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Project Based Learning in EFL Classroom: Strategies for Success

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Abstract

Project Based Learning (PBL) is an innovative and student-centric approach to education that has gained widespread attention for its ability to engage learners in authentic and real-world problem-solving experiences. However, deploying this activity in ELT classroom is not an easy thing to do. To address this gap, this article presents detailed activities to be deployed in class, together with its fundamental principles, benefits, for teachers and students. The implementation of PBL activities in Junior High School level showcase the students' empowerment to become active, engaged, and lifelong seekers of knowledge. The activities also align with modern workforce demands, as it equips students with 21st-century skills like adaptability, collaboration, problem-solving, and communication.

Keywords: Project Based Learning, Project Work, activities, teamwork

I. Introduction

Project Based Learning (PBL) has its variation in the span of time. It depends on the teacher's planning of the lesson. Sometimes it could be done only in one session or it could be done more than three or four meetings. This more complex set of instruction will allow all the students to engage in gathering the information, processing it then reporting it to the audiences. This strategy allows the class activity to enhance students' knowledge and widen their language proficiency. This Project activity serves students with deep experience and comprehension through various activities. In line with this idea, Ching and Hsu (2013) mention that PBL is one of the methods for creating meaningful learning experiences. PBL employs a driving problem to initiate inquiry-based activities in which students seek knowledge, pose questions, discuss, develop, and test potential

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solutions (Blumenfield, et al., 1991). These stances increased the students' motivation, autonomy, and engagement and shaped a positive response to English.

This article lays on how educators can set any strategy to maximize the advantage of PBL to deliver content and language learning to the students. To deepen this topic, it is important to know the characteristics of project work, outline the strategies for success of project work and present a case study to showcase project-based learning.

2. The practical context of project work

The phrase Project Based Learning has been many times used by many language teachers to refer to a project work, but these short of activities frequently fail to drive a maximum benefit of PBL itself. Teachers often trapped with the ambiguity of PBL. Sometimes a very simple activity of the students who can produce a certain product like their video conversation is categorized as a part of PBL. However, under this circumstance, students frequently band together without actively engaging in group activity. Only one student finished the assignment. The remaining students simply sit and have a chat resulting in a loss of valuable time for teamwork, information gathering and wasting the time for learning English. The teacher only focused on the students' physical product; they ignored the language progress and subject acquisition.

In other cases, students experience challenges with their project work because of either the teacher's intrusive control or the lack of feedback and guidance. Overly controlling teachers prevent students from actively defining and taking ownership of their learning, which hinders the growth of a sense of responsibility in them. Additionally, it frequently results in the duplication of the same project in subsequent lessons without any revisions when students are not given the chance to offer feedback on their project experience. Students may feel disempowered and disengaged when they have little control over the projects they choose or the learning process itself. These points challenge teachers to have a practical and well-defined framework designed specifically for the language learning context. It helps teachers to clarify the different stages and learning objective of project-making. Finally, it can assist students with comprehending the procedure and objectives when they take on new responsibilities, develop ongoing relationships with their peers, and get ready to exhibit their work to others (Greenier, 2018).

To make PBL more effective, teachers should relinquish some control, allowing students to view them as guides. It is crucial for students to provide feedback on their project experiences so that improvements can be made in each period of time. It has been suggested that feedback is a crucial component of training that enhances the acquisition of knowledge and skills and fosters learning motivation (Ching & Hsu, 2013). However, complete relinquishment of teacher control is not enough, as students may be left without guidance on language, content, or the project process. To maximize the advantages of

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PBL in the language classroom, it is important to strike a balance between teacher direction and student autonomy (Alan & Stoller, 2005).

3.   Executing projects to their fullest potential

PBL has been proven to be an effective strategy for integrating academic, social, and linguistic communication abilities with the use of real-world problems and situations in English-language learning environments (Yazdanpanah,2019). With this mind, in PBL, students engage actively in group work and construct their own understanding to address authentic real-life challenges. Furthermore, Thomas (2000) reiterates that PBL consists of five criterions:

a.   PBL are central, not peripheral to the curriculum,
b.   PBL are focused on questions or problems that "drive" students to encounter (and struggle with) the central concepts and principles of a discipline;
c.   Projects involve students in a constructive investigation;
d.   Projects are student-driven to some significant degree;
e.   Projects are realistic, not school-like.

