

2.9. PRACTICAL EDUCATION PROJECT AS AN ESSENTIAL TOOL OF SELF-IMPROVING FOR EDUCATORS TEACHING GERMAN AS A TARGET LANGUAGE

Introduction. One of the most urgent tasks of modern higher education system is its transition to creative, problem-based methods of teaching and education that ensure the formation of a competitive specialist. The purpose of professional training of any specialist is forming a professionally competent, creative personality.

The professional competence of a modern specialist (as a readiness to perform their official and professional duties at a high professional level in accordance with modern theoretical and practical achievements and experience, international requirements and standards) should be considered in the unity of its three components: motivation and value, subject and practice, and self-regulatory and volition, which are also aspects of personality. But how do educators encourage students to be active in the classroom? How do they create an exciting atmosphere of research and scientific inquiry?

The article is targeted to observe Practical Education Projects (PEPs) as a central tool for educators' self-developments, that facilitates better assimilation of new knowledge of learners, teaches them to plan, work with multiple sources of information, critically perceive new data, collect, analyze and systematize information, work in a group, present and evaluate their own achievements.

Literature review. The internationalization of education around the world, Ukrainian European integration tendencies, reforms in higher education, and the concept of the New Ukrainian School have preconditioned the necessity of Ukrainian HE students' mastering a foreign language as a means of communication in the future professional sphere. In Europe, multilingualism is an important educational goal and a key factor for successful employment. The importance of multilingualism is recognized in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which sets out internationally recognized standards for foreign language proficiency (Savvatieieva, 2017).

Educational environment nowadays states the importance of majoring in agriculture students' professional training of German. It is impossible to overestimate the role and opportunities that open up for modern young people who speak German.

German is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. Compared to 1983, when German was taught in public schools in 88 countries, today the number of countries where German is taught in schools has grown to 117. Approximately 130 million people learn German, which is not surprising, as German is the language of technical progress and new technologies. German is spoken as an official or minority language in many countries of Western, Central and Eastern Europe. German is the native language of 90-95 million people in Europe, which is 13.3% of the total European population (Ukrinform.ua, 2023).

Realizing the urgency of the issue, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, the German Cultural Center Goethe-Institut in Ukraine and numerous universities have developed and are implementing a qualitatively new program for the training of future specialists.

The Goethe-Institut in Ukraine is a cultural institute of Federal Republic of Germany that operates worldwide. It promotes knowledge of the German language abroad and supports international cultural cooperation. The Goethe-Institut disseminates a broader understanding of Germany by informing about cultural, social and political life in this country.

In 2013, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and the Goethe-Institut in Ukraine signed a Memorandum of Cooperation to support the German language in Ukraine. Among other things, they agreed on the following goals of cooperation:

- support for reforming the Ukrainian education system in the field of foreign language teaching;
- support for the quality of German language teaching in Ukrainian HEIs;
- participation in improving the system of postgraduate pedagogical upgrading of the German language instructors (Dejanović, 2014).

As a part of the Goethe-Institut efforts to promote German language teaching in Ukraine, seminars and various services for Ukrainian educators, who teach German, are offered. The German Cultural Center Goethe-Institut in Ukraine offers a new international program “Learning to Teach German” – Deutsch Lehren Lernen (DLL) that has been promoted for teachers of German around the world. This program is based on the latest achievements in the German language methodology and didactics and is aimed at training new teachers and in-service training of teachers and teachers of German as a foreign language and reflects the current state of development of the discipline “German as a foreign language” (Legutke & Rotberg, 2018).

Methods. A set of methods was used: analysis and systematization to identify the presented problem at the current stage; a generalization method for presenting the advantages of PEP as a practical research project and its implementing in the educational process of higher education institutions. To present the results of the analysis of the effectiveness of PEP as a practical research project Zoom platform, a descriptive method was used.

Results and discussion. The growing requirements for educators, who teach German around the world, have led to the development of the Goethe-Institut’s DLL program. DLL is a professional development program for teachers of German as a foreign language offered by the Goethe-Institut in Munich and its regional institutes around the world. The DLL was launched in 2010 by experts commissioned by the Goethe-Institut to critically review the proposals for further education over the past 20 years and consider the experience of didactic and professional research. The first two blocks (DLL 1, DLL 2) are devoted to the main parties in the lesson, teachers (DLL 1) and students (DLL 2). DLL3 focuses on German as a medium and goal of the lesson. Interaction as a condition for language activity (DLL 4), materials and media (DLL 5), and curriculum specifications and lesson planning (DLL 6) round out the core program (Goethe-Institut, 2023).

