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PROJECT-BASED LEARNING AS A MEANS OF DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN NON-LANGUAGE MAJORS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Olha Chyzykova, PhD in Pedagogical Sciences, Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, State University of Economics and Technology.

ORCID: 0000-0002-4432-9743

E-mail: olgalehina@ukr.net

The article highlights project-based learning as an effective pedagogical method for developing students' foreign language communicative skills, as well as their problem-solving abilities, critical thinking, creativity, and peer cooperation.

The study analyzes various scholarly approaches to the definition of project-based learning, its advantages, and the key pedagogical principles for its effective implementation in foreign language teaching. It presents the results of a questionnaire survey conducted among students of non-linguistic specialties regarding the role of the project method in developing their foreign language proficiency and cognitive skills.

The author also provides recommendations for the effective application of the project method in English instruction.

Keywords: project-based learning; students of non-linguistic specialties; communicative competence; foreign language; communicative skills; innovative pedagogical approach; critical thinking; creativity.

ПРОЄКТНЕ НАВЧАННЯ ЯК ЗАСІБ РОЗВИТКУ КОМУНІКАТИВНОЇ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТІ СТУДЕНТІВ НЕЛІНГВІСТИЧНИХ СПЕЦІАЛЬНОСТЕЙ ПІД ЧАС ВИВЧЕННЯ ІНОЗЕМНОЇ МОВИ

Ольга Чижикова, кандидат педагогічних наук, доцент кафедри міжнародних відносин, Державний університет економіки і технологій.

ORCID: 0000-0002-4432-9743

E-mail: olgalehina@ukr.net

У статті розглянуто проєктне навчання як ефективний педагогічний метод розвитку іношомовних комунікативних навичок студентів. Проєктно-орієнтоване навчання як інноваційний підхід у викладанні іноземних мов ґрунтується на реальних життєвих контекстах і зосереджується на розв'язанні практичних проблем з метою розвитку комунікативної компетентності студентів, приєднання знань із різних дисциплін і водночас стимулює розвиток творчого мислення, умінь розв'язання навчальних проблем, критичного мислення, співпраці студентів і командної роботи.

У дослідженні проаналізовано різні наукові підходи щодо визначення проєктного навчання у контексті викладання іноземних мов студентам нелінгвістичних спеціальностей. Визначено ключові педагогічні принципи ефективного впровадження методу проєктів у процес іношомовної освіти, зокрема активне залучення студентів у навчання, урахування їхніх потреб і інтересів, а також рівня іношомовної комунікативної компетентності, використання автентичного змісту

завдань, заснованого на складних питаннях або проблемах, заохочення командної роботи та співпраці між студентами, розвиток комунікативних умінь тощо. Також визначено переваги застосування проєктно-орієнтованого навчання у контексті іноземної освіти студентів нелінгвістичних спеціальностей.

У межах дослідження проведено анкетування серед студентів нелінгвістичних спеціальностей з метою визначення ролі проєктного методу у розвитку їхніх іноземних і особистісно-пізнавальних навичок. Результати свідчать, що проєктно-орієнтоване навчання має значний потенціал для покращення іноземних навичок студентів, розвитку критичного мислення та креативності, а також підвищення мотивації до вивчення англійської мови.

Автор висвітлює рекомендації щодо ефективного застосування методу проєктів у процесі викладання іноземної мови студентам нефілологічних спеціальностей.

Ключові слова: проєктно-орієнтоване навчання; студенти нелінгвістичних спеціальностей; комунікативна компетентність; мовленнєві навички; іноземна мова; інноваційний педагогічний метод; критичне мислення; креативність.

In the context of globalization, proficiency in English has become a crucial competence for both academic achievement and professional advancement. This has led to a growing demand for innovative and effective teaching approaches that can better support language learning in higher education. Moreover, in the era of digital transformation and rapid developments in science and technology, the educational paradigm is shifting, creating a need for 21st-century skills such as real-world problem solving, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration. Consequently, there is an increasing imperative to implement student-centered teaching methods that foster the development of these essential skills. Project-based learning (PBL), alongside other innovative approaches – such as role-playing, case studies, quizzes, storytelling, debates, discussions, the use of music and podcasts, and media-based learning – is recognized as a novel pedagogical strategy. These approaches promote active learning, enhance critical thinking, meaningfully engage students in foreign language acquisition, and strengthen communication skills [5, 6, 10].

