



## The expediency of implementation of project work into the English for Specific Purposes course

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### Abstract

The paper considers project work as a form of individual student activity in the course of English for specific purposes (ESP). This type of work contributes to the acquisition of professional knowledge and the search for certain information for solving practical problems and, thus, activates cognitive activity. The implementation of the project includes planning, forecasting, decision-making, development, research, and work with authentic materials, i.e. those aspects of the activity that are necessary for the formation of professional competence. This type of work also helps acquire knowledge on your own through individual work and self-education. The expediency of introducing such a task into the program for students with different levels of proficiency in a foreign language, including that in groups with a basic and intermediate level of proficiency in English (A2-B1), has been considered. The article systematizes the most typical mistakes that students make when writing abstracts and presenting the results of their research. The introduction of project work into the process of teaching a foreign language has contributed to the development of elements of research activity, which is a natural part of education since it provides a link between education and modern achievements of science and technology. The experiment showed a high motivation of students to carry out project work in English, their interest in the result, as well as the importance of this type of work for the formation of professional competencies.

**Keywords:** English for specific purposes (ESP); CLIL; authentic materials; project work; motivation; individual work

## 1. Introduction

Since the beginning of reforms in education, higher education institutions in Ukraine have been refining their foreign language programs in order to bring them into line with the requirements of today's labour market. After all, the main goal is to make a correspondence between what a student learns in a university classroom and the skills required in professional activity. Thus, the main task of

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foreign language departments is to develop such ESP courses that will provide students with the necessary communication skills required in the careers they choose. A textbook with professionally oriented content plays an important role in the effective teaching of ESP. But sometimes it does not meet the needs of today's professional environment. To bridge the gap between a university audience and a future specialist's workplace, it is expedient: 1) to gather information about what knowledge and skills the future specialist needs for a successful career; 2) to use the information obtained in the development and improvement of ESP courses.

The aim of higher education today is to reach a new level in the training of specialists and to ensure the advanced growth of their qualifications based on the introduction in the educational process of modern pedagogical techniques and scientific and methodological achievements, which create the conditions for the formation of an educated, hard-working personality, capable of wide realization of his creative potential and self-development. The development of such qualities as activity, initiative, independent decision-making and creative attitude to work, language skills speak, ability to navigate in an infinite mass of professional information, most of which is contained in foreign languages is of great importance. A modern specialist is a person who not only has professional knowledge and skills in his field but also is creative, innovative, working on new principles that meet the requirements of the time and ability to think outside the box. Oral communication skills in English are very important and highly valued by employers. The question about language skills today is equal to "Do you speak English?", and the cliché "I can read and translate with a dictionary" can be considered archaic. However, it is often the skill of speaking that students perform the worst. That is why it is so important to work with authentic materials, to solve problematic tasks that require the student to express their thoughts, to present the results of independent work to the audience.

It should also be borne in mind that in Ukraine, students have rather limited access to a foreign language environment, and that such an environment is created mainly artificially. In order to partially compensate for this shortfall, vocational programs in foreign languages should provide the student with rich and varied authentic material.

### *1.1. Literature review*

When selecting a material for a foreign language course, it is important to evaluate how interesting this material will be to students, but first and foremost, the course material should be directly relevant to the speciality and professional needs (Tomlinson, 1998). This is a major requirement for the ESP textbook generally, as it is the only useful course is a course that focuses on mastering the knowledge and skills needed in professional activity. According to Alexander (1998), the teacher should be guided by this criterion of usefulness when choosing teaching materials. However, no textbook can contain all the necessary information and meet all individual requirements. In other words, the teacher should always supplement the textbook with materials that meet the professional interests of a particular group of students and the level of language training of each student.

Allwright (1981) states that "there is a limit to what teaching materials can be expected to do for us. The whole business of language learning management is far too complex to be satisfactorily catered for by a pre-packaged set of decisions embodied in teaching materials." This point of view is supported by Hutchinson & Waters (1987), and Hutchinson (2001) who argue that in the case of ineffective learning materials, they should be modified and supplemented to meet professional goals. Al Azri & Al Rashdi (2014) emphasize the significance of using authentic materials in teaching.

