

EXPLORING STUDENTS' CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING PROJECT-BASED LEARNING IN TEFL CLASS

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Abstract

This study investigates the challenges faced by students in implementing Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in the Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) course within the English Education Study Program. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through questionnaires given to ten TEFL students with PjBL experience. Results show that limited knowledge of PjBL concepts, inconsistent lecturer guidance, and restricted resources contribute to student difficulties, reducing motivation and learning outcomes. The study suggests the need for clearer instructional support, improved facilities, and structured guidance to optimize the effectiveness of PjBL in language education.

Keywords: challenges, English Education Study Program, Project-based learning, TEFL.

INTRODUCTION

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is an instructional approach designed to deeply engage students through real-world projects that require collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity. Globally, this method has gained popularity across various educational fields as an effective means to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical skills. According to Meng et al. (2023), PjBL not only enhances academic skills but also builds essential life skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication. With advancements in educational technology, PjBL has been further enriched by e-learning platforms that offer students enhanced opportunities for collaboration and interactive learning.

In the context of the Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) course, one of the subjects taught in the English Education Study Program, the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) provides opportunities for students to actively and practically engage with the language through direct involvement in projects. Research conducted by Shi (2024) indicates that students who learn language through PBL tend to exhibit stronger language abilities, particularly in communication skills. Another study by Syafryadin et al. (2024) also highlights that PBL contributes to increased motivation and critical thinking skills among EFL students, which are essential aspects of language acquisition. However, despite the widely recognized benefits of PBL, challenges in its implementation cannot be overlooked.

Research by Kasmainsi et al. (2023) reveals that PjBL implementation in various courses faces obstacles such as limited resources, inconsistent instructor guidance, and

a lack of understanding among students regarding PjBL concepts. In EFL classrooms, these challenges are often exacerbated by limited access to resources essential for students to support their projects (Song et al., 2024). Globally, Bolick et al. (2024) have shown that PjBL challenges extend beyond local settings, with factors such as technological limitations and cultural differences impacting the success of PjBL initiatives.

Specifically, students enrolled in the Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) course in the English Education Study Program encounter several challenges in carrying out PjBL. Aldabbus (2018) highlights that students' limited understanding of the fundamental concepts of PjBL may lead to uncertainty in managing projects, especially without adequate instructor support. Further research by Zhong et al. (2024) confirms that consistent instructor guidance plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of PjBL, as it fosters a structured learning environment and supports student engagement. However, in practice, many language education instructors are not always able to provide the intensive guidance needed, leaving students uncertain about their project direction (Hussein, 2021).

Beyond instructor support, limited facilities pose a significant challenge in implementing PjBL in EFL classrooms. According to Handrianto and Rahman (2018), resources such as learning spaces, teaching materials, and technology access are critical to PjBL effectiveness. Without adequate facilities, students often struggle to access the information needed for their projects. Amalia et al. (2023) also note that resource limitations may negatively impact students' learning outcomes and reduce their motivation to participate in PjBL activities. Other influential factors include time management and mental workload, as students must balance various academic responsibilities while meeting PjBL deadlines.

To enhance the effectiveness of PjBL in EFL environments, several solutions should be considered. Providing consistent and clear guidance from instructors can be a significant first step. Meng et al. (2023) suggest that specialized training for instructors on PjBL implementation can help create a more structured learning environment. Additionally, improving facilities and access to educational resources is a pressing need to enable students to conduct their projects effectively. Support in time management and mental workload management is also necessary to help students complete PjBL tasks without feeling overly burdened.

Given these challenges, this study aims to explore the factors influencing students' difficulties in implementing PjBL in the TEFL course in the English Language Education Study Program. This study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the obstacle's students face and offers recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of PjBL in English language learning at the university level.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, based on the model developed by Cresswell and Poth (2018), to explore the challenges that contribute to students' difficulties in implementing Project-Based Learning (PjBL) within the English Education Study Program. This approach aims to provide an in-depth description of the experiences of fourth-semester students who have completed the Teaching English as

a Foreign Language (TEFL) course. Ten students participated in this study, selected based on their direct experience with PjBL methods. This approach allows the researcher to thoroughly examine factors that may pose obstacles or challenges to the implementation of PjBL, providing insights into how students address the difficulties encountered during the learning process.

