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ENHANCING THE RESEARCH SKILLS IN TEACHING ENGLISH THROUGH PROJECT FEST

Abstract

Developing strong research skills is crucial for first-year students of non-linguistics departments as they embark on their academic journey. Project Fest is an invaluable activity designed to enhance students' research skills by providing a comprehensive, hands-on learning experience. The purpose of the article is to study the research skills of students in teaching English through an organized and conducted project festival. It exposes students to various research methodologies, fosters critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, and improves literature review and data analysis skills. Through presentations and feedback sessions during Project Fest, students refine their communication abilities and learn the importance of iterative improvement. This study investigates the impact of Project Fest on developing research skills among first-year students in non-linguistics departments at L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Kazakhstan, during the 2023/2024 academic year. With 120 students and 50 projects participating, Project Fest offered a platform for students to engage in hands-on research, fostering critical thinking, analytical abilities, and communication skills. The study employed qualitative methods, including open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, to explore students' experiences and perceptions. Findings revealed that Project Fest significantly enhanced research competencies, built academic confidence, and encouraged intellectual curiosity. The event promoted collaboration, constructive feedback, and practical presentation skills, addressing the limited opportunities for first-year students to engage in research within their curriculum. By creating an interactive learning environment, Project Fest supports the transition to higher education, fosters a culture of research excellence, and equips students with essential skills for academic and professional success.

Keywords: research skills, Project Fest, benefits, challenges, English lesson, presentation

Introduction

Project Fest involves the display of scientific, technological, and creative ideas of students in higher schools. It becomes a tool to develop new research skills among the students. Research skills are essential for students, especially in their first year of high school, as they navigate the complexities of academic literature and assignments. Organizing a Project Fest can provide a structured platform for hands-on learning and practical application of research concepts to enhance these skills. Through this event, students can engage in collaborative projects, develop critical thinking abilities, and hone their presentation skills. By actively participating in the Fest, students can gain valuable experience conducting research, analyzing data, and effectively communicating their findings. This immersive learning experience promotes intellectual growth and fosters a sense of academic community among students. Ultimately, Project Fest catalyzes cultivating a culture of research excellence and skill development among first-year students of non-linguistics departments. This project investigates how Project Fest enhances research skills among first-year students of non-linguistics departments.

In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on the importance of research skills in higher education, particularly for first-year students. Research has shown that students exposed to research activities early in their academic careers are more likely to develop critical thinking skills, improve their analytical abilities, and enhance their overall academic performance. However, many first-year students of non-linguistics departments may not have ample opportunities to engage in research-related activities due to the nature of their coursework.

Participating in Project Fest activities specifically tailored for these students and providing a platform for them to showcase their research projects, receive valuable feedback from peers and teachers, and develop a deeper understanding of the research process. By fostering a culture of research early on, students can be better equipped to tackle more advanced research challenges in their future academic endeavors.

Thus, this research describes the concept and the structure of the Project Fest; identifies the research skills to improve critical thinking, data analysis, communication; analyzes the experiences and perceptions of students who participated in the Project Gest through qualitative method (interview, questionnaire); evaluates the impact of the Project fest on enhancing research competencies, academic confidence, and intellectual curiosity; highlights the importance of providing research opportunities for the first-year students of non-linguistics departments; demonstrates how project fest fosters a research-oriented learning environments that aids students' transition into higher education and future professional careers.

Literature Review

Developing strong research skills is crucial for first-year students of non-linguistics departments as they embark on their academic journey. Early exposure to research enhances students' academic performance and builds essential competencies for lifelong learning and professional growth. Aldobekhi highlights that through project-based learning (PBL), students can improve their critical thinking abilities, problem-solving skills, and collaboration techniques [1]. PBL offers a dynamic, student-centered learning environment that promotes active inquiry, creativity, and independent exploration. Integrating PBL methodologies facilitates a deeper understanding of research processes by encouraging students to take ownership of their learning, formulate research questions, and engage in evidence-based investigation. This approach cultivates a sense of autonomy, motivation, and resilience in dealing with complex academic tasks. In addition, integrating literacy narratives and community discourse analysis into the curriculum provides students with valuable insights into different discourse communities [2]. These practices promote analytical thinking, reflective learning, and academic investigation, enabling students to recognize various disciplines' conventions, values, and communication styles. Such awareness helps students participate more confidently and effectively in scholarly conversations, enhancing their ability to evaluate sources critically, construct sound arguments, and contribute original perspectives.

