

Project Work as an Integrated Approach to Teaching Language, Content, and Skills in EFL Textbooks (A Survey of the Algerian Middle School EFL Teachers' Perceptions)

FEDOUL Malika

Université Mouloud MAMMERI de Tizi-Ouzou

Email : malyka_80@yahoo.fr

Abstract

This study is a survey of the Algerian middle school EFL teachers' perceptions of project work as an integrated approach to EFL teaching and learning. It aims to evaluate: one, teachers' perceptions of the integration of language, content and skills through project work in the Algerian middle school EFL textbooks, namely, Spotlight on English One (2003), Spotlight on English Two (2004), Spotlight on English Three (2006), and On the Move (2006). Two, evaluate the participants' perceptions of the integration of language, content and skills through project work with beginner/low level EFL learners. To conduct the study, a questionnaire was handed to 60 Algerian middle school EFL teachers belonging to 22 schools in the Wilaya of Tizi-Ouzou. Mixed-methods research, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, has been used to collect and analyse data. The results of the analysis reveal that while the participants have negative perceptions towards project works proposed in the textbooks, they perceive positively project work as a teaching methodology for beginner/low level EFL learners. Yet, the majority of the teachers (80%) do not consider project work as an appropriate methodology to teach the English language for these categories of EFL learners.

Key Words: *Project Work; Teachers' Perceptions; Integrated Approach; Algerian EFL Education; Tizi-Ouzou Middle Schools*

المشروع كمنهج متكامل لتدريس اللغة والمحتوى والمهارات في الكتب المدرسية للغة الإنجليزية (استبيان آراء مدربي اللغة الإنجليزية في متوسطات ولاية تيزي وزو أنموذجاً)

ملخص: هذه الدراسة عبارة عن استبيان حول آراء مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية في متوسطات ولاية تيزي وزو عن المشروع كمنهج متكامل لتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة اجنبية. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى: أولاً تقييم آراء المعلمين حول دمج تعليم اللغة والمحتوى والمهارات من خلال المشاريع المقترحة في كتب اللغة الإنجليزية للتعليم المتوسط *Spotlight on English One* (2003), *Spotlight on English Two* (2004), *Spotlight on English Three* (2006)

On the Move (2006). ثانياً تقييم آرائهم حول دمج اللغة والمحتوى والمهارات من خلال المشروع لتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية للمبتدئين وذوي المستوى الضعيف. لإجراء هذه الدراسة تم استطلاع 60 معلماً في ولاية تيزي وزو (الجزائر). تبنت هذه الدراسة كل من المناهج الكميد والنوعية لجمع وتحليل البيانات. تشير النتائج إلى أن نظرة المعلمين اتجاه المشاريع المقترحة في الكتب المدرسية سلبية وضررتهم اتجاه المشروع كمنهجية لتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية للمبتدئين ودوي المستوى الضعيف إيجابية. غير أن غالبية المعلمين (80%) يعترض على فعالية المشروع كمنهجية لتعليم قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية.

الكلمات المفتاح:

المشروع ؛ منهج متكامل ؛ استبيان آراء المعلمين ؛ تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية ؛ متوسطات ولاية تيزي وزو

I. Introduction

The adoption of project-based learning (PBL) or project work (PW) to the teaching of EFL in the Algerian middle school (MS) is the result of the education reform of 2002. The adoption of this teaching methodology, according to the designers of the Algerian EFL MS curriculum, aims to encourage learners to work in groups, to conduct research and gather information, communicate effectively, solve problems, and to develop at their social skills (Documents d'accompagnement du programme d'anglais de la première année moyenne, 2002).

In ESL contexts, PW is advocated by many researchers as it is a promising methodology not only to teach the English language but also content or subject-matter knowledge, and various types of skills. The latter include social, methodological, and intellectual or cognitive skills (Stoller F. L., 2002; Beckett G. H. & Slater T, 2005; Slater T., Beckett G. H., & Aufderhaar C., 2006). One of the rare studies that have been found on the effects of PW on ESL learners is Beckett G. H. (1999). It was conducted in a Canadian ESL secondary school. The results of the study revealed, in fact, that teachers approved PBL because it allowed them to integrate the teaching of language, content and skills.

However, in the Algerian EFL context, no studies have been found in the literature on the efficiency of PW as an integrated approach to English language teaching, mainly, with beginner/low level EFL learners.

Therefore, this survey research aims to evaluate the Algerian MS EFL teachers' perceptions on the effects of PW as an integrated approach on teaching beginner/low level EFL learners. In other words, it targets to investigate the extent to which the simultaneous teaching and learning of language, content and skills can be achieved with these categories of learners. The study has two main objectives. First, it seeks to evaluate the teachers' perceptions of the integration of language, content and skills in the PWs that

are proposed in the Algerian MS EFL textbooks which are designed within the Reform Project of 2002. These textbooks are: *Spotlight on English One* (2003), *Spotlight on English Two* (2004), *Spotlight on English Three* (2006), and *On the Move* (2006). They are designed for first, second, third, and fourth year MS learners, respectively. Second, it aims to evaluate the teachers' perceptions of the effects of PW to integrate the teaching of language, content and skills with beginner/low level EFL learners. This research, then, addresses the following research questions: 1) How do the Algerian MS EFL teachers perceive the integration of language, content and skills into PWs in the Algerian EFL MS textbooks? 2) What are these teachers' attitudes towards the integration of language, content and skills into EFL PW with beginner/low level EFL learners?

The following sections provide a brief review of the literature on PW in ESL/EFL education, research method used to conduct this survey, the main findings of the study, discussion of the findings, and finally conclusion and recommendations.

