



Students' and Teachers' Attitudes towards the Effect of Project-Based Learning on the Speaking Skill in Higher Education

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Abstract ;

This research aims to investigate EFL learners' and teachers' attitudes towards the implementation of PBL as a method to improve the speaking skill. The study was carried out at the Department of English at Batna-2 University, in the fall semester of the academic year 2018-2019. The subjects are seventy (70) conveniently-selected second-year students and sixteen (16) randomly-selected teachers of English. A questionnaire as a descriptive data collection tool is-used, through which both quantitative and qualitative data are collected and descriptively analyzed. The results demonstrate that students and teachers have positive attitudes towards PBL. Moreover, they share an agreement about the effectiveness of the PBL approach in developing the speaking skill.

Article info

Received

30 April 2021

Accepted

25 May 2021

Keyword:

- ✓ *Project-Based Learning*
- ✓ *Attitudes*
- ✓ *Speaking Skill*

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1. Introduction

The development of technology and the rapid changes in all life domains propelled a strong demand for learners to get control over their learning and to actively develop knowledge to become global citizens. In order to meet the requirements and challenges of the 21st century, learners need to seize some skills like critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity. These imperative skills are not addressed in the traditional teaching methods. Further, many researchers and educators have been interested in developing the teaching methods and approaches to meet the digital learners' needs and interests. In fact, English Language Teaching and Learning (ELT/ELL) in the Algerian educational system is witnessing a lot of reforms because of some shortcomings found in the previously adopted methods. In the light of these reforms, a noticeable shift from the traditional teacher-facilitated and memorization-based classrooms to a modern learning environment that focuses on student-driven and self-directed learning occurred. The potential of this latter has raised the learners' curiosity to develop academic knowledge and skills within the real-life experiences inside the classroom, especially in the Algerian context where English communications outside the classroom do not happen much. Therefore, there is an urgent need to improve the quality of ELT in Algerian universities by exploring effective teaching methods that endow students with the skills needed to respond to global demands, and that enable them to compete in the highly global marketplace. Being aware of the diversity of innovative teaching methods, PBL is one of the effective and motivating instructions that emphasize the active acquisition of knowledge through collaboration and language production. Thus, the purpose of PBL is to foster not only academic knowledge, but also students' life skills: collaboration, problem-solving, communication, critical thinking, and self-direction.

1.1 The Problematic statement

In a preliminary study conducted by the researcher concerning the students' level in English as Foreign Language (EFL) skills, the participants claimed that students have a low to average level in the speaking skill, compared to writing, in which they have a level ranging from average to high. Such facts reflect the need to pay more attention to enhancing and developing the learners' speaking skill through implementing a teaching/learning approach that dovetails with their needs and interests, and that raises their motivation to improve their oral performances.

1.2 Research Objective

Based on the rationale previously discussed, the current study aims to examine the attitudes and opinions of teachers and students of English towards the use of PBL as an approach to develop the learners' oral performances. Bogardus (1931 as cited in Bashar, 2012) defines an attitude as “a tendency to act toward or against something in the environment which becomes thereby a positive or negative value” (p. 62).

1.3 The research Question

This study endeavors to answer the following research question:

What are the attitudes of EFL teachers and students towards PBL as an instruction approach to develop the speaking skill?

1.4 The Research Hypotheses

Accordingly, we hypothesize, on the one hand, that EFL teachers and students would have positive attitudes towards PBL as an approach to develop the speaking skill. On the other hand, students may show more interest and enthusiasm as PBL is different from the ordinary passive learning environment.

2. Literature Review

2.1 An Introduction to Project-Based Learning

In a review of PBL definitions, the term tends to be broad, having different meanings in different disciplinary areas (Hanney & Baden, 2013). Furthermore, it has been the topic of interest for many researchers who define it differently depending on the context of interest. As it is mentioned by Harmer (2014), "project-based learning falls under umbrella terminologies like problem-based learning, inquiry-based approach, and task-based approach, which are closely related and sometimes they are used interchangeably" (p. 2). Likewise, PBL is often referred to as the Project-based learning method, project-based learning approach, project-based learning instruction, and project-based learning model. Dewey, the father and pioneer of the PBL approach, supported the idea that learners should take part in their learning process. Besides, he believed that learners would succeed if they could collaborate and interact with others to learn through experiences (Talebi, 2015). These beliefs have evolved from the late nineteenth century to become the 21st-century PBL approach.

Researchers provided definitions to PBL through its noticeable advantages on learning. Blumenfeld et al., (1991) defined PBL as "a comprehensive approach to classroom learning and teaching that is designed to engage students in an investigation of authentic problems" (p. 369). Hence, PBL is a paradigm that posits that learners' needs and interests must be supported, and that emphasizes the shift in learners' roles from passive recipients of knowledge to meaning builders or information constructors. In other words, PBL promotes learning by doing instead of learning by receiving.

The PBL approach is "an instructional approach that contextualizes learning by presenting learners with problems to solve or products to develop" (Moss & Van Duzer, 1998 as cited in Wanchid & Wattanasin, 2015, p. 582). PBL is an academic model that encourages learning through conducting projects, and whose fundamental purpose is to link the knowledge acquired in the classroom and the authentic language that students encounter in their real-life situations (Fried-Booth, 1997).

