



## Development of Global Skills Through Projects

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### Abstract

*Project-based learning is a comprehensive teaching concept that leads to the holistic development of the learner's personality. It is a method that effectively develops learners' key competences and fulfills the basic objectives of the educational dimension for the 21st century [1]. It focuses on the learner's independent work, transforming extrinsic motivation into intrinsic motivation. The main objective of project-based learning is to link school with real practice, develop critical thinking, change the way knowledge is acquired and integrate knowledge into a coherent system. The ability to present and argue factually, while respecting other learners, is an equally important part of the objectives of project-based learning. The learners are given the opportunity to learn about themselves and work on strengthening their confidence in their own knowledge and skills [2]. Moreover, each school subject offers many opportunities for project work and at the same time creates a unique platform for the implementation of cross-curricular relationships. The aim of our study is to identify those global skills that project-based learning enables to develop more intensively in lower secondary education. The study is the outcome of the research project KEGA 016UMB-4/2021 Global skills and their implementation in foreign language teaching in secondary schools as a means of developing students' key competences and the professional identity of future teachers in the context of the 21st century.*

**Keywords:** *project-based learning, global skills, critical thinking, teamwork, creativity*

### Introduction

Contemporary society, which is saturated with information and knowledge from all areas of human activity, requires the use of methods and teaching practices that ensure the effective cognitive, global, and communicative development of learners, thus fully preparing them for diverse situations in personal and professional life. Although the project method began to appear systematically in our educational process in the middle of the last century, it is still one of those methods that have an irreplaceable place in the teaching of all subjects, foreign languages not excluded. In general, the project method is based on the fundamental assumption that learners learn most if they carry out meaningful activities that are not only related to the development of communicative competence in the English language but are linked to all areas of their global development [1]. Moreover, the learners put their whole personality into the work of the project, which makes each project unique. During the preparation and implementation phase of the project, the learner develops several important global skills, which overall can be considered a significant benefit of project-based learning in the English language classroom.

#### 1.1 Characteristics of project method

The effectiveness of project-based learning is based on the use of several didactic methods such as integrated thematic teaching, cooperative learning, interdisciplinary teaching, problem-based learning, and task-based learning. Learners are largely allowed to use their own creativity and to explore a topic in detail from their own point of view.

Project-based learning is one of the organisational forms of teaching where learners are not exposed to the teacher's presentation sitting in their desks. At the same time, project work also brings about a shift in teacher role (guide, facilitator, consultant) as well as learner roles (discoverer, self-manager).

One of the most important factors of project-based learning is the intrinsic motivation of the learners in the implementation of the project [5]. The search for stimuli and topics for the creation of projects can be carried out by the teacher together with the learners, which will again increase the motivation of them to participate in the implementation of the project. A topic that is meaningful and stems from the learners' interests brings a natural curiosity and desire to discover and learn about new facts and aspects of life. The interest and deep identification with the project topic stimulate learners to solve the problem and present the result of their project work. Thus, the project is an extended piece of work on



a particular topic where the content and the presentation are determined principally by the learners themselves. Several authors stress that the final product, in whatever form, is not the most important aspect of project work. Equally important are the problems and obstacles they must overcome during each phase of project work because it is on this path that they develop their personality [2].

In general, tasks and activities in English language classes can be classified into three categories:

- tasks aimed at developing linguistic and communicative competence through controlled, semi-controlled and free activities focusing on all aspects of language (vocabulary, grammar functions/structures, pronunciation) and language skills (receptive and productive).
- tasks aimed at developing communicative competence and cognitive development through content (working with information, knowledge, facts,) and cognitive processes (analysis, synthesis, generalisation, evaluation, exemplification, critical thinking), the use of authentic material, the selection of learner-centred text topics, simulations of real-life processes and the development of learners' cultural awareness.
- tasks involving the previous two aspects (communicative development and cognitive development) as well as the global development of the learner's personality (interpersonal and intrapersonal skills), including interculturality [6].

Thus, the potentialities of project-based learning are multidimensional, which is a unique starting point for the development communicative competence as well as all aspects of the learner's personality in terms of soft and hard skills, considering the age of the learner at each level of education.

