

# Modern Multilingual Education in Russia (on the Example of “Deutsch: die Erste Zweite” Project)

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*Abstract. The article is devoted to the issue of linguistic education in Russia and in the Arkhangelsk region, in particular. The content of multilingual education is aimed at the formation of a language personality capable of successful interaction with representatives of foreign cultures. This idea corresponds to the current trends in the development of language education. The main goal of the study is to reveal the didactic potential of the “Deutsch: die erste Zweite” project in the development of multilingual education in Russia. The goal is achieved by theoretical analysis of the main educational documents, dynamics of the development of educational environment during the implementation of the project and the views of the project participants. The research results are based on the data obtained through theoretical analysis and surveys. The didactic potential of the “German - the First among second foreign languages” project is associated with the implementation of the principles of teaching German as a second foreign language.*

*Keywords – multicultural education, multilingualism, the project “Deutsch: die erste Zweite” (“German - the First among second foreign languages”), didactic principles of teaching a second foreign language\*.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization, new requirements appear for the development of the educational system in Russia at the present stage. The focus lies on a personality who should be able to interact successfully and effectively with representatives of foreign cultures, to receive higher education in different countries and to be competitive in the job market in various fields. Mario Pace noted that the ability to provide multilingual communication is an advantage in the modern world [14]. In addition to English, which ranks high among foreign languages in the curriculum, German has not lost its significance in Russian schools. According to official statistics from the German

Foreign Ministry, since 2010 there has been a significant increase of German learners in the world [5].

There has recently been a decrease in the number of Russian schools, which offer German as the first foreign language. One of the reasons for this decrease was weak interest of students and their parents in German as a subject. This might be explained by greater demand for English in the world.

It should be pointed out that significant changes are simultaneously taking place in the Russian school system due to an increased interest in multilingual education. The practice of multilingual education is largely determined by the educational policy of the country, region and school.

One of the trends of multilingual education in Russia is the introduction of a second foreign language into the curricula of secondary schools. This change provides an opportunity for the development of teaching German and other foreign languages. Students may also learn several foreign languages as part of their school education. The concept of multilingualism is defined by state documents that shape the educational policy in the field of secondary education:

- Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation of February 14, 2014 No. 115 “On approval of the procedure for filling, recording and issuing certificates on primary and secondary education and their duplicates”;
- Order No. 1897 of December 17, 2010 approving the national educational standard of primary education;
- Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of Russia dated December 31, 2015 No. 1577 “On Amendments to the Federal State Educational Standard of primary Education, approved by Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation dated December 17, 2010 No. 1897” [6, 7, 11, 15].

These documents create a proper basis for the implementation of multilingual education in Russian schools. Learning of a second foreign language is aimed at

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the formation of a holistic worldview corresponding to the modern level of development of science and social practice, taking into account the social, cultural, linguistic, spiritual diversity of the modern world. According to regulatory documents, learning of a second foreign language should ensure sufficient knowledge of the cultural heritage of the countries, the language of which is taught. This approach should foster a respectful attitude towards foreign languages as a tool for achieving mutual understanding between nations.

Our study reveals strategies for the implementation of multilingual education in Russia at the present stage and the educational potential of the Project “Deutsch: die erste Zweite”, which has been implemented since 2016 by the Goethe-Institute at the German Embassy in Moscow together with partner institutions and the Interregional Association of Teachers and Teachers of the German Language.

The phenomenon of multilingualism is complex. Various studies reflect such aspects as the relevance of multilingualism in the world [14; 8; 10], psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic features of multilingualism [3], cultural and cognitive aspect in the study of foreign languages [9], models and concepts of multilingualism [12].

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The term “multilingualism didactics” is a collective term that aims at the individual multilingualism of each learner [2]. These approaches include all existing language skills and language learning experiences of learners and exploit learners’ academic potential. Individual multilingualism refers to a person’s ability to communicate in several languages.

The guiding principles of multilingualism correspond to the following learning theory findings [2].

- Learning is understood as a cognitive process.
- New knowledge is perceived on the basis of existing knowledge or associated with it.
- All existing language skills (first language, all foreign languages) are passively or actively used when learning a new foreign language.
- All acquired languages, language learning experiences and language learning strategies are interconnected.
- The multilingualism didactics aims at reducing learning time: languages should be learned more efficiently, existing cognitive structures should be used and further developed. Thanks to existing language skills one can achieve a faster learning progress in a new foreign language acquisition.

As English is often the first foreign language learned in Russian schools, all other foreign languages are learned as tertiary languages. A tertiary language, also called a secondary foreign language, is a language that is learned as a third (tertiary) language after the first foreign language and native language.

Anyone who has learnt German after English will understand that English offers learners favorable conditions to connect already existing language skills and learning experiences. These conditions rely on tertiary language didactics and develop didactic-methodical principles as the background information for lesson planning.

