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Res. Assaf Mohammed Salim Haji

Cihan University – Duhok

Asst.Prof.Dr. Saeed Idris Saeed

College of Education, University of Duhok

Email:
assaf.salim@duhokcihan.edu.krd
Saaed.adris@uod.ac

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Implementing PBL in EFL Grammar Instruction: Insights from University Teachers

A B S T R A C T

This study investigates the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) grammar, highlighting university educators' perspectives and attitudes toward the method. The data were collected through discussions with six EFL grammar instructors at four universities in the Duhok Governorate. Thematic analysis was employed to assess instructors' perceptions of the efficacy of Project-Based Learning (PBL) and to identify the challenges and opportunities encountered during its implementation in grammar classes. The results demonstrate that PBL augments students' engagement with grammar, elevates motivation, and boosts contextual understanding. It fosters cooperation and critical analysis. Educators reported difficulties, including increased preparation time, managing group dynamics, and the need for institutional support. The research highlights the importance of professional development and supportive structures for enhancing project-based learning, particularly in grammar instruction in English as a foreign language. These findings offer educators and institutions significant insights into implementing more interactive, student-centered language instruction methodologies.

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تطبيق التعلم القائم على المشاريع في تدريس قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية: رؤى من أساتذة الجامعات

الباحث عساف محمد سليم حجي أ.م.د سعيد ادريس سعيد
جامعة جيهان – دهوك جامعة دهوك ـ كلية التربية

الملخص:

تستكشف هذه الدراسة تطبيق أسلوب التعلم القائم على المشاريع في تدريس قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، مع تسليط الضوء على وجهات نظر أعضاء هيئة التدريس الجامعيين ومواقفهم تجاه هذا الأسلوب. جُمعت البيانات من خلال مناقشات مع ستة من مدرسي قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية في أربع جامعات بمحافظة دهوك. استُخدم التحليل الموضوعي لتحديد تقييمات المدرسين لفعالية التعلم القائم على المشاريع، ولتحديد التحديات والفرص التي وُوجهت أثناء تطبيقه في حصص القواعد. تُظهر النتائج أن التعلم القائم على المشاريع يُعزز تفاعل الطلاب مع القواعد، ويرفع من دافعيتهم، ويُحسّن فهمهم للسياق. كما يُشجع التعاون والتحليل النقدي. وأشار المدرسون إلى مواجهة صعوبات، مثل زيادة وقت التحضير، وإدارة ديناميكيات المجموعة، والحاجة إلى الدعم المؤسسي. يُبرز البحث أهمية التطوير المهني والهياكل الداعمة في تعزيز التعلم القائم على المشاريع، وتحديدًا في تدريس قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. تُقدّم هذه النتائج للمعلمين والمؤسسات التعليمية رؤى قيّمة لتطبيق منهجيات تدريس لغوية أكثر تفاعلية وتركيزًا على الطالب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، التعلّم القائم على المشاريع، تعليم القواعد، المشاركة، التحفيز.

Introduction

Project-based learning (PBL) is an instructional model rooted in the constructivist paradigm. It emphasizes the construction of knowledge through diverse perspectives within a social context, fostering self-awareness of learning and comprehension that are contextually relevant (Duffy & Cunningham, 1996). According to Thomas (2000), there are five key criteria for effective PBL: Projects should be relevant to the curriculum, centered on problems that compel students to engage with core concepts, involve constructivist inquiry, allow for student-directed exploration, and maintain a sense of realism. Additionally, Grant (2002) identifies essential components for implementing PBL, including an activity anchor, a task, an investigation, resource provision, scaffolding, collaboration, and opportunities for reflection and transfer. While PBL offers numerous advantages for the educational process, it also presents challenges for educators. The shift from traditional education to PBL poses significant challenges, despite its advantages. The implementation process can be perplexing, resulting in challenges for both instructors and students. Marx et al., as referenced in Thomas (2000), assert that major obstacles include time constraints, as initiatives frequently surpass anticipated durations and hinder curricular integration. Classroom management can become burdensome for educators overseeing large classrooms and diverse subjects. Facilitating student autonomy is essential but prompts apprehension among educators about the potential loss of authority. Effective project-based learning requires scaffolding to help students balance autonomy with direction. Moreover, educators face obstacles in obtaining essential technology and advocate for evaluations that accurately reflect students' work, emphasizing the need for grades to reflect project contributions to enhance participation.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite increasing evidence in favor of student-centered methodologies in language education, grammar instruction in EFL contexts often remains rooted in a traditional, teacher-centered approach. PBL is well-known for promoting deep learning and student engagement; however, its implementation in EFL grammar instruction remains limited and under-researched in our context in Iraq, Kurdistan Region, Duhok Governorate, particularly among instructors unfamiliar with this methodology. Understanding the perspectives and experiences of university educators as they first encounter and implement PBL in EFL grammar classes is essential.