PBL as a modern teaching approach is based on real-life contexts and driven by practical problems. It crosses traditional subject boundaries, combining knowledge from multiple disciplines into a single project while fostering future-oriented abilities such as creative thinking, problem identification, problem solving, critical thinking, communicative competence, and teamwork [15]. Furthermore, PBL relies on projects designed to address real-world problems and motivates students to think critically and participate actively in language learning. In comparison with traditional teacher-centered teaching, PBL places students at the center of the learning process, allowing them to integrate knowledge and skills from different subjects, generate creative ideas, and develop foreign language communicative competence [16].

J. Bondarchuk et al. analyzed effective strategies for foreign language acquisition in wartime in Ukraine, focusing on students' motivation and learning preferences. The authors emphasize the need to create flexible learning environments and highlight the significance of technology integration, goal-setting, and learner autonomy in language education, which help students overcome the challenges in wartime conditions and continue developing their language proficiency [5]. Project-Based Learning (PBL) is considered an innovative teaching approach for developing foreign language proficiency, fostering students' critical thinking, creativity, learner autonomy, and motivation [3, 9, 13, 15, 16].

PBL is analyzed by a number of both domestic and foreign researchers. Among domestic scholars investigating the PBL approach in higher education notable contributions

have been made by O. Chyzhykova, S. Derkach, S. Shcheglova, and S. Sysoyeva. Thus, S. Sysoyeva emphasizes that PBL represents an implementation of learner-centered education, as it addresses students' individual needs, promotes active engagement according to their interests, and demonstrates the practical application of knowledge. O. Chyzhykova examines PBL as an effective approach for fostering the creative skills of law majors within the context of foreign language instruction, highlighting the typology of projects and the specific pedagogical conditions necessary for its successful implementation in English acquisition to enhance communicative competence [3]. S. Shcheglova explores the use of PBL as a means of developing students' communicative competence, analyzing factors that influence speaking skills in blended learning [4]. S. Derkach investigates the use of project-based methods in teaching English grammar to students majoring in English. The study demonstrates that this method enhances students' motivation to engage with the subject, deepens their understanding of grammatical material, develops research skills, and fosters public speaking abilities [1].

J. Thomas identified key principles of PBL, including student autonomy, active engagement in the learning process, constructive investigation, project authenticity, and real-world tasks [14]. L. Zhang and Y. Ma consider project-based learning an effective instructional approach that enhances students' learning outcomes and academic achievement, particularly by fostering the development of learners' thinking skills [15]. A similar perspective is expressed by Ch. Zhou [16], who highlights the positive influence of PBL on students' critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and teamwork abilities. In addition, PBL is regarded as more effective than traditional teacher-centered methods in preparing students for future professional tasks and project-oriented activities. Furthermore, B. Condliffe [8] emphasizes that the PBL approach in K–12 education closely aligns with contemporary educational goals that prioritize the development of active thinking as well as intra- and interpersonal competencies, including collaboration and communication skills essential for both academic success and future career development. Similarly, P. Guo et al. underline the significant improvement in student learning in higher education resulting from the implementation of the PBL approach, which is widely recognized as an inquiry-based instructional method [9].

A number of review studies have examined the use of PBL in English language instruction. For instance, S. Campbell, O. Chyzhykova, G. O'Brien, M. Lavadenz, E. Armas, N. Rohmah, A. Rosyidha, L. Saputri, and T. Gruber describe PBL as a student-centered approach that promotes learner autonomy in English acquisition, engages students in the development of meaningful real-world products, and contributes to the improvement of English language proficiency.

Despite the considerable number of studies devoted to the project-based learning method in educational practice, as well as to the pedagogical conditions and general principles of its effective implementation, the application of PBL in teaching English to students of non-linguistic majors aimed at developing their communicative competence has not been sufficiently investigated.

The purpose of the article is to explore the effectiveness of project-based learning in English language education for non-language majors and to analyze how its implementation contributes to the development of their foreign language communicative competence.

Within the framework of the study, both theoretical and empirical methods were used.

The theoretical methods included the analysis of domestic and foreign publications related to the research problem in order to identify the definitions and key principles of project-based learning. An empirical method involved a questionnaire survey conducted among first- and second-year non-linguistic students to determine the effectiveness and role of the project method in developing foreign language communicative skills.

