SUSTAINABLE PROJECT BASED LEARNING –

A FRAMEWORK TO DEVELOP THE

PRAGMATIC ENGLISH COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Angela DIMITRIU,

Universitatea de Stat din Moldova

Project-based learning represents a complex approach, a sustainable and creative context that, besides benefiting the process of learning, communication and active cooperation, facilitates the development of skills. Taking into account these aspects, project-based learning is a valuable, meaningful and effective method for developing the pragmatic English communication skills of students in vocational education and training both in their professional career and personal life. Appeared at the end of the 19ᵗʰ century, the project-based method is still used today in teaching as a premise for the sustainable development of skills, including the pragmatic English communication skills, which is imperative in preparing students for the complex requirements of the professional career and for the integration in the personal and professional life both at national and global level.

Keywords: *pragmatic communication skills, project-based learning, English language.*

SUSTENABILITATEA ÎNVĂȚĂRII BAZATĂ PE PROIECTE – CADRU PENTRU DEZVOLTAREA COMPETENȚEI DE COMUNICARE PRAGMATICĂ ÎN LIMBA ENGLEZĂ

Învățarea bazată pe proiecte reprezintă o abordare complexă, un context sustenabil și creativ care pe lângă faptul că avantajează procesul de învățare, comunicare și cooperare activă, facilitează dezvoltarea de competențe. Luând în considerare aceste aspecte, învățarea prin proiecte este o metodă valoroasă, semnificativă și eficientă pentru dezvoltarea competenței de comunicare pragmatică în limba engleză, la elevii din învățământul profesional tehnic, atât pentru cariera profesională, cât și pentru viața personală. Apărută la sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea, metoda proiectului este valorificată și în prezent în demersul didactic drept premisă pentru dezvoltarea sustenabilă a competențelor, inclusiv a competenței de comunicare pragmatică în limba engleză – imperativ în pregătirea elevilor pentru cerințele complexe ale carierei profesionale și pentru integrarea lor în viața personală și profesională atât la nivel național, cât și global.

Cuvinte cheie: *competențe de comunicare pragmatică, învățare bazată pe proiecte, limba engleză.*

Introduction

By definition, project-based learning is a method, an activity, which has a well-defined purpose and organizes learning in a meaningful context around different thematic activities [1, p. 93]. The introduction of project-based learning is not a new idea in education, this model has its origins in the late 19th century, when John Dewey and William Kilpatrick emphasized the importance of acquiring knowledge and developing skills through practical experience. The project-based learning transforms the traditional classroom into a student-centered learning environment, providing both environment and context for collaboration and exploration of real-life or future career-related problems.

Through the project-based method, students acquire knowledge and develop skills during an extended period of time. The students' task in the project is to investigate and answer authentic, engaging and complex questions, problems or challenges. At the end of the projects, under the guidance of teachers, students develop realistic products or presentations.

The project-based learning is an effective method of developing professional skills, involving practical and collaborative activities that allow students to apply their knowledge and skills in a real context [2, pp. 94-95].

This method is essential for the development of pragmatic Englich communication skills, ensuring a deep and sustainable understanding of the importance of this language. Through projects, students learn

to communicate effectively in English in pragmatic situations, such as by interacting with native speakers, including students from other countries within European projects. They develop skills of clear and coherent expression, of understanding the communicative intentions and of adapting to different professional communication contexts.

This educational approach promotes the effective transfer of knowledge and skills, especially of pragmatic English communication skills, through the active involvement of students in various practical activities. Through projects, students learn to collaborate, solve issues, and adapt to new and challenging situations. These skills are essential in a globalized world, where effective communication in English is becoming increasingly important and indispensable for the professional and personal success.

The role of the didactic approach in the project-based learning method

To develop pragmatic English communication skills for the professional career, project-based learning outlines the aspects related to the design of the didactic approach with activities relevant for the project theme, clearly defined roles for teachers and students, integration of connections in the professional context and continuous reflection on the progress in the development of pragmatic English communication skills.

The researcher Catalina Ulrich emphasizes the importance of project-based learning in the teaching approach, pointing out that „the stake is no longer to support the supremacy of cognition at individual level, but to explain how a community of generating cognitive processes can appear." C. Ulrich highlights the fact that „in the process of developing a project, the group members exchange ideas, opinions and information, sharing their joys and discoveries. The group members do not focus on individual solutions, but on the results of the collaborative efforts. Thus, the project-based method promotes cooperative learning, where „collaborative learning involves the development of a shared understanding through interactions with others with the participants being engaged in activities dedicated to sharing common goals or solving certain issues" [4, p. 91].

