

DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE VIA PROJECT-BASED LEARNING IN ENGLISH EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Developing speaking skills remains one of the most challenging aspects of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). Traditional teacher-centred methods often fail to provide sufficient opportunities for authentic communication and interaction. This paper explores the effectiveness of project-based learning (PBL) as an innovative approach to enhancing learners' speaking abilities in English classrooms. The study highlights how PBL encourages meaningful language use, collaboration, creativity, and learner autonomy, leading to improved fluency and communicative confidence among students.

Introduction

Language education has undergone a major shift from traditional teacher-centred instruction to student-oriented pedagogies. Among modern innovations, Project-Based Learning (PBL) has received increasing recognition for promoting creativity, communication, and collaboration in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. While conventional grammar-based lessons often focus on accuracy, PBL encourages fluency and interaction through practical, real-life tasks. This study aims to investigate the role of PBL in developing students' speaking competence and to identify the pedagogical benefits and challenges associated with its implementation.

Literature Review

Researchers such as Richards (2008) and Nunan (2015) emphasise that communicative competence develops best in meaningful contexts where students engage in authentic use of language. PBL creates these contexts by integrating speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills through project work. Thomas (2000) defines PBL as a student-driven approach that engages learners in exploring complex problems and producing tangible outcomes. According to Beckett (2002) and Stoller (2006), PBL enhances motivation, reduces anxiety, and improves oral proficiency. Furthermore, Canale and Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence—comprising grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic components—illustrates how project-based tasks can foster holistic language development.

Methodology

This study was carried out with 20 intermediate-level students enrolled in an English communication course. Over six weeks, learners worked in small groups on a project titled "Our Ideal School." The process included brainstorming, planning, discussion, and a final

presentation. Students used English to negotiate ideas, assign roles, and prepare materials. Data were collected through classroom observation, student reflection journals, and oral performance assessments before and after the project. Evaluation criteria included fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary range, and grammatical accuracy.

Results and Discussion

The results demonstrated that students' speaking fluency and confidence improved considerably. Quantitative analysis revealed an average 20% increase in fluency scores, while qualitative data showed enhanced motivation and reduced anxiety. Students expressed that PBL helped them speak more naturally and spontaneously. Teachers also noted more active participation, clearer pronunciation, and greater peer interaction. However, challenges such as unequal contribution, limited time, and difficulties in assessing group work were also reported. Despite these issues, the findings support previous research suggesting that PBL significantly enhances communicative competence.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Project-Based Learning is an effective approach to developing communicative competence in EFL classrooms. By shifting the focus from mechanical repetition to purposeful communication, it fosters learner autonomy and creativity. Students not only improve their speaking proficiency but also acquire essential 21st-century skills such as collaboration and critical thinking. Teachers are encouraged to integrate PBL gradually, adapting projects to learners' proficiency levels and available time. Future studies could explore the long-term impacts of PBL and its application in blended and online learning environments.

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