Data were collected using a closed-ended questionnaire specifically designed to identify the primary challenges students face in implementing PjBL. The questionnaire posed questions that prompted students to express the obstacles and experiences they encountered. In data analysis, the researcher grouped responses based on themes emerging from the questionnaire to identify patterns in the difficulties experienced by students. This thematic grouping aids in interpreting the factors that affect PjBL implementation, providing insights into the challenges faced by students and the potential steps that could be taken to address them.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Findings

In implementing Project-Based Learning (PjBL) within the TEFL course in the English Language Education Study Program, students face a variety of challenges that hinder the effectiveness of this learning method. Based on the questionnaire responses from 10 students, several challenges emerged, including limited understanding of PjBL concepts, insufficient curriculum and facility support, and a lack of consistent guidance from lecturers. These factors contribute to students' low motivation and high stress levels as they engage in PjBL-based projects. The questionnaire results provide in-depth insights into the key factors that need attention in PjBL implementation, particularly within the TEFL course, and identify areas that could be enhanced to optimize students' learning experiences.

Student Readiness in Implementing PjBL

Most students reported having only a limited understanding of the “Project-Based Learning” concept. Five students indicated that they had “limited understanding” of this concept, and only two students felt they “fully understood” it. This suggests that most students lack a solid foundation in PjBL methods before embarking on their projects in this course. This limited understanding may be due to a lack of introductory explanations or PjBL-related materials in their curriculum.

Regarding motivation, only one student felt highly motivated in engaging with PjBL, while five students felt “motivated.” Three others expressed low motivation, and one student felt no motivation at all. This lack of motivation may be linked to their limited understanding of the PjBL concept and the challenges they encountered during the learning process. Furthermore, low motivation might also be influenced by curriculum support, which was perceived as suboptimal in facilitating PjBL. Four

students rated the curriculum as “not supportive,” and two students felt the curriculum did not support PjBL at all. This suggests a need to better integrate PjBL into the curriculum structure to provide students with a clearer direction and enhanced motivation.

Lecturer Support and Involvement

Lecturer support is a crucial element in PjBL implementation, yet the questionnaire results indicate that this support varies significantly. Out of ten students, two felt that their lecturers were highly supportive throughout the PjBL process, while four students perceived the support as “adequate.” However, three students felt that lecturer support was “lacking,” and one student reported no lecturer support at all.

Guidance from lecturers during the project was also seen as inconsistent; only two students reported receiving regular guidance. The majority, or four students, stated that guidance was given occasionally, while three students reported infrequent guidance. One student even indicated receiving no guidance whatsoever. This finding suggests a need for greater lecturer engagement and consistent direction, as such support can help students overcome challenges throughout the project.

Facility Support

Supportive facilities, such as study spaces and reading materials, are viewed as insufficient by the majority of students, although access to technology is considered adequate. Out of the ten participants, only one student felt that study facilities were “very adequate,” while four students rated the facilities as “sufficient.” Conversely, four students felt that the facilities were “inadequate,” and one student found them entirely unsatisfactory. The limitations in physical facilities, such as comfortable study spaces and sufficient reading materials, pose challenges to PjBL implementation, as students struggle to access the resources needed for their projects. Although technology access is readily available, the lack of physical resources diminishes the effectiveness of project-based learning, as students are unable to fully leverage the available technology to achieve optimal project outcomes.

Challenges in Implementing PjBL

Students face numerous challenges in implementing “Project-Based Learning” (PjBL), especially in the early stages of the project, where unclear guidance from lecturers is a major hindrance. Five students identified that instructions from lecturers were often vague, making it challenging for them to understand the primary objectives of the project and the steps required to achieve them. This lack of clarity hampers smooth PjBL implementation, as students feel uncertain about project expectations and the appropriate methods to meet them. Consequently, they frequently have to interpret project objectives independently, which can undermine effectiveness and

increase the risk of errors or misalignment in their projects. Additionally, limited study facilities and challenges in grasping the basic PjBL concept present additional significant obstacles. Three students noted that supportive facilities, such as adequate study spaces and reading materials, were insufficient, which impeded their learning process. In contrast, two students reported difficulty understanding the basic PjBL concept, which ultimately reduced their confidence in executing the project. Thus, the combination of inadequate lecturer guidance, limited facilities, and students' lack of readiness in understanding PjBL concepts highlights interconnected challenges that may delay or even hinder project success.

