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## INTEGRATING PROJECT-BASED LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND FOSTERING STUDENTS’ 21ST-CENTURY SKILLS

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### Abstract

Project-based learning as an innovative, student-centred and teacher-facilitated approach to learning is well recognised and followed in many countries. When it is integrated into EFL classes, not only students’ academic knowledge and technical competences but also their soft skills will increase remarkably. Studying a foreign language with that approach in higher education and developing 21st-century skills along with language proficiency makes the students a valuable asset for the industry they work for in the future. This paper gives insights into the contribution of the Project-based learning method to the advancement of 21st-century skills of students in higher education settings. It provides four basic considerations to incorporate the method effectively into teaching based on observations.

**Keywords:** *Project-based learning, 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, communicative competence, soft skills*

### Abstrakt

Loyihaga asoslangan ta'lim innovatsion, talabaga yo'naltirilgan va o'qituvchi tomonidan osonlashtirilgan ta'lim yondashuvi sifatida ko'plab mamlakatlarda yaxshi tan olingan va qo'llaniladi. U xorijiy til o'qitish amaliyotiga integratsiyalashganda, nafaqat talabalarning akademik bilimlari va texnik kompetentsiyalari, balki yumshoq ko'nikmalari ham sezilarli darajada ortadi. Oliy ta'limda shunday yondashuv bilan chet tilini o'rganish va tilni bilish bilan birga XXI asr ko'nikmalarini rivojlantirish talabalarni kelajakda ishlayotgan soha uchun qimmatli hazinaga aylantiradi. Ushbu maqolada loyihaga asoslangan ta'lim usulining oliy ta'lim muassasalarida talabalarning XXI asr ko'nikmalarini rivojlantirishga qo'shadigan hissasi haqida tushuncha berilgan. Unda ushbu usulni ta'limda samarali qo'llashda hisobga olish joiz bo'lgan to'rtta asosiy mulohazalar ilgari surilgan.

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**Kalit so‘zlar:** *Loyihaga asoslangan ta’lim, 21 asr ko’nikmalari, kommunikativ layoqat, yumshoq ko’nikmalar*

### **Аннотация**

Проектное обучение как инновационный подход, ориентированный на студента и осуществляемый под руководством учителя, хорошо признано и применяется во многих странах. Когда оно интегрируется в занятия по английскому языку как иностранному, не только академические знания и техническая компетенция студентов значительно повышаются, но и их мягкие навыки. Изучение иностранного языка таким подходом в высшем образовании и развитие навыков 21 века наряду с языковой грамотностью делают студентов ценным активом для будущей сферы их профессиональной деятельности. В данной статье представлены идеи о вкладе метода проектного обучения в развитие навыков 21 века студентов в условиях высшего образования. Она предоставляет четыре основных соображения для эффективной интеграции метода в преподавание на основе наблюдения.

**Ключевые слова:** *Проектное обучение, навыки 21 века, коммуникативная компетенция, мягкие навыки*

In the fast-paced, rapidly changing world with massive resources to be educated in a particular field graduates are being equipped with most of the technical skills in their educational establishments. However, the demand for individuals who are attired with 21st-century skills is increasing year by year. These skills go beyond academic knowledge and it is highly important to develop them before the graduates go to the labour market. The range of skills such as teamwork, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication and many other skills that form the 21st-century skills can be effectively developed, improved or advanced by productively incorporating Project-based teaching and learning into higher education.

Project-based learning as an instructional, learner-centred approach fosters active learning. Regarding foreign language learning the method is highly important as it not only fosters meaningful foreign language learning but also contributes to the refinements of soft skills that can be developed by means of various project-based

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learning activities. It is an instructional methodology that gives students a great chance to learn by implementing the skills and knowledge around projects. It is a student-centred approach as it appeals to students’ personal differences encouraging all of them to deeper learning in context. Apart from classic teaching approaches in which students are mostly required or expected to memorize the information, the project-based learning approach organizes learning around projects which are effective tools for student-driven and teacher-facilitated learning. Moreover, it develops the personal and social responsibility of students which is increasingly significant in educating and upbringing the younger generation.

