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THE APPLICATION OF PROJECT BASED LEARNING TECHNIQUES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AMONG THE STUDENTS OF THE DUAL EDUCATION MODEL

Abstract: Teaching a foreign language at the tertiary level of education should include student-centered methods that motivate students to employ logical thinking skills and contribute to their further development. The dual education model provides lecturers with the opportunities to implement different strategies that focus on creativity, collaboration and correlation between courses. One of these is Project Based Learning, whose main goal is for students to acquire knowledge through interdisciplinary activities they perform while facing real life situations and in this case, professional challenges, exploring them and eventually finding the solutions. Working with students that study within the dual study model at the Academy of Applied Studies Polytechnic provided the author with the chance to implement Project Based Learning strategies in English language teaching and allowed students to apply textbook knowledge. The aim of this paper is to present the process of applying Project Based Learning techniques. Special attention is given to the students' feedback.

Keywords: Project Based Learning, Dual education, Correlation, Students' feedback

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching university students should incorporate approaches and strategies that encourage students to use critical thinking and foster their continued development. Lecturers must strive to find the best possible teaching methods that will motivate students to actively participate in classes, offer their thoughts, solutions and activate their passive knowledge of the language. Teachers must act as mediators and shouldn't dominate discussions. Instead, their role is to guide learners to clarify and simplify their ideas (Smith, 1995, 43-52). The correlation

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between courses in the curriculum is particularly crucial when teaching the language for specific purposes. The dual education model offers language teachers numerous possibilities to implement diverse teaching techniques that focus on innovation, teamwork, and correlation between subjects, because students already have the chance to put their theoretical knowledge into practice and can apply their skills in real life. One such approach is Project-Based Learning (PBL), which seeks to help students acquire knowledge through cross-disciplinary tasks while engaging with real-life scenarios, specifically professional challenges, exploring them, and ultimately devising solutions. Collaborating with students who follow the dual study model provides teachers with the opportunity to apply PBL approaches in teaching the English language and enables the students to transfer theoretical knowledge into practical experience.

2. DUAL EDUCATION

The dual education system at the higher education level is a framework that integrates apprenticeships at companies with academic courses at the Academies of Applied Studies. It is a form of hybrid training in which students are enrolled as full-time learners at the Academies of Applied Studies while simultaneously serving as trainees at companies.

The concept of 'dual system in education' originated in Germany during the mid-1960s as a new method for vocational training. This model eventually gained recognition in other German-speaking countries, including Austria and Switzerland (Boichevska and Veremiuk, 2020, 4-13). According to the German Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training, the dual system is called "dual" because training takes place at two learning venues; in the company and at the vocational school (Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training, s.d.). UNESCO's International Standard Classification of Education describes the dual system as programmes that combine school- or college- and work-based education. (UNESCO, 2012).

Dual education provides an efficient method for the educational system to address the requirements of the economy, job market, technological advancements, and the need for new skills, such as knowledge, expertise, and attitudes. This educational model entails the direct involvement of employers in organizing and executing learning through hands-on experience in an actual work setting.

This type of education boosts the quality of acquired knowledge and abilities, establishing a system where qualifications genuinely reflect the competencies gained, which ultimately improves the employability of young individuals. Consequently, by investing in education, companies also invest in their future workforce, helping resolve long-term issues related to labor force quality.

2.1. Dual Education at the Academy of Applied Studies Polytechnic

The reform of formal applied education in Serbia and the necessity to adapt it to the demands of the industry for specific professionals has encouraged the Academy of Applied Studies Polytechnic (formerly the Academy of Applied Technical Studies Belgrade) to use its resources, experience, and the expertise of its staff and apply this model, refining both its existing academic programs and creating new ones.

According to the study program, students will complete 450 theoretical classes at the Academy and another 450 classes working in companies, with assignments based on their year of study (Karijerni centar ASSP, s.d.). The outlined study programs also facilitate a shift from the traditional model to the dual study model, and vice versa. Throughout their studies, students will be supported by both academic mentors and company mentors, helping them acquire the skills and qualifications needed for their continued professional and personal growth.

