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**THE USE OF BLOG TECHNOLOGY TO DEVELOP SOCIOCULTURAL SKILLS
OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AT THE GERMAN LESSONS**

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Abstract

In recent decades, modern Internet technologies have been actively used in the educational process of universities, namely in the formation of foreign language communicative competence. This study is aimed at presenting scientifically based methodology for the development of sociocultural competence of students of Vyatka State University in the field of Linguistics, with major in Translation and translation theory, based on the use of modern second-generation Internet technology – blog technology, as the intercultural communication effectiveness depends on it. The methods of modeling of the educational process for developing sociocultural skills using blog technology, as well as of experimental training, were the main ones that were used in this work. The applied methods allowed proving the authors' hypothesis about the effectiveness of using blog technology in accordance with the established authors' methodology for the development of sociocultural skills.

Keywords

Higher education – Informatization of education – Information and communication technologies

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Introduction

Modern Russian society is constantly in the process of intensive informatization. Therefore, new information and communication technologies emerge. Due to using these technologies in education, at present a new field of pedagogical knowledge has appeared - informatization of education. It allows developing new methodologies, methodological systems, methodological technologies, methods and forms of training in modern conditions of the information society¹. Over the past 20 years, a large number of both Russian and foreign scientific works have been published². Their purpose is to promote information and communication technologies in education, in particular, while teaching a foreign language, since these technologies have distinctive didactic properties and methodological functions enriching and significantly accelerating the learning process³.

Teaching a foreign language at university is mainly aimed at developing one of the components of foreign language communicative competence – sociocultural competence. The formation of this competence is of particular importance for students of Vyatka State University in the field of Linguistics, with major in Translation and translation theory, as they are constantly at the “crossroads of cultures” due to their professional activity. The effectiveness of intercultural contacts depends on how well they develop their sociocultural skills. The didactic properties of modern new-generation Internet technologies (Web 2.0) - blog technologies, wiki technologies and podcasts - provide great opportunities for the development of students' sociocultural skills⁴.

Despite the fact that there is a large number of works devoted to using Internet technologies in the development of students' sociocultural skills⁵, some issues have been

¹ I. V. Robert; S. V. Panyukova; A. A. Kuznetsov y A. Yu. Kravtsova, Information and communication technologies in education (Moscow: Drofa, 2008).

² I. K. Zabrodina, Methodology for the development of students' sociocultural skills through modern Internet technologies: PhD (Moscow, 2012); E. S. Polat; M.Yu. Bukharkina y M. V. Moiseeva, Theory and practice of distance learning (Moscow: Academy, 2004); I. V. Robert; S. V. Panyukova; A. A. Kuznetsov y A. Yu. Kravtsova, Information and communication technologies in education (Moscow: Drofa, 2008); B. Hanna y J. A. Nooy, “Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum: Electronic Discussion and Foreign Language Learning”, Language Learning and Technology num 1 (2003): 71-85; R. Jaidev, “How pedagogical blogging helps prepare students for intercultural communication in the global workplace”, Language & Intercultural Communication Vol: 14 num 1 (2014): 132-139; M. Marcoccia, “The internet, intercultural communication and cultural variation”, Language & Intercultural Communication Vol: 12 num 4 (2012): 353-368 y J. Matusitz, “Intercultural Perspectives on Cyberspace: An Updated Examination”, Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment Vol: 24 num 7 (2014): 713-724.

³ P. V. Sysoev, “Informatization of language education: main directions and prospects”, Foreign languages at school num 2 (2012): 2-9.

⁴ P.V. Sysoev, “Informatization of language education: main directions and prospects”, Foreign languages at school num 2 (2012): 2-9.