Research skills play a pivotal role in fostering academic success among students. These skills are essential for producing high-quality assignments and developing critical thinking and analytical abilities. By honing their research skills, students learn to locate, evaluate, and synthesize information from various sources to support their arguments. This process of inquiry not only enhances their understanding of the subject matter and cultivates a sense of intellectual curiosity. Additionally, research skills equip students with the tools to navigate the vast landscape of academic literature, distinguishing between credible and unreliable sources. Strong research skills can lead to improved academic performance, increased confidence, and a deeper engagement with the material. Therefore, investing in developing research skills is crucial for students to excel in their educational pursuits and beyond.

Students can significantly enhance their research skills by implementing PBL and organizing a Project Fest. Project Fest could be a platform for students to showcase their projects, allowing them to practice presenting their work professionally. Students would have the opportunity to receive feedback from peers and faculty members, fostering a culture of constructive criticism and improvement. Participating in Project Fest could help students build confidence in their research abilities and develop essential networking skills. Research shows that interactive events like Project Fests have improved students' research skills and academic performance. By actively engaging in the planning and execution of Project Fest, students would

enhance their research skills and contribute to creating a vibrant educational community within the university [3].

To ensure the successful planning and execution of Project Fest, it is essential to establish clear objectives and timelines. The first step involves forming a dedicated organizing committee composed of faculty members, students, and administrative staff who can contribute their expertise and perspectives. Regular meetings should be scheduled to discuss logistics, delegate tasks, and monitor progress. Setting realistic goals for the event and establishing a detailed budget are crucial to avoiding any unexpected challenges. Moreover, securing resources such as venues, equipment, and promotional materials well in advance is necessary to ensure smooth operations. Collaboration with external stakeholders, such as industry partners or alums, can also enhance the overall experience for participants and provide valuable networking opportunities. By following a strategic plan and leveraging diverse talents, Project Fest can foster research skills and academic excellence among first-year non-linguistic students [4].

In considering the culmination of organizing a Project Fest to enhance students' research skills, it is evident that incorporating diverse learning perspectives is crucial for fostering inclusive and engaging educational experiences [5]. By recognizing and embracing cultural values and contexts that students bring to the academic setting, educators can create a more enriching learning environment that caters to the needs of a diverse student body. Moreover, as emphasized by Denise R. Goldman, integrating personal narratives and community discourse analysis can play a significant role in developing students' analytical skills and fostering their investment in academic activities. Embracing this multifaceted approach enhances students' self-efficacy and engagement and contributes to a more holistic understanding of research practices and scholarly endeavors among first-year students [2]. By acknowledging the importance of cultural diversity and personal engagement in educational settings, educators can effectively enhance their students' research skills and academic development through innovative and inclusive initiatives like Project Fest.

In developing research skills among first-year students, Project Fest could be an innovative approach to foster these competencies early in their academic journey. The literature suggests that engaging students in research and project-based learning can significantly enhance their academic performance and retention and equip them with essential skills for their future careers. Moreover, integrating collaborative science projects in undergraduate education has been shown to develop a broad suite of competencies, including teamwork and cooperative skills, which are crucial in modern research settings [6]. Interestingly, while the benefits of research engagement are well-documented, challenges must be addressed. First-year students often require time to adjust to the academic demands of tertiary education, and balancing these with developing research skills can be challenging [7]. Furthermore, developing soft skills, such as communication and organization, is highly valued and can be fostered through international collaborative projects [8]. In summary, a project fest for first-year students could be a valuable initiative to cultivate research skills and soft competencies. It should be designed to accommodate the adjustment period of new students, address barriers to participation, and incorporate collaborative elements to enhance teamwork and communication skills.

