

## METHODS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF LEARNERS' SOCIOCULTURAL AND COMMUNICATION ABILITIES VIA INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL LANGUAGE PROJECTS

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**Abstract.** The paper addresses the issue of the development of learners' socio-cultural and communication abilities in the process of participation in international educational language projects. In the paper the author a) defines the term "international language education projects", b) identifies their properties and related didactic features, c) determines the range of learners' socio-cultural and communication abilities, developed in the course of participation in international educational language projects, d) develops a step by step algorithm of the development of learners' socio-cultural and communication abilities in the course of their participation in international educational language projects.

**Keywords:** international projects; project work; sociocultural abilities; communication abilities.

Substantial increase in international contacts between Russian and foreign educational institutions of basic secondary education form the basis for the organization of students' project activities which would facilitate the development of oral and socio-cultural skills. Moreover, this project activity can take place simultaneously in Russia and in the country of the target language, together with the students from foreign partner schools. Under international educational language projects we understand *phased joint educational and informative, research and creative activities of the students from different countries realized in the target foreign language in the full-time and distant form by the modern Internet technologies, having a single problem, purpose, objectives, methods, and ways of working with a view to achieve students' sharing performance*. In this paper, we have deliberately chosen the combination of terms in the title - "international educational language projects", since each of them represents a necessary condition or purpose of the implementation of project activities. "International" focuses on the fact that, firstly, the same project is being implemented in Russia and in the country of the target language, and secondly, Russian and English learners-partners of secondary schools are working together on the same project (distantly through Internet technologies and on a full-time basis when Russian students are on probation in the UK). "Educational" indicates that the projects are organized at school and have educational, developmental and educational goals. "Language" focuses on the fact that in the

course of a project the foreign language is both a means of communication (means of implementation of the project), and the purpose of training (goal of the project). In the course of international educational language projects the students adopt the social and cultural material of the native country and the country of the target language as well as develop the socio-cultural and oral skills. Table 1 presents the characteristics of this type of projects on each of the mentioned typological features.

Table 1

**Characteristics of international educational language projects**

| <b>Typological feature</b>                     | <b>Characteristic</b>                                                                                       | <b>Description</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Methods used in the project</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- research;</li> <li>- creative;</li> <li>- role and play</li> </ul> | In the international educational language projects are simultaneously used research (when searching, studying, processing, analyzing information), creativity (while preparing the final product of the project activity), and role-playing (partially, when each member of the project fulfills its role)                                                                                                            |
| <b>Coordination of the project</b>             | direct and indirect                                                                                         | When implementing international educational language projects, depending on the degree of readiness of the students and their level of general culture and foreign language communicative competence we can use both direct (rigid or flexible) and indirect (implicit and imitating the project participant) coordination. Indirect coordination should dominate                                                     |
| <b>Nature of contacts</b>                      | international                                                                                               | Participants of international educational language projects are the students of Russian secondary school and school-partner from Great Britain                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Subject area</b>                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- mono-disciplinary;</li> <li>- interdisciplinary</li> </ul>         | Depending on the subject and agenda the projects may be both mono-disciplinary and interdisciplinary                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Form of realization of the project</b>      | - full-time and distant                                                                                     | Part of the phases of the project is implemented distantly, when participants-partners from different countries work on a common project and communicate with each other via the Internet. Another part of the stages is full-time, when the Russian project participants come to the UK for an internship in a partner school and continue to work on the project through personal contact with foreign participants |
| <b>Platform for realization of the project</b> | Web 1.0 and Web 2.0                                                                                         | Depending on the design goals the project may be realized both at Web 1.0 platforms (forums, chat), and at Web 2.0 platforms. When conducting distant stages of the project the relationship between international participants can be organized as via                                                                                                                                                               |

