into Federal state educational standards. The non-official ones arise from the market demands, which mean attracting more people to the development of the standards and result in flexible personalised technologies (Fitzgerald, Jones, Kucirkova, & Scanlon, 2018). Peculiarities of learners' thinking processes also shape these requirements. For example, mosaic thinking makes teachers employ visual training methods and design technologies (Chernova & Makarova, 2018).

New formats of higher education are built upon updated requirements for training university students in order to bridge their skills gap on the labour market. In this regard, researchers take into account a number of methodological approaches when modelling university graduates' professional activity. Axiological (Kiryakova, Olkhovaya, Melekesov, & Presnov, 2015) and competence-based approaches (Biktagirova, Utemov, & Khitryuk, 2016) enable to identify moral and social values, the most significant personal qualities, and professional competencies. Professional competencies establish a professional's knowledge, skills and aptitudes as well as curricular activities to achieve them (Romero, Saucedo, Caliusco, & Gutierrez, 2019).

2. Problem Statement

Professional competencies require acquisition of foreign language skills so university students' practical activities should be aimed at developing these skills (Agudo, Rico, Ferreira, Sánchez, & Edwards, 2010). Educational technology facilitates such practical activities since it improves "performance by creating, using, and managing appropriate technological processes and resources" (Januszewski & Molenda, 2007, p. 1). Society's new requirements for university graduates' level of education and personal enhancement demand changes in educational technologies. Nowadays, incorporating professional activities into the learning process, meeting students' needs and catering to their abilities are characteristics of the most effective educational technologies. The project-based technology is among them.

The project-based technology facilitates development of "problem-solving skills proactively, collaboratively, and practically" (Sato, Hazeyama, Nakamura, & Miyadera, 2018, p. 127). Additionally, the technology helps university students "cultivate independent thinking, problem discovery and resolution, multiple ways of thinking, and meaningful learning" (Chang, Kuo, & Chang, 2018, p. 1). The project-based technology allows students to apply their integrated skills developed in foreign language university classes and enhance their research and analytical skills. Such skills are necessary for employees to effectively perform their professional activity.

The project is a result of implementing the project-based technology in foreign language classes at university. University students should know peculiarities of job-related project work and present a project as a work-related reporting form. It is critical that university classes should provide conditions for acquiring professional competencies, which correspond to the ones created in business. However, working on a job-related project presents some difficulties because creating professional-like conditions in foreign language university classes should be connected with acquiring professional competencies and concurrently foreign language skills. Moreover, learning materials and teaching aids describe typical features of project work as a medium of instruction but give recommendations how to do it either in work-related classes or make language projects in foreign language classes. As a result, presentation of a job-related project in foreign language university classes is under discussion. In this case, it is necessary to characterise job-related project work in foreign language university classes and dwell upon effective organisation of the given project presentation.

3. Research Questions

1. What is specific of job-related project work in foreign language classes at university?
2. What are the main stages of arranging presentation of a job-related project in foreign language university classes?
3. How should university students present a job-related project in foreign language classes?

4. Purpose of the Study

The authors aim to describe how to effectively organise university students' work on presenting a job-related project in foreign language classes.

5. Research Methods

The authors employed the method of observation at the Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation in Saint Petersburg. From 2017 to 2019 they were examining work on job-related projects in foreign language classes among first- and second-year university students majoring in management and economics. This method enables to reveal characteristic features of job-related project work organised in foreign language university classes. The authors explain similarities of job-related project work and completing a customer's order. Then there are comments on productivity of job-related project work regarding foreign language skills acquisition and peculiarities of presenting such a project as a work-related reporting form.

The design method allows establishing a series of stages used to arrange presentation of the given job-related project. The authors share some secrets of presentation gurus like Steve Jobs (Gallo, 2010) and plan the training process so that the students could implement these secrets while presenting their job-related projects. The training process is built upon the idea that any skills can be developed only in the course of activities involving these skills. In accordance with the first stage, the authors establish the theme, which should underlie employees' professional activity in the workplace. Next, there is an explanation how to plan the project in foreign language university classes, which is associated with developing professional skills required for professional communication. Thirdly, the authors reveal the stage of language preparation to help university students succeed in presenting a job-related project. During this stage the university professor explains how to use the target lexis and grammar required for effective presentation skills.

Presentation of a job-related project in foreign language university classes involves practising and enhancing students' communication in professional-like conditions. In this regard, the authors describe peculiarities of university students presenting the given projects, with the observation method considered. First- and second-year university students majoring in management presented a job-related project on every topic, while for those in economics the project presentation was not compulsory. The authors considered the university students' class participation and oral answer at the examination in English held for second-year students in June 2019. Finally, there is project evaluation specific of foreign language university classes.

6. Findings

6.1. Specifics of job-related project work in foreign language classes at university

Embarking on a project is similar to completing a customer's order in the workplace. Each order is comparable to university students' work on a job-related project since it is a problem that requires applying integrated skills to solve it. University students employ such skills to search for relevant information and structure the project with an aim to receive a viable end product. In this respect employees are involved in research and analytical activities to successfully complete their orders, which are similar to job-related projects at university. Specifically, it is necessary to find adequate sources of information, select and verify the obtained data, make relevant inferences, and utilise the acquired information. As a result, job-related project work contributes to intensification of university students' cognitive activity. To add, project work allows meeting university students' needs and catering to their abilities.

