

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PROJECT-BASED LEARNING IN IMPROVING ORAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN ENGLISH

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Abstract

This study analyzes the aspects of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) effectiveness in improving students' oral communication skills in the English Language Education Study Program (ELESP) at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo. It specifically aims to identify which aspects of PjBL are most effective in improving students' oral proficiency in oral communication skills in ELESP at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo. This research employed a descriptive qualitative method, and data were collected through classroom observations and interviews with five students and one lecturer. The classroom observations were analyzed based on the six phases of the PjBL syntax, while interview data were coded using indicators of oral communication, including verbal elements, paralinguistic features, and non-verbal cues. The combined analysis revealed three major aspects contributing to PjBL's effectiveness: (1) Student Engagement and Active Participation, (2) Challenges in Target Language Usage, and (3) Communication Skills Development. The findings demonstrate that consistent and structured PjBL implementation improves students' language use, collaboration, confidence, and interactive communication. The study concludes that PjBL is an effective instructional approach for developing oral communication skills in professional and academic contexts.

Keywords: Aspects Of PjBL Effectiveness, Students Profeciency, Oral Communication, Speaking For Professional Context, ELESP

INTRODUCTION

In English language education, oral communication is one of the most essential skills for developing students' professional and academic competence. It encompasses the ability to express ideas clearly and appropriately, engage in meaningful conversations, and present information effectively in spoken form. As English is widely regarded as a global lingua franca, proficiency in oral communication is a fundamental requirement, especially for students who are preparing to become future English educators.

The teaching of oral communication, however, faces several challenges. Traditional methods often fail to engage students in authentic communication practices, leading to mechanical memorization and limited spontaneous language use. These shortcomings are especially evident when students are asked to create speaking tasks such as video assignments without meaningful interaction or reflection. Some students memorize scripts without internalizing communicative intentions, reducing the value of the speaking activity. These issues have prompted the exploration of

alternative instructional strategies that emphasize real-world relevance and learner engagement.

One pedagogical model that has gained attention in response to these issues is Project-Based Learning (PjBL). PjBL is rooted in the constructivist paradigm and emphasizes learner-centered instruction through project work. It encourages students to collaborate, research, and present solutions to real-world problems using the target language. The model engages students in activities that require them to use language meaningfully and contextually, thus promoting both language proficiency and soft skills such as collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving.

The effectiveness of PjBL has been studied in various educational settings. For instance, Fragoulis (2009) found that the implementation of PjBL in a primary school in Greece improved students' motivation and language retention. In the EFL context, Vaca Torres & Gómez Rodríguez (2017) showed that PjBL provided Colombian students with meaningful communicative contexts, improving their oral performance. Similarly, Hidayati et al (2023) demonstrated that PjBL, when integrated with technological tools, significantly improved Indonesian students' speaking scores in an ESP (English for Specific Purposes) class. These studies indicate that PjBL not only fosters linguistic development but also improves student engagement.

However, despite its potential, the implementation of PjBL is not without difficulties. Almulla (2020) pointed out that students may experience an increased workload and unfamiliarity with collaborative settings. These factors can result in anxiety and reduced effectiveness, especially when learners are not accustomed to group-based learning. Furthermore, poorly structured projects or insufficient teacher guidance may hinder the intended outcomes of PjBL. Therefore, understanding the contextual factors and syntactic implementation of PjBL is essential in evaluating its effectiveness.

In the English Language Education Study Program (ELESP) at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, oral communication is integrated into the curriculum through a course titled "Speaking for Professional Context." This two-credit course focuses on improving students' ability to speak English in professional settings through genre-based texts such as descriptive, persuasive, and expository forms. During the course, students engage in speaking tasks individually, in pairs, or in groups, and are expected to demonstrate fluency, coherence, and appropriate use of workplace expressions.

Despite this goal, some students have expressed dissatisfaction with PjBL tasks, particularly those involving the creation of videos. They argue that the short time frames and lack of interaction make it difficult to internalize language use naturally. This issue aligns with Almulla (2020) argument that project complexity and peer cooperation significantly affect learning outcomes. In some cases, group work becomes unproductive due to poor communication, unequal participation, or a lack of

clarity in task division. These problems highlight the need for further research into the actual implementation of PjBL and its alignment with oral communication goals.