The legal basis for the implementation of dual education in Serbia is the Law on Dual Education, in effect since the academic year 2019/20 (The Government of the Republic of Serbia, s.d.)

Work-based learning is a key component of the study program under the dual study model, carrying a specific number of ECTS credits. It is a structured process in which students, under the guidance of a mentor at the workplace, apply theoretical knowledge in a real-world setting, engage with business practices and technologies, interact with professionals, and prepare for their future careers (Grujic, 2021, 140-147).

3. MOTIVATION

In the research on students' motivation for English language learning among the students of design at the Academy of Applied Technical Studies Belgrade (today the Academy of Applied Studies Polytechnic) conducted by the author in June 2021, it was observed that a considerable proportion of students in the design study programs understand the value of learning English. However, over half of the students lack intrinsic motivation to study the language on their own, such as personal needs, internal desires, attitudes..., with extrinsic motivation being more prevalent (the goal in this case is to get a passing grade on the exam, a higher grade, or avoid a certain type of punishment if the exam is not passed). Their main objective seems to be passing the exam, rather than gaining knowledge that could prove to be useful in the future. (Micanovic and Radovic, 2023, 619-621)

One of the questions students were asked within the research was: "Which of these strategies should the teacher employ in order to improve students' motivation?" The answers are given in Table 1.

Table1. Which of these strategies should the teacher employ in order to improve students' motivation?
Source: https://www.surveymonkey.com/

ANSWER CHOICES–	RESPONSES–	
The teacher should explain to students the importance of knowing the English language in the modern world	23.08%	9
The teacher should reward attendance by giving students points	23.08%	9
The teacher should adapt the syllabus to students' needs.	46.15%	18
The teacher should provide students with reading materials and additional practice.	7.69%	3
TOTAL		39

As shown in Table 1 a large proportion of students answered that the teacher should adapt the syllabus to the needs of the students (Micanovic and Radovic, 2023, 619-621). One important factor to consider when discussing these responses is that the students who participated in the research came from several different study programs and attended the English Language 2 course, which focuses on English for specific purposes, together. Due to the composition of the group of students, it was inevitable for some of them to work on the material that wasn't closely connected to their study program. The challenge that the author faced was how to adapt the syllabus to students who study various study programs and who attend the lectures together. What are the strategies a teacher can employ in order to make the syllabus more inspiring and attractive to the students? Project-Based Learning, combined with Dual Education, proved to be highly effective.

4. PROJECT BASED LEARNING

Project-based learning is a learner-centered teaching approach grounded in three constructivist principles: learning is context-dependent, students actively engage in the learning process, and they reach their objectives through social interactions and the exchange of knowledge and insights (Cain and Cocco, 2006). As students work on a project, they may face challenges that must be resolved in order to develop and present the final product in response to the driving question. In Project Based learning a driving question is one of the main elements of its structure and it sets off the project. It needs to attract students' attention and make them inspired to actively explore, create and learn. (Larmer and Mergendoller 2010, 34-37). The driving question that students at the Academy of Applied Studies Polytechnic were asked was: How can we create a project that meets the requirements of employers and is also representative enough to

present to colleagues in an English class? Next, it is necessary to ensure that students that are engaged in Project Based Learning actually benefit from it.

According to the PBL Works, Project Based Learning (PBL) is a teaching method that provides students with the chance to learn by engaging in projects and real-life situations. (PBLworks, s.d.):

- To ensure that the curriculum units are properly covered and that students gain relevant knowledge through Project-Based Learning, PBLWorks has licensed the 'Gold Standard PBL' model (PBLworks, 2023), which consists of two valuable resources for educators:
- The Seven Essential Project Design Elements, which provide a structure for creating high-quality projects for the classroom, (Figure 1)
- The Seven Project-Based Teaching Practices, which assist teachers, schools, and organizations in enhancing, refining, and evaluating their teaching methods. (Figure 2)

