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Project work in teaching English

This article highlights the issue of using project work in teaching English. The objectives of the given article to highlight the importance of project work in teaching English, to describe its main peculiarities and types, to discover how it influences the students during the educational process and if it helps to learn the language. The given article begins by examining the leading role of using project work as one of the best method in teaching FL.

The fundamental researches in the given field were carried out by such prominent scientists and methodologists as Legutke M., Thomas H., Heines S., Brumfit C., Hutchinson T., Fried-Booth D. and others.

Working on this article we can make the next conclusion - project work has more positive sides than negative and is effective during the educational process. Students are likely to learn the language with the help of projects and have more fun.

Keywords: english language teaching, project work, methods.

As we entered a new millennium, the ability and the need to understand and communicate with each other have become increasingly important. To meet these communication needs, more and more individuals have highly specific academic and professional reasons for seeking to improve their language skills.

The given article deals with the analysis of the project work methodology as an integrated pedagogical and language activity that successfully combines simulations, role-plays and various forms of discussion. The research focuses on the project work methodology functioning in English studying process.

Project work is characterized as one of the most effective methods of teaching and learning a foreign language through research and communication, different types of this method allow us to use it in all the spheres of the educational process. Project work is not a new methodology. Its benefits have been

widely recognized for many years in the teaching of subjects like Science, Geography, and History. Some teachers have also been doing project work in their language lessons for a long time, but for others it is a new way of working. The main idea of project work is considered to be based on teaching students through research activities and stimulating their personal interest.

Project work provides an opportunity to develop students' creativity, imagination, enquiry and their self-expression. It must rank as one of the most exciting teaching methodologies a teacher can use. It truly combines in practical form both the fundamental principles of a communicative approach to language teaching and the values of good education.

Legutke and Thomas in their book "Process and Experience in the Language Classroom" suggest and analyse three types of projects: encounter proj-

ects, which enable students to make contact with native speakers; text projects which encourage students to use English language texts, either a range of them to research a topic or one text more intensively, for example, a play to read, discuss, dramatize, and rehearse; class correspondence projects which involve letters, audio cassettes, photographs, etc. as exchanges between learners in different countries.

Another explorer of the Project Work Method, Brumfit, in "Communicative Methodology in Language Teaching" provides the analysis of projects in which advanced adult students elect to work in groups to produce a radio programme about their own country. A range of topics, for example, ethnic groups, religion, education, are assigned to the groups, who research their topic and write and rehearse a script.

Hutchinson in "Introduction to Project Work" dwells upon a project on 'Animals in Danger' for secondary school students, in which they use knowledge from Science and Geography to research threatened species, write an article, and make a poster.

Another scientist, Haines, in "Projects for the EFL Classroom" considers four types of project work, namely: informational and research projects, survey projects, production projects, and performance and organizational projects.

Therefore a project is an extended piece of work on a particular topic where the content and the presentation are determined principally by the learners. The teacher or the textbook provides the topic, but the project writers themselves decide what they write and how they present it.

The most detailed definition of "project" we can find in The New Penguin English Dictionary (2000):

1. A specific plan or design; a scheme
2. A planned undertaking; e. g.
 - a) a piece of research with a definite plan
 - b) a large or complex piece of work
 - c) a task or problem engaged in use by a group of a students, especially to supplement and apply classroom studies.

Project work captures better than any other activity the three principal elements of a communicative approach.

These are:

- a) a concern for motivation, that is, how the learners relate to the task.
- b) a concern for relevance, that is, how the learners relate to the language.

c) a concern for educational values, that is, how the language curriculum relates to the general educational development of the learner.

Project work leads to purposeful language use because it requires personal involvement on the part of the students from the onset of a project, students, in consultation with their instructor, must decide what they will do and how they will do it, and this includes not only the content of the project, but also the language requirements. So from this point project work emerges as a practical methodology that puts into practice the fundamental principles of a communicative approach to language teaching. It can thus bring considerable benefits to our language classroom, like:

- Increased motivation- learners become personally involved in the project.
- All four skills, reading, writing, listening and speaking, are integrated.
- Autonomous learning is promoted as learners become more responsible for their own learning.
- There are learning outcomes-learners have an end product.
- Authentic tasks and therefore the language input are more authentic.
- Interpersonal relations are developed through working as a group.
- Content and methodology can be decided between the learners and the teacher and within the group themselves so it is more learner centred.
- A break from routine and the chance to do something different.

Project work is not the easiest method to implement. It requires a lot of preparatory work on the teacher's part and multiple stages of development to succeed. It would be wrong to pretend that project work does not have its problems. Teachers are often afraid that the project classroom will be noisier than the traditional classroom and that this will disturb other classes in the school, but it does not have to be noisy. Students should be spending a lot of the time working quietly on their projects: reading, drawing, writing, and cutting and pasting. In these tasks, students will often need to discuss things and they may be moving around to get a pair of scissors or to consult a reference book, but this is not an excuse to make a lot of noise. If students are doing a survey in their class, for example, there will be a lot of moving around and talking. However, this kind of noise is a natural part of any productive activity. Indeed, it is useful to realize that the traditional classroom

has quite a lot of noise in it, too. There is usually at least one person talking and there may be a tape recorder playing, possibly with the whole class doing a drill. Therefore the noise of the well-managed project classroom is the sound of creativity.