The correlation between academic abilities and creative thinking skills suggests that strengthening academic competencies can positively influence students' research capabilities, enhancing their capacity for inquiry, problem-solving, and innovation [9]. Furthermore, the high level of 21st-century skills, including critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and digital literacy, highlights their potential to be effectively applied within the Project Fest activities [10]. In this context, Project Fest should be designed to actively promote student engagement in research, focusing on systematically developing essential research skills such as planning, data collection, analysis, and presentation. Incorporating active learning technologies and collaborative project-based approaches would enhance the initiative's effectiveness, providing

students with hands-on, experimental learning opportunities. Several studies confirm that participation in structures, project-based academic events like Project Fest can make a significant contribution to the development of research skills in higher education settings (Aporbo, 2022; Ishizuka et al., 2013; Kiribayeva et al., 2024; Kocaman, 2022; Maharani et al., 2020; Sorokoumova & Dunaeva, 2022; Stoyanova, 2023; Yani et al., 2023). These findings collectively emphasize the importance of integrating research-based, student-centered initiatives into the educational process to build academic confidence, foster intellectual curiosity, and prepare students for successful academic and professional careers.

Materials and methods of research

The study was conducted in the 2023/2024 academic year in the foreign languages department of L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Kazakhstan. It involved approximately 120 students from non-linguistics departments who participated in 50 student-led projects. The primary aim of this study was to explore how participation in Project Fest influences students' learning processes and contributes to developing their research skills.

A qualitative research design was employed to capture the participants' nuanced experiences, perceptions, and attitudes. Qualitative methods were chosen for their ability to provide rich, descriptive insights, track unique occurrences, and give voice to diverse and underrepresented perspectives. According to Öhman, qualitative research focuses on individuals' experiences, human behavior, and social interaction [11]. It emphasizes flexibility, inductive reasoning, and interpretative analysis, aiming to develop new knowledge grounded in participants' beliefs and experiences. The data collection tools included open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire comprised six open-ended questions designed to allow students to freely express their views regarding their participation in Project Fest, the research process, and the skills they developed. To deepen the understanding of students' experiences and verify questionnaire responses, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a selected group of students during Project Fest. These interviews enabled researchers to clarify ambiguous responses, probe for further details, and obtain comprehensive insights into students' learning journeys and attitudes. And perceived benefits of the event.

Results and their discussion

The finding revealed a diverse range of student perceptions regarding the impact of Project Fest. Students noted that participating in this event enhanced their research planning and organizational skills, improved their ability to analyze and present data, and boosted their confidence in public speaking and teamwork. Students appreciated the opportunity to engage in hands-on research projects, which allowed them to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios and practice critical thinking (Table 1).

Table 1 – Students' perceptions about Project Fest

<p><i>Research and speaking skills development (Project Fest allows students to enhance various skills such as research, problem-solving, project management, and public speaking).</i></p> <p>Practise english and the most important is we make project in english according to our major. It was interesting experience</p>
<p><i>Networking opportunities (students can connect with other students from different university faculties, peers, faculty members, English teachers, and foreign professors, fostering relationships that may be beneficial for their future careers).</i></p>

had a very big impact. Because planning the teamwork across for our couples in uni was harder than I thought. But anyway we did it. And for me personally we did it pretty great.

It helped me to understand that teamwork is very important, each idea of every member matters

I always knew that teamwork is a foundation of any collaborative effort and this event only reinforced that idea.

Before that project i thought im not so sociable but afterwards i understand that i can work in team. And teamwork is not always are misunderstood it can be good and funny time

Not only teamwork but also this project helped me to become the best leader.By collaborating with my peers i can strongly say that this project helped me to know my teammates more closer

Interdisciplinary collaboration (by interacting with students from different departments, participants can gain new perspectives and insights, encouraging innovative thinking and interdisciplinary solutions).

I'm planning to continue this project, because I think for Kazakhstan future it could be very helpful and progressive

We gathered motivation to participate in events more, to speak what we think is right for better developing

I now understand that the base of all projects is research and it should take up the majority of time spend on a project.

I dont remember but i have insight. It simple have a plan and know how to time management your day

The people who were congratulating us gave me a strong feeling of that I'm matter.And my future is so bright because this particular project made a contribution

Exposure and recognition (students have a platform to showcase their work, gaining visibility and recognition for their efforts, which can be motivating and confidence-boosting).

