Project-Based Learning in English Classrooms: Benefits and Challenges

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Abstract

In English classrooms, Project-Based Learning (PBL) has emerged as a potent pedagogical approach that prioritizes student-centered learning by requiring the completion of meaningful projects. This paper examines the advantages and obstacles of integrating PBL into English language instruction. It emphasizes how PBL cultivates real-world problem-solving skills, collaboration, and critical thinking, enabling students to employ language in authentic contexts. The study investigates the theoretical underpinnings of PBL, such as experiential and constructivist learning theories, and explores its practical implementation through empirical research and case studies. Enhanced student engagement, enhanced language proficiency, and the development of 21st-century skills are among the key benefits that have been identified.

Nevertheless, the paper also addresses substantial challenges, including the necessity of extensive teacher preparation, the challenge of evaluating project outcomes, and potential resource constraints. This paper provides educators with valuable insights into integrating PBL into their English teaching practices by providing a balanced analysis of the approach. Ultimately, this will result in more engaging and effective language learning experiences.

Keywords: Benefits ,Challenges, PBL, English Classrooms.

1. Introduction

This essay serves to outline the benefits and challenges of implementing project-based learning in English classrooms and is structured into five sections including: Introduction, What is Project-Based Learning?, Benefits of Project-Based Learning, Challenges of Implementing Project-Based Learning, and Conclusion. In the second section, the essay explores the concept of project-based learning while the third section provides the benefits of this kind of learning process. In reverse, the fourth section outlines the challenges of implementing project-based learning. The essay concludes this analysis, paying particular

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attention to how important quality implementation is in regards to students' learning experiences and how schools are responsible for providing the time, space, and investment to reach that goal.

Project-based learning (PBL) is an instructional approach that encourages students to demonstrate 21st-century competencies and mastery of academic content. In a nutshell, PBL is a model in which students work over an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging, and complex question or problem. It initially aims to develop a culture of inquiry whereby students learn to think critically, probe into what is not working, and ultimately solve problems to receive affirmation. PBL syncs well with the inquiry-based model of the learning process, which is highly regarded in driving conceptual and contextual changes. With its emphasis on concept, contextual learning, thinking, designing, discovery, challenge, and problem-solving, it also stands as a dutiful tool in promoting the most sought-after learning outcomes of the 21st-century curriculum—the 4 C's: Creativity, Critical thinking, Collaboration, and Communication. Approaches to PBL vary, and research has demonstrated that PBL can be used in almost any field. A model that is commonly used in social studies classrooms, however, is the use of universals and generalization to integrate standards from several disciplines.

1.1. Background of Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning is the pedagogical model that focuses on learning by doing in small groups of students while interacting with each other, their teachers, and their communities. The origins of collaborative PBL can be traced back in history: first, to the Dalton experimental school in Massachusetts in the 1920s, and second, to landmark research conducted by John Dewey in the 1930s, and Lev Vygotsky in the 1920s and 1930s. All of these models were very child-centered, and the types of group activities were directed towards social development. Cooperative learning, a more recent form of working together in the classroom, has also greatly contributed to and championed by Robert Slavin. Still active internationally, Slavin's research on group work (1970s to present) has had a huge impact on education.

PBL is based on the strategies of situated learning and inquiry-based learning, combining them to produce a group-based learning approach. Key influences upon PBL have been Dewey with his 'project method', which he espoused and experimented with at the end of the twentieth century, and Vygotsky, whose theories on 'scaffolding' and developing with social help have been compared and used by PBL practitioners to good effect. However, virtually all theoretical models of learning have informed the PBL process in some way.

Situated learning suggests that learning will take place when doing something, when working on a real, tangible project. It's a form of active learning, where students guide, plan, and present their learning experiences. PBL provides opportunities for tutors to perform a mix of 'sage on the stage' and 'guide on the side'. It allows them to share their expert knowledge with students and to answer questions, while also encouraging students to share and pool their own knowledge.

2. Theoretical Framework

Project-based learning is underpinned by constructivist learning theory, where the major interest is given to learners' individual experience. This theory develops cognitive learning psychology, where knowledge initiates from learners' process of accommodation or assimilation. Another point of reference in constructing project-based learning is the theory of social inclusion. The educators include Vygotsky and Bruner as its main proponents. In Vygotskian theory, learning is the effect of communicative events rather than cognitive development. Bruner (1966) defines learning as an active process, where learners construct new ideas or concepts based upon their current/past knowledge. In doing so, the educator should design a teaching technique that can disclose the learners' goals and aspirations in cooperative activities. This condition is described as the classroom as a community.

