

IMPROVING SPEAKING SKILL FOR STUDENTS THROUGH PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

Nguyen Thi Thuong Huyen¹, Phan Minh Huyen²

¹ Thai Nguyen University of Medicine and Pharmacy

² Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration

*Corresponding author: **Phan Minh Huyen**

Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration

ABSTRACT

Speaking is one of the four important skills in learning English and how to teach it effectively is considered by many teachers and educators. However, teaching speaking requires a lot of time and efforts because it is a productive skill that needs a long time to achieve. Besides, Project-Based Learning is considered as a communicative approach to improve speaking skill in terms of vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and pronunciation. This paper is conducted as experimental research to investigate the implementation of Project-Based Learning in improving speaking skill, one of the most important aspects of learning a foreign language. The data of the research was collected and analyzed by using tests and SPSS. The respondents of the research consisted of 30 students from the first and second-year students learning general English programme. The findings indicated that using Project Based Learning helps improve students' speaking skill in terms of speaking components thereby suggesting some implications of using Project Based Learning in teaching and learning English.

Keyword: speaking skill, Project-Based Learning (PBL), improvement

1. INTRODUCTION

It cannot be denied that speaking is one of the important skills that students should master to understand and convey information, ideas, and feeling as well as to develop knowledge, technology and culture. According to Kayi (2006), speaking is a productive skill in the oral mode. Hence, the aim of teaching speaking skill is to develop students' skill in speaking and develop communicative competence. At Thai Nguyen University of Medicine and Pharmacy, English is a compulsory subject in the curriculum. However, many students found difficulties in learning English, especially the speaking skill. They often felt shy to express their ideas in English and nervous when speaking. Moreover, the students did not know how to apply different transactional and interaction expressions in different situations. Some of them did not attempt to respond, they seemed lazy to speak. Consequently, the students could not develop their English creativity and they are still at a low level in speaking. Some of them expressed that they have no vocabulary to express what they want to say. To solve the above problems, it is necessary to apply some new techniques to develop their learning by being attached to several ranges of activities in accordance with their interests, physical, and psychological development. Therefore, PBL is supposed to address the problem. It is defined as a learning strategy that is organized around projects (Thomas, 2000). In this classroom, students plan, implement, reflect, and evaluated their own learning by working on authentic tasks, such as solving problem or task which is constructed based on real-world issues. Besides, PBL also elevated student's willingness in learning. Blumenfeld, et al. (1991) showed that a successful implementation of PBL in the classroom could raise students' motivation by being fully involved and engaged in the classroom activities. Therefore, the researcher hypothesized that PBL will benefit the students in the learning speaking process. In order to facilitate the study, the following research question is conducted:

What are the improvements in the students' speaking skill by using PBL?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Project-Based Learning Technique

Barrows (2001) reviewed that PBL is a student-centred pedagogy in which students learn about a subject through the experience of problem-solving. Students learn both thinking strategies and domain knowledge. The goals of PBL are to help students develop flexible knowledge, effective problem-solving skills, self-directed learning, effective collaboration skills and intrinsic motivation.

PBL technique can be implemented in any kind of curriculum, a field of study and in any class situation.

According to Barrows (2001), there are seven features that can be identified as key components of PBL, including: *learner-centered environment* to maximize student decision-making and initiative throughout the course of the project from topic selection to design, production, and presentation decisions; *collaboration* to give learners opportunities to learn collaborative skills, such as group decision making, interdependence, integration of peer and mentor feedback, providing thoughtful feedback to peers; *curriculum content* to have clearly articulated goals, and to support and demonstrate content learning both in-process and product; *authentic tasks* is the one that can take on many forms, depending on the goal of the project; *multiple presentation* modes gives learners opportunities to effectively use various technologies as tools in the planning, development, or presentation of their projects; *time management* which builds on opportunities for learners to plan, revise and reflect on their learning; *innovative assessments* which is considered as learning is an ongoing process, assessment can be an ongoing process of documenting that learning. PBL requires varied and frequent assessment including teacher assessment, peer assessment, self-assessment, and reflection.

2.2. Speaking skill and its components

Widdowson (1978) says that speaking has two meanings. Firstly, it refers to how language is manifested. Secondly, it refers to the manner in which language is realized as communication (p. 58).

Abdullaeva U.N. (2018) reviewed some criteria for the assessment of speaking skill. These criteria are also based upon the assessment of oral skills.

2.2.1. Fluency

It is considered as the main goal in teaching the productive skill of speaking. The ability to express oneself in an intelligible, reasonable and accurate way without too much hesitation. Many foreign language speakers think of fluency as the ability to speak fast, that is why they start speaking rapidly without pauses. Thornbury (2005) argued that speed is an important factor in fluency and pausing too because speakers need to take a breath. However, frequent pausing is an indication that the speaker has a speaking problem. In such cases, Thornbury suggests using production strategies, i.e. the ability to fill the pauses. The most common pause fillers are "uh" and "um", vagueness expressions such as "short of and" "I mean".