II. Literature Review

II. 1. Origins of Project-Based Education

The origins of Project-Based Education are to be found in the American educational reform movement led by Dewey John and Kilpatrick W. H. It also stems from educational philosophy and psychological theories of many European scholars, mainly Piaget J. and Vygotsky L. (Beckett G. H., 2006). Dewey's philosophy of education is known as progressive education which is, according to him, opposed to the traditional view of education. By contrast to the traditional view of education which considers education's mission as the transmission of knowledge to the learners, progressive education aims at experiential learning or learning by doing and skills building (Dewey J., 1938). In the same vein, Kilpatrick W. H. in his "Project

Method” (1918) suggests project “*a hearty purposeful activity*” as a substitute to rote learning. His project method, he claims, is based on Dewey’s learning by doing.

Other psychological and educational theories that have set the ground for PBL are labeled constructivist theories. The latter are, mainly, represented in Piaget’s cognitive or developmental psychological theory and Vygotsky’s sociocultural views of learning and knowledge construction. Despite their different orientations (cognitive or social), they both view learning and knowledge construction as an active process. Piaget J. argues that children do not learn passively by imitating others, they rather take an active role in the construction of their knowledge and the development of their intelligence (Singer D. G. & Revenson T. A., 1996).

However, in Vygotsk’s sociocultural theory, knowledge is constructed by individuals as members of their societies (Vygotsky L., 1978). In other words, Vygotsky stresses the importance of interaction in intellectual development and knowledge construction. He claims that the knowledge that individuals acquire is first socially constructed and that thinking in culturally mediated (Vygotsky L., 1978: 57).

II. 2. Project-Based ESL/EFL Education

The use of PW in ESL/EFL education is brought about, on the one hand, by the shift from the traditional teacher-centered approaches to the learner-centered ones, which in themselves are based on the constructivist view of learning and knowledge construction (Hedge T., 1993; Beckett G. H., 2006). On the other hand, according to Beckett G. H., (2006), it is the result of the emphasis on the role of output in SLA research or what is known as Output Hypothesis as suggested by Swain M. (1985). The hypothesis claims that learners acquire a language in the process of producing language, spoken or written (Swain M., 1993: 159).

II. 3. Competency-Based Approach and PW

Competency-based education (CBE) or Outcome-based education is defined by Spady W. G. (1994: 198) as “*a comprehensive approach to organizing and operating an education system that is focused on and defined by the successful demonstrations of learning sought from each student*”. In the field of foreign and second language education, this approach is defined as “*a performance-based outline of language tasks that lead to demonstrate mastery of language associated with specific skills that are necessary for individuals to function, proficiently in the society in which they live*” (Gronet & Grandall, 1982: 3. In Auerbach E. R., 1986: 431). The adoption of CBE in foreign/second language education is the result of the growing need for language learning for communicative purposes (Tudor I., 2013). Moreover, the focus on performance or outcomes makes CBE in line with the different manifestations of communicative language teaching, among them PBL (Richards J. C., 2006). In other words, PBL as one of the latest manifestations of communicative language teaching gives more importance to what learners can do with language to perform in different tasks (outcomes).

II. 4. What is PW?

Project is defined by Katz (1994) as “*an indepth investigation by children of a topic that is worth of their time, attention and energy*” (Quoted in Clark A. M., 2006: 2). In other words, project is an activity that is undertaken by children about a theme of their interest for the purpose of learning something. Katz L. G. and Chard S. N. (1992) claim that conducting PW enables learners to acquire content knowledge related to the topic being investigated and different types of skills and competencies, such as, intellectual, academic, social and language-related skills (eg. Reading and writing).

In ESL/EFL education, Stoller F. L. (2002) writes that PW allows for the implementation of content-based instruction. She defines PW as *“a versatile vehicle for the fully integrated language and content learning, making it as a viable option for language educators working in a variety of instructional settings, including general English”* (p.109). In the same vein, Slater T., Beckett G. H. & Aufderhaar C. (2006: 242) define PW as *“a social practice into which students are socialized through a series of individual or group activities that involve the simultaneous learning of language, content, and skills”*.

Many other defining characteristics of PW have been stressed by scholars. Haines (1998) says that projects focus on activities that involve multi-skills learning rather than specific language points (In Tsiplakides I. & Fragoulis I., 2011). Besides, in conducting projects, the process is given more importance than the end-product (Fried-Booth D. L., 2002). PW is likely to motivate, stimulate, empower and challenge learners. It leads to developing learners' confidence, self-esteem, and autonomy. It also enhances their language skills, content knowledge learning, and cognitive abilities (Stoller F. L., 2002).

II. 5. Benefits of PW in ESL/EFL Education

Stoller F. L. (2006) reported the following benefits of PW in ESL/EFL education:

- PW provides opportunities for exposure to authentic language. It allows for creative use of language rather than mechanical way of learning.
- While doing projects, learners have opportunities for modified input, negotiate meaning, and use language to interact (output). All of these enable learners to build up their language skills of writing, reading, speaking, listening, vocabulary and grammar abilities

- Because projects are intended to gather, process, and report real information, they result in the increase of learners' content knowledge about the topic they investigate (Stoller F. L., 2006: 24-27).

III. Research Design

III.1. Method

To conduct this survey, a mixed-methods research is adopted. The latter, according to Dornyei Z. (2007), combines both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect and analyse data. Mixed methods research is chosen for its potential for multilevel analysis of the data and improved validity. In fact, Dornyei Z. (2007: 45) claims that in this method "*words can be used to add meaning to numbers and numbers can be used to add precision to words*". Furthermore, the possibility of triangulation that is offered by mixed-methods research ensures validity through convergence and corroboration of the findings (ibid). Qualitative method is used to analyse and interpret the open-ended items of the questionnaire and the qualitative one is used to analyse the close-ended items. The quantitative and qualitative data occurred concurrently. Yet, in terms of dominance, this study is quantitatively dominant.

