

PROJECT METHOD USAGE FOR THE DIGITAL STUDENTS IN LEARNING ESL

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INTRODUCTION

Value of education is hard to exaggerate. Student all over the world are seeking for quality, prestigious and modern education. The approaches to the modern education require to put the personality of a student in the center of educational paradigm.

Education should be not only a stage in life, but the way to make this life prosperous and fruitful. This is possible only if education has practical potential that combined not only theory, but practice at the very beginning.

In this research we will concentrate on the creative and relatively modern method of education – project method in the framework of students who study English as their second foreign language. Also this is vital to emphasize that psychological aspects are important in the process of successful education, so we are concentrated on suggesting the best teaching methods for students of digital (zoomers generation) who are the majority now in the higher education system.

Creative educating and psychological supporting are the keys to successful learning of the foreign language that help students to master it in short terms with high practical value.

Creativity in the process of educating – this is the paramount issue that helps students to develop necessary skills and use language knowledge in the practical way. Giving students a possibility to create their own language space – this is crucial for making their progress grow.

Project method is one of the most creative ones among other feasible and contemporary educational methods. We will rely on it in our editorial practice because it is greatly in help for making practical students' skills.

This is vital to let students follow their skill that they already have for creating a project and not restrict them in choosing the direction and lexical choices while demonstrating and presenting their works to their groupmates and the educator.

Contemporary education paradigm is strongly connected with psychology and age psychology in particular. Moreover, one of the most effective approaches is to follow the interests and general psychological type of generation to which the student belongs. Our focus group will consist of the students who are Z-generation (Zoomers) who were born in 2000 and further. They have some definite peculiarities in their worldview and they require new and interesting approaches for the educator in terms to have the best results in learning the subject and building leadership in their future carrier.

Providing some practical recommendations and revealing important tendencies in digital generation education are the goal of our research. Beforehand let's consider the classification of generations in general and zoomers in particular.

1. Generation theory. Digital Students (Zoomers) as the contemporary phenomenon. Project Method. Main aspects

First of all, this is vital to emphasize that exists theory of definite generations division. Some scientists think that this belongs much to marketing strategies, but still, this information can be successful applied to educational sphere. Our main goal is to clarify the main physiological traits of the contemporary students of age 17–23 who belong to so called “zoomers” generation.

This will help us to identify and elaborate the best teaching method that will allow them to master foreign language quickly and to have more carrier opportunities in future. When the student of any specialty speaks English fluently, he can be automatically more successful in obtain more interesting and profitable positions.

Let's briefly consider the main generations division suggested by **Neil Howe and William Strauss in 1991 in their book *Generations*¹**. Generation names are the following:

- Great Generation
- Silent Generation
- Baby-boomers
- X Generation
- Y Generation (Millennials)
- Z Generation (Zoomers, digital generation)

This theory supports the idea that every 20-25 years the change of generations becomes. So, the people who belong to the definite generation possess common values, behavior peculiarities and skills. The trigger for this are the same historical events in which these people were emerged and grew.

¹ William Strauss, Neil Howe. *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*. Morrow. 1991. 358 p.

Without dependence on the country of birth, the generation equally comes through wars or economic crisis. For example, grandmothers who suffered from famine in the post-war period, had been making the food stocks in their houses just in case of repeating of such sad scenario in future. They also overfed their grandchildren for the same reason.

Also generations – this is one of the age groups ordering. In their research work **Neil Howe and William Strauss** characterized generation from 1433 year. But in the focus of our interest are the representatives of zoomers (digital) generation who are current students now. Here are the main characteristics and values of zoomers generation:

Values:

- Leading internet-technologies (Wikipedia, Facebook, Google, Youtube, Zoom, AI). Their wide usage;
- Wide usage of platforms for earning money and self-advertising (Instagram, Tik-Tok);
- Online live streams on current topics;
- Blogging is the way of self-manifestation.

These young people were born in the era of internet technologies and they cannot imagine their life without this source. The majority even in the very young age already have had profiles in social nets. They grew in the internet technologies and are open to new possibilities that are growing rapidly (Artificial Intelligence, chat GPT)

Zoomers' traits that are given above aren't all – global events are changing very quickly these days, so this is possible to discover more about this generation further because of this reason and the changes in the characters with getting maturity. But as for psychological traits – we can give a brief description:

- Social responsibility
- Visual information perception
- Tolerance
- Internet as a basic value
- **Project learning**
- Value of work
- Responsibility
- Interest to ecological problems
- Ability to work with huge amount of information
- Self-denitrification
- Know their wishes and goals.