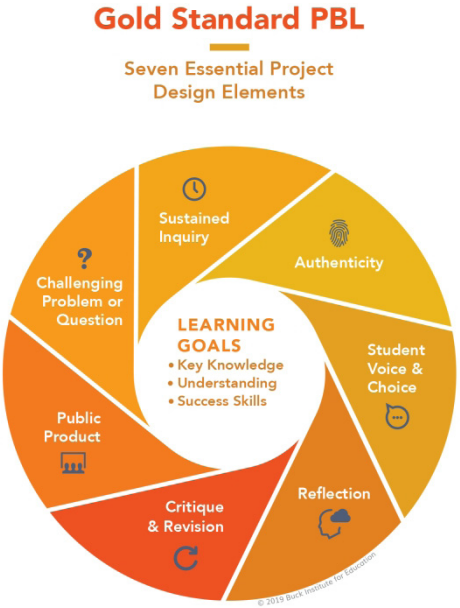

Figure 1.
Source: https://www.pblworks.org/



Figure 2.
Source: https://www.pblworks.org/

4.1. Projects

Following these principles, there were seven different stages students had to complete during their PBL journey.

The first stage was to face the driving question: How to create a project that will meet the requirements of the employers at the company and also be representative enough to present to their colleagues in their English class? For

many of them this was anything but simple, particularly because most of them were first-year students, with little experience in creating projects and public speaking, especially in English language. This is why the right choice of project was crucial for them.

The second stage involved students actively discussing possible solutions with the professor, asking about the types of projects they could propose or participate in, and discussing the stages, structure, and requirements, etc.

They would usually come during office hours and discuss the issue with the professor.

According to John Larmer and John Mergendoller the term authenticity relates to the extent to which the learning experience or task mirrors real-world scenarios (Larmer and Mergendoller 2010, 34-37). Authenticity fosters increased student motivation and improves learning outcomes (Lychock, 2019). Therefore, a project is authentic when it provides an authentic context, allowing students to address challenges that resemble those faced by people in the world beyond the classroom. Given that the students created their projects by working in companies, outside the classroom, the element of authenticity is clearly evident in their work.

Taking into consideration that students were the ones who offered projects that would answer the driving question, they were provided with the opportunity to share their viewpoints and for their voices to be heard. They were encouraged to express themselves in their own manner and share their personal opinions, offering their own solutions and not conforming to what they believe the professor expected.

One of the stages involved presenting their projects to their peers. The presentation had to contain several elements: Inspiration/why the product/project was made, the material, machines, software, procedures, techniques and technologies used in the product/project making, the presentation of the product/project, feedback from the employer or a client, as well as their personal impressions about the project. Creating tangible products and presenting them publicly enhances students' motivation and engages their critical thinking skills. Simply put, the awareness that their products will be publicly displayed motivates them to offer the best solution. Since the product holds significance for individuals outside the group that created it, students are more likely to be engaged and invested in the outcome, striving for high quality solutions. Some of the projects that were completed during the program are shown in Figure 3, Figure 4 and Figure 5. They show vehicle branding (Figure 3), outdoor premises branding (Figure 4), indoor premises branding (Figure 5), flexo prepress (Figure 6) etc..

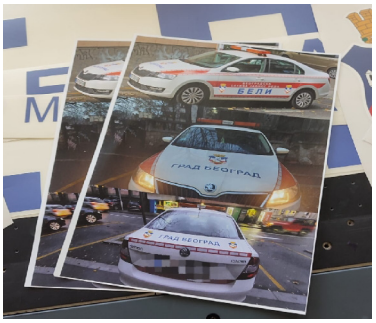

Figure 3. Student's project, Vehicle branding



Figure 4. Student's project, Outdoor premises branding



Figure 5. Student's project, Indoor premises branding



Figure 6. Student's project: Flexo prepress

One of the benefits of giving presentations is that, by doing it, students effectively enhance their public speaking skills. Apart from this, it is also an excellent way to reflect on what had been done during the process of project making. John Dewey repeatedly emphasized the importance of reflection in acquiring knowledge (Dewey, 1997, 151-168).

