

Организационно-дидактические аспекты цифровизации образования / Organizational and Didactic Aspects of the Digitalization of Education

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Implementation of students' project-based activities in a digital educational environment

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Abstract

Background. Digitalization is an indispensable element of the present-day educational system. It affects all the aspects and components of the educational process. The authors claim that project activity is one of the most productive forms of work in a digital educational environment at high school as it enhances students' socialization and develops their soft skills and professional competence. The scientific merit of this research lies in the comprehensive insight into the interconnections between students' project activities carried out in a digital educational environment at high school and their versatile personal development on the basis of the experience gained in the process of studying applied disciplines and fundamental theoretical sources on this issue.

Purpose. The article is aimed at the description of the available experience of students' project activities in the digital educational environment at high school.

Materials and methods. The principal research methods include theoretical (analysis and synthesis of the material under study from psychological, pedagogical, linguo-didactical and methodical sources) and empirical (observation, analysis of educational materials and online resources, questionnaire, conversation, interview) approaches. The practical part of the research is based on the analysis of the project activities undertaken by the students of the Institute of Languages and Cultures of Orenburg State University.

Results. The experience of students' project activities implementation in a digital educational environment at high school is a visual and objective example of a higher level of digital competence and soft skills demonstrated by the students in the control groups. Nowadays, the ability to generate ideas and implement them in social as well as professional projects has become significant and valuable. The result of such project ac-

tivity is a definite product (in our case, this can be an event, a pedagogical model, teaching materials, digital resources) that facilitates solving educational, career guidance and universal problems. Working on the project activity (during its initial stage, implementation period and presentation), students get new knowledge, acquire cooperation skills, improve their communicative, analytical, creative and reflexive skills. Implementation of students' project activities in a digital educational environment at high school develops their digital competence and self-organization skills. Thus, students' project activities in digital educational environment have the potential of forming the personality of a future specialist that can meet high expectations of the society.

Keywords: digitalization; digital educational environment; project activity; project; soft skills; student

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Организация проектной деятельности студентов в цифровой образовательной среде

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Аннотация

Обоснование. Цифровизация является неотъемлемым атрибутом современной системы образования, затрагивая все аспекты и компоненты образовательного процесса. Авторы доказывают, что одной из наиболее эффективных форм работы в условиях цифровой образовательной среды вуза выступает проектная деятельность обучающихся, способствующая становлению их личности и развитию гибких навыков и профессиональных компетенций. Научная значимость исследования заключается в проведении комплексного анализа взаимосвязей между осуществлением студентами проектной работы в цифровой образовательной среде вуза и разносторонним развитием их личности на основе приобретенного в процессе изучения прикладных дисциплин практического опыта и фундаментальных научных работ по данной тематике.

Цель – описать опыт организации проектной деятельности студентов в условиях цифровой образовательной среды высшего учебного учреждения.

Материалы и методы. Основные методы исследования – теоретические (анализ и синтез материала из психолого-педагогической, лингводидактической и методической литературы) и эмпирические (наблюдение, анализ учебных пособий и онлайн-ресурсов, анкетирование, беседа, опрос). Материалом для практической части работы выступили проекты, инициированные и реализованные студентами института языков и культур Оренбургского государственного университета.

Результаты. Опыт организации проектной деятельности студентов в условиях цифровой образовательной среды высшего учебного учреждения наглядно и объективно демонстрирует повышение уровня профессиональных компетенций и гибких навыков обучающихся контрольных групп. В современном мире способность генерировать идеи и воплощать их как в социальных, так и в профессионально-ориентированных проектах приобретает особую актуальность и значимость. Результатом проектной работы становится конкретный продукт (в нашей практике – мероприятия, педагогические модели, методические материалы, цифровые ресурсы), способствующий решению учебных, профориентационных задач, а также общечеловеческих проблем. В процессе проектной деятельности (на этапе подготовки, реализации и презентации проекта) студенты получают новые знания, приобретают навыки командной работы, совершенствуют коммуникативные, аналитические, творческие, рефлексивные способности. Реализация студентами проектной деятельности в цифровой образовательной среде вуза обеспечивает развитие у них цифровой компетенции и навыков самоорганизации. Таким образом, проектная деятельность студентов в цифровой образовательной среде обладает потенциалом для формирования личности будущего специалиста, соответствующей высоким требованиям социального заказа.

