Project Based Learning in an ESP Class: Voices from Indonesian EFL Students

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Abstract
To adapt with the current era, students need to be encouraged to master various practical skills needed in the 21st century. Consequently, an interesting and student-centered learning model is needed to improve the quality of education and teaching, especially in the field of language education. In this regard, the application of the Project Based Learning can be the solution to support the effectiveness of language learning. Based on this issue, this case study aims to explore students' perceptions of the implementation of Project based Learning in an ESP course. Semi-structured interview is employed as a data collection technique. The data obtained were analyzed thematically. This study revealed that students have a positive perception of the implementation of project-based learning as they considered it as an effective learning method which could promote their creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking skills. In addition, it can also support the development of their language skills. The results of this study are expected to provide an overview and serve as a consideration for language teachers to implement Project based Learning in their teaching practices.

Keywords: Project based Learning; ESP; EFL; students' perceptions

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century education, ESP is considered to be one of the important fields of study. ESP is a significant field of study that emphasizes the importance of authenticity and adjusting materials and objectives to learners' particular needs. Moreover, ESP is regarded as an approach as opposed to a product, which alludes to the fact that ESP does not adhere to a particular language, teaching materials, or methodology (Dou et al., 2023 and Ibrahim, 2019). In this case, ESP courses are typically goal-oriented and designed to equip students with the skills they need for academic or professional purposes (Anthony, 2018). However, in order to attain the desired learning outcomes, teachers should carefully choose the appropriate teaching approach in ESP classrooms.

To address this issue, Project Based Learning (henceforth PjBL) can be considered to be one of the teaching approaches that can be implemented in ESP courses. It is based on the assumption that in order to maximize the pedagogical or learning outcomes of a foreign language teaching process that tends to emphasize ESP learning, a change in teaching methods was also required (Dou et al., 2023). In addition, teaching students theories and principles is insufficient to equip them with the skills required to face workplace complexities, difficulties and uncertainties (Shaalan, 2020). As an instructional approach, PjBL enables the students to undertake in-depth, long-term investigation on a specific topic or problem (Guo et al., 2020). Accordingly, it is believed that Project-based learning is one of the most effective methods to teach an ESP courses (Dou et al., 2023; Shaalan, 2020). Furthermore, Larmer et al. (2015) assume that in PjBL, students participate in projects or assignments that entails solving genuine issues or mimicking real-life situations. In this regard, students engage in PjBL by collaborating on a project that requires them to apply their knowledge to real-world scenarios.

This phenomenon is evidenced in the Business English course at a university in Tasikmalaya, Indonesia. In the teaching and learning process, the lecturers implemented the Project Based Learning (PjBL) method. In this course, students were required to complete several group projects such as designing a business idea, conducting a SWOT analysis of a company, compiling a report on the results of an analysis of a company, making a business proposal, making a business advertisement, and conducting a business presentation. In addition, they were also required to deal with several learning activities starting from planning to publishing or presenting their projects to the audience. In this case, while working on the project, the students were encouraged to develop their personal qualities and skills which could be beneficial to support their future careers.

Several studies have examined the application of the Project based Learning method in various educational contexts. One of them is a study conducted by Kavlu (2020) who investigated whether the PjBL project assisted EFL students in obtaining literature and information related to their field in English and the effect of project work on the academic achievement of students in ESP courses. The findings of this study reveal that PjBL has a significant effect on acquisition of vocabulary and information related to certain fields of English. Besides that, the academic achievement of ESP students also showed a statistically significant increase. Another study was conducted by Shaalan (2022) which aimed to investigate the effectiveness of integrating PjBL strategies into the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course design process to increase dental-related vocabulary. The results of this study indicate that PjBL is an effective strategy to improve students' vocabulary mastery. The results of this study also prove that innovative strategies in the dentistry vocabulary class can foster self-autonomy, problem solving, critical thinking, and student creativity. In general, these studies have proven the effectiveness of using the PjBL method, but there is still very little research that explores student perceptions regarding the implementation of PjBL in learning activities especially in ESP classes in the EFL contexts. Therefore, to fill this gap, this study will investigate student perceptions of the use of the PjBL method in one of the ESP courses, namely Business English. It is expected that this research can provide a new

picture of PjBL implementation from the student's perspective, so that it can be a reference for the teachers to consider the implementation of PjBL into their teaching practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Project Based Learning

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is an instructional strategy that enables students to participate in a multidisciplinary assignment or project. Guo et al. (2020) assert that Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is a collaborative scientific inquiry pedagogy in which students integrate, apply, and generate their knowledge while working collaboratively to solve complex problems. According to Thomas (2000), project-based learning (PjBL) places students in authentic problem-solving situations in which they are assigned with resolving complex issues through the completion of specific projects or tasks. Regarding this topic, Larmer et al. (2015) believe that in PjBL, students engage in projects or assignments that involve solving authentic problems or simulating real-world scenarios.