Pedagogical foundations of project-based learning are commonly associated with John Dewey. Having been introduced in the 20th century, it was widely followed in European countries mostly in medical and business education. As a philosopher, Dewey states that education is not about preparation for a life but education is a life itself. Thus he claims that education is a social process that is closely correlated to real life.

As for our country, project-based learning is not widely used in teaching and learning. We mostly include some elements of this method in teaching, for instance, foreign language teaching. The method is applied in the activity type to support learning, however, in many institutions still, it is unlikely to be put into application as a form of assessment. The assessment based on the project is designed to engage students using real-world problems. Hence, project-based learning is an integrative approach since real-world challenges are not almost always solved using information or skills from a single subject area. In project-based learning, students are required to become engaged in inquiry, research and action plans to help address the issue or challenge that they are working on. While accomplishing the task students usually utilize the content knowledge and skills from multiple academic areas to successfully complete the project. They work in teams dividing their tasks depending on their capabilities, cooperating and discussing their findings so that they will be able to sort out the most relevant ideas and provide optimal solutions to the problem they are investigating. In turn, solving highly complicated problems necessitates the fact that students have both fundamental skills of the subject area and 21st-century skills that can be referred to as teamwork, collaboration, research, communication, problem-solving, time management and employing high-tech tools. With the set of these skills, students become managers of their own learning process that is led and mentored by a

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skilled teacher. Thus, project-based learning unleashes creative energy among students and teachers.

As higher education institutions strive to prepare students for the challenges of the future, project-based learning emerged as an effective approach to fostering students' essential soft skills such as communication, public speaking, problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, teamwork, collaboration etc. The method emphasizes active engagement, inquiry and real-world application. By engaging in projects the following soft skills are enhanced in students:

*Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving:* All projects require students to analyze complex problems, think critically, and develop innovative solutions. With the help of this process, students learn to evaluate information, make informed decisions, and apply their knowledge in practical contexts.

*Collaboration and Teamwork:* Project-based learning often involves collaborative work, where students collaborate with their peers to achieve common goals. This promotes teamwork, communication, and interpersonal skills, as students learn to work effectively in diverse teams and leverage each other's strengths.

*Presentation and Communication Skills:* Projects often culminate in presentations or reports, which provide students with opportunities to enhance their communication skills. They learn to articulate their ideas, express themselves clearly, and present their work to an audience, thereby developing confidence in public speaking.

*Creativity and Innovation:* Project-based learning encourages students to think creatively and explore innovative approaches to problem-solving. By designing and executing their projects, students have the freedom to experiment, take risks, and unleash their creativity, fostering an entrepreneurial mindset.

Thus, it is highly suggested to use this method purposefully in teaching since it provides an opportunity for better and deeper learning. Nevertheless, in order to effectively integrate the method into higher education the following considerations should be made carefully:

1. Curriculum design. Project-based learning should be an important, regular component of a curriculum in higher education. Teachers should design projects that are aligned with the learning outcomes of their programs. They

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should give opportunity for students to experience hard and soft skills in real-life learning settings.

2. Faculty Training. Faculty members should have clear instructions and a solid knowledge of how to implement project-based learning in project design, assessment strategies, project management and facilitation.
3. Assessment and feedback. As was mentioned above, project works should be widely used as a form of assessment and students must receive feedback on how well they are performing/have performed on a regular basis. Subsequently, this feedback will help students to reflect on their learning and further improve their soft skills.
4. Resources and Facilities. Higher educational institutions supporting this active learning should provide necessary learning facilities and resources such as libraries, learning areas or learning spaces that give students an opportunity for collaboration and teamwork.

By properly integrating project-based learning into higher education curricula, particularly foreign language teaching and providing the necessary support, institutions can empower students to become lifelong learners and adaptable professionals in an ever-evolving world. As a final analysis, wisely and timely following a project-based method leads to creative and effective learning that may contribute to the development of highly important 21st-century skills.

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