Project: The Survey
An Integrated Skills Approach to EAP/ESP Teaching

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This paper presents a description of a project which the authors have developed to suit the needs of first year students of various humanities and social science groups taking EAP and ESP courses at the Centre for Foreign Languages at the University of Zadar. The aim of the project was to integrate language and academic skills through various tasks which were involved in the project, including designing a questionnaire, collecting and interpreting data, and writing a report. These skills are also considered necessary for students' academic and real-life needs. The authors describe the project in detail including the tasks, as well as the stages involved in the development of an academic survey.

Key words: project, survey, integrated skills approach, EAP/ESP courses

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the challenges in teaching EAP / ESP courses is how to integrate the required academic skills within the specific purposes

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content. Another crucial element to be considered is the motivation of students, that is, their ability to recognise the need for learning these skills within the foreign language framework. Having all this in mind, the solution for successfully combining these elements may be found within the integrated skills approach in form of task based learning, or more precisely, specially designed projects which target a list of set skills. Task based learning offers students collaborative work on communicative tasks that enable them to gain skills which later can be applied in their individual academic development.

Additionally, the integrated skills approach fits the purpose of teaching these above-mentioned courses for another reason. Besides incorporating academic skills within the real life setting, it offers the possibility of focusing on other crucial factors in the ESL / EFL teaching process equation. The four primary skills which are an essential part of foreign language learning (reading, writing, listening, speaking) can be combined with associated skills such as knowledge of vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, syntax, meaning, and usage. In order to achieve the optimal results in the teaching process, it is necessary to combine all the mentioned elements and factors during instruction (Oxford, 2001:1).

In teaching English for Academic and Specific Purposes courses at their university, the authors have favoured task based instruction as means of preparing students for later success in academic communication. Gradually, tasks of various types have found their place within the EAP / ESP syllabuses in the mentioned courses. According to Nunan (1989), the main reason for this was due to the very nature of these communicative tasks, which are considered classroom work that involve learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form.

'Project: The Survey' will be presented in this article in terms of an integrated skills approach, including task based instruction, which will be shown to be a good example of how various features of teaching and learning processes can be combined.

2. PROJECT: THE SURVEY

2.1. Project Initiation

The idea for the project spurred from an activity in the course book 'Global'-Intermediate, Unit 4, lesson 4, pg. 49, (Clandfield and Benne, 2011:49) which was used in one of the EAP/ESP courses. In this activity students were divided into two groups, and were given the task of conducting a brief class survey with the aim of creating a class average man or woman profile. The authors considered this exercise beneficial for various reasons. First of all, as Oxford states (2001), basic pair work and group work increase student interaction and collaboration. Also, conducting a survey is an important skill which students of various humanities and social science groups need to be familiar with.

However, the real benefit of such an exercise was in its adaptation, in other words, the extension of that exercise into a project. The decision was to design a project which would connect additional activities, already part of the EAP /ESP course syllabus in question, "which would be integrated and sequenced to form coherent units of work "(Nunan, 1989:18). The result was a series of tasks, each focusing on specific skills relevant both to an EAP / ESP context, or to an EFL / ESL framework.

2.2. Related Activities and Learning Outcomes

The activities which were integrated into 'Project: The Survey' were the following: writing a questionnaire, collecting first-hand data, organising and presenting data using both graphic representation and statistics, and finally a written discourse in the form of a formal report.

The tasks needed to be completed (in manner of milestones) within a given period of time. Upon completion of each task, the project proceeded to the following stage. Each stage was a demanding task on its own and this is another reason, in addition to the beneficial elements of collaboration among students and an increase in motivation, for dividing the work among several students and assigning it as group work.

