

**PROJECT-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING AS A BRIDGE TO EMI SUCCESS:
THE CASE OF UZBEKISTAN****Abdumalikova Azizakhon Abdumajid kizi***MA TESOL Alumni, Webster University, Tashkent, Uzbekistan*

Abstract: *In Uzbekistan, a growing number of universities - such as Webster, Westminster, British Management University, and New Uzbekistan University - now deliver their programs through English. Students entering these institutions typically come from Uzbek- or Russian-medium schools. While many possess general English proficiency ranging from B1 to C1, they often struggle with the transition to academic English required in university coursework. This paper argues that Project-Based Language Teaching (PBLT) can serve as an effective bridge between general English preparation and the linguistic and academic demands of English-medium instruction (EMI). Drawing on international studies and the Uzbek context, I show how project-based approaches foster academic literacy, critical thinking, and confidence. I also address challenges for teachers and institutions, and outline principles for a PBLT-based EAP course tailored for EMI entrants in Uzbekistan.*

Keywords: *Project-Based Language Teaching (PBLT); English for Academic Purposes (EAP); English-Medium Instruction (EMI); Academic Literacy; Uzbekistan; Higher Education*

Аннотация: *В Узбекистане растёт число университетов, таких как Вебстер, Вестминстер, Британский университет менеджмента и Новый университет Узбекистана, которые реализуют свои программы на английском языке. Студенты, поступающие в эти вузы, как правило, выпускники школ с узбекским или русским языком обучения. Хотя многие из них обладают достаточным уровнем владения английским языком (от B1 до C1 по CEFR), им трудно адаптироваться к академическому английскому, необходимому для успешного обучения. В статье утверждается, что обучение академическому английскому на основе проектного подхода (PBLT) может стать эффективным мостом между общим знанием языка и академическими требованиями программ с английским языком обучения (EMI). Опираясь на международные исследования и узбекский контекст, я показываю, как проектная методика способствует развитию академической грамотности, критического мышления и уверенности студентов. Также обсуждаются трудности внедрения PBLT и предлагаются принципы проектирования курса EAP для подготовки студентов к EMI в Узбекистане.*

Ключевые слова: *проектное обучение иностранному языку (PBLT); академический английский (EAP); английский как язык обучения (EMI); академическая грамотность; Узбекистан; высшее образование*

Annotatsiya: *O'zbekistonda so'nggi yillarda Webster, Westminster, Britaniya Menejment Universiteti va Yangi O'zbekiston Universiteti kabi oliy ta'lim muassasalari o'z dasturlarini ingliz tilida olib bormoqda. Bu universitetlarga kirayotgan talabalar, odatda, o'zbek yoki rus tilida ta'lim olgan maktab bitiruvchilari hisoblanadi. Ularning ko'pchiligi umumiy ingliz tilini yetarli darajada biladi (CEFR bo'yicha B1-C1), ammo akademik ingliz tiliga moslashish va universitetdagi ingliz tilida olib boriladigan mashg'ulotlarga tayyorlanish qiyinchilik tug'diradi. Ushbu maqolada loyiha-asosidagi til o'qitish (PBLT) umumiy ingliz tilini o'rganish bilan ingliz tili o'qitish dasturlaridagi akademik talablar o'rtasida samarali ko'priq bo'lib xizmat qilishi mumkinligi ta'kidlanadi. Xalqaro tadqiqotlar va O'zbekiston tajribasiga asoslanib, men PBLT yondashuvi talabalarning akademik savodxonligi, tanqidiy fikrlashi va ishonchini rivojlantirishini ko'rsataman. Shuningdek, o'qituvchilar va ta'lim muassasalari uchun yuzaga keladigan muammolar muhokama qilinadi hamda O'zbekistonda EMI dasturlariga kiruvchi talabalar uchun EAP kursini loyihalashtirish tamoyillari taklif qilinadi.*

Kalit so'zlar: *loyiha-asosidagi til o'qitish (PBLT); akademik ingliz tili (EAP); ingliz tili o'qitish tili sifatida (EMI); akademik savodxonlik; O'zbekiston; oliy ta'lim*

INTRODUCTION

English-medium instruction (EMI) is expanding globally, and Uzbekistan is no exception. Institutions such as Webster University, Westminster International University, and New Uzbekistan University already operate entirely in English, and more international branch campuses continue to open. Each year, increasing numbers of students in Uzbekistan pursue degrees in these institutions.

Yet the majority of these students graduate from schools where the medium of instruction is Uzbek or Russian. While many have reached a respectable level of English proficiency (often B1-C1 on the CEFR scale), their competence tends to reflect general English skills rather than the academic literacy required in EMI contexts. They can communicate effectively in everyday situations but find it difficult to read dense scholarly texts, write structured essays and reports, or give formal presentations. This mismatch creates a significant barrier to success in EMI programs.

Traditional pre-sessional English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses exist in some universities, but they are often grammar-heavy or exam-oriented. They rarely provide students with opportunities to practice authentic, discipline-specific academic tasks. As a result, students enter EMI classrooms underprepared for the discourse styles, research practices, and critical thinking expected of them.

This paper argues that Project-Based Language Teaching (PBLT) offers a powerful alternative. By structuring courses around extended, authentic projects, PBLT not only develops students' language but also rehearses the skills and practices of academic life. I will review why PBLT is especially suitable as a bridge to EMI, summarize evidence from international contexts, propose a design framework for Uzbekistan, and discuss challenges and implications.

