

STUDENT GROUP WORK AS AN EFFECTIVE WAY OF ORGANIZING COLLECTIVE WORK IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSES IN THE CONTEXT OF BLENDED LEARNING

The theses explore group work as a method of foreign language teaching in higher education. It emphasizes its role in developing communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and intercultural competence, while also addressing challenges and strategies for effective implementation.

Keywords: *blended learning, group work, foreign language learning, communication, collaboration, higher education, critical thinking, intercultural competence*

Modern research shows that university instructors use various teaching styles and approaches while working with students learning a foreign language. Some students grasp knowledge better by listening to lectures, others by taking notes from the textbook, and some absorb it mainly through visual learning. The issue of activating students' participation, teaching them to think critically, form and express their opinions, listen to others, and consider different viewpoints has always been at the forefront when planning the work of an educator.

Collective forms of organizing students' cognitive activity help the teacher achieve practical goals related to mastering phonetic, lexical, grammatical, and stylistic material. Solving collective tasks helps students develop a sense of responsibility for the task at hand, encourages partnership, collaboration, and respect for others' opinions, and fosters the ability to make collective decisions, considering various perspectives.

Thus, the key in the educational process is the correct selection of the work format that will facilitate successful interaction between the teacher and students. One such collaborative approach is group work.

Group work, or teamwork, is a general term encompassing various methods and techniques that involve cooperation between two or more students working towards a common goal, and ensuring independent speech initiation by the students. Group work is typically understood as work in small groups, consisting of four or fewer students, as this form of organization creates optimal conditions for constant speech interaction among all students, which is especially important in foreign language learning for achieving the communicative goal of education.

The organization of group learning activities has been addressed in the research of V. Dyachenko, K. Nor, O. Pavlova, N. Pozhar, O. Pometun, H. Piatykova, S. Ratovska, V. Yagodnikova, O. Yaroshenko, and others. Analyzing these works shows that group collaboration improves the quality of learning and cognitive activities, promotes positive motivation for learning, and increases student activity during lessons.

Group learning activities serve several functions. They create conditions for positive motivation, as group work activates the participation of all students, and provide opportunities for students to master collaborative forms of mutual assistance. In group work, students achieve high results in mastering knowledge and skills. Weaker students have no choice but to join strong students' groups, thus enhancing their level of knowledge.

The collective learning method refers to an organizational structure of the learning process, where paired work with changing team composition predominates. This structure allows for collective work and cooperation while also developing independent thinking, language skills, and other individual abilities, ultimately improving the quality of knowledge, skills, and abilities. The goal of this technique is to develop cognitive action methods, the practical sphere of personality, and communication skills.

The task of organizing the foreign language learning process is to improve speech tempo, increase emotional expression, develop creativity, and enhance teamwork.

An example of a collective task can be seen in the topic "Sports and Games." Without prior preparation, the instructor organizes temporary micro-groups in the class, pairing up students sitting nearby, and gives them a few minutes to discuss a specific question: "The Revival of Popularity in Physical Exercises" and present it, for example, in the form of a dialogue. There are three groups, each with four participants. Clear instructions for execution are given. The instructor asks the same question to all groups: "Why don't teenagers do physical exercises in the morning?" The students are required to list four points to solve this problem. The teacher corrects the work of each group, offering advice. During the active group discussions, the ability to resolve conflicts constructively is enhanced. All participants focus on helping each other, creating an atmosphere of enthusiasm and positivity, and learn to work as one team. The task is to be completed in 15-20 minutes. Afterward, the instructor reshuffles the groups, changing their composition. Now, other subgroups with the same task will continue the debate, leading to the development of final well-founded proposals. The presentation can vary. A representative is chosen from each

group for the final team that will present constructive suggestions. Other participants must either approve the resolution or reject it for further improvement.

Thus, the success of collective work depends on the professional and personal qualities of the instructor and the willingness of students to work together and harmoniously. Both the instructors and students must be psychologically prepared for group work and for organizing group activities.

