

Project Activity in Teaching ESP

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Abstract. Project activity with web quest elements in teaching ESP is a common technique nowadays. This article considers the results of a project activity lesson on website design in ESP teaching. The task involves usage of web quest elements as an integral part of a modern teaching approach. The technique is aimed at improving the quality of teaching process via using available Internet resource tools. In this particular case a group of students is given a task in the framework of English language lesson on web design to test a set of website builders with further analysis and description of the achieved result. The whole procedure is supposed to be carried out in English.

1. Introduction

Currently, the sphere of education is in the everlasting process of adopting and shifting to new approaches and tools. Traditional translation and grammar approaches have given way to communicative and learner-centered ones [1] that require of a teacher to generate qualitatively new ideas, acquire new skills and use innovative tools. Two such approaches are TBL (Task-Based Learning) and PBL (Project-Based Learning). Teaching foreign languages implies all the above mentioned.

Task-based learning, where the central focus of the lesson is the task itself, shifts the stress from a grammar point or a lexical field to completing the task. So, learning this or that grammar structure is not the main objective anymore. This also means that to complete the task successfully learners need to use the appropriate language and share their ideas. Thus the language serves as an instrument of communication which is aimed at helping complete the task successfully. The learners are free to use any language they need to fulfill their task. Normally this kind of activity is an open task, so there is no "correct answer", which is also encouraging and contributes to motivating students. They can decide on their own how to reach the objective, applying language structures they see fit.

Being focused on learners' needs by putting them into true-to-life communicative situations and allowing them to involve all their language resources to cope with them, task-based learning possesses the advantage over more traditional methods.

The project-based learning (PBL) approach takes learner-centeredness to an even higher level. PBL often makes a task the focus of a whole term or academic year.

Generally, there are considered to be four elements which are characteristic of all project-based activities or classes.

They are the following:

- A central topic from which all the activities derive and that drives the project towards a final objective;
- Access to means of investigation to collect, analyze and make use of information. Nowadays the

Internet has become the main tool and facilitator;

- Large amount of opportunities for exchanging ideas, collaborating and interacting with other learners, which is crucial in this technique;
- A final product (normally a tangible one and created involving new technologies available) in the form of reports, presentations, videos, webpages, blogs, posters, etc. [1].

Project activity has long been used in teaching in the framework of communicative and activity approaches, and a project activity with web quest elements in teaching ESP (English for special purposes) is a common technique nowadays [2-5].

In its most common sense a project activity is any activity aimed at making learners complete some thematic task requiring preliminary preparation and investigation. Thus, a group of teenage learners working on a project to develop a series of posters on how to protect the environment is an example of a project [6], [7].

The British Council website on teaching English gives the following definition of project activity: “Project work is work which focuses on completing a task. Project work normally involves a lot of resources - time, people and materials - and learners practise a range of skills and language systems” [8]. In the article they comment on that project work may provide many opportunities to meet a variety of learning aims, but it requires strong classroom management skills. Learners need independence in planning and realizing the work but they also need the teacher to act as a driver in ensuring it is carried out in a way that meets learning aims.

There are some crucial points to a successful project activity involving speaking aspect [9]:

- There is not any real need for extensive or time-consuming research
- The topic is centered on the learners’ interests
- Students can present their work orally to the rest of the class.

What also should be mentioned is the vocabulary issue, the one that is considered to be the key element of students’ understanding and efficient communication. It is well-known that without vocabulary comprehension mutual understanding is almost impossible even in native language, not speaking about a foreign one. Thus a project activity has the potential to enrich or at least activate learners’ vocabulary on a related topic. It is an appropriate strategy to help learners boost their term stock while doing the task and preparing the presentation.

2. Methodology

Nowadays the global aim of education, in particular in the field of foreign language teaching, tends to be interdisciplinary, i.e. it is to provide not only linguistic training, but also give an insight into learners’ specialization also via involving them into performing some professional tasks, which is aimed at overall improvement of teaching process and results and shifting to implementation of the practically oriented approach in training [10].

For this reason, the authors have undertaken the experiment with the purpose of justifying the expediency of the above mentioned approaches.

In this paper the authors describe the steps and course of the experiment and present the results. Thus a group of second year students is given a task in the framework of English language lesson on web design to test a set of website builders with further analysis and description of the achieved result. The project is a supplementary assignment of the “Infotech. English for computer users” and “Professional English in Use: ICT” course books [11], [12] as well as Oxford English for Information Technology [13] which are good prerequisites for learners’ preparation. The whole procedure is supposed to be carried out in English. The project is a short term one to ensure fulfillment of the task and students’ not losing interest in the activity.