It should also be noted that, following the requirements of the Bologna Process, a significant part of the curriculum involves the student's independent work. A project-based method is an important form of individual work of the student. It gives a chance to awaken, develop and realize the communicative

skills of a young person, to strengthen individual and collective responsibility, to prepare the future specialist for work in production. High motivation of students to perform project work in English is ensured by the fact that during its implementation, speech communication is organically combined with intellectual and professionally-oriented activities.

In the conditions of formation of a common pan-European educational and scientific space, the implantation of methods of language teaching that stimulate the independence of thought, judgment and action in relation to social skills and responsibility is of particular importance (Nikolaiev et al., p. 4). The introduction of project work into the teaching of a foreign language should raise both the quality of language teaching and learning. According to Krymskyi (2003), “The experience of the creation of the future and construction in modern civilization has shown that the implementation of acts of transition from theory to practice, from past to future, from potential to actual activities require a special type of activity. Such activity manifests design and its main conceptual expression is the project” (p. 6). The very word ‘project’ comes from the Latin ‘projects’ and means ‘thrown forward’. Designing is a special type of intellectual activity, a distinctive feature of which is a perspective orientation, practically directed research (Polat et al., 2000, p. 21).

The project-based method originated at the beginning of the XX<sup>th</sup> century in the United States. Its founders were J. Dewey, W.H. Kilpatrick and E. Collings, who tried to find a way to develop students’ active independent thinking to teach them not only to memorize and reproduce the knowledge they have learned in school but also to apply it in practice. However, there is research calling into question the authenticity of the facts that at one time became evidence of revolutionism of project method. The paper under the name that speaks for itself “Faking a dissertation: Ellsworth Collings, William H. Kilpatrick, and the ‘project curriculum’” contains the re-examination of Collings’s dissertation, in particular, of the so-called ‘typhoid project’. The documents prove that the experiment never took place as described and that Collings fabricated his data “in order to conform to Kilpatrick’s frame of reference and to present convincing data on the possibility and superiority of child-centred education” (Knoll, 1996).

However, nowadays the project method has become an integral part of the modern learning process in general and ESP in particular. At the present stage of the development of education, the method is studied in detail by both domestic and foreign scientists. In the studies of S. Haines, G. Carter, H. Thomas, S. Estaire, J. Zanun, D. Fried-Booth, T. Hutchinson, N. Vidal, F.L. Stoller the main characteristics of project-based method and types of projects are defined and the sequence of implementation of projects into the curriculum when teaching a foreign language is described. Polat (2000) generalized the methodological classification of projects and described the experience of international Internet projects.

In a typical ESP program worked out by leading national experts under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine with the assistance of the British Council (2005), particular attention is given to the project work as a technique to help bridge the gap between learning the language and speaking it, encouraging students to move beyond the university and transfer into a professional environment. Thus, according to National Curriculum for Universities, it is a valuable way of actually using the communication skills acquired in the audience (Bakaieva H.Ye. et al, 2005, p. 19). The idea that goal-setting activities motivate students was proved by many researchers (Al-Murtadha, 2019; Munezane, 2015; Munezane, 2016).

Some authors (Hye-Jung & Cheolil, 2012) mention the effect of “social loafing” as a negative aspect of collaborative learning. When working in a team, students tend to minimise their efforts which may include insufficient performances by some team members as well as a lowering of expected standards of performance by the group as a whole to maintain congeniality amongst

members. Furthermore, according to the researchers, “attention is paid to the finished product, and the social dynamics of the task may escape the teacher’s notice” (Hye-Jung & Cheolil, 2012).

The effectiveness of the project method and CLIL in modern academic courses has repeatedly attracted the attention of researchers. Some works were devoted to teaching presentation making skills in the ESP classroom (Danilina & Shabunina, 2019). The experiment described in the paper was carried out with the participation of the students whose CEFR level was mostly B2-C1, which is rather uniform and high. Other authors pay special attention to the advantages of the project method in foreign language teaching and the way students’ language skills are integrated with the process of project realization (Kavlu, 2017; Kotkovets, 2014).

