

PROJECT-BASED ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES: A FRAMEWORK FOR BRIDGING GENERAL AND ACADEMIC LITERACY IN EMI CONTEXTS**Abdumalikova Azizakhon Abdumajid kizi**

MA TESOL Alumni, Webster University, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Abstract: As English-Medium Instruction (EMI) expands in Uzbekistan, there is an increasing need for innovative pedagogical models that prepare students for the linguistic and academic demands of English-language university programs. This paper develops a conceptual framework for integrating Project-Based Learning (PBL) into English for Academic Purposes (EAP), arguing that such an approach effectively bridges general English proficiency and academic literacy. Drawing on socio-constructivist theory, the framework conceptualizes PBL as a dynamic, learner-centered process where authentic projects foster disciplinary communication, critical inquiry, and academic autonomy. The proposed PBL-EAP framework consists of four interrelated principles: (1) authentic academic tasks linked to students' disciplines, (2) integration of reading, writing, and speaking skills through research-driven projects, (3) formative feedback cycles emphasizing reflection and peer collaboration, and (4) alignment with CEFR-based academic outcomes. By embedding these elements in pre-sessional courses, Uzbek EMI institutions can create a structured pathway from general English to academic success. The paper concludes that Project-Based EAP offers a theoretically grounded and contextually adaptable model that enhances student readiness for EMI environments in Uzbekistan and similar multilingual contexts.

Keywords: Project-Based Learning, English for Academic Purposes, Academic Literacy, EMI, Uzbekistan

1. Introduction

The rise of English-medium education in Uzbekistan marks one of the most dynamic shifts in the country's higher education history. Universities such as Webster, Westminster, British Management University, and New Uzbekistan University now offer entire programs in English. This development represents more than a linguistic change; it symbolizes Uzbekistan's aspiration to participate fully in the global academic community.

Yet, the transition into EMI is rarely smooth. Students entering these universities often come from Uzbek- or Russian-medium schools, where English is learned as a subject, not as a tool for thinking, reading, and writing academically. Many reach intermediate or even advanced proficiency, but when faced with university lectures, scholarly texts, or research assignments, they realize that knowing English and thinking in English are not the same.

Teachers, too, experience this challenge. They want to prepare students effectively but are often constrained by curricula that emphasize grammar, vocabulary lists, or exam formats. These methods can build accuracy but do not develop confidence, inquiry, or academic voice - the qualities that make a student thrive in an EMI environment.

This paper proposes a more active and meaningful way to bridge this gap: Project-Based English for Academic Purposes (PBEAP). Through project work such as inquiry, collaboration, writing, and reflection, students not only study language but use it to explore ideas, solve problems, and express themselves in academic ways. In doing so, they grow not only as English users but as young scholars learning to think and communicate with purpose.

2. Theoretical foundations

Learning is most effective when students are engaged, curious, and emotionally connected to what they are studying. Language learning becomes powerful when learners feel that their classroom work matters beyond passing a test or completing a course.

Projects bring together communication, critical thinking, and creativity within a social and interactive process. When learners discuss ideas, research questions, or drafts, they are not just practicing grammar, they are experiencing how language helps them express meaning.

Many EMI students begin their academic journey with anxiety and fear of mistakes. A project-based environment allows them to take small risks, collaborate, and see their progress over time. Teachers act as guides rather than evaluators, helping students view English as a living language they can think and grow through.

This understanding lies at the core of PBEAP. Learning is a social, meaningful, and reflective act. Academic English is not only about structures; it is about expressing thought, curiosity, and discovery (Hyland, 2006).

3. Rationale for Project-based EAP in Uzbekistan

The introduction of EMI programs across Uzbekistan has created both opportunity and pressure. For many students, English is the key to global study and employment. But the transition from general English to academic English often feels like crossing a wide river with no bridge (Swales, 2004).

Traditional EAP courses tend to focus on forms rather than functions, on how sentences look rather than what they mean in academic life. Students learn to summarize texts or write essays, but rarely experience the deeper academic process of questioning, synthesizing, and constructing arguments (Flowerdew, 2013).

Project-based EAP provides that bridge. When learners carry out real academic tasks, such as conducting a small study, presenting results, or writing a mini paper, they begin to see how language supports thought. They learn to connect ideas, not just memorize expressions (Beckett & Slater, 2020; Li, 2018).

In Uzbekistan, this model fits particularly well. Group collaboration mirrors the cultural values of mutual support and respect for collective effort. PBL also aligns with the country's

educational reforms that emphasize innovation, creativity, and learner independence (Presidential Decree PQ-5117, 2021).