⁵ V. V. Safonova, “Cultural studies in the system of modern language education”, Foreign languages at school num 3 (2001): 17-24; A. K. Cherkasov, The methodology of development of sociocultural skills of students through a web forum (English, language university): PhD (Moscow, 2012); A. A. Andreev, “Use of the Internet in the education process”, Computer Studies and Education num 9 (2005): 2-7; V. G. Apal'kov y P. V. Sysoev, “Methodical principles of formation of the cross-cultural competence in the process of teaching a foreign language”, Tambov University Reports. Series: Humanities num 7 (2008): 254-260; A. Durant y I. Shepherd, “‘Culture’ and ‘Communication’ in Intercultural Communication”, European Journal of English Studies Vol: 13 num 2 (2009): 147–162 y

insufficiently studied: the sociocultural skills of Vyatka State University students that should be developed using modern Internet technologies; methodological conditions for the development of students' sociocultural skills through modern Internet technologies; an algorithm for the development of sociocultural skills using modern Internet technologies. This article deals with the above-mentioned problems.

It should be underlined that the article considers blog technology used to develop aspects of a foreign language communicative competence. According to P.V. Sysoev, blog technology is one of the technologies of Web 2.0, which enables each Internet user to create his own personal pages - blogs in the form of magazines or diaries. Blogs are considered to be a new generation of social Internet services that create the conditions for communication among people with common interests but separated by distance⁶.

Blog technology has the following didactic characteristics:

- 1) publicity (blogs are available to all project participants);
- 2) linearity (all information in blogs is arranged in chronological order);
- 3) authorship and moderation (the blog has one author and it is moderated only by the author);
- 4) multimediality (the ability to use content materials of various formats: text, graphic, photo, video, audio)⁷.

These didactic characteristics of blog technology allow developing such types of speech activities as writing and reading. When using blog technology in teaching a foreign language, it is necessary to take into account its methodological functions: 1) blog technology can be used to organize networking in a foreign language between students and extracurricular activities aimed at development of various language aspects (vocabulary, grammar), types of speech activity (reading, writing), as well as sociocultural and intercultural competence; 2) all information in the blog is posted in chronological order, the blog technology does not allow changes and additions to information previously published in the blog; 3) the author of the blog is a person who acts as a moderator; 4) blog technology allows using materials of different formats, which makes it possible to enrich the language and sociocultural material for writing essays, summaries, reviews based on blog technology⁸.

So, the research hypothesis is the fact that the development of the sociocultural competence of Vyatka State University students will only be successful if it is carried out based on a clearly identified group of sociocultural skills of students that are developed using modern Internet technologies, in particular blog technology. Moreover, it is important to consider its didactic properties, methodological functions, methodological conditions and

M. A. Gernsbacher, "Internet-Based Communication", *Discourse Processes* Vol: 51 num 5/6 (2014): 359-373.

⁶ P. V. Sysoev, "Blog technology in teaching a foreign language", *Language and Culture* Vol: 4 num 20 (2012): 115-127.

⁷ P. V. Sysoev, "Blog technology in teaching a foreign language..."

⁸ P. V. Sysoev, "Blog technology in teaching a foreign language", *Language and Culture* Vol: 4 num 20 (2012): 115-127.

step-by-step algorithm for the development of students' sociocultural skills using blog technology.

Materials and methods

The research is aimed at determination of science-based methodology for the development of sociocultural competence of Vyatka State University students using blog technology. Therefore, the tasks of the research are as follows:

1) to define sociocultural skills of Vyatka State University students developed using blog technology;

2) to study didactic properties and methodological functions of blog technology;

3) to identify methodological conditions for the development of students' sociocultural skills using blog technology;

4) to create an algorithm for the development of sociocultural skills of Vyatka State University students using blog technology;

5) to test the effectiveness of the development of sociocultural skills of students using blog technology in experimental training and to describe its quantitative and qualitative results.

To solve these tasks, the authors used the following research methods: 1) analysis and generalization of the results of theoretical and practical research; 2) experimental training; 3) analysis and description of quantitative and qualitative results of experimental training.

The research consisted of three stages with each stage having specific tasks and was carried out in 2015-2017. Table 1 presents the stages and objectives of the research.