1.3 Aim of the Study

This study aims to investigate the experiences and perceptions of university EFL instructors regarding the implementation of PBL in grammar instruction, specifically targeting those unfamiliar with this pedagogical approach.

1.4 Research Questions

This study tries to answer the following questions:

1. How do university EFL teachers perceive the effectiveness of PBL in grammar instruction?

2. What challenges and opportunities do university EFL teachers encounter when implementing PBL in grammar lessons?

1.5 The Significance of the Study

This study offers insights into the practical challenges of implementing PBL in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) grammar instruction from the perspective of university educators, many of whom are unfamiliar with this approach. It fills a gap in the existing research by documenting initial perceptions, identified advantages, challenges, and support needs. This information serves as guidance for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers who aim to incorporate innovative, student-centered methodologies for grammar instruction. The findings may encourage the broader implementation of PBL in language education and inform the development of effective training programs to help educators adopt this approach. This study seeks to explore the experiences and perceptions of university EFL instructors regarding the implementation of PBL in grammar education, particularly among those unfamiliar with this pedagogical method.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is a student-centered methodology grounded in constructivist and constructionist theories, as described by Gergen (1995), Piaget and Inhelder (1969), and Vygotsky (1978). The worldwide importance of the idea has risen, as educational institutions recognize its potential through extensive study assessments (Pereira et al., 2017; Willkson, 2014). The key objective of PBL is to promote engaging learning experiences that foster collaborative teamwork in addressing a central theme, solving

problems, or overcoming challenges, resulting in a tangible outcome (Bell, 2010). Unlike traditional teaching methods that emphasize memorization, PBL fosters psychomotor and social competencies, including critical analysis, information retrieval, problem-solving, self-assessment, summarization, and presentation skills, essential for lifelong learning (Phillips et al., 1999; Bell, 2010). Thomas (2000) underscores the suitability of PBL across various educational contexts, especially for students from ethnically diverse or struggling backgrounds. In contrast to traditional approaches dominated by teacher-led discussions (Aldabbus, 2008), Project-Based Learning (PBL) promotes active student involvement in inquiry, goal formulation, and the collaborative design and implementation of projects (Markham, 2003).

In PBL, instructors serve as facilitators and guides, offering support and critique while providing students autonomy in carrying out tasks, thereby fostering independence. Students engage in collaboration by assigning roles, offering reciprocal assistance, and contemplating vital intellectual and social skills for lifelong learning. Bell (2010) highlights the benefits of PBL, including enhanced student engagement, a greater sense of accomplishment, improved problem-solving abilities, and more accountability for learning. PBL caters to distinct learning requirements and interests via diverse activities, allowing students to confront real-world challenges (Grant, 2011). Gubacs (2004) contends that learners are capable of self-assessment, peer evaluation, and providing constructive feedback, hence, identifying personal strengths and opportunities for improvement. PBL permits students autonomy in topic selection, resource availability, responsibility allocation, and final presentation, unlike conventional projects with predetermined outcomes (Marwan, 2015). Studies by Thomas (2000) and Edelson et al. (1999) demonstrate that participants in project-based learning exhibit increased social interactions, consistent attendance, and higher cognitive abilities through iterative problem-solving and reflection.

Despite its advantages, PBL has some disadvantages. Habok and Nagy (2016:3) said that PBL is labor-intensive and requires careful thought. Collaborative assignments may pose difficulties for students who are weak in teamwork abilities (Johnson & Johnson, 1989), and certain instructors might oppose the innovative aspects of project-based learning due to potential clashes with conventional ideologies (Ladewski et al., 1991). Practical challenges encompass significant time commitment, complications in student oversight, and obstacles to maintaining enthusiasm and access to essential technologies (Marx et al., 1997). Harmer and Stokes (2014) assert that the most effective use of PBL is as a supplementary approach when its continuous application may impede specific learning goals. Effective implementation requires comprehensive planning, sufficient resources, disciplined learners, and effective evaluation systems. Therefore, educators must consistently assess the appropriate balance between the advantages and disadvantages of PBL to maximize its benefits in educational environments (Heines, 1989).

2.1 Implementation of PBL

Project-Based Learning (PBL) involves several stages, beginning with selecting relevant information to engage students. It includes introducing the subject compellingly through discussions or activities that energize student interest. Students develop a guiding question to

focus their investigation, which should remain rigorous and open-ended. Allowing students the freedom to express their ideas in project design enhances creativity and promotes independent learning. Instructors are responsible for ensuring ample time for skill development in communication, technology, critical thinking, and problem-solving. After gathering information, students /submit their findings for assessment, incorporating feedback from peers and instructors to refine their work. Presenting their final products to a public audience acts as a significant motivator, encouraging effort and pride in their accomplishments.

