OVERCOMING CHALLENGES IN PROJECT-BASED LEARNING: INSIGHTS FROM EFL LEARNERS AND EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

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Abstract: This study examined the English Education Department's project-based learning challenges and methods. In order to obtain insight into their experiences, the study concentrated on sixth-semester students enrolled at a state institution in Central Java. In conducting this research, qualitative data was used with a case study approach design. To gather the required data, a questionnaire is the data collection instrument used. Several challenges were found, such as difficulty finding theories and previous research related to their project, time management, and overlapping with other lecture assignments. Students then give their strategies to deal with that obstacle by collaborating with peers, breaking down the project into smaller ones to help avoid being overwhelmed, and setting goals and timelines for the project using a calendar planner.

Keywords: case study, challenges, project-based learning, strategies

INTRODUCTION

Achievement can be attained through education by helping each student reach their full potential, which includes both academic and non-academic potential (Novitasari et al., 2018). Arguably, education takes an important role in every people's life. In education, different applications of learning methods may affect its outcomes. Many learning approaches are used to attain various outcomes for the learners. Project-based learning has been used in schools for many years, among other things. The utilization of project-based learning remains a widely embraced method among educators, serving as an effective approach to guide students in achieving their educational goals. As a result, its enduring appeal underscores its efficacy in meeting the evolving needs of contemporary education.

The need for instructors to develop the appropriate abilities in the context of various student learning styles in a heterogeneous class is related to the adoption of project-based learning. Hence, instructional approaches need to encompass diverse learning opportunities, including individualized learning, teacher-guided instruction, and practical examples and exercises. Project-based learning represents an instructional method that offers each student a chance to learn in accordance with their unique learning style (Cintang et al., 2018). Project-based learning can also help students with problem-solving, questioning, debating, and interpersonal communication.

Project-based learning enables students to independently explore skills based on their individual plans and engage in learning through hands-on experiences, embodying the principle of learning through active involvement.

A major goal of the present studies was to investigate whether there are any challenges and strategies in implementing project-based learning experiences by the English Education Department among the 6th-semester students at Tidar University. The essay is broken up into pieces to address this question: a background summary of project-based learning, a literature review, the methodology, the findings and discussion, and the conclusion. Despite the study's relatively small sample size, the researchers highlighted that the data results will help understand possible

challenges and strategies in project-based learning implementation. The information collected by researchers holds valuable significance for decision-makers and offers insights into the significance of conducting environmental analysis prior to implementing new instructional approaches. Furthermore, the outcomes of this study will aid in mitigating the potential adverse effects of challenges and provide valuable strategies for an effective project-based learning application.

Project-based learning (PjBL) involves learners acquiring practical knowledge and skills through effective teaching by an educator and incorporating student feedback to collaboratively tackle real-life challenges in a group environment (Amissah, 2019). Along the same line, Chen & Yang (2019) discovered

that project-based learning is commonly viewed as an appropriate substitute for traditional, teacher-led education. Additionally, they claimed that project-based learning has a moderate to large positive effect on students' academic achievement when compared to traditional schooling. Project-based learning cannot entirely replace traditional education, according to the findings. Students collaborate to identify and address a problem (Tsybulsky and Muchnik-Rozanov, 2019), and then communicate their results to the audience, gaining lifelong knowledge and skills (Chen and Yang, 2019). Similar to this, project-based learning enables students to gain knowledge through investigating problems, posing inquiries, talking about concepts, making plans, and communicating with others (Choi et

al., 2019). It suggests that project-based learning encourages student participation and that, while the students work on the project, the instructor only serves as a facilitator (Greenier, 2020).

The method seeks to fully involve learners by arousing their natural curiosity and igniting their internal questions (Tsybulsky et al., 2020). Many people think that implementing project-based learning has advantages as well as cons in education. Shin (2018) revealed that project-based learning can assist learners in cultivating their creativity, internal motivation and interest, responsibility, ability to communicate with others, interpersonal skills, collaboration, and problem-solving abilities. On the other hand, Rahmawati (2020) believed there are still many kinds of obstacles to

implementing project-based learning. The research found that teachers must carefully establish and construct specifications for task instruments on specific students. It means that by implementing project-based learning, teachers must pay more attention to each student and measure their abilities in achieving the materials.