Thus, the issue of the effect of the application of project work as a form of individual acts of students in the course of ESP on the formation of their language competence remains underexplored. The possibility of using this method in groups with a heterogeneous level of foreign language proficiency, including the students with a basic level of English is of central interest. High motivation for task performance, when the emphasis is made on the content, is supposed to give the students chance to acquire grammar, syntax, lexis, and style skills as a by-product of content-oriented learning.

## *1.2. Research questions*

The following questions are being researched below:

1. Is it expedient to introduce project work into the ESP course?
2. Is it advisable to apply this method in groups with a heterogeneous level of foreign language proficiency?
3. Can project work be undertaken by the students with a basic level of English?
4. What are the recommendations for the introduction of project work into the ESP course?

## **2. Method**

This research is based on empirical observation and evaluation with an application of survey and quantitative methods. A questionnaire form was specially developed for the students to evaluate the project work. The students were to assess this type of activity as difficult / not difficult, interesting / not interesting, useful / not useful. The results of the survey were systemized. Besides, the whole process of preparation and presentation of the task was controlled and evaluated by the teacher, the most typical types of mistakes being fixed and systematized.

According to the programs of the course “Foreign language for specific purposes” at the SBTU (KhNTUA), the implementation of project work is an obligatory component of the curriculum for the training of professionals of any speciality. At the KhPI, it was used in Academic English course for graduates. In the beginning of the semester, the students find out about the essence of project work. The students could choose to work alone or split up into groups of 2-3 people of their own will and choose a topic for future research. The general project implementation scheme is as follows:

- 1) Preparatory stage: choice of topic, division into micro-groups (optionally), formulation of the goal, drawing up a work plan, determining the final product of the project;
- 2) Executive stage: data search and collection, information processing and analysis, data selection, the discussion of project work progress in micro-groups between students and the teacher;
- 3) Presentation stage: presentation of the information processed: preparation of abstracts of 2-3 pages, preparation and implementation of the presentation with the help of PowerPoint;

4) Discussion of the results: analysis and evaluation of project work in which is performed not only by the teacher(s) but also by the students themselves.

The presentation of the projects occurred as part of a round table discussion of the results at the end of the semester. Thus, the students had sufficient time to complete the assignment – about 3 months.

### *2.1. Participants*

In this paper, we performed the analysis of the effectiveness of this type of work for the formation of the language competence of students of different courses and specialities according to the results of the second semester of the 2020-2021 academic year.

In their first year, the students do not have basic knowledge and terminology in their specialty so far, so they have the common theme of a project: “Inventions and Discoveries”. The topic covers a wide range of issues: the prerequisites for the discovery (invention), its author(s), the essence and the current status of the issue.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> year Economics students carried out projects on the topic of “Stories of Success”, within which it was necessary to study the history and emergence of well-known world companies and brands, consider their philosophy, present the best-selling products, and find the factors that brought these businesses to the top of success.

The group of 2<sup>nd</sup> year students of the speciality “Ecology” had to develop the theme “The worst man-made environmental disasters in history”. It was assumed that students will study the problem, find the data on the most large-scale disasters, analyse their causes and make a prediction about the possibility of a repetition of such accidents in the future.

The training program in the speciality “Mechanical Engineering” in the second semester of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year provides for the preparation of design work on the theme “Major farm machinery manufacturers worldwide”. The task included familiarization with the leading companies in the production of agricultural machinery. It was necessary to study the history of their creation, get acquainted with the basic concept of the brand and the flagship models of machines and equipment.

It should be noted that the listed groups differed not only in specialities, and, consequently, in the terms of research, but also in heterogeneity in terms of the level of foreign language proficiency (which is largely due to the fact that most students come from rural areas and get their secondary education in small schools where the possibilities of learning foreign languages are very limited compared to urban schools). Students with a level of language knowledge from A1 to B1, included, studied in one group. This posed an additional challenge since it was necessary to build classes and give assignments in such a way that the material was interesting to students with a higher level and at the same time understandable to students with a lower level of training in English. Otherwise, the students lost interest in the academic process and, thus, lack motivation.