2.2 Teachers' Perception and Challenges

Perception is an essential cognitive process that influences how individuals interpret and respond to their environment, hence impacting behavior and decision-making (Robbins, 2003; Slameto, 2003; Mulyana, 2007). Walgito (2011) defines perception as comprising physical, physiological, and psychological stages, shaped by internal factors such as experience, motivation, and beliefs, as well as external factors such as stimulus intensity, contrast, and novelty. Experiences, educational contexts, and personal attributes shape teachers' perceptions of PBL. Empirical studies indicate that educators generally see PBL positively, recognizing it as a student-centered methodology that promotes independent, self-regulated learning and authentic engagement (Tamim & Grant, 2013; Baysura, Altun & Toy, 2015; Ravitz et al., 2012). Within this concept, instructors evolve from mere transmitters of knowledge to facilitators, offering guidance, scaffolding, and ongoing formative assessment while empowering students in their learning pursuits (Grant, 2002; Thomas & Mergendoller, 2000; Hugerat, 2016). PBL emphasizes cooperative group activities, practical problem-solving, and the creation of meaningful final products, distinguishing it from traditional pedagogical approaches (Beneke & Ostrosky, 2009; Yam & Rossini, 2010).

Despite its educational advantages, the transition from traditional teaching to project-based learning presents substantial hurdles. The literature highlights technical and practical obstacles, including the considerable time investment required for planning and implementation, challenges in managing large classes and numerous student teams, and the necessity for educators to hand over some authority to foster student autonomy (Murray & Savin-Baden in Tally, 2015; Marx et al., as cited in Thomas, 2000). Effective classroom management becomes progressively complex, particularly with bigger class sizes, necessitating the coordination of multiple simultaneous projects. Educators face challenges providing appropriate scaffolding, balancing student autonomy with sufficient support, and integrating technology as a cognitive tool, especially when students have inconsistent access to necessary resources. Assessment is a critical issue, as instructors strive to develop evaluations that accurately reflect student effort and learning outcomes while ensuring fairness and alignment with project objectives. These issues underscore the complexities of effectively implementing PBL, notwithstanding its capacity to improve student engagement and learning.

2.3 Previous studies

This section examines prior research about the application of PBL in EFL grammar instruction, emphasizing university teachers' viewpoints, efficacy, obstacles, and prospects.

Beckett (2006) provides a historical and theoretical analysis of project-based second- and foreign-language instruction. The chapter examines the evolution of PBL in language instruction and its impact on the development of linguistic competencies. Beckett discusses educators' perspectives on the advantages and disadvantages of PBL, noting its potential to enhance student motivation and facilitate practical language applications, while also acknowledging the challenges it poses for classroom management and student assessment. These insights are relevant for understanding how university EFL instructors perceive and implement PBL in grammar instruction.

Beckett and Slater (2005) introduce the Project Framework, emphasizing a combination of language, content, and abilities. Their research examines how PBL facilitates comprehensive language acquisition, including grammar, through meaningful tasks. The study investigates educators' perspectives on the feasibility and effectiveness of PBL, as well as time constraints and curriculum alignment—issues relevant to university EFL instructors who use PBL in grammarinstruction.

Bell (2010) examines PBL as a method for conveying 21st-century competencies in educational settings. The article discusses teacher perceptions of PBL as an effective method for engaging students and facilitating profound learning, including in the context of grammar instruction. Bell discusses issues such as the need for teacher training and the lack of resources, providing a foundation for evaluating the efficacy of PBL and the tangible challenges it may pose in EFL grammatical contexts.

Fragoulis (2009) investigates the application of PBL in teaching English as a foreign language in Greek elementary schools. The study indicates that educators encounter both positive and negative aspects, such as increased student engagement and challenges in classroom management. Although the contexts differ, these findings reveal potential similarities in university settings, particularly regarding teachers' perspectives and the implementation of PBL in grammar education.

Guo et al. (2020) examine project-based learning approaches in China, highlighting the experiences of both teachers and students in language classes. The study highlights positive perceptions of PBL's efficacy in promoting language development, especially grammar, while also recognizing problems, such as insufficient training and evaluation issues. These observations are directly related to university EFL teachers' perceptions of PBL's efficacy and the challenges and opportunities that arise when implementing it in grammar instruction.