Furthermore, Project-based learning (PjBL) is intended to foster in-depth learning by providing students with opportunities to engage in complex, subject-related, practical problems and inquiries. It also provides opportunities for students to develop problem-solving, social interaction, and critical thinking skills. According to Helle et al. (2006), the PjBL learning process frequently entails assigning group assignments to students in order to develop their teamwork skills through cooperation. Moreover, according to Milentijevic et al. (2008), project-based learning (PjBL) seeks to promote profound learning by providing students with opportunities to engage in complex, real-world, subject-related issues and questions through an inquiry-based methodology. Moreover, according to Hmelo-Silver (2004), PjBL provides students with opportunities to develop problem-solving, social interaction, and critical thinking skills. In this case, King & Smith (2020) suggest that the instructor's function in PjBL is that of a facilitator, meaning that their primary responsibility is to provide guidance to students as they work on their projects. During PjBL, students have the opportunity to collaborate in groups to develop, work on, and present a project they have been working on. Therefore, PjBL positions students as the primary subjects, who are urged to increase their capacity for critical thinking by finding solutions to real-world problems. PjBL may also make learning activities more meaningful for students because it provides them with the opportunity to ruminate that enables them to evaluate the learning process in which they are engaged.

Haatainen & Aksela (2021) additionally argue that Project-Based Learning has specific characteristics, such as a focus on student learning objectives, the centrality of the project, contextual assignments, the promotion of collaborative learning, the production of project artifacts, the promotion of constructive nature, the provision of scaffolding instructions, the encouragement of student engagement, the implementation of multiple assessment methods with clear criteria, and the provision of scaffolding instructions. These defining characteristics distinguish Project-Based Learning from other instructional strategies.

Meanwhile, according to Jalinus, et. al (2017) PjBL typically involves several phases, including (1) The formulation of expected learning outcomes, (2) Understanding the concept of teaching material (3) Analysis, where students analyze the information they have gathered, and use it to develop a deeper understanding of the topic or problem; (4) Synthesis, where students synthesize their findings and develop a product or presentation that demonstrates their understanding of the topic or problem; and (5) Evaluation, where students evaluate their own work and the work of their peers, reflecting on what they have learned and how they might improve their approach in the future. However, Rao (2019) also states that when choosing topics for these activities, English teachers must consider the wants and interests of the students. As a result, they must be able to adjust the topic of their teaching, the learning activities in the classroom, the instructional media, as well as the assessment appropriately.

English for Specific Purposes

In the context of teaching and learning, ESP is more likely to be viewed as a strategy than a product. According to Orr (2002), English for Specific Purposes is a branch of language learning that examines and teaches aspects of English to assist students in performing particular tasks for specific purposes. In addition, as a subfield of Applied Linguistics, ESP supports the teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) with the aim of addressing the academic, professional, and vocational needs of learners through the use of English (Stojkovic, 2017). In other words, ESP is a strategy in teaching and learning, focusing on English for Specific Purposes to assist students in specific tasks. It supports EFL teaching and learning, addressing academic, professional, and vocational needs through English use.

Furthermore, according to Basturkmen (2015), the objective of English for Specific Purposes is to manage the language characteristics of the learners or improve their language proficiency requirements for a discipline, occupation, or work environment. In other words, courses in ESP must adequately prepare students and professionals for the workplace (Dou et al., 2023). Therefore, English for Specific Purposes refers to the teaching and learning of a second or foreign language that emphasizes on the needs of the learners and where the aim of the learners is to be proficient in English with respect to their professional circumstances or academic goals.