Apart from presenting their projects, one of the tasks students had to complete was to write an expository essay to describe the whole process of project making. This task had several aims:

- **Reinforcing vocabulary:** Since expository essays require clarity and precision in language and aim to objectively convey the project-making process, they are an excellent tool for students to acquire new vocabulary and reinforce what they already know.
- **Improving communication skills**: By writing expository essays, students learn to express their ideas clearly and persuasively. While writing, they must break down a complex process into smaller steps and

provide thorough, step-by-step explanations. Good communication skills and the ability to provide clear and concise explanations are among the most sought-after skills by employers and are thus very beneficial for students' futures.

- **Enhancing research skills:** While writing expository essays, students must read about topics related to their projects, learn how to narrow down information, and be selective. They learn where and how to look for sources, which tools to utilize, and how to critically evaluate sources.
- **Improved knowledge retention:** During the essay-writing process, students reflect on the project content, think about the project-making procedure, break it down into smaller steps, and thus understand it more thoroughly. Once they grasp every step of the project, they become more confident, enjoy learning, and recall information more easily, resulting in prolonged knowledge retention.
- **Enhancing creativity-** Expository essays are a type of academic writing aimed at explaining, clarifying, and providing a balanced evaluation of a particular topic or idea. Therefore, they are not typically associated with creativity. However, when students grasp the basics of essay writing and develop related skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and logical reasoning, they gain the ability to become creative, confident, and proficient writers, regardless of essay type (Riddell, 2015).
- **Strengthening analytical skills:** Analysis is a key skill in academic writing. At its core, analysis involves interpreting and making sense of evidence. Elevating students' writing skills leads to the development of a more insightful perspective. Strong academic writing skills foster critical thinking, the ability to evaluate information, construct logical arguments, and draw meaningful conclusions, all of which are essential for students today.

Finally, students had to go through the stage of critique and revision from both the professor and their peers. After every presentation, they answered questions from their peers, discussing processes, techniques, and the effort and time invested in the project. Their peers were very supportive, encouraging participation while also offering constructive criticism with recommendations for potential improvements. The professor also reviewed their essays, focusing on structure, vocabulary, and grammar, emphasizing the importance of each element. This provided an opportunity to revise grammar, reinforce vocabulary for specific purposes, and consider alternative solutions for the projects.

4.2. Correlation between courses

As students from various academic programs took part in the program, they had the opportunity to see presentations of projects created by their peers who are students from different study programs. This offered them a valuable chance

to explore a diverse range of projects and gain insights from perspectives outside their own area of expertise.

During the discussions, students were encouraged to ask questions and engage in conversations about the project development process, the companies where their peers are employed, organizational structures, and more. For example, when graphic engineering students presented their projects, design students inquired about the programs they used, the techniques, color choices, and other related details. Environmental protection and recycling technologies students asked about materials, solvents, dyes, waste disposal practices, and the management of hazardous waste within companies. Food engineering and food safety students focused on the materials used in food packaging, while occupational safety and health students raised questions about machinery, safety equipment for handling hazardous chemicals, machine guards on cutters, and personal protective equipment.

This exchange not only allowed students to draw connections between their English language studies and their professional courses but also gave them the chance to actively apply the vocabulary they had learned in class. It proved to be an inspiring experience, as students could relate the projects to their own fields of study, contribute with their insights, and share suggestions from their unique perspectives.

4.3. Teaching practices

While developing the program the professor kept the teaching practices aligned with the Gold standard PBL, Seven project-based teaching practices (Figure 2) in order to make sure that the students actually benefit from participating in the program. It was important for the professor to design the program in a way that gave students the chance to have their voices heard, of course to some extent, as the professor needed to maintain the role of a mediator and guide the students toward the right solution. It was important for students to be organized, deliver their work within deadlines and follow the guidelines provided by the professor. Creating the right atmosphere around the program was essential, with the aim of promoting team work, collaborative and supportive activities, sharing ideas, all leading to high quality results. Through different stages of the project students had the opportunity to upgrade their language skills and knowledge, which was the program's primary goal. By having the essays assessed and receiving feedback from their peers, students were given the opportunity to get an insight into the quality of their work. The aim of this step was to provide students with the guidelines on how to improve their work and to educate students by acknowledging both positive and negative elements of their work. Also, students were asked to give their own feedback on the program to gain insight into how they perceived it, whether they found it beneficial and in order to get potential ideas for future improvements.