Considering those points above, it is obvious that meticulous planning which incorporates both intercultural and English-language learning goals are pivotal for the accomplishment of PBL activities in an EFL context. During the accomplishment of project activities, the students build a very strong connection with others and their projects. These activities also enable the students to have more chances of interpersonal interaction, collaboration, coordination, and cooperation. PBL is regarded as a very effective technique for engaging students, interpreting educational material in fascinating ways, gaining new knowledge, but also for developing the character traits required for working with others and resolving conflict (Chmelárová & Pasiar, 2017).

In order to optimize the potential benefits of project work, the teacher can deploy planned activities proposed by Stoller (1997) and Sheppard and Stoller (1995). These activities are believed to have chances of having authentic experience, fostering critical and creative thinking, and promoting the ability of decision making. Teachers can use carefully planned activities, as recommended by Stoller (1997) and Sheppard and Stoller (1995), to fully utilize the benefits of PBL. These detailed ten activities can be seen in the table below.

Table 3.1. The PBL Activities

Step 1	The teacher and students choose the project's theme.
Step 2	The teacher and students jointly decide on the project's final product.
Step 3	The teacher and students organize the project
Step 4	The teacher instructs students on information gathering
Step 5	The students collect information

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Step 6	The teacher prepares the students for compiling and analysing information and data
Step 7	The students compile and analyse information and data
Step 8	The teacher prepares students for the language demands of the final activity
Step 9	The students exhibit the final project
Step 10	The students evaluate the project

These intentional activities aim to give students real-world learning opportunities so they may relate their academic work to actual situations. Students are inspired to think critically and creatively via these types of projects, discovering various solutions to issues and challenges. As students are required to make decisions, manage resources, and work through the difficulties of their projects, these activities are essential for helping students develop their decision-making skills.

4. Project Work Possibilities

To lead this project to its greatest potential, deploying the project into real world context aspects is the most important thing. Implementing PBL to accomplish the language target goals and draw from numerous real-life sources is a pivotal thing in learning English. With this mind, Thuan (2017) implemented the project work in teaching ESP courses for students at the tertiary level in Vietnam. The result showed that project work was an applicable and effective approach in language teaching as it leads to enhancing language skills, and group work skills. Furthermore, Kaldi, Filippatou, and Govaris (2011) conducted PBL in primary school in Greece. They argued that the primary students can develop content knowledge and teamwork skills in addition to motivation and positive attitudes towards peers from different cultural background through PBL instruction. In line with this idea, Mali (2016) conducted PBL in Indonesian EFL classrooms. It showcased that the use of PBL grounded in the poster and academic essay projects appears to prove a high level of students' active learning participation in a way that they can experience working together with their peers to articulate thought, to negotiate, and to appreciate different point of views.

Those examples raise possibilities that the PBL is applicable to broad ranges of study level and it has various benefits to the teaching and learning. It fosters greater topic understanding, critical thinking, teamwork, and the development of practical skills. PBL gives both teachers and students more authority, transforming learning process into an attractive journey of captivating real-life experience.

5. Project Work: A case Study

This Study was carried on at the Junior High School level in one of the government schools in Indonesia. The project encourages the students to participate actively in

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empowering local wisdom issue. They gather useful information about any relevant resources through variety of activities like observations, interviews, library and web research. They then imaginatively express their findings as multimodal texts that combine text with audio, video, graphics and other media. They are given the opportunity to affect their local community and share insights globally by sharing their project with peers, parents, and on social media platforms. The project intends to enable students to influence things locally and act globally in their community while fostering language proficiency, critical thinking, and creativity.

The project began with determining the project theme. After having the agreement, then the teacher designed a lesson to increase students' knowledge and awareness of local issues and provide them with the terminology and language they need to engage effectively in the project. It was recommended for them to discuss the issues from their hometown, along with comparisons from different perspectives. Students were assisted in analysing the pros and cons of their ideas and coming up with potential improvement. In this activity, as they followed the teacher's instruction, it aroused the students' ownership of the project.