In ESP, the materials are commonly tailored to the students' needs. They would focus on the language, identified skills, and genres that are most pertinent to the specific activities that English language learners must execute in order to use the language effectively (Dou, 2023). As a result, performing an analysis of needs is the first step in devising an ESP course (Ekayati et al., 2020; Parnawati & Ulinuha, 2019; Pranoto & Suprayogi, 2020). It involves determining the what and how of the course, devising the curriculum, and deciding on the content, methodology, assessment, and evaluation (Paltridge & Starfield, 2013). Consequently, need analysis cannot be isolated from the ESP course development process, which should be linear. According to Pranoto and Suprayogi (2020), needs analysis is an indispensable tool for instructors of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in determining

students' fundamental requirements and the English skills they must acquire for future success. Therefore, it is clear that teachers should emphasize students' needs and interest as the basis for designing the ESP courses.

METHOD

The present research used qualitative approach as a method of the study. Furthermore, in order to investigate students' perceptions of the implementation of project-based learning in an ESP class, this study employed case study as a research design. This study took place in a university located in Tasikmalaya, West Java, Indonesia. Six students were involved as the participants of this study. They were 3 male and 3 female students of English education department whose age ranged between 20-22 years old. They enrolled in the Business English course as one of the elective courses in their fourth semester. This ESP course aims at giving students some overview on the application of English especially in business contexts trough the completion of some projects. The participants were chosen as the representative of each group in Business English class who had accomplished the group's projects including designing a business idea, conducting a SWOT analysis of a company, compiling a report on the results of an analysis of a company, making a business proposal, making a business advertisement, and conducting a business presentation through the implementation of Project-based Learning in Business English course. Semi-structured interview was used to collect the data regarding the students' perceptions of the implementation of Project-Based Learning in their Business English class, by using interview guideline adapted from Alyani & Ratmanida (2021) and Susanti et al. (2020). The obtained data were then analyzed by using interactive model by Miles et al. (2014) which cover three main steps namely data condensation, data display, and drawing conclusion.

FINDINGS

The results of semi-structured interview indicated that in general, the students positively perceived the implementation of Project based Learning in their ESP class. They believed that PjBL can promote the development of several skills, including creativity, collaboration, critical thinking as well as their language skills. The following are the thorough description of the research findings.

Improving students' creativity

During the interview, the students admit that the projects given by their lecturers encouraged them to develop their creativity. The method implemented in their class challenged them to be more innovative in resulting a satisfying product. For instance, when they were asked by the lecturer to make a business advertisement, they tried to make different and unique ads by firstly did their own research to identify and analyze some ads, and then they worked together to formulate their own concept of business ads.

Extract 1

P1: In my opinion, the projects given by my lecturers encouraged me to be more creative. Just like when we were asked to make a business advertisement, it challenged me and my group to think out of the box, so we can make unique and interesting ads.

P4: The projects required us to be more creative, that is why my friend and I had to find various examples of business ads as references before we make our own ads. While deciding the concept of our own ads we combined, added, or modified the concept of those ads to make our own so it could meet our expectations.

<div align="right">(Author's translation, May 5th 2023)</div>

From extract 1 it can be seen that P1 and P4 agreed that the projects given by their lecturers through PjBL learning method challenged their creativity. P1 alluded to the notion of "to think out of the box" in order to make a unique and interesting ad. Meanwhile, P4 also asserted that they have to do preliminary research to analyze some existing ads, so when they wanted to formulate their own ads concept, they already had some references. By doing so, it could ease them in completing the project, since they may add, combine, or make some modifications in terms of their ads concept by considering the product that they wanted to promote.

Promoting Students' Critical Thinking

Further analysis of the interview results also reveals that students admit the contribution of PjBL in sharpening their critical thinking skills. By various projects given by the lecturers, students were required to think critically about some relevant issues while completing their projects. They had to engage in some problem solving and decision-making activities while completing their projects that required the evaluation and analysis of information as can be seen in Extract 2 below:

Extract 2

P2: In doing the project, we had to deal with some problems that we need to solve as a group. We have to think critically to decide how to cope with those issues by sharing our ideas or find some relevant references or information that can help us find the solution.

P5: Actually, my friend and I spent a lot of time to discuss the best solutions for several problems that we face in completing the project, we have to carefully think what we need to do by sharing our ideas, or reviewing some references to ensure the project could be accomplished well and we can obtain the expected results.