Continuing with this idea, it is worth emphasizing that the project-based method significantly changes the role of the teacher and the student. The teacher no longer leads the courses in the form of traditional lectures, but becomes a flexible and motivating facilitator, interested in the project's topic. The teacher's main role is to guide and observe, helping students to solve tasks on their own. The students involved in thematic projects tend to be more engaged, better understand the content and apply it in a certain context, either professionally or personally. Therefore, it is important for the teacher to focus on the relevant design of the activities and the organization and coordination of the learning process, while the students must demonstrate the ability to use and apply the acquired knowledge and be motivated to study English for their future professional career. Thus, we ascertain that an innovative and motivating didactic approach with activities aimed at achieving this goal is necessary for the development of pragmatic English communication skills. A series of activities can be carried out in a project to support the development of pragmatic English communication skills. Such activities include as follows:

- *Debates:* Organizing debates on various topics in the English language is a great way to develop pragmatic communication skills. Students will learn to express their opinions and arguments in a coherent and persuasive way.

- *Role playing:* Students are divided into groups and assigned specific roles so that they simulate real English communication situations. This will help them understand how language can vary depending on the context and develop negotiation and persuasion skills.

- *Listening and comprehension activities:* Students are exposed to different audio or video materials in English, such as interviews, speeches or dialogues, and are encouraged to identify and interpret the pragmatic elements of communication, such as intonation, gestures or tone of voice.

- *Research projects:* Students are involved in research projects that focus on the pragmatic aspects of the English language, such as the use of the language in business environment or tourism. This will help them develop research skills and improve their ability to use language appropriately and effectively in various situations, for example related to their future professional career.

- *Activities to produce written messages:* Students are encouraged to write formal or informal letters, e-

mails or tourist itineraries in English, in order to develop their writing skills and understand the pragmatic requirements specific to these types of communication.

- *Feedback:* Students seek feedback from teachers, colleagues or native English speakers, or project partners, to identify their strengths and weaknesses in communication, using the feedback to continuously improve their skills.

The didactic approach in the project-based method, aimed at developing the pragmatic English communication skills for the professional career, outlines the following steps:

- *Identifying a relevant thematic project:* The project shall be relevant to the students' area of interest or future professional career and involve practical and collaborative activities.

- *Setting objectives:* The project objectives shall be clear, specific, measurable, accessible, relevant and time-bound.

- *Planning and organization/implementation:* The project plan shall be developed in detail and include the steps and activities required to achieve the project objectives. The teacher shall ensure the necessary resources (time, team, materials, etc.) to carry out the project successfully.

The European project, a sustainable framework for the development of pragmatic English communication of students in vocational education and training

Leveraging on the project-based learning in the context of developing pragmatic English communication skills, it is worth highlighting the essence of the European eTwinning projects implementation to achieve this objective. We consider the European eTwinning projects to be an effective way to develop the pragmatic English communication skills of students in vocational education and training, as these are implemented during a certain period of time, for example, an academic year or a semester. Thus, new horizons and opportunities are opened to students for the sustainable development of pragmatic English communication skills.

eTwinning is a program launched by the European Commission in 2007 and represents a community of teachers from pre-university institutions, including VET schools, from 44 countries. In the Republic of Moldova, the eTwinning program was launched in 2013, offering VET teachers the opportunity to implement the project-based method in light of the eTwinning projects [6].

One of the most important dimensions of eTwinning projects is the international thematic collaboration between teachers and students. Moreover, parents, economic agents, librarians and local authorities can participate in these projects. During the implementation of an eTwinning project, teachers from different disciplines collaborate and plan activities for their students to develop students' transversal and specific skills. They play an active role, interact, analyze, make decisions, respect each other and acquire skills. An eTwinning project offers dynamics to the educational approach, involving students in an interactive and friendly process of learning, international collaboration and communication in a foreign language.