Another definition was provided by Tamim and Grant (2013) who claimed that PBL is "an instructional modal that is based on the constructivist of knowledge" (p. 73). In fact, PBL traces its theoretical roots in constructivism; "a theory which regards learning as an active process in which learners construct and internalize new concepts, ideas and knowledge based on their present and

past knowledge and experiences" (Cohen et al. 2004, p. 167). Constructivism views learning as a natural process where meaning is made by student interactions and reflections upon ideas and experiences (Dewey, 1938 as cited in Choi et al., 2019). Additionally, Bell (2010) defined PBL as: "A student-driven, teacher-facilitated approach to learning. Learners pursue knowledge by asking questions that have piqued their natural curiosity. The genesis of a project is an inquiry. Students develop a question and are guided through research under the teacher's supervision" (p. 39).

Along with this line of thoughts, PBL is characterized by its core principle that students are motivated and supported to get the ownership of their learning, to solve and discuss real-world situations, to design their inquiries, to plan their learning process, and to organize their knowledge to achieve academic goals. Moreover, the Buck Institute for Education (BIE) defines PBL as a "teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging and complex question, problem, or challenge". PBL is deemed to be an innovative method implemented in the teaching and learning process to develop the capacities known as 21st-century skills, including collaboration, critical thinking, communication, creativity, global connection, and self-management. Markham et al. (2003) summarized the fundamental meaning of PBL as a "systematic teaching method that engages students in learning knowledge and skills through an extended inquiry process structured around complex, authentic questions and carefully designed products and tasks" (p. 4). PBL has the potential to allow learners to engage in and to work on contextualized situations, and it helps them in filling the gap between what they acquire inside the classroom, and the experiences they pass by outside school (Juwon, 2005). In the same line, Bender (2012) defined PBL in few words: "working cooperatively to solve a problem" (p. 7). Hence, collaboration is an important standard in PBL instruction. In short, the purpose of PBL is to foster students' abilities for life-long learning through contextualizing learning by presenting them with problems to solve or authentic situations to perform.

2.2 Key Features of the Project-Based Learning Approach

Although definitions and project parameters may vary from one researcher/scholar to another, the characteristics of PBL are clear and permanent. Tschudi and Rodriguez (2017) state: "We define PBL as an articulated series of activities, motivated by real-world needs and driven by the learners' interest, whose common goal is to improve language learners' communicative competence in the target language through the construction of products" (p. 3). Thus, PBL can be seen as a student-centered learning approach wherein students investigate an authentic question or topic with a collaborative team, and they choose a way to share their findings in the target language with an authentic audience (Collier, 2017, p. 3). Accordingly, four fundamental features of PBL can be extracted.

2.2.1 Learner's voice and choice

The traditional ways of teaching, called teacher-centered approaches, were mainly based on the teacher's input and the reproduction and recall of information. Thus, the teacher has the validities to decide, plan, and assess the content to be taught. Considering the teacher and student roles, educational reforms around the world have called for a necessary shift from teacher-centered to the learner-centered classrooms to meet the requirements of the global society. Closely related to this

principle, Cohen et al. (2004) point out that "... This signals a significant move from attention on teaching to attention on learning; classrooms are places in which students learn rather than being mainly places in which teachers teach" (p. 167).

Advocates of PBL argue that learner-centered approaches, like PBL, are necessary for students to develop crucial skills needed in the 21st century, including cooperation, independent thinking, negotiation, collaboration, and communication (Bell, 2010). Further, PBL places the learner at the core of the teaching/learning process, and it emphasizes autonomous learning (Thomas, 2000). Autonomous learning, as defined by Chalupa and Haseborg (2014, p. 56), is a process by which students have a voice and choice in what and how they learn. It gives crucial importance to learners' needs, interests, and contributions. PBL equips the learners with the appropriate and necessary knowledge and competencies needed in the 21st century under the guidance and supervision of the teacher. More specifically, learners are no longer passive, for PBL fosters active learning by actively engaging them to become co-responsible for their knowledge creation. Correspondingly, the teacher's role is to become a facilitator, a companion, and a creator of learning contexts that support the appropriate learning objectives to achieve the intended learning outcomes. In such an environment, learners are given the complete power to decide, plan, and construct their own knowledge and to try to exploit it, when and where necessary, in real-life situations (Baghoussi & El Ouchdi, 2019, p. 272).

2.2.2 *Collaboration and communication*

Yam and Rossini (2010) describe PBL as an academic approach that seeks to find answers to real-world issues through collaborative investigations. Thus, collaboration is a key element in the PBL process. Its main aim is to encourage students to learn with and from each other through group work, communication, and interaction. Drastically different from the traditional notion of individual learning, collaborative learning has a direct link with social constructivism (Oxford, 1997), and it is rooted in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. Furthermore, Vygotsky's notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) identifies and describes the distance between the students' abilities to perform a task independently without external help, and what they can achieve with the help of peers and instructors (Brown, 2007). Social constructivism, hence, holds the idea that learners develop their knowledge through social interaction and cooperation with others (Yaman, 2014). Indeed, scaffolding is directly related to learners' engagement with more capable others who provide the assistance and guidance dimension of the ZPD. Powell and Kalina (2009) point that: "Vygotsky stated that language enhances learning and that it precedes knowledge or thinking. To embrace diversity, students must interact socially by using language" (p. 245). Therefore, PBL emphasizes the social dimensions in constructing new knowledge, wherein learners work in collaboration with their peers and teachers to explore issues, to critically analyze problems, to synthesize their understanding, to actively build meaning of new information, and to apply their learning to a practical setting.