Kokotsaki et al. (2016) provide a comprehensive literature review of Project-Based Learning (PBL), summarizing findings on its impact on student learning and teacher experience. The review outlines both positive perspectives (e.g., enhanced motivation and deeper comprehension) and significant challenges (e.g., time constraints, resource limitations, and assessment) faced by educators. These themes pertain to grammar instruction in university EFL courses and affect both the perceived effectiveness and the practical difficulties of PBL.

Larmer and Mergendoller (2010) identify seven essential components for the efficient implementation of PBL, emphasizing the importance of teacher responsibilities and instructional design. The article discusses instructors' perceptions of PBL as a means to

promote active learning, including grammar instruction. It also addresses challenges such as planning difficulties and the extent of assistance required, which may be beneficial for university educators employing grammar-focused project-based learning.

Markham et al. (2003) present a practical framework for PBL in educational settings, including strategies for integrating language and content knowledge. The guidebook discusses teacher perceptions of how PBL influences the acquisition of various abilities, such as grammar, and addresses prevalent challenges encountered during its implementation, including alignment with curriculum goals and assessment criteria. These findings are relevant for understanding university EFL instructors' perspectives on PBL in grammar education.

Stoller (2006) establishes the foundation for PBL in the instruction of second and foreign languages by examining its efficacy in facilitating language acquisition, including grammar comprehension. The chapter discusses teachers' perceptions of PBL and emphasizes the importance of careful planning and development. It also addresses challenges that university EFL instructors in grammar-focused project-based learning may encounter, such as integrating project objectives with language goals.

Thomas (2000) analyzes research on project-based learning, highlighting its influence across many educational contexts. The paper presents teachers' views on the benefits of Project-Based Learning (PBL), such as its capacity to enhance student engagement and facilitate deeper learning, as well as its drawbacks, including challenges in student assessment and classroom management. These broad patterns provide a foundation for analyzing how university EFL educators perceive and address the opportunities and challenges associated with the introduction of PBL in grammar instruction.

3.0 Methodology

This research employed a qualitative methodology, utilizing semi-structured interviews as the principal data collection technique. The study involved six educators, each from a distinct English department at four universities in the Duhok Governorate: Cihan University-Duhok and Nawroz University (private universities), and the University of Duhok and the University of Zakho (public universities). All designated instructors conducted grammar lessons during which their students participated in Project-Based Learning (PBL) activities for two weeks, while the instructors were monitored.

3.1 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each educator to obtain comprehensive insights into their observations and experiences concerning students' involvement and learning outcomes throughout PBL projects. The interviews facilitated the examination of novel concerns while adhering to predetermined questions pertinent to the research objectives.

All interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim to guarantee precision. To verify the accuracy and dependability of the transcriptions, the documents were sent to the

interviewed teachers for member checking. Educators were asked to examine the transcripts and offer revisions or comments to improve clarity or correct any inaccuracies.

We utilized theme analysis to scrutinize the transcribed material, adhering to four essential steps:

1. Familiarization: Conducting several readings of the transcripts to understand the data fully.
2. Coding: Methodically encoding relevant claims and patterns related to the research questions.
3. Theme Development: Systematically categorizing codes into theme groups and examining these categories in relation to the coded excerpts and the comprehensive data set.
4. Review and Refinement: Improving topics for clarity and uniqueness, followed by thorough analysis and interpretation.

This meticulous approach ensured that the data were systematically assessed, leading to the identification of prominent themes demonstrating educators' application of PBL in grammar courses at both private and public universities in the Duhok Governorate.

4.0 Findings

This section delineates our findings derived from the examination of the interview data. It highlights educators' fundamental concerns and perspectives on the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL). The interview transcripts were rigorously reviewed and coded using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and salient themes. The analysis was guided by the research questions and aimed to provide comprehensive insights into the facilitators and obstacles educators face when using PBL methodologies.

To enhance the rigor and accuracy of our qualitative analysis, we utilized the NVivo software program for coding and theme identification. NVivo is a widely recognized qualitative data analysis tool designed to facilitate the organization, coding, and interpretation of unstructured data such as interview transcripts, open-ended survey responses, and field notes (Edwards-Jones, 2014). Its advanced features allow researchers to systematically manage large volumes of qualitative data, ensuring that patterns and themes are identified with a high degree of reliability (Zamawe, 2015). NVivo supports transparency and replicability in qualitative research, making it well-suited for thematic analysis in educational studies.

The chosen subjects offer comprehensive insights into the difficulties educators face, including their perspectives on PBL, strategies to enhance student engagement, and obstacles related to classroom management, evaluation, and resource accessibility. Quotations from participants clarify and support each identified issue, showcasing the diverse opinions and approaches of various instructors. Key concepts extracted from the interview data are elucidated in the following subsections.