Ключевые слова: цифровизация; цифровая образовательная среда; проектная деятельность; проект; гибкие умения; студент

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Introduction

Rapid changes in the world around us and the emergence of ever-new spheres of human activity have led to changes in the professional requirements for specialists. While just a few years ago the need for the combined development of soft and hard skills in the training of future specialists was discussed [15; 18], today, when hiring, employers increasingly evaluate exclusively soft skills, noting that the development of specialized skills can

be achieved directly in the course of the work process. Among the most important skills and abilities for an employee are communication skills [21], critical and analytical thinking skills, the ability to think creatively and make decisions [16], learning ability, and the desire for continuous self-improvement. However, the digitalization of all spheres of human activity in recent decades, including the education system, has undoubtedly had a significant impact on the socio-psychological properties of the personality, on the one hand, and the requirements for a modern specialist, on the other [2; 3; 6; 8; 13; 14; 27].

Digitalization is characterized as a rather contradictory process. Thus, possessing undeniably great potential in the context of the development of forms of educational activity [11] and forms of interaction between teachers and students (face-to-face, distance, blended, electronic) [19], providing access to large volumes of information, unification of the global business space, individualized trajectory of education [13, p. 105], sustainable growth of students' motivation for studying, their digital literacy and culture [2, p. 148], the digital environment, at the same time, changed greatly personal characteristics of Generation Z who "focus on the rapid search and perception of information, multitasking, clip thinking, values of self-development and self-improvement" [1, p. 660], demonstrate the habit of multichannel perception of information (audio, video, colorful pictures, video sequences, etc.) in a ready-made, processed form; psychological dependence on gadgets, decreased social contacts, and emotional deficits; the loss of a number of intellectual skills [3, p. 18].

Thus, organizing education in the digital environment makes teachers face a number of challenges in content, organization [14, p. 112], and methodology, especially when it comes to distance learning. One of them is connected with the developing students' autonomy of different kinds: in education (independent choice of one's own learning methods and strategies, conscious management of educational and cognitive activities); in values («the need to have one's own views and the presence of such» [6, p. 25]); in emotions («the need to have one's own preferences» [6, p. 25]); in behavior (the need and ability to make one's own decisions, the need for independence in choice, self-determination, self-realization, and self-devel-

opment). One of the objectives of the digital educational environment, outlined in the Russian Federation's national project "Education", is "ensuring the students' readiness and ability for autonomy and productive activity in their study" [6, p. 21].

Naturally, in the context of a digital educational environment, there is also the question about the role of the teacher, "who must possess a developed information and professional culture, and a high level of media competence" [4]. In this regard, researchers underline the difference in consciousness and perception of digital reality by teachers born outside the digital environment and by modern schoolchildren who grew up in the digital 21st century [24; 28]. Therefore, traditional forms and methods of teaching offline are not as effective online, and there is a clear need to develop and implement new forms of teaching and assessment that take into account the needs, interests, and expectations of young people [8; 29], which requires thorough preparation from teachers.

One more challenge for teachers is the need to provide an individualized trajectory of education and the pace of learning depending on the capabilities and characteristics of students. Considering the increasing students' autonomy and other mentioned risks of digital education, the role of the teacher is thus becoming increasingly important, requiring high professionalism, broad knowledge, and the ability to multitask.

One more contemporary challenge for higher education, mentioned earlier, is connected with the need to develop soft skills in response to changes in the labor market, which, however, does not mean the unimportance of cognitive skills. For example, one of the new requirements for the personality of a young specialist is the ability to work in a project-based format, i.e., to independently create and implement projects in various fields of work.

