



Realization of Project - Based Language Learning at the Context of Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences

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Abstract

As an instructional approach Project-based learning contextualizes teaching by presenting learners with problems to solve or products to develop.

Project based learning functions as a connecting bridge between using communicative English in class and using English in real life situations outside of class. It does this by placing learners in situations that require authentic use of language in order to communicate. When learners work in pairs or in teams, they find they need some definite skills to plan, organize, negotiate, make their points, and arrive at a consensus about issues such as what tasks to perform, how to distribute tasks among partners, who will be responsible for each task, and how information will be researched and presented.

*Students' **Research Projects** have been practised at the Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences, replacing traditional diploma papers. Thanks to the learners' great organizational efforts, mutual understanding and responsibility, pedagogical and social skills, these projects became real implementations of interactive cooperation among students in different teams. Learners develop research products introducing their inner motivation, individual interest and responsibility to solve problems and work together.*

Keywords: *Research, authentic situation, inner motivation, innovation, interaction.*

Projects are usually problem-focused, task-oriented and meaningful activities rather than language-oriented; in other words, the learners focus on doing something practical rather than directly on studying the language. Projects bring together learners with their ideas and principles within different subject areas or disciplines [6].

Teaching through projects is not a new idea. Project-based approaches to education have been tried before, but they have often been thought of as too difficult to implement in most schools and as ineffective for teaching basic skills. Many-year experience has shown that projects are manageable and educationally effective. Projects are especially good teaching tools in different levels of language instructions (at schools, colleges, universities) for the following reasons:

- **Projects enhance learners' motivation to learn about and use a wide variety of literacy and thinking skills.**

For example, publishing a newspaper gives students opportunities to plan, write, reflect on, revise articles, and provides a way in which students can share their work with others.

- **Projects encourage students to become self-directed thinkers and learners.**

Unlike many classroom activities, projects enable students to take the lead in their own learning. As Scrivener states, most projects will be successful if undertaken by small groups of three or four learners. In the process, they develop the skills and dispositions they need to initiate, pursue, and complete work without explicit directions or supervision by their teachers [6].

- **Projects give teachers opportunities to use innovative teaching techniques.**

Because projects encourage students to be self-directed, teachers are able to act as coaches and can vary their level of support to suit the needs of individual students. Projects also provide students with incentives to work together, cooperate and share their experience. **Projects can be used both in classrooms and in out-school environment.**

By providing opportunities for students to develop literacy and thinking skills, projects can satisfy students to become involved in numerous afterschool programs [2].



Five Characteristics of the Successful Project

Projects are of genuine interest.

A genuine project must be **motivating** and **authentic** to the teacher as well as to the students. Without these elements, neither students nor teachers are likely to have the sustained attention needed to accomplish the goals of the project and learn from what they are doing. Motivation, of course, comes from choosing topics, tasks, and goals that everyone truly cares about.

Authenticity, on the other hand, comes from involving students in "real" work toward "real" products.

Projects have clear goals and steps.

There are at least two ways to make a project's goals clear to students. One is to have the students decide the goals of the project themselves. Another is to begin by telling students what the goals are and then to discuss the goals to make sure they understand what the teacher means.

Having clear goals or products is not enough however. It is also important to clarify complex steps involved in achieving these goals. Again, there are several ways to accomplish this. One approach is to use a problem-solving framework or strategy.

Projects are flexible.

It is out of question, that the goal of a project must be clear. As for the teacher - they must be flexible about where the project will go and how students will get it there. This kind of flexibility allows students to work according to their own styles and intelligences [1].

Projects encourage self-direction.

Project encourages and requires student self-direction when it is genuine to the teacher and students, has clear goals and steps, is flexible in terms of tasks and approaches to them.

Great/successful projects begin with the end in students' mind. Students naturally have an interest/inner motivation to learn, do important work, and be taken seriously. Project based learning is a method of instruction that involves a question and a problem to be solved by the student [2]

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Project planning

Before students gather to tackle a project, teacher planning is necessary. Teachers usually work cooperatively across content areas to develop a project that addresses standards in several content areas.

Begin with the end in mind: Identify desired results

While developing project ideas, teachers may work backwards and ask questions such as:

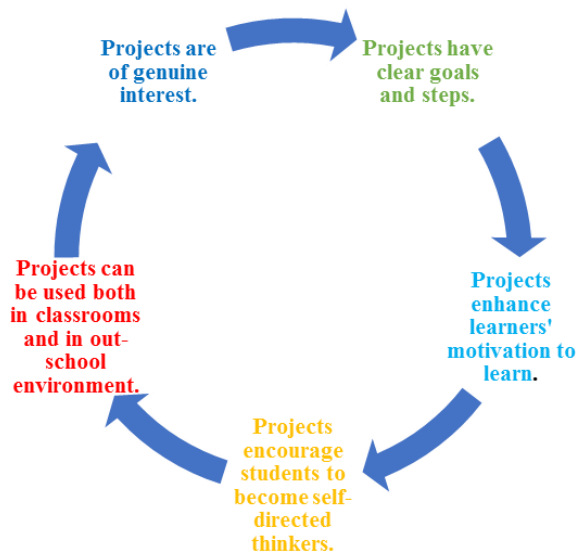
- What understandings are desired at the end of the experience?
- What does it look like?
- What key knowledge and experiences do students need to get out of it?

A good place to start gathering ideas for projects is to look at the State Standards for each subject area, identify those standards that can best be addressed through authentic project based instruction; there is a danger to incorporating too many standards in a project. The teacher acts as a guide in planning and developing the project with the focus given to student participation throughout the planning stage.

