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## **STAGES OF CONDUCTING VIRTUAL EXCURSIONS AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS**

The article deals with the basic organizational issues of educational virtual excursions: their development, conduct and summarization. Depending on the participants' language proficiency level, educational virtual excursions are classified into two groups: illustrative and research ones. In the course of the research, the authors have considered and defined the stages of educational virtual excursions' conducting and the types of exercises corresponding to them as well as have described some of their characteristics. It is very important that during educational virtual excursions students learn to make decisions by making a choice from a number of related opportunities, master the methods of formulating typical problem questions that activate the processes of memory and thinking. Such a transition from an illustrative to a research excursion significantly increases the didactic potential of educational virtual excursions as a teaching method.

**Keywords:** educational virtual excursions (EVE), illustrative excursions, research excursions, interactive learning organization, stages of EVE's preparation.

**Relevance of research topic.** Currently, we can talk about the priority value of the interactive organization of education where virtual excursions are actively used. And if in our first articles we spoke with caution about the possibility of using educational virtual excursions (hereinafter – EVE) in the teaching of foreign

languages, now practice has shown not only the possibility but also the need to use EVE whose task is to improve students' oral and written speech based on regional and cultural material.

**Formulation of the problem.** The purpose of this article is to analyze the main organizational issues of preparing for educational virtual excursions that affect their development, conduct, summing up etc.

The purpose of educational virtual excursions is the development of students' skills in working with various sources of information, the ability to analyze and transmit information; ability to interpret as well as apply information at the stage of reflection; the formation of a reading culture in the contemporary information environment; improvement of students' spoken language based on regional geographic material and in-depth familiarity with the host country.

**Analysis of recent researches and publications.** The problem of visualization has always been one of the central ones in the studies of didacts and methodologists, however, recently the understanding of visualization has undergone significant changes. In modern conditions, «the principle of visualization is not only leading, but also integrating, in the aggregate, didactic recommendations on ways to achieve learning goals based on its known patterns» (Temnikov, 2010, p. 36). «An analysis of the evolution of visualization in learning, shows its peculiar transformation: from the reflection of the external, sensually perceived properties of the object and the formation of empirical concepts, empirical thinking to the awareness of the need for an active approach and its inclusion into the context of students' independent cognitive actions, including research, and creative ones based on the integrated use of training aids adequate to them» (Temnikov, 2010, p. 38).

Namely, «in the visibility not only the capabilities of multimedia tools are manifested, but also the environment created by these training tools provides the implementation of other principles: activity, accessibility, individual approach, etc.» (Temnikov, 2010, p. 36). Thus, «visual aids acquire a new function – management of cognitive activity of students. With their help, students can be led to the necessary generalizations and taught to apply the acquired knowledge» (Krasnova, Belyaev, Solovov, 2001). (We will turn to this opinion when we talk about the features of educational virtual excursions).

**Presenting main material.** The excursion has its educational characteristics only under certain conditions, namely: the theme of the excursion is related to the theme of classroom lessons, the excursion is provided with educational materials, and guidelines for the excursion have been already developed.

Mention should be made that EVE's specific feature is the participants themselves: we are talking about the students studying a foreign language, who are in a foreign language or a native environment and who want to get an education, as well as to engage into the professional activity in the studied language. Therefore, we are talking about the consolidation of three aspects in the interaction: the study of a

foreign language (including professionally oriented), acquaintance with the country of the studied language, and plunge into the culture of the studied language. Here, roughly speaking, EVE manifests its multifunctionality, diversity, and multivectorness.

In addition, in the context of pedagogical cooperation, EVE provides a three-way (or three-level) interaction «teacher-guide» / «teacher-sightseer» / «guide- sightseer», contributing to the solution of problems based on joint educational activities and involving the development of interpersonal interaction skills (Ivanova, Pakhalkova-Soich, 2015).

Traditionally, we distinguish ordinary, advertising and study excursions in terms of their conducting. In the last group, such excursions stand out as: excursion-lectures, excursion-crowd-scenes, excursion-performances, excursion-walks, excursion-consultations, excursion-demonstrations etc. According to the content, excursions are divided into survey (multifaceted, covering several topics) and thematic ones (Savina, 2009, p. 17). We have taken this classification as a basis for systematizing EVE's types depending on the language proficiency level.

Given the form of the conduct, we recommend all types of educational excursions at different stages of teaching a foreign language. As for the content of the excursion, it is proposed to conduct thematic–illustrative excursions at the initial stages of language learning (levels A1-A2), and survey–research excursions, supplemented by information found by the students themselves on the global Internet network that goes beyond the knowledge they had known earlier – at advanced stages of language learning (levels B1-B2). Such EVE's classification to illustrative and research educational virtual excursions based on educational purposes, provides EVE's effective implementation into the educational process.