Project-based learning, as defined by P. Guo et al., is an inquiry-based instructional approach in which learners construct knowledge through engagement in meaningful projects that result in real-world products [9]. This approach typically incorporates a driving question, clearly defined learning objectives, active participation in learning activities, and collaboration among students. The authors highlight that a defining characteristic of PBL, which distinguishes it from other student-centered pedagogies, is its emphasis on problem-solving activities that address authentic, real-world issues. Through this process learners integrate, apply, and construct knowledge while working collaboratively to develop viable solutions. Within this framework, the teacher assumes the role of a facilitator, providing guidance, feedback, and instructional support, while students remain central to the learning process as active participants in knowledge construction and collaborative inquiry [9]. A similar definition is proposed by Ch. Zhou, who emphasizes the student-centered nature of PBL as a learning model based on project work. In this approach, students' engagement is reflected in active cognitive processes, including active thinking abilities, as well as in the development of practical skills. These include hands-on abilities such as English writing and speaking, project implementation, and task completion, which enable learners to apply knowledge to real-world problems. Additionally, PBL promotes the development of teamwork and cooperative competencies, including the ability to collaborate with peers, practice communication skills, work effectively in small groups, and provide peer feedback [16]. According to G. O'Brien et al. PBL aims at completing a project through collaborative student work [11]. This approach emphasizes the teacher's role as a facilitator, the student-driven nature of learning, and the need to address real-life problems in order to develop communicative skills (speaking and writing) and comprehension skills (listening and reading) [11, p. 24–25]. Project-based learning in teaching foreign languages to non-language majors involves purposeful collaboration among students to solve educational problems through project activities. This approach promotes the development of professional and communicative skills in foreign language communication, ensures effective interaction and cooperation with others, and fosters students' motivation. The outcome of this process is the creation and presentation of an original project product [3, p. 62]. The project method integrates elements of problem-based and cooperative learning, promotes the development of speaking skills, socio-cultural and professional competence, and the ability to clearly express ideas and work with information. An educational project is therefore a set of tasks independently carried out by students to solve practical or theoretical problems [4, p. 145].

Among *the key principles of PBL in foreign language acquisition* aimed at developing *communicative competence*, researchers emphasize the following:

- 1) Centrality of projects, where projects are implemented as the core method of learning [8, 11, 14].
- 2) Student-centeredness, in which the teacher facilitates the learning process and acts as a co-designer of learning activities, while students actively engage in learning [1, 8, 11, 12, 13, 16].

3) Clearly defined objectives, with the focus on meaningful learning goals and well-structured activities [8, 9, 11].

4) Allocation of sufficient time for project-based activities; the project is planned in advance, but remains flexible, allowing for adjustments and changes during the implementation process [1, 3, 8].

5) Use of motivating guiding questions that stimulate learning, including a driving question that requires students to master the essential ideas and principles of the subject [8, 9, 13, 14].

6) Authentic task content, based on challenging questions or problems, as well as the complex and open-ended nature of projects [8, 9, 11, 12, 14].

7) Consideration of language-specific factors, including students' English proficiency levels and curriculum requirements [3, 11, 13].

8) Promotion of active student participation and engagement [8, 9, 12].

9) Provision of structured support (scaffolding) to guide students' learning throughout the project [7, 8, 12]

10) Encouragement of teamwork, peer collaboration, and cooperative learning [1, 3, 12, 16].

11) Use of computer technologies, including tools for data collection and information processing [1, 9, 12, 13].

12) Implementation of comprehensive formative and summative assessment for English language learners [8, 11, 13].

13) Provision of opportunities for reflection and necessary constructive teacher feedback [1, 7, 8].

14) The communicative principle which focuses on the development of communicative skills and overall foreign language proficiency [1, 3, 4, 12, 13].

The analysis of the scientific literature allows us to outline *the key advantages of PBL in foreign language instruction*:

1) Positive contribution to students' academic achievement and learning outcomes [12, 13, 15].

2) Development of learners' active and critical thinking as well as decision-making skills, including the ability to perform various social roles such as leader, performer, and mediator [3, 9, 12, 16].

3) Enhancement of interest in language learning, formation of positive attitudes toward learning, and increased motivation through the use of driving questions [3, 4, 8, 12, 15].

4) Fostering creative thinking and problem-solving skills through the exploration of real-life problems, students' deep involvement in investigation and inquiry [2, 4, 8, 15].

5) Development of collaboration skills and teamwork [2, 3, 8, 12, 13, 15].

6) Improvement of communicative competence, including the clear formulation of ideas and the practice of the main language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing [4, 8, 12, 13, 15, 16].

7) Development of content knowledge and research-related skills, including problem identification, and data collection [3, 9, 13].

8) Formation of positive attitudes toward English courses [3, 9, 12, 13].

9) Opportunities to apply different types of language activities and discuss diverse topics in project work, taking into account students' needs, interests, and foreign language

proficiency levels [3, 12, 13].

10) Making foreign language acquisition more meaningful, authentic, dynamic, and interactive, encouraging students to think critically and apply their knowledge in practice [3, 4, 12, 13].