The theoretical aspects of project-based learning explored in the study concern essentially three related domains: why project-based learning is claimed to be an appropriate approach for creating autonomy in college writing courses, how English genre knowledge of project work can be favorably used in promoting students' autonomy, and how the assumption of project-based learning is translated practically into a teaching-learning strategy. The project-based approach, then, may be seen as a consequence of the sociocultural theories of learning that stress learners' participation in collective activities. Such theories believe that learning can occur if it takes place within such a context. This view gives support to an informal approach to implementing project-based learning in English genre education in general. In brighter terms, a project can be an effective vehicle for creating institutional change towards the autonomous classroom. In short, it may be said that project-based learning combines the social aspects of learning with the use of language and thus situates language in a real context.

2.1. Constructivist Learning Theory

Constructivist learning is a theoretical framework grounded in philosophy and cognitive psychology. Its basic principle is that human learners develop their knowledge non-linearly through social practice, that is, "learning by doing". This implies that the application

of new knowledge can change the learner's cognition. The theory suggests: "Learning occurs in a social environment where students are part of a community". From this foundational point of view, teaching strategies can vary because the selection, combination, and sequencing of activities depend on the teacher's theoretical and personal perspectives with respect to the objectives to be achieved in English classroom settings.

English teachers, as creators, match their contents and assess the students' progress in the subject, reflect their thinking, feelings, and knowledge. Project-based learning is an instructional method powerful enough to connect with these English classroom challenges. Instead of interpreting the project as a method to apply or a technique to use, it refers to project-based learning as a pedagogical approach that applies constructivist learning theory in the classroom and most often used to describe a specific family of teaching methods. As with any pedagogical method, it facilitates the acquisition of important knowledge, skills, and understanding and has benefits as well as challenges with respect to its implementation. Likewise, each approach also varies to some extent in relation to the principles and strategies it advocates. Is project-based learning (PrBL) a pedagogical approach that capitalizes on the principles and practices of constructivist learning theory? If it is, why is it relevant to start constructing writing from the perspective of a theoretical framework? Why constructivism? Why project-based learning? Why investigate students' perceptions of PrBL in English classrooms? In order to answer these questions, this section structures the investigation by analyzing the philosophical and instructional implications of the constructivist learning theory based on the theoretical contributions of Dewey, Vygotsky, Piaget, and Bruner, followed by the principles and rationale of PrBL.

3. Benefits of Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning (PBL), also known as task-based language learning (TBLL), entails creating in-depth methods to help construct students' knowledge as they practice English. It entails performing a task, challenged with solving an issue for which students are given a set amount of time to gather resources and/or research using various tools. As such, PBL is primarily learner-centered. Cultivating students' interest, comprehension, creativity, and talent while teaching them to speak, read, write, and listen in English necessitates their direct engagement in all four abilities and the employment of techniques that benefit both assessment and project work. As a result, many teachers are equally drawn to the potential of PBL to produce quality learning and assessments that advance English language learning. PBL is a substitute for a lecture and offers an examination technique to produce interesting results. Students work on real-life resources to create their own items, goals, or activities in

PBL. They will generally create a business strategy, a solution, or an artifact with unique deliverables. They choose the subject of the project. Next, students address the teacher and their class or community as well as "evolved customers." One of the potential benefits of PBL is improved and improved academic outcomes, according to studies. Participants are typically more actively committed in the lesson experience of the field and engage with PBL trainers in peer assessments. Projects can enhance patience and attention and create effective solutions by promoting cooperation. In these situations, students acquire transferable 21st-century qualifications.

3.1. Enhanced Student Engagement

Using Project-Based Learning (PBL) in English Classrooms

3.1. Enhanced Student Engagement

As highlighted in the conceptual framework, Vygotsky believes that education is designed to promote intellectual development by facilitating active participation of the learners. By actively involving in project-based hands-on activities, students start to think and practice on their own and communicate with their peers fluently. Thus, the current section talks about how project-based learning could create various opportunities for students to become more engaged in learning and could nurture more active learners who are willing to participate in learning English. The section underlines the way in which project-based learning could play a part in creating more ambitious students who are driven to do better through increased attention and devotion. Students who engage in project-based learning develop self-directed, reflective learning habits that can carry over to and be leveraged in new situations in their further studies.