Maybe possibility to hear other students and their ideas. And make individual presentations.

I may suggest to find more spacious ground to hold the event, because it was very crowded

The only complaint i heard was that the our venue was too cramped and hot so it was difficult to present our projects.

Bigger place for a lot of students. Because it was hard to stand there when it a little space for all of us

Real-world experience (participating in Project Fest mimics real-world scenarios where students must present their ideas and findings, preparing them for similar future career experiences).

My participation in project fest opened me new opportunities for researching about new theme, that I have never seen and heard

It made me realize that the sphere i chose suits me

It taught me the basics of research and importance of teamwork.

Yes, of course. Because it was good experience and practise.

Project Fest was a pivotal experience for me, both personally and academically. It honed my problem-solving skills, deepened my understanding of sustainability, and taught me the value of teamwork. I gained confidence in my ability to tackle complex challenges, expanded my knowledge base, and gained valuable hands-on experience. Overall, Project Fest was a significant stepping stone in my growth and development.

new ideas appeared

Feedback and improvement (constructive feedback from judges, mentors, and peers can help students refine their projects and improve their work, aiding their learning process).

Our work went smoothly, but we faced some problems with time management, we solved it by deviding task between us

The biggest challenge was coming up with the idea and giving directions as a captain. The idea was quickly figured out after we gathered and did a quick brainstorm. But the role of a leader is hard to bear and I can count myself as lucky since I was blessed with hardworking and understanding teammates that supported me throughout the event.

It was our bioplastic. We couldn't make it so many days so i made it in overnight and i dont sleep because of that but It was worth it

During Project Fest, one of the biggest challenges our team faced was sourcing the right ingredients for our bioplastic recipe. Many traditional bioplastic recipes call for cornstarch or gelatin, which we found either too expensive or difficult to obtain locally. We were committed to using sustainable, accessible materials, and this presented a significant hurdle

Note: Compiled by authors

Participants emphasized that Project Fest's collaborative nature encouraged them to share ideas, negotiate roles, and work collectively toward a common goal, fostering a stronger sense of academic community. Some students highlighted changes related to time management and balancing research responsibilities with other academic duties, indicating areas where additional support and resources could be beneficial.

The findings from the student interviews highlight the multifaceted benefits of participating in Project Fest, underscoring its role as a transformative learning experience for first-year students. The event significantly contributes to developing essential skills such as research, problem-solving, project management, and public speaking, which are vital for academic and professional success. Additionally, the networking opportunities provided by Project Fest allow students to connect with peers, faculty members, and international experts,

fostering relationships that can support their future career growth. Interdisciplinary collaboration during the event encourages innovative thinking and broadens students' perspectives by exposing them to diverse ideas and methodologies. Furthermore, Project Fest offers students a platform to showcase their work, enhancing their visibility, boosting their confidence, and motivating them to excel. The exposure to real-world scenarios and the constructive feedback received from mentors and peers further enrich the students' learning experience, equipping them with practical skills and a mindset for continuous improvement. Project Fest is an academic activity for the comprehensive development platform that prepares students for future educational and professional challenges. By fostering a culture of innovation, collaboration, and excellence, it paves the way for students to become confident, skilled, and well-rounded individuals.

The results of semi-structured interviews identified the challenges of Project Fest. The challenges identified from the student interviews shed light on the complexities of organizing and participating in Project Fest. Balancing preparation for the event with regular academic responsibilities highlights the importance of fostering practical time management skills among students. Resource constraints, such as limited access to funding, materials, or mentorship, underscore the need for organizers to provide adequate support to ensure equitable opportunities for all participants. Stress and pressure stemming from the competitive nature of the event can impact students' mental well-being, suggesting the necessity of creating a more supportive and encouraging environment. Team dynamics, including conflicts and coordination issues, emphasize teaching students' effective collaboration and conflict resolution strategies. Additionally, technical difficulties during project presentations highlight the importance of proper planning and technical support to minimize disruptions. Finally, challenges related to inclusivity and accessibility point to the need for deliberate efforts to ensure all students, regardless of their English proficiency or academic background, can participate and succeed. Addressing these challenges will improve Project Fest's quality and create a more inclusive, supportive, and enriching experience for all participants. By overcoming these obstacles, Project Fest can further enhance its role as a transformative platform for academic and personal development.