In 2018, the DLL consisted of 12 thematic units. The DLL puts teachers and their ideas about learning at the center of the work. It is important to create a coherent

teaching link that enables educators to express their views on teaching and learning from different contexts. The lesson link is supported by a wide range of short lessons (videos) that provide a discussion. Relevant tasks are also used for this purpose. The learning activities aim to support dialogic and cooperative learning through partner work and small group work supported by relevant tasks (Goethe-Institut, 2023). They are intended not only to stimulate activity, create an exciting atmosphere of research and inquiry, motivate participants to consider a research perspective in their own and documented lessons, but also to encourage them to try new techniques (see also research-based learning).

Personal experiences related to teaching in DLL always take place with reference to didactic theories and the didactic research associated with them. Classical topics such as language skills or grammar are integrated into the relevant units. The approach is aimed at action-oriented and communicative foreign language learning (Mohr, 2016).

The DLL program enables learners to combine online learning, traditional and independent study, classroom and extracurricular activities. In the Ukrainian educational space this format is called blended learning, which engages using modern interactive technologies and combining them with traditional ones (Niewalda, 2015).

The DLL program is based on the latest developments in the field of German as a foreign language and integrates an innovative approach to training and professional development – Research through Action. The DLL takes into account the requirements for future specialists training programs and meets international quality standards in the field. It consists of 2 course blocks (German as a Foreign Language: Modules 1-10; German as a Second Foreign Language: Modules 15-16) (Funk et al., 2014).

Most Ukrainian HEIs, that are engaged in training German, have already successfully restructured their curricula and educational programs, taking into account individual DLL modules of the Goethe-Institut program. Cooperation with the Goethe-Institut in Ukraine opens up great opportunities and contributes to the integration of Ukrainian education into the European one. It provides

the following benefits, namely: participation in the creation of a common (open) educational space, increasing the competitiveness of universities in the market of educational services by offering an innovative educational product, the possibility of using DLL basic blocks in various learning models: full-time education, web-supported education, combined full-time and online education, and online education itself, improving the quality of education through the use of human, scientific, methodological, didactic and technical potential of the Goethe-Institut in Ukraine.

The DLL program promotes academic mobility of the participants in the educational process. Creating conditions for the growth of the professional level of educators through their training at Goethe-Institut courses in Ukraine. Currently, 14 Ukrainian HEIs are implementing selected DLL modules in their educational process.

In order to increase motivation to teach German, the Goethe-Institut German Cultural Center implements a number of activities, such as organizing and supporting the contest for students, who learn German “You Will Be the Best”. The winners of the competition have the opportunity not only to compete and share their experiences, but also to receive a scholarship to attend a two-week language course in Germany.

Of course, for everyone, who has connected their professional life with a foreign language, it is pivotal to improve knowledge in the methodical and didactic field, language competencies and country study. Every year, the Goethe-Institut offers scholarships to educators engaged in teaching German for their further postgraduate training in Germany. The scholarships cover seminars on methods and didactics of teaching German, seminars on country study and improving language skills in Germany. The seminars are held in interesting and picturesque cities and include a cultural program, providing many opportunities for language practice, acquaintance with the German culture, and establishing contacts with participants from other countries. The professional development course is designed to last 12 weeks – primarily, in-person training for 2-3 days, then a distance course, and finally another

in-person methodological and didactic seminar. In total, the training will last 80 academic hours.

As a part of the distance module, educators work in small groups on a practical research project (PEP). Then each participant carries out this project in his / her own class at the end of the course and evaluates its success with the group and a multiplier (teachers' trainer) (Romanovska, 2007).

The project method is not fundamentally new in the pedagogical practice, but it is now considered to be an essential educational technology of the 21st century, as it involves the ability to adapt to a rapidly changing world in a post-industrial society.

“Thrown forward” is an accurate translation of the word “project” from Latin. Originating from the idea of free education at the beginning of the last century in the United States, the project method incorporated the ideas of the humanistic trend in philosophy and education. J. Dewey and W. H. Kilpatrick proposed to build learning on an active basis, through the appropriate activities of the student. In project method learners are developing their self study activities through studying beyond the program, using their knowledge to solve communicative and informative problems and gain cultural-informative competencies. The problem had to be from the real life, familiar and meaningful. To solve it, both previously acquired and new knowledge is needed. The teacher-consultant guides the project work, directing the students' search in the right direction and suggesting sources of information (Zhylybay et al., 2014).

To successfully develop a PEP, it is necessary to take into account 10 rules – 10 steps, namely:

- 1) creating a working group for PEP with your colleagues;
- 2) finding out what exactly the group want to explore in its PEP;
- 3) exchanging ideas amid the project working group;
- 4) each participant analyzes his/ her own ideas;
- 5) a project should be small and clearly defined;
- 6) running the project and collecting data;

- 7) evaluating the project;
- 8) preparing a presentation of a PEP;
- 9) presenting a project together and responding to other groups' presentations;
- 10) documenting the PEP and the responses of others (Goethe-Institut, 2023).