The project method is well known and widely used at all stages of education. It involves students' creative (and largely independent) activity in the subject, resulting in a creative product. Any project is activity-based and focused on the individual student. Although the basis of the method remains unchanged, resources and products of project work can vary greatly in accordance with economic, social, technological and digital world development.

The theoretical foundations of the project method are primarily associated with the American philosopher and educator J. Dewey and his student W.

H. Kilpatrick [25]. In Russian pedagogics, N. Yu. Pakhomova and E. S. Polat made significant contributions to the development of the project method.

Project method is a teaching method based on a personality-centered and activity-based approach, according to which the personality is formed in activity and in communication with other people and determines the nature of this activity (P.Ya. Galperin, A.V. Zaporozhets, I.A. Zimnyaya, A.A. Leontiev, D. B. Elkonin). The core idea of this approach is to shift the emphasis from various types of exercises to students' active thinking in a creative atmosphere where each participant is engaged in an active, collaborative learning process. In other words, this approach can be characterized as «learning through doing».

E.S. Polat defines the project method as a way to achieve a didactic goal through detailed development of a problem, which should result in a very real, practical result, formalized in one way or another [12].

Traditionally, among the products of project work there are the following: presentation; newspaper or magazine publication; exhibition, film, or report; research; poster; wall newspaper; brochure; web page model (real web page); book (e-book); poem; song; script; video (educational, video tour, video report); booklet; album; postcards; drawing; holiday script; training program plan, etc.

However, in a digital educational environment, the project method gains much greater potential, with geographic, age, and thematic boundaries virtually disappearing. “Modern digital tools significantly expand the possibilities of project activity, providing access to authentic materials, ... visualize project results, and develop a project evaluation system” [4, p. 114].

Furthermore, digital projects allow students not only to acquire practical skills in a specific field but also to develop digital skills and digital literacy. The result of such a digital project can be an electronic collage, a slide show, a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation, a graph, a diagram, a video, and more. Most students are generally interested in modern technology. Naturally, the use of digital devices and applications can increase students' motivation to participate in project activities.

The project method offers a number of advantages in helping students acquire the necessary practical skills and abilities because it allows:

- to maintain students' motivation for the subject at a high level through the wide range of topics and formats of project presentation; according to D. Fried-Booth, "The motivation lies in the project itself" [22].

- to encourage students' independence in searching for information, planning, organizing, and presenting projects;

- to organize non-standard activities that make learning enjoyable;

- to develop students' ability to work in teams, interact, and collaborate to achieve successful results; among interactive skills the following ones are usually mentioned: the ability to listen and hear the other person, to argue, to assert, to counter with tolerance, to respond quickly, to analyze the situation and give an adequate assessment, etc. [9, p. 61].

- to assign students to groups according to their abilities, allowing weaker students to collaborate with stronger ones;

- to help strong students develop further by providing freedom to experiment in the subject area;

- to develop public speaking skills and self-confidence.

Materials and methods

The study aimed to examine the potential and risks of the digital educational environment in organizing students' project activities, as well as the impact of systemic project work on the development of students' professional and flexible skills.

Achieving this goal required solving a number of tasks:

- analyzing and synthesizing theoretical and practical knowledge about the digital educational environment, and predicting potential risks of its use in project work;

- searching for and systematizing digital resources for implementing projects online and offline;

- refining the content of professional courses for linguistics students to incorporate project-based activities;

- conducting experimental work to develop the professional and flexible skills of linguistics students in project-based activities based on the content of the studied disciplines in both classroom and extracurricular activities using digital tools.

In the course of the experiment, quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative (observations of the educational process, interviews, conversations) research methods were used. At the ascertainment stage, students were offered questionnaires that allowed them to assess their level of professional (foreign language communication skills) and soft skills (creative, reflective, analytical, and teamwork skills), as well as their awareness of project-based activities. Changes in students' answers to the same questions at the end of the formative stage of the experiment made it possible to statistically evaluate the impact of the project activities carried out in the digital environment on the development of the skills mentioned above. In order to get an objective result, the obtained data were compared with the teachers' observations of the educational process, interviews and feedback from students on the work carried out and its impact on the personality of students, an analysis of documented achievements of students in the field of projects.