Another distinctive feature of job-related project work is its productivity. It shows university students' ability to achieve the desired result no matter what level of foreign language skills they have. Such productivity plays an exceedingly important role in foreign language instruction used in academic groups where university students' level of foreign language skills varies. The low level may be indicative of university students' failure to acquire professional competencies since they experience a lack of knowledge when working with those students whose level is higher. Due to the sense of achievement upon completing a job-related project, students feel more willing to study a foreign language further.

Also, it should be noted that development of skills to prepare and present a job-related project is necessary for doing business successfully. Employees should be able to speak clearly and to the point, explain their project idea, get the audience interested, and make the relevant information understandable. Additionally, they should be able to visually present the obtained data in the workplace and make use of developed foreign language skills. These skills will contribute to launching and promoting any new and unusual product, service or idea, selling them to a customer, attracting a new client, or getting the project financed.

The job-related project work results in a reporting form which should correspond to university students' future professional activity. Familiar forms to create a poster, compose a poem, design a photo book, or prepare a summary are not common in the business sphere. An example of such a form is preparing a poster after working on the project "Unity in Diversity" (RELOD, 2019) proposed by Oxford University Press and the company RELOD. However, using a multimedia presentation to share the job-related project idea is rather effective since it is associated with producing the completed order to the client. The order should be a holistic product that satisfies the customer's needs; in turn the presentation of the completed project should be a holistic product as well. It should reflect the theme of the project and be logically arranged and well-structured, without just containing data from numerous sources of information.

6.2. The main stages of arranging presentation of a job-related project in foreign language university classes

Specifics of job-related project work in foreign language classes at university determine the main stages of arranging presentation of the given project. To begin with, it is necessary to establish the theme which will reflect university graduates' professional activity. As regards foreign language classes, the university professor proposes themes of projects (for example, *Companies: Their History, Operations, Products and Markets; SWOT Analysis; Marketing – 4 Ps; Banking*). The themes are closely connected to university students' majors (such as laser optics, banking, engineering). Within one theme university students choose an interesting topic to suit their needs. For example, when working on the theme *Companies: Their History, Operations, Products and Markets* university students select the company they would like to work for after graduation, where their parents work, or which is the potential competitor. *Gazprom* and *Sberbank* are among the companies.

The content of the project does not require much of the university professor's control as only the theme is set. In fact, he or she may not know certain details or have less knowledge of his or her students' majors than the students themselves. In addition, university students select a product for market research for a number of reasons. Firstly, they want to have this product in the future (for example, the perfume Chanel or car Bentley). Secondly, they try to explain why it is popular with people (the capsule coffee Nescafe is such an example). Another reason is presenting a prototype which is not on the market yet so university students would like to design it (for instance, the chameleon clothes whose colour matches the colour of shoes, or plexiglass aquariums as an element of interior design).

Another stage is planning the job-related project. While preparing a presentation university students develop skills and personal qualities that will be of vital importance in their professional life. One of such skills is planning and organising information. The project presentation must be broken down into several steps; at each step a problem is presented, targets are set and ways of solving the problem are found. Every slide of the presentation is related to the step of the project and therefore shows the solution to the problem set at this step. The information on each slide must be organised in a way that reflects the steps of the project, its problems and solutions.

What comes next is the language preparation stage which allows university students to practise the target lexis and grammar. At this stage the university professor's role is crucial since doing project work and preparing a presentation can be classified as controlled practice of the language. From a linguistic point of view, the aim of presenting a job-related project is to make university students use the target lexis and grammar. Therefore, the university professor has to provide students with relevant lexical and grammar structures. It is more important than allowing university students to find them on their own while using various online translation applications.

The language preparation process embraces introduction and controlled practice. Introduction involves providing university students with key lexical items found, for example, in a business vocabulary and practise course *Business Vocabulary Builder* by Macmillan ELT. In this case university students are equipped with a range of lexical items they may need to do their job-related project. Controlled practice means that the university professor supplies students with a number of exercises

(reading, listening, and speaking exercises) to practise the provided lexis. Such exercises must be examples of the presentations that university students are supposed to make.

The order of activities for controlled practice while discussing the theme *Companies* is shown below. University students first have to do a listening exercise about the company *Electrolux*. The task is the following: A Swedish company of Electrolux is welcoming a group of visitors. Listen to the presentation and complete a data file.

Company data file:

The Electrolux Group is the world's largest producer of powered appliances for kitchen, cleaning and outdoor use.

- nationality _____
- head office _____
- started _____
- world's first vacuum cleaner _____
- first fridge _____
- employs _____ people
- sells its products in _____ countries
- worldwide turnover _____
- global divisions: Consumer Durables _____ % of sales
Professional Products _____ % of sales

During the second listening university students pay attention to the lexical and grammar items as they have to choose words and phrases used in the exercise out of a range of given lexis. An example of this exercise is given below.