Time management also poses a significant challenge for students, with four students reporting difficulty managing time amid various academic responsibilities. In PjBL implementation, students are required to balance project work with other academic obligations, such as assignments and exams from other courses, which can significantly increase their workload. These difficulties often leave students feeling overwhelmed, potentially compromising the quality of their projects. Effective time management skills are essential for balancing project demands with other academic responsibilities. However, some students still need to develop these skills further. Additionally, two students found it challenging to connect theoretical content learned in class with their projects, highlighting the need for a more integrative learning approach. With a more integrative learning model, students are expected to gain a better understanding of the relationship between classroom theory and practical application in projects, leading to a more profound and directed grasp of the subject.

Selecting and developing project topics proved challenging for most students due to time constraints and limited access to relevant resources. Five students felt that they lacked sufficient time to conduct in-depth research, especially given the tight deadlines for project completion. These constraints limited students' ability to gather thorough, accurate information related to their chosen topics. Additionally, four students reported limited access to resources, such as journals or academic references, which compounded the difficulties they faced. These findings indicate the need for greater support from lecturers or the institution in providing adequate access and more flexible research timelines. Some students also struggled to assess the real-world impact of their projects, highlighting a need for guidance in evaluating the relevance and potential impact of their projects in real-life contexts. With additional guidance, students are expected to focus more effectively on designing projects that not only fulfill academic requirements but also have meaningful implications for society or their field of study.

Project assessment also requires attention, as five students reported that the assessment criteria provided by lecturers were insufficiently clear. This lack of clarity creates uncertainty for students, as they struggle to understand the standards and quality expected by lecturers for their projects. This ambiguity may cause students to

feel unsure about the projects they have completed, as they are uncertain whether their work meets lecturer expectations. Additionally, in terms of stress management, six students reported experiencing high mental strain due to project demands and tight deadlines. Four other students felt overwhelmed by the creative expectations required for the project, indicating that mental workload and high expectations are important factors that need careful management. Students face pressure to produce innovative, high-quality projects, but without adequate support, this pressure can become overwhelming. Therefore, it is essential for lecturers and institutions to provide not only technical guidance but also psychological support, helping students to navigate PjBL challenges more effectively and achieve optimal results.

Suggestions and Recommendations

In the suggestions section, eight students recommended that lecturers or the program provide clearer guidance on PjBL. This indicates that the majority of students feel that more concrete directions would help them carry out projects with greater confidence and focus. Additionally, seven students suggested that the frequency and quality of lecturer guidance should be improved.

The availability of adequate facilities is also considered essential by six students, highlighting the need for better access to teaching materials, technology, and study spaces to support project work. Four students also recommended allocating specific time for group discussions, which would allow them to collaborate more effectively without being hindered by other course demands.

In conclusion, the questionnaire results indicate that students face significant challenges in implementing Project-Based Learning in the TEFL course, including conceptual understanding, motivation, lecturer support, and facility availability. The lack of clear guidance, limited facilities, as well as time management and mental workload issues, are factors that hinder the effectiveness of PjBL. By providing clearer guidelines, improving facility access, and offering consistent guidance, the effectiveness of PjBL in the TEFL course can be enhanced, thereby offering a better learning experience for students.

Analysis/Discussion

This study reveals that the primary challenges faced by students in implementing “Project-Based Learning” (PjBL) in the Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) course are driven by multiple factors that significantly hinder the effectiveness of this method. Based on student questionnaire responses, one of the greatest challenges is a limited understanding of the basic PjBL concepts. Most students possess only rudimentary or even inadequate knowledge, impacting their readiness to undertake PjBL projects independently. This lack of understanding leads to uncertainty and confusion in each project stage, from planning to execution. Aldabbus (2018) highlights

that a failure to fully grasp PjBL concepts within the curriculum becomes a major obstacle for students attempting to adopt and internalize this learning method. Aldabbus found that without an in-depth introduction to the goals, principles, and steps of PjBL, students often struggle to navigate this process independently. These findings underscore the importance of a comprehensive introduction to PjBL early in the educational process to ensure that students not only understand PjBL's primary objectives but also feel confident and prepared to carry out each stage of the method.