The European eTwinning projects are based on five quality criteria: *pedagogical innovation, curricular integration, collaboration between partner schools, use of technology and results and documentation.*

The *pedagogical innovation* criterion implies the use of various pedagogical methods and techniques, which demonstrate originality in the project topic and active involvement of students. Students have the main role in the project: they interact with partners from abroad, work in collaboration, using different methods such as information gathering, problem solving, documentation and comparative activity. Students play different roles and, in case of vocational education and training, they are focused on the chosen specialty/field and qualification: travel agents, receptionists, technicians, cooks, etc.

The *curricular integration* criterion is based on the integration of the eTwinning project into the didactic process and project-based pedagogical framework is coherently explained and exemplified by the teaching staff. Thus, the thematic activities of the project are carried out during class hours and allow students to develop their skills according to the objectives of the didactic project.

The criterion *collaboration between partner schools* highlights the fact that the activities are performed in collaboration and are not limited to communication only. This criterion also implies that partners are not only receivers of information, as the collaborative activities shall lead to the development of a concrete

product in partnership (for example, the development of an electronic book/magazine by a transnational team of students).

The *use of technology* implies that the technology serves to help the partners achieve their pedagogical goals of the project. ICT tools help the partners collaborate better with each other. The use of ICT increases the interest in the discipline studied, is useful for mastering the material and contributes to the development of students' creative thinking, allows students to develop their digital competence, discover and expand their creative potential.

The *results and documentation quality* criterion requires project results assurance. These are presented online, through the project's virtual space, which is secure and is called TwinSpace. Thus, the students are involved through TwinSpace, in all stages of the project, from planning and implementation to evaluation and feedback. The results are recorded, including by presenting the analysis of the formative and summative evaluations that must justify the achievement of the proposed pedagogical objectives (for example, the development of transversal skills, or the skills of pragmatic communication in English, etc.). At the same time, the impact that the project had on the students and teachers involved in the project is mentioned [7].

The European eTwinning projects represent a viable, functional and sustainable framework for achieving a goal, in particular of developing the pragmatic English communication skills. In the table below, the outline of a European eTwinning project is presented, designed based on the five eTwinning quality criteria.

Table 1. The outline of an European eTwinning project.

Title	TRIP - Travelling Responsibly Inspired and Peacefully
Educational level/Field	Vocational education and Training, Tourism, Hospitality, Business, ICT
Participating countries	Republic of Moldova, Poland, Italy, Turkey, Romania
Project description	The project aims to promote and capitalize the national tourist attractions, culture and traditions. It starts with the creation of the partnership between schools, the students introduce themselves, present their institution, country and hometown. Students play the role of travel agents, exploring the tourist attractions of the participating countries. After discovering them, they promote them to the project partners through discussions, informative presentations, and communication. Also, the students are divided into 5 international mixed teams, and each team makes a tourist itinerary that represents a trip to the five partner countries. Each trip is addressed to one of these five target groups of tourists: students interested in the culture of these countries; retirees (old people); athletes practicing hiking; a family (parents and children); young art enthusiasts.
No. of students involved/age	Total number of students involved form 5 countries: 60 students/ 16-19 years old
Objectives	- *Creation of the European eTwinning educational partnership:* promoting the institution, the country and the hometown. - *Research:* Studying and identifying ten tourist attractions in the native country. - *Analysis:* recognizing and presentating/showing ten most important tourist attractions from the Republic of Moldova, Turkey, Poland, Italy, Romania. - *Valorization and promotion of tourist attractions and national traditions:* developing a tourist itinerary (including offers for accommodation, transport, food services). Each group of mixed students proposes to each target group of tourists, an itinerary for travelling and visiting two tourist attractions in each partner country. - *Communication in English and online international collaboration in asynchronous and synchronous manner through online tools.* - *Collaboration for the creation of the common product:* developing the e-guidebook for the five travel itineraries reflecting the visit in five countries participating in the project.