First and foremost, the idea of the task was explained and the students of information technology institute (IKBO-16-17) were divided into subgroups of 4-5 people, to be precise there were 5 subgroups of 3 to 5 students. The idea of the task is multistage. First students need to research on and find out the main requirements to what makes an efficient and attractive web site. To make sure they are successful in their choice of the sources of information they are provided with the links. So, the stu-

dents are to elaborate a shortlist of criteria for creating a site and those for web site builders they will be using for the next lesson. As composing the list is supposed to be a home assignment for the next lesson, it has elements overlapping with a flipped lesson and a web quest [14], [15].

Here are the links provided:

1) on the requirements for a robust web site:

<https://www.lyfemarketing.com/blog/effective-website-design/>

<https://www.socialmediatoday.com/content/web-design-11-characteristics-user-friendly-website>

2) and some website builders, correspondingly:

<https://www.websitebuilderexpert.com/designing-websites/> (with some tips as well).

<https://www.websitebuilderexpert.com/> [16-19]

The students are instructed to read through the articles and choose the web site builders they are going to test to create a page. While explaining the task, the teacher deliberately uses the grammar structures to be used later on by the students: a web site should be/have, a web site builder must feature, etc.

As the next stage comes discussion of the lists of requirements. In this preliminary task the students proved to be diligent and eager to conduct the research and improve both their creating software and speaking English skills. If to speak about the features of a successful website, the groups came up with rather a wide list of criteria ranging from up to the point and objective to particular ones.

The overall shortlist for websites requirements:

- user-friendliness (easy to understand and navigate)
- adaptability (for different devices)
- security
- coherency of content
- it must upload fast

The overall shortlist for web site builders requirements:

- user-friendliness (easiness to understand and use)
- variety of available tools and elements
- availability of a free trial period
- an option to update written code
- an option to export data

The next stage enclosed in choosing a website builder to try and test it. This successive step is an autonomous task to be done outside the classroom. So, the groups of students chose the following website builders to test:

- Wiks
- Scorespace
- Wiks
- Tilda
- Googlesite

The overall result of the experiment can be demonstrated in a sample presentation speech (to demonstrate usage of grammar structures and vocabulary):

Speaker: We have chosen Wiks website builder to create a webpage. An efficient and compelling website *should be* easy to understand and navigate, *possess* an adequate colour palette for theme content and content itself. Adaptability and *versatility* of a website matter as well. Taking all the above mentioned into account, we chose this website builder, as it meets all the requirements. *If you decide* working with Wiks, *you will get* a good *template* with an ample set of tools and such a *feature* as an embedded audio player. (...)

The discussion and presentation of the results proved to be both language practice (argumentation involved; verbal tenses practice) and gaining and sharing knowledge in their professional field. While speaking students used modal verbs constructions and conditionals. The most common sentence structures were: “The website should have... The website builders must be.... It needs to comply with... If you want to create a really efficient website, you will need to/ you need to...” etc. Also they covered

the topical vocabulary – terms related to ICT (Information Communication Technologies), **such as** website editor, site builder, criterion/criteria etc – with all their peculiarities in categories and pronunciation. To present their findings the groups chose speakers. It is worth mentioning that they did not just choose the strongest in terms of speaking aspect student to make the presentation, but encouraged other members of the group and helped each other to explain themselves.

We find it necessary to provide the diagram with statistics on the results of students’ project work and improvements.



Figure 1. demonstrates the success rate in IKBO-16-17.

To sum up, the course of the activity can be separated in 3 logical stages: the first lesson is an introductory/ explanatory part; the second lesson implies the discussion of their findings and opinion of a proper web site and web site builder with further its testing assignment; the final part involves demonstrating the results of the whole project activity in the form of a created web site (or at least a web page) by means of one of the web site builders, furthermore, the students are to speak out on the advantages and drawbacks of using this or that builder.

The task allows practicing and enhancing particular grammar structures designed for definite communicative situations and topic related vocabulary.

3. Conclusion

The findings of the experiment show that the key elements of an equally productive and absorbing lesson are that of a project activity with some web quest elements.

Both TBL and PBL focus primarily on the achievement of realistic goals, dealing with true-to-life situations and then on the language that is needed to achieve goals. These two approaches regard language as a tool to complete a given task rather than an isolated grammar topic or lexical set to learn and practice. They provide plenty of opportunity for communication in authentic contexts and give the learner freedom to use the linguistic resources he/she possesses, and then reflect on what they have learnt or need to learn.

This type of activity has proved to be rather efficient in teaching, learning and practicing such a challenging aspect as vocabulary which tends to cause difficulties when it comes to practice due to the fact that it is the most flexible and changing language aspect.

The overall findings prove the efficiency and expediency of project activity involving in ESP lesson as an active component. This leads to quality of educational process improvement, and consequently – of the whole educational product [20].

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