

THROUGH STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS TO BROADENING THEIR PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS AND DEVELOPING PROFESSIONALLY-ORIENTED COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE SKILLS

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The importance of international business projects in enhancing students' both professional knowledge and skills and communicative language skills is highlighted. It is pointed out that teamwork promotes the development of social and socio-cultural skills. The necessity of incorporating transferable skills in language syllabi is analysed.

Introduction

The demands of Ukraine and Poland in highly-qualified specialists who are capable of establishing business contacts and seeking business cooperation with foreign partners and possessing professional communicative skills are reflected in university language syllabi.

The overall aim of teaching and learning students of non-linguistic universities is to prepare them to communicate effectively in their academic and professional environments. It comprises a set of aims: practical (to develop students' general and professionally-oriented communicative language competences (linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic) in English); educational (to develop students' general competences (declarative knowledge, skills and know-how) and ability to learn); cognitive (to expose students to academic activities that draw on and further develop the full range of their cognitive abilities); developmental (to help students form general competences to develop their personal motivation (values, ideals, etc.); to foster students' confidence as users of the language, and their positive attitudes and feelings towards learning the target language); social (to facilitate and develop students' critical self-awareness and interpersonal skills and to contribute meaningfully to changing international environment); and socio-cultural (to develop a broad understanding of important different international socio-cultural issues in order to operate appropriately in culturally diverse professional and academic environment) [2].

Knowledge of languages and an ability to communicate as a social tool is an integral element of social development. Changes in the geopolitical and economic situation of Poland and Ukraine, Poland membership in the European Union, tighter commercial and cultural relations with European countries as well as the European integration process trigger a constant and necessary acquisition of new competences.

Acquiring communicative competences by students allows them to use the knowledge and skills they obtain to solve specific communicative tasks in real-life situations.

Thus, university language teachers should know innovative teaching methods and techniques in order to choose and use the most effective approaches and tasks relevant to students' level, needs and interests in order to help them be competitive in the constantly changing and demanding job market.

The purpose of the research is to find out to which extent students' participation in international business projects increases their professional knowledge and skills and develops their communicative language competences; and how university language syllabi aimed to develop students' communicative language competences help students successfully participate in international projects in order to broaden their professional knowledge and skills.

1. Research Analysis

Having considered future needs of managers, teaching should comprise vocational and interdisciplinary aspects and take into account changing goals, contents and methods of teaching. Apart from traditional teaching, new practical forms should be implemented into the study process. The most frequent ones are as follows:

- foreign students' exchange between universities
- specialized programs such as summer schools
- international programmes such as: business week, conferences, symposia, championships etc.
- lectures of visiting professors.

The respondents of the research carried out were students in their third, fourth and fifth years of studies of the National Mining University (Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine) and Wrocław School of Banking (Poland) majoring in various business areas of specialism who were asked to reply to the following questionnaire about their experience in participating in international projects.

1. What university do you study at?
2. What is your area of specialism?
3. What year of study are you in?
4. Are you a participant of any international project? Yes No
5. If yes, what project(s) do you participate in?
6. If not, would you like to participate in any international project?
Yes No Why? Explain your point of view.
7. Where did you get the information about the international projects?
8. Why did you decide to participate in international projects?
Please, write 3 main reasons.
9. Which framework of international projects do you like most and why?
 - debates
 - teamwork
 - on-line projects
10. Did you face any difficulties when doing a project? Yes No
11. If yes, what kind of problems did you have? Please, identify them.
12. What helped you overcome the difficulties?
13. What do you benefit from participating in the international project(s)?

The information obtained shows that 72 % of those who were surveyed do not participate in any international project. Nevertheless, the majority of them (78 %) would you like to participate because they consider international projects as a good opportunity to:

- exchange experience
- gain experience of international work
- obtain new knowledge in their speciality
- broaden experience in management and marketing
- learn different cultures.

Twenty-eight percent of respondents are the participants of different projects:

- Summer School of Leadership
- International School of Leadership "Argo"
- X-culture
- Leader Project
- Europe Fair
- DIPMUN (Dnipropetrovsk International Program Model United Nations)
- Business Week (Poland, Latvia, Belgium).

The respondents have got the information about the international projects from the following sources:

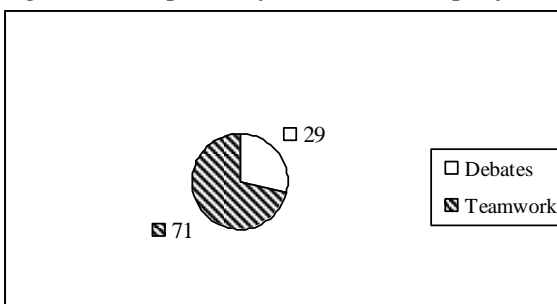
- university website
- university advertisements
- NMU department of International scientific projects
- subject department
- university teachers
- annual university 'Fair of Opportunities'
- groupmates.

The reasons of participating in international projects are the following:

- gain knowledge and skills in marketing, management and business
- develop professional skills
- develop communication skills
- learn the culture of other countries
- widen outlook
- improve English
- make new friends
- travel.