The present study seeks to address this gap by examining the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning in improving students' oral communication skills, particularly in the context of Speaking for Professional Context. The research problem is formulated as follows: *What aspects of PjBL effectiveness can improve students' proficiency in oral communication skill?*

Theoretically, this research is grounded in two main frameworks: (1) the syntax of PjBL, as developed by John Dewey and elaborated by Kusumawati (2019), which includes six key phases Defining Project and Driving Questions, Project Planning and Design, Research and Inquiry, Product Development and Collaboration, Presentation and Public Sharing, and Reflection and Self-Assessment; and (2) the elements of oral communication as proposed by Morreale et al. (2017), namely verbal elements (fluency and vocabulary), paralinguistic features (tone, pitch, volume), and non-verbal cues (gestures and body language).

This dual framework allows for a comprehensive analysis of how PjBL contributes to both the learning process and the measurable improvement in oral skills. By evaluating each phase of PjBL implementation and its corresponding impact on students' speaking abilities, this study provides insight into the instructional value of project-based methods.

The research employs a descriptive qualitative method, involving classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with students and one lecturer. The observations are guided by the six phases of PjBL, while interviews explore students' experiences with speaking, including fluency, pronunciation, and communicative confidence. The study participants include 24 students from the second semester and one English lecturer from the ELESP program.

Preliminary observations indicate variation in students' engagement and performance across different stages of PjBL. While some students excel in planning and collaboration, others struggle with expressing ideas in English or engaging confidently in presentations. The implementation of reflective practices, in particular, appears to influence student awareness and language improvement. These patterns will be further explored in the findings section to identify the most effective components of PjBL in oral communication development.

Ultimately, this research contributes to the ongoing discussion about student-centered learning and language pedagogy in higher education. It provides empirical evidence to inform lecturers and curriculum designers about the strengths and challenges of PjBL in language learning. By highlighting the critical factors that affect the success of PjBL, the study offers practical recommendations for improving speaking courses in teacher training programs and beyond.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, aiming to provide an in-depth analysis of how Project-Based Learning (PjBL) affects students' oral communication skills in English. The choice of qualitative research is based on the need to understand participant experiences, teaching practices, and classroom dynamics in natural settings rather than testing a hypothesis or quantifying variables. This method enables the researcher to interpret behaviors, perspectives, and events in a rich, contextualized manner, which is suitable for exploring the complex interactions between teaching methods and language learning outcomes.

The research design used is a case study, focusing on the implementation of PjBL in a specific speaking course, namely "Speaking for Professional Context," at the English Language Education Study Program (ELESP), Universitas Negeri Gorontalo. The case study approach allows the researcher to investigate a bounded system a single class within a specific semester and analyze the phenomenon in detail, using multiple sources of data.

The primary data sources in this research are the students and the lecturer involved in the observed class. A total of 24 second-semester students from Class A participated in this study, along with one lecturer who facilitated the PjBL activities. These participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their involvement in the course and prior experience with project-based learning. Their active engagement in speaking tasks made them suitable subjects for assessing the effectiveness of PjBL in improving oral communication.

Data collection was conducted through two primary methods: classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The classroom observations were carried out over three scheduled meetings during regular class hours. These observations focused on identifying the extent to which the six phases of PjBL were implemented in the teaching process: defining the project and driving question, planning and designing, research and inquiry, product development and collaboration, presentation and public sharing, and reflection and self-assessment. Each observation session was documented using a structured checklist derived from these six phases and included 17 observation items in total. To ensure data validity, observations were supported with video recordings and observer notes, providing visual and contextual evidence of classroom interactions.

In addition to observations, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five students and one lecturer. These interviews were designed to explore the participants' experiences and perceptions related to their oral communication development during the project. The interview questions were developed based on the oral communication indicators proposed by Morreale et al. (2017), focusing on verbal elements, paralinguistic features, and non-verbal cues. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to guide the conversation while also enabling

participants to elaborate freely, yielding deeper insights into their attitudes and language learning experiences.

The types of data collected in this study include verbal responses from interviews, observational notes, checklists, and student activities recorded in class. These data are qualitative in nature, meaning they consist of words, behaviors, and reflections rather than numerical measurements. The analysis of these data seeks to identify recurring themes and patterns that explain how and why PjBL influences the students' oral communication skills.