Table 4 presents an overview of the main themes identified through the analysis. The subsequent paragraphs elaborate on each theme in detail, providing further explanation and supporting evidence from the interview data.

Table 4 NVivo Coding and Thematic Analysis of Teachers' Interviews on PBL in EFL Grammar Instruction

In Vivo Code (Participant Quote)	Initial Code	Sub-Theme	Main Theme	Interpretation
"I had no idea what this kind of learning was before observing the method." (T3)	No prior knowledge	Limited familiarity	Teachers' Prior Understanding of PBL	Teachers entered the study with minimal exposure to PBL, indicating a knowledge gap.
"I'd like to learn more… I can apply it in my lectures." (T6)	Desire to learn	Openness to innovation	Attitudes toward PBL	Despite limited knowledge, teachers showed willingness to adopt new pedagogy.
"I felt excited and happy about it." (T1)	Excitement	Positive anticipation	Initial Reactions to PBL	Initial emotional responses were largely positive and motivational.
"I was curious, but also worried… hard to manage." (T5)	Mixed feelings	Concern about management	Anticipation with concern	Teachers anticipated benefits but feared classroom management issues.
"They were more engaged than just listening." (T1)	Increased engagement	Active participation	Student Engagement & Motivation	PBL promoted active learning compared to traditional methods.
"Some students were very positive… others were not." (T2)	Uneven response	Individual differences	Student Response Variation	Learner readiness influenced engagement levels.
"Some shy students opened up." (T5)	Student empowerment	Confidence building	Changes in Participation	PBL enabled quieter students to participate more actively.
"The whole group depends on one student." (T3)	Unequal contribution	Group imbalance	Group Dynamics Challenges	Collaboration issues emerged due to unequal participation.
"Time consuming… too many students." (T4)	Time pressure	Class size issues	Implementation Challenges	Structural constraints hindered effective PBL application.
"Syntax is very heavy… difficult book." (T3)	Content difficulty	Topic complexity	Pedagogical Constraints	Not all grammar topics were suitable for PBL.
"I felt like a guide, not a teacher." (T1)	Facilitator role	Role shift	Teacher Role Transformation	PBL redefined teachers' roles toward facilitation.
"Students were exploring and discovering." (T1)	Active discovery	Deep learning	Effectiveness of PBL	Learning through discovery enhanced grammar understanding.
"Finding time to plan	Planning	Preparation	Barriers to Regular	High preparation

In Vivo Code (Participant Quote)	Initial Code	Sub-Theme	Main Theme	Interpretation
projects." (T1)	workload	burden	Use	demands limited frequent use.
"We need training for teachers." (T2)	Need for training	Professional development	Institutional Support Needs	Successful PBL requires structured training programs.
"I would definitely use this." (T1)	Future adoption	Willingness to implement	Interest in Future Use	Positive experiences increased intention to reuse PBL.

4.1 Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences with Project-Based Learning (PBL) in Grammar Instruction

4.1.1 Teachers' Prior Understanding of PBL

Theme 1: Familiarity and Prior Knowledge

Many teachers began with only superficial or limited knowledge of PBL. Their understanding often originated from general impressions or brief exposures, rather than hands-on experience. Teacher 1 explained, "Before observing this method, I thought project-based learning was a way for students to learn by working on real projects. Moreover, it seemed like a fun and hands-on approach to learning." Others, like Teacher 2 and Teacher 3, acknowledged, "My understanding of project-based learning was not very good… I have only heard about it before," and "Honestly, I had no idea what this kind of learning was before observing the method," respectively. This limited familiarity created an initial uncertainty regarding the approach's practical classroom application.

Theme 2: Attitudes Toward PBL

Despite knowledge gaps, teachers' attitudes were generally open and curious. Teacher 6 expressed an eagerness for professional growth: "I'd like to learn more, honestly, all the details about it, because, like, as a main concept, I get it. But still, I want to learn more after knowing this. I can apply it in my lectures." Similarly, Teacher 5 described their early view as "just group-working" but remained open to learning more. This curiosity set the stage for receptivity to innovation.

Theme 3: Perceived Purpose and Application

Some teachers associated PBL with collaborative, real-world learning, seeing potential to enhance language use in authentic contexts. Teacher 4 noted, "Through this method, they'll be familiar with the topic in real-world situation, which is very useful, and will help them increase their level of English language."

4.1.2 Initial Thoughts on Implementing PBL

Theme 1: Excitement and Anticipation

Teachers largely expressed positive anticipation toward the implementation of PBL. Teacher 1 remarked, "I felt excited and I was happy about it. I thought it would be a great way for students to learn and to work together in teamwork and I think it succeeded as well." Teacher

2 viewed it as "a very new experience for me and my students," highlighting the novelty and potential benefits.