Pedagogical approaches	The project: a) contributes to the achievement of the following objectives of the „Education 2030" strategy: Effective and motivating learning environments, use of modern information and communication technologies to ensure the quality and sustainability of education; b) capitalizes on the project-based learning method; c) develops communication in English and international collaboration - the much-needed competence for professional insertion.
Curriculum integration	English language applied in tourism, semester VIII of the study program at Tourism specialty.
Collaboration	Students collaborate in mixed transnational teams, synchronously through video conferences and asynchronously through TwinSpace and web tools: padlet.com, canva.com, google drive (word, PowerPoint, forms, meet) and calameo.com. Acting as travel agents, they carry out activities and create thematic products in collaboration.
Examples of web tools used in the eTwinning project	
TwinSpace: https://school-education.ec.europa.eu/en/etwinning/projects/trip-travelling-responsibly-inspired-and-peacefully/twinspace/materials, Padlet.com: https://padlet.com/grupa_meteo2017/let-s-get-to-know-each-other-etwinning-project-64ko8wh4k-5wo3gon; https://padlet.com/beetzanna65/my-country-my-city-my-school-czgh3ytdgctdh9ea/slideshow Google applications: Google Meet (online meetings link), Google PowerPoint (performing the presentations: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1WWQF08IuxiBL5srkVE5u4ICOpYC2v65u-jnU1u2atwI/edit?usp=sharing https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1YTWXPBmshpesMj-O5vUzT1hy-V1UWGzBhkjUMpROIto/edit#slide=id.g275b4ff0aac_0_4 Google Word (performing the collaborative tasks): https://docs.google.com/document/d/1_6X8QlQLDgiz2pLH1RlkSp8HtdDO0KAI6X7THOZo9g8/edit?usp=sharing Google Forms and linoit.com (evaluation): https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfw2Z7H2MJg7yeHaAqGfMN3Fc7Aq7IAwpQ7D2--2AU3UvgLDg/viewform http://linoit.com/users/Ecologie/canvases/Final%20Evaluation_TRIP canva.com (creation of the presentation): https://www.canva.com/design/DAFgeW7REzo/O9RBP0cxoLz-ykuDRA46YA/edit?utm_content=DAFgeW7REzo&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link2&utm_source=sharebutton https://www.canva.com/design/DAFbOx2ta3s/AzixAFm9DR2t7OPsE93MOA/watch?utm_content=DAFbOx2ta3s&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=publishsharelink calame.com (creation of final product): https://www.calameo.com/books/005930344b8c2ed3c70b7	
Results, impact and documentation	Capitalizing on the tourist attractions of the five European countries; mastering the competence of pragmatic communication in English and international collaboration, digital and transversal skills; a partnership between VET schools from five European countries; the results are documented in the project's TwinSpace.

Conclusion

Project-based learning is a complex and relevant method in the didactic approach, which facilitates the development of multiple skills, including the skills of pragmatic communication in English for VET stu-

dents. This approach facilitates both the acquisition of theoretical knowledge and its practical application, preparing students both for their professional careers and personal lives.

Through the development of European eTwinning projects, we highlight the sustainability of project-based learning for the development of pragmatic English communication skills. The European projects offer students a real and relevant framework to develop their pragmatic English communication competence, which will contribute to the diversification of career insertion opportunities, preparing them for the challenges and demands of the global labour market.

References:
1. BECKETT, G. H. *Project-based second and foreign language education: Past, present, and future.* Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing, 2006. ISBN-13: 978-1593115050.
2. DIMITRIU, A., BÎRNAZ, N. *Metoda proiectului – context de formare a competenţei de comunicare pragmatică la elevii din învăţământul profesional tehnic*. În: *Metodologii contemporane de cercetare şi evaluare: Ştiinţe Sociale şi ale Educaţiei*, 22-23 aprilie 2021, Chişinău. Chişinău: CEP USM, 2021, pp. 92-96. ISBN: 978-9975-159-16-6 18.
3. MOURSUND, D. *Project-Based Learning: Using Information Technology.* Editura Intl Society for Technology in education, 2nd Edition, 2002. ISBN-13: 978-1564841964.
4. ULRICH, C. *Învăţarea prin proiecte. Ghid pentru profesori.* Iaşi: Editura Polirom, 2016. ISBN: 973-46-6240-1.
5. WOLK, S. *Project-Based Learning: Pursuits with a Purpose. Educational Leadership*, 52(3), 1994, pp. 42-45. ISSN: 0013-1784.
6. https://e-twinning.utm.md/
7. https://school-education.ec.europa.eu/en/recognition/etwinning-national-quality-label

Data about the author:
Angela DIMITRIU, Ph student, Şcoala Doctorală Ştiinţe Umaniste şi ale Educaţiei, Universitatea de Stat din Moldova, Teacher of English, Colegiul de Ecologie, Chişinău.
E-mail: andimitriu337@gmail.com
ORCID: *0000-0001-5074-3724*