The analysis of the preparation projects by graduate students deserves particular attention. Since young scientists are already engaged in the study of certain scientific issues, they were offered to summarize the accumulated information about the object and subject of their research, the history of its study and the current state of the issue and familiarize the group with the results of their work. Graduate students, in general, had a higher and uniform basic level of language training (from B1 (predominantly) to B2). It was supposed that the analysed array of foreign-language literature by profession would be useful in the writing of postgraduates’ dissertation research, expand and enrich their theoretical base.

### 3. Results

At different stages of the project work, the students showed a great interest in performing their tasks. The teacher help students identify the topic, issue, and purpose of the project discussed its structure and drew up a rough work plan. Students received recommendations on optimal information retrieval, organization of work with various sources, processing, and presentation of search results; and got a clear explanation on the principles of academic integrity and the concept of plagiarism. At the stage of analysing the collected information and preparing for the presentation of the project, students worked independently, but they were able to seek advice from the teacher on the content of the report and its linguistic presentation. It was recommended to provide the report with a necessary vocabulary foregoing the presentation to make it more comprehensible taking into account the variety of themes and compensating for the difference in language proficiency.

Despite the fact that the students had the opportunity to work on a project in teams of 2-3 people, the vast majority of them preferred to work independently. The post-graduate students were expected to work independently, as the research of each of them has its own scientific specificity. Therefore, each graduate student presented a separate report. However, it was surprising that only a minority (12 people) of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students preferred pair work; none student chose to work in a team of 3 people. The absolute majority of the students presented individual reports.

The demonstration of project results (project defence) took place in front of an audience with the use of electronic means, which allowed to evaluate the project work not only from the point of view of a specific topic, present ability and aesthetics of the results, but primarily taking into account the students' foreign language rhetorical skills, their ability to express and defend their views and to participate in the discussion.

The students in general coped with the assignment successfully, however, it is necessary to make a few general comments and highlight the most common mistakes. First of all, the comments can be divided into two groups:

- mistakes in writing the abstract (there are drawbacks of structure and logic violation, grammatical and stylistic errors, cases of academic dishonesty (mainly in the form of plagiarism, citation without specifying the source of it; some papers contained text taken entirely from a single source);
- drawbacks of the presentation (bad structure, reading from the text, absence of contact with the audience, faults while providing visual support (font and style of the text of the presentation difficult for perception, attempts to include the whole text of the presentation into the slide, absent emphases on the main concepts, non-relevant pictures or superfluous amount of them used).

The statistical results on the quality of projects and types of mistakes are given in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Classification of mistakes made by the students while fulfilling the task

Group of students, speciality	Number of projects presented	CEFR level	Types of mistakes						
			Abstract			Presentation			
			drawbacks of structure and logic violation	grammatical and stylistic errors	academic dishonesty	bad structure	reading from the text	absence of contact with the audience	faults in visual support
1 <sup>st</sup> year students, various	40	A1-B1	21	28	10	12	20	20	13

specialities									
2 <sup>nd</sup> year students, “Economics”	21	A2-B1	10	13	5	9	8	8	4
2 <sup>nd</sup> year students, speciality “Ecology”	10	A2-B1	2	7	4	4	6	5	2
2 <sup>nd</sup> year students, speciality “Mechanical Engineering”	17	A2-B1	8	12	6	8	10	8	4
Graduate students	14	B1-B2	2	4	0	1	5	3	1
Total	102		43	64	35	34	49	44	24

After the presentation of the results of the work, the students were suggested to evaluate how difficult, interesting and useful this type of activity was. The majority of students evaluated project work as difficult but interesting and useful. The questioning was anonymous to avoid dishonest answers for psychological reasons. It is noteworthy that the assessment of the task as difficult did not have a direct relation with the level of language proficiency. The results of the survey are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Evaluation of the project work as a type of activity by the students