III. 2. Sample Population and Context of the Investigation

Data for this survey are obtained from a sample of 60 volunteer Algerian EFL MS teachers. The sample is randomly chosen among teachers who are familiar with the PWs in textbooks under study. The participants teach in different MSs in the Wilaya of Tizi-Ouzou, Algeria. Some of the schools are located in urban areas others in rural ones. The participants belong to 22 MSs, each one having between 3 to 4 teachers. These schools are: Amyoud Smail, Mouloud Feraoun, Derdar Said, Babouch, Colonel Lotfi, Halliche Hocine (all of them are located in the city of Tizi-Ouzou); Ahmed Chafai, Challal Mohamed Ali, and Benziadi Mohamed (Makouda); Medjber

Mohamed, and CEM Nouveau (Tigzirt); Abdelhamid Arezki (Mizrana); CEM Nouveau (Tikobain); Benaissa Mohamed (Azeffoune); Khelifati Said, and Touares (DBK); Ousmail Hocine (Tamda); CEM Nouveau Taka (M'kira); Mahiouz Ahcene (Larbaa Nath Irathen); Ziane (Souk Elhed); Krim Rabah, and Tazrout Aouaoudha (Draa El-Mizane) . The study took place between January and February, 2018.

III. 3. Instrument of Data Collection

In this research, a questionnaire was used to collect data from the participants. It was designed to evaluate the Algerian MS EFL teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the integration of language, content and skills through PW in the four official EFL MS textbooks, namely, *Spotlight on English One* (2003), *Spotlight on English Two* (2004), *Spotlight on English Three* (2006), and *On the Move* (2006). It targets also to evaluate their perceptions of the integrated approach to language teaching and learning through PW with beginner/low level EFL Algerian MS learners. The designed questionnaire included 15 items. However, three of them were deleted after a piloting that involved 10 teachers. Therefore, the questionnaire items were reduced to 12. The latter include close-ended questions and open-ended ones. The close-ended ones include both multiple choice and rating scales items. The questionnaire includes an introduction that explains to the teachers the aim of the study and what is required from them. It also ensures the teachers about the anonymity and confidentiality of their answers. It includes two sections: the first one is entitled *teachers' perceptions of the integration of language, content and skills into project work in the Algerian middle school EFL textbooks* (items 1-7). The second one is named *Teachers' perceptions of the integration of language, content and skills into EFL project work for beginner/low level learners* (items 9-12). To ensure the validity of the questionnaire's content, the latter included only

items that are directly related to the raised issue. Besides, the inclusion of multi-items scales targets internal consistency reliability.

Before administering the questionnaire to the participants, the researcher had obtained the permission of both the educational authorities of the Wilaya of Tizi-Ouzou and the headmasters of the schools mentioned above. The questionnaires were, then, either handed by the researcher to the volunteer teachers or the headmasters who in turn handed them to the teachers. The latter were allowed enough time to fill in the questionnaires, from three days to one week, before we collected them.

III. 4. Data Analysis Procedures

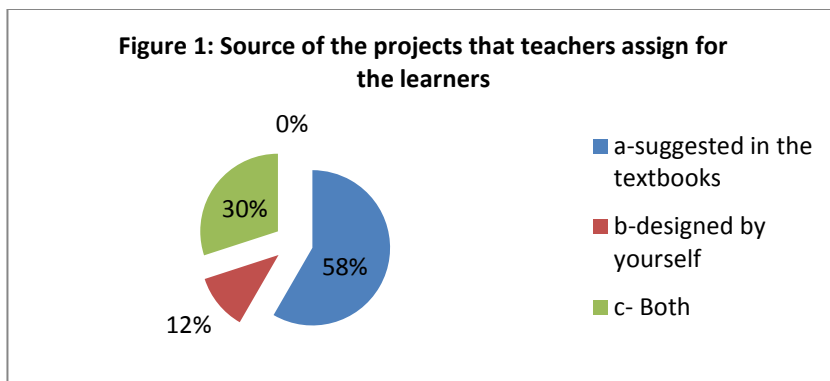
To analyse the close ended-items of the questionnaire, descriptive statistical method was used. This statistical method, according to Tavakoli Hossein (2012) is used to summarize and organize the gathered data numerically and graphically (Tavakoli H., 2012). The results of the study are presented in percentages using histograms and pie charts. The open-ended items were analysed using qualitative content analysis procedure as provided by Fraenkel J. R. & Wallen N. E. (2009). The participants' answers to the open-ended questions were taken individually, and key points were highlighted for each response. Then, general categories were used to describe these key points.

IV. Results of the Survey

This section presents the results of the teachers' answers to the questionnaire items. It presents both the quantitative and qualitative data. It also provides the finding for the participants' perceptions of PWs that are proposed in the official Algerian MS EFL textbooks and their perceptions of the use of project-based teaching methodology to integrate the teaching of language, content and skills for beginner/low level EFL learners.

1. Project works you assign to your learners are:

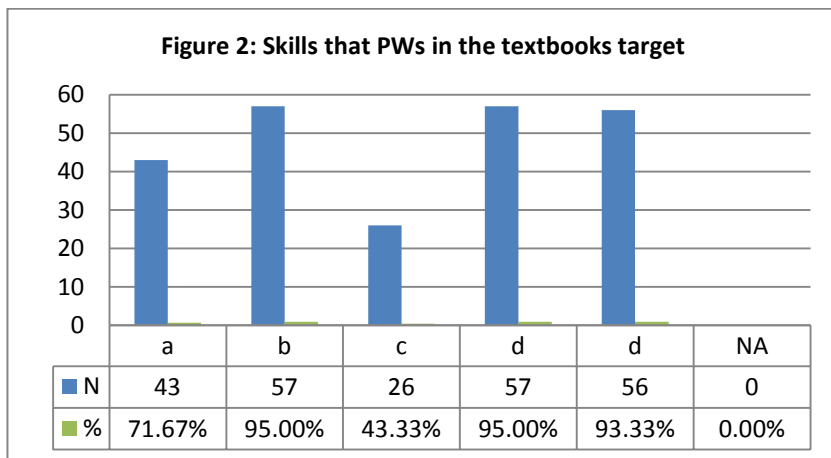
2.



