Project-Based Learning to Improve Students' English Skills: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract

Project-based learning (PjBL) has emerged as a powerful pedagogical approach to enhancing students' English and soft skills, especially in promoting active language use in authentic contexts. PjBL has been implemented in various levels of education all over the world. The importance of this topic is to explore the potential of PjBL approach to enhance English skills while addressing the practical challenges faced in educational contexts. This paper employs a literature review methodology to examine existing studies on the implementation of PjBL in English language learning and the challenges faced during its implementation. The findings reveal that PjBL has the full potential in enhancing students' English skills. PjBL is also shown to improve students' soft skills, namely critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills. However, the study identifies common issues and challenges such as insufficient teacher training, lack of alignment between project goals and language learning objectives, constraints of time, classroom management, resources availability, and social context. To overcome these challenges, the study suggests institutions and universities to provide all lecturers with upgrading or seminar regarding to the use PjBL in teaching and learning to improve lecturers' professional development. Universities need to develop new model of PjBL and lecturers need to implement several models of PjBL that enhance students' English skills and soft skills. Further research is proposed to explore the long-term effects of PjBL on students' language acquisition across different educational contexts, as well as to investigate scalable PjBL models that can be adapted to various classroom environments.

Keywords: Project Based Learning, English Skills, Soft Skills, And University Students

Introduction

In recent years education institution have been trying to provide students with both hard skills (cognitive knowledge and professional skills) and soft skills, namely problem-solving, teamwork, creative thinking, communication, and collaboration skills (Guo et al., 2020). Project based learning (PjBL) has been implementing to improve students' English kills

and soft skills. PjBL is congruent with the outcome based education curriculum and 21st century education (Solihin et al., 2023). The comprehensive PjBL technique, which combines learning via collaborative project work and makes use of real-world experiences, has proven to be effective in developing academic and soft skills. The main goal of this strategy is to demonstrate learners' abilities to cope with real-world challenges (Tuyen et al., 2020). Many disciplines have incorporated PBL in the classroom as a means for students to learn certain topics by exciting a real-life situation and motivating them to investigate, solve issues, or make decisions (Abdullah et al., 2022). In essence, PBL combines what students already know with what they do while learning, in which students use their past knowledge to create an important effort rather than taking paper tests or being evaluated based on written assessments.

PjBL is an inquiry-based teaching strategy that involves learners in knowledge production through meaningful projects and real-world outputs (Guo et al., 2020). Numerous studies have confirmed the benefits of project-based learning in several fields worldwide (Bakeer, 2023). These impacts include student involvement, achievement, oral and research skills, motivation, and confidence in their talents. PjBL encourages students to address relevant challenges and concerns (Phu-ngamthong, 2020). The projects or activities might serve as a learning medium. Learners do a research, analyze, interpret, synthesize, and present project-related knowledge. PjBL involves long-term, student-centered activities that include real-world challenges and techniques. PjBL encourages pupils to solve real-world problems and creating a product requires thorough study, communication with team members, and the use of technology during the inquiry process (Marnewick, 2023). It means that PjBL) is an inquiry-based approach that engages students in meaningful projects, fostering knowledge production, critical thinking, and real-world problem-solving. Studies highlight its benefits, including increased student involvement, motivation, achievement, and the development of research, communication, and teamwork skills. PjBL encourages students to tackle real-world challenges, requiring thorough research, collaboration, and the integration of technology throughout the learning process.

Furthermore, English and soft skills are crucial for employment. In terms of employability, students should have not just an awareness of English skills, but also a package of talents, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills, and the business is seeking applications at higher education to establish that competence set (Rautenbach & Mann, 2019). PjBL is an effective approach not only to deepen students' understanding of course content, but also to hone the important skills they need to continue their education, build a successful career in the future, and achieve success in all aspects of life (Boss & Krauss, 2022). In summary, PjBL is crucial for university students to improve students' English skills and their soft skills to support their employment in the future.