This kind of work is time-consuming of course, it takes much longer to prepare, make, and present a project than it does to do more traditional activities. When we are already struggling to get through the syllabus or finish the textbook, we will probably feel that we do not have time to devote to project work, however good an activity it may be. There are two responses to this situation:

1. Not all project work needs to be done in class time. Obviously, if the project is a group task, most of it must be done in class, but a lot of projects are individual tasks. Projects about My Family, My House, etc. can be done at home.

2. When choosing to do project work we are making a choice in favour of the quality of the learning experience over the quantity. It is unfortunate that language teaching has tended to put most emphasis on quantity. And yet there is little evidence that quantity is really the crucial factor. What really matters in learning is the quality of the learning experience.

Some teachers doubt about using this method because they think students will spend all their time speaking their mother tongue. This is true to a large extent. It is unlikely that most students will speak English while they are working on their project. However, rather than seeing this as a problem, we should consider its merits:

a) it is a natural way of working. It is a mistake to think of L1 (the mother tongue) and L2 (the language being learnt) as two completely separate domains. Learners in fact operate in both domains, constantly switching from one to the other, so it is perfectly natural for them to use L1 while working on a L2 product. As long as the final product is in English it does not matter if the work is done in L1.

b) project work can provide some good opportunities for realistic translation work. A lot of the source material for projects (leaflets, maps, interviews, texts from reference books, etc.) will be in the mother tongue. Using this material in a project provides useful translation activities.

c) there will be plenty of opportunities in other parts of the language course for learners to practice oral skills. Project work should be seen as a chance to practice that most difficult of skills, writing.

Types of Project Work

Haines identifies four types of projects [Haines S. Projects for the EFL Classroom, 1991, p.65]:

1. Information and research projects which include such kinds of work as reports, displays, etc.

2. Survey projects which may also include displays, but more interviews, summaries, findings, etc.

3. Production projects which foresee the work with radio, television, video, wall newspapers, etc.

4. Performance/Organizational projects which are connected with parties, plays, drama, concerts, etc.

What these different types of projects have in common is their emphasis on student involvement, collaboration, and responsibility. In this respect, project work is similar to the cooperative learning and task-oriented activities that are widely endorsed by educators interested in building communicative competence and purposeful language learning. However, it differs from such approaches; it typically requires students to work together over several days or weeks, both inside and outside the classroom, often in collaboration with speakers of the target language who are not normally part of the educational process.

One of the great benefits of project work is its adaptability. We can do projects on almost any topic. They can be factual or fantastic. Projects can, thus, help to develop the full range of the learners' capabilities. Projects are often done in poster format, but students can also use their imagination to experiment with the form. It encourages a focus on fluency.

Each project is the result of a lot of hard work. The authors of the projects have found information about their topic, collected or drawn pictures, written down their ideas, and then put all the parts together to form a coherent presentation.

The projects are very creative in terms of both content and language. Each project is a unique piece of communication, created by the project writers themselves. This element of creativity makes project work a very personal experience. The students are writing about aspects of their own lives, and so they invest a lot of themselves in their project.

Project work is a highly adaptable methodology. It can be used at every level from absolute beginner to advanced.

Another point is that this work is a very active medium like a kind of structured playing. Students are not just receiving and producing words, they are:

- collecting information;

- drawing pictures, maps, diagrams, and charts;
- cutting out pictures;
- arranging texts and visuals;
- colouring;
- carrying out interviews and surveys;
- possibly making recordings, too.

Lastly, project work gives a clear sense of achievement. It enables all students to produce a worthwhile product. This feature of project work makes it particularly well suited to the mixed ability class, because students can work at their own pace and level. The brighter students can show what they know, unconstrained by the syllabus, while at the same time the slower learners can achieve something that they can take pride in, perhaps compensating for their lower language level by using more photos and drawings [Ribe R., Vidal N. *Project Work. Step by Step.* – Oxford: Heinmann, 1993, p.320].

Firstly, project work helps to integrate the foreign language into the network of the learner's own communicative competence. It creates connections between the foreign language and the learner's own world. It encourages the use of a wide range of communicative skills, enables learners to exploit other spheres of knowledge, and provides opportunities for them to write about the things that are important in their own lives.

Secondly, it helps to make the language more relevant to learners' actual needs. When students use English to communicate with other English speakers, they will want, and be expected, to talk about aspects of their own lives – their house, their family, their town, etc.

Project work thus enables students to rehearse the language and factual knowledge that will be of most value to them as language users.

Stages of a project

The success of project work depends on planning and organization that students and a teacher deal with together. If a good timetable of the project is established, it helps to avoid the chaos and similar problems. Generally, I think that every project should have four stages: topic, collecting data, presentation and evaluation of a project.

