IMPLEMENTING PROJECT-BASED APPROACH IN TEACHING ESL STUDENTS AT KAZAN FEDERAL UNIVERSITY

D. Khakimzyanova, E.S. Khovanskaya

Kazan Federal University (RUSSIAN FEDERATION)

Abstract

The article examines various methods of introducing project-based approach to teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) students at Kazan Federal University, Russian Federation. Being very dynamic, it can be applied to different fields, ranging from lessons to extracurricular activities. Nowadays project-based methods are one of the most effective and actively developing pedagogical technologies in modern education. One of the biggest advantages of using projects in teaching English is that project-based approach does not concentrate on some specific exercise but on active thinking of students what in its turn requires proper language skills for students to express their thoughts and ideas. This approach is efficient both on creative stage of using English and on the beginning level, when students will practice and enhance their language skills to complete the project. Project-based approach proved to be efficient in strengthening interdisciplinary ties. Moreover, implementing projects in class environment (depending on the type of the project used) enhances critical and logical thinking, problem solving, teamwork skills. As a result, students acquire essential skills of making research, working in team, cooperating, making presentations, public speaking and presentation skills which are of high demand in modern life. In conclusion, experience of the English teachers at Kazan Federal University in using project-based approach in the classroom, within the learning management system (LMS) and as an effective part of e-learning and distance learning is presented.

Keywords: education, student, teaching, English, ESL, university.

1 INTRODUCTION

The history of project-based learning dates back to Confucius and Aristotle who were early proponents of learning by doing. Then, Socrates contributed to learning through questioning, inquiry, and critical thinking. So, this approach isn't a new phenomenon – it was popular at the beginning of the 20th century, most notably championed by John Dewey who also supported the "learning by doing" approach to education [1]. As A. Morgan outlined, central to the project- based approach is the idea that learning is most effective when students put theory into practice - a philosophy advocated by US educationalist John Dewey [2]. Maria Montessori considers that children should study through gaining experience from the environment. Jean Piaget is famous for his constructivist approach to education, in which students study by asking questions, investigating, interacting with others, and reflecting on these experiences. Barnes argues that receiving transmitted facts doesn't ensure successful learning but exploring new ideas though discussion, talk and writing helps develop understanding of the world [3]. Postman and Weingartner's educational view that: 'the critical content of any learning experience is the method or process through which the learning occurs' [4, p.30], is precisely illustrated by projects which are learner centered.

Furthermore, in his research scholar J.W. Thomas reports that "the original problem-based learning model was developed for use with medical students in Canada [5, p. 5]. The model was designed to help interns improve their diagnostic skills through working on "ill-structured problems." Medical students are introduced to a diagnostic problem, usually a patient with a complaint or illness. Using a database of information and test data about this patient and guided by a facilitator who plays the role of a coach or Socratic questioner, students are led to construct a diagnosis by generating hypotheses, collecting information relevant to their ideas (e.g., interviewing the patient, reading test data), and evaluating their hypotheses [5]. More recently, the "problem-based learning" model has been extended to mathematics, science, and social studies classes at the elementary and secondary [5].

Regarding project-based language learning, it "began in the mid-1970s alongside the application of project work in other educational domains as a response to new pedagogical theories of "learner-centred teaching, learner autonomy, the negotiated syllabus, collaborative learning, and learning through tasks" [6, p.8]. In Denmark, for example, two universities have, since the 1970s, institutionalised project-based learning as a central methodology for all courses [6, p.8].

Due to the fact that "the area of project-based learning is broad and applies to different educational domains including science, technology, and mathematics "[6], giving definition to this approach is not easy. Such scholars as N. Harmer and A. Stokes confirm "its use across a breadth of disciplines in differing national contexts, including Media and Business Studies, Geography, Environmental Science, Education, Information Technology and Sustainability" [7]. Researchers R. Hanney and M. Savin-Baden state that the term "is broad, far reaching and means different things in different countries and different disciplinary areas" [8].

According to A. Patton, project-based learning refers to students designing, planning, and carrying out an extended project that produces a publicly-exhibited output such as a product, publication, or presentation [1]. Blumenfeld et al. suppose that it "is a comprehensive perspective focused on teaching by engaging students in investigation. Within this framework, students pursue solutions to nontrivial problems by asking and refining questions, debating ideas, making predictions, designing plans and/or experiments, collecting and analyzing data, drawing conclusions, communicating their ideas and findings to others, asking new questions, and creating artifacts [9]. T. Markham defines project-based learning as it "integrates knowing and doing. Students learn knowledge and elements of the core curriculum, but also apply what they know to solve authentic problems and produce results that matter. PBL students take advantage of digital tools to produce high quality, collaborative products. PBL refocuses education on the student, not the curriculum – a shift mandated by the global world, which rewards intangible assets such as drive, passion, creativity, empathy, and resiliency. These cannot be taught out of a textbook but must be activated through experience" [10].