Models of Project-Based Learning
There are some main principles of constructivism and their impact on the learning process (Habók & Nagy, 2016; Ulrich, 2016), namely (1) Each learner brings prior knowledge and beliefs into the learning environment; (2) Each person constructs their own knowledge uniquely and individually, using a variety of sources and contexts; (3) Learning is an active

process that requires thought; (4) Learning means growing and understanding the world by integrating, adapting to, or rejecting new information; (5) Interaction with others brings new perspectives to learning; and (6) The learning process is guided from learners.

There are several models of PjBL implemented by the previous researchers. According to (Stoller,& Myers, 2020) there are five stages in implementing PjBL: (1) Preparation (determine project); (2) Information gathering; (3) Information process (organization and analysis); (4) Information display (presentation); and (5) reflection (evaluation).
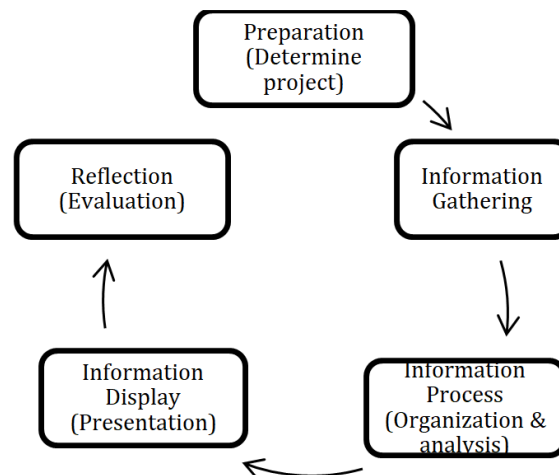

Figure 1. PjBL Model (Stoller & Myers, 2020)

Figure 1 reveals in the determine the project (preparation cycle) stage, lecturers and students determine the project theme and topic, the final result, and the progress plan from start to finish that is relevant to the students' lives and experiences. In information gathering, the students gather information from reading, interviews, surveys and the web. In the third stage, the students organize and analyze data obtained in the previous stage. In the information display (presentation) stage, the students display the results of the project with lecturers and other friends. In the last stage, the lecturer gives a score to the results of the student's project. Then, the lecturer and students conduct reflection at the evaluation stage. During this stage, with encouragement and modeling from the lecturer, students reflect on what they have learned from project involvement in terms of (a) content, language, skills, and strategies, (b) process and product.

According to Risdianto et al (2023), there are six stages of PjBL, namely: (1) Essential question; (2) Design a plan; (3) Create a schedule; (4) Monitoring ; (5) Asses the outcome; and (6) Evaluate the project. The model of PjBL of Risdianto et al. (2023) is presented in Figure 2.
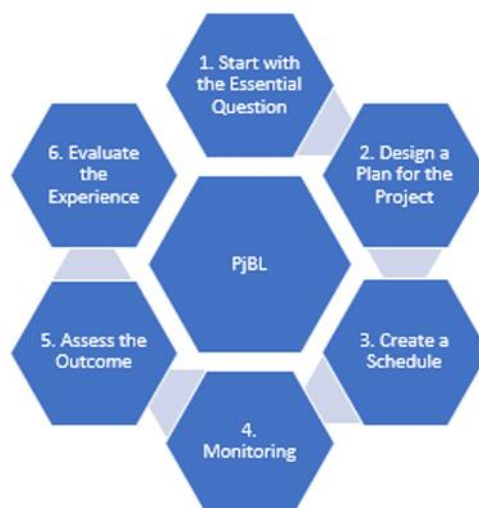
Figure 2. PjBL Model (Risdianto et al., 2023)

Figure 2 shows the stages of PjBL that can be used in learning English. In the first stage, the students are asked to form questions. Next, the lecturer should set competency requirements to evaluate during problem-solving discussions. In the third stage, students create project implementation timelines in collaboration with their lecturer. Students define project stages and report progress at class meetings to ensure timely completion. In the monitoring stage, lecturer monitors and encourages student project creation and implementation. In the fifth stage, the students present their project and lecturers assess the project. In the last stage, the students' projects were evaluated.

