

Exploring the spectrum of impacts: A review of Project-Based Learning's effects on young English Language Learners

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Abstract

In recent years, the educational landscape has been significantly shaped by the concept of Outcome-Based Education (OBE), a framework that emphasizes the importance of achieving specific, measurable outcomes as the fundamental basis of the learning process. This has brought a shift away from conventional educational practices, concentrating instead on the skills and abilities students acquire through their learning journey. As we make our way through the dynamic era of the 21st century, it becomes increasingly clear that to equip students with the skills and knowledge necessary for success in this rapidly changing world, innovative teaching methodologies are essential. Among these, Project-Based Learning (PBL) emerges as a powerful strategy. By engaging students in real-world projects that require critical thinking, collaboration, and creative problem-solving, PBL not only aligns with the goals of OBE but also enhances the learning experience, making education more relevant and impactful.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) has emerged as a transformative educational approach, particularly in the context of teaching English to young learners. This instructional strategy integrates language acquisition with content knowledge and essential skills, offering a holistic learning experience. The following research article synthesizes findings from various studies to explore the efficacy and impact of PBL on young English Language Learners.

After identifying a gap in the literature regarding comprehensive analyses of Project-Based Learning's (PBL) impacts specifically on young English Language Learners (ELLs), this article systematically reviews existing research to provide educators, policymakers, and researchers with evidence-based insights. It focuses on how PBL can enhance language development, student motivation, skill development, and academic success in diverse learning environments, a pressing need in today's educational context.

Keywords: Project Based Learning, Outcome-Based Education, English Language Learners (ELLs)

According to the Buck Institute for Education, a leader in PBL advocacy and research, "Project Based Learning is a teaching method in which students learn by actively engaging in real-world and personally meaningful projects." (Buck Institute for Education). This definition underscores the essence of PBL, highlighting its focus on engaging students in learning through the lens of real-world, relevant issues, thereby promoting a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is a dynamic classroom approach in which students actively explore real-world problems and challenges, gaining a deeper knowledge through active exploration. The theoretical underpinnings of PBL are rooted in several key learning theories and pedagogical models that emphasize active learning, critical thinking, collaboration, and the application of knowledge to real-life situations. Here are some of the primary theories and models that inform PBL:

1. Constructivism

One of the core theories underpinning PBL is constructivism, as proposed by Jean Piaget and later expanded by Lev Vygotsky. Constructivism posits that learners construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. In PBL, students are placed in the role of active learners who build their knowledge by engaging with and solving complex problems, thus embodying the constructivist principle that knowledge is constructed through interaction with the environment and others.

2. Social Constructivism

Expanding on Piaget's ideas, Lev Vygotsky introduced the concept of social constructivism, which emphasizes the social contexts of learning and that knowledge is constructed through social interaction and collaboration. PBL leverages this theory by encouraging students to work in groups and learn from each other, facilitating the sharing of diverse perspectives and cooperative problem-solving.

3. Situated Learning

Situated learning theory, proposed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, argues that learning occurs best when it is situated in a context similar to where the knowledge will be applied. PBL aligns with this theory by situating learning within real-world projects that mimic the complexity and ambiguity of real-life challenges, thus making learning more relevant and meaningful.

4. Experiential Learning

David Kolb's experiential learning theory, which describes learning as a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience, also supports the foundation of PBL. This theory emphasizes the importance of concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. PBL engages students in a cyclical learning process by allowing them to plan, act, observe, and reflect upon their projects, thereby embodying Kolb's experiential learning cycle.

5. Inquiry-Based Learning

Inquiry-based learning is a pedagogical approach that emphasizes investigation and problem-solving. PBL is a form of inquiry-based learning where students start with questions or problems rather than simply presenting established facts. This approach encourages students to engage in research, hypothesis testing, and the development of solutions to complex questions, fostering a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

Outcome-Based Education (OBE), a concept introduced by William Spady in the 1990s, shifts the educational focus towards the achievements and capabilities students gain through learning, rather than the traditional emphasis on the teaching process. OBE prioritizes the final objectives, achievements, and results of education, guiding all curriculum, assessment, and instructional decisions towards ensuring that students meet predetermined learning outcomes at the conclusion of a course or program (Rao et al.). Outcome-Based Education (OBE) is a versatile and comprehensive educational framework that is applicable across a wide range of age groups and educational contexts.

PBL can be seen as a pedagogical strategy that aligns well with the principles of OBE by focusing on the attainment of specific learning outcomes through engaging, student-centered projects.

PBL allows for the design and implementation of projects that are directly tied to the learning outcomes specified by the OBE framework. This ensures that all project activities are purposeful and aimed at achieving the desired educational goals. And OBE emphasizes the importance of students demonstrating mastery of subject matter as a result of their learning experiences. PBL engages students in an active learning process where they explore, research, and solve problems, thereby acquiring and applying knowledge in a manner that is conducive to achieving OBE outcomes.