To encourage project-based instructions at schools and other educational institutions, teachers must be competent in ICT concepts and skills. Schools and classrooms, both real and virtual, must have teachers who can effectively establish modern learning environment in class, incorporating new strategies [6].

The new learning environment that generates projects and different types of cooperative teaching/learning, should prepare learners to:

- communicate using variety of media and formats





- access and exchange information in a variety of ways
- compile, organize, analyze, and synthesize information
- interact with others in ethical and appropriate ways.

Projects motivate learners in different subject areas and at different levels. They are more real, authentic, meaningful and enjoyable than any other artificial speaking or writing activity. The strong point is - topic selected and plan coming from the topic must be adequate to the students' needs and interests, their intelligence. The following 2 tables show students' role in project design and in project activities.

Project Design and the Student's Role

| Limited Student Input <-----> | Maximum Student Input |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Teacher selects topic | Teacher solicits student input |
| Teacher defines learning outcomes | Teacher and students negotiate learning outcomes |
| | Student select topic |
| | Student define learning outcomes |

Project Activities and the Student's Role

| Limited Student Autonomy <-----> | Maximum Student Autonomy |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Teacher defines products and activities | Teacher solicits student input |
| Teacher controls timeline and pace of project | Students define products and activities |
| | Students determine timeline and pace of project |

Once teachers and/or students have selected desired outcomes, they can determine appropriate assessment methods.

Once teachers and/or students have identified a topic for a project they will want to capture that in the form of a question. The question should be thought provoking, open ended and go to the heart of the problem being addressed. The goal of the project must be real-world oriented and needs to be of interest to students, allowing them to work on big issues. Students will engage in active learning within selected small/big/open groups, pairs.

We can turn our class project assignment into an activity which will be more meaningful and enjoyable than any other boring tasks.

Things needed: Notebook, paper, pencil or pen, notes.

Instructions:

Step 1

Choose the project topic.

Step 2

Research the topic thoroughly.

Step 3

Start writing the paper as soon as the research has been completed.

Step 4

Work from the notes to ensure that the important information has been collected. Start by stating what the project is, then use the main body of the paper to describe how the project has been accomplished. Write in such a way that the audience could recreate the project by following the paper.

Step 5

At this (final) stage the teacher invites learners to collect their ideas about the work they did. Students start to speak about advantages and disadvantages of their activity, things that they wanted to do in another way, expected outcomes and real outcome, etc.

Finally the teacher provides the learners with papers, asking to evaluate their cooperative project, describe their contribution to this activity, things that they wanted to do, but didn't manage etc.

Project-based learning is a real platform for the learners' self – assessment/evaluation. Project-based work involves careful planning and flexibility on the part of the teacher. Because of the dynamic nature of



this type of learning, not all problems can be anticipated. Moreover, sometimes a project will move forward in a different direction than originally planned [4].

So the success of learning through projects is very much dependent on how students relate to each other, what the classroom environment is, how effectively they cooperate and communicate with each other, and of course what roles the teacher play and what level of pedagogical and professional competences they possess.

Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences offers bachelor's program in "Teacher of Foreign Languages" specialization. Students' research projects are practised at the University, replacing their traditional diploma papers. As a new initiative, project papers have already enjoyed great popularity. Learners show inner motivation, creativity, cooperation enthusiasm to develop successful products.

Projects make learners sociable, respectful, responsible and tolerant. At the beginning stage they form groups with 3-4 students. They are introduced the Package of project work standards. Students select/elaborate topics. All learners get a clear idea about the goals and objectives of their work, expected outcomes, research methods and strategies to specify complex steps towards achieving their final goals. E.g. in **English teaching methodology course** learners accomplished the following projects:

1. **Development of learners grammatical skills on the basis of English texts at basic schools of the RA**
2. **Test as a modern and effective tool for checking learners communicative language competence at school**
3. **Developing learners English pronunciation skills in basic schools of the Republic of Armenia**
4. **Strategies and ways to overcome the barriers in communication, etc.**

Students clarify their research plan. They expose equal participation and equal responsibility. Teachers regularly observe the learners. They encourage them with appropriate instructions and constructive feedback. Students continue their research at different schools, trying to put practise their theoretical ideas. Students pass through the monitoring and approbation stages and get their scores, which must be considered while grading the learners at their final graduation presentation (60-100).

One thing is more than apparent:

- **All students must solve problems.**
- **They must produce/develop product – A PROJECT.**

After final presentation learners complete survey. They try to evaluate their cooperation, describe their individual contribution, things that they wanted to do, but didn't manage etc.

Students' answers state that absolute majority of them appreciate projects as the most effective type of graduation paper. They did their work with great interest, enjoyed enthusiasm and learnt a lot.

A Survey for Students to Evaluate their Projects

1. What kind of final paper is preferable to you?
.....
2. What difficulties did you meet?
.....
3. Did you use the Package of Standards for your project?
.....
4. How do you evaluate your project?
.....
5. What kind of skills does the final project tend to develop?
.....
6. If you were to do this project again, what would you do differently to improve your work?
.....
7. How could your team work together more effectively next time?
.....



95 % of the Brusov University students evaluate projects as an effective type of graduation paper.

In a nutshell - Project-based instructions are organic and unique to each learner. They are exciting, challenging and meaningful to all learners even with different levels of language communicative proficiency.

We suppose that projects will have their further developments in different educational institutions as well, as they raise learners' motivation, individual interest and responsibility to solve problems and work together along with different language learning performance.

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