

Importance of Interdisciplinary Approach in Project Based Learning

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Annotation: Teaching Business English at economics universities nowadays necessitates an interdisciplinary curriculum that incorporates economics, English, and technology studies. The integration of various disciplines helps to improve understanding of the topic, content, and discipline itself. This work provides an overview of how the Interdisciplinary approach is important in Project Based Learning for teaching Business English to economics students. The article is based on the experience gained on project work conducted with freshmen at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy. The purpose of the research is to analyze the process of implementing the approach, assessment procedure, benefits taken and also challenges met by teachers and some recommendations on how to facilitate the process by interdisciplinary cooperation

Keywords: interdisciplinary approach, integration, academic disciplines, Business English, project based learning.

INTRODUCTION

Interdisciplinary research is defined as the deliberate involvement and integration of multiple academic disciplines and methods to investigate a central problem or project. This approach in teaching and learning demands explicit recognition and connection of content and instruction from more than one subject or academic area. Project-Based Learning (PBL) as a “model for classroom activity that shifts away from the classroom practices of short, isolated teacher-centered lessons and instead emphasizes learning activities that are long-term, interdisciplinary, student-centered, and integrated with real-world issues and practices” [1], is well-suited for developing conceptual understanding through the incorporation of various subject areas. It serves as the best complementary for interdisciplinary instruction because it naturally involves many different academic skills, such as reading, writing, listening, speaking and it may also incorporate other academic skills such as critical-thinking and problem solving skills and visual and fine arts skills. Implementing interdisciplinary PBL approach is beneficial in improving students’ research, social, and problem-solving skills on the one hand, and on the other hand, poses certain challenges both for teachers and learners that would not typically arise within a traditional framework. The success or failure of the interdisciplinary approach are teacher, students and administration commitment to effective collaboration, innovation and effort in curriculum re-design, creation and coordination of integration plan.

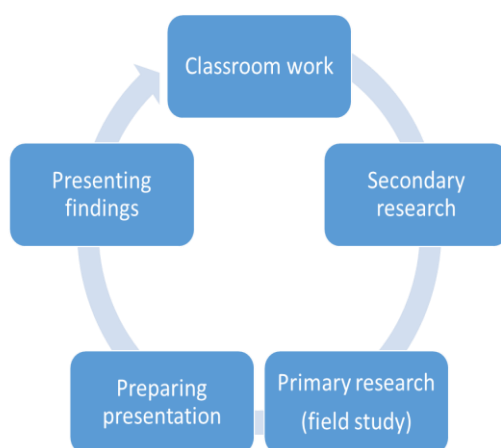
Rethinking and updating methods of teaching English to future economists is one of the most important challenges of modern education. Nowadays, the English language proficiency of students majoring in economics does not always correspond to the Effective Operational Proficiency level mentioned in the Common European Framework of References for Languages. During the meeting of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev on January 31, 2020 with the heads

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of research institutions, scientists, young researchers and representatives of the manufacturing sector, the most important tasks in the field of science were identified. The announcement of 2020 as the Year of Science, Enlightenment and Development of the Digital Economy in our country also provides opportunities for the implementation of priorities in this regard. The process of integration between science and industry, the benefits of which have been neglected or underestimated so far has been made priority in all spheres of higher education. The nature of “interdisciplinary project-based teaching” makes this integration possible in early stages of learning serving to bridge the gap between the different disciplines taught at higher educational institutions. It gives opportunity to students to gain skills outside the classroom as PBLs often include content related to real world issues. Educational researchers have identified the educational benefits of the interdisciplinary approach that help students recognize bias, think critically, tolerate ambiguity and acknowledge and appreciate ethical concerns [2]. Through interdisciplinary PBL learning students are encouraged to become independent problem solvers and promotes understanding across multiple subject areas. The activities are intended to motivate students by appealing to their personal interests as well as through their content. As teachers carefully plan these projects, a natural interconnectedness of topics is supported, allowing for a more comprehensive introduction to curriculum. This comprehensiveness and interconnectedness promotes student comprehension and motivation.

The Interdisciplinary Project Based Learning approach to teaching Business English at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy in Tashkent was realized basing on the course content in Professional English in Use classes. The approach focused on applying the theoretical knowledge acquired in Business English classes (the sample involved 46, upper-intermediate level students) was carried in 2021 March –June and consisted of three stages that included the collection of information, analysis and organization of data in the form of presentation and presenting the material in class.



