

The Project Method: Practical Implementation in English Classroom

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The article focuses on the project method as a teaching tool, which activates teacher and students' roles in learning English. We reveal our experience of implementing project activities to develop different communicative skills such as speaking, reading, listening, and writing. The paper deals with special approaches while developing project stages for each skill. In the article, listening skills are presented as the most difficult ones for the students to acquire within the project method activity. Even the most advanced learners need to prolong working on listening and will find that there are some words or collocations which are difficult to understand the first time they hear them. It can be stated that project method implementation into class activities comprises all language skills which are interconnected, meanwhile, reading skills are the basis of writing activity and enlarge an individual's vocabulary, knowledge about the world around or inner outlook. Listening skills prepare for better understanding, responding and proceed to further information in the process of learning. It is also emphasized that development of speaking skills with the project method provide easier communication for a speaker in different speech areas, which can lead to the higher professional development.

Key words: *language; acquisition; project; activities; classroom*

Modern dynamic life requires active learning, cognition, and flexibility, which form an independent person able to think and work creatively, produce non-

standard ideas. One of the methods to develop such characteristics is a project method which has become quite popular among teachers, and students. It can be easily applied to learning languages at higher educational establishments. The essence of the project method lies in solving a definite problem, working both individually and in the team, thinking outside the box, and producing creative pieces of language production.

The project method was introduced in the architectural and engineering education movement that began in Italy during the late 16th century and was divided into five phases of its long history. Later W. Kilpatrick described it in detail in his work “The Project Method” and determined it as the procedure of American progressive education.

According to Kilpatrick’s view, projects had four phases: purposing, planning, executing, and judging. He claims that the unity of all four phases initiated and completed by students is an ideal progression in education. Kilpatrick considers that only when the pupils exercised “freedom of action” they are able to acquire independence, power of judgment, and the ability to act-the virtues.¹

There are two basic models of the project method that are used in the study process today. According to Woodward’s model students learn and develop their skills through instruction and apply them in a creative way in the process of project implementation.² However, in Richards’ model instruction does not proceed the project itself, but is integrated into it revealing various interests of students.³

At the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University we have introduced project-based activities in the courses of “Practice of Oral and Written Speech” and “Creative Writing” in order to develop students’ listening, reading, speaking and writing skills.

We can state that the benefits of project method are:

- development of a student’s confidence and interest;
- willingness to seek for new information;
- enlargement of learning opportunities;
- meaningful language interactions;
- teamwork.

Listening skills

The process of comprehension plays an excessive role, while listening, which makes necessary changes by conversion of verbal data into visible one. Listening is

¹ Kilpatrick, W. H. (1918). The project method. *Teachers College Record*, 19, pp. 319–335.

² Woodward, C. M. (1887): *The manual training school, comprising a full statement of its aims, methods, and results.* Boston: D. C. Heath & co. [Electronic resource]/ Calvin Milton Woodward – online: <https://archive.org/details/manualtrainingsc00woodrich>

³ Richards C. R. (1900). The function of handwork in the school. *Teachers’ College Record*, 1, pp. 249–25.

more effective when the listener is focused on a purpose and engaged in following it. The way of transforming information is not the simple task for the students as they have different individual mental abilities. Some kinds of listeners have problems with identification of phonetic sounds or mixing the correct sequence of words or phrases in the text they heard. Some students do not listen to the audio text attentively. But at the same time attention can be also motivated on the part of the learner. Students can have problems with literal recognition, especially in the situations where it is necessary to reproduce what was said or when they have a task to evaluate a problem or make a decision concerning the text.

To succeed in creating images while listening, a person can take some steps on prediction of the text and creation of visual images. At first, listen to the beginning of the text and try to guess the development of events; listen to the first part of the text and offer your own versions of closing the text; define the family of events etc. Besides, to develop listening skills students are supposed to complete definite stages. To work with audio text, O. Vovk, suggests providing division of exercises to be done at various stages of listening.⁴ As a rule, the procedure comprises several close stages: pre-listening, actual listening and post-listening tasks.

