

## PROJECT-BASED LEARNING IN JAPANESE LANGUAGE

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**Tomoko Shimbo**  
Kazan Federal University,  
*Institute of International  
Relations, History and  
Oriental Studies*

**Alina Airatovna  
Khaliullina**  
Kazan Federal University,  
*Institute of International  
Relations, History and  
Oriental Studies*

**Daria Vladimirovna  
Grinyova**  
Kazan Federal University,  
*Institute of International  
Relations, History and Oriental  
Studies*  
*fantaisie-impromptu@yandex.ru*

**Abstract.** The relevance of this work is determined by introducing new methods of teaching Japanese language as well as presenting current situation of Japanese language education in Kazan Federal University. The goal of this paper is to study innovative method of project-based learning and use it in teaching and learning activities, as well as to encourage students' motivation of learning Japanese and to create powerful and memorable learning experiences for students. The leading approach to this problem is the problem-thematic approach. The main material for the study was the project-based learning in general and project-based learning in modern foreign language education. The key finding of the study may be considered as the proof of efficiency of using project-based learning in Japanese language education. The materials of this article may be helpful for school and university teachers of Japanese at the advanced level, as well as for educators and developers of educational materials.

**Keywords:** education, language study, educational technology, project-based learning, foreign languages, Japanese language, communicative competences, innovative methods.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Current situation of Japanese language environment in Kazan is on its developing level. As one may see from the table below, in contrast with increasing number of Japanese language learners, the number of native speakers temporarily living in Kazan is overwhelmingly small. Even holding a cultural exchange meetings in Japanese study center of Kazan Federal University does not provide necessary opportunities to practice students' communication skills (Shimbo, 2017).

*Table 1: Japanese language environment situation in Kazan Federal University*

The amount of students of Japanese study center of Kazan Federal University	The amount of native-speakers temporarily living in Kazan
2015-2016 academic years: 27 students	2015-2016 academic years: 8 native speakers
The faculty of International relations: 11	Foreign students: 6
The faculty of Linguistics: 16	Researcher: 1
	Japanese language teacher: 1
2016-2017 academic years: 78 students	2016-2017 academic years: 6 native speakers
The faculty of International relations: 16 (1 <sup>st</sup> year students), 11 (3 <sup>rd</sup> year students)	Foreign student: 1
The faculty of Linguistics: 15 (3 <sup>rd</sup> year students)	Company workers: 2
The faculty of Japan's Economy: 36 (1 <sup>st</sup> year students)	Researcher: 1
	High school student: 1
	Japanese language teacher: 1

In the circumstances of lack of real communication it is very important to find the approaches in order to keep students motivated.

Analyzing various methods of teaching, we came to conclusion that contemporary progressive schools emphasizes the importance of combination teacher centered traditional learning system with student-centered learning system. In Experience and Education John Dewey pointed the problem of lack of connection between the knowledge students receive at school with the real life (Dewey, 1915). One of the solutions of this educational problem may be considered as method of projects. The project approach is inquiry-based method which represents learner based pedagogy (Ulrich, 2016). Educational project is collaborative activity which unites students in achieving the goal through the learning,

game or art. It forms active and independent position of learner (Yakovleva, 2014). In this article we describe the projects which were held in Japanese study center during 2016-2017 academic years (Krauss, 2013).

## 2. METHODS

As part of the study we had to solve the following tasks: researching and analyzing the existing traditional and innovative methods of teaching and reveal advantages and disadvantages of these methods. As the representative of innovative methods we studied the method of project which is considered as one of the effective ways of using knowledge received within the class room in real life. To solve these tasks we used a complex of different methods mutually reinforcing each other: the descriptive method; the analytical method; the comparative-contrastive and comparative-historical methods that helped us to disclose the content of every method under study and thoroughly analyze it. The main material for the study was modern teaching methods of foreign languages and project-based learning in particular.

## 3. RESULTS

This article presents the results of the study teaching methods and the current situation of Japanese language environment in Japanese study center of Kazan Federal University. And thus, in this situation one of the most efficient methods is the method of projects which is based on the learner-centered pedagogical ideas. In teaching Japanese the method of projects can be used at different levels of learning the language. This method facilitates the formation of communication skills of the students, as well as encourages students' motivation to apply acquired language skills in the real life. Let us examine implementation of project-based approach in Japanese language courses of Kazan Federal University. The following projects were held in the period of 2016-2017 academic years.

1. In the modern world Internet technologies are becoming inevitable part of high-quality education process. Innovative methods of teaching are also frequently based on Internet technologies aimed at building intercultural communication. Japanese study center of Kazan Federal University also made an attempt to insert modern technologies in education process from 2016 academic year. Due to mentioned above intercultural informative project "From Kazan to the World!" has been created.

Now we are going to describe an implementation of the project step by step. The participants of the project are the students of Kazan Federal University of the 3rd grade specialized in International Relations and the pupils of special middle school in Date city of Fukushima prefecture, Japan. In collaboration with Igari Katsuya, the teacher from the school of Date there was decided to set and keep the contact between Kazan Federal University students and Japanese pupils via photo and video materials. Furthermore, in order to widen the audience of the project, for exchanging and storing information was chosen a video-sharing website YouTube, where users are allowed to upload, view, rate, share, add to favorites, report, comment on videos, and subscribe to other users.

