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WORK ON A PROJECT AS A PART OF ENGLISH-TEACHING PROGRAM AT TECHNICAL UNIVERSITIES

Mebuke T.

Georgian Technical University

В статье рассматривается вопрос включения работы над проектом по специальности на английском языке в программу обучения английскому языку в техническом вузе. Работа студентов над проектом входит как в число требований международной аккредитационной комиссии к высшим учебным заведениям, так и считается одним из самых перспективных способов обучения иностранному языку для специальных целей. В статье приводится пример работы над совместным проектом на английском языке студентов трех факультетов Белорусского национального технического университета и Грузинского технического университета, осуществленной в течение второго семестра 2018-2019 учебного года. Преимуществом проекта является развитие коммуникативных навыков студентов в специальном, связанном с будущей профессией контексте, навыков творческой, исследовательской работы и применение в ее процессе достижений информационных и коммуникационных технологий.

According to the International Accreditation Commission, work on joint projects represents one of the main demands for the establishments of higher education. At the same time, work on a project is considered to be one of the most effective methods of teaching a foreign language for specific purposes. Work on a project involves implementation of Information and Communication Technologies in the teaching process, which is also a demand of the International Accreditation Commission.

The fact that the English language has gained special prominence and is often the only means of communication across borders in the modern world has to be reflected in updated educational programs, especially as most of recent scientific information and special literature are available only in English. It has become a must for those who want to work with modern Information and Communication Technologies. Consequently, the aim of Universities is to give their

students the highest possible level of its knowledge, ability to work in their chosen fields of science using the latest publications, do research work, contact their colleagues from other countries using the advances of modern technologies.

Courses of English for specific purposes at Technical Universities give students knowledge of special terms and topics in an appropriate context, skills to work with special literature, deepen their knowledge in general. Inclusion of a project into English programs gives students a possibility to begin their own creative research work at an early stage of special education, learn to find appropriate material from printed and electronic sources, establish contacts with their colleagues from all over the world, work in a team, and make presentations using advances of Information and Communication Technologies. It prepares students for participation in future international projects and conferences, makes them more competitive, teaches to establish professional contacts, use language in a specific, profession-related context, enhances their communication skills. It is also beneficial for the lecturers and professors who will constantly work at raising the level of their knowledge, at making their work more versatile and interesting for both themselves, and students.

The agreement of Cooperation, signed between Belarusian National Technical University and Georgian Technical University in September 2016, gave us the idea to suggest work on joint projects in the English language for students to our Belarusian colleagues. We proposed to start, as an experiment, with one group from each department, namely: Faculty of Informational Technologies and Robot-Technique, Faculty of Electrical Power Engineering, Architectural Faculty at Belarusian National Technical University and corresponding faculties at Georgian Technical University: Faculty of Informatics and Control Systems, Faculty of Power Engineering and Telecommunication, and Faculty of Architecture, Urban Planning and Design. Each group was to have its coordinators – Deans of corresponding faculties, their English language teachers, and advisors from the lecturers in the subjects related to the themes of the projects.

The original plan consisted of the following steps:

1. At the beginning of the second semester of the first year English Language lecturers offer their students the suggested by their Deans lists of topics for the future project and ask them to choose one after having searched for available sources, mainly online sources, and consultations with their lecturers in corresponding subjects. During their work participants in the project may be divided

into groups according to their specific interests and chosen themes.

2. English Language lecturers, besides the appointed by the courses programs, guide the work of their students with special literature. This stage of work lasts for about a month.

3. Students from corresponding faculties of both Universities have a Skype conference in order to get acquainted and to decide on the common topic of their future project, exchange e-mail and Facebook addresses and contact telephone numbers.

4. Students continue work on their chosen project topic looking for and working with relevant texts with the help of their English language teachers and consultations with suggested by Deans lecturers. At the same time they contact one another to exchange their opinions and plans for the future project. They communicate in the English language.

5. Second Video-Skype Conference. Completion of stage 4 of the research is followed by another video conference of the students of both universities, when they make short presentations on their findings, get to know each other better, and define the title and the main goal of their future project. Students from both universities speak about their vision of the final project. It may be either a joint presentation, or separate presentations of the students from both universities on a chosen theme using Power Point.

6. Subsequent work is planned according to the course of work on the project with exchange of e-mail correspondence. Students continue work on a chosen version of the project guided by their English language teachers and consulted by recommended by their Deans specialists. Work on the project lasts for one semester.

7. At the end of the second semester of their first year students have the last, third Video-Skype Conference when they make either a joint, or separate presentations in the English language.

8. Students that took part in the project are awarded certificates for their participation in an International Students Project.

We have asked the deans of corresponding faculties to suggest possible topics for presentations for the first year students. All the deans expressed their interest in the prospective work of the students and gave their consent to it. The Dean of the Faculty of Informatics and Control Systems, Professor Zurab Tsveraidze, suggested work on one of the Programming Languages, the Dean of the Faculty of Power Engineering and Telecommunication, Professor Giorgi Arabidze, proposed the following topics for projects: 1) «Research in Renewable Sources of Energy»; 2) «Modern Trends in Hydropower Development (on the example of such countries as Austria, Italy,

etc.)»; the Dean of the Faculty of Architecture, Urban Planning and Design, Professor Nino Imnadze, suggested work on such projects as 1) «Green” Architecture»; 2) «Synthesis of Arts in Architecture»; 3) «The Problem of Colour in Architecture».

