

The Effectiveness of Project-Based Learning in Raising Tertiary Students' Proficiency in English Speaking

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Abstract

English speaking proficiency is a critical skill in both academic and professional contexts, especially for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Traditional language instruction, which often emphasizes grammar and writing, frequently fails to develop learners' speaking fluency and confidence. This study investigates the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in enhancing English-speaking skills among first-semester Informatics students at the tertiary level. Grounded in constructivist and communicative language teaching theories, PBL emphasizes real-world communication, collaboration, and learner autonomy. Using a descriptive method, students participated in a one-month instructional project that culminated in video presentations, assessed across five key speaking indicators: comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency. After a one-month PBL intervention, it was shown that 20% of students reached the highest proficiency level (score 85-90), then 55% performed at an average level (score 75-80), and 25% remained at a lower proficiency level (score 60-70). 100% of students showed improvement: high and average performers improved by 15 points on average, and low performers improved by 10 points. Results showed significant improvement across all proficiency levels, particularly among high- and average-performing students. The findings indicate that PBL effectively improves learners' speaking abilities by promoting engagement, authentic language use, and confidence. However, lower-performing students may require additional scaffolding and support. This study supports the integration of PBL into EFL curricula to promote more interactive and meaningful language learning experiences.

Keywords: *Project-Based Learning, English Speaking Skills, Language Learning, EFL, Communication*

Abstrak

Kemahiran berbicara bahasa Inggris adalah keterampilan penting dalam konteks akademik dan profesional, terutama bagi pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL). Instruksi bahasa tradisional, yang sering menekankan tata bahasa dan penulisan, seringkali gagal mengembangkan kefasihan dan kepercayaan diri berbicara pembelajaran. Studi ini menyelidiki efektivitas Pembelajaran Berbasis Proyek (PBL) dalam meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara bahasa Inggris di kalangan mahasiswa Informatika semester pertama di tingkat perguruan tinggi. Berlandaskan teori pengajaran bahasa konstruktivis dan komunikatif, PBL menekankan komunikasi dunia nyata, kolaborasi, dan kemandirian pembelajaran. Menggunakan metode deskriptif, mahasiswa berpartisipasi dalam projek pembelajaran selama satu bulan yang berpuncak pada presentasi video, yang dinilai berdasarkan lima indikator berbicara utama: pemahaman, tata bahasa, kosa kata, pelafalan, dan kefasihan. Setelah intervensi PBL selama satu bulan, ditunjukkan bahwa 20% siswa mencapai tingkat kemahiran tertinggi (skor 85-90), kemudian 55% berkinerja pada tingkat rata-rata (skor 75-80), dan 25% tetap pada tingkat kemahiran yang lebih rendah (skor 60-70). 100% siswa menunjukkan peningkatan: siswa berkinerja tinggi dan rata-rata meningkat rata-rata 15 poin, dan siswa berkinerja rendah meningkat 10 poin. Hasil menunjukkan peningkatan yang signifikan di semua tingkat kemahiran, terutama di kalangan siswa berkinerja tinggi dan rata-rata. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa PBL secara efektif meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara pembelajaran dengan mendorong keterlibatan, penggunaan bahasa otentik, dan kepercayaan diri. Namun, siswa berkinerja rendah mungkin memerlukan peranah dan dukungan tambahan. Studi ini mendukung integrasi PBL ke dalam kurikulum EFL untuk mempromosikan pengalaman belajar bahasa yang lebih interaktif dan bermakna.

Kata Kunci: Project-Based Learning, Keterampilan Bahasa Inggris, Belajar Bahasa, Mahasiswa EFL, Komunikasi

1. Introduction

English speaking skills are essential for effective communication in both academic and professional settings. In today's globalized world, English speaking proficiency has become a vital skill for academic success, career advancement, and cross-cultural communication. However, many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners struggle to develop fluency and confidence in speaking. Traditional teaching methods often emphasize grammar and written exercises, which may not adequately prepare students for real-life conversations. Traditional language teaching methods often fall short in fostering real-life communication abilities, particularly in non-native English learners. This has led educators and researchers to explore alternative instructional approaches that actively engage learners and simulate authentic language use. As a result, innovative approaches such as Project-Based Learning (PBL) have gained attention for their potential to enhance language acquisition in a more engaging and meaningful way.