5. STUDENTS' FEEDBACK

The students were invited to provide feedback on the program with the purpose of gaining insight into their perceptions, assess its value and provide potential suggestions for further improvements. Their feedback offers valuable insights into how the curriculum could be refined and how the delivery of content might be enhanced. According to Allison Pingree, it has often been proven that feedback gathered halfway through the semester can lead to minor adjustments or guide the planning of future lessons (Pingree, s.d.). Furthermore, collecting and demonstrating reactions on the students' input shows teachers' openness to addressing their needs, reinforcing students' sense of being respected and valued members of the academic community (Blaire, 2017).

Both students who actively participated in the program and those who merely acted as observers participated in the survey. The total number of eighty-five students completed the survey and gave their feedback on the program. However, as the survey progressed, there was a decline in the number of students who participated in it. Among them, seventeen students who completed the survey participated in the program. The survey tool, Mentimeter (https://www.mentimeter.com/), was used. The survey consisted of thirteen questions and it was anonymous.

The initial question, "Do you know anything about the Project-Based Learning program we have implemented this year?" did not yield satisfactory results for the author (Table 2). The reason for this can be found in the fact that English lectures at the Academy of Applied Studies Polytechnic aren't obligatory, so many students simply choose not to attend them regularly. Due to this fact, it is possible that they failed to be informed about the program.

Table 2. Question Nº 1
Source: https://www.mentimeter.com/

ANSWER CHOICES–	RESPONSES–	
Yes	28.24%	24
No	71.76%	5
TOTAL	85	

As already mentioned, the response rate declined throughout the survey, so only 79 students answered question number two: "Have you participated in the program?" Eighteen students responded positively, while sixty-one gave a negative answer.

Regarding question three, the results were somewhat contradictory, as only eighteen students who completed the survey had participated in the program. The question was:"If your answer was YES, what was your motivation for

participating? If your answer was NO, move on to question 4." However, the total number of fifty students answered the question in a following manner (Table 3):

Table 3. Question Nº 3
Source: https://www.mentimeter.com/

ANSWER CHOICES–	RESPONSES–	
I wanted to present some of my projects to my peer colleagues	4%	2
I wanted to get points and get a better grade	8%	4
Both of the above	16%	8
Other	64%	32
TOTAL		50

A possible reason for this contradictory result could be that students misunderstood the question and did not move on to the next one as instructed

The next question was for students who chose not to participate. The question asked why they chose not to participate: "Why did you decide not to participate in the program?" They responded in the following manner (Table 4):

Table 4. Question Nº 4
Source: https://www.mentimeter.com/

ANSWER CHOICES–	RESPONSES–	
I didn't find it useful.	3.57%	2
I am afraid of public speaking.	32.14%	18
I had no project to present	12.5%	7
Other	51.79%	29
TOTAL		56

Only two students indicated that they did not find the program useful, which was encouraging for the author. However, 32.14% reported being afraid of speaking in public, which is an issue that needs to be addressed in the future. More than half of the students selected 'Other,' which requires further discussion to identify the underlying reasons.

The following question sought their opinion on the advantages of the program: "Do you think programs like these are useful methods for learning a foreign language?" Of the sixty students, thirty-seven answered positively, one responded negatively, and twenty-two chose 'to some extent.

Question number six inquired about the process they had to go through in order to complete the program: "Regarding the steps of the program (choosing

the project, making the presentation, presenting, essay writing), was the program too complicated?" Four students answered positively, twenty-six said 'no,' and twenty-three chose 'to some extent'.