However, it should be noted that the results obtained may be inaccurate in the context of developing students' professional and soft skills, due to the diversity of disciplines in the curriculum, the content and methods of which are also aimed at developing the aforementioned skills.

The methodological basis for the study was a synthesis of personality-centered and activity-based approaches, which determine the very essence of students' project activities in the digital educational environment at high school [5, p. 45-54].

Results and discussion

The described experimental work on the implementation of students' intensive project activities in the digital educational environment was carried out at the Institute of Languages and Cultures of Orenburg State University (OSU) with future linguist-teachers during the 2024-2025 academic year. The experimental control groups included 2nd and 3rd year bachelor's students and 1st year master's students, in total 44 people. Students carried out project activities on the content of several academic disciplines: Practical Course of Use of English (2088 academic hours), Theory and Practice of Project Management (144 academic hours), Interactive Technologies in Teaching Foreign Languages (144 academic hours), Project Management in Teaching Foreign Languages (108 academic hours), Technologies of Dig-

ital Education in Teaching Foreign Languages (144 academic hours). The collection of learning assessment materials on the disciplines mentioned above includes students' project work carried out in the form of individual creative assignments, which are checked by the university teacher in class orally and/or in a written form.

A project work traditionally includes three main stages: preparation, implementation and presentation. However, reflection on the project can also be identified as a separate stage.

The preparation stage focuses on motivating students; identifying their interests and selecting a project topic; setting project goals and objectives; and planning the upcoming work (analyzing available resources and allocating time to solving specific tasks).

Identifying a project topic is of great importance as it should be closely connected to the student's interests in order to motivate him/her for the following work.

First, it is essential to define the aim of the project:

- to solve some problem (local or global);
- to attract attention to a definite problem (if unable to solve it);
- create a new product or develop a new function of a well-known one.

Thematically, most of the projects are devoted to:

- studying social problems and phenomena, often dealing with inter-personal relations;
- studying environmental issues (global or local);
- satisfying personal interests and needs, developing personal qualities.

Undoubtedly, this classification is quite conditional, since projects can also combine the features of several categories, but it can help define the topic of the project.

The second stage involves implementing the actions planned in the first stage: analyzing, synthesizing, and systematizing information resources, creating products, and preparing a presentation. During this period, regular and effective communication between the student(s) and the instructor is of great importance.

The project presentation is the most visible part of the project and requires students to demonstrate their best public speaking skills. The format

of the event and presentation requirements are discussed in advance. At this stage, the project is evaluated, and evaluation criteria are also presented to students in advance.

The reflection stage involves analyzing and evaluating one's own performance and the performance of other group members, working on mistakes. Of course, reflection should be present at all stages of the project; it is reflection that makes the work meaningful and contributes to personal development.

Project activities can be classified by duration, by the number of participants, by goal and content.

In terms of duration, projects can be short-term and long-term. The project may make a part of one 90-minute university class, or it may last six months. In the context of foreign language teaching, short-term projects are carried out by groups of students during one lesson, requiring minimal time, while long-term projects need independent work and careful preparation. In this case, after students receive the assignment, discuss the topic and structure of the project, they should have enough time to implement it. The presentation of projects is scheduled for another day and is discussed in advance. Accordingly, the project requirements are much higher.

In terms of the number of participants, projects can be individual, pair and group. Group projects are most commonly used in practice. Small groups of three to four people are considered the most effective for organizing effective interaction and achieving successful results. This size group, on the one hand, allows each student to actively participate in the project, and on the other, minimizes the risk of conflicts due to psychological incompatibility. In this format, the teacher's role becomes mentoring and advisory. Nevertheless, the teacher's task is to provide timely methodological support to the creative group and to ensure equal opportunities for all group members to express themselves. It should be especially emphasized that creative groups using the project method are characterized by the absence of a leader; equal participation by each team member; collective responsibility for the project's outcome; and the absence of competition between teams.