The results of the analysis of the first question, shown in the histogram above, reveal that the majority of the Algerian MS EFL teachers (58, 33%) rely mainly on textbooks to assign projects for their learners. 30% of the respondents use both their own designed projects and the ones proposed in the MS textbooks. Only a minority of the participants (11, 67%) claim that they use their own designed projects.

2. Project works that are suggested in the middle school textbooks encourage learners to learn (you may tick off more than one answer):

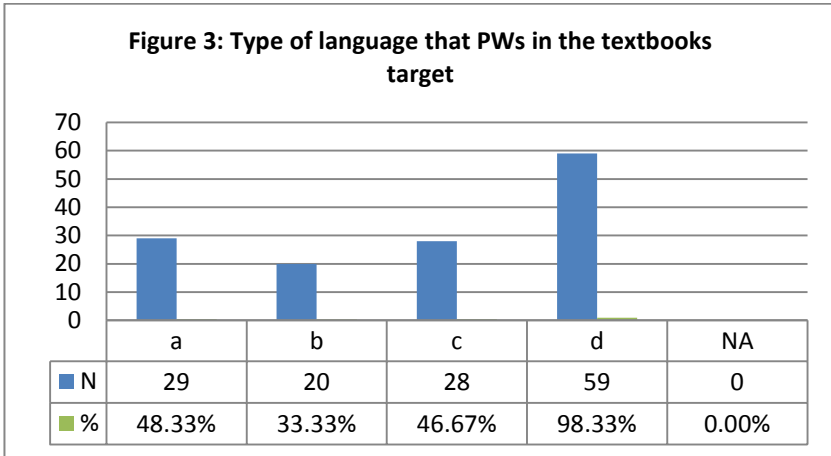
- a- English grammar and vocabulary
- b- Information and knowledge about the projects' themes
- c- To use English to express their opinions and formulate arguments
- d- To collaborate with other learners and share their ideas
- e- To find out information from different sources



The participants seem to agree that PWs in the textbooks target the development of different skills. Content (subject-matter knowledge), and social skills came in the first position with 95% for each. Methodological skills was chosen by 93, 33% of the participants. 71, 67% of them also claim that the projects target the development of language-related skills. Finally, 43, 33% of the respondents have also chosen intellectual skills.

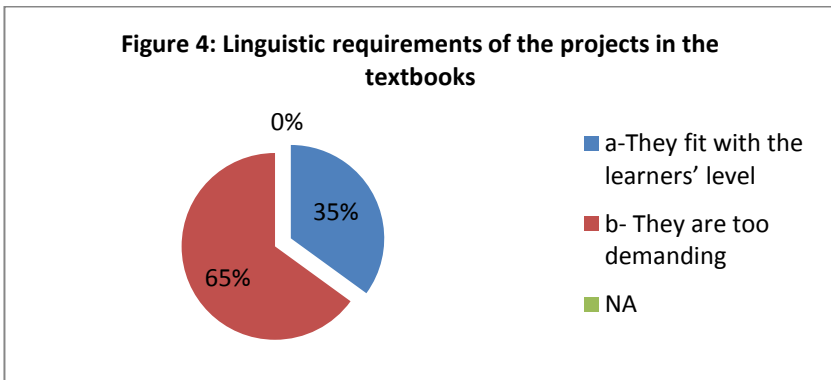
3. Projects in the middle school textbooks enable your learners to learn the English language they need to (you may tick off more than one answer):

- a- Carry out informal conversations or write an email to a friend
- b- Talk to people when they visit an English speaking country
- c- Understand various types of texts (history, science, literary...)
- d- Do school work

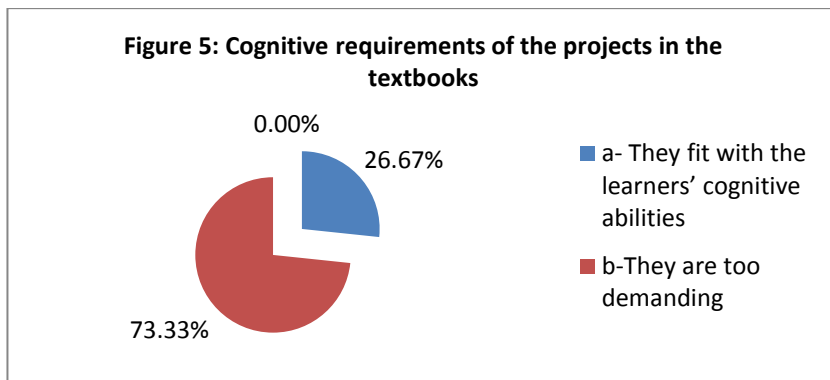


As for the type of language that projects in the textbooks target to develop, it seems that the majority of the participants (98, 33%) agree that it targets language that is needed to do school work. 46, 67% of them also believe that it aims to help learners to understand different types of texts. As regards the language needed for everyday life, 48, 33% claim that it targets the teaching of language to be used in informal conversations. Only 33, 33% of the respondents say that it enables learners to talk to English speaking people.

4. What do you think of the linguistic requirements of the project works in the middle school textbooks?



5. What do you think of the cognitive requirements of the project works in the middle school textbooks?



As concerns the linguistic and cognitive demand of the projects in the textbooks, the majority of the respondents claim that they are both linguistically and cognitively demanding with the percentages of 65% and 73, 33% for each, respectively. The percentages of teachers who think that the projects fit with the learners' linguistic and cognitive abilities are 35% and 26, 67%, respectively.