Project-Based Learning is a student-centered pedagogy that encourages learners to acquire knowledge and skills by working for an extended period to investigate and respond to complex questions, problems, or challenges. Unlike conventional rote learning, PBL emphasizes collaboration, creativity, and practical application of language in meaningful contexts. These features make it a promising strategy for developing English speaking skills, as it immerses learners in interactive tasks that require verbal communication, problem-solving, and peer interaction. Mastering English speaking skills remains a significant challenge for many ESL learners, often due to limited exposure to real-life communication scenarios in classroom settings. Traditional teacher-centered methods typically prioritize grammar and vocabulary memorization, offering little opportunity for practical usage. In contrast, Project-Based Learning (PBL) provides a dynamic and engaging learning environment where students use English purposefully while collaborating on meaningful tasks. (Ulfa, 2019) Stated that the mastery of speaking skills in English is a priority for many second or foreign language learners, as profound knowledge of oral strategies helps foreign learners negotiate meaning and solve any communication problems.

Despite the recognized importance of speaking proficiency in language learning, many EFL learners struggle with oral communication due to a lack of practice, anxiety, and insufficient exposure to authentic language use. Traditional methods, which focus on memorization and written exercises, usually fail to create an environment conducive to active speaking practice. Given the potential benefit of PBL in language education, it is necessary to investigate its effectiveness in improving students' English-speaking abilities. This study seeks to explore whether PBL can significantly enhance fluency, accuracy, and confidence in spoken English compared to conventional teaching approaches. This research is significant for educators, curriculum designers, and students. For educators, it provides insights into an alternative teaching approach that may enhance speaking proficiency. Curriculum designers can use the findings to develop more interactive and student-centered English programs. For students, PBL may offer a more engaging and effective way to improve their speaking skills, ultimately leading to better communication abilities in both academic and real-life contexts. The goal of this study is to examine how PBL affects students' English-speaking abilities. By engaging in collaborative projects, learners are expected to experience improvements in fluency, vocabulary usage, and speaking confidence. This research aims to contribute to pedagogical innovation by providing empirical evidence on the advantages of using PBL in English language instruction.

2. Literature Review

PBL is rooted in constructivist learning theories, which emphasize active student engagement and real-world application of knowledge. John Dewey's (1920) experiential learning theory and Lev Vygotsky's (1997) sociocultural theory support the notion that learning is most effective when students interact and collaborate in meaningful contexts. Additionally, communicative language teaching (CLT) underlines the importance of communication in language acquisition, aligning well with PBL's interactive approach. Several studies highlight the role of PBL in developing language skills. According to Thomas (2000), PBL allows students to take ownership of their learning, improving both engagement and linguistic competence. Beckett and Slater (2005) found that PBL enhances students' motivation and confidence in speaking by encouraging real-world communication. Furthermore, Stoller (2006) emphasizes that PBL promotes meaningful language use by integrating listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

Research suggests that PBL improves fluency and pronunciation as students frequently engage in discussions, presentations, and group activities. Richards (2008) highlights that continuous interaction in PBL projects helps learners develop automaticity in speech. Barrett (2017) found that students who engaged in PBL-based tasks demonstrated better pronunciation and rhythm compared to those in traditional learning settings. PBL encourages learner autonomy, increasing students' confidence in speaking English. Krajcik and Blumenfeld (2006) argue that PBL's student-centered approach fosters intrinsic motivation. A study by Simpson (2011) demonstrated that students involved in PBL felt more comfortable speaking in front of others, reducing anxiety and enhancing communication skills. Despite its benefits, implementing PBL in language education comes with challenges. Assessment difficulties, time constraints, and teacher preparation are common obstacles (Harmer, 2015). Some educators struggle with evaluating students' speaking progress effectively. Additionally, PBL requires sufficient classroom time, resources, and proper scaffolding to be effective.