It is also worth mentioning the manifold learning outcomes of this assignment:

- familiarity with terminology and procedure of doing first hand research
- extending communicative activity beyond the classroom

- acquiring advanced skills for using Microsoft word, specifically for creating tables and charts
- reviewing and summarising stages of the project in a formal written report

3. PROJECT STAGES

3.1. Designing a Questionnaire

As Holi (http://www.confabjournals.com/confabjournals/images/6220137593110.pdf) mentions in his article, "designing the questionnaire is one of the most important aspects of the survey". This stage involves the planning process, as well as the formulation of the questions. This planning process is perhaps the most crucial step within the project since it affects all the steps that follow.

Therefore, prior to the beginning of the questionnaire design, students were presented with an activity which explained the basic principles of survey design. The activity was adapted from an exercise found in the course book 'Language Leader' (Cotton et al., 2008:59) and focused on seven different types of questions which could be used in a questionnaire. It discussed the benefits and drawbacks of certain types of questions in relation to the obtained data.

After completing these pre-activities, "the first step in designing the questionnaire was to define the problem to be tackled in the survey and then to decide on the questions" (http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/elt/article/view/15275/10339). The topic of the questionnaire was adapted from the original survey ('average man or woman') with the following new project topic: *What is a first year male or female student like?* The framework of the questionnaire was predetermined and students needed to include seven different types of questions in their questionnaire, as discussed in the pre-activity.

This step in the project successfully combined several elements of academic skills learning along with elements of foreign language learning. The learning outcomes of this section were directed towards drawing students' attention to careful questionnaire planning in terms of subsequent analysis, as well as in enabling them to revise certain grammar aspects such as question word form, with an emphasis on content rather than form.

3.2. Conducting a Survey

In addition to predetermining the topic of the questionnaire, and therefore the topic of the whole project, the instructors also set the questionnaire sample, which is another important element in designing a survey.

Strict instructions were also given with regard to the process of conducting the survey. Students were placed into groups of three and each student had the task of interviewing four colleagues (two male and two female students) regardless of the university they attended, or the study group. The outcome was twelve interviewed students per group with an even ratio of male and female students. Setting the sample unit to university students, as well as choosing pre-specified questions with replies recorded either by the respondents or by the investigators, enabled the students involved in the project to conduct the survey using social networks and e-mails, which speeded up and eased the whole process.

The reasons why these decisions were made by the instructors rather than students were twofold. Firstly, since survey planning, design and conducting is a rather complex process, and for some students this was the first time they were introduced to these skills, the idea was to simplify the process and still keep basic elements which would give students insight into the processes involved in each stage. On the other hand, by predetermining the topic and sample unit, a large part of the work had been done which left the students enough time to focus on language and context. Since the main aim of EAP /ESP courses is, in fact, language learning within a context, therefore the main learning outcome of the tasks within the project was to extend the process of communication and learning outside the classroom.

According to Nunan (1989:38), tasks help the learner develop the skills they will need for carrying out real-world communication tasks beyond the classroom, and in this case, the real-world communication refers to the academic context. As a result, the task benefits of conducting a survey outside the classroom are completely justifiable.

3.3. Presenting and Interpreting Data

The students' task at this stage was to create a bar chart, pie chart, table or graph for each question from the questionnaire, and thus

visually present the obtained results. Subsequently, this enabled them to present both data and their own conclusions in the form of a formal written report.

The task of graphic presentation of data was introduced while discussing how to interpret the data and write the final report. The tables and charts offered visual elements which were a valuable aid in helping students analyse the data obtained from the survey.

As Padilla reports

 (http://www.educ.sfu.ca/narstsite/publications/research/skill.htm), one of the most important goals of schooling is to teach students to think critically, and all subjects should attempt to achieve this overall goal. Interpreting statistics is a necessary research skill which students need as it is also part of their own area of study. For example, the students involved were from the following areas of study: Information Science, Sociology, Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, History, Geography, Applied Ecology in Agriculture and other foreign languages, except English. Thus, prior to this project, students were familiar with the terminology needed for interpretation. However, the lesson on interpreting statistics was never particularly successful when it was taught with the primary focus on data interpretation as a segregated skill.   According   to   Ramesh   and   Patel (http://www.confabjournals.com/confabjournals/images/6220137593110. pdf), "learning science is effective if the learner is engaged in a meaningful learning environment". Therefore, the decision to integrate these, according to Ramesh and Patel, science process skills (http://www.confabjournals.com/confabjournals/images/6220137593110. pdf) into the project had therefore an additional intention of motivating students to see the purpose of the learnt skills.