In addition to limited conceptual understanding, inadequate support from lecturers is another significant barrier for students. Most students reported not receiving sufficient and consistent guidance from lecturers throughout the PjBL implementation process. This lack of support exacerbates the difficulties students face in understanding project objectives and determining the steps needed to achieve desired outcomes. Research by Zhong et al. (2024) demonstrates that consistent lecturer involvement in the PjBL process is essential in maintaining student motivation and ensuring they stay on track in their learning journey. In the context of PjBL, lecturers not only serve as content providers but also as facilitators who support students through guidance, offer clear directions, and provide ongoing support. This perspective aligns with the findings that emphasize the critical role of lecturers as facilitators to help students overcome confusion and challenges during PjBL implementation, enabling them to achieve optimal learning outcomes.

The limitations of available facilities, such as adequate study spaces, reading materials, and access to technology, also present key challenges in PjBL implementation. Students reported that these limitations restrict their ability to access the information and resources needed to complete their projects. This lack of facilities hampers the progress of ongoing projects and ultimately impacts the quality of their outcomes. Hussein (2021) points out that facility limitations significantly affect students' abilities to collaborate and explore ideas in PjBL, which is central to this method. In this regard, the researchers' view aligns with Hussein's, emphasizing that adequate supportive facilities, such as internet access, relevant literature, and conducive study spaces, are crucial to enabling students to work effectively, access necessary resources, and enhance project quality.

In addition to facility limitations, time management and high mental workload are also critical factors that compound difficulties in implementing PjBL. Many students feel overwhelmed as they juggle other academic demands alongside their PjBL projects, resulting in time management struggles and considerable stress. Amalia et al. (2023) indicate that poor time management and high mental strain are major barriers to PjBL, particularly when students are expected to meet deadlines and produce creative outcomes. This situation highlights the importance of lecturer and institutional roles in providing training on time management, helping students balance various academic demands more effectively. Furthermore, psychological support from the institution is

essential to assist students in managing the mental strain they may experience during the learning process, ensuring they do not feel burdened by numerous assignments.

The significance of these findings lies in the deeper understanding of the need for strategic interventions that can strengthen PjBL implementation within the TEFL course. Meng et al. (2023) suggest that PjBL success largely depends on the institution's ability to identify and address the challenges students face. By providing more structured guidance, improving facilities, and adjusting the curriculum to more effectively integrate PjBL, educational institutions can help create an environment that supports the success of this method. The researchers stress that by addressing these obstacles, students can experience more productive and meaningful learning, which in turn can enhance overall educational quality.

Overall, the challenges students encounter in implementing PjBL in the TEFL course within the English Education Study Program underscore the importance of deep conceptual understanding, consistent lecturer support, adequate facilities, and strong time management and mental workload management skills. Handrianto and Rahman (2018) also support this view, emphasizing the need to understand and address the challenges in PjBL implementation to maximize its effectiveness. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that PjBL effectiveness be enhanced through appropriate interventions, which ultimately can help students develop practical skills, critical thinking abilities, and communication skills optimally. More structured interventions from institutions and lecturers are expected to improve students' learning experiences, allowing them to achieve more satisfying outcomes in each project they undertake.

CONCLUSION

This study identified several key challenges faced by students in implementing Project-Based Learning (PjBL) within the TEFL course in the English Education Study Program. The main obstacles include limited understanding of PjBL concepts, insufficient lecturer guidance, inadequate facilities, and difficulty managing time and mental workload. These issues not only reduce students' confidence and motivation but also hinder the overall effectiveness of PjBL. The findings underscore the need for clearer guidance, more structured lecturer support, and improved resources to help students effectively navigate PjBL projects. Addressing these challenges will be essential to optimizing the PjBL approach in English education and enhancing the quality of student learning experiences.

The logical consequences of these findings highlight the importance of a more supportive educational environment for both PjBL implementation and the broader advancement of English education. Institutions should consider integrating PjBL concepts more thoroughly within the curriculum, ensuring students have foundational knowledge and feel prepared for project-based work. Additionally, providing training

for lecturers in PjBL facilitation and offering necessary resources will be crucial for fostering a more conducive learning environment. These improvements can contribute to developing students' critical thinking, communication skills, and practical application abilities, strengthening both the academic and practical dimensions of English education.

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