While numerous studies highlight the benefits of PBL in language learning, there is limited research on its long-term effects on speaking proficiency. Moreover, more empirical studies are needed to compare PBL with traditional teaching methods in diverse educational settings. Future research should explore strategies to overcome challenges in implementing PBL effectively. It can be concluded that this research reviewed key literature on the role of PBL in improving English-speaking skills, including its theoretical foundations, benefits, and challenges. Research suggests that PBL enhances fluency, confidence, and communicative competence, though challenges exist in its implementation. Addressing these challenges and conducting further research can help maximize the effectiveness of PBL in language education.

3. Method

This research methodology was employed to investigate the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in enhancing English-speaking skills. The methods include research design and data collection, as well as analysis techniques. Speaking skills can broadly be categorized into four: comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency. Comprehension: The recall of oral information requires listening and responding to speech, which is both interactive and dynamic. Grammar: In any kind of conversation during classroom activities, students are expected to formulate an appropriate utterance and recognize suitable grammatical distinctions. Grammar also aids learners in obtaining adequate mastery of how to use a language both orally and through writing. Vocabulary: Providing a definition for effective communication or articulating one's ideas succinctly is impossible in the absence of sufficient vocabulary. Thus, idiolect clashes are described as what vocabulary denotes. Pronunciation: This deals with phonological processes that pertain to the production of clearer spoken language by learners, concerning the sounds of words and their patterns within grammatical structure. Fluency: Diminished pauses while speaking at an adequately brisk pace yields evidences of fluency alongside quick processing speed for basic expression components (Syakur 1987: 3).

The Teaching Learning Unit is from the English students' book, and the instructor will adjust the material as per student's needs and instruction to but needfollowed. The Research data was gathered from the first semester of English class in Technic Informatics as a tertiary level course. The instructor has been allocated an instructional English project whereby he/she shall dispense information and directions to the pupils, who in turn shall record themselves practicing with video cameras. After recording, video files were saved to Google Drive, set to open with general access. This is for easy retrieval by interested parties. The location for filming (practicing) is on campus, starting from in front of the campus. When done practicing, students are required to submit their recorded files by posting links where they are accessible in class work submission comments within Google Classroom. This medium serves well for file submissions. The method used here is descriptive. The researcher will select the highest score from forty students of the first semester in the video presentation. The highest scores have been given to the students' video presentation who speak in English, have criteria, such as comprehension, correct pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and speaking loudly. The students will be given two weeks to prepare, learning the material, and 2 weeks to create a video presentation.

As stated (Gottlieb, 1995), the following scoring rubric is employed for analyzing and evaluating group or pair activities tests. It is also a straightforward scoring rubric that is appropriate for conducting action research during class, particularly in speaking.