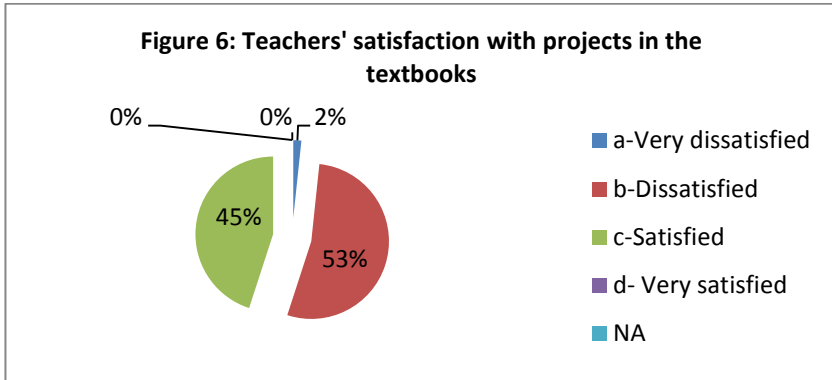
6. a. How much are you satisfied with project works in the middle school textbooks?

Very dissatisfied

Dissatisfied

Satisfied

Very satisfied



Respondents' answers to the sixth item above show that the majority of the teachers (53%) are not satisfied with the projects proposed in the textbooks. 45% of them, however, say that they are satisfied.

6. b. Could you explain why are you satisfied or dissatisfied, please?

Teachers' Reasons for their Satisfaction with the Textbooks' Projects

It is important to mention that only a minority of the respondents (06/27) have answered this question. After analyzing the provided responses, two categories have been sorted out. The first category is *projects' topics*. The respondents claim that they are satisfied with the projects' topics because they are in direct relation with the instructional units of the textbook. For instance, one of them says *"I'm satisfied because the topics are related to what they [learners] have already studied, so they are required to do is to find out more information about the topics and make use of the grammar points already learned"*. The second category is related to *the aim of the projects*, which according to them consists in re-using of the acquired language and content. *"I am satisfied because project works go hand in hand with the programme. It is up to the learners to reinvest the acquired knowledge in the files through projects"*, one of the participants states.

Teachers' Reasons for their Dissatisfaction with the Textbooks' Projects

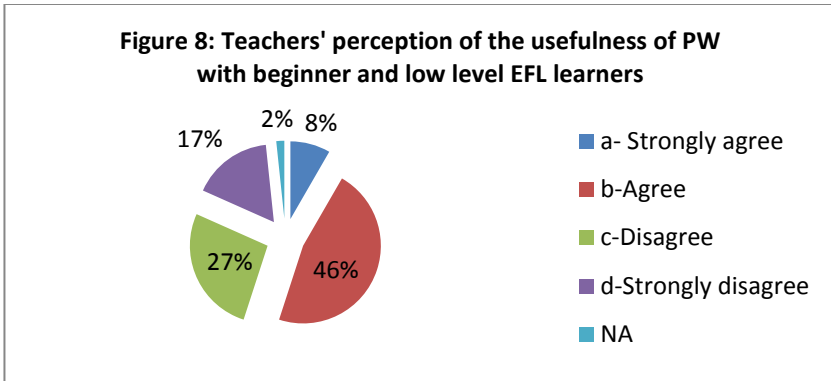
As for the teachers' reasons for their dissatisfaction with the projects of the textbooks, here also only 10/32 have provided their reasons. The analysis of the latter revealed three main categories. The first one is ***the topics of the projects***. The respondents claim that the topics are not interesting and motivating for their learners and sometimes they are not clear. The following are two illustrative quotes: *"the themes are not clear, my learners are confused about what they will perform"*; *"I'm dissatisfied because my learners are not motivated and not interested in the project"*. The second category that has been sorted out is that of ***the difficulty of the projects***. The participants claim that the projects are difficult. They are beyond their learners' level and abilities. The following quotes illustrate the point: *"the majority of my learners find difficulties in conducting the projects and presenting them"*; *"I am dissatisfied because the projects are too much demanding. Average and slow learners find difficulties in doing them appropriately"*, *"projects of the textbooks do not suit my learners level and abilities"*. The third category is ***time constraints***. The respondents state that the projects are too much time consuming. One of them says *"they [projects] require too much time"*.

7. In your opinion, how can project works in the middle school textbooks be improved?

Item 7 has been answered only by 22/60 teachers. The respondents' answers have been analysed one by one and then organized into four categories. The first of these is ***the projects' topics***. The teachers state that projects in the textbooks can be improved by incorporating more topics that are related to the learners' real lives, and the ones that help them acquire English language to be used outside the classroom. The following are

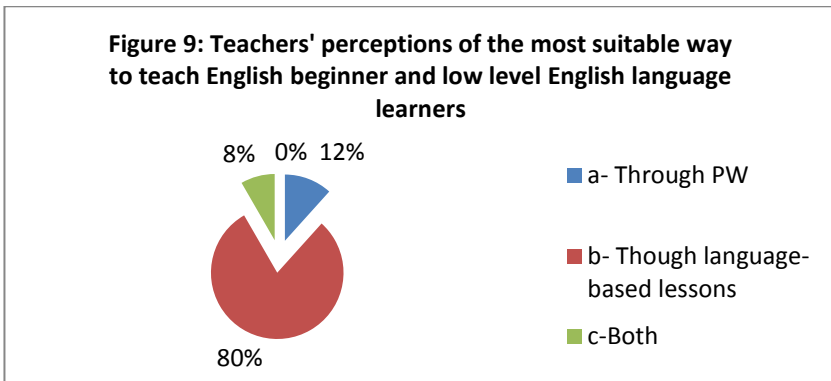
illustrative quotes: *“the projects should be based more on the learners’ real-life”*; *“they should integrate language to be used outside the classroom”*. The second category is ***the number of projects to be incorporated into each textbook***. The participants believe that PW can be improved by reducing the number of projects for each textbook. They believe that this would allow more time for the learners to work on the projects and avoid copy and paste. One of the teachers states *“If their number [projects] is reduced, that is, instead of one for each file, this is going to be one for each trimester. This way, learners will avoid bringing expensive ready made projects from internet cafés*. Another one says *“Reduce the number of the projects and the contents of the programme so as to allow enough time for learners to work on their projects in classroom not only at home”*. The other category that has been identified is ***teacher involvement in the design of the projects***. The participants believe that teachers know more about the learners’ needs, interests, weaknesses and strengths. The following statement by one of the participants summarizes the point. *“I think that project work should be designed by the teacher ... since the teacher is in a daily contact with her pupils, she/he knows what his/her pupils need, what are their strengths and weaknesses, how to deal with the project work”*. Another type of suggestions that is made by the teachers to improve projects in the textbooks is related to ***the learners’ profile***. They claim that projects should take more account of the learners’ needs, interests, environment, age, abilities, and level. The following are some illustrating quotes: *“They [projects] should be designed to fit with the learners’ needs, age, abilities, and their environment”*; *“Topics should be... and suit the learners’ interests and needs”*; *The projects can be improved by making them easier, by adapting them to the learners’ level”*.