Why Project-Based Language Teaching?

Project-Based Language Teaching builds on the principles of task-based learning but extends them into longer, more complex endeavors. Instead of completing isolated tasks,

students work on sustained projects that require planning, collaboration, research, and a final product. Such projects mirror the realities of academic study, where assignments often span weeks and involve multiple drafts, peer feedback, and presentations.

Scholars have long noted that PBLT can enhance learner motivation and autonomy. Beckett and Slater (2020) highlight how projects create meaningful contexts for language use, encouraging students to recycle vocabulary and structures in authentic ways. Similarly, Li (2018) found that Chinese university students engaged in project-based academic English tasks developed not only stronger language skills but also a sense of themselves as novice researchers.

For Uzbek students entering EMI programs, this is critical. They do not necessarily lack general English competence, but they have had limited practice in the kinds of authentic academic practices - such as synthesizing sources, citing research, or defending an argument - that will be required of them in EMI classrooms. PBLT provides a rehearsal space where these practices can be introduced and scaffolded.

Evidence from International Contexts

A growing body of research supports the value of PBLT in academic English contexts. Grant (2017) reports that in Macau, students in a project-based EAP writing course showed greater motivation and engagement compared to those in more traditional essay-focused classes. Li's (2018) ethnographic study in Shanghai demonstrated that project-based instruction led students to adopt more discipline-relevant rhetorical choices, thereby fostering both linguistic and academic development.

Even at the secondary level, evidence suggests benefits. Sun and Zhu (2023) found that project-based approaches in Chinese high schools led to improvements in summarizing, reasoning, and creative use of English. Students reported feeling more confident in handling complex texts and producing extended discourse.

While most of this research is drawn from East Asian contexts, the parallels with Uzbekistan are striking. In both settings, students often transition from non-English-medium schools into universities where English dominates. The need to move beyond general proficiency toward academic literacy is shared, and PBLT has proven effective in helping students make this leap.

Designing a PBLT-EAP Course for Uzbekistan

For PBLT to be effective in EMI preparation, courses must be carefully designed. A project-based EAP course should integrate reading, writing, listening, and speaking around shared academic tasks.

One possible model for a semester-long preparatory course might look like this:

Weeks 1-3: Proposal Stage. Students select a topic related to their intended field of study and draft a short research proposal. Language support includes research vocabulary and formulating research questions.

Weeks 4-6: Research and Reading. Students gather academic sources, summarize them, and synthesize ideas. Instruction focuses on paraphrasing, citation, and academic reading strategies.

Weeks 7-9: Writing Drafts. Students produce a mini-research paper or report. Support includes cohesion, argument structure, and academic style.

Weeks 10–11: Peer Review and Revision. Drafts are exchanged for feedback. Instruction emphasizes feedback language, editing strategies, and revision.

Week 12: Presentation. Students present their findings in a symposium-style class session. This phase emphasizes presentation skills, handling Q&A, and visual literacy.

Such a course would directly prepare Uzbek students for EMI coursework by requiring them to practice the same genres and skills they will later need-research, synthesis, writing, and oral presentation - in an integrated, scaffolded way.

Challenges and Considerations

Implementing PBLT in Uzbekistan will face challenges. Teachers may lack training in project-based approaches, as many are accustomed to grammar-focused instruction. Professional development will be crucial. Institutional constraints also matter: universities often prioritize exam preparation, and administrators may resist courses that seem less measurable than test-driven ones.

Students themselves may initially resist the unfamiliar responsibility that projects demand. Coming from school systems where learning is often teacher-centered, they may find group work, independent inquiry, and open-ended tasks disorienting. Careful scaffolding - breaking projects into manageable steps and providing strong teacher guidance - will be essential.

Assessment is another concern. Traditional exams may not capture the full range of skills developed in PBLT. Instead, rubrics that evaluate both the process and the product of projects will be necessary.

Despite these challenges, international research suggests that once teachers and students adjust, PBLT is highly motivating and effective. The key is gradual introduction and institutional support.

Implications for Uzbekistan

For Uzbekistan, the stakes are high. As EMI universities expand, student success depends not only on general English proficiency but also on mastering academic literacy. If institutions adopt project-based EAP courses, they can give students a smoother transition into EMI programs.

The benefits would be multiple: students would gain early familiarity with academic genres and discourse; universities could raise the overall quality of student performance in EMI programs; and teachers would have a structured framework for integrating skills in meaningful contexts.

Most importantly, students would enter EMI not as outsiders struggling to catch up but as prepared learners who have already practiced the skills required for success.

CONCLUSION

For many Uzbek students, the transition into EMI is daunting. They may have strong general English skills but lack the academic English literacy required for higher education. Traditional EAP courses, while helpful, rarely close this gap. Project-Based Language Teaching offers a compelling solution. By engaging students in extended, authentic projects, it builds academic skills, promotes autonomy, and mirrors the practices of academic life.

The next step is to pilot PBLT-EAP courses in Uzbekistan, gather evidence of their effectiveness, and refine their design. If adopted widely, project-based approaches could

become a powerful bridge enabling students to cross from secondary education in Uzbek or Russian into the challenges and opportunities of university study in English.

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