To analyze the data, the researcher employed thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2021). This method involves six steps: familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. First, the researcher transcribed all interview recordings and reviewed observation notes and video materials to understand the content deeply. Then, coding was applied to identify relevant pieces of information related to the PjBL phases and oral communication indicators. These codes were grouped into broader categories and refined into main themes, such as student engagement, language use, confidence, collaboration, and reflection.

By using thematic analysis, the researcher could interpret the meaning behind students' actions and spoken words, offering a comprehensive view of their development throughout the project stages. The combination of observation and interview data ensured triangulation, thereby improving the credibility and depth of the findings. This method enabled the researcher to construct an evidence-based narrative that links the implementation of PjBL with specific improvements in students' oral communication skills.

In summary, the research method is grounded in a descriptive qualitative design with a case study focus. It uses classroom observation and interviews as primary instruments for collecting data from a targeted group of students and one lecturer. The data are analyzed thematically to uncover the effectiveness of PjBL in improving oral communication skills in English, providing valuable insights into instructional practices in language education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This study was conducted in the English Language Education Study Program (ELESP) at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, focusing on the second-semester students of Class A taking the "Speaking for Professional Context" course. The class implemented Project-Based Learning (PjBL) as the instructional model aimed at improving oral communication. Observations were conducted across three sessions, and interviews were held with five students and one lecturer to collect qualitative data.

Classroom Observation

Observational data were collected using a 17-item checklist aligned with PjBL syntax and recorded for accuracy. The results across three meetings are shown in the following table:

Table 1. Classroom Observation Recap Based on PjBL Aspects

PjBL Aspects	Yes/ No Responses		
	Observation 1	Observation 2	Observation 3
Project Initiation			
Driving Question	Y	Y	Y
Student Engagement	Y	N	Y
Language Use	Y	N	Y
Project Planning and Design			
Collaboration	N	Y	Y
Communication	N	N	Y
Teacher Facilitation	Y	Y	Y
Research and Inquiry			
Inquiry-based Learning	N	Y	Y
Use of Target Language	Y	N	Y
Critical Thinking	N	N	Y
Product Development and Collaboration			
Teamwork	N	Y	Y
Application of Language Skills	Y	N	Y
Problem Solving	Y	Y	Y
Presentation and Public Sharing			
Presentation Skills	Y	N	Y
Engagement with Audience	Y	N	Y
Confidence	Y	N	Y
Reflection and Self-Assessment			
Student Reflection	N	N	Y
Language Reflection	N	N	Y
Total	9	7	16
Percentage	56,25%	43,75%	100%

Source: Researcher's Observation Checklist (2025)

This table indicates a steady increase in successful implementation of PjBL syntax, reaching full implementation in the third session.

Interviews

Themes emerged from interview responses covering verbal communication, paralinguistic features, and non-verbal cues. Students consistently reported

improvements in vocabulary use, sentence fluency, and voice modulation. For instance, one student reflected:

“I feel more confident speaking in English now.”

These improvements were most prominent in the final stages of the PjBL process, particularly during project presentations.

Verbal Skills and Vocabulary Acquisition

Students demonstrated improved vocabulary and grammatical usage throughout the project. One teacher noted:

“At first, they don’t know how to use the passive voice correctly, but now they do, not 100%, but I can spot improvement.”

This aligns with the goals of PjBL, where authentic tasks reinforce vocabulary acquisition through context, not memorization.

Paralinguistic Features – Tone and Pitch

Improvement in vocal delivery was observed. Students became more aware of how tone, pitch, and volume affect message clarity. The teacher stated:

“Their intonation wasn’t clear at the start, but after I corrected them, they improved in the next class.”

This suggests that real-time feedback, a key element in PjBL, reinforces effective paralinguistic communication.

Non-Verbal Cues

Students also improved in non-verbal communication, including gestures and facial expressions. One student remarked:

“I learned to use gestures better during presentations. It helped make my point clear.”

These elements are crucial in developing confident and persuasive speakers, aligning with PjBL’s goal to simulate real-world communication.

Discussion

This section elaborates on the research findings obtained through classroom observations and interviews. The discussion focuses on three key themes that emerged from the thematic analysis: (1) Student Engagement and Active Participation, (2) Challenges in Target Language Usage (English), and (3) Communication Skills Development. Each theme provides a comprehensive view of students’ experiences during the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) and its impact on the improvement of their oral communication skills.