As for learning outcomes at this stage of the project, students learnt how to graphically illustrate data, acquired computing skills by creating graphs, charts and tables in Microsoft office/word, and they were also exposed to specific terminology needed for data analysis.

3.4. Writing a Report

Writing a report was not seen as the main goal of the whole project, but rather as a final assignment which included all the stages. Once again, there were multiple benefits connected with this task. To start

with, composing a report offered students the possibility of realising the necessity of the previous project steps to reach final conclusions.

Although writing a report is a part of the course syllabus (the students were required to write a report for one of the course assignments) and they were familiar with its form and structure, the authors decided to predetermine its structure as was the case with the previous stages of the project. This was due to time restrictions, as well as to review formal report writing.

The students were given a clear outline including subheadings and additional notes to help them develop and write each section of the report. The word limit of the report was 250-300 words.

Additionally, this task encouraged students to practice academic writing, and as a result aided in improving their English language proficiency. One of the main learning outcomes of writing a report is mastering report structure as well as interpretation of results within the formal report structure.

4. MARKING
4.1. Marking the Project

After the final stage was completed, all the project materials had to be handed in to be marked by the teachers. The students were asked to submit all their survey materials, starting from the questionnaires/answer sheets to their final reports. The teachers checked the material for relevance, accuracy of presented data, and compared the students' final results with the results of all the stages involved. It was also some sort of assurance that the students had actually carried out their surveys. Although the entire project was conducted by the students within their assigned groups without the supervision of the teachers; nevertheless, each of the students had to work individually and not rely on the Internet, for example, as all of the obtained data had to match in the end.

After considerable evaluation of the pros and cons of giving a group mark as opposed to an individual mark, the authors agreed upon the former since, the entire project was set up as group work. The students were given the benefit of the doubt and it was assumed that each one of them contributed equally to the project. This aspect of marking (group versus individual mark) should, perhaps, be reconsidered in the future

in order to obtain a more transparent situation of the effort and amount of work that each student put into the project and mark them accordingly. However, each of the project stages was valued separately: the questionnaire carried 30% of the total mark, interpreting data 30%, and report writing 40%. An appropriate Excel table was created to make the marking system easier.

5. CONCLUSION

The rationale behind the research project was to combine an integrative approach to learning a foreign language, as well as to encourage language use, for "real success in English teaching and learning is when the learners can actually communicate in English inside and outside the classroom" (Davies and Pearse, 2002:99).

While working on the project, the students learned different segregated language skills through various tasks (designing a questionnaire, collecting and interpreting data, writing a report) which are necessary for students' academic and real-life needs. This project broadened their academic perspective and involved them in the classroom teaching process, which increased their motivation to learn, and eventually it enabled them to integrate these skills on their own outside of the classroom.

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METODA INTEGRIRANIH VJEŠTINA U IZVOĐENJU NASTAVE ENGLESKOG JEZIKA STRUKE

Ovaj rad prikazuje opis projekta koji su autori osmislili za potrebe studenata prve godine različitih humanističkih i društvenih smjerova koji pohađaju kolegije engleskog jezika struke u Centru za strane jezike Sveučilišta u Zadru. Cilj je projekta bio integrirati sve jezične vještine kroz različite zadatke uključene u projekt (izrada upitnika, prikupljanje i obrada podataka, pisanje izvješća) nužnima za akademske i životne potrebe studenata. Autori opisuju sve faze ali i zadatke koje je potrebno izvršiti u svrhu projekta.

Ključne riječi: projekt, *istraživanje*, integrirane vještine, engleski jezik struke