Professor Jean Twenge in her book *iGen* described these traits of zoomers in a profound way. In the following citation Professor Twenge describes the most distinct peculiarities: “ technology is not the only thing that makes iGen distinct from every generation before them; they are also

different in how they spend their time, how they behave, and in their attitudes toward religion, sexuality, and politics. They socialize in completely new ways, reject once sacred social taboos, and want different things from their lives and careers. More than previous generations, they are obsessed with safety, focused on tolerance, and have no patience for inequality. iGen is also growing up more slowly than previous generations: eighteen-year-olds look and act like fifteen-year-olds used to”²

Due to forecasts of **Urban Dictionary**, zoomers generation will be more cautious and conservative. They will have tendency for depression and anxiety. *“Probably all are either depressed, have anxiety or both ”*³. This is easy to explain, because they live in the situation of global wars – real wars, political and economic with huge risks for ecology and health. Internet lets them be present in any point of the world and to have the full understanding of what is going on. The latest news, up-to-date information – all this is available for them.

Knowing so much causes some kind of depression because of global world instability. But at the same time technologies let zoomers be more confident in future with development of numerous internet professions.

They can master such professions easily and feel comfortable earning decent salaries in future. This also gives them opportunity, because their job carrier can start really early. This gives zoomers opportunity to choose from many options the perfect for them.

Usage of global net gives wide opportunities of working in the international companies without physical presence. So, English knowledge opens many doors for ambitious young job seekers. Zoomers are motivated to learn English from the very early age and many of them have relatively high level of the subject. Educator must take this fact into consideration and offer project method as one of the perfect for this generation.

Building individual approach will also help zoomers to find their own educational way and to achieve the best results. In the project you are controlling every process and create your own vision and share it with others. This greatly helps to develop leadership and to get rid of anxiety, because you know all the details about the future project and you know it better than anyone else.

Project method itself is the teaching tool while students are emerged into the real process and interact with the educator and groupmates in a practical way. Comparing to traditional roles of the educator and student when there are lectures and practical classes, project method gives more opportunities exactly for practical communication and “learning by doing” strategy.

² Jean Twenge. iGen.

³ Urban dictionary by wt137 September 10, 2021

This way students can plan and execute their work showing results like presentation or practical involving in the activity.

As for history of the question. The inventor of this method was an American educator William Heard Kilpatrick. Among his revolutionary ideas were involving of the student in the practical and social activity during learning. He denied traditional system of ready-made classes when a teacher just gives information and a student follows a teacher without research and individual trajectory.

The main task of a student according to Kilpatrick's theory, was to learn in a practical way and search for individual learning and development.

In 20–30 years of XXth century the project method was firstly applied. According to it, students' chose themselves the contents of their studies. The educator only assisted them in the practical implementation of this project. The student has his own life experience and the task of a teacher is to help him in to correlate this with learning process. The way to solve the project studying problem is the student's responsibility. This way a student can apply some theory in a practical way and acquire new knowledge and broad his understating of the task.

Also this method will help the student to be ready for new challenged not only in studies, but in real life. This way the student can be more ready for tasks solving in a practical way. (Kilpatrick:3) W. Kilpatrick in his work *The Project Method* stated "that the child may properly progress, the total situation – all the factors of life, including comrades – speaking, if need be through the teacher, must make clear its selective judgment upon what is done, approving the better, rejecting the worse. In a true sense the whole remaining discussion is but to support the contention here argued in advance that education based on the purposeful act prepares best for life while at the same time it constitutes the present worthy life itself"⁴

In our contemporary conditions with zoomers generations these words are really up-to-date. The most important is the fact that students according to this method are truly responsibly for the knowledge and its level. When the students do this project themselves, they definitely feel more engaged and proud of themselves.

In the modern conditions with much information and access to internet resources this is relatively easy to execute a project and to gain new experience and new knowledge. Zoomers are familiar with technologies, so, this tasks will be easy and this will help to concentrate on new material and learn it much better.

There are three stages in preparing of the project:

- Choosing a topic

⁴ William Heard Kilpatrick. *The Project Method* . Publisher. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University . March, 1929.

- Making a plan (simple or complex) depending on tasks
- Elaborate a project
- Present a project
- Making conclusions and reflecting on the main aspect of it.

2. Practical implementation of the project method

For making project method more effective we suggest some practical decisions with relevant topics and commentaries on their choice. First of all, these materials have a practical value, the ESL students of all years of study. While discussing the topic for the future project students were very active and suggested the topics that were interesting for them.

In many cases project activity involves deep interaction with the audience and can grow into discussion or even debates.

This way the topics should include some controversial issues and provoke emotions and desire to participate in the discussion. The level of students has been taken into consideration. Some topics are more appropriate for younger students and some for more mature and experienced like third, fourth year learners.