| Typological feature                            | Characteristic                                                                                                                 | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                |                                                                                                                                | e-mail (a more formal type of communication) (Web 1.0), and by means of blog technology (social networking) (Web 2.0). Some projects involve the creation of a common Web-site and placing on it the results of the project. This may be based on blog-technology, Wiki or podcast technology (Web 2.0). To carry out projects, the participants use a variety of information and reference resources of the Internet |
| <b>Language for realization of the project</b> | - foreign;<br>- native                                                                                                         | First of all, the project should be implemented in the target foreign language. However, in the search for and selection of the information at the initial stages of the project for better understanding the material the students are allowed to use sources in their native language                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Goal of using Internet</b>                  | - extracting information;<br>- communication between the participants of the project;<br>- creation and placement of a product | During the project, students will have to search for the necessary resources on the Internet. Communication between the parties on the remote stage of the project will be based on Internet technologies (e-mails or social networking (blogging technology)). The result of the international educational language projects can be the Internet page created by the students (Wiki technology)                      |

Relying on the characteristics shown in table 1, we can distinguish didactic properties, didactic functions and methodological functions (in relation to the methods of foreign language teaching) of the international educational language projects. **To didactic properties we refer** the distinctive features of the international educational language projects that are essential for didactics and distinguish this type of projects from other types of projects. **Didactic functions** are the outward manifestations of this type of projects that are used in the educational process [1: 122]. Under **methodological functions** of the international educational language projects we understand the manifestation of didactic properties of the projects directly in foreign language teaching.

To the **didactic properties** of the international educational language projects we refer the following:

- focus on integrated education, development and training of the students;
- project participants are the schoolchildren from the school-partners of different countries;
- projects are realized basically in the target foreign language;
- projects have a regional geographic or cultural studies orientation;

- implementation of the projects is carried out on a full-time basis and distantly via Internet technologies;

- projects may have varying degrees of coordination (from direct to indirect);

- implementation of the projects is possible on one of the platforms Web 2.0 (blog technology, Wiki technology, server of podcasts).

To the **didactic functions** of the international educational language projects we refer:

- organizing students' cognitive activity;

- development of students' skills of autonomous learning activities;

- implementing educational technology "cooperative learning";

- computerization of educational process;

- forming students' educational and cognitive competence;

- developing students' information culture.

**Methodical functions** of the international educational language projects are as follows;

- developing productive (speaking and writing) and receptive (listening and reading) speech activities;

- developing students' language skills (phonetic, lexical, grammatical);

- developing social competence;

- developing intercultural competence.

**Nomenclature of sociocultural and communicative skills developed on the basis of international educational language projects.** Taking into consideration didactic properties and methodological functions of the international educational language projects, relying on the analysis of papers devoted to the formation of students' social competence [2-7] and communicative competence [8-15] it seems appropriate to work out a range of sociocultural and communicative abilities of senior students (profile level) developed in the process of their participation in the international education language projects (tables 2, 3).

**Algorithm for developing students' communicative and sociocultural skills on the basis of international educational language projects.** It should be noted that the majority of researchers in their papers on the use of project-based learning in foreign language teaching in general, or on the formation of one of the components of foreign language communicative competence in particular, developed algorithms or techniques for realization of project activities [3, 6, 16-18]. All of them included specially outlined phases and steps. The sequence of stages and steps of the algorithm is directly dependent on the objectives of the project. In our study, the participants of the international educational projects are the senior pupils from Russian and British schools. The goal of the project is the development of social and cultural awareness, socio-cultural and foreign-language communicative competence of the students. Projects have a socio-cultural orienta-

tion and are implemented in the target language (English). The students are focused on the aspects of culture of the country of the target language. Russian students prepare projects on British culture, and the students of a British partner-school prepare projects on Russian culture. The stages of realization of international language and cultural studies projects are presented in more detail in the table 4.

Materials in the Table 4 show that the special feature in implementing international language and cultural studies projects is that they include two main parts: a series of steps is performed by Russian schoolchildren in Russia, and the second part of stages is carried out in direct contact with the bearers of language and culture when visiting the UK.

