

FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF USING PROJECTS IN ENGLISH CLASSES

Taiteliyeva Maira Abdikaimovna

senior teacher, South Kazakstan State Pedagogical Institute

Kassymbekova Laila

*master teacher, South Kazakstan State Pedagogical Institute
Kazakhstan, Shymkent*

Abstract. The presented article deals with the issues of using project works with the ESP learners. Identifying the value of project works in developing learners language skills, the author points its possibilities in increasing responsibility and the ability to cooperate with others. The author shares her experience of using project work with history department students of her institute.

Key words: project work, learner-centered activity, working in groups, collaboration, presentation, end product, process-oriented, product-oriented.

Project work in the foreign language classroom is the opportunity for learners to develop their language and social skills, it motivates learners to use the foreign language, increases their sense of responsibility and develops the learners' ability to cooperate with others. Fried-Booth says that "most organized language learning takes place in the classroom. What is taught in the classroom may in theory be useful, but usefulness does not always extend to practice. Often, there is a gap between the language the students are taught and the language they in fact require. It is this gap that project work can help to bridge" [2: 5].

Kerstin and Pay divided projects in foreign language learning into three groups: 1) Encounter projects, which enable the students the direct contact with native speakers, as a short visit, a class trip or a school exchange. 2) Text projects let the students work with various materials, like literature texts, newspapers and magazines, video and audio materials. 3) Class correspondence projects aim to combine students with native speakers and work with written and visual materials, such as letters, audioletters, videoletters, photo stories. [3: 161-162].

In educational context, the project work should be a learner-centered activity, and it is the students who can choose the topic of the project, the way of work, divide tasks into group members and agree on the output of the project themselves. Students can benefit in different ways from this creative approach in learning condition. Frederica Stoller's theory states that there are several benefits of project work in the classroom. These benefits entail the authenticity of the language experience, which suggests that project work supports a more reliable use of the English language than is given in the context of regular classes [4:32].

Project work gives students the opportunity to contribute to the lessons, and motivate students to learn the language that is taught and use it in a meaningful context. The use of the students' language skills in a meaningful context is also part of a further benefit of project work, namely meaningful input and output.

Using projects in ESP classes has become a standard feature of much EAP work as many students carry out projects during their studies. The project begins in the classroom, moves into the outside world and then back into the classroom. It provides an opportunity for real world and classroom experience. Working on projects help ESP learners to experience transferable skills too.

Working at South Kazakhstan State Pedagogical Institute, we have used several projects in our teaching experience. Every time we use projects we come up to the conclusion that this way of learning is much more useful for ESP learners than the traditional text-based or grammar-based lessons. According to the syllabus students are involved in student-centered project works done in small groups, which are planned, discussed, and later evaluated with the learners. Further, we'd like to share our experience of making a project on the topic "Historical places of South Kazakhstan" with a history department students. During the process students worked in three small groups of 5 students, and the project was done during a month. To successfully complete the projects students were involved in following steps:

- Classroom planning (discussing the content and scope of the project).
- Carrying out the project (conducting interviews, gathering materials, making recordings).
- Reviewing and monitoring the work (discussions and feedback sessions, group analysis of the work, self-monitoring by the participants)
- Designing materials
- Presenting their product

In our first lesson I introduced the topic to the students "Discover Kazakhstan" and in class we learned the vocabulary of the topic, read information about historical places of Kazakhstan, and watched films about famous places of Kazakhstan. Due to these tasks I enlarged their knowledge of the topic, motivated them to learn the topic and supplied them with necessary input. At the end of the lesson I divided them into groups of 5 students, distributed roles to each member of the group like the leader of the group, material collector, designer, and presenter, explained the procedure and the deadline of the project. Kerstin and Pay [3: 170] say that "learners are

encouraged to become aware of their role within groups in preparation for more responsible tasks at later stages in the project.“ Then I gave students time to discuss in their groups the topic of their projects, the final product they are going to prepare. In this stage learners focus on a possible product and explore its interest, value in terms of insights into the topic. My objective here is to sensitize learners towards the theme, to mobilize their existing knowledge, and to arouse curiosity to the project.

In the second lesson the groups shared their plans of their future projects. The first group planned to make a flyer about historical places of Shymkent city, the second group was going to make a video clip about Khoja Akhmed Yassaviy Mouseleum and the third group a power point Presentation about their own Institute. The groups suggested their ideas, the members identified their tasks and other procedures needed to complete the target task. The other groups gave advice, changed some procedures and suggested their own versions about the use of books, newspaper/magazine articles, films or the Internet to come up with facts about historical places of South Kazakhstan. This kind of tasks develop students' responsibility to work, gave them opportunity to cooperate and communicate. But, I should admit that not all students speak English in this lesson, I allowed them to use their mother tongue, as we are motivated to the process and final product of the project. So, in this way students defined the nature and extent of the project tasks, learned how to carry out the project work, what materials they should find, how to design them and how to complete the target task.

During a week students worked outside the classroom collecting data for the project, like photographs, various texts, research charts, dialogues, their written notes and etc., and deciding what to do with it in regard of the end product and for whom it will be intended. In this stage students are remotivated towards completion of an end product, their life skills are developed, they felt responsibility, they have a common aim and moved towards it.

In the third lesson the students presented their work. Kerstin and Pay argue that many projects have a form of presentation that is intended to audience outside the group. This stage enables the students to communicate in the target language and practise acquiring presentation skills. The presentation itself is a short-time event but it is preceded „by a preparatory process of collective decision making, data reorganization and skill acquisition.“ [3; 178]

The objectives for learners in this part of the project are:

- to present information to an audience,
- to structure and direct the event and interact with the audience.

On presentation, the students also present their end product of the project. I find the importance of the end product by Blue [1: 12] significant. He says that the end product, whatever its form is, „should be the final result of the various tasks students engage in during the project. Without an end product to aim at, projects would have no natural conclusion and activities might become meaningless, unrelated exercises. “ If it is possible, the learners should display their end products in their classroom. The students were very satisfied with their work, they were proud of their product. They did their best to present it in English, and they admitted they learned a great number of words in order to do presentation.

At the end of the lesson the teacher and other groups gave feedback to the projects. Before evaluating the projects everybody had already been introduced with assessment criteria. I usually introduce the assessment criteria at the first lesson, because some learners try to fit the criteria and work according to it. So, the students' work is assessed according to the following criteria:

1. *Process-oriented 45 %*

- Contribution to the process (teamwork, research skills, etc)
- Language used in the process (negotiation, interaction, interim products e.g. questionnaires, scripts) etc

2. *Product-oriented 55 %*

- Task response (focused on topic, use of resources; relevant and well supported by evidence of research)
- Language (in the outputs, eg presentation, brochures, posters etc)
- Organisation and delivery (a logical organizational structure)
- Design (creativity, layout, format, attractiveness)

As a home task I ask the students to write a reflection on this project work including their impression about what they have learnt while working on the project, they can write down their challenges and achievements in fulfilling the task, they can determine his own contribution to the project and etc.

The presented method and its practice showed us that project work in the language classroom is the opportunity for learners to develop their language skills, it encourages learners to use the foreign language and motivates them. Using appropriate method and creating the necessary conditions, classroom environment will help students feel more comfortable making their learning. There is nothing like seeing the students' pride and sense of achievement at the completion of a project and witnessing the group dynamic grow and develop as

they share their skills and support each other. The possibilities are endless and there are numerous benefits to this way of learning.

Reference:

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