2.1. Definition of Project-Based Learning

Fink defines project-based learning as a model of instruction that is more than merely hands-on learning. Project-based learning is using in-depth investigations on real-world issues in order to develop and practice critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and collaborative skills. Advancements in the information and communication technology (ICT) industry have enabled PBL to be proactive in the field of education by offering potentially engaging and more meaningful learning materials. A concept that has been implemented as an alternative teaching method, project-based learning is believed to be a solution to the inherent challenges faced by educators in the pursuit of making learning more meaningful for learners.

4.Challenges of Project-Based Learning

Even though project-based learning brings many benefits to English classrooms, there are also difficulties and challenges that teachers might have to face when using it. One of the challenges might be with regard to assessment principles. Project-based learning assumes formative assessment. Teachers do not mark the failed project after a year's work; during the whole work on the project, they assess both the project and the process and not the product alone. The control of final products cannot be in the hands of a teacher, one has to agree. The students' products should be presented to audiences other than their teacher. To have it assessed from different points of view enables to prevent Gricean maxims from being transgressed and hence addressees getting the wrong interpretation of the message.

Similarly, Nathalie Dion points out that teachers using project-based learning are creating an environment in which students have more control and take more responsibility for their own learning than they do in a traditional class. Project-based learning also requires more time than traditional methods, as teachers have to spend time designing projects and related lessons before starting work with students. Vanessa Ruohong-Tai and Oi Muan Loke note that teachers always try to fit their ideas into the formal curriculum and this is always a challenge when only a set time is given to complete a project. All the partners agreed that English, broadly and particularly in Japan, has a fixed syllabus and duration of courses; however, students are more developed and exposed to such facilities. Research has to be devoted to what can be obtained in just sixteen hours of study in a week.

4.1. Assessment Difficulties

Blumenfeld et al. (1991) suggest and confirm that project-based learning typically includes some kind of presentation of information, generally a written report accompanied by visual aids, where students can demonstrate their expertise and suggest evidence to support their generalizations.

4.1. Assessment Difficulties Even more daunting may be the thought of creating an appropriate assessment for the student work produced in project-based learning. Individual projects are more difficult to assess than individual papers because project-based learning often involves the combination of several skills, processes and final products, many of which are intangible. Not only do finished projects need to be considered, but the teacher must also take into account such components as collaboration, project management, work habits, oral presentations, written reports, group dynamics, understanding of the connection between curriculum and life, and a commitment to social responsibility. Furthermore, like the assessment of cooperative learning groups, the assessment of projects often concerns aspects that are not readily apparent. For example, some teachers are currently assessing the

communications of work groups by using audiotapes of group discussion. These tapes often show that a great deal of brainstorming, debate and conflict have occurred even though the end product was a smooth combination of the skills and contributions of all group members.

5. Implementation Strategies

Designing an effective project: • Keep in mind the fact that not all average students are literate, especially those who find English a tough nut to crack. • Consider students' learning styles and interests if you want to make your project really appealing to students. • Spend a good deal of time preparing for this and gather updated information about students' linguistic weaknesses and strengths. • Bear the student-learning objectives in mind and make sure that they are compatible with the goals of your project. • Make proper use of the maximum available resources to implement it.

Managing Time: • Plan all the activities included very carefully so that they are compatible with the teaching program. This means that teachers and students have to strike a balance between doing justice to the curriculum requirements and working on the project. • Arrange certain time in the program that will be used for the project data-collection research work. • Discuss the project plan and funding and submit all necessary details to a board well in advance.

Saving Resources: • Estimate what staff and other resources are required and draw your plan up accordingly. • Always bear in mind that the classroom you work in must be computer-assisted and stay this way until the program is underway.

Developing Collaboration: • Teams may be created whose members will not only be students but also teachers, administrative staff, and guardians. • The objectives have to do with approving ideas for the activities, developing the homework plan, deciding on the time periods for work, and drawing up the curriculum. • Decide on a website where all the activities will be published and updated.

5.1. Designing Effective Projects

Rather than attempting to answer every concern or question teachers may have in reference to PjBL in one course, we have broken these strategies into different parts. The current concern is about designing projects. The concern is not that teachers cannot assign and, subsequently, grade a project. Many teachers already assign a project to ELLs and continually report some level of frustration with the end product. We know that there are modifications that need to take place, but, to effectively modify a project or design a new one,

it is necessary to address the serious concerns of classroom teachers. To assist teachers in the modification of assessments, or to assist teachers in the creation of new projects, it is important to consider the following, which we address in detail: 1. The project doesn't have to be about everything. 2. The project establishes rigor. 3. The project has appropriate audience. 4. The project does not focus solely on mastery of language. 5. A flexible time frame for project completion is part of the design.