Therefore, students in higher education institutions are being prepared for effective work in the future, where the ability to collaborate with a team and solve tasks together is of great importance. Group-based learning, based on the principle of cooperation, can help them develop skills necessary for successful professional self-realization.

In addition to the pedagogical advantages discussed, group-based learning also plays a crucial role in fostering essential 21st-century skills such as adaptability, problem-solving, and interpersonal communication. When students engage in group work, especially in the context of foreign language acquisition, they are frequently placed in situations that demand negotiation of meaning, clarification, and feedback—core processes in second language development. These interactions are not only linguistically beneficial but also cognitively enriching, as students learn to articulate their thoughts more precisely, listen actively, and respond appropriately to differing perspectives.

Moreover, group work provides a dynamic learning environment where peer teaching becomes a natural component. Stronger students reinforce their knowledge by explaining concepts to their peers, while those who may struggle benefit from explanations that are often more accessible than traditional teacher-led instruction. This reciprocal process promotes deeper understanding and encourages a sense of shared responsibility for learning outcomes. It is this mutual engagement that transforms the classroom into a community of practice, where language learning is not just about absorbing vocabulary and grammar rules, but about co-constructing meaning in a supportive environment.

Another significant advantage of group work is its potential to cater to diverse learning styles and multiple intelligences. For example, kinesthetic learners may thrive during interactive role-plays or task-based activities, while visual learners might contribute more effectively through graphic organizers or visual presentations. By working collaboratively, students have the opportunity to leverage their strengths and learn from others who approach tasks differently. This inclusivity promotes equity in the classroom and ensures that every learner has a chance to contribute meaningfully.

To maximize the benefits of group work, instructors must carefully plan and scaffold activities to ensure that all students are actively involved. Simply placing students in groups is not enough; tasks must be purposeful, structured, and clearly aligned with learning objectives. Clear expectations, roles, and time limits should be established, and instructors should monitor group dynamics to ensure that participation is balanced and that no student dominates or withdraws from the task. Incorporating reflection activities after group work sessions can also help students internalize what they have learned and how they have contributed to the group process.

Assessment is another critical aspect of successful group learning. Instructors should consider using a combination of formative and summative assessments to evaluate both individual and group performance. Peer evaluations, self-assessments, and group presentations can be valuable tools for measuring not only language proficiency but also collaboration skills and critical thinking. Transparent grading criteria should be shared in advance, and students should be encouraged to provide constructive feedback to one another, further reinforcing their learning and professional growth.

The integration of technology can further enhance group-based learning, particularly in language classrooms. Digital tools such as collaborative documents (e.g., Google Docs), discussion forums, breakout rooms in video conferencing platforms, and language learning apps can facilitate communication and project work beyond the confines of the physical classroom. These tools provide opportunities for asynchronous collaboration, enabling students to contribute according to their own schedules while still participating in collective tasks. Instructors can use these platforms to monitor progress, provide feedback, and guide discussions in real-time or after group meetings.

In conclusion, group work represents a powerful pedagogical approach in foreign language education. It fosters a learning environment that is interactive, inclusive, and student-centered, allowing for the development of both linguistic and soft skills. Through structured group activities, learners are encouraged to take initiative, collaborate effectively, and engage in meaningful communication, all of which contribute to their overall academic and personal development. As higher education continues to evolve in response to the demands of a globalized workforce, the ability to work productively in teams will remain a cornerstone of professional success. Therefore, by embedding group work into the foreign language curriculum, educators are not only enhancing language acquisition but also equipping students with the competencies they need to thrive in the interconnected world of the 21st century.

Despite its numerous advantages, implementing group work effectively in foreign language classrooms is not without its challenges. One common issue is the unequal participation of group members, where some students may assume a passive role, relying on more confident or proficient peers to complete the task. This phenomenon, often referred to as “social loafing,” can undermine the collaborative learning experience and diminish the effectiveness of the activity. To address this, instructors must establish clear expectations and accountability mechanisms, such as assigning specific roles (e.g., speaker, writer, timekeeper, researcher) within each group. Rotating these roles regularly ensures that all students develop a range of skills and remain engaged throughout the learning process.