Theme 2: Curiosity Mixed with Concern

Despite excitement, some teachers were apprehensive about classroom management, especially with larger groups. Teacher 5 reflected, "I was curious, but also worried at the same time, because I thought it might be hard to manage, honestly. I thought it would be hard, since I have too many students."

Theme 3: Expectations About Student Engagement

There was a common expectation that students would take on more responsibility for their learning. Teacher 6 anticipated, "My thoughts that the students will prepare and present the presentation. They will be presenters for the next lecture."

4.1.3 Student Response Compared to Usual Methods

Theme 1: Increased Engagement and Motivation

Teachers unanimously noted heightened engagement and motivation among students participating in PBL. Teacher 1 observed, "Very positive. They changed a lot. They were all very motivated. And they were more engaged than just listening to what I was explaining." Teacher 5 stated, "They seemed active, interested…more active from the traditional way."

Theme 2: Individual Variation in Response

However, teachers also reported that some students struggled to adapt, especially those less accustomed to active participation. Teacher 2 noted, "Some students were very positive...others were not very active...since it was the first experience." Teacher 3 echoed, "Some of the students who are clever, who are active, they liked it, and some other...were a little bit bored."

4.1.4 Changes in Student Engagement, Participation, or Motivation

Theme 1: Positive Change in Engagement and Participation

All teachers described a marked shift toward greater participation. Teacher 1 stated, "The students were more engaged. They had a lot of participation. They increased all of that during their projects." Teacher 2 linked this change to the student-centered nature of PBL.

Theme 2: Challenges in Group Dynamics

Some teachers noted challenges with group work, particularly uneven contribution. Teacher 3 explained, "Usually the whole group depends on one, depends on one, or only two students. This makes this kind of learning...more complicated."

Theme 3: Empowerment of Shy Students

PBL appeared to empower traditionally quiet students. Teacher 5 remarked, "Some of the shy students, they opened up…they had more freedom…as a group, they have more chance to spell it out, or to share their ideas."

4.1.5 Motivation and Disengagement Factors

Theme 1: Teamwork Skills

A lack of teamwork skills was a notable barrier for some students. Teacher 1 commented, "Some of them did not have the skills to work in a team, lack of collaboration...It was not the project."

Theme 2: Pre-existing Student Characteristics

Higher-achieving or more independent students were often more motivated. Teacher 2 observed, "Students were very motivated, especially the ones who are more independent, and could do the word alone." Teacher 4 added that "those with high English level…were very, very motivated."

Theme 3: External Circumstances

A small number of students disengaged due to external pressures. Teacher 6 noted, "One, two students or presenter were not engaged maybe because...they have exams they had to prepare themselves for the other classes."

4.1.6 Student Interaction and Collaboration

Theme 1: Effective Cooperation and Peer Support

Collaboration was generally effective, with students using various means to support one another. Teacher 1 described, "Most of them interacted very well. They shared ideas…made these group chats on social media to communicate…" Teacher 5 agreed, "From their presentation, it was obvious that they worked all together very well, and they shared ideas."

Theme 2: Reliance on Key Members

Groups sometimes relied heavily on a few top performers. Teacher 3 noted, "They were depending on only one student, and mostly the top student."

4.1.7 Challenges Observed During PBL

Theme 1: Time Management

Managing project timelines was a universal challenge, exacerbated by large class sizes. Teacher 1 explained, "We have a lot of students in one group…if we would count down the groups in less members, I think it would be better."

Theme 2: Language and Content Difficulty

Some students struggled with the complexity of grammar and academic resources. Teacher 3 remarked, "Syntax is very heavy...the book we are teaching is a very, very difficult book...it might be maybe a little bit above them."

Theme 3: Adapting to a New Approach

Introducing PBL was difficult for students unfamiliar with non-traditional methods. Teacher 4 observed, "This is the first time for them doing a project-based learning. So at the beginning, they faced challenges because they had to search for this process, for this method."

4.1.8 Teacher's Role During PBL

Theme 1: Shift from Lecturer to Facilitator

Teachers described a clear transition from direct instruction to facilitation. Teacher 1 said, "I did not feel like a teacher. I more feel like a guide. I was guiding them through whatever project they did." Teacher 2 echoed, "I was only a kind of guider…I gave them feedback when I could see any mistakes."

Theme 2: Student-Centered Approach

Several teachers highlighted the move toward student autonomy. Teacher 6 stated, "My role was a facilitator or instructor only giving them instruction and all the focus is on the student-centered classroom."