Group of students, speciality	Number of students	CEFR level	Parameters evaluated by the students					
			difficult		interesting		useful	
			Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
1 <sup>st</sup> year students, various specialities (3 groups)	44	A1-B1	24	20	42	2	42	2
2 <sup>nd</sup> year students, “Economics”	22	A2-B1	20	2	21	1	22	0
2 <sup>nd</sup> year students, speciality “Ecology”	10	A2-B1	10	0	10	0	10	0
2 <sup>nd</sup> year students, speciality “Mechanical Engineering”	18	A2-B1	17	1	18	0	18	0
Graduate students	14	B1-B2	6	8	14	0	14	0
Total	108		77	31	105	3	106	2

When asked to give reasons why did they found the project work useful the students marked the following ones: the possibility to choose the topic for research (30%), work with ‘real language’ (24%), creative work (48%), interesting and useful information on their specialty (86%).

Among the useful practical results of the work, it should be noted that the most interesting from the scientific point of view projects became the basis for the papers presented at student scientific All-Ukrainian and international forums and conferences.

#### **4. Discussion**

Despite the different types and forms of projects, the project work has some common features. First of all, it is an interesting work aimed to solve the problem, concentrated on the content, not the specific language units. In the course of the project activity, there is an integration of theoretical knowledge and practical skills. Students work individually or collaborate in micro-groups (2 to 4 people), share resource materials and ideas, thus supporting each other for the final product, which can be an oral or poster presentation, a display of materials, a report at a scientific conference. It is this end product that gives the project work real value.

There is a point of view that authentic materials can be used with advanced and intermediate level learners only (Kim, 2000; Kilickaya, 2004), while other authors support the idea of application of authentic materials in the group with lower levels of proficiency in English (McNeil, 1994). We agree with the thesis that the materials used should satisfy the learners' level. "This is vital to obtain the highest level of benefit from using authentic materials in the classroom. In other words, if the materials are beyond the learners' ability or level, it might lead to demotivation and discourage learners from learning the target language" (Al Azri & Al Rashdi, 2014, p. 252).

Our research showed that project work based on studying authentic materials had a positive effect on the formation of students' language and professional competence when applied in groups with various levels of proficiency, including students with a lower level of English (A1- A2). This was proved by satisfactory results of presentation of outcomes of project work and positive evaluation of the task by the students themselves.

#### **5. Conclusions**

Based on the above, we can assert that the use of project work in the ESP course is an effective method of working in groups of students with different levels of proficiency, as well as for students with a lower level of English. An important prerequisite for successfully accomplishing the task is on-going guidance from the teacher on all the stages.

Thus, the project stimulates the acquisition of knowledge, the search for certain information to solve practical problems, and the search for a way to solve the latter activates the need for knowledge, cognitive activity. It is important that completing the project is based on planning, forecasting, decision making, development, research, i.e. those aspects of the activity that the future specialist needs, and also teaches to acquire knowledge independently through self-organization and self-education. The introduction of project work into foreign language teaching contributes to the development of elements of research activity, which is an organic part of education, the driving force of its development, ensures the relevance of educational content to the modern achievements of the agricultural sector. The project activity gives a chance to awaken, develop and realize the personal qualities of a student, to work as part of a team, to strengthen individual and collective responsibility, to prepare the future specialist for work in production. High motivation of students to perform project work in a foreign language is ensured by the fact that during its implementation, speech communication is organically combined with intellectual and professionally oriented activities. The most interesting projects from the scientific point of view can be the basis for the thesis that can be presented at student scientific forums and conferences.

In conclusion, we can assert that project work is an important element in the formation of professional competence of both future scientists and highly qualified practitioners. We consider the implementation of interdisciplinary project work as promising, which, as the European experience



shows, is an indispensable part of organizing students' independent work in the modern educational space.

## 6. Ethics Committee Approval

The author confirms that the study does not need ethics committee approval according to the research integrity rules in their country (Date of Confirmation: May 11, 2021).

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