Our proposal was approved by the colleagues at Belarusian National Technical University, and during my stay in Minsk, where I had been invited as a visiting professor to deliver lectures to students and lecturers on 12 – 17 November 2018, a group of coordinators was formed. It was headed by the Head of the English Language Department № 1, associate professor S.A. Khomenko, the Head of the Department of Electrical Power Engineering, professor V.G. Bashtovoy, associate professor of the Department of Informational Technologies and Robot-technique Yu.S. Kruk, and the Head of the Department of Architecture, professor A.A. Litvinova.

he course of work on the first project, which was conducted during the second semester of the last year, underwent some modifications, mainly due to the fact that at Belarusian National Technical University semesters start about a month earlier than at Georgian Technical University and, consequently, work on the project began without the initial, originally planned Video-Skype conference. However, after the first Skype Conference was conducted, work became more coordinated as the students became better aware of the work they were expected to do, more motivated and enthusiastic.

Meanwhile our colleagues from Kaliningrad Technical University joined the project. The second Video-Skype Conference, which took place about a month later after the first one, proved to be a real success. Students of the three Departments of both Belarusian National Technical University and Georgian Technical University had worked really hard on their presentations. However, only the Department of Power Engineering of Kaliningrad Technical University participated in it.

Students of the Faculty of Informational Technologies and Robot-technique from Belarusian National Technical University and students of the Faculty of Informatics and Control Systems of Georgian Technical University prepared presentations on *Programming Languages*. Students of the Faculty of Electrical Power Engineering from Belarusian National Technical University and students of the Faculty of Power Engineering and Telecommunication from Georgian Technical University made presentations on *Renewable Sources of Energy*. Students of the Faculty of Architecture from Belarusian National Technical University and students of the Faculty of Architecture, Urban Planning and Design from Georgian Technical Uni-

versity chose different topics for their presentations: «The Problem of Colour in Architecture» and «*Green Architecture*» respectively. All presentations were made using Power Point and were beautifully illustrated by colourful slides.

The results of the Video-Skype Conferences exceeded our expectations. Having seen their fellow-students from other universities, and having understood the meaning of actual application of the English language to their work, the students became so enthusiastic, that the appointed for the Skype Conference time was not enough to hear all the presentations they had prepared. They expressed their wish to continue work on projects, became more motivated, better prepared for their English Language classes, asked if they would be studying English the following years and when the next Skype Conference would take place.

Another benefit of the work on our first joint project was the experience that both students, and their lecturers got. We all had a chance to see and compare the levels of knowledge, preparation and attitude to work of one another. It is my pleasure to make compliments to the colleagues from Belarusian National Technical University and the Head of English Language Department № 1, associate professor S.A. Khomenko.

On the whole, inclusion of work on a project in a definite field of science in the English language into the course of studies of the English language at a Technical University meets all modern demands for teaching foreign languages and helps to develop all necessary skills that the students of the XXI century will need in their future work, and, in a way, is a guarantee of their better future competitiveness and employment.

The biggest advantage of the project is that it enables all participants to take part in the work at their own level and pace, gives opportunity to both students and their English language teachers to enlarge their knowledge of special terms, expressions, and specific topics in the English language that will make their knowledge more solid and develop speaking and analytical thinking skills. During the course of work special emphasis is made on developing communication skills in a specific, career-related context, which represents a demand for modern foreign language teaching methods when the basic skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking are set in modern foreign language teaching standards that make stress on *what students know and are able to do*, and are known as the Five Cs (i.e. communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities), that represent the goals for modern foreign language learning (Phillips, Draper 1987; Phillips 2008) [1], and help to develop skills and abilities of each participant. All these demands are

completely met by the above described project.

Participation in the project will teach the students how to work with special literature in the English language and implement their knowledge in practice, find necessary material in traditional and electronic libraries, use the English language in both professional and everyday environment, learn to use modern Information and Communication Technologies for learning and scientific purposes, will develop their communication competence in the English language, ability to work in a team.

Students` general education broadens as they learn to communicate and interact with representatives of other countries, cultures and communities. On the basis of their English language knowledge and special education they will be prepared to do their professional work at an international level. Students will be able to select appropriate to their work special literature, write abstracts, prepare oral and written presentations, participate in scientific conferences and symposiums, take active part in future international projects and exchange programs with foreign universities from all over the world.

As a result we have a joint project the work on which, we hope, will not only interest students and their teachers, but also meets all the demands for modern foreign language teaching, and involves implementation of the main information and communication technologies in the English language teaching.

Such projects may vary from year to year and include internal, faculty projects, or joint projects with other universities, but will have one trait in common – they will foster the development of creativity and professionalism of our students.

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