2.2.3 *Authenticity*

PBL is generally considered as a valuable teaching approach that gives learners the ability to explore and discuss subjects that meet their interests. Authentic activities, however, are activities designed to develop learners' life-long skills which are important in out-of-school contexts, and

which have a real-world relevance and utility. Larmer (2012), Editor and Chief of the Buck Institute for Education, claims that "PBL means students are doing work that is real to them—it is authentic to their lives—or the work has a direct impact on or uses in the real world" (para. 4). Accordingly, authenticity is one of the main criteria of project-based instruction, and it refers to learners conducting projects that simulate what happens in real-world contexts. The topics investigated should be based on real-life issues and not fictitious ones. Further, authenticity is a principle that emphasizes real-world and meaningful language used for real communicative purposes (Brown, 2007, p. 377). Dealing with a PBL model, the final output must have an authentic purpose, an authentic audience, and direct use in real-world situations outside the classroom. PBL encourages learners to investigate projects that are real to them to sustain their interests and motivation. Larmer (2012) suggests four key characteristics for a project to be considered authentic:

1. The project meets a real need in the world beyond the classroom, or the products that students create are used by real people.
2. The project focuses on a problem, issue or topic that is relevant to students' lives.
3. The project sets up a scenario or simulation that is realistic, even if it is fictitious.
4. The project involves tools, tasks or processes used by adults in real settings and by professionals in the workplace (para. 5).

2.2.4 Public product and assessment

Patton (2012) defines PBL as a method that allows "students to design, plan, and carry out an extended project that produces a publicly exhibited output such as a product, publication, or presentation" (p, 13). Thus, one of the essential features of PBL that might increase students' motivation is the final public product. Presenting a public output to an authentic audience at the end of the project is far more realistic than having a lecture in a traditional learning atmosphere, in which learners are passive and teachers are spoon feeders. The National Foreign Language Resource Center (NFLRC) (2014) underlines that PBL is "a transformative learning experience designed to engage language learners with real-world issues and meaningful target language use through the construction of products that have an authentic purpose and that are shared with an audience that extends beyond the instructional setting" (para. 1). In PBL projects, learners investigate the selected topic or problem collaboratively through the constructed product, being presentations. The output, therefore, is used to display the gained knowledge and the skills developed, and it is often presented to an audience that provides feedback to evaluate the presented product and the learning proficiency.

According to Gubacs (2004), learners are allowed to self-assess their final products, as well as their peer's projects, and to provide constructive comments according to the teacher's reflection. This would help them to be aware of their own strengths to improve and weaknesses to eradicate. Furthermore, such activities develop the learners' motivation, enthusiasm, and empowerment to develop their knowledge and to produce high-quality outputs for display in front of their teachers and classmates (Fougler & Jimenez-Silva, 2007).

Thus, through a final product, learners are eager to make a sense of achievement, which is so important for their overall attitudes towards the subject. Soleimani et al. (2015) state that

PBL is a means of using language to learn, rather than learning a language. However, when learners listen, speak, read, and write the target language in finding information, discussing, consulting experts or reference and presenting findings, they learn the language in real-world context (p. 3).

Presenting a final knowledgeable product when dealing with the PBL approach results in enhancing learners' language skills, self-confidence, self-esteem, cognitive abilities, and autonomy.

2.3 Benefits of Project-Based Learning

After reviewing the overall idea of PBL and its main characteristics, it proved to be an effective teaching method, despite its implementation and success that require pondering the improvement of the learners' language performance and proficiency. Kettanun (2015) summarized that "the project-based EFL classroom yielded not only positive learning outcomes, but also helped the students to improve their cognition, work ethics, and interpersonal skills " (p. 569).

Advocates of PBL confirm that this model of teaching and learning has numerous benefits on learners' language and life-long skills, namely motivation, increased engagement and interests (Lee, 2002; Brophy, 2004; Levine, 2004; Deci & Moller, 2005; Fougler & Jimenez-Silva, 2007; Peterson & Nassaji, 2016), in addition to developed proficiency and accuracy of the language skills and greater achievement (Fragoulis, 2007; Li, 2010; Tuncay & Ekizoglu, 2010; Sadeghi et al, 2016). Indeed, Srikrui (2008) and Simpson (2011) (as cited in Poonpon, 2017) concluded that PBL gained a significant acceptance due to its positive effects in enhancing the learners' language skills. Fragoulis (2007) claims that "Most students showed an improvement in all four language skills at the end of the term. Their speaking and listening skills, in particular, had the greatest improvement" (p. 116). Particularly, this study's main interest is the speaking skill.

Many researchers and studies are concerned with determining methods and techniques to improve the speaking skill, especially in the field of teaching and learning EFL. Particularly, Simon (2014) confirms that the major aim of foreign language learners is to be fluent and to master speaking of the target language. Besides, several studies are focusing on enhancing the students' speaking skill through PBL, and the majority revealed its significant effect on students' oral performances (Balagiu et al., 2014; Abubakar, 2015; Zare-Behtash & Sarlak, 2017).