Research stages	Tasks of the research
The first stage (2015 – 2016)	highlighting research problems; determination of goals, objectives, subject, object, research methods; analysis of pedagogical and methodological literature on the topic of the research
The second stage (2016-2017)	definition of sociocultural skills developed by students in the field of Linguistics, with major in Translation and translation studies; identification of methodological conditions for the development of students' sociocultural skills using modern Internet technologies; creating an algorithm for the development of students' sociocultural skills using modern Internet technologies
The third stage (2017)	conducting experimental training in order to test the working hypothesis of the study (an experimental group - fourth-year students of Vyatka State University in the field of Linguistics, with major in Translation and translation studies)

Table 1
Research stages

Results

Having analyzed the scientific methodological literature, the authors came to conclusion that many researchers used theoretical foundations of the organization of project activities⁹ when developing algorithms and technologies for teaching a foreign language using Internet technologies - blog technology¹⁰, wiki technology¹¹ and podcasts¹². Let us consider the main stages of the organization of project activities of other scientists and establish own algorithm for the development of students' sociocultural skills through blog technology.

According to P.V. Sysoev and M.N. Evstigneev, the organization of project activities has the following stages:

- 1) introduction to project activities: familiarization of students with the opportunity to participate in proposed projects and discussion of these projects;
- 2) planning the project work: discussing the goal, objectives, content of the project;
- 3) implementation of the project after school: preparation for the organization of an oral presentation and its discussion;
- 4) evaluation of the project¹³.

A feature of project activities is that students carry out most of their projects after school, with particular attention being paid to independent learning activities. The teacher has a key role in the initial and final stages, while in the intermediate stages, students work independently. Thus, much attention is paid to the development of independent educational activity skills, which plays an important role in the competency-based approach. According to many researchers, a detailed description of the activities of the teacher and students in the process of project organizing and implementing has stages and steps with a hierarchical relationship¹⁴.

⁹ N. S. Petrishcheva, The methodology for the formation of sociocultural competence of students of the specialty "Jurisprudence" through educational Internet projects (English): PhD (Moscow, 2011); E. S. Polat, "The method of projects in the lessons of a foreign language", Foreign languages in school num 3 (2000): 3-9; E.S. Polat, "Internet in foreign language lessons", Foreign languages at school num 2 (2001): 14-19 y P. V. Sysoev y M. N. Evstigneev, Methods of teaching a foreign language using new information and communication Internet technologies (Moscow: Glossa-Press, 2010).

¹⁰ P. V. Sysoev, "Blog technology in teaching a foreign language", Language and Culture Vol: 4 num 20 (2012): 115-127.

¹¹ E. D. Koshelyaeva, Methodology for the development of sociocultural skills of students through the social service "Wiki" (English, language university): PhD (Moscow, 2010) y Yu. Yu. Markova, Methods of development of students' writing skills based on wiki technology (English, language university): PhD (Tambov, 2011).

¹² A. G. Solomatina, Methodology for the development of speaking and listening skills of students through educational podcasts (English, basic level): PhD (Moscow, 2011) y P. V. Sysoev y M. N. Evstigneev, "Modern educational Internet resources in teaching a foreign language", Foreign languages at school num 6 (2008): 1-10.

¹³ P. V. Sysoev y M. N. Evstigneev, Methods of teaching a foreign language using new information and communication Internet technologies (Moscow: Glossa-Press, 2010), 76-77.

¹⁴ N. A. Sushkova, The methodology of the formation of intercultural competence in conditions of immersion in the country's culture of the studied language (English, language university): PhD

So, based on the analysis of pedagogical and methodological literature, the following students' sociocultural skills are defined that can be developed using Internet technologies:

- 1) search and evaluation of culturally significant events of the country of the studied language;
- 2) comparative analysis of culturally significant events of the countries of the native and studied languages;
- 3) analysis of changes that have occurred in the cultures of the countries of the native and studied languages over time;
- 4) work with culturally oriented texts in order to search for sociocultural information with subsequent submission of sociocultural comments;
- 5) implementation of projects based on studies of the culture of the countries of the native and studied languages.