2.2.2. Accuracy

Most foreign language teachers emphasized the term of accuracy in their teaching because learners seek more to be fluent and they forget about being accurate. Therefore, paying attention to the correctness and completeness of language form is of more importance for oral proficiency.

2.2.3. Grammar

The grammatical accuracy relates to the range and the appropriate use of the learners' grammatical structure that involves the length and the complexity of the utterances in addition to the ability to use the subordinating clauses. Besides, the grammar of speech differs from that of writing.

2.2.4. Vocabulary

Vocabulary refers to the appropriate selection of words during speaking. Students often find difficulties when they try to express what they want to say, they lack the appropriate vocabulary, and they sometimes use words incorrectly like in the case of synonyms which do not carry the same meaning in all contexts. Hence, students have to be able to use words and expiration accurately.

2.2.5. Pronunciation

Students should be aware of the different sounds and their features and where they are made in one's mouth; they have also to be aware of where the words should be stressed, when to use raising intonation and when to use a falling one. All these issues give them extra information about how to speak English effectively and help to achieve the goal of a better understanding of spoken English.

In short, these criteria were applied in the assessment of the students' speaking skill in the research. However, based on the assessment from English modules at the university, some of these criteria were applied, including pronunciation, fluency, grammar and vocabulary.

3. Advantages of using PBL in the speaking skill

Based on Boss, Krajcik, and Patrick (1995), the implementation of the PBL technique can bring some advantages:

Firstly, it increases motivation for learners. It means that learners can choose their own topics, the extent of content, and the presentation mode. Learners build their projects to suit their own interests and abilities. These activities are highly motivating for learners when they learn to speak.

Secondly, it increases problem-solving abilities. By participating in both independent work and collaboration, learners improve their problem-solving skills thereby developing their critical thinking skills.

Thirdly, it improves media research skills because PBL provides a real-world connection to context. Learners conduct research using multiple information resources. By locating the resources themselves, their research skills develop and improve.

Fourthly, it increases in collaboration since learners create and organize their own groups. They share knowledge and collaboratively construct artefacts, thereby developing social communication skills and obtain multiple perspectives.

Fifthly, it increases resource-management skills: successful Project-Based Learning provides learners with experience in project organization and time management with the necessary scheduling of resources.

In addition, according to Fragoulis (2009:92), there are many benefits of implementing the PBL technique in teaching speaking, such as: creating contextual and meaningful learning for students; bringing an optimal environment for practising speaking English; making students actively engage in project learning; enhancing students' interests, motivation, engagement, and enjoyment; promoting social learning that can enhance collaborative skills and giving an optimal opportunity to improve students' language skills.

According to Dörnyei (2001:100), the advantages of project work are: it encourages motivation, fosters group cohesiveness, increases the expectancy of success in the target language, achieves "a rare synthesis of academic and social goals", reduces anxiety, increases the significance of effort relative to ability, and promotes effort-based contributions.

3. SUBJECT AND METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted at Thai Nguyen University of Medicine and Pharmacy with thirty students. These were chosen in the experimental group which was taught by using PBL to learn speaking skill. All of them are first-year and second-year students. They were chosen randomly from the researcher's class and all of them wanted to improve their speaking skill. After six weeks of learning speaking by using PBL, they were each required to take a speaking test to explore how PBL improve their speaking skill.

For the analysis of the data, Mean (M) and Standard deviation (SD) were to check the differences between pre-test and post-test; pair sample T-tests were to check the impact of the treatment and correlation coefficients were to find out the significant correlation between the pre-test and the post-test.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1: The total average of the Pre-test and the Post-test distributed by the experimental group

Students	Pre-test	Post-test
Average	5.26	7.42

To answer the main question of the study which is related to using PBL to improve speaking skill, Table 1 indicated that the total average of the post-test was higher than the pre-test. The total average of the pre-test for the experimental group was 5.26 and the total average of the post-test was 7.42. It means that the students worked better in the post-test after learning writing through PBL. Therefore, these findings indicated that the use of the PBL technique had a positive effect on students' speaking skill. This progress could also mean that the students participated, shared ideas and opinions and collaborated with others through PBL, which had good results in their speaking performance.

In order to investigate the effectiveness of using PBL on improving students' speaking skills, paired Sample T-test was used to investigate the significance of the differences according to the three dimensions and the total average grade for the tool of the study by measuring the mean of the student's grade on the pre-test and the post-test of the experimental group, which was illustrated as followed.