<div align="right">(Author's translation, May 5th 2023)</div>

As can be seen from extract 2, the participants of this study also mentioned the contributive role of PjBL in developing their critical thinking. P2 stated that in order to deal with some challenges during the completion of the projects, students should develop their critical thinking skills. This issue is also echoed by P5 who stated that they had to discuss and think carefully about the best solutions of the problems they face, so they could accomplish the projects optimally. In addition, it is also indicated that students need to plan, design, and

implement their projects, which involved decision-making and problem-solving along the way. This procedure assisted students to develop their critical thinking abilities by requiring them to analyze information, evaluate alternatives, and make informed decisions.

Allowing Students to Work Collaboratively

It is worth noting that the implementation of Project Based Learning allows students to collaborate with their peers in order to produce the specified product. This benefits of PjBL are also confirmed by the participants of this study. In Business English class, the students were divided by the lecturers into 6 six groups which consisted of 7-8 students. During the completion of the projects each student should collaborate with the other group members. In order to complete group projects, students must engage in multiple learning activities, such as discussing, analyzing, developing, producing, and publishing their products. The interview data also demonstrates that they believed such activities could develop their collaboration skills.

Extract 3

P3: Of course, my group had to work collaboratively in this course. We need to maintain a good relationship among the group members to avoid conflict that could interfere, so we can work optimally to complete the project.

P4: Sometimes we faced some problems while completing the group projects, so we usually discussed and shared our ideas as well as negotiated the decision that we would take to overcome those problems. I think it can expand my horizon of certain topic because we obtain knowledge from different viewpoints.

P6 : ...each project had different deadlines. That is why my group had to work collaboratively and effectively so we could complete the project within the allocated time.

(Author's translation, May 5th 2023)

It is obvious that form extract 3, participants admitted the benefits of Project Based Learning in promoting their collaboration skills. However specifically, participants proposed various details about this issue. P3 stated that in PjBL method implemented in their ESP course, students should be able to work together to complete the project. Consequently, they had to maintain a good relationship with the other group members to anticipate the emergence of potential conflicts that can impede teamwork. Furthermore, P4 mentioned that through discussions, idea sharing, and negotiation, the students could deal with problems they faced during the completion of group project. Moreover, P4 also asserts that through these activities, students may gain knowledge from different viewpoints. In addition, P6 stated that collaboration is important since students had to share duties within their groups, so they can complete the project within the given time. In general, the participants agree that the implementation of Project based Learning allows them to work collaboratively with their friends which also brings some beneficial roles to the project completion.

Supporting the Development of Students' Language Skills

The last finding in this study was the implementation of Project Based Learning encouraged students to improve their language skills. In this case, according to the data obtained from semi-structure interview, students assumed that Project based learning involves several learning activities which allow them to develop their language skills. Their listening and reading skills could be developed while they plan and design their group project, since they had to do their own research i.e., observation and evaluation towards some relevant sources that related to their project theme. In addition, their speaking and writing skills could also improve when they had to present their project to the audience. Extract 4 below illustrate students' view regarding this topic.

Extract 4

P1: I think project based learning helps me improve my language skills. For example, while we plan or arrange our project, we usually read some relevant sources and watch some related videos which can help us design our product.

P2: When we had to do a poster presentation or a business presentation in pitching session, I had to continuously practice my public speaking skills prior to my performance so I could be more confident during the presentation.

P5: As I experienced, PjBL requires me to practice my language skills more, just like when we were asked to make a business proposal, my friend and I wrote a draft and did some revisions before we submit the final version of our proposal.

(Author's translation, May 5th 2023)

In extract 4, P1 indicated that during designing the project, students can read some references and watch some videos, which means those activities trains their reading and listening skills. In addition, P2 also mentioned that while presenting their project, students can improve their speaking skills through continual practices. Furthermore, P5 also asserted that students writing skills could also be enhanced through the project given by the lecturers. Overall, the implementation of Project Based Learning in ESP course could promote the development of students' receptive and productive language skills.

DISCUSSION

In general, the results of data analysis in this study demonstrates that students have a positive perception of the implementation of Project based Learning in an ESP course, since it provides some beneficial roles that can promote their personal qualities and skill. In this regard, using project-based learning to teach an ESP course is one of the most effective methods (Shaalan, 2020). Furthermore, Kartika (2020) states that recently many educators realize the beneficial role of PjBL in language classroom. In addition, in EFL (English as a foreign language) and ESL contexts, PjBL has been advocated as an effective instructional method that promotes the simultaneous acquisition of language, content, and 21st-century skills. Accordingly, the participants of this study agree that PjBL could promote the enhancement of their creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and language skills.