An example is an experimental study carried out by Yang and Puakpong (2016), who investigated the possible effects of PBL on the improvement of the students' speaking skill. This study was conducted with 80 first-year EFL students at Kaili University (Guizhou, China). The students were divided into two groups (40 students in the control group and 40 students in the experimental group). Both group subjects were all given the same speaking topics. The control group was taught in what the researchers called a traditional teacher-centered class where there was no interaction among students, and the teacher's talk takes most of the class time. Correspondingly, the experimental group experienced PBL, a student-centered approach in which learners worked in teams, structured the projects, and assigned roles and tasks to develop. The students were also exposed to a pre-test and a post-test to assess their English levels before and after the treatment. After 12 weeks of working, the final results claimed that PBL enhanced the students' speaking

abilities, provided them with an authentic environment, and fostered their autonomous learning. Thus, it would be useful for English language teachers and students to explore the potential of a project-based approach to enhance the language learning experience and the students' skills.

To conclude, Fragoulis (2009) and Bell (2010) (as cited in Maulany, 2013) state that the implementation of PBL has several benefits in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), including

1. PBL contextualizes language learning for students to make it meaningful
2. PBL creates an optimal environment for English oral performance.
3. PBL encourages the students' active engagement in the learning process
4. PBL increases students' motivation, interest, enthusiasm, and enjoyment.
5. PBL promotes social skills that can enhance collaborative skills
6. PBL improves students' language proficiency and accuracy skills (p. 33)

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Method

This study aims at investigating EFL students' and teachers' perceptions about the effectiveness of PBL as an approach in developing the speaking skill. Therefore, the nature of this situation requires the descriptive method. Burns and Grove (2001) declared that "descriptive design helps to identify a problem in a current practice to improve outcomes" (p.248). Relying on the questionnaire as a data-gathering tool, both quantitative and qualitative information are collected.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The necessary information to answer the research questions requires, a specific population, defined by Polit (2001) as: "The entire aggregation of cases that meet a specified set of criteria" (p. 233). The population of students for this study is the second-year students of English at Batna-2 University, the equivalent of 350 students. Such a selection is attributed to the fact that second-year students have already experienced learning the oral expression subject through the traditional teaching method at the university level, and they were taught through PBL during the academic year of 2018-2019. The population is extended also to include all teachers of English at the same university in order to back up the results obtained from students and to benefit from their teaching experience.

However, such a large-scale population is not manageable, which necessitates selecting a sample. According to Polit (2001),

Sampling involves selecting a group of people, events; behaviors or other elements with which to conduct a study. When elements are persons, they are known as subjects . . . selected from the delineated target population in a way that the individuals in the sample represent as nearly as

possible. (p. 235)

Following our research requirements, on the one hand, the convenience sampling technique is the most suitable; it is defined by Taherdoost (2016) as "selecting participants because they are often readily and easily available" (p. 22). Indeed, the student sample was assigned by the administration, and the researcher was their teacher and the implementor of the suggested PBL approach. In this respect, 70 second-year students of English constitute the sample. On the other hand, 16 teachers of English were randomly selected.

3.3 The Questionnaire

3.3.1 Description of the Questionnaire

The nature of the topic under investigation urged us to use the questionnaire as a data-gathering tool. Brown (2001) claimed that "questionnaires are any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answer" (p. 6). The purpose of the current study is to figure out students' and teachers' attitudes and opinions towards PBL as a learning and teaching approach to improve the speaking skill. According to Shamsavar and Tan (2012), to assess attitudes in a learning environment, questionnaires are considered as a reliable instrument. Thus, the reason behind choosing the questionnaire is to gather reliable and valid data in a short period.

Hence, the questionnaires were administered at the end of a 9-week treatment using PBL in the oral expression subject in the academic year 2018-2019. Participants were asked to tick the corresponding box for close-ended choices questions, and to add more information and to explain their views freely in the open-ended questions. Additionally, there was a head note on the questionnaire defining the key term PBL. The questionnaires are structured into three main parts: (a) participants' personal information, (b) students'/teachers' opinions towards the principles of PBL instruction and its significant implementation in EFL classes, and (c) participants' perceptions and attitudes towards the PBL strategy in improving the learners' speaking skill.

Before the main administration, the questionnaires were piloted with three expert teachers, and some changes in the formulation of questions happened. Cohen et al (2005) stated, concerning piloting, that "a pilot has several functions, principally to increase the reliability, validity, and practicability of the questionnaire" (p. 260).

The results obtained from the participants' answers to the closed questions are analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics (the means and standard deviations SD) processed by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences program (IBM SPSS Statistics 23). Correspondingly, the open responses are discussed qualitatively.

3.4 Results and Discussion

The participants' answers and comments are presented without any adjustments in the coming sections (corresponding to the sections of the questionnaire).

General Information

Students

The general information of the subject students involve their age (Table 1), gender (Table 2), and studying English being their personal choice or not (Table 3).

Table 1. Students' age

	Frequency	Percent
Valid 18-25	66	94,3
Valid 26-30	4	5,7
Total	70	100,0

Table 1 shows that the students' age ranges from 18 to 30 years old, which reveals that there are two (02) age groups in the selected sample. 94,3% of the students age between 18-25 years old, and 5% of them are between 26-30 years old. This reflects that all the sample students belong to the millennial age range. Corbin (2017) defines millennials as the generation that ranges between 18 and 35 years old. He added: "Researchers have characterized Millennials as comfortable with technology, prefer interactive classrooms with individual feedback, peer collaboration, multitask with ease, collaborative databases and demonstrate intolerance for traditional lecture-style teaching ... tend more toward independence and autonomy" (p. 69).