Table 2: Paired Sample T-test of the students' grade mean on the Pre-test and the Post-test of the experimental group according to the dimensions and the total average

Sig. (2-tailed)	T	Degrees of freedom	Standard Deviation	Mean	Exam
0.00	-10.051	29	1.25	5.02	Pre-test fluency
			0.81	7.30	Post-test fluency
0.00	-10.623	29	1.18	5.17	Pre-test pronunciation
			0.89	7.53	Post-test pronunciation
0.00	-8.21	29	1.28	5.17	Pre-test vocabulary
			0.98	7.45	Post-test vocabulary
0.00	-8.76	29	1.50	5.67	Pre-test grammar
			0.83	7.43	Post-test grammar
0.00	-10.691	29	1.55	5.26	Pre-test total average
			0.89	7.42	Post-test total average

The table showed that there were statically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in using PBL to improve students' speaking skills according to the four dimensions and the total average between the pre-test and the post-test of the experimental group. Testing this question showed that using PBL for improving students' speaking skill of the experimental group had a positive result on the achievement of the students in favour of the post-test grades according to the four dimensions and the total average. The statically significant differences in Table 2 indicated that there was the effectiveness of using PBL to improve speaking skill for the students. In terms of the total average, the mean of the total average of the post-test was higher than the one of the pre-test. It means that the students achieved in the post-test compared with the pre-test. According to the mean of the four dimensions of the two tests, the mean of the pronunciation criteria of the post-test was 7.53 higher than the one of the pre-test, 5.17, which ranked the highest criteria. Besides, the mean of the vocabulary criteria of the post-test was 7.45, which was also higher than the one of the pre-tests ($M=5.17$, $SD=1.28$). This means that the students made big progress in terms of pronunciation and vocabulary after learning to speak through PBL. In addition, the mean of the post-test grammar criteria ($M=7.43$; $SD=0.83$) was higher than the one of the pre-test grammar criteria ($M=5.67$; $SD=1.50$). Besides, the mean results also implied that the students made higher progress between the pre-test and the post-test in terms of fluency, which ranged from $M=5.02$ to $M=7.30$. The mean results of grammar and fluency criteria were lower than pronunciation and vocabulary criteria; however, it can be concluded that the students interacted actively while learning writing via PBL. Their discussion, interaction, comments and feedback helped them a lot to get better results on speaking skill.

To find out there was a significant correlation between the pre-test and the post-test or not in order to examine the effectiveness of using FB on learning the speaking skill, the correlation for each of the four dimensions and the total average of the grades before and after applying the tool was calculated.

Table 3: Correlation Coefficients Distributed by the four dimensions before and after applying the tool.

Correlation	Number	Description
0.716	30	Pre-test fluency & Post-test fluency
0.740	30	Pre-test pronunciation & Post-test pronunciation
0.612	30	Pre-test vocabulary & Post-test vocabulary
0.667	30	Pre-test grammar & Post-test grammar
0.725	30	Pre-test total average & Post-test total average

The results showed that there were correlation coefficients between the pre-test and the post-test according to the total grades (0.725) and the four dimensions of the test which was from 0.612 to 0.740. The correlation coefficient is used to affirm the correlation between two variables. The results in Table 3 displayed that there was a positive correlation between the pre-test and the post-test in terms of the total grades and the four dimensions of the test. Therefore, it can be confirmed that there was an improvement in using PBL on

improving speaking skill.

5. CONCLUSION

The conducted study examined the improvements of using PBL to improve speaking skill for students at TUMP, Thai Nguyen University. The results of the study shed some light on concerning issues of using the PBL technique in the academic field of teaching languages, especially in teaching speaking skill. In details, the study showed that there were improvements in using PBL to improve speaking skill for students in terms of fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar criteria. The main results can be summarized as followed:

- There were obvious improvements in using PBL to improve the student's speaking performance.
- There were statistical differences in using PBL on students' speaking skill between the pre-test and the post-test of the experimental group.
- There were correlation coefficients between the pre-test and the post-test of the experimental group.

Therefore, some suggestions are highly recommended to improve students in learning writing by using PBL, including (1) spending time using PBL in English learning class; (2) explaining to the students the criteria which are using for assessing their speaking; (3) giving the deadline so that students can concentrate and spend time to complete the task; (4) choosing suitable and interesting topics for students to motivate them in learning speaking.

It is unavoidable that there exist some limitations of the research due to the limited scope, the time constraint and other objective factors. The limitation found in the number of participants of this study is that it used only the limited subjects at a single university which could be insufficient to ensure the reliability of the findings of the study. Besides, the findings of the study mainly focused on one group of the research because of the limited subjects as well. Therefore, further research should include testing subjects on a larger scale and in some other universities in the area.

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