PjBL model involves a dynamic, student-centered process where learners actively engage in exploring real-world problems and challenges through meaningful projects. The process typically begins with identifying a central question or problem, followed by planning and designing a project to address it. Students conduct research, gather information, and collaborate with peers, often using technology to enhance their inquiry and problem-solving. As the project unfolds, learners analyze and synthesize their findings, refine their ideas, and apply critical thinking to develop solutions or create tangible products. Throughout the process, students present their work, receive feedback, and reflect on their learning, promoting deeper understanding and practical skills applicable to real-world contexts.

Issues and Challenges in Implementation of Project-Based Learning

There are several issues and challenges found by the previous experts in implementing PjBL in teaching and learning English (Almulla, 2020; Bakeer, 2023; Phu-ngamthong, 2020), namely: (1) teacher preparedness; (2) Collaboration issues; (3) Time constraints; (4) Assessment difficulties; (5) Resource availability; (6) Student engagement; (7) Student engagement; (8) Classroom management; (9) Cultural and social context. First, many educators and novice teachers struggle with adopting the PjBL approach, particularly if they are not well-versed in the facilitative teaching methods that PjBL requires. This challenge is

magnified for novice teachers who may find it difficult to balance traditional teaching practices with the open-ended, student-driven nature of PjBL. Second, PjBL emphasizes collaborative learning, but group dynamics can often be a challenge. Some students may dominate the project while others contribute less, leading to frustration and an uneven distribution of work. Teachers need to monitor and manage group dynamics to ensure equitable participation.

Third, the implementation of PjBL can be time-consuming for both teachers and students. Designing, executing, and assessing complex projects requires more time than traditional instruction. This issue is further complicated by the packed curricula in many educational institutions, where teachers struggle to fit PjBL into the existing schedule. Fourth, evaluating students in PjBL environments can be complex because traditional assessment methods may need accurately capture the skills developed through PjBL, such as collaboration, problem-solving, and critical thinking. Teachers must develop new ways to assess both the process and the final product of student work. Fifth, PjBL often requires access to various resources, such as technology, materials, or real-world partnerships. In resource-constrained environments, providing students with these tools can be challenging, potentially limiting the effectiveness of the PBL approach.

Sixth, student engagement is also a challenge in learning English through PjBL. While PBL is designed to increase engagement, poorly designed projects or projects that lack real-world relevance can lead to disengagement. Maintaining student motivation throughout the long process of PjBL can also be challenging, especially if the project becomes too complex or overwhelming. Seventh, managing a PjBL classroom can be more challenging than traditional settings due to the open-ended nature of the tasks. Teachers must balance guiding with allowing students the autonomy to explore and discover on their own, which can be difficult to manage effectively. Finally, PjBL implementation traditionally prioritizes teacher-centered approaches. Shifting to a more student-centered, inquiry-based model may face resistance from both teachers and students. These challenges underscore the need for comprehensive professional development, resource allocation, and careful planning to ensure successful PBL implementation.

PjBL faces several challenges, including the need for significant time and resources to plan and execute projects effectively. Teachers may struggle with shifting from traditional instruction to a more facilitative role, requiring professional development and support. Classroom management can also be difficult as students work on long-term, independent projects that demand collaboration and critical thinking. Additionally, PjBL requires adequate access to technology and resources, which may only be available in some educational settings. Assessing student progress in PjBL can be complex, as it involves evaluating both the process and the final product. These challenges highlight the need for careful planning and support to ensure the successful implementation of PjBL.