The above sociocultural skills are aimed at studying the cultures of the countries of the native and studied languages and thus fully reflect the aspect of sociocultural competence.

During the research, the step-by-step algorithm was established for the development of sociocultural competence of Vyatka State University students using blog technology. It included three stages (preparatory, procedural and final) and twelve steps. Let us consider each stage in more detail (Table 2).

Stages of sociocultural development	Step-by-step algorithm	Actions of the teacher and students
Preparatory stage	Step 1. Familiarization of students with Internet technologies, in particular blog technology	The teacher introduces students to modern Internet technologies, the possibilities of using blog technology
	Step 2. Explanations of the goals and objectives of the project which will be carried out on the basis of blog technology	The teacher explains how to carry out the project and offers a list of topics; students offer additional topics that they would like to discuss as part of the educational program

(Tambov, 2009); P. V. Sysoev, "Informatization of language education: main directions and prospects", *Foreign languages at school* num 2 (2012): 2-9; P. V. Sysoev, "Blog technology in teaching a foreign language", *Language and Culture* Vol: 4 num 20 (2012): 115-127; P. V. Sysoev y M. N. Evstigneev, "Modern educational Internet resources in teaching a foreign language", *Foreign languages at school* num 6 (2008): 1-10 y P. V. Sysoev y M. N. Evstigneev, *Methods of teaching a foreign language using new information and communication Internet technologies* (Moscow: Glossa-Press, 2010).

	Step 3. Formulation of evaluation criteria	The teacher tells about the criteria for evaluating the work. Evaluation criteria may include the following: presentation of the topic, deadline, creativity
	Step 4. Registration on the blog server, learning rules for posting materials on it	The teacher offers students the address of the blog server where their projects will be posted, helps register on the server, explains how to post materials in the blog; students register and try to post their materials
	Step 5. An explanation of rules for maintaining information security in the Internet during the implementation of the project	The teacher explains the rules of compliance with information security on the Internet
Procedural stage (using blog technologies as an example)	Step 6. Formulation of the topic	Students choose an interesting topic for the project, they can look for suitable material in the search engines Rambler, Google, etc.
	Step 7. Finding information and selecting material for posting in personal blogs	Students are trying to find information on the Internet on the topic, systematize and analyze the material
	Step 8. Writing and publishing a project in a blog	The teacher monitors students' independent work on the selected project, monitors the placement of materials in blogs; students prepare written works using Word and post materials in personal blogs (essays, reports)
	Step 9. Discussion of written papers	The teacher tells how the discussion should take place, gives an example, gives criteria for evaluating student responses; students go to classmates' personal blogs, study published material and analyze it
	Step 10. Reaction to classmates' comments	Students respond to the comments of classmates, make changes to their written work, if necessary, then re-publish it in their personal blog
Final stage	Step 11. Students' reflection	Students evaluate how much they could reveal the chosen topic; due to the analysis of their own work, students develop the self-esteem skill, which leads to better performance of tasks
	Step 12. Teacher's mark	The teacher evaluates the work of each student according to previously announced criteria

Table 2

Algorithm for the development of sociocultural skills of students of Vyatka State University in the field of Linguistics, with the major in Translation and translation theory, using modern Internet technologies (blog technology as an example)

In order to determine the effectiveness of the methodology for the development of students' sociocultural skills using blog technology, an experimental training was carried out at Vyatka State University from September 2017 to December 2017. The participants of the experiment were third-year students of the Faculty of Linguistics studying Linguistics, with major in Translation and translation theory and German as the first foreign language. All students were divided into two groups: the "control group" (15 people) and the "experimental group" (15 people). Experimental training was carried out in accordance with the algorithm developed at the Department of Linguistics and Translation of Vyatka State University. At the German classes, students of the control and experimental groups studied the modern German textbook "German Time", and as an additional material, they used textbooks from German publishers and German-language media materials: Moskauer Deutsche Zeitung, Deutsche Welle. According to the curriculum, students in the control and experimental groups had 24 hours of classes per month (6 hours per week).