Table 2. Students' gender

	Frequency	Percent
Valid Female	58	82,8
Valid Male	12	17,1
Total	70	100,0

As far as the gender variable is concerned, females prevail. There are 58 female students (83%) and only 12 male students (17%), which is consistent with the university's aggregate male and female ratio. Hamidah et al. (2009), Amir et al. (2011), Baneshi et al. (2014) reported that females had higher preferences for collaborative learning, and they like being involved in learning activities; unlike males who prefer being reserved. Accordingly, females can easily adapt to the PBL approach since it calls for collaboration and self-autonomy.

Table 3. Studying English was a personal choice

	Frequency	Percent
Valid Yes	64	91,4
Valid No	6	8,6
Total	70	100,0

Furthermore, concerning the students' choice of the English language as a field at the university, the majority of participants (91%) contended that studying English was their personal choice. This

reflects a great interest and motivation to study the English language. Conversely, only 8,6% of the respondents reported that the English language was not their personal choice; they were compelled to study it.

Teachers

Teachers are asked about their years of experience (Table 4)

Table 4. Teachers' years of experience in teaching English

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1-5 years	6	37,5
	6-10 years	2	12,5
	More than 10 years	8	50
	Total	16	100,0

As the table shows, the majority of respondents (62,5 %), representing 10 teachers, have an experience of more than 6 years as EFL teachers at the university level. This reflects their seniority in the teaching process. Hence, their contribution to the current investigation adds significant reliability as they faced different students' generations and adopted different methods and approaches.

The first part of the questionnaires denotes that the characteristics of the project-based approach match the students' learning styles and preferences in terms of variables like age and gender. This could lead to raising the students' acceptance of the PBL approach.

Section One: Students' and teachers' opinions towards the principles of PBL

This part aims to find out both students' and teachers' perceptions of the characteristics and principles of PBL and its benefits and effectiveness in the development of students' academic achievement. The results are classified into the learning environment and the benefits of PBL features.

The learning environment.

As it is different from the traditional learning environment, PBL provides a new, enjoyable, and attractive teaching and learning atmosphere.

Students

Students were asked about how they found the PBL learning environment.

Table 5. Students' enjoyability of the PBL environment

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Positive	66	94,3
	Negative	4	5,7
	Total	70	100,0

As it is clear from the table, almost all of the students (94,3%) reported that they enjoyed working on the projects, while 5,7% of them reported that they did not enjoy the tasks under the PBL

lessons. All of these findings amount to the result that PBL turns out to be an interesting and enjoyable method in terms of influences on the students' attitudes towards the learning environment. Besides, they found that PBL is different from the traditional teaching and learning environments because it creates a motivational and an enjoyable classroom with a harmonious atmosphere. Some of the students' statements are:

Student 1: "PBL model was different from the boring traditional classroom I had before. I found myself in an interesting atmosphere which motivates me to develop my knowledge in a non-threatening class"

Student 2: "I like learning in an atmosphere that is not stressful and threatening, and this is exactly what I found in the PBL environment. I felt confident and less stressed in working with my classmates"

Teachers.

The teachers, however, were asked to give their point of view concerning the PBL environment. Some of their responses are:

Teacher 1: "Comparing with the teaching methods we have already adopted, PBL establishes a new, interesting and enjoyable teaching and learning environment"

Teacher 2: "PBL motivates not only learners but also creates an enjoyable teaching atmosphere for teachers. Students become active and interact with their teachers unlike the traditional classroom in which the teachers did everything and students were passive"

The benefits of PBL

Both participant groups agreed upon the students' favorable learning activities. The results show that students prefer group work and classroom discussion. They claim that working collaboratively on projects is interesting and enjoyable because the group members provide help to each other, so the learning stress is reduced. Examples of the participants' comments are:

Student 3: "while working in groups, all members brainstorm together. Learning in a collaborative environment increases our enthusiasm and sense of competitiveness"

Student 4: "We worked together with my classmates; we shared ideas and helped one other to boost our learning process"

Besides, teachers postulated that collaboration is a PBL tenet and an integral part of learning. When collaboration is integrated in an instructional design, learning becomes more cooperative and social undertaking, and the teacher becomes facilitator. Some of their responses include:

Teacher 3: "Working collaboratively encourages learners to perform better, to learn from each other in a supportive atmosphere"

Teacher 4: "PBL develops social skills namely respect the others' ideas, cooperate, turn-taking and conveying empathy"

Learner-centered environment and language skills

Students and teachers were asked about the feasibility of a learner-centered environment in developing students' language skills. Tables 6 and 7 summarize their opinions, respectively.

Table 6. Students' opinions towards a learner-centered environment in developing their language skills

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Positive	68	97,1
	Negative	2	2,9
	Total	70	100,0

Table 7. Teachers' opinions towards a learner-centered environment in developing students' language skills

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Positive	16	100,0
	Total	70	100,0

Tables 6 and 7 display that almost all the participants (students and teachers) report positive opinions apropos a learner-centered environment in developing students' language skills. However, few students (2 students) opposed this idea, for they rely on teachers as the only source of knowledge. They would rather prefer a teacher-centered atmosphere in which they absorb information and are instructed in the classroom. In other words, they are dependent learners who support the instructivist principles.