Kratochvílová (*Theory and practice of project work*, 2009, p.41-42) suggests four stages of the project that she enters them into details, furthermore. The main stages are:

1. Planning

2. Realization
3. Presentation of an output
4. Evaluation

I consider the characteristics of a project according to Legutke and Thomas (1991, p. 169) as the most sententious and applicable in various subjects. They say that preparation and follow up are reflected in these stages of a project's development:

1. Opening;
2. Topic presentation;
3. Research and data collection;
4. Preparing data presentation;
5. Presentation;
6. Evaluation.

Let's consider Evaluation. According to Legutke and Thomas, a concluding evaluation stage involves an overall evaluation of:

- topic understanding;
- group and teacher interaction;
- procedural organization;
- input materials;
- language gains and deficits;
- examples of learner work;
- possible by-products, e.g. changes in learner's intercultural awareness,

but they also say that teachers can use various forms of evaluation, such as the students can write their own diaries with their notes about what they have learnt during working on the project, they can write down their experiences in their own reports, they can determine the criteria for success and failure and discuss about their individual work in the project. (Legutke and Thomas 1991, p. 180 – 181)

Assessment of project work is another difficult issue. We should not correct mistakes on the final project itself, or at least not in ink. It goes against the whole spirit of project work. A project usually represents a lot of effort and is something that the students will probably want to keep. It is a shame to put red marks all over it. This draws attention to the things that are wrong about the project over the things that are good. On the other hand, students are more likely to take note of errors pointed out to them in project work because the project means much more to them than an ordinary piece of class work. There are two useful techniques to handle the errors:

- Encouraging the students to do a rough draft of their project first. The students can then incorporate corrections in the final product.
- If errors occur in the final product, correcting in pencil or on a separate sheet of paper attached to

the project. A good idea was suggested by a teacher in Spain to get students to provide a photocopy of their project. Corrections can then be put on the photocopy. But fundamentally, the most important thing to do about errors is to stop worrying about them.

Projects are real communication. When we communicate, we do the best we can with what we know, and because we usually concentrate on getting the meaning right, errors in form will naturally occur. It is a normal part of using and learning a language. Students invest a lot of themselves in a project and so they will usually make every effort to do their best work. [Lavery C. *Cultural Studies for the Language Classroom*. – London, 1993, p.106]

Conclusion

In the given article I have highlighted the importance of the project work in teaching English, discovered how it influences the students during the educational process and if this type of work in the classroom helps to learn the language.

On the basis of the literary sources studied we can come to the following conclusions that project work has advantages like the increased motivation-when learners become personally involved in the project; all four skills, reading, writing, listening and speaking, are integrated; autonomous learning is promoted as learners become more responsible for their own learning; there are learning outcomes-learners have an end product; authentic tasks and therefore the language input are more authentic; interpersonal relations are developed through working as a group; content and methodology can be decided between the learners and the teacher and within the group themselves so it is more learner-centred; learners often get help from parents for project work thus involving the parent more in the child's learning; if the project is also displayed parents can see it at open days or when they pick the child up from

the school; a break from routine and the chance to do something different.

The types of projects are information and research projects, survey projects, production projects and performance and organizational projects which can be performed differently as in reports, displays, wall newspapers, parties, plays, etc.

The organization of project work may seem difficult but if we do it step by step it should be easy. We should define a theme, determine the final outcome, structure the project, identify language skills and strategies, gather information, compile and analyse the information, present the final product and finally evaluate the project. Project work demands a lot of hard work from the teacher and the students, nevertheless, the final outcome is worth the effort.

The project work supported the students' autonomy of decision and solution of problems in doing projects.

Therefore I can conclude that I am a big supporter of project work at schools, colleges and Universities, and I think it has its significant place next to traditional teaching methods. Doing the project is positive motivation for the students to reach better results in English.

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В.Н. Акшалова, А.С. Тәшенова
Ағылшын тілін меңгеру барысында ғылыми жобаны қолдану

Бұл мақалада ағылшын тілі меңгеру барысында ғылыми жобаны қолданатын үйрету тәсілі қарастырылған. Мақаланың негізгі мақсаты жоба жұмыстарының әдістемелік жолдарын анықтайды негіз ретінде И.А. жұмыстары қолданған. Зерттеу жобасының ерекше қайнар көздері ретінде мынадай ғалымдардың М. Легутке, Х. Томас, С. Хейнес, С. Брумфи т.б., еңбектері қолданылған.

Түйін сөздер: ағылшын тілі, тәлім беру, жоба жұмыстары, әдіс.

В.Н. Акшалова, А.С. Ташенова
Проектные работы в преподавании английского языка

Данная статья освещает основные приоритеты использования проектной работы в методике преподавания английского языка.

Основной целью работы над данной статьей является выявление главных принципов и типов проектной работы как основного метода преподавания ИЯ. Посредством анализа главных принципов данного метода выявлена и обоснована необходимость использования проектной работы в процессе обучения ИЯ.

Наиболее значимыми источниками исследования данной работы являются методологические исследования таких ученых как Legutke M., Thomas H., Heines S., Brumfit C., Hutchinson T., Fried-Booth D. и другие.

Ключевые слова: английский язык, преподавание, проектная работа, методы.