Literature Review

There are numerous studies related to the implementation of PjBL conducted by the previous researchers in teaching and learning English skills. Writing is the practice of repeatedly creating written work. The study conducted by Ilham (2022), examines the impact of PjBL on academic writing at the tertiary level, as well as student perceptions of its application in writing instruction. The study uses a mixed-method approach and spans twelve sessions. Thirty-eight students from a private university in Mataram, West Lombok, Indonesia, enrolled in an academic writing class during the 2022-2023 academic year. Academic writing classes use Canva for PjBL. Writing exams and interviews were employed to gather information. The study found that PjBL enhances students' writing skills and positively impacts their perception of the learning method (Ilham, 2022).

English speaking abilities are essential for worldwide communication and connection. To speak English effectively at an acceptable level for a non-native speaker, several sub-skills are evaluated by (Tuyen et al., 2022). Nonetheless, a large majority of remote learners at Ho Chi Minh City Open University (HCMCOU) appeared to struggle with expressing their ideas and speaking sub-skills (Tuyen et al., 2022). Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate the problems faced by remote learners, the efficacy of PjBL in teaching speaking skills online, and learners' views regarding the implemented project. A mixed research methodology was used in this study. Twenty-two remote learners completed the survey form, and five were selected at random for in-depth interviews. To determine an appropriate level for non-native speakers, numerous sub-skills are assessed, including lexical resources, grammatical structures, pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation through PjBL interviews. According to the findings, the majority of remote learners struggled with speaking sub-skills and lacked sufficient contexts for speaking practice, communication, and engagement. Furthermore, PjBL is identified as a unique strategy that allows learners to address current problems and develop their speaking abilities. All remote learners showed good attitudes regarding PjBL's use in their learning process (Tuyen et al., 2022).

Sirisrijmangkorn (2018), improved EFL learners' speaking abilities through PjBL by utilizing drama. It included EFL learners majoring in English who were enrolled in the learning English through Drama course. The data for the current study were gathered both statistically and qualitatively. According to both quantitative and qualitative data analysis, PjBL and drama boosted learners' speaking abilities. PjBL integrating with drama is effective in improving speaking skills and emotional elements. The study suggests PjBL with drama is an excellent teaching strategy that allows learners to speak English and enjoy learning a foreign language. The study suggests adopting drama-based PjBL in language classrooms to allow students to practice speaking in a communicative setting (Sirisrimangkorn, 2018).

Furthermore, Syakur et al (2020), examine the influence of innovative learning based on PjBL on English learning outcomes for students at Brawijaya University in Malang. The study adopts a quasi-experimental approach, especially a Time-Series Design with a Control Group that is analyzed by using the one-way ANOVA test. The results demonstrated variations in pre-test and post-test TOEFL scores in both the control and experimental groups after using the PjBL model. The experimental group's average pre-test score was 344.71, with a range of

300-397 and a standard deviation of 29.386. Following the PjBL intervention, the average post-test score rose to 360.83, with a range of 303-400 and a standard deviation of 24.146. The p-value of 0.026 suggests that PjBL significantly enhanced students' learning results. The use of PBL as a model and approach to address the issue of low TOEFL scores had a significant effect, resulting in better TOEFL scores among students (Syakur et al., 2020).

The adoption of PjBL as a teaching approach is growing across the country since it is seen as a way to make learning more exciting for students while emphasizing the development of skills required for success in the contemporary workplace. Because of its distinctive characteristics, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) requires multidisciplinary skills to meet the demands of its learners. As a result, the educator's role moves dramatically from traditional language education to subject-area teaching. The study conducted by Hidayati et al (2023), aimed to see if employing PjBL in an ESP class enhances students' overall learning results. In this study, a single group pre-test and post-test experimental design was used, with 40 samples chosen on purpose. The inclusion of PjBL in students' video projects resulted in a considerable improvement in learning outcomes. The findings revealed high mean scores on the learning outcomes subscales under investigation, as well as good relationships with the participants' academic success. These findings may contribute to the expanding corpus of research on how to effectively teach and learn ESP across fields by combining various ways and methods (Hidayati et al., 2023).