Firstly, teacher should evaluate students' knowledge, then provide them with tasks. The most important thing on the pre-listening stage is to give appropriate instructions to the students, organize their activity according to the listening assignments, and introduce pre-teaching vocabulary. Motivate them to work.⁵

At the stage of actual listening, it is meaningful to concentrate student's attention on the process of listening whether it is a whole text or separate blocks of information. According to K. McCaughey, active listening will definitely increase the effectiveness of listening skills. Active listening includes: applying events or ideas, places and persons; paying attention to uncertain and obscure words and collocations; listening "between the lines", drawing conclusions concerning the information and express own judgments as to the received information.⁶

Post-Listening stage is the final phase of text manipulation. On this stage, students are evaluated of understanding of taking place with the help of diversified activities. It is relevant to study the information in depth, implement audio message in different kinds of activities and be ready to present their own creative vision of the suggested problem.

The students of our university are future teachers of English. They are eager to know more about the nature of listening and how to teach it. Our aim is to improve

⁴ Vovk, O. (2011). Methodology of teaching English in the aspect of communicative-cognitive approach: educational manual / O. Vovk, A. Kuzminsky // Cherkasy: Publishing House of Chernivtsi National University B. Khmelnytsky, p. 316.

⁵ Paulston, C. (2004). Teaching English as a Second Language: Techniques and Procedures / C. Paulston, M. Bruder. – New York: Norton Company, p. 113.

⁶ McCaughey, K. (2015). Practical Tips for increasing Listening Practice Time / K. McCaughey //English-Teaching Forum. Vol. 53, pp. 2–12.

their English listening skills to an extent when they can follow, understand an English conversation and respond.

The process of listening comprehension is supposed to develop the following students' skills:

- retain chunks of language in short-term memory;
- discriminate between the distinctive sounds of English;
- recognize reduced forms of words;
- recognize grammatical word classes (e.g., nouns and verbs), systems (e.g., tense, agreement, and pluralization), patterns, rules, and elliptical forms;
- form events, ideas, etc. described, predict outcomes, infer links and connections between events, deduce causes and effects, and detect such relations as main idea, supporting idea, new information, given information, generalization, and exemplification;
- distinguish between literal and implied meaning;
- develop means of retaining information.

According to Brown, this is an area of instructional focus and students are better to use the skills in order to fully participate in the classroom lessons.⁷

Meanwhile, the process of listening comprehension is mostly based on classical approaches and tasks, and under certain conditions, has its objective value. But we cannot simply unload our knowledge on students. What is required nowadays is a true transformation of students' existing knowledge. We must shift from classical to modern, not just to put new information into old one but replace the approach that students have learned, practiced, and been rewarded for with new one. For this reason, our goal was to intrigue students and increase their motivation to learn whatever they will be produced in class. We asked students to make a prediction about an experiment. Made them explain their predictions in discussion or a quickly written exercise. That was particularly effective.

At the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University, we have introduced a project in the course of "Practice of Oral and Written Speech" in order to develop students' listening comprehension skills. We engaged 32 BA students to take part in the project, which was called "Google Art Project" in the 2nd semester of a study course.

Effective listening is not something that just happens by chance. It takes a lot of practice and efforts to develop. If a student grows in this area, no other skill will serve a person better in life.

We identified three basic stages of listening training:

- preparatory phase (introduction into the situation)
- process of listening and performing tasks
- final phase

⁷ Brown, H. (2001). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy*. White Plains, NY: Addison-Wesley.

On the phase of preteaching vocabulary students have to put project tasks in writing, outlining the work to be performed (answer the questions to the text, look at the list of items before listening, predicting events). During that phase, students should prioritize the project and determine what items are needed.

An intelligent scheduling help them to visualize and develop a plan for successful project delivery on the phase of while listening. That is high time to pass to important project related information which includes the following assignments:

- carrying out actions
- arranging items in patterns
- using lists
- multiple choice questions
- speaking mistakes
- seeking specific information

Post listening phase is much longer and complicated then on previous phases. Participants are engaged into discussion of the text, complete written assignments and personal individual projects on related topics (interpretation, using information from the text for decision making activities, etc.).

The subject of audio recording is determined in accordance with the level of obtained lexical, phonetic abilities, and skills and correspond to the current curriculum for the 3rd year students. The structure of work include several stages.

Methodologically, listening is a specially organized program with perceived text. As this process is a non-observable internal activity, the tutor needs gradually to teach students the individual actions that are its constituent components. Therefore, the system of training exercises for listening includes both exercises for the development of purely listening skills and exercises for the formation of speech (phonetic, lexical, grammatical) listening skills, as well as special exercises aimed to develop verbal listening mechanisms (probable prediction, attention, and auditory memory) thinking, comprehension).