Table 2

**Sociocultural skills of the secondary school senior pupils developed on the basis of international educational language projects**

| Sociocultural skills                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | International educational language projects |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Interpret cultural facts and events of the native community and community of the target language                                                                                                                                       | +                                           |
| Identify cultural similarities and differences between ethnic, social, regional groups within the region, country, world                                                                                                               | +                                           |
| Participate in the discussions with the representatives of the target culture on the issues of cultural life                                                                                                                           | +                                           |
| Collect, classify, summarize information on cultural studies in the form of a message, report, defence of the project using various sources, including the Internet                                                                    | +                                           |
| Establish cultural contacts (interpret communicative activity with the features of native and foreign culture, identify, analyze, predict and prevent possible communicative misunderstandings and conflicts)                          | +                                           |
| Choose socio-culturally acceptable communicative style (understand and accept the other person's position and consider his socio-cultural specifics of communication) promoting positive interaction in the modern multicultural world | +                                           |
| To perform the social role of a cultural guide, intercultural mediator, to explain the facts of the culture of his native country to the representatives of contacting culture                                                         | +                                           |
| Socio-culturally acceptable oppose cultural discrimination, cultural inequality, cultural vandalism and cultural aggression (to form a proactive stance)                                                                               | +                                           |

Table 3

**Language skills of the secondary school senior pupils developed on the basis  
of international educational language projects**

| <b>Language skills</b>                                                                                                                                                                                             | <b>Inter-<br/>na-<br/>tional<br/>educa-<br/>tional<br/>lan-<br/>guage<br/>pro-<br/>jects</b> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i><b>Communicative skills</b></i>                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                              |
| To make reports containing important information on the subject                                                                                                                                                    | +                                                                                            |
| To summarize the information received                                                                                                                                                                              | +                                                                                            |
| Speak on himself, his environment, his plans justifying his intentions and actions                                                                                                                                 | +                                                                                            |
| Dwell on facts and events providing examples, arguments, making conclusions                                                                                                                                        | +                                                                                            |
| Describe the specifics of life and culture of his native country and country of the target language                                                                                                                | +                                                                                            |
| Exchange information in the process of dialogic communication on the content of the text being read / listened to                                                                                                  | +                                                                                            |
| To start, to keep on and to finish the conversation in the standard communication situations observing the rules of speech etiquette, clarifying and specifying something if necessary                             | +                                                                                            |
| Ask an interlocutor and respond to his questions giving opinions, respond to a request, respond to an invitation by a consent / refusal relying on the studied themes and adopted lexical and grammatical material | +                                                                                            |
| Generate replica (answers to questions, comments, notes, remarks to replica)                                                                                                                                       | +                                                                                            |
| <i><b>Auditive skills</b></i>                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                              |
| Determine the information load of a semantic stress in the sentences                                                                                                                                               | -                                                                                            |
| To identify the shortened lexical and grammatical forms                                                                                                                                                            | -                                                                                            |
| To identify the word order in the various types of sentences                                                                                                                                                       | -                                                                                            |
| To identify the active vocabulary while listening to a text on a certain subject                                                                                                                                   | -                                                                                            |
| To identify the key words in audio-text                                                                                                                                                                            | -                                                                                            |
| To identify the meaning of the unknown words from the context                                                                                                                                                      | -                                                                                            |
| To identify words-connectors in audio-text                                                                                                                                                                         | -                                                                                            |
| To auralize speech (audio-text) of different speed and generated by speakers of different accents and dialects                                                                                                     | +                                                                                            |
| To identify registers of a statement                                                                                                                                                                               | -                                                                                            |
| To identify and interpret the variation of linguistic presentation of a statement depending on the affiliation of a speaker to a particular social / cultural group (age, social, ethnic, etc.)                    | -                                                                                            |
| To understand the goal of communication                                                                                                                                                                            | +                                                                                            |
| To understand the subject of communication                                                                                                                                                                         | +                                                                                            |
| To identify the participants of communication / speaker                                                                                                                                                            | +                                                                                            |
| To understand the logic of presenting information or argumentation (succession of facts, events)                                                                                                                   | +                                                                                            |
| To understand the interrelations of facts, reasons, events, etc                                                                                                                                                    | +                                                                                            |
| To identify the attitude of a speaker to the subject of discussion                                                                                                                                                 | +                                                                                            |
| To forecast the course of events                                                                                                                                                                                   | +                                                                                            |

