

## CHARACTERISTICS OF IMPLEMENTING PROJECT WORK IN TEACHING ENGLISH

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**Abstract.** *The problem of using project work in teaching English is of great importance. Project work is characterized as one of the most effective methods of teaching and learning a foreign language through research and communication, different types of this method allow us to use it in all the spheres of the educational process.*

**Keywords:** *project work, ability, skills, learner-centered method.*

A project is an extended piece of work on a particular topic where the content and the presentation are determined principally by the learners. The teacher or the textbook provides the topic, but the project writers themselves decide what they write and how they present it. This student-center characteristic of project work is vital, as we shall see when we turn now to consider the merits of project work. It is not always easy to introduce a new methodology, so we need to be sure that the effort is worthwhile. Students do not feel that English is a chore, but it is a means of communication and enjoyment. They can experiment with the language as something real, not as something that only appears in books. Project work captures better than any other activity the three principal elements of a communicative approach. These are:

- a) a concern for motivation, that is, how the learners relate to the task.
- b) a concern for relevance, that is, how the learners relate to the language.
- c) a concern for educational values, that is, how the language curriculum relates to the general educational development of the learner.

A project is an extended task which usually integrates language skills through a number of activities. These activities combine in working towards an agreed goal and may include planning, gathering of information through reading, listening, interviewing, discussion of the information, problem solving, oral or written reporting, display, etc.

Learners' use of language as they negotiate plans, analyse, and discuss information and ideas is determined by genuine communicative needs. At the school level, project work encourages imagination and creativity, self-discipline and responsibility, collaboration, research and study skills, and cross-curricular work through exploitation of knowledge gained in other subjects. Successful use of project work will clearly be affected by such factors as availability of time, access to authentic materials, receptiveness of learners, the possibilities for learner training, and the administrative flexibility of institutional timetabling.

Project work leads to purposeful language use because it requires personal involvement on the part of the students from the onset of a project, students, in consultation with their instructor, must decide what they will do and how they will do it, and this includes not only the content of the project, but also the language requirements. So from this point project work emerges as a practical methodology that puts into practice the fundamental principles of a communicative approach to language teaching. It can thus bring considerable benefits to our language classroom, like:

- Increased motivation - learners become personally involved in the project.

- All four skills, reading, writing, listening and speaking, are integrated.
- General learning is promoted as learners become more responsible for their own learning.

There are learning outcome-learners have an end product.

Authentic tasks and therefore the language input are more authentic.

Interpersonal relations are developed through working as a group.

Content and methodology can be decided between the learners and the teacher and within the group themselves so it is more student centred.

Learners often get help from parents for project work thus involving the parent more in the child's learning. If the project is also displayed parents can see it at open days or when they pick the child up from the school.

A break from routine and the chance to do something different.

A context is established which balances the need for fluency and accuracy.

It would be wrong to pretend that project work does not have its problems. Teachers are often afraid that the project classroom will be noisier than the traditional classroom and that this will disturb other classes in the school, but it does not have to be noisy. Students should be spending a lot of the time working quietly on their projects: reading, drawing, writing, and cutting and pasting. In these tasks, students will often need to discuss things and they may be moving around to get a pair of scissors or to consult a reference book, but this is not an excuse to make a lot of noise. If students are doing a survey in their class, for example, there will be a lot of moving around and talking. However, this kind of noise is a natural part of any productive activity. Indeed, it is useful to realize that the traditional classroom has quite a lot of noise in it, too. There is usually at least one person talking and there may be a tape recorder playing, possibly with the whole class doing a drill. There is no reason why cutting out a picture and sticking it in a project book should be any noisier than 30 or 40 learners repeating a choral drill. The noise of the well-managed project classroom is the sound of creativity.

Project work is a different way of working and one that requires a different form of control. Learners must take on some of the responsibility for managing their learning environment. Part of this responsibility is learning what kind of, and what level of noise is acceptable. When we introduce project work we also need to encourage and guide the students towards working quietly and sensibly.