In the current digital educational environment, high school students who major in foreign languages (English and Chinese) teaching methods devel-

op projects of various types, individual or group, short-term or long-term, but all of them are primarily aimed at their hard and soft skills development.

In the practical course of Use of English, students work on short-term projects related to the issues under study, which correlate with the academic course program (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Students' project activities in the practical course of Use of English

№	The issues under study	Project titles
1	College Life	Top 10 students' resolutions for academic year
2	Health and Wellbeing	5 tips on how to stay mentally and emotionally healthy
3	Environment Protection	5 eco-friendly habits to develop this month
4	Books and Reading Preferences	A poster for the book I recommend to read
5	Visual Arts	A review of the theatre performance

Source: [15, p. 8-9]

Students may collaborate in their project activities in groups of 2-3 or work individually. They develop the content of their projects and prepare to present them in public using interactive online boards, presentation templates, digital documents. Thus, one project idea proves to be developing personal and collective mindsets, creative potential and communicative skills, pursuing individual and global goals for self-expression, language competence and digital literacy. OSU students are highly aware of global issues such as environmental pollution, human wellbeing, visual arts. They develop online projects that promote their views and educate the people around, within the students' community and among older citizens. Thus, social networking service VKontakte and Telegram media channels have become the domain for sharing project ideas on the best theatre performances and book titles in the form of critical reviews and posters; on compiling the common list of healthy habits to maintain mental and physical wellbeing with motivational slogans and pictures; on implementing everyday actions to contribute to the environment protection (using textile shopper bags instead of plastic ones; using one portable water bottle filled at home instead of buying one every time one feels thirsty; sorting out the rubbish). These projects carried out in practical classes of Use of English result in students' independence

in searching for information, their ability for teamwork and collaboration, their public speaking skills and self-confidence.

In the course of Interactive Technologies in Teaching Foreign Languages, students work on long-term academic projects related to their future teaching job on methods of teaching the English and Chinese languages. Here are several examples of such projects' titles suggested to and by students: The Potential of Using Digital Resource Fliktop in Book Club Sessions with Linguistics Students; The Jigsaw Method in Interactive Book Club Meetings with Linguistics Students; Icebreakers as Means to Organize Group Interactive Activities in Foreign Languages in Extracurricular Time; The Potential of Project Technologies in the Development of Students' Social and Cultural Skills. These projects develop into students' yearly essays and events they organize for junior students and university applicants.

Embracing innovative methods of teaching foreign languages, our students make use of available digital means and technologies to make the process of language learning more interactive and efficient. They harness the full potential of such digital resources as online collaborative platform Miro, interactive learning platform Quizizz, interactive online constructor of teaching materials Fliktop, online comic strip editor Pixton and many other tools. These projects are educational, developing students' digital and language skills, applicable in their daily language practice and subsequent professional teaching activity. When students choose the topic for their long-term projects in the course of Interactive Technologies in Teaching Foreign Languages it enhances their motivation for the subject, develops them further by providing freedom to experiment in the subject area and helps them organize non-standard activities that make learning enjoyable. Students' results in such academic project-activities are illustrated by their successful participation and prize winning in International and Russian competitions of students' scientific research projects, i.e. Research of New Generation204–2025 (Moscow, 2025); Students' Current Research: Philology, (Barnaul, 2025); In the World of Science: the Issues of Philology, Linguodidactics and Translation Studies (Cheboksary, 2025).

Long-term social projects for a wider audience are being developed by OSU students to maintain the goal of knowledge dissemination and make

the valid information accessible and applicable. Our master students have been working on the promotion and content of their Telegram channel “Silk Wind” aimed at learners of the Chinese language and connoisseurs of Chinese culture. They publish information on Chinese lexis and curious facts from the history of China on a daily basis with much care and digital skills given to make them visually attractive and educational.