|                                                                                                                       |                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Language skills</b>                                                                                                | <b>Inter-national educational language projects</b> |
| To express his own judgment, opinion on what he has heard                                                             | +                                                   |
| <b>Reading skills</b>                                                                                                 |                                                     |
| To identify the structure and communicative orientation of a whole text and its parts, functions of paragraphs        | +                                                   |
| To identify the subject, emphasize the main idea                                                                      | +                                                   |
| To choose the basic facts from the text omitting the secondary                                                        | +                                                   |
| To forecast the content of the text on a headline, beginning of the text                                              | +                                                   |
| To distinguish the meaningful milestones and key points in the text                                                   | +                                                   |
| To guess the meaning of key words and avoid unfamiliar words that do not affect the understanding of the main content | +                                                   |
| To understand the text accurately at the level of sense and meaning                                                   | +                                                   |
| To understand the structure and organization of the text                                                              | +                                                   |
| <b>Writing skills</b>                                                                                                 |                                                     |
| To fill in forms (to indicate the name, surname, gender, age, nationality, address)                                   | -                                                   |
| To write standard letters                                                                                             | -                                                   |
| To maintain personal / electronic correspondence                                                                      | +                                                   |
| To write applications                                                                                                 | -                                                   |
| To fill in the forms of various types                                                                                 | -                                                   |
| To present personal information in the form adopted in the country of a target language (autobiography, resume)       | +                                                   |
| To design plan, theses                                                                                                | +                                                   |
| To write various types of essays (narrative, argumentative, contrastive-comparative)                                  | -                                                   |
| To write reports on the studied subject                                                                               | +                                                   |
| To prepare presentations (Power Point, wall newspapers and posters) on the studied subject                            | +                                                   |

Table 4

**Stages of developing students' sociocultural and foreign language communicative skills in the process of their participation in the international educational language projects**