4.1.9 Effectiveness of PBL for Grammar

Theme 1: Enhanced Understanding through Active Engagement

Teachers widely believed PBL led to a better understanding of grammar. Teacher 1 commented, "It helps students understand grammar more because…they were exploring and going after it, discovering new things. It's more engaging than just sitting there and listening." Teacher 5 observed, "They used grammar in real tasks...it's one of the best way to control the grammar."

Theme 2: Variable Outcomes by Student and Topic

The effectiveness of PBL was found to vary, depending on student ability and topic complexity. Teacher 2 remarked, "There are students who are…very good in English and could understand the subject matter very well, and there are some other students who depend on grammatical structures."

4.1.10 Positive Aspects of PBL in Grammar Class

Theme 1: Engagement and Preparation

Teachers praised the increased engagement, creativity, and preparedness that PBL brought. Teacher 1 linked it to "student engagement, teamwork, the creativity and the way that they enjoyed learning in a different way." Teacher 3 believed students were "well prepared…anything is mentioned inside the class is going to be as if it is just a revision to them."

Theme 2: Real-World Skills and Learner Autonomy

Teachers felt PBL fostered real-world learning and autonomy. Teacher 6 highlighted the value of "students…looking for the information. They were searching whether googling or looking for further resources."

4.1.11 Challenges to Regular Implementation

Theme 1: Time Constraints

Time and workload were the most frequently cited barriers. Teacher 1 stated, "Finding time to plan projects…can take more time than just going and teaching there." Teacher 4 added, "Time consuming…a great number of students in class, this needs a lot of time."

Theme 2: Curriculum and Class Size

Teachers found it difficult to adapt PBL to large classes and to fit all curricular requirements. Teacher 2 noted, "The teacher…cannot cover all the materials…since this method needs…more than two lectures to cover one subject."

Theme 3: Topic Suitability

Certain grammar topics were seen as less compatible with PBL. Teacher 3 explained, "One of the challenges…is how difficult the grammar lessons are…the level of the difficulty."

4.1.12 Feasibility of PBL in the Local Context

Theme 1: Feasibility with Support

Most teachers believed PBL could work if conditions were favorable. Teacher 1 was optimistic: "Yes, it is feasible in my context because it makes learning enjoyable…you can make a change wherever you want." Teacher 6 agreed: "This strategy can be used in our context because grammar subjects are not difficult for students."

Theme 2: Conditional on Institutional Support

However, success was seen as dependent on departmental and institutional backing. Teacher 5 stated, "If we have a time support from the department…we can apply it in a better way." Teacher 2 advised selective use: "This method is feasible...but...cannot be used in all grammar lessons, because of the language."

4.1.13 Interest in Future Use of PBL

Theme 1: Willingness to Adopt PBL

All teachers expressed interest in further use. Teacher 1 said, "I would definitely use this." Teacher 3 would "implement it…not fully," suggesting a blended approach.

Theme 2: Interest Tied to Student Outcomes

Motivation stemmed from observed student benefits. Teacher 6 concluded, "I will be interested in using it...because I found that students are engaged and they are motivated."

4.1.14 Support and Training Needed

Theme 1: Professional Development

Teachers consistently identified a need for training. Teacher 1 advocated for "more training on how to plan the projects and manage the groups." Teacher 2 emphasized, "There should be trainings for the teachers…for any new…methods or approach of teaching."

Theme 2: Institutional Support

Teachers also requested department and administrative backing. Teacher 4 stated, "I would need the curriculum to be more helpful to give us more time to apply this method and not to rush the teachers…" Teacher 5 added, "Support, yes, from the department…some workshop, I think, for example."

4.1.15 Overall Experience and Additional Reflections

Theme 1: Positive Impact on Students

Teachers valued the students' excitement and initiative. Teacher 1 said, “I enjoyed seeing my students being excited about it and actually doing something because this is the weakest group in our department.”

Theme 2: Teacher Growth and Balance

Reflecting on their practice, some teachers noted increased professional satisfaction and a better balance of classroom responsibilities. Teacher 3 shared, “Now I know how to make a balance…between things that we share with the students.”

Theme 3: Desire for Continued Learning

A clear desire for ongoing professional development. Teacher 5 commented, “I'd like to learn more, honestly, all the details about it...even though we are using different methods…”

Theme 4: Ongoing Challenges

Time remained a practical challenge. Teacher 6 observed, “One challenge is that it was time consuming because not all the students have found the time to present their presentation. That was one of the problems.”

5. Discussion

This study examined university EFL teachers' experiences and perceptions of PBL in grammar education, particularly among those unfamiliar with the methodology. Two key questions guided the research:

1. **How do university EFL teachers perceive the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in grammar instruction?**
2. **What challenges and opportunities do university EFL teachers encounter when implementing PBL in grammar lessons?**

The following discussion integrates the study's findings concerning these research topics and locates them within the wider literature.