This kind of work is time-consuming of course, it takes much longer to prepare, make, and present a project than it does to do more traditional activities. When we are already struggling to get through the syllabus or finish the textbook, we will probably feel that we do not have time to devote to project work, however good an activity it may be. There are two responses to this situation:

1. Not all project work needs to be done in class time. Obviously, if the project is a group task, most of it must be done in class, but a lot of projects are individual tasks. Projects about My Family, My House, etc. can be done at home.

2. When choosing to do project work we are making a choice in favour of the quality of the learning experience over the quantity. It is unfortunate that language teaching has tended to put most emphasis on quantity. And yet there is little evidence that quantity is really the crucial factor. What really matters in learning is the quality of the learning experience.

3. Project work provides rich learning experiences: rich in colour, movement, interaction

and, most of all, involvement. The positive motivation that projects generate affects the learners' attitude to all the other aspects of the language programme. Learning grammar and vocabulary will appear more relevant because the students know they will need these things for their project work. The students will spend all their time speaking their mother tongue. This is true to a large extent. It is unlikely that most students will speak English while they are working on their project. However, rather than seeing this as a problem, we should consider its merits:

a) it is a natural way of working. It is a mistake to think of L1 (the mother tongue) and L2 (the language being learnt) as two completely separate domains. Learners in fact operate in both domains, constantly switching from one to the other, so it is perfectly natural for them to use L1 while working on a L2 product. As long as the final product is in English it does not matter if the work is done in L1.

b) project work can provide some good opportunities for realistic translation work. A lot of the source material for projects (leaflets, maps, interviews, texts from reference books, etc.) will be in the mother tongue. Using this material in a project provides useful translation activities.

c) there will be plenty of opportunities in other parts of the language course for students to practice oral skills. Project work should be seen as a chance to practice that most difficult of skills, writing.

Some educators are concerned that without the teacher's firm control the weaker learners will be lost and will not be able to cope. But not all students want or need the teacher's constant supervision. By encouraging the more able learners to work independently we are free to devote our time to those learners who need it most. One group may have 'finished' the project after a couple of hours and say they have nothing to do than remind them that it is their responsibility to fill the time allocated to project work and discuss ways they could extend the work they have already completed.

Assessment of project work is another difficult issue. This is not because project work is difficult to assess, but because assessment criteria and procedures vary from country to country. So there are two basic principles for assessing project work:

a) not just the language

The most obvious point to note about project work is that language is only a part of the total project. Consequently, it is not very appropriate to assess a project only on the basis of linguistic accuracy. Credit must be given for the overall impact of the project, the level of creativity it displays, the neatness and clarity of presentation, and most of all the effort that has gone into its production. There is nothing particularly unusual in this. It is normal practice in assessing creative writing to give marks for style and content, etc. Many education systems also require similar factors to be taken into account in the assessment of learners' oral performance in class. So a wide-ranging 'profile' kind of assessment that evaluates the whole project is needed.

b) not just mistakes

If at all possible, we should not correct mistakes on the final project itself, or at least not in ink. It goes against the whole spirit of project work. A project usually represents a lot of effort and is something that the students will probably want to keep. It is a shame to put red marks all over it. This draws attention to the things that are wrong about the project over the things that are good. On the other hand, students are more likely to take note of errors pointed out to them in project work because the project means much more to them than an ordinary piece of class work. There are two useful techniques to handle the errors:

- Encouraging the students to do a rough draft of their project first. Correcting this in their normal way. The students can then incorporate corrections in the final product.

- If errors occur in the final product, correcting in pencil or on a separate sheet of paper attached to the project. A good idea was suggested by a teacher in Spain to get students to provide a photocopy of their project. Corrections can then be put on the photocopy. But fundamentally, the most important thing to do about errors is to stop worrying about them. Projects are real communication. When we communicate, we do the best we can with what we know, and because we usually concentrate on getting the meaning right, errors in form will naturally occur. It is a normal part of using and learning a language. Learners invest a lot of themselves in a project and so they will usually make every effort to do their best work.

Project work provides an opportunity to develop creativity, imagination, enquiry, and self-expression, and the assessment of the project should allow for this.

Project work must rank as one of the most exciting teaching methodologies an educator can use. It truly combines in practical form both the fundamental principles of a communicative approach to language teaching and the values of good education. It has the added virtue in this era of rapid change of being a long- established and well-tried method of teaching.

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