Many scientists note in their research that this approach is used interchangeably with inquiry-based approach and problem-based learning [11, 12, 13]. "It is related to enquiry-based learning (also known as inquiry-based learning), and problem-based learning. The distinctive feature of project-based learning is the publicly exhibited output" [1].

2 METHODOLOGY

Since the mid-1970 ELT has been sustaining principle of learner-centered teaching, learner autonomy, collaborative learning, and learning through tasks, English language teachers have been exploring and exploiting the tradition of project work. The paper discusses different project-based approaches to teaching Non-native students within the framework of higher education. The study uses both theoretical and practical methods. There applied such methods of investigation as literature review, complex and comparative analyses, interviewing, investigating and summarizing the advanced experience of other teachers. Consequently, the implementation of project -based techniques in teaching English at Kazan Federal University is described.

3 RESULTS

Project work has been part of educational principle and practice in experiencing learning for many years and has influenced the teaching methodology of many curriculum subjects both at the school and university levels. The goal of studying a foreign language at the university is to provide students with communicative competence, which, in our opinion, can be interpreted, on the one hand, as a condition for psychological comfort in a team, and on the other hand, as a condition for achieving success while solving business issues. The essence of communicative competence should be considered in terms of the theory of speech behavior, according to which it is supposed to teach the language not so much as a system of rules necessary for their use in speech, but primarily for the purposes of the most productive communication; to establish collaborative relationships with others; for coordination and consistency of speech actions aimed at establishing social contacts, and developing a strategy of behavior in order to avoid conflicts. Thus, communicative competence is the ability for verbal interaction based on the readiness to communicate. Through the development of communicative competence, the path of genuine humanization of higher education is realized, since it takes into account the uniqueness of the individual, his right to familiarize himself with the values of world culture, to self-determination and choice of his own development trajectory, for which the educational institution provides appropriate conditions for each student.

The project-based approach to teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) students at Kazan Federal University provides an opportunity to independently acquire knowledge in the process of solving practical tasks or problems. This requires not only knowledge of a foreign language, but also the integration of knowledge from various subject areas as well as evolvement of soft skills. This method refers to the

technologies of a student-centered approach in teaching foreign languages, when the focus is on is the cognitive activity of a student. In the process of working on the project, social and business competencies are actively developed: planning, search for information, decision-making, systematization, communication in a group, mutual respect, tact, the ability to express and accept criticism.

Projects have been promoted in ELT at Kazan Federal University for a number of reasons: students' use of language as they negotiate plans, analyse and discuss information and ideas, prepare presentations and talks, write thesis and articles, is determined by genuine communicative needs. Moreover, project work encourage imagination and creativity, self-discipline and responsibility, research and study skills, and cross-curricular work through exploitation of knowledge gained in other subjects.

Projects involve a number of features which fit the principle of communicative language teaching:

- An emphasis on group-centered experience
- The encouragement of student responsibility for planning, carrying out, and presenting a task
- A sequence of activities over a period of time (planning, fieldwork, preparation of information, and presentation)
- The use of a range of skills
- Activity outside the classroom in the students' own time
- The study and use of authentic english-language material.

We have studied data from case studies of project work for nonlinguistic specialties students in foreign language classes and suggest the following types of project.

1 Reading projects involve reading and interpreting specific books, novels, short stories or plays. Books by outstanding British and American writers might be recommended by the teacher or students make their own choice. This type of project always includes class discussion and writing an essay. N. Maklakova [11] describes different approaches to work with texts providing a detailed scenario of project work and states that this activity helps students to become self-confident and value their opinion.

2 Writing projects involve documents such as letters, e-mail messages, different kinds of essays, book and science literature reviews.

3 Working-with-information-and-data projects teach students to collect, evaluate, sort, and summarize information and data from multiple sources, as well as to check the accuracy of information and put it into a variety of formats.

4 Debates play the crucial role in project base learning. Students are supposed to present their views in a logical and creative manner. The ability to debate in the form of a dialogue or polylogue is a vital condition for successful communication. Discussion skills acquired by the students participating in a project work include: negotiation techniques (sharing opinion, responding, summarizing, asking questions for clarification, persuading); problem-solving strategies (analyzing, conceptualizing, agreeing and disagreeing constructively, supporting opinions with evidence); interpersonal and leadership skills (asking for somebody's opinion, active listening, active participation, encouraging the others to participate, being tolerant).