The analysis of the interviews indicates that teachers held predominantly favorable perceptions of PBL's efficacy in grammar instruction, despite their initial unfamiliarity with the approach. In accordance with previous studies (Thomas, 2000; Bell, 2010; Beckett & Slater, 2005), educators noted that Project-Based Learning (PBL) enhanced student engagement, motivation, and participation. The hands-on, student-centered approach fostered profound and significant understanding. As one teacher noted, “It helps students understand grammar more because…they were exploring and going after it, discovering new things. It is more engaging than just sitting there and listening” (Teacher 1).

Teachers indicated that Project-Based Learning (PBL) promoted autonomy and creativity and enhanced preparation, corroborating the conclusions of Stoller (2006) and Beckett (2006) about the advantages of active, collaborative learning in language education. The method was especially advantageous for timid or disengaged students, who developed confidence via collaborative effort.

Nonetheless, the efficacy of PBL varied among different learners and subjects. Teachers observed that students with strong English proficiency transitioned more easily, but those with weaker proficiency or limited collaboration skills occasionally had difficulties—a trend also noted by Fragoulis (2009) and Guo et al. (2020). Moreover, intricate grammar topics were occasionally better suited to project-based learning, underscoring the need for careful topic selection and scaffolding.

Teachers highlighted the benefits of Project-Based Learning (PBL), such as increased teamwork, enhanced critical thinking, and the cultivation of practical communication skills (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010). The transition from a teacher-centered approach to a facilitator role was seen as empowering for students and teachers alike, promoting a more collaborative and dynamic classroom atmosphere.
The predominant problem identified was time management, especially in extensive classes or under inflexible curricular frameworks, as evidenced by the research of Markham et al. (2003) and Kokotsaki et al. (2016). Educators faced challenges dedicating sufficient time to project design, implementation, and evaluation due to the curriculum's demands. Overseeing group dynamics and guaranteeing fair participation presented further obstacles, consistent with earlier findings in the PBL research (Stoller, 2006).

A constant topic was the necessity for professional advancement and institutional backing. Teachers frequently sought specialized training and administrative support to incorporate Project-Based Learning (PBL) into their instruction, a suggestion also endorsed by Bell (2010) and Thomas (2000).

The findings directly align with the study's objective by elucidating how EFL teachers understand and respond to PBL within the framework of grammar education, especially when they are initially unfamiliar with the method. The transformation in educators' perceptions—from initial doubt to a sophisticated understanding of both the advantages and disadvantages—demonstrates the significance of exposure, reflection, and institutional support. This observation corresponds with extensive literature advocating for continuous professional development and flexible teaching methodologies (Kokotsaki et al., 2016; Beckett & Slater, 2005).

Based on these results, several key implications arise:

- Institutions should invest in robust professional development programs focused on PBL principles, classroom management, and assessment strategies (Bell, 2010).
- Curriculum designers and educational leaders should consider adjusting class sizes, schedules, and assessment frameworks to accommodate the time-intensive nature of project-based work (Thomas, 2000; Stoller, 2006).
- Creating a collaborative culture among teachers can facilitate sharing of resources, reflection on practice, and adaptation of PBL to diverse contexts (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010).

6. Conclusion

This study substantially enhances the discussion on PBL by analyzing its integration into university-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) grammar instruction. The findings demonstrate that effective PBL implementation markedly enhances student engagement, motivation, and understanding of grammatical concepts. Participants asserted that PBL fostered collaborative learning, enhanced critical thinking, and allowed students to apply their grammatical knowledge in authentic, real-world contexts—benefits that are sometimes difficult to achieve through traditional lecture-based methods.

Despite these advantages, applying PBL in this educational context poses specific challenges. The research highlights several enduring problems, such as the substantial time required for planning and execution, the intricacies of coordinating collective efforts, and the imperative for institutional support and professional development. The balance between student autonomy and equitable participation requires ongoing attention. These findings highlight the necessity for a robust institutional structure, sufficient training opportunities, and access to suitable resources for both instructors and students.

The results indicate that PBL substantially improves EFL grammar education at the university level. Resolving implementation challenges can enhance its collaborative and interactive features, leading to more meaningful language-learning experiences. Educational institutions are encouraged to support professional development initiatives and cultivate an environment that enables teachers to explore novel pedagogical methods such as Project-Based Learning (PBL). Moreover, continuous research is essential to investigate long-term consequences and develop strategies to mitigate the concerns identified in this study. By acknowledging the advantages and challenges of project-based learning, educators and institutions can create more effective, engaging, and student-centered approaches to language instruction, thereby promoting students' linguistic proficiency and lifelong learning skills.

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