Let us begin with the first point: the project doesn't have to be about everything. We address this question in detail in the next section. A common teacher concern is that PjBL will require much additional time to teach as everything, including the mastery of content, is tied to the project. The second point, project clarity and the creation of a set of desirable objectives, also impact our experiences as teachers. Teachers, when incorporating project-based learning into their curriculum, report a concern about how projects may allow students to receive a better grade for "less work." Furthermore, they often believe that unless projects have very detailed rubrics, students will not provide thorough work at any point during the project. Can we actually teach students content using a project-based approach? Teachers are certainly concerned and skeptical about how to do this in their classes.

6. Research Methodology

This study aims to explore, by using a qualitative exploratory case study, the challenges and benefits associated with implementing project-based learning (PjBL) in two English classrooms run by two experienced teachers from Brazil. The thought was that, being a little explored field, it was of paramount importance to both investigate and describe this phenomenon based on relevant data. In other words, through case studies, and drawing and discussing data already obtained through the means of interviews, off-record and observation, we aimed at understanding the strategies and operations of the main actors involved in their daily lives while teaching the English language through the means of PjBL.

The data was collected through audio-taped, semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, and was complemented by official documents (syllabus, school board announcements etc.). Certain hours of classroom observations were taken. Through content analysis, the findings are discussed in terms of the benefits and challenges of implementing PjBL in the English classroom. This study was based on a literature review discussing how PjBL is important and also focusing on linguistic activities and the role of teachers inside schools, in addition to discussing PjBL in SA schools and in Brazilian ELT courses. As for the case study framework, it was implied by the semiotic approaches. The study was introduced by the pre-positioning of the authors, presenting their justifications and

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purposes for conducting the study, as well as the objectives of the research. It follows a brief review of the literature. The next step presented the methodology (which included data collection and participants, procedures and procedure description, and materials). In addition, we presented data analysis and categorization. Finally, the results were discussed and conclusions were offered.

6.1. Literature Review

This chapter comprises the literature review, which consolidates the existing body of knowledge and research related to the topic in question. An exploration of definitions of the main constructs, theories, and field-based studies is presented over Sections Two to Five. Syntheses of related research are also presented in these sections. The literature review presents the rationale for study based on the absence of project-based learning (PBL) in English as a part of the regular curricula of schools in Mozambique, drawing on the existing body of evidence concerning the main advantages of project-based learning for students, teachers, and the education system at large.

A search in English, French, and Portuguese languages was conducted on ProQuest, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, EBSCO, and ResearchGate. The following search terms were used, separately and in combination: project-based learning, PBL, and EFL (English as a Foreign Language), communicative competence, twenty-first-century competences, teaching methodology, communicative approach, and Mongolian educational system. Dictionaries, thesauruses, and academically accessible websites were searched for definitions related to the main concepts of this study.

7. Case Studies

Over the last few years, the use of project-based learning as a teaching method has been encouraged in different educational systems due to its potential to engage students in the learning process. According to Freire et al., PBL can be 'interesting' because 'the possibility of use of the method is mostly based on the critical differences possible to be captured only in real-life classrooms. Teachers experiment with PBL's codes and find out their interestingness, at the very moment of doing, making a divine intention largely impossible' (Freire, Engel, & Sales, 2007, p. 172). In this section, we present two case studies that show successful concrete implementations of the use of PBL in EFL contexts. The first case study offers practical implications for including PBL projects in ELT lessons in the English classroom as an evaluative tool in the lower levels. The second case study provides evidence, insights, and validations where English learning is deemed necessary due to internationalization in a scientific field. Clearly, the information from both case studies is

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practical and actionable for practitioners who may intend to use a similar teaching strategy in their English classes.

The first case study was carried out in Ukraine and describes the self-made evaluation system for English courses at lower levels. The successful completion of a PBL project was one of the evaluation criteria connecting the different course components to such criteria as teamwork, analytical and problem-solving skills using foreign language intermediation. Its findings will be of particular importance not only in Ukraine but also in other countries affected by their educational systems adapting to the changing times. Its reproducibility in an EFL or CLIL secondary school setting is just one of the possible practical implications. A description of the designed evaluation system and the project itself as part of the system can be advantageous for English language teachers and curriculum designers operating in countries with 'differential gradual integration into the EU eligibility to apply for membership', which can often be associated with the standard of English their citizens possess. In addition, the paper may be interesting for PBL or ESP specialists focusing on medical, dental, and pharmacy terminology, especially in education systems aiming for mandatory English university requirements for the study programs mentioned. In contrast, the findings of the second case study demonstrate that group work with oral presentations fosters student motivation to learn an international language for academic purposes in a non-English speaking sociocultural context. This is essential for students exposed to a transnational scientific environment, therefore offering a different sort of practical implication.