| <b>STAGES I-V IMPLEMENTED IN RUSSIA</b>                                                                                                                                                                             |                              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>STAGE I. IDENTIFYING GOALS, TASKS, PROBLEMS OF A PROJECT</b>                                                                                                                                                     |                              |
| The teacher explains to the Russian students the essence and the main stages of the international educational project activity aimed at the development of socio-cultural and foreign-language communicative skills |                              |
| <b>Teacher's actions</b>                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>Students' actions</b>     |
| The teacher divides the students into groups, explains to them the goal and tasks of the international educational project                                                                                          | Ask organizational questions |
| The teacher specifies the themes of an educational project                                                                                                                                                          | Ask questions                |
| The teacher explains to the students the crite-                                                                                                                                                                     | Ask questions                |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ria for assessing the project and their participation in project activity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>STAGE II. DISCUSSING THE ISSUES OF INFORMATION SECURITY WHILE WORKING WITH INTERNET RESOURCES</b><br>The teacher discusses with the students the issues of information security in the implementation of international educational project while searching and selecting material on the Internet                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Teacher's actions</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <b>Students' actions</b>                                                                                                                                                               |
| discusses with the students the issues of information security in the implementation of international educational project while searching and selecting material on the Internet                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Ask questions                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>STAGE III. BRAINSTORMING</b><br>The students divide into groups and participate in brainstorming on the suggested subject with a view to identify the aspects of a theme to be represented in the future project on the whole and searching and gathering information on the Internet in particular                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Teacher's actions</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <b>Students' actions</b>                                                                                                                                                               |
| Monitors students' educational activity in the process of their participation in brainstorming                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Participate in brainstorming on the suggested problem of a project                                                                                                                     |
| <b>STAGE IV. SEARCHING, GATHERING AND SUMMARIZING MATERIAL</b><br>The students implement search on the Internet, gather, summarize, classify material on the theme of the project                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Teacher's actions</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <b>Students' actions</b>                                                                                                                                                               |
| Monitors students' educational activity on searching, gathering, summarizing and classifying material on the theme of the project                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Implement search, gathering, summarizing and classifying material on the theme of the project                                                                                          |
| <b>STAGE V. CREATING PRELIMINARY VERSION OF A PROJECT</b><br>The students create a preliminary "rough copy" of a project on the suggested problem which will be discussed with the foreign partners (students from Great Britain) for real compliance with the culture of the country of the target language with a view to avoid false stereotypes and generalizations                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Teacher's actions</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <b>Students' actions</b>                                                                                                                                                               |
| Monitors students' educational activity on creating the preliminary version of a project                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | create the preliminary version of a project (in the form of a presentation, report, wall newspaper, etc.)                                                                              |
| <b>STAGES VI-X. IMPLEMENTED IN GREAT BRITAIN</b><br>These steps are performed under immersion into the country of the target language and culture and are held together with the foreign partners - students from the UK. The purpose of these steps is to identify and overcome the socio-cultural stereotypes and generalizations about the culture of the country of the target language on the discussed issue, as well as presenting the multicultural nature of the modern British and Russian societies |                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>STAGE XI. DISCUSSING THE PRELIMINARY VERSION OF A PROJECT WITH THE FOREIGN PARTNERS</b><br>The teacher organizes discussion of the projects on UK cultural studies carried out by the Russian students with their British partners with a view to detect and overcome the sociocultural stereotypes and generalizations. British students present their projects on the culture of Russia                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Teacher's actions</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <b>Students' action</b>                                                                                                                                                                |
| Monitors the educational activity of the students of the two countries                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Foreign partners (partner school students) in the target language country study the project carried out by the Russian participants, introduce their recommendations, make corrections |

| <b>STAGE VII. MAKING CORRECTIONS AND PREPARATION OF A FINAL VERSION OF A PRODUCT</b><br>After discussing the initial versions of a project, the students make their changes and amendments in order to overcome social and cultural stereotypes and generalizations |                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Teacher's actions</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>Students' actions</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Monitors students' educational activity on correcting and preparing the final version of a project                                                                                                                                                                  | Make adjustments and changes, prepare the final version of a project                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>STAGE VIII. PRESENTATION OF A PROJECT BEFORE THE RUSSIAN AND INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS</b><br>Students of both countries present their projects                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Teacher's actions</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>Students' actions</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| organizes the defence of students' projects                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Present the results of project activity (presentation, report, wall newspaper, etc.), defend their project                                                                                                               |
| <b>STAGE IX. ASSESSMENT AND SELF-ASSESSMENT</b><br>The teacher assesses the results of students' project activity and personal participation of each student in the work on the project. The students assess their participation in project activity                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Teacher's actions</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>Students' actions</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Assesses the project and participation of each of the students in project activity according to pre-defined criteria                                                                                                                                                | Each students assesses his personal participation in project activity                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>STAGE X. REFLECTION</b><br>The teacher organizes a general discussion in which each student gives his own view on his personal successes and failures and what difficulties he had experienced in the course of the project                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Teacher's actions</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>Students' actions</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Organizes general discussion of the students                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Assess how they were able to reveal the essence of the problem under discussion, trying to think over what difficulties they experienced during the project and why, summarize what they need to do to improve next time |

However, the implementation of all stages and steps together will contribute to the development of socio-cultural and foreign-language communicative abilities of the students.

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