Considering the high level of positive statements in the participants' answers, it can be said that the learner-centered classroom fosters learners' active learning, responsibility, and motivation. Some students' and teachers' statements scaffold such findings:

Student 5: "Before we were in an annoying and boring learning environment, we keep listening to the teachers' talk and memorizing their words. However, in the PBL environment, we felt as we are the core, we were motivated to participate, interact and share ideas"

Student 6: "I am active in a learner-centered classroom because I feel more responsible for my learning instead of being passive"

Teacher 5: "Learner-centered classroom helps students to have control over their learning. They share the class talk with the teacher, and decide upon the tasks and lessons"

Teacher 6: "I put my students in the core of the teaching and learning classroom by stimulating their curiosity and doubtfulness, and letting them take the responsibility to look for the appropriate answers and solutions"

Moreover, since the final step of the PBL model is the students' performance in front of the class and receiving their teacher's and peers' feedback, learners develop their self-confidence and courage

to strengthen their weaknesses.

Student 7: “I was always shy and I never thought that I could perform in front of my teachers and classmates. Through PBL and group working, I became more self-confident and I developed my knowledge to best display it in front of the class”

Student 8: “I think it is the most difficult part of the PBL class. Standing in front of the classmates and present your work is quite challenging and requires a lot of self-confidence. Yet, with my teachers’ and peers’ emboldening, I did it”

Teacher 7: “From the teachers’ and classmates’ feedback after displaying knowledge, learners gain more self-confidence and become more eager to develop themselves and perform better in every presentation”.

Furthermore, several students and teachers reported that PBL's main benefit is to enhance learners' autonomous learning and to increase their sense of responsibility. Their comments are:

Student 9: “Working through PBL model, I became more responsible and confident to decide my own learning”

Student 10: “I felt more motivated and confident due to my integration in the lesson design and activities”

Teacher 8: “PBL calls for learners' self-development and autonomous learning, the thing which is required to be a citizen in the 21st-century globe”

The results of Section One reveal that both students and teachers assert the effectiveness of PBL as a teaching and learning approach. Hence, they have a positive attitude towards its features. They claim that PBL develops not only language skills, but also the students’ life-long skills, knowledge and academic achievement, which are all goal-oriented.

Section Two: Students’ and teachers’ attitudes towards the effect of PBL on the speaking skill

This section aims to find out participants’ views towards the effect of PBL as a method to develop the speaking skill. Therefore, the first question in both questionnaires positions the participants’ positive or negative attitudes (Tables 8 and 9).

Table 8. Students’ attitudes towards the Efficacy of PBL in developing the speaking skill

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	No	2	2,9
	Yes	68	97,1
	Total	70	100,0

Table 9. Teachers’ attitudes towards the Efficacy of PBL in developing the speaking skill

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	16	100,0
	Total	16	100,0

According to Tables 8 and 9, 68% of the students and 100% of the teachers think that the PBL approach contributes effectively to the development of the speaking skill. However, 2,9% of the students reported their negativity. Accordingly, the percentages clearly show that there are notable answers in favor of the effect of PBL on the students' oral performances.

Second, students and teachers are asked about specificities as far as their perceptions of PBL's effects on the speaking skill are concerned. On the one hand, students' perceptions are addressed with a set of 15 statements describing the speaking abilities the students developed after PBL lessons. Students were asked to rank the statements on a 4 point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree). Their answers are summarized in Table 10.

Table 10. Students' perception of PBL's effects on the speaking skill

Statements	N	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
I can speak more fluently	70	3,36	,660
My pronunciation is better improved	70	3,36	,566
My grammar mistakes while speaking are reduced	70	3,27	,658
I use longer sentences when I speak	70	2,86	,666
My speaking coherence developed	70	3,20	,672
I feel active and engaged in the classroom	70	3,36	,539
I encountered a lot of difficulties when doing projects	70	1,69	,733
I gained a lot of new knowledge while doing projects	70	3,34	,587
I gained a lot of self-confidence when I speak in front of the others	70	3,43	,604
I find that I learn better with the others	70	3,21	,635
I accept the others' assessment and feedback	70	3,20	,628
I become more responsible for my learning	70	3,30	,574
I find more opportunities to speak English when doing projects	70	3,24	,731
I perform better in every presentation	70	3,23	,765
I become motivated to practice English outside the classroom	70	3,16	,581
Valid N (listwise)	70		

The comparability of the mean values (M), which represent the average ranks, demonstrates that students gain a lot of self-confidence when speaking in front of others (M= 3,43), which implies that PBL reduces shyness and stress when speaking in public. Indeed, PBL develops the students' speaking fluency (M=3,36), improves their pronunciation (M=3,36), and fosters active engagement in the classroom (M=3,36). Students also gain new knowledge (M=3,34) and become more responsible for their learning (M=3,30). Therefore, PBL tends to develop the aspects of the speaking skill and to promote learning autonomy. Other effects of PBL include the reduction of

grammar mistakes while speaking (M=3,27), ample opportunities to speak English when doing projects (M=3,24) and improvement of the students' oral performances in every presentation (M=3,23).