8. Doing project work in English language classes with beginner and low level learners is useful:



Answers to item 8 of the questionnaire suggest that the majority of the participants (47%) agree that PW is useful when teaching beginners/low level EFL learners. Others, however, either disagree or strongly disagree with the percentages of 27% and 17%, respectively.

9. a. In your opinion, what is the most suitable way to teach English language for beginner and low level English language learners?



The majority of the respondents (80%) believe that language-based lessons are more suitable to teach English language for beginners/low level learners than PW. Only 11, 67% think that PW is suitable and only five participants, that is, 8, 33% think that both can be helpful.

9. b. Justify your answer

Teachers' Justification for their Preference for PW to Teach EFL

Only 3/7 teachers who believe that projects are more suitable to teach language beginner/ low level EFL learners provided us with their justifications. The first justification is related to *projects' benefits for language learners*. PW enables learners to acquire language and communication skills. It is stated by the participants as follows: "*project work helps learners to develop the required skills for communication*". "*Conducting projects helps learners to learn vocabulary and grammar of English*".

Teachers' Justification for their Preference for Language-Based Lessons to Teach EFL

Only 15/48 of the respondents presented arguments to justify their choice. The latter are grouped into four categories after analysis. The first justification is *the development of learners' accuracy in English*. That is, language-based lessons, according to these teachers enable learners to learn how to use grammar and vocabulary in accurate way to make sentences, and speak and write accurately. One teacher says "*They are [language-based lessons] important to teach learners how to use grammar and vocabulary correctly*". In the same vein, another one states "*grammar and vocabulary are the basis of the production of language either spoken or written, thus beginners have to learn the basics before taking projects*". The second argument presented by the teachers is related to the *learners' limited knowledge of the English language*. They believe that learners have a limited

knowledge of the English language. So, they have first to learn its basics then use it to do projects. One of the teachers states: *“How can a learner do his/her project if s/he does not know grammar, vocabulary,... so it’s important to teach them the basis of the language then develop them in their project work”*. *“Learners have limited knowledge of English, so they should first practice language structures, vocabulary, and pronunciation before doing project work”*, another one declared. The third argument advanced by the respondents is **project’s difficulty**. They affirm that learning through language-based lessons is easier than learning through PW. One of them states: *“language-based lessons are easier than doing project work and they prepare learners to well conduct their projects”*. The last reason for the respondents’ preference for language-based lessons is **motivation**. Learners, they maintain, are more motivated to learn through language lessons rather than through PW. One respondent says: *“learners are more motivated to learn grammar and vocabulary lessons rather than doing projects”*.

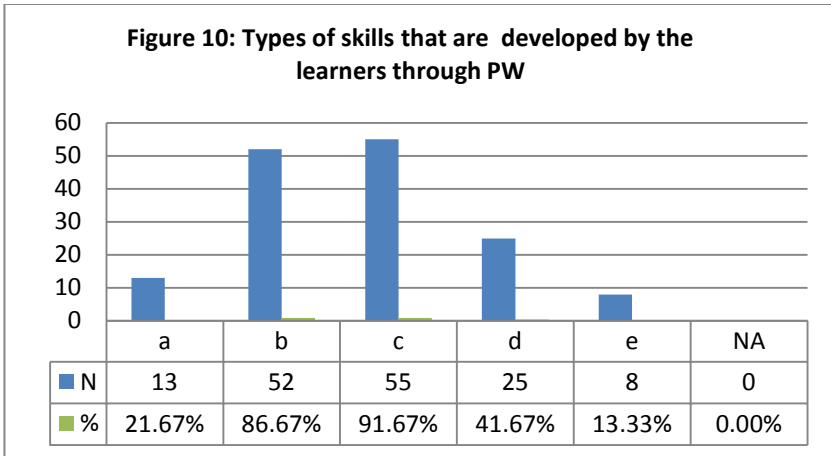
Teachers’ Justification for their Preference for both Language-Based Lessons and PW to Teach EFL

The argument which is used by the teachers, (2/3) of the respondents, who believe that both ways of teaching English language are important is **the shared benefit of both language-based lessons and PW to teach and learn a language**. One of them says that *“learners learn language through both language lessons and project work”*.

10. Which of the following skills do your learners develop more when doing project work? (You may tick off more than one answer)

- a- Select appropriate information then use it creatively
- b- Learn how to use a dictionary and the internet
- c- Cooperate with other learners and share their ideas
- d- Learn English language and use it in order communicate

e- Use language to formulate arguments and express opinions



According to the respondents' answers learners develop more social and methodological skills when conduction projects. The percentages of the respondents who claim so are 91, 67% and 86, 67%, respectively. Only 41, 67% of the participants claim that learners develop language and communication skills. The skills that are least developed by the learners are the intellectual ones, confirmed only by 13, 33% of the respondents.