Language anxiety is another potential barrier to effective group work. Some students, particularly those with lower proficiency levels, may feel self-conscious or fearful of making mistakes in front of their peers. This anxiety

can lead to reluctance to speak, which in turn limits their language practice. To mitigate this, educators should strive to create a supportive and non-judgmental classroom atmosphere. Activities should be appropriately leveled to match students' abilities, and errors should be treated as natural steps in the learning journey. Encouraging the use of strategies such as "think-pair-share" or "jigsaw reading" can help scaffold students' contributions and build their confidence over time.

Cultural differences may also influence students' willingness and approach to group collaboration. In multicultural classrooms, learners bring diverse attitudes toward authority, participation, and communication styles. While some students may be accustomed to cooperative learning, others may prefer individual tasks or be hesitant to challenge their peers' opinions. Teachers must be culturally sensitive and aware of these differences, adapting their facilitation techniques to ensure inclusivity and respect. Introducing intercultural competence as a component of the foreign language curriculum can help students develop the skills needed to navigate and appreciate cultural diversity in group settings.

Furthermore, time constraints and large class sizes can pose logistical challenges for organizing group work. It may be difficult for instructors to monitor all groups effectively, provide timely feedback, or manage classroom noise. To overcome these obstacles, teachers can implement structured protocols for group discussions, use timers to manage activity duration, and apply peer assessment tools to distribute evaluative responsibilities. In large groups, breaking the class into pairs or triads for shorter intervals can still promote meaningful interaction while remaining manageable within limited class periods.

Professional development for instructors is also essential for maximizing the benefits of group-based learning. Teachers must be equipped not only with linguistic and pedagogical knowledge but also with the skills to facilitate group dynamics, resolve conflicts, and design collaborative tasks that are engaging and goal-oriented. Workshops, peer observations, and reflective teaching practices can enhance instructors' ability to implement group work successfully. Sharing experiences and best practices within faculty teams encourages continuous improvement and innovation in teaching methods.

Looking ahead, the future of foreign language education will likely place an even greater emphasis on collaborative learning, driven by advances in educational technology and the growing importance of global communication skills. As hybrid and online learning formats become more widespread, instructors will need to adapt group work strategies to virtual environments, ensuring that students remain active participants despite physical distance. Virtual breakout rooms, collaborative online tools, and digital portfolios are just a few ways that group work can be effectively integrated into digital classrooms.

In summary, group work remains a valuable and transformative instructional method in the context of foreign language learning. When designed and implemented thoughtfully, it not only enhances language proficiency but also nurtures essential life skills such as empathy, adaptability, and teamwork. The success of this method relies heavily on the instructor's ability to create an inclusive, motivating, and well-organized learning environment, as well as on the students' willingness to engage and collaborate. As higher education continues to prepare students for a rapidly evolving world, the role of group-based learning in cultivating competent, confident, and communicative global citizens cannot be overstated.

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Євгенія Постикіна

ГРУПОВА РОБОТА СТУДЕНТІВ ЯК ЕФЕКТИВНИЙ СПОСІБ ОРГАНІЗАЦІЇ КОЛЕКТИВНОЇ ДІЯЛЬНОСТІ НА ЗАНЯТТЯХ З АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ В КОНТЕКСТІ ЗМІШАНОГО НАВЧАННЯ

У тезах розглянуто групову роботу, як метод навчання іноземної мови у вищій освіті. Підкреслюється її роль у розвитку комунікації, критичного мислення, співпраці та міжкультурної компетентності, а також висвітлюються труднощі та стратегії впровадження.

Ключові слова: змішане навчання, групова робота, вивчення іноземної мови, комунікація, співпраця, вища освіта, критичне мислення, міжкультурна компетентність

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