5 Investigation projects enable students to do research around a topic, which is not connected with their future qualification, and share the results through different types of products and experience: oral presentation, writing an article, audio or video production. Students may opt for their own topics for research projects based on their own interests. Scientific research projects are tightly connected with students' specialty. Discussion of projects is held in English and is organized in the form of a role-playing game. Since this event is the final one, students and teachers of other groups are invited to participate in this mini conference. Participants play the roles of the chairman of the jury, experts, opponents, outside observers, journalists, foreign guests. Each group had its own task. Journalists and opponents, for example, should actively participate in the conference, ask questions, comment, and evaluate. The next stage, reflection, is very important. After the presentation of the projects the teachers share their opinion, evaluate the activities of each group and draw conclusions. Students are invited to express their opinion on the preparation and defense of the project, sum up, analyze the positive and negative sides, express their wishes and choose the best reports for participation in the university-wide student conference. The final presentation of projects takes place next semester and is evaluated by a jury, which consists of

students and teachers. The final stage of the project is the preparation and publication of a scientific article in the conference proceedings.

6   We should note that scientific project is suitable only for second year students as they have an experience of doing research, on one hand, and for students with in-depth study of a foreign language, on the other hand, because this form of work must be based on good preliminary preparation. Students need to work out the necessary language (vocabulary, grammar) and speech material. Conference participants must know and be able to use evaluative expressions, means of logical connection (connector words), formulas in speech, speech etiquette. In fact, debate is an exit to a real speech situation, the highest form of oral speech skills.

7   Authentic projects include all kinds of events somehow related to the social life of students at the University that are held in the English language: a variety of contests (e.g. English language festival where students prepare a short group performance on a given theme), quizzes (e.g. quizzes about state system of European countries), concerts (e.g. English song festival), exhibitions (e.g. a story of one photograph, when there was an art-exhibition of students' works with short texts in English describing the story related to the photograph).

4   CONCLUSIONS

All things considered, project work improves four essential skills in language learning: reading, writing, speaking and listening. Project-based learning arouses students' interest, makes the classes diverse, strengthens interpersonal relationships. Besides, this approach helps to develop a strong motivation for language learning, and the need for self-education. It creates a lifelike language environment encouraging the learners to communicate in English. Working in groups, students learn to cooperate, and take responsibility for the results. Project-based learning helps students understand the significance of knowledge and skills in their lives, relation between studying and future professional activity.

REFERENCES

[1]   A. Patton, Work that matters: The teacher's guide to project-based learning, 2017. [E-Reader Version]. Retrieved from https://www.innovationunit.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Work-That-Matters-Teachers-Guide-to-Project-based-Learning.pdf (accessed September 2022)

[2]   A. Morgan, "Aspects of Project-Based Learning in Higher Education", British Journal of Educational Technology, 14 (1), pp. 66-78, 1983.

[3]   D. Barnes, From Communication to Curriculum. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976.

[4]   N. Postman and C. Weingartner, Teaching as a Subversive Activity. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969.

[5]   J.W. Thomas, A Review of Research on Project-Based Learning, 2000. [E-Reader Version]. Retrieved from http://www.bobpearlman.org/BestPractices/PBL_Research.pdf (accessed September 2022)

[6]   M. Gibbes, Project-Based Language Learning: An Activity Theoretical Perspective, 2011. [E-Reader Version]. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/4384502/Project_Based_Language_Learning_An_Activity_Theoretical_PerspectiveProject_based_language_learning_An_activity_theoretical_perspective   (accessed September 2022)

[7]   N. Harmer, A. Stokes, The benefits and challenges of project-based learning. A review of the literature, 2014. [E-Reader Version]. Retrieved from https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/5/5857/PedRIO_Paper_6.pdf (accessed September 2022)

[8]   R. Hanney, M. Savin-Baden, "The problem of projects: understanding the theoretical underpinnings of project-led PBL", London Review of Education, 11 (1), pp. 7-19, 2013.

[9]   P.C. Blumenfeld, E. Soloway, R.W. Marx, J.S. Krajcik, M. Guzdial, A. Palincsar, "Motivating project-based learning: Sustaining the doing, supporting the learning", Educational psychologist, 26 (3-4), pp. 369-398, 1991.

[10]   T. Markham, "Project Based Learning", Teacher Librarian, 39(2), pp. 38-42, 2011.

[11]   N.V. Maklakova, E.S. Khovanskaya, A.V. Favictorovna, "Critical Thinking as a Fundamental Ability of a Personality", Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology, vol.10, Is.4, pp.142-147, 2019.

[12] E.S. Khovanskaya, A.V. Fakhrutdinova, N.V. Maklakova, "University as a Social Phenomenon", Man in India, vol.97, Is.9, pp. 101-107, 2017.

[13] R.R. Fahrutdinov, D.F. Khakimzyanova, O.K. Melnikova, "Game-Based Approaches for Specializing in Information Technology", European Research Studies Journal, vol.20, pp.63-73, 2017.