## **1.2 Stages of project development**

As we have already mentioned, project-based learning is a complex educational concept that is effective when there is a sequence in the preparation and implementation phases of the project. Incorrect methodological procedure is the most common problem encountered in the planning and implementation of a project, resulting in the basic principles and objectives of project-based learning not being fulfilled [4].

From a general point of view, the objectives of project work are implemented in four successive stages, each of which has its own indispensable role, and the teacher should not omit any of them. Each stage provides excellent opportunities and space to promote the communicative competence, increase the cognitive level of the learner and the awareness of interpersonal and intrapersonal soft skills that it also develops [2].

### **1.2.1 Project initiative**

In the first phase of project-based learning, the problem and the purpose of the project are formulated. The selection of the individual problems should be based on a consensus between the learners and the teacher, and the choice of the main topic must be based on the social and cultural background of the learners.

At this stage it is important to assign and then discuss the topic, specify the project task, define the main objectives, and recommend resources. The project topic should meet the requirements of interdisciplinarity, age appropriateness and usability. It is the teacher who has an important role to play in motivating learners.

At the same time, already at this stage, the teacher can adequately develop skills such as communicative competence, creativity, critical thinking, and self-control.

### **1.1.2 Project planning**

Project planning is the second stage of project-based learning, which involves forming individual learner groups, agreeing on a timetable, defining sub-goals, fleshing out the assigned topic, and gathering information that will form the core of the project. In the project planning phase, the process and resources needed to carry out the project are determined. The main problem (theme) is analysed, and sub-tasks are created, the solution of which will lead to the fulfilment of the main objective. A timetable is drawn up and information is gathered which forms the main core of the project.

The role of the teacher is not as dominant as in the first phase - the teacher acts more as a consultant and advisor to ensure that the learners working on the project in the same team cooperate with each other. This is the stage at which the learners already take full responsibility for managing the project



work. This stage offers opportunities to develop collaboration, self-management, problem solving, reasoning and critical thinking.

### 1.1.3 Finalizing the end-product

In the third stage, the learners work intensively while the teacher is in the role of advisor, facilitator, guide and manager, creating the environment and conditions suitable for the implementation of project-based learning. In this phase, learners work with resources, collect information, evaluate it, discuss, argue, compromise, consider comments and finalize the end-product. At the same time, a solid platform for developing self-confidence, teamwork, responsibility, critical thinking, and presentation skills is created.

As mentioned earlier, an important part of successful project planning is dividing learners into groups in which they will work on the project. The teacher should respect the criteria according to which they are divided into working groups:

The groups are formed by the learners themselves on the basis of the relationships between them, taking into account their knowledge, pace of work, mutual liking, language competence and abilities.

The groups are formed by the teacher deliberately following one of the following criteria:

- compensatory criterion - a combination of better and weaker learners, with the expectation that the weaker ones will catch up with the better ones when the project is carried out.
- criterion of similar interests, skills, knowledge, and abilities
- differentiation-cooperation criterion - each group is composed of learners who have different abilities, knowledge, and skills. It is assumed that learners will be able to complement each other in the implementation of the project.

Each criterion has its potentials and limits, and it is up to the teacher, who knows their learners, to decide which criterion to apply to ensure that the learners meet the objective of the project work and at the same time to enable their personal development.

Experts recommend that the teacher should vary the way in which groups are formed. It would create reasonable conditions to prepare learners to cope with real-life situations in which the individual has to adapt flexibly to new conditions.

### 1.1.4 Project evaluation

This is the final but extremely important stage of project-based learning. In this stage the evaluation of individual projects takes place. Project-based learning does not tolerate standard methods of grading, thus forcing the teacher to come up with new, more innovative forms of assessing learners' work. Assessment should be comprehensive and consist of evaluation of different aspects - the degree of acquisition of new knowledge, the level of presentation of the project, the ability to cooperate in its creation, and the form and content of the project itself. This stage allows the development of important skills - critical thinking and reflective thinking.