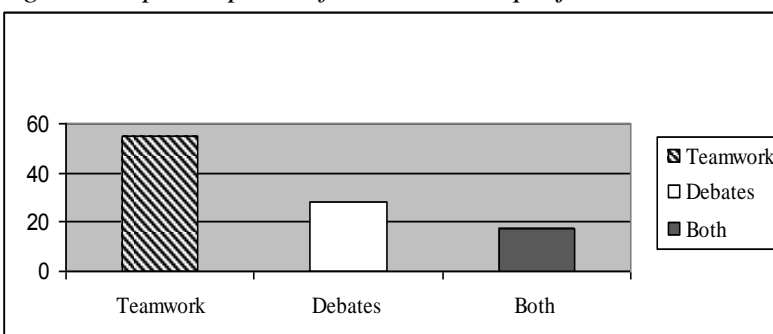
The results of the research indicate that the preferable frameworks of international projects are teamwork and debates. Seventy-one percent of those who participate in international projects prefer teamwork, whereas 29 % stand for debates.

Fig. 1 Participants of international projects



Interestingly, those who do not participate in any international project, also answered question 9 about which framework of international projects they like most and why.

Fig. 2 Non-participants of international projects



The bar chart shows that 55 % would prefer teamwork, 28 % - debates and 17 % would participate in both. None of the respondents chose on-line projects. Team-working enjoys greater benefits as compared with debates. Being a team member students have ample opportunities to:

- learn how to work in a team
- solve problems in the most efficient way

- how motivate people and make them be interested (for a team leader)
- exchange opinions
- possibility to combine strengths of each team participant and help catch up with weaknesses
- learn others' experience
- increase self-esteem
- be more sociable
- make friends.

In spite of the fact that debates are not so popular among the respondents, they offered the advantages that allow to:

- generate new ideas
- make everybody think
- develop logical thinking
- look at the problem from different sides
- learn how to express your viewpoint and support it
- find a consensus when you disagree
- learn to listen to other people
- get to know different points of view.

When doing a project, some students encountered difficulties. One of them was connected with the fact that different cultures illustrated different behaviour in doing tasks and longer adaptation to each other. The other difficulty was a language problem. The respondents identified what helped them cope with the difficulties. Those were:

- team's help and support
- common goal
- hard work
- enthusiasm.

Finally, the respondents were asked to list benefits from participating in the international project. They set out the reasons that explain why it is important to participate in international projects which are the following:

- improve language skills
- gain and improve professional practical skills in marketing and management
- develop team-working skills
- open up possibilities for finding a good job
- see possibilities for continuing education abroad
- gain huge and valuable experience
- make new friends from different countries
- get acquainted with different cultures, lifestyles and behavior of different nations
- develop personal qualities
- be flexible
- visit new countries.

Thus, the respondents see international projects as an opportunity to develop all the skills they need, including enhancing professional knowledge and skills in their specialism areas, to be able to be successful in their academic environment and in their future professional career.

2. Developing Social and Socio-cultural Skills Using Teamwork and Debates

The work in an international team presupposes that people should possess interpersonal skills and contribute meaningfully to changing international environment. Moreover, they should understand important different international socio-cultural issues in order to operate appropriately in culturally diverse professional environment.

A good way for students to learn social and socio-cultural skills is to apply cooperative language learning, which helps build a positive relationship in the classroom. Cooperative learning is

defined as follows: ‘... group learning activity organised so that learning is dependent on the socially structured exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others’ [6].

Application of cooperative learning creates an atmosphere of friendliness, support, readiness to help and pride in others’ success. Such a friendly and supportive atmosphere in a team is a good motivator for the students to learn. The most effective methods used are the following: discussions, debates, case-study, modeling, etc. because they get students to analyse the specific situations of cross-cultural communication and immerse into their discussion.

Teamwork is defined in Webster’s New World Dictionary as ‘a joint action by a group of people, in which each person subordinates his or her individual interests and opinions to the unity and efficiency of the group’. Thus, complementing each other people create a united and balanced group, in which a team member does what he or she can do best.

Effective teamwork has the following eight characteristics according to which the team must:

- have a clear goal with specific objectives
- have a results-driven structure
- have competent team members
- have unified commitment
- have a collaborative climate
- have high standards that are understood by all
- receive external support and encouragement
- have principled leadership [4].

University teachers should be interested in using teamwork and include collaborative learning in the study process. As teamwork has become an important part of the working culture, teaching effective teamwork is becoming a crucial task for a university teacher. In addition, being a part of a team can also improve learning a language and develop communicative language skills.

The mechanism behind such a form of teaching language and language competences in an international environment is as follows:

- a student is motivated to respond comprehensively in typical situations (initiates relations, introduces himself and others, greets and says goodbye, provides information about himself and asks others for information)
- a student uses sources of information in a foreign language (implementing materials, media, manuals, ICT)
- a student applies communication strategies (inferring meaning of words from the context, understanding a text comprising unknown words and phrases) and complimentary strategies (substituting a different word, description, non-verbal means) if they do not know a word
- uses polite expressions
- obtains and gives content-related information and explanations
- conducts simple negotiations in typical situations in everyday life
- expresses opinions, intentions, preferences and wishes, asks for opinions, agrees and disagrees
- expresses emotions (joy, dissatisfaction, surprise)
- asks for repetition or clarification (making something precise) [5].