The process of listening started with speech perception. At the pre-teaching stage, participants were encouraged to listen to the text and define certain lexical units used in the audio text devoted to the topic. Due to the record, students were asked to gain the information about proper names, find English equivalents and answer the questions devoted to the problem, share their thoughts and making the gist of the audio story (*What is Google Art Project? When was the project launched? Is one of the aims behind this project to encourage more people to enjoy the art and then get back into the museum?*). All the instructions as to the further tasks were made at the end of the class and presumed visiting the site of Google Art Project, choose the picture they like ad describe it.

At the stage of listening and performing tasks students were to activate background information (definition of the idea, characterization of personalities, individual impression of the audio text) and build some new knowledge about people's ability to see in the picture using such technology, they were proposed to

unite in micro groups (4–6 persons) and focus on the reason of choosing the picture for the project, performing all the accompanying tasks, practicing their “for” and “against”. Then show and point to visual support to assist the demonstration.

The final stage, presupposed students’ individual work. Each student had to pick up a picture of famous artist and limned it in details according to the plan filling the proposed Table 1 (*Name the artist? Where is it situated? What canvases did the collection include?*).

All the stages of the project were properly estimated and positive feedbacks were made.

To evaluate the project results, students were asked to answer the following questions:

- was it difficult to determine the most informative parts of the audio text?
- work in micro groups: advantages and disadvantages?
- which task was most interesting of all proposed?
- which of the aspects caused the greatest difficulty: phonetic, lexical or grammatical?
- were students well motivated, and keen to engage with the topics being explored?
- was it clear about teaching listening aims and sharing those with group-mates?
- what is the desired outcome for each activity and whether it was related to the skills that you were being trained?
- were there opportunities for students to discuss their progress in listening?
- were the tasks and text appropriate to students’ needs?

Actually, the most important role in listening performs the mechanism of listening comprehension, which makes the corresponding changes by transforming verbal information into figurative.

Reading and communicative skills

At the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University, we have introduced a project in the course of “Practice of Oral and Written Speech” in order to develop students’ reading and communicative skills. 40 BA students were engaged to the project-based learning of the topic “Media” in the 2nd semester of a study course.

We conducted Internet addiction test developed by Kimberly Young and set the task before students to read two related articles “Internet addiction” and “the FOMO”. That preparation stage helped students to realize the actuality of a problem being discussed.

According to Hudson, we used student-centred and metacognitive approaches to developing students’ reading skills.⁸

⁸ Stix A., Hrbek F. Teachers as Classroom Coaches: How to Motivate Students Across the Content Areas [Electronic resource] / Andi Stix, Frank Hrbek – online: http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/106031/chapters/The_Nine_Steps_of_Project-Based_Learning.aspx

A student-centred approach. The approach was based on interaction among students and a teacher by discussing ideas and concepts related to the problem of the Internet addiction and the FOMO and proved an efficient tool of developing students' reading skills.

Speaking skills are an important part of students' language proficiency. They can be acquired in the process of mono- and dialogical speech.

In developing students' speaking skills we focused on such questions as

- *Analyse the given situation of people's Internet addiction/FOMO syndrome of youth:*
- *Structure your speech following the plan (opening, body, conclusion):*
- *Share your point of view about Internet addiction/the FOMO with other students. Put questions to the speaker:*
- *Summarize main points of your speech.*

Considering Brown's speaking micro skills in ELL we engaged students in producing English stress patterns, using an adequate number of words to accomplish purpose, monitor oral production and use strategic devices to enhance the clarity of the message, using right word order, patterns, rules, and grammatical word classes in their speech, accomplish appropriately communicative functions according to situations.⁹

Developing students' speaking skills we focused on awareness-raising approach, which aimed at making the students more aware of the English language, enlarge their understanding of unknown terms, process and reflect new information in different ways, etc.

Metacognitive approach. Using this approach, we set such tasks for students:

Share your opinions (What do you think of the problems raised by the author in the article?);

- *Choose the most prominent part of the article (students reading habits usage);*
- *State the aim of the article (applying reading strategies);*
- *Underline the words and phrases which emphasize the problem raised by the author;*
- *Name strategies to solve the problem;*
- *Identify other situations in which you can apply abovementioned strategies) (Fig. 1).¹⁰*

⁹ Brown, H. (2001). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy*. White Plains, NY: Addison-Wesley.