Students worked in mini groups to carry out a research on a chosen local business and complete 15 tasks which were based on the unit topics (Companies, Leadership, Strategy, Pay, Development, Marketing , Finance, Recruiting and etc.) of the Intellegent Business coursebook. Each unit of the course focuses on certain aspects of economy, mainly basic notions and components of businesses. While studying a unit students gained theoretical knowledge and had to apply the information they got in investigating chosen company. Investigation of a company was

carried out as a **Primary** or a **Secondary** research. In secondary research students refer to information in books, journals, magazines, mass media and internet. While in primary research they had to conduct field study –got the information required directly from the source i.e visited the company assets, talked to the staff or conducted interview. When presenting the information required students indicated the type of research conducted to get the information as **SR** or **PR**. Collaboration with teachers of major subjects proved to be essential in this stage as the theoretical base of the project demanded comparative approach- when student need to compare and contrast basic economic notions in Uzbek and English languages, translate or find equivalents of business terms in English. Students were encouraged to use different types of infographics while formatting the tasks which contribute to the visualizing and making the information vivid.

Teams presented their findings each week upon completing the unit, the keywords of the topic were revised, conclusions were made and they were supposed to make final presentation at the end of the course. The main criteria of IPBL assessment were the following: physical appearance and neatness of presentations, informativity, factual information in the content, delivery, use of analytical and creative approach, timing and teamwork. Students were assessed for individual presentation (each students had to present some part of the project individually at the end of the course) and group work (gathering information, putting it in required format and meeting deadlines). The scores for the group work were divided into current (formative assessment) and final (summative assessment) scores. They received current grades when they presented weekly task on a certain unit while final scores were given when groups successfully finished the project meeting the final deadline. Regular collaborative assessments allowed teachers to check student progress throughout the project timeline and determine potential misconceptions that they can help students correct through research— or direct instruction if necessary.

Implementing IPBL showed that student showed greater interest in learning, better problem solving skills in the process of the project work and displayed stronger content knowledge at the final stage. The students mentioned that interdisciplinary approach was a good opportunity to bring together two disciplines: language and economics, analyze business terms and situations in a better way connecting new learning with what they know and are interested in. The approach gave teachers opportunities to see their discipline from a fresh perspective, to build excitement about teaching and opportunities to collaborate with colleagues.

Teachers will certainly face challenges when implementing PBL that would not normally arise in a traditional framework. Due to PBL's emphasis on student-guided inquiry [3], lesson plans are more difficult to design, and teachers may struggle to select appropriate content. PBL used in UWED, for example, posed certain challenges which were tackled with the support and collaboration of economic teachers. The approach in turn changed into IPBL from initially planned PBL. The most significant problems arose from the unpredictable nature of PBL, as teachers encountered difficulties assisting students with material outside of their content specialty, dealing with unfamiliar challenges or answering unexpected questions. Before designing and initiating each task teachers consulted their counterparts majoring in economic, tried to predict possible questions and prepared answers to them with the help of colleagues to avoid this frustrating situation. Another challenge was that PBL often consumes more class time than traditional teaching methods and reduces a teacher's ability to cover a pre-defined syllabus. In this case teachers considered team-

teaching working, as a technique for IPBL, on certain parts of the tasks and then sharing outcomes and materials.

Conclusions drawn from the conducted work show that IPBL will be invaluable experience both for teachers and students if interdisciplinary collaboration takes place in each stage of the process, from designing tasks to final assessment. However, in the experiment conducted collaboration occurred in certain stages when there was an urgent need to do so. The nature of “interdisciplinary team teaching” suggests doing something that can’t be done individually and is not always initiated by a single subject. Teachers should be ready to commitments to establish required integration level to achieve the goals of the course where planning everything in detail is crucial.

Steps to Successfully Plan IPBL [4]

1. Define problems, issues, topics, or questions that warrant interdisciplinary examination.
2. Present a clear rationale for taking an interdisciplinary approach.
3. Identify relevant disciplines.
4. Conduct a literature review on the topic in each discipline.
5. Identify key underlying assumptions and methods of evaluation.
6. Study the problem and generate insights and predictions from each of the relevant disciplines.
7. Identify conflicts and areas of commonality between disciplines.
8. Develop a cohesive framework of analysis.
9. Combine disciplinary insights to construct an integrated understanding of the topic.

This planning sequence also encourages teachers to acquire content knowledge outside of their discipline, define connections between courses, and create timelines and tasks that address standards from all included subjects. Davis states that, “the ideal interdisciplinary course begins with a great idea that can come from anywhere. Once the course is established that idea grows and the course takes on a life of its own .” [4] Equally important, to realize all the challenges and required efforts of the approach in preparing qualified learners equipped with academic and non-academic skills. Only close cooperation and thorough planning will be beneficial for both sides: the teachers will find the necessary expert advice for the design and implementation of their courses, students will have an opportunity to learn in a high quality learning environment and get better academic achievements

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