Students were asked to provide feedback on the program: "Would you add any steps or change the process in any way?" Eighteen students gave their comments. Eleven of them answered that they wouldn't change anything. Some of them provided the author with some interesting comments and suggestions that could be used for further class optimization:

- *The video could consist of a screen recording of the presentation and the student would just do a voiceover presenting it.*
- *I think that students should be able to make a presentation, but not present it in front of the whole class. Instead, they could either write out how they would present it or even do a video.*
- *More topics for certain study programs.*

They also provided comments in response to the following question: 'Which of the steps did you find most interesting and why?' Eleven students commented, and from their responses, it was concluded that they found all steps of the program interesting:

- *The ideas of the students were fascinating and their perspectives.*
- *The learning in classes because the teacher was pleasant and great at explaining, conversation and discussions during the lectures were the most useful to me in addition to the PowerPoint presentations by other colleagues.*
- *The preparation of the paper also introduced me to the words of the English language that I will use in my profession.*

There were eight comments related to the question: 'Which of the steps did you find most difficult and why?' Four comments referred to public speaking, three to essays, and one student mentioned that the most difficult aspect was discussing the questions after the presentation.

When asked if the program inspired them to do something similar, eight out of thirty-three students responded affirmatively, eleven said no, and fourteen chose 'to some extent.' Since 42% answered negatively, this fact provides the author with an opportunity to explore the reasons and work on improvements.

The following two questions addressed the choice of topics covered during the program and their relevance. Students provided the following responses to question eleven: 'Do you think the projects involved contemporary topics that students of your age are interested in?' (Table 5), and to question twelve 'Do you think students should be involved the process of choosing the topics that are covered during learning the language for specific purposes?' (Table 6).

Table 5. Question Nº 11
Source: https://www.mentimeter.com/

ANSWER CHOICES–	RESPONSES–	
Yes	74.19%	23
No	3.23%	1
To some extent	22.58%	7
TOTAL		31

Table 6. Question Nº 12
Source: https://www.mentimeter.com/

ANSWER CHOICES–	RESPONSES–	
Yes	80.64%	25
No	3.23%	1
To some extent	16.13%	5
TOTAL		31

Finally, the last question provided important insight into the level of success in correlating courses within the Academy. The majority of students (62.07%) answered affirmatively to the question: 'Since there are a lot of students from various study programs studying together, were you able to correlate your field of expertise with other projects?' Only one student answered negatively, and ten students (34.48) chose 'to some extent'. One of the program's objectives was to establish a correlation between courses, making these results not only satisfactory but highly successful.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the gathered information, it can be concluded that Project-Based Learning, combined with the dual education model, provides a strong foundation for developing various programs that allow students to acquire knowledge through practical, real-world experience. The stages of the program were well-structured, aligning effectively with the Seven Essential Project Design Elements. The topics were relevant and contemporary, and the objective of achieving a correlation between courses was successfully met. However, moving forward, the issue of public speaking should be addressed, or alternative options could be offered to students to enhance their motivation to participate in the program. Finally, dual education students have the unique opportunity to develop projects while working, offering their teachers limitless possibilities to incorporate PBL strategies into teaching English for specific purposes.

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PRIMENA TEHNIKA UČENJA ZASNOVANOG NA PROJEKTIMA U NASTAVI STRANIH JEZIKA KOD STUDENATA DUALNOG MODELA OBRAZOVANJA

Rezime

Ovaj rad se bavi primenom strategija učenja zasnovanog na projektima u nastavi engleskog jezika kod studenata dualnog modela studija na Akademiji strukovnih studija Politehnika. Primena strategija nastave usmerenih na studente od suštinskog je značaja u situacijama kada nastavi prisustvuju studenti različitih studijskih programa. Program se sastojao od sedam faza koje su bile usklađene sa Sedam ključnih elemenata dizajna projekta, dok su nastavne prakse bile usklađene sa Sedam nastavnih praksi u okviru projektno orijentisane nastave. U radu su predstavljeni neki od realizovanih projekata, kao i rezultati ankete koju su studenti popunili na kraju programa. Zaključak do kojeg se došlo jeste da učenje zasnovano na projektima, kada se integriše sa dualnim modelom obrazovanja, pruža izvanredan okvir za razvoj raznovrsnih programa koji osnažuju studente da kroz praktična, životna iskustva steknu relevantna znanja. Rad sadrži i određene preporuke i sugestije koje bi trebalo razmotriti u cilju budućeg unapređenja.

Ključne reči: učenje zasnovano na projektima, dualno obrazovanje, program, iskustva iz stvarnog sveta