The second step was for the teacher to facilitate collaboration among the students and reach an outcome agreed upon and approved by both the students and the teacher. The teacher directed the process, leading to diverse outcomes that bloom new fresh ideas about the local value, making them more acceptable and appealing to the new generation, and moving away from traditional perceptions. Furthermore, the students were encouraged to create and produce the outcome in various forms, such as multimodal texts, photographs, interview sessions or even a book, showcasing a modern perspective while preserving the high culture of society. The students were also given authority to determine their target audiences.

In the third step, the students attempted to plan their project by considering all the information needed to conduct it. In this case, they aimed to access any relevant information about local wisdom that could be developed into an innovative cuisine. They decided where to search for the information and how to compile, gather, and analyse it. Additionally, they distributed tasks according to each student's capabilities to access the sources. The teacher ensured that each student took charge of this process, and he was closely observing and monitoring their progress carefully.

The fourth step is the information gathering stage, where the necessary information for formulating ideas were collected. The teacher prepared the students for interviews, trained them in how to ask questions, used formal language and wrote or recorded the interview process. The teacher also needed to facilitate a role play interview among the students to make them well trained. In another way for the literature references, the teacher recommended web sources or books available in the library to gather relevant information. Furthermore, the teacher also initiated a brainstorming session to lead the

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students to have an effective search navigation and suggested appropriate search engine or web addresses. Overall, these activities laid the foundation for effective PBL in EFL class, empowered students to take charge of their education while enhancing language abilities, critical thinking, and self-confidence. This process involved engaging in discussions with their peers about the information they have found, negotiated meaning, explained their ideas to others and condensed relevant information they have acquired.

In the fifth step, the students gathered the information. The teacher could facilitate the information gathering by inviting a selected interviewer based on his or her competency as needed by the students. Subsequently, the students were set in a hall to meet and conduct the interview with the selected interviewee. During the real-world interview, the students utilized the language skills they had practiced before. The teacher monitored and facilitated the discussion and occasionally providing feedback on the language used by the students.

The sixth step is the sorting of collected data. The teacher prepared the students to examine, observe and sort the data they have collected. The teacher asked the students to analyse the relevant information by using their notes, the references the students got from the internet searching, the list they had and relevance gathered data. This process helped them gain a deeper understanding about the theme; therefore, they would be ready to face the next step.

In the seventh step, the students compiled and analysed the data they had gathered through group discussions and brainstorming session. They thoroughly reviewed the findings and noted significant trends, ideas or patterns. They collaborated to develop a coherent and enticing story that would successfully convey their result of their research to their target audience.

In the eighth step, the teacher prepared students for the language demands of the final activity. The students had a review on their writing, finalized editing on their multi modal text and prepared for their presentation. In this stage they used the time to prepare presentation, fluency, pronunciation, intonation for public speaking in front of the representative of the parents and stakeholders.

In the ninth step, students were ready to publish their final result. In this digital era, the result could be published offline or online. The students could have a presentation in front of the audience in an open session or the final works could be published online via social media. The important thing here was the feedback that could be collected from the audience. From this feedback students could understand the response of their audience to increase their performance to the next level.

Finally, the tenth step involved the students evaluating the project. During this step, the students synthesized all the feedback they received from the teacher and audiences. The feedback could cover various aspects, including language abilities and acquisition

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strategy during the project, the lessons learned, the project's impact, and recommendations for enhancing future project work.

In conclusion, the writers have endeavoured to introduce PBL in an EFL context, specifically for Junior High School students. The applicability of this context to other classes may vary significantly, contingent on the specific learning objectives established. Several key aspects can be implemented in an EFL class, serving as the foundation for teachers seeking to incorporate PBL into the curriculum. These principles empower teachers to effectively deploy PBL activities in the classroom.

6. Conclusion

These recommendations include developing projects that align with the institutional assets' readiness and expectations while also taking into account students' interests and linguistic requirements. To optimize the advantages of a project, teachers should identify learning objectives linked to language, topic, task, abilities, and techniques. When incorporating the project into the teaching and learning process it is essential to involve students' voices and choices in all phases of the project, including offering them the chance to influence the project's structure and cultivating a feeling of student ownership.

Designing the syntax of the project carefully and comprehensively is important to set each stage to be meaningful and give a vivid contextual experience to the students. This is also important not only to incorporate the 21st- century skills into the students' learning but also to incorporate the language target and practice process. The variations of activities between individual and cooperation can facilitate students in improving collaborative skills and individual responsibility toward the tasks.

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