The tasks that the teacher provides in the classroom to develop students’ teamwork skills are aimed to help students to:

- explain their own ideas
- express their feelings
- listen carefully to each other’s ideas
- respect the opinions of others

- ask questions to clarify others' ideas
- help each other
- solve problems.

Debates are also an effective task for developing students' social skills. In-class debates are an excellent teaching tool, which has a number of advantages. They foster students to:

- organise and synthesize information;
- improve critical thinking;
- develop language skills;
- encourage to learn on their own;
- increase cooperation skills [3].

For business students to be able to participate successfully in international projects it is crucial to:

- understand how core values, beliefs and behaviour in academic or professional environment differ from culture to culture (international, national, institutional);
- understand different corporate cultures within specific professional contexts and how they relate to each other;
- apply intercultural insights while interacting orally or in writing to immediate academic and professional situations;
- behave and react appropriately in common social, academic and professional situations in everyday life, and know rules of how people should interact in these situations (recognise appropriate gestures, eye contact, personal space, and body language in each situation). [2].

This socio-cultural competence component 'strictly affects all language communication between representatives of different cultures' [1] and aims to develop understanding and interpret different aspects of culture and language behaviour in the world of work. It encourages the development of skills involved in appropriate behaviour in and responses to different cultural and professional situations. Socio-cultural competence is included into the list of study skills which are aimed at developing students' abilities to make effective use of the learning opportunities created by teaching/learning situations. [2].

3. Transferable Skills

The international projects organised and held by Wrocław School of Banking and National Mining University have the following objectives:

- promote international cooperation of higher education institutions that allow students to go abroad for part of their studies or practice
- promote students' mobility
- present and discuss the issues of project management on the background of today's market conditions and the progressive processes of European integration and globalization
- increase the knowledge and ability to work in an international environment
- bring business issues to contemporary market conditions and advance the European integration process
- expand economic and managerial expertise, while creating intercultural citizenship through targeted forms of non-formal education, such as panel discussions, study visits, student presentations, workshops and leadership exercise
- introduce students to the practical aspects of doing business in countries with difficult entrepreneurship development conditions, exchange of experiences in this area
- present various aspects of leadership and the role of leaders in society

- develop skills in teamwork, negotiation techniques, that has a very important impact on the students' qualities of future leaders.

One of the benefits that international projects bring to students is an opportunity to get a good job. "Employers want adaptive recruits, people who can rapidly fit into the workplace culture, work in teams, exhibit interpersonal skills, communicate well, take on responsibility, perform efficiently and effectively, they want adaptable people, people who can use their abilities and skills to make the organization evolve through bright ideas and persuading colleagues to adopt new approaches and they want transformative employees, people who can anticipate and lead change, who have higher level skills, such as analysis, critique, synthesis, etc [8].

University language teachers can help students with a good job by teaching them the so-called transferable skills which are also called job-related or employment skills and mean abilities, aptitudes and qualities developed in one context that can be applied to another, for example, they can be transferred into different job areas.

There are top 10 essential transferable skills:

1. Communication Skills
2. Teamwork Skills
3. Time Management Skills
4. Problem-Solving Skills
5. Organization Skills
6. Learning Skills
7. Computer Skills
8. Listening Skills
9. Creativity Skills
10. Leadership Skills.

According to many employers communication and interpersonal skills are the most important of all the transferable skills. They want employees who are able to communicate effectively at an appropriate level, interpret and share knowledge and ideas and able to inspire and motivate. Below are the examples of communication and interpersonal skills that are included into the language syllabi developed by the department of foreign languages of the National Mining University, Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine:

- speaking and presenting effectively
- writing concisely and accurately
- using active listening skills
- developing and building rapport
- persuading
- providing appropriate feedback
- negotiating effectively
- providing effective support for others
- motivating others
- cooperating with others
- being assertive.

Comparing the list of top essential transferable skills with those in the language syllabi, it is possible to claim that much attention is paid to developing transferable/job-related skills to students specializing in business and economics.

Conclusion

The overall aim of the language syllabi for business and economics students is to develop professionally-oriented communication language competences that will allow them to communicate effectively in their professional environments.

The skills that business students are to develop are professional transferable/job-related skills which can be used by students in learning other subjects as well as in many other different contexts including their careers and personal lives.

Students' participation in different international projects gives them an opportunity to develop the competences and strategies needed to participate effectively during their studies and in the professional situations they encounter. International projects help students meet their language requirements. Besides, they develop entrepreneurship and negotiation skills as well as practical knowledge in marketing, finance, PR, teamworking, project management and, of course, acquaintance with European culture. On the whole, participating in international projects increases students' motivation in learning the English language.

International projects enable students both to diagnose their strengths and weaknesses and to develop strengths and diminish weaknesses. They also give an opportunity to develop non-linguistic skills supporting the learning process such as self-assessment, resorting to various information sources, developing language awareness and communication strategies as well as interaction in a team [7].

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