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## Project-based Method in Teaching Foreign Language for Specific Purposes

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### Abstract

This paper considers the innovative methods of teaching Foreign Language for Specific Purposes. The methods are intensively implemented in teaching 3–4-year students at the Institute of Natural Resources, Tomsk Polytechnic University (TPU), Russia. In particular, the paper presents the international project “Approaching the Arctic” developed in cooperation with NTNU (Norwegian University of Science and Technology), Norway. This paper analyzes the efficiency of the implementation of the project-based method in teaching English for Specific Purposes.

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### 1. Introduction

The education policy of the modern higher education institution aims at accommodating the needs of personality, society, and state. Among highly esteemed and sought-after personal qualities, one can distinguish individuality, independence, erudition, originality, and the ability to take the initiative. The process of teaching a foreign language at a technical institution of higher education is unique in terms of its educational opportunities. Today, the

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enhancement of the educational process is one of the priorities in the process of optimizing language education. Experience in teaching foreign language in an institution of higher education allows us to note that both the content and the methods of teaching are changing. Russian methodology at the current stage of its development is searching for new methods and techniques of teaching foreign language. Project-based teaching is one such breakthrough technology, as it allows students to generate their own ideas and to integrate knowledge obtained through different disciplines to solve hands-on tasks.

Currently, the project-based method is a topical issue at many seminars and conferences worldwide and it is intensively used in teaching foreign languages. The method can be successfully implemented in teaching foreign language for specific purposes as it aims for hands-on outcomes, accommodating students' needs and satisfying their interests. The project is an essential element for modern education programmes of institutions of higher education, and this is relevant not only for language but also for technical disciplines. Implementation of group work, and of project work in particular, is a requirement set by international accreditation organizations for higher education programmes in engineering. It is important to note that foreign language for specific purposes is a discipline within which project-based teaching can be intensively implemented. Project activities are characterized by numerous advantages in comparison with other teaching techniques. The main strength of the method is that students immediately turn to their specialty no matter which year of studies they are in. As the previous studies of project-based teaching indicate, students are involved in self-determination and identification of their future prospects (Kopylova, 2003), that is, self-identification in a future profession and motivation to get additional information in the field of the studied discipline. Performing project activities, students not only perform tasks they can cope with but also learn to work in a team, where it is important to listen to partners, agree or disagree with them, give arguments to support one's opinion in other words, to express one's individuality, which is a challenge for Russian students. Working together, students perform different social functions: duty-holder, initiator, expert, and researcher. Thus, they try themselves in different positions and act out various situations which can happen at work. Group work makes communication an essential component of the education process while the topics are learning results: while studying, students exchange their learning results in discussions or disputes. Personal interaction increases students' motivation through social incentives, such as personal responsibility and satisfaction from group success. This changes the traditional attitude to disciplines as they are currently taught – students start feeling they contribute to the group project. As a result, project work not only provides students with specific knowledge but also develops their individual abilities and skills, while foreign language improves their professional toolbox.

This advantage was pointed out in a publication by the English researcher D.L. Fried-Booth, (Fried-Booth, 2002), who noted that project work allows each student to make a contribution to a shared project, which reflects individual abilities and gifts. As they are all different, students learn to communicate and work together. Besides the advantages mentioned above, project-based teaching can be implemented in self-study activities, which is especially important in view of the reduced number of academic hours assigned for foreign language for specific purposes in accordance with the academic programme.

## **2. Project description**

According to Polat's classification (Polat, 2001), in terms of dominant activity (research, informative, creative, role-playing, practice-oriented), the first three project types are readily applicable to teaching foreign language for specific purposes, though the rest can be adapted to the aims and objectives of this discipline as well. To give an example, let us turn to the project work of third- and fourth-year students performed at the Institute of Natural Resources, TPU, where English for specific purposes (ESP) is included in the curriculum.

The project preparatory stage included a survey of students' opinions on how well they were prepared for independent work, as well as their preferences for home assignments and the ways information is exchanged in class. The survey results showed that 75% of students prefer creative forms of independent work (searching the Internet for information, writing and submitting reports, drawing bulletin boards, designing videos, etc.); 80% of polled students prefer doing their home task on teams, as in this case, in the students' opinion, they can find a solution to the problem more quickly, and the results are remembered for longer; 95% find the information acquired

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