Project Fest is a multifaceted event that significantly benefits students, including skill development, networking opportunities, and exposure to interdisciplinary collaboration. It is a valuable platform for students to showcase their projects, gain constructive feedback, and prepare for real-world professional scenarios. However, the event also presents challenges such as time management, resource constraints, and potential stress. By acknowledging and addressing these challenges, organizers can enhance the overall experience, making Project Fest an even more enriching and inclusive event. Ultimately, Project Fest fosters community and collaboration among students, equipping them with valuable skills and experiences to benefit their academic and professional futures.

The qualitative data indicated that Project Fest significantly contributed to developing essential research competencies, enhanced students' engagement with academic content, and promoted a positive, interactive learning environment. This event successfully addressed gaps in early research opportunities for students of non-linguistics departments, equipping them with valuable skills for both academic and professional contexts.

Conclusion

The data collected during Project Fest indicate that first-year students greatly benefited from participating in this event. The findings demonstrate a notable improvement in research skills, critical thinking abilities, and overall academic confidence among the participants. Students reported feeling better prepared to undertake future research projects and academic assignments after participating in the workshops, collaborative projects, and presentations offered during the fest. Specifically, students highlighted the following key outcomes:

- Enhanced research planning and analytical skills;

- Improved public speaking, teamwork, and presentation abilities;
- Increased motivation and confidence in engaging with academic tasks;
- Greater understanding of research processes and real-world application of theoretical concepts.

Based on these outcomes, several recommendations are proposed further to enhance the effectiveness and impact of future project Fest: 1) Integrate more hands-on research exercises (provide opportunities for students to apply research methods in simulated real-life contexts); 2) Establish mentorship and feedback system (collaborate with industry professionals as mentors to improve the quality of student projects and academic development); 3) Expand Interdisciplinary and collaborative opportunities (encouraging students from different departments to collaborate on projects to build transferable skills in teamwork and communication); 4) Incorporate follow-up activities and continuous support (provide follow-up sessions, workshops, or research clubs to sustain student interest in research, reinforce the skills acquired). Implementing these recommendations, future iterations of Project Fest can continue to foster a culture of research excellence, support academic growth, and equip first-year students of non-linguistics departments with essential skills for their ongoing educational and professional journeys.

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ЖОБА ФЕСТИВАЛІ АРҚЫЛЫ АҒЫЛШЫН ТІЛІН ОҚЫТУДА СТУДЕНТТЕРДІҢ ЗЕРТТЕУШІЛІК DAҒДАЛАРЫН ДАМЫТУ

Андатпа

Бірінші курс студенттері үшін мықты зерттеу дағдыларын дамыту олардың академиялық жолының басталу кезеңінде аса маңызды. «Жоба фестивалі» студенттердің зерттеу дағдыларын жетілдіруге бағытталған құнды іс-шара болып табылады, өйткені ол жан-жақты және тәжірибеге негізделген оқыту