Writing is seen as a challenging skill when learning English. This is how teachers should be creative and imaginative while teaching writing. One approach for teaching writing is PjBL. The objective of this research conducted by Sholihah (2017), is to look at how PjBL may help students improve their writing skills. It is based on classroom action research with students from Widya Dharma University's English department in their fourth semester. The study's findings suggest that PjBL is highly effective. The introduction of PjBL increased pupils' writing abilities. PjBL allows students to be more engaged in exploring their ideas. By working on the project, students may collaborate and share their thoughts and expertise with others. Because students undertake the majority of the work, the learning activity becomes student-centered rather than teacher-centered. It may also enhance writing classes in better condition in the sense that the classroom setting becomes exciting activities and there is an increase in student engagement (Sholihah, 2017).

In conclusion, PjBL has considerable benefits for improving both English language abilities and soft skills. In terms of language acquisition, PjBL promotes the growth of speaking, writing, listening, and reading skills by immersing students in real-world tasks that demand active communication, critical thinking, and teamwork. Students experience utilizing English in genuine circumstances through presentations, debates, and written reports, which improves fluency and understanding. PjBL also develops important soft skills like cooperation, problem-solving, time management, and creativity. Working on collaborative projects teaches students how to negotiate group dynamics, manage deadlines, and solve issues creatively, all of which are essential for academic and professional success. PjBL's integrative nature not only improves language fluency but also prepares students for real-world issues by honing their interpersonal and professional abilities. Working on collaborative projects

teaches students how to negotiate in groups, manage deadlines, and solve issues creatively, which are essential for academic and professional success. PjBL's integrative nature not only improves language fluency but also prepares students for real-world issues by honing their interpersonal and professional abilities.

Suggestion

Based on the discussion and literature review of PjBL to improve students' English ability, the researchers suggest several suggestions, namely:

1. Lecturers especially at the university level need to master the teaching and learning process by implementing the PjBL model to improve students' English at universities especially in teaching English as a foreign language.
2. Institutions need to provide all lecturers with upgrading or seminars regarding the use PjBL in teaching and learning English at University since PjBL is crucial for university students to enter job employment in the future. PjBL model is crucial to improve the students' English skills and to ease the teaching and learning activities. This model consisted of several stages, namely preparation, analysis, presentation, and evaluation that enrich the process of English acquisition.
3. Universities need to implement several models of PjBL that enhance students' English skills and soft skills, namely; communication, critical thinking, collaborative, and creativity skills. These PjBL models have been proven to improve students' in speaking, writing, reading, and listening.
4. Universities need to develop a new model of PjBL that solves the issues and challenges in teaching and learning through PjBL so that teaching and learning activities can be conducted effectively and can improve students' English skills. This new model is expected to enhance students' speaking, listening, writing, and listening skills.

Conclusion

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) presents numerous benefits, particularly in enhancing students' engagement, critical thinking, and practical application of knowledge. In language learning, PjBL significantly improves key English skills, namely speaking, writing, listening, and reading, by providing students with opportunities to use the language in meaningful, real-world contexts. Furthermore, PjBL promotes the development of essential soft skills, such as teamwork, problem-solving, and communication, which are valuable for academic and professional growth. However, despite its advantages, PBL faces several issues that can hinder its effectiveness. These challenges include (1) Teacher preparedness; (2) Collaboration issues; (3) Time constraints; (4) Assessment difficulties; (5) Resource availability; (6) Student engagement; (7) Student engagement; (8) Classroom management; (9) Cultural and social context. The effectiveness of PjBL depends on how lecturers implement the stages component in the model. Moreover, the components in the PjBL can be adapted to suit students' environment at the university, especially for countries that use English as a foreign language. Further research is proposed to explore the long-term effects of PjBL on students' language acquisition across different educational contexts

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