Another long-term social project initiated at the Department of the English and Chinese Languages of OSU combines volunteer work of interviewing the best graduates who have achieved success in their profession with online media coverage of these video recordings to promote language learning and teaching job among the applicants. This project requires multiple skills, time and effort to produce high impact and demonstrate great values, i.e., choice of vocation, succession of generations, community spirit, respect for labor. The geographical, temporal, and thematic possibilities of such project activity are extensive, as the interviewees’ personality and career paths are of high interest for prospective, current and even ex-students, their teachers and parents, and all the people in general who are eager to expand their outlook.

The afore-listed students’ project activities in the digital educational environment of the Institute of Languages and Cultures of Orenburg State University carried out during the 2024-2025 academic year in experimental control groups, have resulted in the development of communicative, creative, social and cultural skills as well as professional competence and digital literacy according to the data obtained through questionnaires and observation.

Communicative skills have enabled students to express their ideas in the foreign language fluently and freely during their public project presentation, defend their position and justify their point of view, ask questions related to other students’ projects. It is worth noting that the quality of project presentation has substantially increased through the experiment if we compare its initial and final stages in the 2024-2025 academic year, in particular, the number of mistakes in students’ speech has decreased, the number of sentences and their structure has become more advanced, the scope of answers to the questions posed has expanded.

Creative skills have ensured project initiation and production, especially in the stages of its content development and presentation. According to the

questionnaire results students faced certain problems while choosing the topic for their projects, working in groups, debating and solving conflicts at different stages of project activities. Some students have noted that the feedback provided after the public project presentation has failed to satisfy their needs and expectations. Nevertheless, students' self-estimation and self-analysis of their project activity, their adequate reaction to the questions and feedback have demonstrated their enhanced reflexive, social and cultural skills.

The experiment has shown that the professional competence of linguistics students has improved due to the number of digital tools they have mastered through project activities, time-management skills they have upgraded in the process of project work and knowledge they have gained in the course of study and research. The permissible variations of the results obtained include allowances for students' motivation and enthusiasm to get involved in project activities, their role in teamwork; formulated differently, the results depend on students' personal traits and behavior, which are highly variable and unpredictable. The practical significance of the study lies in the development of a set of English-language projects and methodological recommendations for their use within the framework of the discipline Interactive Technologies in Teaching Foreign Languages, presented in teaching aid [10], as well as a tutorial on project management [17] and guidelines for organizing a seminar on project activities in foreign language education [16].

The results of the research and experiment carried out at the Institute of Languages and Cultures of Orenburg State University correlate with the findings shared by the colleagues from Samara State Technical University [18], Pskov State University [26] and South Ural State University [7]. Facing the globalization and digitalization challenges high school curriculum incorporates project activities which "contribute to the obtaining of a complex of non-specialized, career-important supraprofessional skills that are responsible for successful participation in the work process, high productivity and are not related to a specific subject area" [26, p. 459].

Conclusion

1. Nowadays, there is a social need for specialists with highly developed both professional and soft skills. The last ones include communicative, cre-

ative, analytical, time-management, reflexive skills, high digital literacy and the ability to work in a project-based format.

2. Digitalization in education is a rather contradictory process. On the one hand, the digital educational environment provides new multiple instruments and resources, on the other hand, it sets a number of content, methodological and organizational challenges.

3. Project work at high school can be realized on the content of different disciplines. The digital educational environment expands the geographical, temporal, and thematic possibilities for the application of project activities at high school.

4. The described students' project activities at the Institute of Languages and Cultures of Orenburg State University proved to have great potential in the digital educational environment for developing students' communicative, social, creative, cultural, time-management skills, adequate self-estimation and self-analysis. The research of the interconnections between students' project activities implemented in the digital educational environment at high school and their versatile personal development has both theoretical and practical relevance as it provides a comprehensive insight into the most efficient methods of young specialists' education in present-day digital environment with reference to high demands of the employers who value project management skills and hire young people for their hard skills but fire them for their soft skills.

5. The research perspectives lie in the domain of creating elaborate designs and topics for students' project activities as well as providing them with opportunities to implement their project ideas in the local and regional educational institutions in order to get unbiased feedback from the current and prospective employers, colleagues and pupils.

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