Pace and success of learning are affected by the native language and the target language, possible similarities in their structures, as well as previous knowledge in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and spelling of the target language.

The experience of teaching a first foreign language shows that the already acquired knowledge and skills can be incorporated into the acquisition of a second foreign language. This is actually the transfer of:

- knowledge about teaching and teaching methods;
- existing strategies to learn a foreign language and individual language learning styles;
- knowledge about language, culture, geography, forms of communication and patterns of behaviour.

This transfer provides the background for the five didactic-methodological principles to teach German as a second foreign language. These principles are the following: comparing and discussing, promoting understanding, considering the learners’ interests, the use of texts for special purposes, less time consuming learning.

The didactic-methodological principles can be applied to vocabulary work in teaching German as a second foreign language.

• **The principle of comparing and discussing** is important for vocabulary work. The central teaching / learning activities include language comparison, language learning experience, and vocabulary editing practice. Lexical similarities and differences between learners’ languages provide positive conditions for the interlanguage transfer.

• **The principle of understanding** emphasizes the importance to always clarify the meaning of new words and phrases based on already existing language knowledge. The understanding of vocabulary can be easily obtained by language comparison. The criterion for vocabulary selection is the following: word fields that contain lexical parallels can be obtained earlier and easier and provide a basis for further language learning. The quick understanding of unknown language features motivates students to learn and gives them the important feeling of success from the very beginning.

• **The principle of considering learners’ interests** includes selection of texts that are thematically relevant, motivate students to learn and successfully use German in authentic situations.

• **The principle of using subject-oriented texts.** The choice of texts depends on the extent of their compliance with learning goals.

• **The principle of reducing learning time** includes activities that stimulate the use of existing knowledge, necessary strategies, use of the long-term memory for new

vocabulary and thus accelerate the learning process. The parallels between the English and German vocabulary create opportunities which contribute to academic efficiency [13].

These principles form the basis of the “Horizonte” textbook recommended by the Ministry of Education for teaching German as a second foreign language in Russian schools [1].

### III. METHOD

The study of the didactic potential of the “Deutsch: die erste Zweite” project included several stages. At first, we studied the conceptual background in the field of multilingualism and the theory of multilingualism. At the next stage, the task of our study was the theoretical analysis of existing research on the didactics of multilingualism. The subject of research at this stage was the didactic principles of multilingualism and their use in learning German as a second foreign language, English being the first. In addition, there was a study of current trends in the state educational policy in the field of multilingualism. The regulatory documents of the Russian education system were used as research material. We also monitored the results of the implementation of the “Deutsch: die erste Zweite”, which is evidence of a multilingual educational policy in Russia. The monitoring included the analysis of statistical data, as well as a survey of the project participants.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The educational initiative “Deutsch: die erste Zweite” aims to support Russian educational organizations, in accordance with the new educational standards, the German language is taught or planned to be introduced as a second foreign language. This project was approved by the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation.

The objectives of the project are: to attract the attention of parents, students and heads of educational institutions to the educational potential of the subject area “Foreign languages / second foreign language”, to improve the quality of teaching German in educational organizations, to support teachers of German, including young professionals, to introduce modern technologies and methods of teaching German.

The main participants of the project are: Goethe-Institute, resource centres established in the regions - participants of the project and schools. The tasks of the Goethe-Institute include the overall coordination of the project (development, piloting of the project's activities, finding partners among the municipal education authorities). The tasks of the resource centres, created either at universities or in educational institutions of higher education qualifications, should provide the coordination of the project at the local level, interaction with regional education authorities, consulting for educational organizations and offer of promotional activities. Interaction with schools - potential project participants consists of five steps: motivation of parents and learners, promotional activities with learners, discussion of organizational issues with the

school administration, hiring personnel and providing methodological support for the educational process.

The main stages of the project implementation are as follows:

1. Providing information for potential project participants. In order to inform and attract potential project participants, information letters and questionnaires were sent to school teachers to understand their readiness to introduce the teaching of German as the second foreign language. The information letter reported on the project objectives, target audience, partners, benefits for schools - project participants, models for integrating a second foreign language into the main educational program of the school.

2. Signing of contracts between the educational organization and the Goethe-Institute.

3. Survey of participants in the educational process in order to identify their expectations regarding the results of the project implementation. The questionnaire included the following questions:

*Is the school interested in introducing German? Is the school ready to make changes to the curriculum? Is there a material and technical base for the project implementation? Are there any teachers ready to teach German?*

Of the 45 schools in Arkhangelsk Region surveyed in 2017, 20 schools expressed a desire to participate in the project. Six schools included lessons for a second foreign language in the compulsory part of the curriculum, 14 schools introduced the study of German as extracurricular activities. All schools had necessary materials, technical support and personnel resources.