11) Development of foreign language communicative proficiency, as well as socio-cultural and professional competence [1, 3, 4, 12].

12) Use of modern information and communication technologies [1, 4, 9].

13) Development of students' research and learning skills, such as working with dictionaries and reference materials, selecting appropriate means of presenting information, formulating hypotheses, drawing conclusions, as well as facilitating authentic acquisition of lexical and grammatical structures [1, 3, 4, 13].

14) Provision of authentic communication opportunities [1, 3, 4, 12, 13].

Within the framework of the research, we conducted a mini-scale questionnaire involving 42 first- and second-year students from five specialties (Management, Marketing, Business and Trade, Economics, and Creative Industries Management) at the State University of Economics and Technology. The questionnaire aimed to examine the role of project-based learning in developing students' foreign language communication skills and personal skills during the English course.

The survey evaluated the impact of project-based learning according to the following criteria: foreign language skills (speaking, writing, reading, listening), critical thinking and creativity, collaboration and teamwork, grammar accuracy, English vocabulary acquisition and lexical usage, and motivation to learn English. The questionnaire included the following questions, with response options "Yes," "Partially," or "No" for each item:

A. Foreign language skills:

1. Has project-based learning helped you improve your speaking skills in English?
2. Has working on projects during English classes contributed to the development of your writing skills?
3. Have project tasks improved your reading comprehension in English?
4. Has working on projects improved your listening skills in English?
5. Has project work helped you develop your ability to express your ideas clearly in English?

B. Personal / cognitive skills:

6. Has project work promoted the development of critical thinking and creativity?
7. Has working on projects developed your collaboration and teamwork skills?

C. Language development and motivation:

8. Has project-based learning helped you improve your grammar accuracy?
9. Have project-based activities helped you expand your English vocabulary and improve lexical usage?
10. Has project-based learning made English learning more meaningful and motivating?

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, including percentage distribution of responses. The results of the questionnaire indicate a generally positive perception of project-based learning among the respondents. Thus, 69% (29 respondents) reported that project-based activities significantly improved their speaking skills,

while 71% (30 respondents) agreed that project work helped them express their ideas clearly in English. A considerable number of students indicated that project-based tasks contributed to the development of writing (28 respondents, 67%) and reading skills (27 respondents, 64%), as they were involved in preparing written reports, analyzing information sources, and working with authentic materials. The results also showed that listening skills improved for 55% (23 students), since the learners actively listened to their peers' presentations, participated in discussions, and worked with multimedia materials during project activities. Another important outcome is the development of critical thinking and creativity, reported by 71% of respondents (30 students), as project-based activities encouraged them to analyze information, generate ideas, and solve problems while completing project tasks. Students also emphasized the role of project work in fostering collaboration and teamwork (32 respondents, 76%), as most projects required group interaction, role distribution, and cooperative decision-making. A significant percentage of respondents confirmed that project-based learning helped them expand their English vocabulary and improve lexical usage (29 respondents, 69%), as well as enhance grammar accuracy (25 respondents, 60%).

Finally, the majority of participants (34 respondents, 81%) reported that project-based learning made English classes more engaging, meaningful, and motivating, which increased their interest in language learning and encouraged active participation in the educational process. However, while students reported noticeable progress in vocabulary acquisition and lexical usage, the improvement in grammar accuracy and listening skills was relatively moderate. This suggests that although project-based learning effectively promotes communicative language use, the development of grammar and listening skills may require supplementary instructional strategies and more focused practice.

Furthermore, the successful implementation of project-based learning in foreign language education requires thorough preparation, clear objective setting, and consideration of students' language proficiency levels. It also involves a focus on all language skills, an individual approach based on learners' needs, the use of varied work formats (individual, pair, and group), the incorporation of authentic tasks, the encouragement of active student engagement, and the provision of regular teacher feedback.

Project-based learning is an innovative pedagogical approach that makes a significant contribution to foreign language acquisition. It enhances students' communicative competence and also fosters the development of problem-solving skills, critical thinking, creativity, and teamwork, preparing learners to meet the demands of professional and real-life contexts. The integration of PBL in EFL courses thus supports both linguistic and personal skill development, making language learning more meaningful, engaging, and directly relevant to students' future careers.

The findings of the mini-scale survey indicate that project-based learning promotes the development of students' foreign language skills, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and motivation. Therefore, the integration of PBL into English courses for students of non-linguistic specialties can significantly enhance the quality of foreign language education.

Further research will focus on the analysis of other effective pedagogical methods for developing students' communicative competence.

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