¹⁰ *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching* 1st Edition by Susan A. Ambrose (Author), Michael W. Bridges (Author), Michele DiPietro (Author), Marsha C. Lovett (Author), Marie K. Norman (Author), Richard E. Mayer, p. 258.



Fig. 1. Metacognition Cycle.

According to W. Kilpatrick's classification of projects,¹¹ students were proposed to make up a problematic project, which was supposed to reflect their own experiences of Internet addiction and the FOMO syndrome.

The suggested stages of the project development correspond to the main steps of project-based learning.¹²

Firstly, we created a proper situation for students as well as gave them instructions of procedure and steps of the project development. We emphasized the significance and purposefulness of the problem proposed for the project

The stage of problem selection arose from the curriculum topic "Media" and presupposed the selection of a problem connected with students' interests in the area of media production.

¹¹ Kilpatrick, W. H. (1918). The project method. Teachers College Record, 19, pp. 319–335.

¹² Stix A., Hrbek F. Teachers as Classroom Coaches: How to Motivate Students Across the Content Areas [Electronic resource] / Andi Stix, Frank Hrbek – online: http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/106031/chapters/The_Nine_Steps_of_Project-Based_Learning.aspx

At the stage of planning students were discussing the problem of Internet addiction introducing different points of view. While discussing, students accumulated the information about media.

At the stage of criteria evaluation students gave ideas of the project evaluation considering whether the objectives of the project were achieved or not.

At the stage of accumulating necessary materials students decided, they would use the statistical data of FOMO syndrome and Internet addiction and the results of psychological researches to emphasize the related problem to their common project.

Creating the project. During this stage, the tutor served as coach, guiding students' work in two different groups. The questions posed to students aimed at clearing up understanding of the common task and role of each student among others, providing cooperative work and partnership within the group, realizing the problem on the bases of the materials applied, defining the progress of work on the project. This step helped us to understand what level of learning the students were on.

Preparation to present the project. Students made notes considering such issues as Internet addiction/FOMO syndrome definition, the role of the Internet in their own lives; critical analysis of the Internet and social network images, etc.

At the pre-final stage, students presented their projects in the form of power point presentation. Each level of presentation was discussed and evaluated. They also created a poster demonstrating the stereotypical and damaging images of FOMO syndrome and Internet addiction and explained their feelings about the images.

The defined criteria of evaluation were applied on each level of project presentations.

Finally, evaluating the process of projects presentations, students discussed such questions set by the tutor:

- *Did you enjoy working under the project in small groups or separately?*
- *What did you like most and what was found as frustrating?*
- *Whose project was more convincing?*

While working on the project, students read proposed articles about the impact of Internet addiction and the FOMO on our lives and tried to grasp the author's idea.

In developing students' reading skills, we focused on such stages as perception, decoding and interpretation of texts.

Perception stage included such questions as:

- *What does the title of the text tell you about Internet addiction and the FOMO?*
- *Is this a publicist article or a fiction story?*

Decoding stage included such questions as:

- *How can you compare yourself with a character mentioned in the article?*
- *Find unfamiliar terms and define them (e.g. FOMO syndrome, withdrawal symptom, etc.)*

Interpretation stage included such questions as:

- *What is the main idea of the article?*
- *What new can you learn from it?*

We set accurate tasks for students' reading skills development such as retrieving information about Internet addiction and the FOMO from the given articles; forming an understanding the problem of the Internet addiction in modern digital world; interpreting the given article; evaluating the content of the article, etc.

Writing skills

At the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University, we have made a successful try to introduce project-based activities in the course of "Creative and academic writing". We engaged 45 MA students.