Both OBE and PBL emphasize the importance of assessing students based on their ability to apply what they have learned in real-world contexts. PBL projects provide a tangible means for students to demonstrate their competencies, making it easier for educators to assess whether learning outcomes have been met.

One of the goals of OBE is to prepare students for success in real-life situations and future careers. PBL projects simulate real-world challenges, requiring students to develop and apply skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, and communication, which are essential for achieving the broader competencies outlined in OBE.

Both PBL and OBE allow for a high degree of customization and flexibility in how learning objectives are met. This enables educators to tailor projects to meet the diverse needs of students, ensuring that all learners have the opportunity to achieve the specified outcomes. PBL can increase student engagement and motivation by making learning relevant and meaningful. This heightened engagement is conducive to deeper learning and better retention of knowledge and skills, aligning with OBE's focus on meaningful and lasting learning achievements. In conclusion, PBL can indeed be viewed as a powerful method to achieve the goals of OBE. By integrating PBL into an OBE framework, educators can create a dynamic and effective learning environment that not only meets specific educational outcomes but also prepares students for success beyond the classroom.

A recent study by Eneko Cabanilla Hilario, focusing on the educational landscape amongst young learners, proved that interdisciplinary Project Based Learning (PBL) significantly enhances speaking results. This finding underscores the potential of PBL as a transformative approach in language education, fostering not only linguistic skills but also critical thinking and creativity among students. Given the pivotal role of effective communication in today's globalized world, such insights are invaluable.

The research study analyzes the impact of interdisciplinary Project Based Learning (PBL) on speaking skill results in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. The study found that interdisciplinary PBL had a significant impact on the speaking results of young learners, with the experimental group showing better post-test speaking results compared to the control group. The findings suggest that the effect of interdisciplinary PBL on speaking results was greater, indicating the potential of this teaching method in enhancing speaking skills in EFL. However, there was a significant difference in motivation between the two groups, with the control group showing higher motivation levels. The difference in motivation could not be directly attributed to the training.

method, indicating the need for further research to understand the relationship between instructional methods and motivation.

Another study by Kimsesiz, Dolgunsöz, and Konca (2017), was to investigate the effectiveness of teaching EFL vocabulary to pre-school children through Project Based Learning (PBL). For this purpose, an experimental design, consisted of observation checklists, exam scores and a short survey, was adopted. Firstly, through a short online survey, 150 kindergarten teachers were asked to specify which techniques they commonly used in their English classes. The primary aim here was to define traditional techniques and the rate of PBL use in Turkey. After defining common techniques, 28 children were randomly assigned to experimental (PBL instruction) and control groups (traditional instruction) equally and the data was collected in real time classroom setting for 8 weeks. The results showed that (1) PBL was rarely adopted in EFL classes in Turkey, (2) PBL instruction could increase EFL vocabulary learning gains when compared to common methods and (3) young learners were observed to have been more active in PBL classes.

A study by Mujiono et.al aimed to conduct a meta analysis of the findings of experimental studies evaluating the impact of project based learning on English language proficiency between 2015 and 2021. experimental studies on the effect between project-based learning and English language proficiency are analysed using meta-analysis. The results showed that the average impact measure value is a high degree of effect. PjBL has a significant impact on English language proficiency. This research finding implies that PjBL can be applied in the teaching of English at the preschool, primary, high school, and college levels. The application of project-based English learning is a strategy to improve critical thinking skills, psychomotor improvement, self-confidence, and English competence at all levels of education.

Another study which investigated the project-based learning (PBL)' s effectiveness for language learners with different motivation, conducted by K Nurcahyoko showed that PBL is effective to improve students' grammatical accuracy for high and low motivated students.

Another study entitled Project-Based Learning as a Methodology to Improve Reading and Comprehension Skills in the English Language by Jorge Cardenas, investigated the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in enhancing English language reading skills among ninth-grade students, using a mixed-methods approach and literature review. The results showed that implementing PBL positively impacted students'

English language reading skills, leading to enhanced motivation and advancements in reading abilities. The implementation of PBL resulted in students engaging in significant, relevant projects aligned with their social and educational environment, which contributed to the development of their reading and comprehension skills. The study highlights the importance of educators stimulating and encouraging the development of reading abilities, especially for students at the beginning of their schooling. PBL offers an active and innovative approach to foster student engagement and improve reading proficiency. The positive results of this study support the recommendation for the widespread adoption of PBL in English language learning contexts to enhance reading skills among students.