Examining the use of project-based learning in the English Education major at Universitas Tidar is the primary goal of this inquiry, as well as to investigate the obstacles that may develop during the implementation of this method. In numerous investigations, the implementation of project-based learning for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers and students has been found to present a number of challenges. Among them was Wicaksono and Setiawan (2022)

who asserted that the difficulties experienced in the groups while applying project-based learning were primarily due to a lack of ability to understand each other's points of view, rather than a lack of project structure. Given the urge to overcome challenges, there is a need for teachers to understand various strategies. Cintang et al., (2018) on their research found that project-based learning implementation strategies may include procedural and process strategies. When developing activities for project-based learning, procedural methods are implemented, whereas process strategies are utilized when implementing project-based learning within the context of thematic learning. The study aims to gain insights into the challenges faced by both teachers and students when applying project-based learning.

Amissah, (2019) the experts' viewpoints supported the positives and negatives identified in the literature while also bringing up a wide range of additional issues that were not mentioned in the literature. There are six advantages and also five challenges of online project-based learning founded by the writer. Project-based learning has undergone significant change in conventional classrooms in recent years. Although it might be challenging to implement project-based learning in an online classroom, the writer is able to illustrate the benefits of doing so. Now in the past pandemic era, the challenge will also be different.

METHODOLOGY

This study took the subject from the sixth-semester EFL students majoring in English

Education at Universitas Tidar. By using Creswell (2012) theory, a detailed assessment of an enclosed structure (such as a task, event, process, or person) based on a large amount of data was conducted in this study using qualitative data and a case study approach design. A questionnaire is the data collection instruments the researcher uses to gather the required data. The questions conducted are from the application of previous research. Implementing the same project-based learning method, the amount of 30 students from the Academic Writing class will be sampled and examined. Based on students' learning experiences, the questionnaire seeks to establish whether or not the project-based learning approach may be used in Tidar

University's English Education major. Furthermore, to find out if there are challenges experienced during the implementation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Tidar University has generally acknowledged that through implementing project-based learning, it has made an enormous transition from traditional to cutting-edge teaching approaches. As a result, several difficulties are anticipated to arise when using this teaching strategy. The information gathered from the questionnaire was examined in the following section. The topic classifications are followed by the following classifications for the material that is provided: (1) student-related challenges; and (2) student-related strategies.

The questionnaire results revealed that project-based learning has a vital role in students' learning outcomes. In the first statement, most students tend to experience better learning with the implementation of this approach showed by 73,1% of students who agree. 19,2% of students then indicated their strong agreement with the statement. The number of 7.7% of students disagrees that they ever have a better learning experience as a result of the implementation of project-based learning. The use of project-based learning, which can enhance their learning outcomes, is shown in the second assertion. It showed that 80,8% of students agree with that and 15,4% of students even strongly agree. Despite this, 3,8% of students disagree with the offered assertion. However, 73,1% of students feel that

project-based learning helps them to understand one another's perspectives. The third statement was followed by 19,2% of students who strongly agree and 7,7% of students who disagree. The fourth statement showed a total of 57,7% of students agree and 30,8% strongly agree that the implementation of project-based learning helps them to improve their time-management skills. This statement also showed the highest student disagreement rate with a total amount of 11,5%. The last statement resulted in all students agreeing and even strongly agreeing that they found challenges during the project-based learning implementation. Some questions are also given to seek further knowledge regarding their experience during the project-based learning implementation.

During the project-based learning implementation, I have some challenges such as follows:

Since we are focusing on the challenge that students experienced during the implementation of PjBL, we asked this question to the respondents. Some students indicated that they experienced problems in working on projects and some showed concern in handling the projects they received. *"The obstacle that I experienced was that I had difficulty finding theories and research related to the project." (Student A, questionnaire 02/05/2023).* From another student, *"Managing time and also re-understanding while drafting the project." (Student B, questionnaire 06/05/2023).* Here we can see the importance for students to learn to manage their

time management so that the projects they receive can be carried out well. Specifically, the quantity of assignments received by students, as expressed by student C, *"Difficulties in carrying out the projects because they often overlapped with other lecture assignments." (Student C 07/05/2023).*

What kind of strategies do you use to overcome the challenges?

A question was asked to find out if there is any strategy they use and what kind of it in the term of solving some challenges they experienced during the learning activity. The majority of students were known to collaborate with one another on the assignment, dividing it up into smaller components, and the others chose

to maintain good time management. *"Collaborating with other students can help me share ideas and perspectives." (Student A, questionnaire 02/05/2023), "By breaking down the project into smaller, manageable tasks, I can approach each one with focus and clarity, which can help me make progress and avoid feeling overwhelmed." (Student B, questionnaire 02/05/2023), "I would set goals and timelines for the project, and use a calendar or planner to schedule tasks." (Student C, questionnaire 02/05/2023).* Overall, Students can overcome obstacles and acquire the skills they need to be successful in their projects and their future employment by utilizing these techniques, among others.