When a group participants starts working, the first thing they need to do is to define and justify the topic of the project. A clearly formulated task facilitates the conscious creative work of the group. A well-thought-out clearly defined project structure and goals helps them to realize their research aspirations and strategies. The topic of the project should be clear and practically oriented, as a rule, the goal of the project is a specific type of practical activity. In order to clearly formulate the topic of the future, the PEP recommends answering simple questions: 1) What is new for me as an instructor in this topic? 2) What impressed me? 3) What interested me? 4) What would I like to try / test?

Here are some examples of topics for the PEP that have been successfully explored by German educators: “Activation of vocabulary through the game “Taboo”, “Correction of mistakes by students in the process of a foreign language communication”, “Using rituals to change the social form of German classes”, “Working with authentic podcasts to introduce a local history material”.

It is important to note that the PEP is documented and has a presentation with a very clear structure. The topic is followed by the “initial data” or “situation before the project” – “Impuls and Ist-Stand”. The next file is “Hypothesen”, in which it is predicted how the situation in mastering a particular activity will change after the project is tested, either positively or negatively. Next are the indicators “Indikatoren” that reflect the fulfillment or non-fulfillment of a certain stage of our research. As a rule, three main types of documents serve as data collection tools: questionnaires for teachers, questionnaires for students, and oral analysis and discussion of the project. For example, the questionnaires for teachers who observe the implementation of the PEP contained the following questions (PEP on the topic “How do students react if a commercial of the corresponding topic is used to introduce a new language topic?”):

- What emotions/feelings do students react to the commercial with?
- How active were the students?
- What part of the group participated in the discussion?
- How quickly did the students realize, what the topic of the lesson was, with the help of the commercial?
- Were the comments on the commercial meaningful and varied?
- Do you consider the use of a promotional video to be an effective way to introduce a new topic and to stimulate students' interest?

(Feldnotizen zu PEP: Mit welchen Gefühlen / Emotionen reagierten die TN auf den Werbespot? Wie aktiv waren die TN? Welcher Anteil der Gruppe hat sich am Gespräch beteiligt? Wie schnell haben die TN verstanden, in welches Thema der Werbespot ein Einstieg war? Gab es vergleichende Kommentarien zu den Inhalten des Werbespots? Sehen Sie Werbespots als wirksamen und lernaktivierenden Einstieg in neue Themen?).

In order to be able to correctly and objectively evaluate a particular PEP, a special attention should be paid to the preparation of questionnaires / tables for students. When formulating questions, it is recommended to check out the following sections:

- which points (parts) of the PEP are particularly important to you?
- how many questions can students answer and how much time is needed for this?
- for which questions do you expect what results?
- what points will be given to closed questions?
- what are the scores for open-ended questions?

At the end of the class, students answer the questions from the questionnaires. This data is attached to the project presentation and the individual file of the teacher who conducted the project in a separate group of students. The presentation of the project ends with conclusions, assessments and suggestions for its improvement, taking into account the shortcomings and mistakes that were identified during the PEP.

In one of the last PEPs participated by the authors, the working group explored collaborative writing in an online learning environment. The ideas and impulses for our PEP came from the content of DLL 4 “Tasks, Exercises, and Interaction”. While writing skills are mostly practiced as homework, as it is really time-consuming, the main goal of collaborative writing is to overcome students’ dislike and fear of writing and increase their motivation. To achieve the goal of the PEP in an online lesson, it was agreed that students should create a relatively short text at the end of the lesson. For this project, exercise 4, lesson 14, from the Menschen B1 textbook was chosen. After the students had read and discussed the long text on “Courses offered at a German adult education center”, they were asked to work in pairs and fill out a table with notes together, collecting ideas for their own courses. While writing, they discussed ideas the use of language structures in German, corrected and assisted each other. At the end of the online lesson, students could presented their course proposals in writing in a group and encouraged other students in the group to tell them who would like to take their course and why.

To sum the lesson up, students were asked to answer a questionnaire and evaluate the project idea, their own results, and the written texts of other students. As a result, most of the students were satisfied with this form of work and would like to continue to train their writing skills in the virtual classroom.

Conclusion. After analyzing PEPs conducted by German teachers, it was concluded that this type of testing and practical use of new methods and tools in teaching is and widespread, making it an important component of the professional training of a modern German teacher, contributing his/her competence in the field of professional activity; competence in other areas of professional activity; information and computer competence; communicative competence; foreign language communicative competence; competence in the field of self-determination and self-regulation); production and activity competence.

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