The first finding of this study indicated that the participants agreed that the implementation of PjBL could enhance their creativity. In this case, the projects given by the teachers encourage the students to challenge their creativity to make an innovative product that reflects a novelty in certain field. Several studies have also proven that implementing Project Based Learning can enhance students' creativity while working on the projects (Hanif et al., 2019; Ismuwardani et al., 2018 and Ummah et al., 2019). More specifically Ummah et al. (2019) report that PjBL can enhance students' creativity in terms of several aspects namely originality, flexibility, and novelty. Typically, PjBL assignments present open-ended problems or challenges requiring creative solutions. This encourages students to think creatively, investigate unconventional methods, and experiment with various approaches. Students can expand their creative thinking and generate original ideas by embracing ambiguity and uncertainty.

In addition, the findings also demonstrate that students believe the implementation of PjBL in ESP course could promote their critical thinking. According to Hmelo-Silver (2004), PjBL allows pupils to develop their problem-solving, social interaction, and critical thinking abilities. Furthermore, Issa & Khataibeh (2021) suggest that PjBL requires students to prepare, create, and carry out their projects, which needs decision-making and problem-solving throughout the process. In addition, through the process of designing until evaluating their product in PjBL, students can develop their critical thinking skills (Rochmawati, 2015). These learning activities enable the students to develop their critical thinking abilities by requiring them to analyze information, evaluate alternatives, and make informed decisions.

Moreover, the participants of this study also believe that PjBL enables them to work collaboratively with their friends. In this case, Helle et al. (2006) speculate that the PjBL learning process often entails assigning group projects to students in order to develop their cooperation and collaboration skills. It is in line with Guo et al. (2020) who argue that Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is a collaborative scientific inquiry pedagogy in which students integrate, implement, and generate knowledge while solving complex problems collaboratively. The collaborative learning activities of PjBL can actually bring some beneficial impacts for the students, since related to the previous findings, they can develop their creativity and critical thinking skills while working together with their friends to accomplish the projects.

The last finding of this study is that the students perceive the implementation of PjBL positively since it can enhance their language skills. Throughout the learning process of PjBL, students can develop the four language skills including speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Kristianto & Harendita, 2022; Kavlu, 2020; Aghayani & Hajmohammadi, 2019; Poonpon, 2017; Fragoulis & Tsiplakides, 2009). In ESP classrooms, PjBL is an effective method for enhancing students' language abilities. PjBL can help students develop the language skills necessary for success in the 21st century by providing opportunities for real-world language use, engaging them in meaningful projects, and customizing the approach to their particular needs.

In general, the findings of this study are particularly promising, since the students confirmed the beneficial role of Project based learning by giving positive perceptions of its implementation in an ESP course. However, it is important to note the role of the instructor in PjBL is that of a facilitator, meaning that their primary responsibility is to advise students as they work on their projects (King & Smith, 2020). In addition, Rao (2019) adds that when choosing topics for learning activities, teachers must consider the needs and interests of their students. Therefore, they must be able to adapt the subject of their instruction, the learning activities in the classroom, the instructional media, and the assessment with the students' needs in order to attain the expected learning outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Teaching English for Specific Purposes needs a careful choice of the appropriate approach to maximize the learning outcome. In this case, implementing Project Based Learning can be beneficial strategy that can support students' personal qualities and skills. In this regard, the present study aims at investigating students' perceptions of the implementation of Project Based Learning in an ESP course. The results of this study indicate that students have a positive perception of the implementation of PjBL. They agree that while joining the teaching and learning process in PjBL, they can develop their creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and language skills. It is indicated that PjBL is an effective instructional strategy in ESP contexts. However, it is important to note that while implementing PjBL, teachers need to provide the authentic task and materials to make the teaching and learning process more meaningful. Hence, this present study proves the beneficial roles of PjBL seen from the students' perspective. However, due to the limited number of participants and research methods, further research is suggested to employ different research design, use multiple data collection techniques and involve more participants to obtain a more comprehensive data regarding the implementation of PjBL in language teaching and learning. Overall, the results of this study are expected to inspire the English teachers to implement Project based Learning in their language teaching.

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