Based on the classical pattern (Savina, 2009, p. 26) of preparation stages for the so-called «real traditional excursions», we determine the following stages:

1. preparatory («pre-excursion») stage;
2. actually excursion («excursion») stage
3. generalizing («post-excursion») stage).

At each stage, the so-called pre-excursion, excursion, and post-excursion exercises (we proposed these terms for the first time (Pakhalkova-Soich, Ivanova, 2012) by analogy with the generally accepted ones: pre-text, text, post-text exercises (Azimov, Schukin, 2009).

Let us dwell on the analysis of each stage.

1. The preparatory («pre-excursion») stage.

The first stage is the definition of the theme of the excursion, the preparation of its plan and the obligatory correlation of the time of the excursion with the calendar planning of the given subject (the study of certain theoretical material should precede the excursion).

The teacher carries out:

- working-out of teaching materials for the excursion;

- ensuring the study of a certain theoretical lexical and grammatical material, preceding EVE;
- correlation of EVE's time with the curriculum;
- preliminary selection of EVE's topic.

Together with the students, the teacher discusses EVE's name (heading). Here you should focus on the students' foreign language proficiency level, not to forget, of course, the classic recommendations (avoid all kinds of cliches that depersonalize the topic; do not use abbreviations and abbreviations for syllables; do not use foreign words that can cause ambiguous or negative associations).

Further, the teacher and students determine the EVE's goals and objectives; distribute roles («guides» and «sightseers»). «Guides», coordinating their actions with the teacher, begin to study the necessary virtual sources of information, to select and study virtual excursion objects, to surf the virtual route of the excursion, to form EVE's control and individual text, to select additional visual materials for EVE; «sightseers», like «guides», take part in the discussion of time, place, duration, dates and other EVE's organizational aspects.

Students are also invited to conduct video recording of EVE. In the case of a positive solution to this issue, it is necessary to consider where to put the camera (or mobile phone), to appoint the person(s) responsible for shooting (to use complex applications for working with video, to cut the video, edit it, record etc., and then to send the finished product to computers and / or other portable devices).

It seems reasonable to us that an educational virtual excursion should last no more than two academic hours (with a minimum duration of no more than 0.5 academic hours); it can represent no more than 50 objects as additional visual materials etc. For a city excursion lasting 2–3 academic hours, it is recommended to use 15–20 objects; for a thematic one – 8–10 objects (9). As our experience has shown, EVEs drawn out in time are exhausting; it is advisable to plan a 10–15-minutes break for rest (coffee break) 35–40 minutes after the start of the excursion.

Particular attention should be paid to the choice of a virtual excursion's route and the closely related issue of the optimal number of EVE's facilities providing an adequate reliable information load. The «guide» independently (or in consultation with the teacher) selects and accumulates to the optimal level, the information necessary for the presentation.

On the next page, a student puts the links needed for the excursions. When creating virtual training excursions, it is important to set a strict sequence for changing screens (note that during an ordinary excursion, sightseers see everything strictly in order). One screen of virtual excursion can contain links to various sites on the Internet, which helps to better illustrate the material. Each screen can contain no more than 2–3 links; a greater number of them disorient students during their independent work, creating difficulties in understanding the text.

A feature of the virtual excursion (including a study excursion) is, which contributes to deeper coverage of the topic, an increase in additional materials of the objects (the so-called «portfolio of the excursion»: models, photo documents, films, sound and video recordings; popular science, documentary and educational films, moving pictures and videos etc., maps, schemes etc.), which can be presented both virtually and materially. A small amount of these components leads to insufficient informational saturation of the excursion.

The purpose of the pre-excursion exercises is to neutralize the predicted linguistic and sociocultural difficulties and to update all EVE's participants' supporting knowledge as well as to motivate them to search the necessary information. This stage of work is obligatory for all the students – both future «guides» and future «sightseers».

2. Actually excursion stage. It should be noted that EVE's peculiarity in the study of a foreign language is that, on the one hand, it necessarily complies with the language level of sightseers' training group, and on the other hand, it undoubtedly reflects the guide(s)'s language level, moreover the latter usually shows deeper language proficiency.

In the process of EVE, the guide offers a group of students to sit at the screen (board), and begins a demonstration of objects in the virtual space. The guide follows a predetermined virtual route, purposefully thematically conducting «excursions» from object to object during virtual movement, if necessary, including additional visual materials into the EVE. The vigorous activity of sightseers is in close connection with the guide.