It should be noted that in the classroom and extracurricular time, students of the experimental group were engaged in project activities, creating cultural projects using blog technology. Students had unlimited access to electronic content, they had the opportunity to comment on a generally given topic, as well as on a specific statement by another student, which helped stimulate discussion in the studied language.

The implementation of one project and its discussion using blogs on the topic was carried out for two weeks during extracurricular time. Table 3 presents the topics of written projects.

№	Project deadlines	Topics of Internet projects
1	September 2017	1) Problems of youth in the country of the native and studied language
2	October 2017	1) Traditions and holidays of the country of the studied language
3	November 2017	1) Linguistic variability
4	December 2017	1) Will modern Internet technologies replace traditional means of communication?

Table 3

The topic of discussions in the personal blogs of students of the experimental group

During the experiment, control and experimental tests were carried out in the control and experimental groups. To assess the formation of sociocultural skills, students in the control and experimental groups were asked to complete a project on two topics studied during the course "Workshop on the culture of speech communication of the first foreign language": "Problems of youth in the country of the native and studied language" (before experimental training) and "Will modern Internet technology replace traditional means of communication?" (after experimental training). Assessment of the development of each sociocultural skill using blog technology was carried out according to specially developed scale of sociocultural skills, presented in Table 4.

№	Controlled Sociocultural Skill
1	search and assessment of culturally significant events of the country of the studied language
2	comparative analysis of culturally significant events of the countries of the native and studied languages
3	analysis of changes that have occurred in the cultures of the countries of the native and studied languages over time

4	work with culturally oriented texts in order to search for sociocultural information with subsequent submission of sociocultural comments
5	implementation of projects based on studies of the culture of the countries of the native and studied languages

Table 4
Sociocultural skills controlled in experimental training

Table 5 and Table 6 present the results of the analysis of tests in the control and experimental groups.

Sociocultural skill	Student's t-criterion	p-value
1	8.15	0.05*
2	14.20	0.01**
3	11.33	0.01**
4	4.31	0.068
5	4.81	0.071

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 5
The results of the analysis of tests in the control group using an unpaired t-test

Sociocultural skill	Student's t-criterion	p-value
1	8.76	0.05*
2	15.27	0.01**
3	12.96	0.01**
4	4.53	0.066
5	4.67	0.06

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 6
The results of the analysis of tests in the experimental group using an unpaired t-test

The results of the experimental training were encoded for statistical processing in the Minitab program. The indicators for each sociocultural skill (Table 4) were translated into a five-point scale: "1", "0.75", "0.5", "0.25" or "0". According to this five-point system, an analysis of controlled sociocultural skills was conducted among students in the control and experimental groups. To assess the significance of the obtained results, Student's t-test was used.

According to a statistical analysis of the data, the results of the assessment of some students' sociocultural skills turned out to be statistically significant in the control and experimental groups immediately before experimental training. Statistical data processing allowed stating that prior to experimental training, many experiment in both groups had already had the ability to collect, systematize cultural information using a variety of Internet sources.

Such results of the tests in both groups can be explained by the fact that, firstly, some sociocultural skills have already been developed while studying at a university. Secondly, sociocultural skills are universal regardless of the academic discipline within which the training and development of sociocultural competence takes place. While studying other disciplines, students had already developed the ability to work with information and to present the results of their projects at a certain level so they simply transferred it from one educational context to another.

P-value of Student's *t*-criterion in the control group in the 4th ($t = 4,31$), 5th ($t = 4,81$) and the experimental group in the 4th ($t = 4,53$), 5th ($t = 4,67$) controlled sociocultural skills turned out to be $>0,01$. It means that, despite the presence of positive assessments, there was no real development of the students' sociocultural skills. To identify the statistical significance between the results of the test in the control and experimental groups, an unpaired *t*-test (for independent samples) was carried out. The results are presented in Tables 7 and 8.