Table 1. Scoring Rubric

Indicator	1 Beginning	2 Developing	3 proficient	4 Advance	5 exceptional
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Comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shows limited comprehension of the task or content - Relies heavily on peers or teachers - Rarely uses academic language - Limited or off-topic contributions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shows partial understanding; may miss key points - Needs support to complete tasks - Uses some academic language, though inconsistently - Participates with prompting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demonstrate s a clear understanding of content - Completes tasks with minimal support - Uses appropriate academic vocabulary - Engages in productive interaction with peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fully understands and completes tasks independently. - Consistently contributes insightful, relevant information - Uses academic language fluently - Supports peers appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demonstrates deep, critical understanding of content - Connects ideas creatively across contexts - Uses precise and varied academic language - Initiates and leads discussion effectively
Grammar	Minimal control; frequent errors interfere with meaning; requires support.	Limited accuracy and range; frequent errors; needs support.	Mostly accurate grammar with some variety; errors do not hinder meaning.	Accurate and varied grammar with minor, non-disruptive errors.	Fluent, flexible, and precise grammar in a variety of contexts.
Vocabulary	Very basic or unrelated vocabulary; frequent errors; relies on support.	Limited vocabulary; emerging use of academic terms; needs support.	Accurate and task-appropriate vocabulary with a growing variety.	Wide-ranging and accurate vocabulary that enhances clarity and detail.	Sophisticated, creative, and precise vocabulary use in all contexts.
Pronunciation	Minimal control; hard to understand; frequent breakdowns in clarity.	Frequent errors; intelligible with effort; needs support.	Generally clear pronunciation; errors do not interfere with meaning.	Clear, confident, and accurate pronunciation with minor, rare errors.	Fluent, precise, and expressive pronunciation with native-like clarity.
Fluency	Halting, minimal speech with frequent pauses and very limited expression.	Hesitant and uneven speech; often disjointed but somewhat understandable.	Generally fluent speech; occasional hesitation, but the message is clear.	Fluent and natural speech with minimal hesitation or disruption.	Native-like fluency with expressive, smooth, and confident delivery.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Result

The result of the research Implementation: The students have one month for this project. Two weeks to prepare by learning the material and observing, then 2 weeks creating a video, the students will be submitted the video link which already save in google drive that can be accessed by everyone or upload from YouTube, TikTok, or Instagram which can be forwarded to the class work at google classroom as comment based on assignment instruction such as: link, name, student ID number and their class.

Evaluation: Based on the data, the researcher will analyse the video assignment by watching the video from the link, and will rank the students' scores in the table below:

Table 2. The score of the pre-test and post-test

No	Level	Pre-test	Post-test
1	Highest	75	90
2	Average	70	85
3	Lowest	60	70

From Table 2, it can be shown to effectively describe and interpret the pre-test and post-test. The data provided it's essential to analyze the changes in student performance across different proficiency levels that can be to breakdown: Firstly, the highest level: an increase from 75 to 90 indicates a significant improvement of 15 points. Then, the average level scores rose from 70 to 85, also reflecting a 15-point gain. The last is the lowest level: an improvement from 60 to 70 shows a 10-point increase.

These results suggest that all student groups benefited from the intervention, with the highest and average groups showing more substantial gains.

Table 3. The percentage of the score

No	Level	Score	Percent
1	Highest	85 – 90	20%
2	Average	75 – 80	55%
3	Lowest	60 – 70	25%

The interpretation table 3 showed that the highest level is 20% of students who achieved scores between 85 and 90, indicating high proficiency. The continued majority 55% scored between 75 and 80 is an average level, representing average performance. The last, which is 25% of the lowest level, fell within the 60 to 70 range, highlighting areas needing improvement. This distribution showed that while a significant portion of students are performing at an average level, there is a noteworthy percentage at both the high and low ends of the spectrum.

The results indicate that PBL has a positive impact on enhancing students' English-speaking skills. The interactive and student-centered nature of PBL likely contributed to these outcomes by: 1) Promoting authentic use of language in contextualized tasks. 2) Enhancing student motivation and engagement through real-world relevance. 3) Encouraging collaborative learning and peer interaction, which facilitated practice in a low-pressure environment. 4) Allowing students to express their ideas creatively, thereby improving fluency and confidence.

These findings align with previous studies (e.g., Beckett & Slater, 2005; Simpson et al., 2011), which suggest that PBL fosters both linguistic development and learner autonomy. Furthermore, the improvement in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary use aligns with the theoretical underpinnings of communicative language teaching (TCL) and constructivist approaches.

However, the less pronounced improvement in the lowest-performing group suggests the need for differentiated support. These students may benefit from additional scaffolding, more guided practice, and

formative feedback throughout the PBL process. It also reflects the challenge noted (Harmer, 2015), where PBL requires careful planning and individualized attention, especially for learners with foundational skill gaps.