Do you think project-based learning has been implemented well in the classroom? State your reason!

In this question, we try to look at the students' perspectives on whether PjBL has been implemented well in class, especially in academic writing class, and the reasons for their answers. There are almost the same answers from students for various reasons. *"Yes, for Academic Writing Course. Mostly, it is because the lectures can manage the class and learning procedure well, so students become active and follow the learning instruction well, especially for project-based learning." (Student A, questionnaire 02/05/2023).* From student A's opinion, the researchers can see how the attitude of the academic writing lecturer greatly influences the activity of the students. This statement is also supported by Student B, *"Yes, one example is when students work on project assignments, the lecturer doesn't just let go or skip the students, but the lecturer can become a facilitator for students by providing information, providing the knowledge, and skills needed by students to carry out projects." (Student B, Questionnaire 02/05/2023).* From this, we can see that the teacher's role as a facilitator for students is highly needed. However, some students also stated that several things were not realized well in academic writing classes that applied PjBL, namely how to elaborate student critical thinking, this can happen because in project-based learning

we only focus on one problem, *"I think it quite enough, but sometimes it cannot be good enough to elaborate the critical thinking." (Student C 06/05/2023).*

In your perspective, is there anything that needs to be improved from project-based learning implementation in the academic writing course?

The last question asks for suggestions from the respondents on what should be improved from the project-based learning that has been implemented in the academic writing class. A suggestion said that teachers need to give helpful feedback to the student's work, *"More formative feedback: To help students develop their skills and improve their work, it is important to provide frequent and specific feedback on their progress* *throughout the project. This could be done through peer review, instructor feedback, or self-assessment, and should focus on both content and process. (Student A, questionnaire 02/05/2023)* Another student said, *"Actually, the implementation of Project Based Learning in the Academic Writing Course is good but for skill improvement, it is more about improving writing skills, so maybe the lecturer can provide something innovative and creative that can improve other skills in the Academic Writing Course." (Student B, questionnaire 02/05/2023)* The students also advised the lecturers to be innovative in order for students to improve not just their writing skills but also other skills. Another student made an insightful

proposal that a task may be tied to our current concerns and events that students are enthusiastic about or interested in. *"One potential issue with project-based learning in an academic writing course is ensuring that the projects are relevant and meaningful for students. Projects should be designed to help students develop specific writing skills and strategies, such as research skills, critical thinking, argumentation, and academic language use. Additionally, the projects should be connected to real-world contexts and problems that students are interested in or passionate about, which can increase engagement and motivation." (Student C 03/05/2023)*

The findings of a study about EFL learners' challenges and strategies during the project-based learning implementation, show that some students encounter challenges as well as the strategies they used in this approach. Regarding the challenges in its implementation, (Habók & Nagy, 2016) stated that teaching methods using project-based learning are very time-consuming and require great attention to detail.

Nonetheless, from the 4 classifications SD, D, A, and SA the highest data was 80.8% of students as participants agreed (A) that implementing project-based learning improved their learning outcomes. The data obtained was supported by previous studies conducted by (Mohamad & Tamer, 2021) which stated that project-based learning can be used as a consistent learning method so that

it can influence the achievement of learning objectives. From the data collected, all participants agreed and even strongly agreed that they faced challenges in implementing project-based learning. Challenges that participants faced, such as difficulty finding theories and previous research related to their project, time management, overlapping with other lecture assignments, etc. Some students give their strategies to deal with that obstacle such as collaborating with peers, breaking down the project into smaller ones to help avoid being overwhelmed, and setting goals and timelines for the project using a calendar planner.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, project-based learning (PjBL) involves practical skill acquisition through effective instruction and student feedback, addressing real-world problems in group settings. A case study with a questionnaire revealed challenges and strategies in PjBL implementation. Despite difficulties like finding relevant theories and managing time, the data emphasizes PjBL's positive impact on learning outcomes. Students' strategies, such as collaboration and project breakdown, prove crucial in overcoming obstacles. This study underscores the need for thoughtful project design, considering student needs. It is hoped that this research serves as a valuable reference for addressing challenges in PjBL, prompting further exploration in future studies.

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