4. Integration of German as a second foreign language into the curricula of educational institutions.

5. Summarizing the preliminary results of the project.

The project statistics shown in tables 1 and 2 demonstrate a significant growth in the regions and schools involved in the project [4].

TABLE I. STATISTICS OF PARTICIPATION IN THE PROJECT  
IN RUSSIA

Number of participants	Data for 2016	Data for 2017	Data for 2018
regions	11	37	45
schools	146	567	779

TABLE II. STATISTICS OF PARTICIPATION IN THE PROJECT  
IN THE ARKHANGELSK REGION

Number of participants	Data for 2017	Data for 2018	Data for 2019
schools	20	43	70

Thus, today the German language is taught as a second foreign language in 1,472 schools of Russia. In the Arkhangelsk region, this project is being implemented with the support of the administration of the Arkhangelsk region,

the Department of Education and NArFU named after M.V. Lomonosov. Over 3 years, 70 schools of the city of Arkhangelsk, Novodvinsk, Severodvinsk, Mirny, as well as schools of the Kotlas, Velsk, Primorsky and Mezen districts joined the project.

The analysis of the results showed that at the beginning of the project implementation (2017) only 80% of schools offered German as a foreign language as part of extracurricular activities. Today 98% of schools have introduced German into the curriculum, which is explained by the change of the educational policy of the Russian Federation to strengthen the "Foreign Language subject area and to emphasize importance of the German language in the European educational sphere.

In April 2019, in the framework of the Forum of German teachers, a second survey of teachers was held in order to identify the degree of satisfaction of participation in the project. Teachers shared their impressions of working in the project, difficulties they encountered in teaching German and expectations for further collaboration. 45% of the Forum participants noted the possibility of resuming the practice of teaching German at school after a long break as a positive moment and they expressed their wishes to take computer courses in order to increase language competence.

100% of teachers were satisfied with the material and technical base provided by the Goethe-Institute, but would like to receive support in acquiring educational and methodological literature at the subsequent stages of the project.

70% of respondents noted the interest and high degree of schoolchildren's motivation in learning foreign languages and German in particular. Learning German on the basis of English, relying on comparison of common and distinctive features of the studied languages, contributes to the expansion of horizons, the development of analytical thinking, cognitive abilities and personal potential in general. But, on the other hand, 35% of teachers noted the instability of the motivation to learn German. They primarily associate it with doubts about the relevance of German compared to the popularity of English, as well as the difficulties of learning the morphological and syntactic features of the language and in general, with the psychophysiological characteristics of the secondary school age. A big advantage of the project's implementation is that 65% of teachers considered the possibility of students passing the international youth examinations in the German language. In the future it will allow them to study at universities in Germany. As a prospect for the further implementation of the project, 80% of teachers expressed the desire to organize an exchange of schoolchildren, which would contribute to the growth of motivation to learn German.

On the basis of NArFU, a German language resource center has been created within the framework of the Cooperation Agreement with the Goethe-Institute. Its task is to provide information, consultation and organizational support to heads of educational organizations who are leading or planning to introduce curricula to study German as a second foreign language. Other goals include

organizing and conducting activities for the project target groups, testing innovative practices of teaching German, organizing advanced training for young professionals for teaching German as a second foreign language. Goethe-Institute provides schools with sets of textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation, curricula, teaching and learning materials, and opportunities for improving teachers' qualifications.

The project offers a variety of activities for all target groups, including advanced training in teaching German as a second foreign teacher, language animation lessons "Deutsch im Gepäck", the Digital Alphabet competition, flash mobs with a raffle for students etc. The suggested activities support children's motivation, stimulate interest in the German language and demonstrate to students and parents that learning German does not only increase the intellectual level of development of schoolchildren, but also serves as a tool of knowledge, opens up numerous opportunities to master other disciplines based on integrated learning.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

Modern multilingual education is viewed both from the standpoint of multilingualism and from the point of view of didactics of multilingualism and as one of the trends in the implementation of the state educational policy, which is aimed at nurturing a competitive multicultural personality. According to the legal documents on multicultural education, schools in Russia are obliged to introduce a second foreign language into their curricula. The monitoring of educational activities demonstrates the popularity of German as a second foreign language. This current tendency is explained by the successful implementation of the German – "Deutsch: die erste Zweite" project (2016). The methodological basis for teaching German after English is the concept of didactics of multilingualism, which is based on the principles of contrastive analysis, conscientiousness and purposeful use of texts in teaching. As a result of the study, we revealed the linguodidactic potential of the "German - the First among second foreign languages" project based on the implementation of the following principles of teaching German as a second foreign language: comparing and discussing, promoting understanding, considering learners' interests, use of subject-oriented texts, less time consuming learning.

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