Empowering the Voices of Young Multilingual Learners in the ESL Classroom, by G. P. Srivastava, highlights six effective strategies for empowering multilingual students in elementary ESL classrooms, including project-based learning, restorative circles and debate, reflection on identity and social justice, and publishing student work. These strategies aim to elevate student voice and strengthen learner autonomy in conjunction with language acquisition. The author shares excerpts from her action research journal, providing authentic reflections and student feedback on the implemented strategies. The use of culturally responsive pedagogy allows young multilingual learners to engage in active learning experiences that promote their voices and empower them in the classroom. Overall, the paper emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive environment where multilingual learners can actively participate, reflect on their experiences, and have their voices heard in the ESL classroom.

The study discusses the use of project-based learning (PBL) as an effective strategy for empowering multilingual learners in elementary ESL classrooms. PBL is one of the six classroom practices highlighted in the study that aims to elevate student voice and strengthen learner autonomy. Through PBL, multilingual learners engage in active learning experiences that promote their voices and empower them in the classroom.

Project-based learning in teaching speaking to young learners: Is it effective, by Elok Widiyati, Wulan Pangesti aimed to investigate the effectiveness of using Project-based Learning (PBL) in improving young learners' speaking skills. The research involved 59 seventh-grade students from SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Kudus, divided into experimental and control classes. The data collected from pre-test and post-test showed that the students' speaking ability mean scores in both classes were higher in the post-test than in the pre-test. The results were supported by the independent sample t-test, indicating that project-based learning had a significant difference in improving young learners'

speaking skills. Overall, using PBL created a more fun, active, and interactive speaking class atmosphere for young learners.

Another research titled, Active Learning through Project Based Learning Approach in English Language Lessons for Early Age Groups explores how Project Based Learning (PBL) approach influenced students' engagement and interest in English language lessons for Class I students.

The study found that the use of self-assessment, daily reflection logs, parental involvement, and real-world problem exploration positively impacted student engagement, although challenges were faced in planning, teaching, management, and assessment of PBL.

The conclusions put forward by the study were that the Project Based Learning (PBL) approach positively influenced students' cognitive and emotional engagement in English language lessons for Class I students. The use of self-assessment, daily reflection logs, parental involvement, and real-world problem exploration contributed to increased student engagement and interest in the classroom. Cross-curricular/interdisciplinary and Information Communication Technology (ICT) integration helped to keep students intrinsically motivated. The relevance of the driving question resulted in immense student engagement throughout the project unit. However, challenges were faced in the planning, teaching, management, and assessment of PBL for teachers.

A relatively recent study conducted by Didit Kurniadi et al. endeavors to bridge the existing gap in the literature by investigating the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in English education for young learners and its influence on their language acquisition and critical thinking abilities. Employing a mixed-methods approach, this study combines quantitative analysis of language proficiency tests with qualitative exploration of student perspectives and teacher insights to unveil the transformative potential of PBL in facilitating comprehensive language development and fostering essential cognitive competencies in young learners. The research findings offer compelling evidence that PBL serves as an effective instructional strategy, holding promise in augmenting language proficiency and nurturing vital cognitive aptitudes among young English learners.

Conclusion

1. In the multifaceted landscape of educational strategies, Project-Based Learning (PBL) emerges as a beacon of innovation, particularly for young English Language

Learners (ELLs). This exploration has illuminated the profound impacts of PBL, showcasing its potency in not only enhancing language development and academic success but also in fostering intrinsic motivation and skill acquisition among students. Through the lens of diverse learning environments, it has become evident that PBL's hands-on collaborative approach aligns seamlessly with the principles of Outcome-Based Education (OBE), prioritizing clear outcomes and practical application of knowledge.

The synthesis of the research and case studies presented herein underscores PBL's unique capacity of PBL to create immersive, context-rich learning experiences that resonate with young ELLs. By engaging students in meaningful projects, PBL transcends traditional learning paradigms and offers a dynamic platform for language immersion, cultural relevance, and interdisciplinary learning. This approach not only accelerates language acquisition, but also cultivates a suite of 21st-century skills, critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity, thereby preparing students to navigate the complexities of a globalized world with confidence and competence.

Moreover, the alignment of PBL with the OBE principles further amplifies its educational value. By focusing on outcomes, PBL ensures that learning is intentional and measurable with a clear emphasis on achieving proficiency in language skills and academic content. This outcome-oriented framework supports educators in designing projects that are both challenging and achievable, thereby promoting students' engagement and success.

In conclusion, the integration of Project-Based Learning into the educational experiences of young English Language Learners represents a forward-thinking approach that not only meets the immediate needs of language development and academic achievement, but also addresses the broader goal of preparing students for lifelong success. As educators and policymakers continue to seek innovative strategies to enrich learning and support diverse student populations, PBL stands out as a compelling model aptly suited to the evolving demands of Outcome-Based Education. The journey ahead is filled with the promise of transformation as we embrace PBL's potential to empower young learners, inspire educators, and shape the future of education.

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