While preparing for presenting the projects, students were suggested several platforms for helping them like Tweek, Lexile and others.

For creative thinking development we offered students to express their opinions without any restrictions and to show in their works. They could use the vocabulary that was relatively easy for their current language level.

The percentage of unknown words shouldn't be numerous; in this case it will be hard for the students to feel confident during discussion. This is very vital issue, because very often in the group of ESL students of the same year of study have distinctly different language level.

For involving students with relatively low language level project method can really work, because they can present their thoughts on their language level and they can still feel on a par with higher language proficiency students in the group.

This method can also be the way to fight fear of public speech and to develop not only language, but also leader skills that is crucial for the future carrier. Digital students tend to choose project method of learning, close to their mental structure and psychological peculiarities.

Taking into consideration curriculum and individual learning trajectories of the students, projects can help to solve many tasks for the learners in terms of upgrading their linguistic potential and ability to apply this knowledge in a practical way.

Also project method helps students to develop their skill of individual performing and of working in the team. These two skills will be greatly in need for building their carrier in the majority of areas.

Here is the list of project topics for the students taking into consideration the above facts and Practical value for the generation of zoomers. It doesn't mean that we cannot apply this method for the different age group, but for this particular generation it will be very much in help.

Suggested Project Topics first year ESL students:

- About Myself
- Everyday Routine
- Are you a Lark or an Owl?
- My appearance. Fair description
- My best friend and beloved relatives
- My native city/town
- My favorite weather
- My favorite visual art
- Geographical position of my country
- My favorite holiday (religious and public)

These topics are relatively simple and many of students already have some basic knowledge of these themes. It will be easy for them to create a project that can be interesting and valuable. Grammar usage can be simple and easy for the students of this ESL level.

Suggested Project Topics 2-year ESL students:

- Traveling in my life
- Politics in my worldview
- My favorite things to do. Leisure
- My career ambitions
- Outstanding person for me
- Means of Transport. Favorite ones
- Higher Education system in English-speaking and my own countries
- The capital of my country. Interesting places to visit
- Charity. My attitude
- Space and me. The structure of Solar system

This scope of themes can be interesting for older students who have more life experience, traveling, in particular. These topics will help students to communicate freely and express their attitudes and opinions for broad their horizons. Grammatical constructions can be more complex, using of all tenses is desirable.

Suggested Project Topics 3-year ESL students:

- Prominent Festivals of my country
- Cuisine of my country
- Importance of Sports in my life
- Cinema Vs Theater: what is more attractive for me
- Healthcare in my country
- My emotions about war

- Emotional Intellect
- Management skills
- My financial literacy
- Good manners. How do you understand this?

These topics suggest students to show the diversity of their own country and to speak about similarities and differences in the cultural issues. This is especially interesting when students belong to different nationalities and countries that can name a project and further discussion vivid and informative for all participants. Grammar issues can be more complicated comparing to the second year students, vocabulary can include more diverse words, wide usage of synonyms.

Suggested Project Topics 4-year ESL students

- Digitalization: Pros and Cons
- Law system of my country
- Political system of my country
- My carrier goals
- Artificial intelligence
- Raw Materials of my country
- Spiritual Issues. Their place in my life
- Economic activity in my country
- Parents and children: their interaction
- Optimism vs realism. Which strategy is more appropriate?

These topics have some abstract component and touch the sphere of future carrier goals. For older students this is evident which direction to choose and how to see themselves in the profession. Some students already have working experience and interaction with colleagues and have some issues to share and discuss. The complexity of grammar should grow: usage of idioms and various stylistics devices is desirable.

Suggested Project Topics for Master ESL students. Problematic Issues for discussion:

- Gossiping. Your attitude
- Lucky chance. Have you ever had it?
- Do you have any regrets about your life?
- Place of Musical Art in my worldview
- Law or justice. How do you understand it?
- Climate changes. What do you think on this matter?
- Your ideal work conditions
- A vegetarian or a meat consumer? What makes better for the planet?
- What is mental health for me?
- Green energy. My thoughts.

The projects for Master students should include the themes where this is possible to make a discussion and to apply your working and life experience

you have. Some topics have philosophical, spiritual component. At this level of English knowledge this vital for students to talk on the unordinary topics with their own ideas and possibilities to be as creative as they are able. Grammar usage can be close to advanced or upper-intermediate. Anyway, the student has a right to choose the most appropriate grammar issue for the project depending on his/her level.