11. What problems do your learners face when conducting project work?

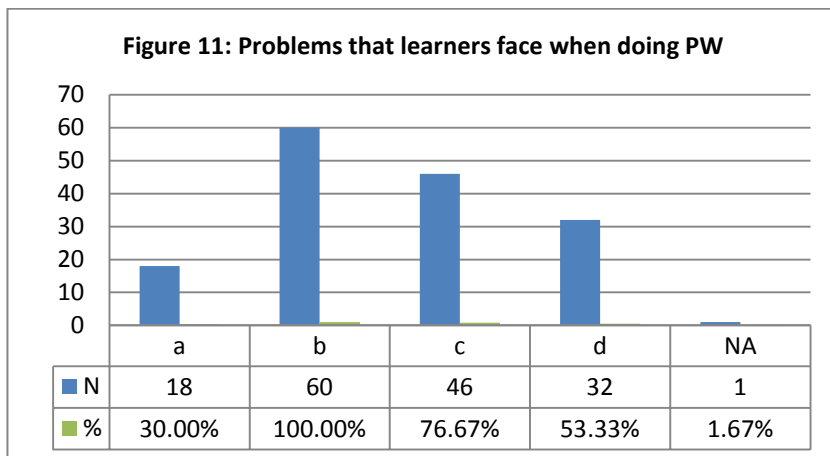
(You may tick off more than one answer)

a- They cannot find the required information

b- They cannot summarize and analyze the information in English

c-They cannot report their findings and write the texts in English

d- They cannot present their projects in English in front of the other learners



Results for item 11 above show that the major problem that learners encounter when conducting projects is related to intellectual skills. The latter was chosen by 100% of the participants. The second problem is related to language skills as it is shown in the answers to items “c” and “d”. That is 76, 67% claim that their learners have difficulties in reporting their findings and writing their texts when conducting the projects. 53, 33% also assume that their learners cannot present their projects in English. It seems, however, that the learners have less problems with the methodological skills as it is revealed by the percentage of participants who have chosen suggestion “a” (30%).

12. What skills do you think should project work for low level/ beginner English language learners target?

Item 12 of the questionnaire has been answered only by 23/60 of the teachers. The respondents’ answers have been analysed one by one and then three categories have been sorted out. The first category is **language and communication skills**. The respondents claim that projects should target the teaching of the English language, including grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, spelling, and reading and writing skills. They also believe that

they should encourage the acquisition of the English language that learners need to use outside the classroom. That is language to be used with friends or with other people when visiting an English speaking country. The following are some illustrating quotes: *“projects should teach learners how to communicate with other people from different countries”*; *“they should help learners to learn the language to use at home and with friends”*. The second type of skills that the participants believe that should be developed through PW is **social and personal development skills**. That is, they state that projects should teach learners how to share and work with others, accept different opinions. They should also learn to become autonomous and responsible. One of the teachers states: *“Encourage learners to share and learn from others, accept differences and criticism”*; another one declares: *“They should target to build autonomy in learning which means helping learners to build strong self confidence”*. *To insist on the development of personal skills one respondent says: “I believe that when learners engage in project work, they acquire non-linguistic skills such as acting as a group, leadership and cooperation as well as commitment to attain certain goal”*. The third type of skills that the participants think should be developed through PW is **methodological skills**. They claim that projects should teach learners how to organize a work, use a dictionary, use different technologies...etc. The following are some quotes to illustrate the point. *“They [projects] should teach how to organize a work”*, *“use a dictionary to check for word meaning”*, *“use the internet”*.

V. Discussion

The overall results of this study show that while the participants have negative attitudes towards PW in the Algerian MS EFL textbooks, they perceive positively PW as a teaching methodology for beginners/low level EFL learners.

The results show that the participants are familiar with PWs in the textbooks under study. While 58, 33% of them rely only on these projects, other 30% use them along with their own designed projects. Teachers affirm that the projects target the teaching of different skills, namely, content knowledge and language skills, social, methodological and intellectual skills (see results for item 2 of the questionnaire). The projects, therefore, are designed in a way to allow simultaneous teaching and learning of the mentioned skills and meet the requirements of PW in ESL/EFL education (Katz, L. G. & Chard S. N., 1992; Slater T., Beckett G. H. & Aufderhaar C., 2006).

However, the majority of the respondents (53%) confirm that they are not satisfied with the projects proposed in the Algerian MS EFL textbooks. They claim that the projects are neither interesting nor motivating for their learners. The projects are too difficult and beyond the learners' level and abilities. They are also too much time consuming. Moreover, answers to items 4 and 5 (see results section) show that the majority of the participants claim that these projects are both linguistically and cognitively demanding for their learners, with the percentages of 65% and 73, 33% of the participants, respectively.

The reason for the difficulty of PWs in the Algerian MS EFL textbooks might be explained by the type of language that the latter target. Indeed, the results for item 3 of the questionnaire reveal that 98,33% of the respondents confirm that the these projects target the type of language that is required *to do school work* and 46, 67% say that it aims to help learners *to understand different types of texts such as, scientific and literary ones*. The type of language proficiency needed in both cases is referred to by Cummins J. (2000) as cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) or the type of language that reflects the demands of the classroom. The latter is

differentiated from basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS), which is used to carry out conversations in everyday life, in informal situations. The two suggestions that illustrate this type of proficiency in item 3 are: *using language to carry out informal conversations*, and *talk to English-speaking people*. They were chosen by 48, 33% and 33, 33% of the participants, respectively. Therefore, the projects under study tend to target more CALP than BICS. However, research into L2 acquisition, mainly conducted by Cummins (2000), suggests that learners need first to master BICS before CALP, and that learners need more time to master CALP than BICS. The latter according to Cummins J. (1982) is developed by learners in about two years whereas the former takes about five years. This is, in fact, due to the characteristics of these two types of language proficiency. While BICS uses different paralinguistic cues such as, gestures, facial expressions...etc (context-embedded), CALP is context-reduced and therefore requires more knowledge of the language (Cummins J., 1982). CAPL is more abstract and therefore is more linguistically and cognitively demanding than BICS.