The topic of the first intercultural contact in the project framework was chosen as "Origami which connects hearts". The intercultural contacts were held with the frequency of once a month. The content of the project is following:

- a) The representatives of Japanese side download the video lesson on modeling figures from paper, which is called origami.
- b) KFU students make the figures watching the video-lesson and shoot a feedback video.

As a result intercultural interaction appears: people from all over the world may become the observers of the dialogue between two educational institutions. As experience showed the advantages of such type of work may be considered as following: video-material may be watched as many times as needed in the pace which is the most appropriate for an adequate understanding of the message. Furthermore, working on the video, students have an opportunity to remake it until impeccable result wouldn't be achieved.

As project is being maintained in the small groups of 3-4 students, it encourages students' autonomous learning skills, as well as the will to send a high-quality answer to Japanese communication partners, raises the motivation of applying all knowledge and skills which were received in the process of learning. Students must evaluate the accuracy of intonation and pronunciation, the clarity of the video-message which was initially intentioned, the correctness of vocabulary, style and grammatical constructions used. The majority of the students, receiving personal answer from their Japanese partners, expressed positive emotions, which undoubtedly affects foreign language learning motivation.

2. It is worth mentioning that significant peculiarity of the project-based approach is applying acquired knowledge in real life, and even sometimes it may be a contribution to society. In order to prove this statement we will describe one more project which is maintained within the group of 3<sup>rd</sup> year students "Walking Kazan online". One of the main goals of this project is contribution to the development of the tourism in Tatarstan republic. The project is based on Google-maps service, which is a web mapping service developed by Google. The service allows users to add information about places such as description, useful recommendations, historical facts, so as the entire world can be able to view the places worth visiting in Kazan or find the details needed. In this case Japanese tourists who are interested in visiting Kazan or who want to know information about Kazan's famous spots receive the information in Japanese language. Except Kazan's sightseeing one may also find information about cafes and restaurants which are recommended by students. Thus, the use of internet-technologies in the project-based learning promotes interaction with Japanese language speakers in the world scale.

3. One more project which is being realized between the 1<sup>st</sup> year and 3<sup>rd</sup> year students of Japanese student center is "Senpai-kohai project". According to Japanese traditions, senpai is the person, who is older than one or entered the school, university or company earlier than one. Whereas kohai is the person who is younger than one, or entered the school, university or company later than one. In the Japanese study center senpais are the 3<sup>rd</sup> year students, who've chosen their kohais from the 1<sup>st</sup> year students. Usually, the group of 3 students is formed: one senpai who is the leader of the group and two kohais. The steps of realizing the project are following: in order to form the working groups there is an organizational lesson at the beginning of academic year, where senpais find their kohais. During the lesson students think the name of the group and create a poster which they present to other students. After that the groups receive next task which is to be done within the definite period. For example, the groups were offered to shoot the short video about Kazan where they had to answer the questions: 「カザンってどこ？」 "Where is Kazan?" and 「カザンと言えば…」 "Speaking about Kazan is...".

The main aims of the project can be defined as followings: firstly it is penetrating into traditions of Japanese society which is based on the hierarchy principles and secondly, working in small groups encourages students' autonomous learning skills, as well as affect learning

motivation of the senior students, who are to be the tutors and take responsibility for the accuracy of the work.

According to our observations the results show that these projects which were applied into learning Japanese language have improved communicative and independent learning skills.

#### 4 DISCUSSIONS

After an American philosopher psychologist and educational reformer has proclaimed the necessity of transformation in educational system by introducing new directions of teaching “Learning by doing”, the world came to know the method of projects. Despite the world pedagogical community including the representatives of Soviet Union pedagogy greatly appreciated this method, there were some obstacles in introducing method of projects in Soviet Union pedagogy (Morozova, 2007). Firstly, the project-based approach wasn't connected with traditional classroom learning system. Secondly, the lack of qualified teachers couldn't apply skillfully the method of projects. These reasons led to the downswing of quality of teaching (Yakovleva, 2014). At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was observed the rise of interest to the project-based learning in Europe and Soviet Union (Penkovskih, 2010). It was caused by a reason that pedagogical community was aimed to up-bring the individual independent learner who would be able to adapt to the real life and make a contribution into society (Yakovleva, 2014).

#### 5 SUMMARY

The method of projects aims to prepare the learners to use the knowledge they have received during lessons, to think deeply, creatively; it helps to understand the individual significance in the process of building new ideas, ways of achieving goals and gives a chance to apply the knowledge in real life.

In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of publications on project-based learning, what proves an extreme raise of its popularity. The method-based approach can be successfully used for a number of various applications, including teaching languages, what we could prove during our practice. Method of projects is an undoubtedly wholesome way of increasing and keeping motivation in studying Japanese language for both students and teachers. This is how the project-based approach can be summed up.

#### 6 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results, it can be concluded that the implementation of the method of projects into the process of learning Japanese language has been very successful. The participation of students in the projects showed the rise of confidence in using Japanese language while speaking with groupmates or the Japanese; the students could consolidate received knowledge by implementing it in practice and improve the level of Japanese language.

In conclusion we would like to mention that the skillful applying of this method helps the student to develop into knowledgeable, autonomous, and life-long learner. Project-based learning encourages students to participate actively in the development of their world. Due to the projects, students may realize that they have the skills to influence the society and make significant contributions.

In our future research we intend to concentrate on developing the methods of projects and introducing more detailed structure of the project-based learning concerning Japanese language.

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