Table 1. Overview of the skills developed during each of stage

skills/phase	STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4
<b>interpersonal</b>	communication skills	team management cooperation empathy	presentation skills team skills, conflict resolution adaptability	communication skills interpersonal competence
<b>intrapersonal</b>	creativity self-control	organisation skills flexibility self-control self esteem self-management responsibility	self esteem emotional self-regulation creativity self-confidence digital literacy	critical thinking reflective thinking

## 2 Research

The aim of our research was to find out whether teachers at the second level of primary school are aware of the potentiality of project work in the field of personality development of learners or whether they consider project work only as a method that develops the communication competence of the learner. We are interested in which soft skills teachers purposefully develop in a selected age group using the project method.



## 2.1 Research method

As a research method we chose a group interview targeting the following areas of project work:

- interpersonal versus intrapersonal skills
- the absence of certain skills in a selected age group
- limitations in developing some skills.

## 2.2 Research questions

- Do you consider the development of soft skills to be important during English lessons?
- How do you rate learners' attitudes towards project work?
- Which skill did you find most difficult to develop during any phase of project work?
- Which skills does project work allow you to develop naturally?

## 2.3 Research sample

We included 9 teachers (age 28-54) in lower secondary education, who at the time of the research were teaching 7th grade (12–13-year-olds) and were intensively using the project method in their English language classes. The interview was conducted in May 2023.

## 2.4 Discussion

*Do you consider the development of soft skills to be important during English lessons?*

All teachers agreed that every subject, including English, must contribute to the development of the learner's personality. They see the potential of the project method in the fact that it not only connects all subjects but also forms a very suitable starting point for developing not only the English language but also global skills. What they evaluate very positively is the fact that the project method makes the awareness and development of these skills very natural, often without the learners themselves being aware of it. Three teachers emphasised that after the presentation and evaluation of the projects, they often lead learners to become aware of what skills they have learnt (apart from the English language) after the presentation and evaluation of the projects (3-4 phase). They do this through questions, statements, and discussion, and in this way, they also make them think about the importance of soft skills. They admit that such reflection also takes place in Slovak.

*How do you rate learners' attitudes towards project work?*

Project work is also a common method in other subjects, but due to the Project Explore textbooks used, learners work on more short-term projects in English lessons than in other subjects. Teachers agreed that the age group has a very positive attitude towards projects. They stressed the importance of Phase 1, which significantly influences learners' motivation. Teachers have to be flexible in the sense that if a learner is not interested in a particular topic, they can adapt it in a certain sense. In this age group it is sometimes difficult to form working teams, as learners prefer to work in pairs with a friend.

*Which skill did you find most difficult to develop during any phase of project work?*

Teachers consider developing presentation skills to be the most difficult skill to develop due to the number of projects (an average of 6 projects during the school year) and the lack of class time. They consider developing critical thinking equally challenging, which is related to a misunderstanding of the meaning of the word "criticism", which learners eliminate to point out negative phenomena without justification, and frequent ignoring of positive phenomena.

*Which skills does project work allow you to develop naturally?*

Teachers agreed that each phase allows for the development of certain skills. Already in the first phase, creativity is developed when learners, after announcing the topic, they think about the end-product and suggest different alternatives. At the same time, communication skills are also developed. Teachers find it challenging to eliminate the use of the mother tongue. In the second phase it is team and self-management. The learners must agree who will be responsible for what and follow a work





plan. In this way, project work provides an ideal platform for developing management skills and responsibility for a common outcome.

In the next stages, the teachers agreed on the importance of presentation skills. Overall, learners have few opportunities to perform in front of an audience and should practise this skill as often as possible as it also boosts their self-confidence. However, it is time-consuming. The final stage is a platform for developing critical thinking skills, the ability to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their project and those of other classmates. Teachers explained that they often do this in written form, with learners reporting on a handout what they have done well and what they would have done differently. They do the same when assessing classmates' projects.

## Conclusion

Discussions with teachers show that they fully recognise the potentialities of project work in English language classes. The projects that the learners work on are closely related to real life situations and interests. It is this aspect that results in a positive motivational-stimulating effect on learners' work in finding concrete solutions to a problem. At the same time, it can be stated that teaching English through projects provides a very natural environment for the formation of the learner's personality and the development of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. The aim, topic, and process of creation of the project offers a very suitable platform for their global development. Thus, project-based learning is a modern form of foreign language teaching and learning that appropriately complements the more traditional notion of the educational process while responding to the needs and demands of the 21st century.

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