As regards the teachers' perceptions of teaching of beginner/low EFL learners through PW, while the majority of the respondents agree that projects are useful (47% agree, 8% strongly agree), the majority of them (80%) believe that PW is not suitable to teach the English language (its grammar, vocabulary...). In spite of the benefits of PW as a provider of input (Stoller F. L., 2006), the participants believe that language-based lessons (LBL) are more relevant. The respondents justify their preference on the ground that LBL are more appropriate to develop learners' accuracy in English. They also affirm that their learners have a limited knowledge of the English language, therefore, LBL are necessary in order to teach them the basics before requiring them to do projects. The teachers claim also that PW is more difficult and less motivating than LBL.

The respondents' preference for LBL may also be explained by the fact that in the process of doing PW their learners acquire less language skills and intellectual skills which are highly dependent on language than skills which are not related to language mastery and use. This is shown in the respondents' answers to item 10 of the questionnaire (see results section). The results of the latter reveal that the Algerian MS EFL learners develop more social and methodological skills with 91, 67% and 86, 67% of the participants, respectively. Only 41, 67% of them claim that their learners develop language skills when doing PW and only 13, 33% say that they develop intellectual skills.

Therefore, despite the positive effects of PW for language learning in ESL context (Stoller F. L., 2002, 2006; Slater T., Beckett G. H. & Aufderhaar C., 2006; Beckett G. H. & Slater T, 2005), the results of this survey do not seem to provide strong evidence for the acquisition of language skills and cognitive skills, which are closely related to language, through PW with beginner/low level EFL learners.

VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study is a survey research which targets to investigate the Algerian MS EFL teachers' perception of PW in the official textbooks designed for the MS learners and their attitudes towards the use of this teaching methodology with beginner/low level EFL learners. It evaluates their perceptions of the integration of language, content and skills through PWs in these teaching materials and their attitudes towards the integration of these three major aims of PW with beginner and low level EFL learners. The results reveal teachers' assertion that the projects in the textbooks under study target the teaching of language, content and different types of skills, namely, the social, methodological and intellectual. However, the majority of the respondents is dissatisfied with these projects and claim that they are beyond their learners'

linguistic and intellectual abilities. As regards their attitudes towards the use of PW with beginner/low level EFL learners, the results indicate that while the majority of the teachers agree that this methodology is useful, they do not consider it as appropriate to teach language to EFL beginner/low level learners.

Based on the findings of this study, then, to make PWs in the Algerian MS textbooks more interesting and to make EFL learning through PW more enjoyable and beneficial for the learners, we recommend that textbooks' PWs incorporate more projects that target BICS. In fact, the type of language that the latter targets would make PW for beginner/low level learners less linguistically and cognitively demanding and, therefore, making it less difficult. It would also be more interesting and motivating since tasks that are based on BICS help learners acquire the type of language they need in their daily life outside the classroom.

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Appendix

Questionnaire to Middle School Teachers

Dear teacher,

This questionnaire is part of a research work which aims at evaluating the use of project work for the teaching of English as a foreign language for the Algerian middle school learners and its integration the textbooks *Spotlight on English One* (2003), *Spotlight on English Two* (2004), *Spotlight on English Three* (2006), and *On the Move* (2006) Your answers to the questions and your opinions as a practitioner in the field will be valuable in shedding light on the issue that our research addresses. Your answers will remain anonymous. You are kindly requested to tick off the appropriate box(es) or supply your own answers where necessary. We greatly appreciate your collaboration.

1. Project works you assign to your learners are:

- a- Suggested in the middle school textbooks b- Designed by yourself Both

2. Project works that are suggested in the middle school textbooks encourage learners to learn (you may tick off more than one answer):

- a- English grammar and vocabulary
 b- Information and knowledge about the projects' themes
 c- To use English to express their opinions and formulate arguments
 d- To collaborate with other learners and share their ideas
 e- To find out information from different sources

3. Projects in the middle school textbooks enable your learners to learn the English language they need to (you may tick off more than one answer):

- a- Carry out informal conversations or write an email to a friend
 b- Talk to people when they visit an English speaking country
 c- Understand various types of texts (history, science, literary...)
 d- Do school work

4. What do you think of the linguistic requirements of the project works in the middle school textbooks?

- a- They fit with the learners' level in English
 b- They are too demanding (difficult)

5. What do you think of the cognitive requirements of the project works in the middle school textbooks?

a-They fit with the learners' cognitive abilities

b-They are too demanding (difficult)

6. How much are you satisfied with project works in the middle school textbooks?

Very Dissatisfied Satisfied Very satisfied

Dissatisfied

Could you explain why are you satisfied or dissatisfied, please?

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7. In your opinion, how can project works in the middle school textbooks be improved?

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8. Doing project work in English language classes with beginner/low level learners is useful:

Strongly agree Agree Strongly Disagree Disagree

9. In your opinion, what is the most suitable way to teach English language for beginner/low level English language learners?

a- Through project work

b- Through language-based lessons (eg. Grammar/vocabulary lessons)

c- Both

Justify your answer

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10. Which of the following skills do your learners develop more when doing project work?
(You may tick off more than one answer)

a- Select appropriate information then use it creatively

b- Learn how to use a dictionary and the internet

- c- Cooperate with other learners and share their ideas
- d- Learn English language and use it in order communicate
- e- Use language to formulate arguments and express opinions

11. What problems do your learners face when conducting project work? (You may tick off more than one answer)

- a- They cannot find the required information
- b- They cannot summarize and analyze the information in English
- c-They cannot report their findings and write the texts in English
- d- They cannot present their projects in English in front of the other learners

12. What skills do you think should project work for low level/ beginner English language learners target?

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Thank you!