Individual work that is a substantial part of any curriculum. Project method can be in a great help in this case. The topics of project can be suggested as an individual task, especially if the classes of ESL aren't numerous. For the students this option can be a perfect decision to show their skills and to develop creative thinking at the same time. Here are some variants for further implementation:

Project Topics for individual leaning. Problematic Issues for discussion:

- Democracy. What is this for you?
- Online Jobs: Pros and Cons
- Psychological comfort. Personal boundaries
- Women's Rights
- Environment Protection. Its importance
- The phenomenon of Global Culture
- Modern technologies. Your attitude.
- Healthy diet. How do you understand it?
- Hardships of moving to another city
- Gadgets in my life
- Human rights

From the list the student can choose the project that is close to his/her interests and field of specialization. This fulfills the idea of individual approach to each student in terms to help him/her improve foreign language skills and to develop critical thinking and broaden knowledge.

It will be wise to combine project method with discussions in terms of ESL learning. This approach has already shown good result and the combination of these two methods can be in a great help for the educator.

Professor A. Zelenov in his work devoted to the digital generation also suggests discussion as the effective method for successful zoomers' learning: "One more method that is suggested by the specialists, is discussion and searching for the alternative. Seeing only one viewpoint is always dangerous... Discussion and participation in the discussion clubs and round tables makes a person sane and reasonable. This is better to take part in discussion itself, not in debates. In the process of debates people are feeling strong in their opinion and want to win.

Discussion participants not only defend their view points, but try to listen to the opponents, to understand each other and to find truth. Both are vital – discussion and debates, but the latter develops skills and desire to think.

Controversial viewpoint develops analytical thinking. The more of this controversy, the wider is spectrum of reflections. If the person knows only one point of view, the self-made boundaries are built, so, there can be development in this case”⁵

From the teaching practice we can assure that combination in these two methods gives strong effective results. Moreover, students feel really motivated. Even students with low English skills can demonstrate good results and enthusiasm during preparation.

This is important to make the process of learning interesting and reducing of dull tasks can be one of the solutions.

Certainly, this much concerns oral practice, because grammar issues must be taught thoroughly and profoundly for any student of any generation.

Practical approach will be in need to build a perfect class with effective result in future. Making classes of foreign language interesting is a crucial, but rather complicated task. Project method is one of the means that help any educator to solve this problem and rise motivation. Self-reflection is the key for future success and acquiring of new knowledge, especially during discussion, makes students see more in the given topic that before its analysis and projecting.

CONCLUSIONS

As the conclusion we can say that in our research the topic of project method usage was analyzed and some practical recommendation were presented. For the digital generation project method is one of the most effective.

It lets zoomers feel free with technologies and gives freedom of choice. Zoomers don't like to be instructed and project method gives this possible to develop in the unique way.

Also this is important to stress that in learning English this method is perfect, because even students with low English proficiency still can perform and participate. This way a problem when there are students of different English level is solved. Every student has the tasks and tools to fulfill this tasks. This forms individual approach and helps the student not only improve skills, but learn how to deal with information, to make a plan, to analyze, to perform and to reflect.

Discussions and debates are also vital to makes these skills strong. These skills are greatly in need in adult life. In such a way, the students are more prepared to their future carrier goals and individual intellectual growth. This is hard to make digital generation read paper books or admire classical

⁵ Є.А.Зеленов. Цифрове покоління: витоки, особливості, засоби взаємодії : монографія. Вид-во ЧНУ ім. В. Даля. Київ, 2023. 240 с.

literature, but this is completely possible to grow interest to practical and important things for their further life.

Learning English is one of the keys for building successful carrier and to achieve difficult goals. With strong English knowledge this is much easier to get well-paid position and to be a real professional in the chosen sphere.

The topics what were suggested in the practical part of our research have been chosen taking into consideration students' interests, their psychological peculiarities and global tendencies. They can help in preparation for the future and to keep focus on improving English skills.

For digital generation this is vital to keep interest vivid and to reduce anxiety. These two aspect project method covers completely.

Some tasks require more profound research that we are to do in the next publications.

SUMMARY

Foreign language learning is rather complicated process that involves several tasks to complete. First of all – to help the student to master language in a fast and quality way taking into consideration speaking, audial, writing and visual competences. Many methods have been applied to reach this goal. In our case we suggest training of visual and speaking competences using project method of ESL student of different age groups. For effective result this is crucial to take into consideration the generation issue. Contemporary students mainly belong to so-called digital generation (z-generation: IGen, zoomers). Therefore, they require special approach and understanding of their common psychological tendencies.

Due to scientific researches project method itself is one of the most effective for the above generation and has already shown good and stable results in English learning in particular. In the article some practical tips are suggested. They can be used both for classwork and individual tasks as well.

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