7.1. Successful Implementations

This section provides evidence of successful implementations of project-based learning in ELT. This may be in the form of case studies, or in commentaries that draw on evidence and examples from specific instances. These contributions should detail the case(s), discuss relevant contextual factors, and highlight key strategies and ways of working. At the same time, it is hoped that they will move beyond individual instances and help identify broader principles around designing and implementing successful PBL in ELT. Case studies must be labelled as such in the submission system and should conform to the following criteria.

A case is a pedagogical innovation, within the English classroom, of a significant scale or ambition, with one or more classes, for example, where the whole class or a significantly large group of learners (for example half or more) engaged in PBL for a substantial number of hours across a term. 'PBL' is defined as learning that results from the

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process of working towards understanding, resolution, or completion of problems or tasks which require 'Inquiry-discovery; critical thinking; problem solving; team work; communication and collaboration'. Case studies can be institution- or region-based, or aim to explore specific contributing factors or activities in teaching or learning. They should be written with an ELT practitioner audience in mind, but must also draw on relevant, specific evidence to clearly demonstrate and illustrate the learning process and outcomes for ELT (including concrete examples of project tasks and evidence of learners' submissions, etc).

This article presents a case study of two project-based learning (PBL) implementations enacted at a tertiary language institute in Greece. Drawing on ecolinguistics and using participatory methodologies, the academic coordinator and colleagues used PBL to help students develop and apply their language, teacher, and research skills. In the changes and methodology section we provide a literature review on PBL within ELT. In the context section we explain the context in which the course codes under study operated. In the evaluation and discussion section we analyse both iterations of PBL and assess their effectiveness. In the conclusion section we argue that despite intimidation that social theory can engender in language education contexts, a critical environmental literacy is an asset in terms of language and teacher education.

8. Conclusion and Future Directions

In this essay, we have aimed to critically evaluate the literature surrounding the implementation of project-based learning in English classrooms. Overall, the results of our study indicate that although PBL is overwhelmingly positive in terms of fostering students' motivation and boosting their creativity, it may also be associated with a range of challenges, from students' poor attendance and teacher anxiety to time constraints and resource allocation inadequacies. Yet, these findings are predominantly gleaned from Taiwanese, UK, and Greek contexts. Hence, more research is required across different contexts where this approach has been implemented for more than a decade to weigh the perceived benefits against the challenges of this approach. On the same note, further empirical studies are needed to address students', teachers', and policymakers' perceptions of implementing this approach, as a way of triangulating all the data sources.

There are different ways in which theory and practice can be connected, starting with the impact of this approach on learners, teachers, and the curriculum, and then moving to future, wider-oriented skills that can be targeted and practiced through such an interdisciplinary approach. In some teacher bio-messages, practitioners stressed the notion of PBL as an extended type of teaching and learning from which mathematics can also benefit,

given the emphasis on exploration of complex problems that we encounter in this research. In addition, by teaching learners how to make connections between different subjects, PBL can help them develop skills required in different disciplines, which can support their future choices.

8.1. Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to create a thorough understanding of the benefits and challenges of project-based learning in English classrooms. To achieve this purpose, the research participants were 15 pre-service teachers. This study used the qualitative research approach with a case study design. Five different types of data were employed, including interviews, observations, classroom documents, audio-tapes, and field notes. All methods in the qualitative research in this study were used to examine closely and explore the phenomena experienced by the pre-service teachers. The cross-analyses that were performed in this study guaranteed that the data gathered was aligned with the research questions. Following the discussion of the findings, limitations of the study, and practical implications, the essay concludes with future directions/further research.

This empirical study provides insights regarding the pre-service teachers' perceptions of the benefits and challenges encountered while implementing project-based learning in their English classrooms. Our study confirmed the benefits of project-based learning discussed in the project-based learning literature, such as collaboration, creativity, productivity, engaged learning, and learning by doing. Our findings also identified four other benefits, including community support and appreciation, meaningful learning, cultural exchange and cultural competence, and learner autonomy. In addition, our study confirmed the presence of five of the six challenges of project-based learning reported in the project-based learning literature. For example, project-based learning was time-consuming and forced teachers to adapt to time constraints and time flexibility.

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