Sociocultural skill	Student's <i>t</i>-criterion	<i>p</i>-value
1	8.26	0.05*
2	14.22	0.01**
3	11.33	0.01**
4	4.5	0.068
5	4.84	0.071

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 7

The results of the analysis of the test in the control group using an unpaired *t*-test

Sociocultural skill	Student's <i>t</i>-criterion	<i>p</i>-value
1	8.80	0.05*
2	15.26	0.01**
3	12.94	0.01**
4	4.52	0.068
5	4.88	0.071

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 8

The results of the analysis of the test in the experimental group using an unpaired *t*-test

Tables 7 and 8 present the results of an unpaired *t*-test in the control and experimental groups, which show that the control and experimental groups differ significantly in favor of the experimental group. It means that the methodology for the implementation of language projects has a positive effect on the development of students' sociocultural competence.

Discussion

Analysis of pedagogical and methodological literature on the use of blog technology in teaching a foreign language allowed distinguishing the following didactic properties of blog technology: publicity, linearity, authorship and moderation, multimodality.

When using blog technology while teaching a foreign language, it is necessary to take into account its methodological functions:

- 1) organization of networking between students in a foreign language as well as extracurricular activities;
- 2) posting information in the blog in chronological order, inability to make changes to information previously published in the blog;
- 3) the author of the blog is one person who acts as a moderator;
- 4) possibility of using materials of various formats in blogs.

Based on the experimental training, the following conclusions could be made:

- modern Internet technologies, in particular, blog technologies make it possible to develop students' sociocultural skills such as:

- 1) collection, generalization, systematization, interpretation of cultural information;
- 2) comparative analysis of culturally significant events of the countries of the native and studied languages;
- 3) analysis of changes that have occurred in the cultures of the countries over time;
- 4) analysis of texts of cultural orientation in order to search for sociocultural information with the subsequent submission of sociocultural comments;
- 5) implementation of projects based on the material of culture of the countries of the native and studied languages.

- sociocultural competence of Vyatka State University students is effectively developed when taking into account the following methodological conditions:

- 1) development of students' competence in information and communication technologies by the time of training;
- 2) taking into account the features of didactic properties and functions of information and communication technologies;
- 3) using problematic cultural tasks;
- 4) presence of step-by-step learning algorithm.

In conclusion it should be noted that due to using blog technology in the development of sociocultural skills in students of Vyatka State University in the field of Linguistics, with major in Translation and translation theory, a unique methodology for teaching foreign languages has been established that could be applied in the educational process.

Conclusion

Thus, during the past 10-20 years, a large number of scientific papers were devoted to the study and use of Internet technologies in the educational process, namely, in the formation of foreign language communicative competence. P.V. Sysoev, M.N. Evstigneev, Yu. Yu. Markov, A. G. Solomatina, E. D. Koshelyaeva, N. S. Petrishcheva, A. K. Cherkasov developed various unique methods of teaching written speech through electronic mail group, wiki technology, blog technology; teaching speaking and listening through instructional podcasts; forming sociocultural competence through wiki technology, blog technology, educational Internet resources, and a web forum. The analysis of these works has shown that, despite the effectiveness of the application of these technologies in the educational process, some of them - the e-mail group and the web forum - undergo technological "aging". As a result, they are used much less often than such Internet technologies as blog technologies, wiki technologies and podcasts, which are aimed at development of different speech skills, teaching methods based on them, and can be used in the educational process.

When teaching a foreign language, it should be taken into account that modern information and communication technologies have a number of didactic properties and functions. Using these technologies, it is possible to develop language skills, speech skills, and due to new didactic properties, using information and communication technologies, language and sociocultural practice of students can be significantly enriched.

Recommendations

The results of our research are of interest to teachers of higher educational institutions, since using modern Internet technologies in teaching a foreign language provides unlimited opportunities for using new interesting elements in the educational process. This direction is currently the most relevant and promising.

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