Student Engagement and Active Participation

Active student involvement played a crucial role in the success of PjBL. Observation results showed that in the initial phase, student participation tended to be passive, with only 56.25% of the PjBL indicators being met. Students appeared hesitant to engage in discussions and project collaboration, largely due to unfamiliarity with the PjBL method and anxiety about using English.¹

However, participation gradually increased. By the third observation, all PjBL indicators (100%) had been fulfilled. Students were more engaged in sharing ideas, working in groups, and showing enthusiasm in completing their projects. They began to define roles independently, demonstrated time management skills, and collaborated effectively as a team.²

This change aligns with Grant (2017) view that project-based learning improves motivation and learner autonomy when implemented with proper scaffolding.³ It also supports Vygotsky's constructivist theory, where knowledge is constructed through meaningful social interaction in authentic contexts.⁴

Challenges in Target Language Usage

Using the target language (English) was one of the main challenges in implementing PjBL. In the early observations, students often used their native language during group discussions. This was due to limited vocabulary, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes.⁵

However, as the project progressed particularly by the third session students began to use English more consistently in discussions and presentations. This shift reflected growing confidence and willingness to engage in real communicative practices. The teacher's role as facilitator was instrumental in providing encouragement, feedback, and resources such as vocabulary sheets and sentence starters.

Sun & Zhu (2023) emphasize the importance of teacher scaffolding in helping students use the target language effectively. Teachers who provide both structural and emotional support can significantly enhance students' linguistic readiness in project settings.⁶ This is supported by Kavlu, who argues that the success of PjBL in EFL contexts largely depends on student involvement and appropriate facilitation strategies.⁷

Communication Skills Development

Consistent implementation of PjBL significantly improved various aspects of communication skills. Verbal skills such as vocabulary development, sentence structure, and fluency were enhanced through repeated practice in discussions, script drafting, and project presentations. Students did not merely memorize words but applied them in meaningful contexts, improving retention and understanding.⁸

Paralinguistic features such as intonation, tone, and volume also improved. Students began to understand the importance of voice modulation to express meaning effectively, particularly when giving opinions or responding to questions during presentations.

Non-verbal communication skills such as facial expressions, eye contact, and body gestures became more refined through active participation in simulations, role-playing, and video projects. Students learned that appropriate body language strengthens the message and improves the delivery of their presentations.

This improvement aligns with Song et al. (2024) who found that project involvement significantly improves students' oral communication awareness and provides space for natural self-expression in supportive environments.⁹

Reflection and self-assessment also emerged during the third observation. Students began to evaluate their achievements, identify strengths and weaknesses, and plan improvements for future tasks. For example, one student stated, "We could have planned our script better," indicating growing awareness of process and performance.¹⁰

Limitations of Study

This study was conducted in a single class within one semester, limiting generalizability. Furthermore, time constraints and overlapping assignments affected student performance. Future research should explore PjBL implementation across multiple classes or institutions and consider longitudinal designs to track long-term improvements in oral communication. Mixed-method designs incorporating pre- and post-tests could also provide more robust quantitative evidence of language gains.

CONCLUSION

This research found that the systematic implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) significantly improves students' oral communication skills in the English Language Education Study Program. Through structured classroom observations and interviews, the study showed that students improved in key areas of verbal expression, paralinguistic awareness, and non-verbal communication. The six-phase PjBL syntax, when consistently applied, fostered not only linguistic competence but also collaboration, critical thinking, and self-reflection.

The logical consequence of these findings is a reaffirmation of learner-centered approaches in language education, emphasizing experiential and contextual learning over rote memorization. In the context of Islamic education, these results offer valuable insights. Islamic learning principles such as *ta'dib* (disciplining the mind and behavior), *tarbiyah* (holistic education), and *ta'lim* (knowledge transmission) can be better realized through methods like PjBL that foster critical engagement, cooperation, and self-accountability.

Practically, this study encourages Islamic education institutions to integrate PjBL into language and communication curricula to produce learners who are not only proficient speakers but also reflective, ethical communicators. It supports the scientific development of Islamic education by aligning modern pedagogical models with Islamic values that promote *amal sholeh* (righteous actions), *akhlakul karimah* (noble character), and *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) through collaborative and dialogic learning.

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