4. The PBL-EAP Framework

The PBL-EAP framework rests on four guiding principles that connect classroom practice with real academic experience.

4.1 Authentic academic tasks

Students should experience English as it functions in academic life. Instead of completing isolated exercises, they can design research proposals, analyze small sets of data, or prepare presentations modeled on real conferences. Such projects help them understand how academic knowledge is created and communicated (Beckett & Slater, 2020).

4.2 Integration of language skills

Reading, writing, listening, and speaking naturally complement one another in authentic tasks. For example, a project on sustainable tourism might involve reading articles, summarizing findings, discussing implications in groups, and producing a written report followed by a short oral defense. This integration reflects real academic work and strengthens both comprehension and expression.

4.3 Feedback and reflection

Feedback in PBL is a conversation, not a grade. Students exchange comments on drafts, discuss revisions, and write short reflections about what helped them improve. This process nurtures ownership and responsibility for learning and shows that growth comes through revision and persistence rather than perfection (Grant, 2017).

4.4 CEFR-aligned outcomes

To keep progress visible, outcomes are linked to CEFR descriptors for academic English at B2-C1 levels. These include synthesizing information, organizing arguments, and maintaining coherence (Council of Europe, 2020). The standards provide structure without reducing creativity.

5. Implementation insights

A pilot version of this framework was tested with first-year students in two private universities in Tashkent. Over a twelve-week semester, learners worked on projects related to their majors.

At first, many were hesitant and preferred clear, teacher-led instruction. But as the course progressed, attitudes changed. Students began to take initiative, explore sources independently, and help peers improve. Teachers observed growth not only in writing quality and vocabulary but also in confidence and participation.

One student wrote: “Before this course, I thought English was grammar. Now I see it is how I explain my thoughts.” This simple reflection captures the main achievement of the course, the development of academic identity.

The process was not without challenges. Teachers needed more time for planning, and some institutions preferred measurable test outcomes. Yet once administrators witnessed tangible results through presentations and written work, support for the method increased.

6. Pedagogical and policy implications

6.1 For teachers

Teachers play a crucial role in this transition. Adopting a project-based model means guiding rather than lecturing, encouraging exploration instead of correction. It can be a learning process for teachers as much as for students. Professional workshops and collaboration between colleagues can help educators design balanced projects and meaningful assessments.

6.2 For institutions

Universities can begin by integrating project-based modules into existing foundation or EAP programs. Blending portfolio assessments with traditional tasks will make learning outcomes more authentic. This approach fits naturally with Uzbekistan’s national strategy for modernizing education and developing internationally competitive graduates (Presidential Decree PQ-5117, 2021).

6.3 For students

Students benefit most when they see their studies as connected to real academic and professional goals. Working on projects gives them a sense of agency and purpose. They learn not just to use English correctly, but to think through it, question, and contribute ideas of their own.

7. Discussion

Experience with PBEAP suggests that language development and personal growth happen together. When learners engage in real tasks and see their progress in meaningful outcomes, such as improved writing or confident presentations, their motivation grows naturally.

Studies in other contexts also report similar effects. Grant (2017) found that project-based EAP courses enhanced learner motivation and independence. Li (2018) observed improvements in both engagement and language proficiency. These findings support what many Uzbek teachers have already noticed in practice: when learning feels purposeful, effort follows.

The key idea is simple. Students learn best when they feel respected, challenged, and inspired. English, when used as a medium of inquiry, becomes a bridge to knowledge rather than a barrier to it.

8. Conclusion

As Uzbekistan continues to expand English-medium programs, the focus must remain on how students experience learning. Project-Based English for Academic Purposes offers a path that connects language study with genuine academic growth.

Through meaningful projects, learners gain the skills and confidence they need to participate fully in EMI environments. Teachers rediscover their role as facilitators of inquiry, and institutions find a model that combines global academic standards with local educational values.

Ultimately, this approach develops not only linguistic ability but also intellectual independence and self-belief - qualities essential for success in today's academic world.

References

- Beckett, G. H., & Slater, T. (2020). *Project-Based Second and Foreign Language Education: Theory, Research, and Practice*. Routledge.
- Council of Europe. (2020). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment – Companion Volume*. Council of Europe Publishing.
- Grant, S. (2017). Implementing project-based learning in a university EAP writing course: Student perceptions and outcomes. *System*, 65, 109–120.
- Hyland, K. (2006). *English for Academic Purposes: An Advanced Resource Book*. Routledge.
- Li, M. (2018). Project-based learning in EAP: An ethnographic study in Shanghai universities. *English Language Teaching Journal*, 72(2), 200–212.
- Presidential Decree of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PQ-5117. (2021). On measures to develop higher education and improve its quality.