тәжірибесін ұсынады. Мақаланың мақсаты-ұйымдастырылған және өткізілген жобалар фестивалі арқылы студенттердің ағылшын тілін оқытудағы зерттеу дағдыларын зерттеу. Бұл шара студенттерді әртүрлі зерттеу әдістемелерімен таныстырады, сыни ойлау мен мәселелерді шешу қабілеттерін дамытады, сондай-ақ ғылыми әдебиеттермен жұмыс істеу және деректерді талдау дағдыларын жақсартады. «Жоба фестивалі» барысында студенттер өз жобаларын таныстырып, кері байланыс алады, бұл олардың коммуникациялық қабілеттерін жетілдіруге және жобаларын кезең-кезеңімен жақсартудың маңыздылығын түсінуге көмектеседі. Бұл зерттеу 2023/2024 оқу жылында Л.Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университетінің (Қазақстан) тілдік емес мамандықтарында оқитын бірінші курс студенттерінің зерттеу дағдыларын дамытудағы «Жоба фестивалінің» әсерін зерттеуге бағытталған. Іс-шараға 120 студент қатысып, 50 жоба ұсынылды. «Жоба фестивалі» студенттерге зерттеу қызметімен тәжірибелік түрде айналысуға мүмкіндік беретін платформа ұсынды, сыни ойлау, аналитикалық қабілеттер және коммуникациялық дағдыларды дамытуға ықпал етті. Зерттеу барысында студенттердің тәжірибесі мен пікірлерін зерттеу үшін ашық сұрақтардан тұратын сауалнамалар мен жартылай құрылымдалған сұхбаттарды қамтитын сапалы әдістер қолданылды. Нәтижелер көрсеткендей, «Жоба фестивалі» зерттеу құзыреттіліктерін айтарлықтай жақсартып, студенттердің академиялық қабілеттеріне деген сенімін нығайтып, интеллектуалдық қызығушылықтарын арттырды. Іс-шара сонымен қатар ынтымақтастықты, конструктивті кері байланысты дамытуға және тиімді презентация дағдыларын игеруге ықпал етті, бірінші курс студенттеріне зерттеу жұмыстарымен айналысуға арналған мүмкіндіктердің шектеулігін толықтырды. Интерактивті білім беру ортасын қалыптастыра отырып, «Жоба фестивалі» студенттердің жоғары білімге бейімделуін қолдайды, зерттеу мәдениетін дамытуға ықпал етеді және студенттерге академиялық және кәсіби жетістіктерге қажетті маңызды дағдыларды игеруге көмектеседі.

Негізгі сөздер: зерттеу дағдылары, жоба фестивалі, артықшылықтары, мәселелер, ағылшын тілі сабағы, презентация

РАЗВИТИЕ ИССЛЕДОВАТЕЛЬСКИХ НАВЫКОВ СТУДЕНТОВ В ОБУЧЕНИИ АНГЛИЙСКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ С ПОМОЩЬЮ ФЕСТИВАЛЯ ПРОЕКТОВ

Аннотация

Развитие исследовательских навыков имеет решающее значение для первокурсников нелингвистических специальностей, начинающих свой академический путь. «Фестиваль проектов» является ценным мероприятием, направленным на развитие исследовательских навыков студентов, предоставляя комплексный и практико-ориентированный опыт обучения. Цель статьи – изучить исследовательские навыки студентов в обучении английскому языку с помощью организованного и проведенного фестиваля проектов. Он знакомит студентов с различными исследовательскими методологиями, способствует развитию критического мышления и навыков решения проблем, а также улучшает навыки анализа данных и работы с научной литературой. В рамках «Фестиваля проектов» студенты участвуют в презентациях и получают обратную связь, что помогает им оттачивать навыки коммуникации и понимать важность поэтапного улучшения своих проектов. Данное исследование изучает влияние «Фестиваля проектов» на развитие исследовательских навыков первокурсников нелингвистических специальностей в Евразийском национальном университете имени Л.Н. Гумилева (Казахстан) в 2023/2024 учебном году. В мероприятии приняли участие 120 студентов, которые представили 50 проектов. «Фестиваль проектов» предоставил платформу для практического освоения исследовательской деятельности, способствовал развитию критического мышления, аналитических способностей и коммуникативных навыков. Исследование проводилось с использованием качественных методов, включая открытые анкеты и полуструктурированные интервью, для изучения опыта и восприятия студентов. Результаты показали, что «Фестиваль проектов» существенно улучшил исследовательские компетенции, укрепил уверенность в собственных академических силах и пробудил интеллектуальный интерес. Мероприятие также способствовало сотрудничеству, развитию конструктивной обратной связи и навыков эффективной презентации, восполняя недостаток возможностей для проведения исследований в рамках учебной программы первокурсников. Создавая интерактивную образовательную среду, «Фестиваль проектов» поддерживает адаптацию студентов к высшему образованию, способствует развитию исследовательской культуры и помогает студентам приобрести важные навыки для академического и профессионального успеха.

Ключевые слова: исследовательские навыки, Проект Фест, преимущества, проблемы, занятие английского языка, презентация

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