Furthermore, students find that they learn better when working collaboratively (M=3,21); they accept the others' assessment and feedback (M=3,20), and they develop their speaking coherence (M=3,20). Thus, PBL potentially prioritizes collaborative work rather than individual work.

Ranked last are the students' motivation of practicing English outside the classroom (M=3,16) and the use of long sentences when speaking (M=2,86). It may be explained by the lack of speaking opportunities in the Algerian context where speaking English outside the classroom does not happen much.

At the end, students reveal that they did not find a lot of difficulties when doing projects (M=1,69). This issue might be explained by the students' motivation and eagerness to practice authentic English in the classroom context.

We conclude that students are moderately conscious about the significant effect of the PBL approach on their oral performances, and they are able to comply with PBL characteristics that call for the adoption of student-centeredness, collaborative work, and the display of newly acquired knowledge.

On the other hand, teachers' perceptions are addressed in an open-ended format: "What do you think of the implementation of PBL as an approach to develop EFL speaking skill?" The majority of teachers (Fourteen 14 teachers out of sixteen 16) agreed upon the effectiveness of the PBL approach to enhance the students' speaking skill. Some of the teachers' answers are classified in the following categories:

- a. PBL promotes active learning inside the classroom: A considerable number of teachers claim that this approach is effective for developing autonomous learning, especially when dealing with the speaking skill which is an important skill to develop in foreign language classrooms.
- b. PBL increases students' motivation to practice English: A significant number of teachers believe that PBL motivates students to speak as it encourages them to engage in learning activities, and puts them at the core of the learning process.
- c. Effectiveness of PBL: Teachers posit that the PBL approach is effective and useful for improving the students' speaking aspects, including fluency, pronunciation, grammar, and coherence.
- d. PBL supports collaborative learning: Group work and the performance of the gained knowledge in front of the classmates are cited as an important effect of PBL for learners to develop their oral performances.

Nevertheless, the two remaining teachers believe that the PBL approach is not suitable for developing the students' speaking skill. Such stands are justified by this approach's adequacy when dealing with other language skills, such as writing and reading.

3.5 General Discussion

All the findings show that PBL gains considerable acceptance among learners and teachers, and support the integration of PBL into speaking classes. Participants responded in favor of PBL due to its compatibility with 21st-century learners and educators. Additionally, the majority of respondents approved the effectiveness of PBL as a teaching and learning approach because it develops learners' language skills, knowledge, and academic achievement.

The study found that participants have significant positive attitudes and acceptance towards the usability and effectiveness of project-based classrooms as they match students' learning styles. On the one hand, students of the study thought that a PBL environment is enjoyable and interesting for Foreign Language Learning (FLL), and is motivating for them to develop their knowledge. On the other hand, the teachers consider PBL as a worthwhile approach since it meets the students' needs and interests, so it creates an enjoyable and fruitful teaching and learning atmosphere; they further support its use in EFL classes.

Particular to the speaking skill in EFL, participants have positive attitudes towards the effects of PBL on the development of students' oral performances. They agreed upon its efficiency in improving the speaking aspects, such as pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and word choice. Besides, the majority of students' answers show that PBL is a motivational approach for the development of their self-confidence.

The opposite extreme of the findings, obtained from the students' questionnaire, reveals that few students have negative attitudes toward PBL, given their dependability and reliance on the teacher as the feeder of knowledge. Besides, as they say, such a stance is justified by their unsociable personality; they do not like interaction and group work.

To conclude, the sample teachers claimed that the acceptance of PBL depends on students' learning styles and preferences; however, PBL has the advantage to adapt to different learning styles.

3.6 Recommendations

Some research and pedagogical recommendations are drawn from the research conclusions for researchers who are interested in investigating PBL, and for teachers who are interested in integrating it into their regular language classes:

1. This research study has shown that implementing PBL in the oral English classes helps students in various aspects. Researchers and educators should give more attention to this topic to help students develop their language skills. Since traditional classrooms are seen as an 'old hat' and conflict with modern needs, students should be encouraged to be active to gain knowledge on their own with less assistance from teachers.
2. Researches on PBL should focus to a greater degree on how this approach develops other language abilities, such as writing, reading, and culture in the EFL context where the teacher usually dominates the classroom.
3. Further research studies would benefit greatly from investigating the role of the teacher in a project-based environment. The teachers' role is very crucial for the success of the PBL model as it

is the guide, facilitator, and assessor of the students' outcomes. More focus is given to the student when dealing with PBL, yet the teachers' intrinsic merit and the role they undertake in their classrooms cannot be denied.

4. A further suggestion for future research would be the investigation of the efficacy of PBL in another study using an experimental research design to assess how the speaking skill is affected by PBL and to compare it with the traditional one. It would provide more detailed and comprehensive results which would be more enlightening for EFL teachers and researchers.

5. The organization of seminars and study days for teachers and EFL practitioners is required to raise their awareness of the benefits of PBL as it promotes the twenty-first century required skills, and to acquaint them with ways of implementing such an approach appropriately in EFL classes.

