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## **CHALLENGING PROJECT WORK IN THE ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES COURSE IN DISTANCE LEARNING MODE**

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## **ПРОЕКТНА РОБОТА В КУРСІ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ ЗА УМОВ ДИСТАНЦІЙНОГО НАВЧАННЯ**

**Abstract.** The paper considers the project work as a form individual activity of a student in the course of English for specific purposes (ESP) in the distance learning mode. The expediency of the implementation of such a task into ESP program of students with different levels of English proficiency, including in groups elementary and intermediate level of English (A2-B1), has been considered. It has been shown that this type of work encourages the acquisition of knowledge, the search for certain information to solve practical problems, and, thus, activates cognitive activity. It has been stressed that accomplishing a project is based on planning, forecasting, decision making, development, research, work with

authentic materials, i.e. those aspects of the activity that the future specialist needs, and also teaches to acquire knowledge independently through individual work and during distance learning.

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

**Анотація.** У статті розглядається проектна робота як форма індивідуальної діяльності студента з курсу англійської мови за професійним спрямуванням в режимі дистанційного навчання. Розглянуто доцільність впровадження такого завдання в програму для студентів з різним рівнем володіння англійською мовою, у тому числі в групах початкового та середнього рівня англійської мови (A2-B1). Показано, що такий вид роботи спонукає до засвоєння знань, пошуку певної інформації для вирішення практичних завдань, а отже, активізує пізнавальну діяльність. Підкреслено, що виконання проекту базується на плануванні, прогнозуванні, прийнятті рішень, розробці, дослідженні, роботі з автентичними матеріалами, тобто тими аспектами діяльності, які потрібні майбутньому фахівцю, а також навчає самостійно здобувати знання через індивідуальну роботу та під час дистанційного навчання.

**Ключові слова:** англійська мова за професійним спрямуванням; дистанційне навчання; автентичні матеріали; проектна робота; мотивація; індивідуальна робота.

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 [5, p. 4]. The introduction of project work into the teaching of a foreign language should raise both the quality of language teaching and learning. Such activity manifests design and its main conceptual expression is the project” [5, p. 6]. The very word ‘project’ comes from the Latin

‘projectus’ and literally means ‘thrown forward’. Designing is a special type of intellectual activity, a distinctive feature of which is a perspective orientation, practically directed research [6, p. 21].

The project-based method originated in the beginning of XXth 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 in order to teach them not only to memorize and reproduce the knowledge they have learned in school, but also to apply it in practice.

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 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.

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 [4], 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 actual using the communication skills acquired in the audience [3, p. 19].

Another challenge in teaching foreign languages in Academic environment is the current situation when students do not have an access to the classroom and have to study on-line in the distance mode (first – due to the Corona restrictions, now – because of the full-scale war in Ukraine, when the students sometimes do not have a stable access to the Internet or even have to do without electricity. This

means, they have to overlap the information not obtained in the classroom by means of individual work.

Thus, the issue of the effect of application of project work as a form of individual activity 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 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.

According to the programs of the course “Foreign language for specific purposes” at the SBTU, the implementation of project work is an obligatory component of the curriculum for the training of professionals of any speciality [1, 2, 7, 8, 9]. On the first lesson 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 at their own will and choose a topic for the 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 a microgroup 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.

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 first semester of the 2022-2023 academic year. In their first year, 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 training program in the speciality “Mechanical Engineering” in the 2nd 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 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. 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 a sufficient time to complete the assignment – about 2 months.

At different stages of the project work the students showed a great interest in performing their task. The teacher help students clearly 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 onto account the variety of themes and to compensate 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 team of 3 people. The absolute majority of the students presented individual reports.

The demonstration of project results (project defence) was held on-line, which allowed to evaluate the project work not only from the point of view of a specific topic, presentability 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).

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.

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.

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 .

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## **СОЦІАЛЬНА ВІДПОВІДАЛЬНІСТЬ УКРАЇНСЬКОГО АГРОБІЗНЕСУ В УМОВАХ ВІЙНИ**

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