Excursion exercises, like text exercises, «should aim the student at extracting information from the text and checking how this information is understood and assimilated» (Azimov, Schukin, 2009). The system of excursion tasks provides for the development of such skills and abilities as: 1) reproduction of a sample text; 2) some processing of the sample text (both form and content); 3) the development of the student's prepared speech on the material of several sources; 4) the development of student's unprepared speech.

3. Generalizing («post-excursion») stage.

The final stage. The excursion ends with a final conversation, during which the teacher, together with the students, summarizes, systematizes what he has seen and heard, highlights the most significant, reveals impressions, sets preliminary estimates as well as outlines the timing of homework creative assignments.

While planning home creative assignments, the teacher should expand the range of reports which makes it possible to create a «free choice situation» in which a student selects one from a number of reporting forms proposed by the teacher for an excursion or offers his own in accordance with inclinations and capabilities: preparing a poster presentation, a presentation, a written review, a message, an article to a magazine, a compilation of an album using illustrative material of visited sites.

Information collected by the students during a training excursion can be materialized in the form of Flash clips (Ivanova, Pakhalkova-Soich, 2014), and become a learning tool that can be used in other groups and courses. Virtual excursions are one of the most promising forms of educational excursion. The most important thing for our students is a powerful motivating factor in achieving high and stable results in educational activities, the principle of cognitive activity through creative thinking, and the ability to independently evaluate acquired knowledge (Pakhalkova-Soich, Ivanova, 2015).

After excursion tasks that are performed by students should provide control over understanding of what they have heard (seen and / or read) (Azimov, Schukin, 2009), the success of semantic processing of information, i.e. the transformation of information gained from EVE.

Particular attention is paid to tasks on the speech development, aimed at preparing «guides» for conducting EVE and «sightseers» to express impressions on EVE. It is necessary to pay attention to the development of the necessary discussion skills in the form of discussing some micro-situations with the preliminary task of comparing, establishing similarities and differences, analyzing, generalizing etc. (Ivanova, Pakhalkova-Soich, 2012).

The teacher can conduct a general discussion of the excursion, and also offer students to complete assignments to determine the cognitive value of what they have heard, both in the form of tests, as well as various creative tasks: creating a presentation, a photo report (picture story), designing a newspaper or a stand; writing a review, an article, an essay; description of students' impressions, organization of photo exhibition (Pakhalkova-Soich, Ivanova, 2014).

Students can prepare a message about a particular historical monument, compile a biography of an outstanding figure (or a story about his achievements) etc., or something which has been discussed during the excursion. Students post their messages (you can also invite the students to send information to the forum for further discussion). In groups with an advanced language level, a teacher can offer the students make reports based on excursion materials and it is highly recommended that they should read additional literature.

As it was mentioned above, tests of diagnostic, current, intermediate and final control are adjacent to the system of excursion tasks, which should be considered an extremely important and necessary condition for successful training, and the creation of a typology of tests in these conditions is an urgent requirement of the time. A student chooses self-review or mutual appreciation.

If a video recording of EVE was carried out, it is possible to offer students who own video processing applications, the following tasks: to watch EVE's video, to make a general idea of EVE, to express their attitude to it; to cut out parts of the video that are not interesting; to select the desired video files, to create a video story; to add some special effects, captions, background music, voiceover, and other sounds.

**Conclusion.** In the course of the research work, we have arrived at certain conclusions: 1. EVE's features are described in terms of list of participants and their language proficiency level. 2. Depending on the participants' language proficiency level, educational virtual excursions are classified into two groups: illustrative and research ones. 3. The authors have considered and defined the stages of EVE's conducting (pre-excursion, actually excursion, post-excursion) and the types of exercises corresponding to them (pre-excursion, excursion, post-excursion) as well as have described some of their characteristics.

In conclusion, mention should be made that the use of educational test as one of the forms of students' knowledge control within educational virtual excursions allows you to check the degree of understanding of both the linguistic component of educational texts and their informative content. At the same time, students learn to make decisions by making a choice from a number of related opportunities, master the methods of formulating typical problem questions that activate the processes of memory and thinking. Such a transition from an illustrative to a research excursion significantly increases the didactic potential of educational virtual excursions as a teaching method.

Thus, the presented experience of using EVE excursions in the practice of foreign languages teaching as a foreign language proves that their holding occupies an important place in ensuring individualization of instruction and increasing motivation for learning a language, and plays a special role in improving the students' communication skills.

Summing up it should be said that since this form of educational activities has positively proven itself, we consider it expedient and promising to further develop the theoretical and practical foundations for creating educational virtual excursions and their sites.

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