The data indicate a positive trend in student performance following the intervention. All proficiency levels experienced score increases, demonstrating the effectiveness of the implemented strategies. However, the varying degrees of improvement suggest that while the intervention was beneficial, additional support may be necessary for lower-performing students to achieve more substantial gains. For a more comprehensive understanding of the intervention's impact, conducting statistical analyses such as paired sample tests could determine the significance of the score improvements across different groups.

It can be concluded that the results confirm that PBL is an effective method for improving speaking proficiency among EFL students, particularly in enhancing fluency, vocabulary, and confidence. While all students showed progress, targeted interventions may be needed to support lower-performing learners more effectively. Future research could benefit from statistical analysis, such as paired sample t-tests, to validate the significance of the gains and provide more empirical evidence. These findings support the integration of PBL into English language instruction as a viable alternative to traditional, grammar-heavy approaches, offering a more engaging, communicative, and learner-centered pathway to language development.

4.2 Discussion

These findings align with previous studies (e.g., Beckett & Slater, 2005; Simpson et al., 2011), which suggest that PBL fosters both linguistic development and learner autonomy. Furthermore, the improvement in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary use aligns with the theoretical underpinnings of communicative language teaching (TCL) and constructivist approaches. However, the less pronounced improvement in the lowest-performing group suggests the need for differentiated support. These students may benefit from additional scaffolding, more guided practice, and formative feedback throughout the PBL process. It also reflects the challenge noted (Harmer, 2015), where PBL requires careful planning and individualized attention, especially for learners with foundational skill gaps.

The data indicate a positive trend in student performance following the intervention. All proficiency levels experienced score increases, demonstrating the effectiveness of the implemented strategies. However, the varying degrees of improvement suggest that while the intervention was beneficial, additional support may be necessary for lower-performing students to achieve more substantial gains. For a more comprehensive understanding of the intervention's impact, conducting statistical analyses such as paired sample tests could determine the significance of the score improvements across different groups. Project-based learning offers much benefits and make it classroom more real like a real-life experiences (Lubis 2021; Maghfirah & Lubis, 2024).

It can be concluded that the results confirm that PBL is an effective method for improving speaking proficiency among EFL students, particularly in enhancing fluency, vocabulary, and confidence. While all students showed progress, targeted interventions may be needed to support lower-performing learners more effectively. Future research could benefit from statistical analysis, such as paired sample t-tests, to validate the significance of the gains and provide more empirical evidence. These findings support the integration of PBL into English language instruction as a viable alternative to traditional, grammar-heavy approaches, offering a more engaging, communicative, and learner-centered pathway to language development.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to explore the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in enhancing the English-speaking skills of EFL students, particularly focusing on fluency, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and confidence. In response to the limitations of traditional, grammar-focused instruction, which often fails to develop real-life communication abilities. This research demonstrated that PBL offers a dynamic and practical alternative for language acquisition. Grounded in constructivist and communicative theories, PBL immerses students in meaningful, real-world tasks that require active verbal engagement, collaboration, and critical thinking. The methodology involved assigning speaking-focused projects to tertiary-level Informatics students, assessed through video presentations and evaluated against key speaking criteria.

The results clearly show that PBL positively impacts English-speaking proficiency across all performance levels. Students in the highest and average categories demonstrated significant gains in post-test scores, with improvements of up to 15 points. Even the lowest-performing group experienced some progress, though to a lesser degree, indicating that PBL benefits a wide range of learners but may require added support for those with foundational gaps. These findings align with prior research suggesting that PBL fosters learner autonomy,

motivation, and authentic language use. However, challenges such as assessment complexity, time constraints, and the need for differentiated scaffolding were also evident, particularly in supporting lower-proficiency learners.

In conclusion, this study provides strong evidence that PBL is an effective, student-centered approach for improving English-speaking skills in EFL contexts. It not only enhances linguistic abilities but also fosters greater confidence and engagement among learners. For educators and curriculum designers, PBL represents a promising strategy to shift from rote memorization toward communicative competence. Future studies should incorporate statistical analysis and explore long-term outcomes to further substantiate these findings and optimize PBL implementation across diverse learning environments.

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