4. CONCLUSION

The current investigation's overarching aim is to identify EFL learners' and teachers' attitudes towards the effect of PBL on the speaking skill. After the implementation of the PBL approach in an EFL oral expression class, the researcher discovered that many students felt more motivated to speak and to participate in the classroom discussion, in contrast to their silence in the traditional teacher-led instruction. Likewise, both students and teachers appreciate the change from the traditional instructional approach because they enjoyed group learning, the active learning setting, and the display of an end product to the classroom audience that enhances their self-confidence. Students' motivation in this study is strongly affected positively by the project-based unit; they showed a great interest to improve their speaking skill through PBL. Overall, the findings suggest that PBL is an effective instructional approach as well as a motivational method to develop students' speaking skill in EFL. In the light of the findings, we conclude that both students and teachers have highly-positive attitudes toward PBL as a promising approach to FLT/FLL. Besides, PBL offers considerable benefits to students' academic achievement; Wolk (1994) says in the same vein: "PBL is an outlet for every student to experience success" (p. 44)

Being aware of the diversity and multitude of the modern teaching methods, the researcher of the present investigation adopted a PBL method because it is more suitable for students' learning styles, and it meets their ambitions and aspirations. Traditional teacher-based instructions no longer have effects on the 21st generation; however, cooperative learning, authenticity, and autonomous learning are a few of the most common strategies needed in today's classrooms. Teachers need to investigate innovative teaching methods to develop the students' knowledge and academic achievement. By incorporating the PBL approach, the current researcher spent a fresh and exciting experience, developed her teaching practices, and maintained her students' desire and motivation to develop their English speaking skills. Tamim & Grant (2013) posit that: "PBL is not simply an instructional model that aims at gaining knowledge about specific content areas, but it targets the building of the learner as a whole" (p. 74).

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6. Appendices

Students' Questionnaire

Dear Students,

You are kindly invited to fill in this questionnaire which is designed to gather data as part of a research work. It aims mainly at investigating EFL teachers and students’ attitudes towards the implementation of project-based learning approach in university classes, and its effect on the development of the students' speaking skill. We would be so grateful if you answer sincerely because your answers will determine the success of this investigation.

Thank you

Key Term:

Project-based Learning (PBL): is a learner-centered pedagogical approach in which students' have control over their learning, investigate collaboratively an authentic problem or topic, and display the findings in form of public product to authentic audience.

General Information

Specify your gender

Male

Female

Specify your age

18-25

26-30

More than 30

Studying English field in the university was your personal choice

Yes

No

Section One: Students’ opinions towards the principles of PBL

How did you find the PBL learning environment ?

Positive

Negative

Justify your answer

Students' and Teachers' Attitudes towards the Effect of Project-Based Learning on the Speaking Skill in Higher Education

Which of the following activities students prefer most to speak and participate in the Oral expression subject?

- Role play
 - Debate and discussion
 - individual presentations
 - Group work presentations
- Justify your answer

What do you think about the idea that learner-centered environment develops student's knowledge and academic achievement?

- Positive Negative
- Justify your answer

How do you find the final step of the PBL model which is the performance in front of the class ?

What are the learning skills that PBL enhances more?

- Critical thinking and problem solving
 - Active learning
 - collaboration and Communication
 - Autonomous learning
 - all of the above
- Justify your choice

Section Two: Student' attitudes towards the effect of PBL on the speaking skill

Do you think that PBL enhances students' speaking skill?

- Yes No
- In the current academic year, after PBL lesson

Statements	strongly disagree	disagree	agree	strongly agree
I can speak more fluently				
My pronunciation is better improved				
My grammar mistakes while speaking are reduced				
I use longer sentences when I speak				
My speaking coherence developed				
I feel active and engaged in the classroom				
I encountered a lot of difficulties when doing projects				
I gained a lot of new knowledge while doing projects				
I gained a lot of self-confidence when I speak in front of the others				
I find that I learn better with the others				
I accept the others' assessment and feedback				
I become more responsible for my learning				
I find more opportunities to speak English when doing projects				
I perform better in every presentation				
I become motivated to practice English outside the classroom				

Teachers' Questionnaire

Dear Teachers,

You are kindly invited to fill in this questionnaire which is designed to gather data as part of a research work. It aims mainly at investigating EFL teachers and students' attitudes towards the implementation of project-based learning approach in university classes, and its effect on the development of the students' speaking skill. We would be so grateful if you answer sincerely because your answers will determine the success of this investigation.

Thank you

Key Term:

Project-based Learning (PBL): is a learner-centered pedagogical approach in which students' have

control over their learning, investigate collaboratively an authentic problem or topic, and display the findings in form of public product to authentic audience.

General Information

How long have you been teaching English as a foreign language ?

1-5 years

6-10 years

More than 10 years

Section One: Teachers' opinions towards the principles of PBL

What do you think of the PBL teaching and learning environment ?

.....

Which of the following activities students prefer most to speak and participate in the Oral expression subject?

Role play

Debate and discussion

individual presentations

Group work presentations

Justify your answer

.....
 What do you think about the idea that learner-centered environment develops student's knowledge and academic achievement?

Positive

Negative

Justify your answer

.....
 How do you find the final step of the PBL model which is the performance in front of the class ?

.....

What are the learning skills that PBL enhances more?

Critical thinking and problem solving

Active learning

collaboration and Communication

Autonomous learning

all of the above

Justify your choice

Section Two: Teachers' attitudes towards the effect of PBL on the speaking skill

Do you think that PBL enhances students' speaking skill?

Yes

No

What do you think of the implementation of PBL as an approach to develop EFL speaking skill ?

.....