Electrolux *started in / dates from* _____ .
Its *head office* is in _____ .
It *employs* _____ *people / has* _____ *employees*.
It has *companies / subsidiaries* in _____ .
It *produces / manufactures / sells* _____ .
Its *worldwide turnover* is _____ .
It has _____ *divisions / business groups / well-known brands*.
It *spends* _____ % *of its turnover on R&D*.
_____ % *of its sales come / revenue comes* from _____ .
It has a _____ % *market share* in _____ .

Or during the second listening university students have to fill in the gaps with the words they hear. Such sentences are given below.

I am responsible for _____ in Modena.

It's important to _____ of our product.

It's my job to _____ to the best of his or her abilities.

You need to _____ and show people who you are and that you are interested in their work.

My job involves a lot of _____, which I like.

I spend a lot of time _____.

The part of my job that I enjoy most is _____.

You have to know how to combine _____ with relaxation – that's the most important _____ to have.

After that university students practise the lexical and grammar structures: work in pairs or in small groups to make mini-presentations on company profiles provided by the university professor. The condition and criteria of the successful task implementation are the use of the target language structures. Then university students can be given an opportunity to find similar information on other companies on the Internet, write their own company profiles, and make their own mini-presentations on them.

In many cases university professors overlook controlled practice. But the authors believe that it is not enough to only provide university students with a range of lexical items. The more example models of future presentations are provided, the more accurately lexical items will be used and the more effectively the presentation will be prepared in general.

Grammar is usually taught separately, so the university professor draws students' attention to the grammar structures typical of most presentations. The authors insist on providing university students with enough exercises to practise such structures.

The work on developing presentation skills is done throughout foreign language university classes. Students are provided with special presentation models that contain the presentation language, which is a set of language structures to be used while giving a presentation. Below there is a list of phrases given as the presentation language.

This morning I am going to talk about _____.

Today I'd like to describe _____.

The aim of my presentation this morning is _____.

I have divided my presentation into _____ parts.

My talk today will be in _____ parts.

Or there is a set of phrases to be used to refer to the information presented visually as slides, or tables and charts.

The slide shows _____.

If you look at this graph, you can see _____.

What is interesting in this slide is _____.

I'd like to draw your attention to the chart showing _____.

6.3. Presenting a job-related project in foreign language university classes

Arranging presentation of a job-related project in foreign language classes explains how university students as presenters should give it. During the presentation itself both presenters and the audience develop skills of active listening and active speaking. In order to be successful, presenters have to take into consideration characteristic features of their audience and show advantages of the job-related project to them. In other words, presenters have to be able to adapt the information they have. Listeners have to be able to analyse the presented information critically, look for hidden drawbacks of the project, and clarify the obtained information.

During classes management students were more motivated to study the foreign language as they knew about the upcoming project presentation and wanted to be better prepared. They were more willing and active to do assignments provided by the university professor and give their own examples. Therefore, participation in classroom activities among management students was 30% higher than participation among economics students. Additionally, all the university students who had delivered their project presentations in foreign language classes made references to them and gave relevant examples when answering at the examination. As all the management students had had to make project presentations on all the themes their examination answers were better and they scored more points than economics students (about 50% higher). All the students, who had made project presentations, showed more confidence while answering at the examination.

During project presentations university students evaluate presenters' project work in accordance with some criteria. They include the following: the content of the project corresponds to the given topic, the student uses the relevant lexis and it is accurate, the student uses relevant grammar structures and they are accurate, and the project is presented correctly.

University students are provided with an opportunity to make alterations to their own projects that are scheduled to be presented later. Students tend to introduce changes into their own project presentations based on the feedback on other students'. So it is recommended that presentations of university students with more developed foreign language skills should be scheduled first. Then the project presentations of those whose foreign language skills are less developed should be scheduled for later lessons.

7. Conclusion

New formats of higher education determine the use of the project-based technology in order to satisfy university students' needs to acquire foreign language skills for future professional activity. Organisation of job-related project work and concurrently development of foreign language skills are the main aspects of university graduates' professional and personal development plan. The findings show that management and economics students succeed in presenting job-related projects in foreign language university classes and answering at the examination if this work is effectively organised. In particular, university students employ their integrated skills to solve the selected project problem no matter what level of foreign language skills they have. The job-related project work proves to be efficient due to elaborated project themes, well-organised planning, and language preparation. Active listening and active

speaking are characteristic of the job-related project presentation, which is followed by university students' evaluation of presenters' project work and alterations to their own project presentations.

It can be concluded that doing job-related project work and making the project presentations are effective media of instruction in foreign language university classes. The obtained findings can be used in the course of studying such subjects as English, Business English, and English for Professional Purposes. The authors plan to describe in detail how management and economics students are involved in work on job-related projects on all the themes covered in foreign language university classes. In this case, the authors intend to compare how management and economics students employ their integrated skills to solve the problem embedded into the job-related project. Additionally, there should be a description of what alterations management and economics students tend to make to their project presentations after observing those of students with more developed foreign language skills. Finally, the authors mean to use statistical methods to analyse results of the delivered job-related project presentations.

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