While developing project activities we set a meaningful problem at the appropriate level of challenge for the students to grasp the ideas quickly and produce unique writing. We followed definite stages of preparation, project development, reflection, and publishing. The suggested stages correspond to the essential project design elements (according to Buck Institute of Education).¹³

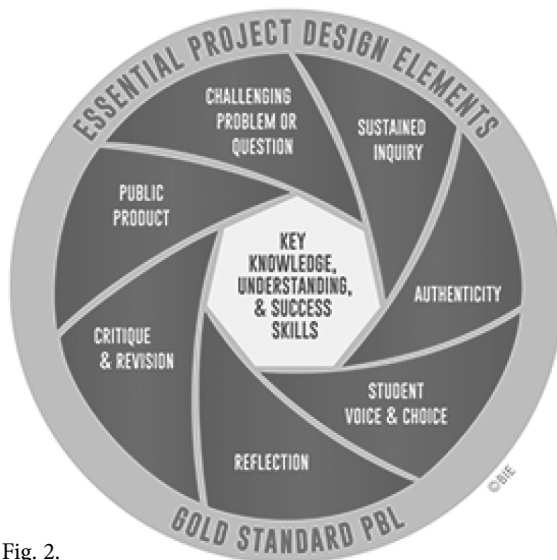


Fig. 2.

¹³ Larmer, J. Gold Standard PBL: Essential Project Design Elements [Electronic resource] / John Larmer – online: http://www.bie.org/blog/gold_standard_pbl_essential_project_design_elements

Bellow we provide the description of one of the projects in writing as an example. Therefore, in “Creative and Academic writing” the students worked on the linguistic and extra linguistic means while compiling a paper. The topic for writing was “National heritage: Bread”. Firstly, the students were provided with two articles about Turkish Bakhlava¹⁴ and Non-from Uzbekistan.¹⁵

At the stage of preparation, the students were asked to analyse discursive, narrative and descriptive pieces of writing, which they could find in the articles. After that, the problem question arose “*How do the illustration and font correlate with the article?*” The students were engaged in a rigorous, extended process of discussion (e.g. What does the picture add to the understanding of the article? How would you illustrate your article? What kind of font and photographs will convey to your readers whatever you want them to know about your object? Etc.). The discussion resulted in some free writing about their expectations. For the next class they were asked to check their expectations with the expectations of their potential target readers: *will the reader as a consumer perceive that very sense as well?*

The stage of project development and reflection was predetermined with the given assignment. Back in class, the students had a discussion of their research results within their groups. At this very stage, they could already reflect on the effectiveness of their inquiry, obstacles, and how to overcome them. Their reflections found practical application in the form of written recommendations for young writers to properly balance illustrations, font, and text. Moreover, they were ready to develop their own visual sketch of the article and wrote the paper itself.

The stage of publishing the students sent their works to each other and published them in blogs. Soon they received positive comments and feedbacks.

The activities proved to be exciting. They developed active learning while writing and researching. The project method rose students’ self-esteem, confidence, and creativity.

Conclusion

The project method used in development of listening, reading, speaking and writing skills of USPU students proved to be an efficient tool in language production. It helped to raise students’ activity and interest to language learning, willingness to complete tasks of the project and achieve the academic result.

This project aimed to find out the effectiveness in developing listening skills by using project method in EFL students at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Pavlo

¹⁴ Simmons, J. Capital of Baklava [Electronic resource] / Gail Simmons /

¹⁵ Hansen, E. The Fabled Flatbreads of Uzbekistan [Electronic resource] / Eric Hansen // Aramco World – online: <http://archive.aramcoworld.com/issue/201504/the.fabled.flatbreads.of.uzbekistan.htm>.

Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University. It consisted of the ability to differentiate the perceived sounds, integrate them into semantic complexes, and hold them in memory during the listening, to distribute all predictions and, based on the situation of communication, to understand the perceived sound chain. While working on the project, we identified and explored all the benefits of cooperation in micro groups. Finally, listening is the basis of communication.

This case study also aimed to find out the effectiveness in developing reading/speaking skills by using project method in EFL students at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University. It lasted for 6 weeks. 40 BA students took part in the project and were given a pre-test confirming their ability to reading/speaking skills. The proposed project method in developing reading and speaking skills of students has proved to be an effective one to evaluate students' language proficiency and prepare them for language proficiency exams.

Project method proved to be an effective learning technique which can be successfully applied to develop students' writing skills. This method broke the stereotype about writing as a tedious activity which should be done at home and consume plenty of time. On the contrary, project method incorporated all communicative competences while developing a written project and made writing bright, and exciting. It ran from discussion and active group interaction to an individual or group analysis of the published resources, interviews, and critical research into an interesting problem. The written paper was a logical product, the result of multiple stages and common job. The project method may be widely used in English classroom to balance the time while mastering different language skills.