

A Teacher's Reflection on the Implementation of Project-Based Learning to Enhance Speaking Skills in Grade 6 Elementary Students

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Abstract

This qualitative case study investigates the reflective practices of an English teacher with 20 years of experience, focusing on her use of project-based learning (PjBL) to enhance students' speaking skills in grade 6 elementary students. The study centers on a single participant, exploring her insights and strategies through in-depth semi-structured interviews complemented by analysis of her daily reflective journals. These methodologies provide a comprehensive view of her ongoing pedagogical adaptations and the personal reflections shaping her teaching approach. The main objective is to assess the effectiveness of reflective practices in implementing PjBL within English language classrooms, particularly in terms of improving students' speaking skills at grade 6 students. Second, how the PjBL can enhance speaking skills. The findings showed that reflective practice during PjBL implementation was effective to know students' engagement, the increasing of critical thinking and creativity, teacher's feedback and challenges and solutions. It was also found that PjBL can promote speaking skills through the authentic communication among the members and collaborative works, increasing vocabularies related to the project topics, and sufficient chance to boost confidence to practice speaking.

Keywords: Elementary, PjBL, speaking skill, teacher's reflection

Introduction

Teacher's reflection has become important since it enables teachers to monitor and improve their teaching practices and update the educational progress (Orakci 2021; Moreno et al., 2021; Grushka et al, 2013). It portrays a personal growth to explore and solve the problems of classroom practice (Grushka, et al, 2013). Schön (1983) emphasizes that doing reflection is a dynamic and integral part of professional development in education. Furthermore, reflection serves as a link between the practical teaching experiences to integrate approaches in education. Again, Moreno et al (2021) consider reflection as adaptation to educational reforms, contemporary educational needs, and a tool for professional development.

Reflective practice is defined as cycles which consist of examining, adjusting, and reflecting upon teaching practice that functions as a bridge of theory and practice to adjust teaching strategies (Grushka et al., 2013; and Moreno et al., 2021). It is beneficials to teaching strategies, fulfilling students' needs, and enhancing teachers' efficacy. As supported by Oktama et al. (2023) who defines reflective practice as an activity to shape a teacher's process and knowledge in enhancing teaching effectiveness. It is also to identify a

teacher's strengths and weaknesses and to foster critical thinking beyond routine teaching ideas. Walida & Murtafi'ah (2022) say that the reflective practice process of gaining insight from the classroom practices. It is done to minimize problems which may be encountered in the classroom.

Project-based learning (PjBL) is one of recommended methods that can promote speaking skills to engage learners in communication, enhancing students' fluency, vocabulary development, pronunciation, grammar, and comprehension (Latifah et al., 2019; Siminto 2024). Early acquisition of speaking proficiency is particularly important for elementary students, as it lays the foundation for advanced language learning and effective communication in future educational and professional pursuits (Ellis, 2008). Indonesia launched the Emancipated curriculum since 2022. The new issue in this curriculum is the Project to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students (P5) as issued in the letter No.56/M/2022. It means that the ministry of education mandates that the project based method must be implemented through curriculum to achieve the Pancasila profile characters. Project-based learning (PjBL) is defined as an approach of inquiry in responding to complex questions, problems, and critical thinking that result from output such as product, publication or presentation (Latifah et al., 2019; Riswandi, 2018). Student centered activities, collaborative works become the main features of PjBL (Siminto, 2024).

Reflective practice within the framework of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is crucial, particularly in the context of enhancing speaking skills in language learning. The process of reflection in PjBL allows educators and students to continuously evaluate and adapt their approaches to teaching and learning, ensuring that speaking skills are effectively developed through real-world applications and collaborative projects. Reflective practice helps identify successful strategies and areas needing improvement, enabling tailored instructional methods that cater to the diverse needs of students. This ongoing evaluation not only enhances teaching efficacy but also deepens students' learning experiences, thereby improving their ability to communicate effectively in varied contexts. As highlighted by Riswandi (2018), reflection in PjBL fosters a deeper understanding of the material, encourages critical thinking, and supports the development of communication skills, all of which are integral to mastering a language.

Although teacher's reflection is important and gives benefits in the teaching of English, many educators still face significant challenges in consistently integrating these practices into their daily teaching routines. It is suggested that while reflection is known to enhance pedagogical effectiveness and adaptability, the implementation among teachers varies widely (Oktama et al., 2023). The main reasons are due to a lack of time, heavy teaching loads, less training on effective reflection methods, and the perceived complexity of integrating reflective practices with existing curricular demands (Riswandi, 2018; Siminto et al., 2024). Consequently, there is a significant discrepancy between the expected improvements that reflective practices promise in academic development and the reality in classroom settings.

The main objective of the study is to explore the effectiveness of English teacher's reflective practices when implementing the PjBL method in English language classrooms for grade 6 elementary students. Second, how the PjBL can enhance speaking skills. While previous research has established the effectiveness of PjBL in enhancing various student

skills and the critical role of teacher reflection in educational settings (Riswandi, 2018; Latifah et al., 2019), this study explores the interplay between these two domains. It uniquely investigates how teachers' reflections on their PjBL practices influence the outcomes of speaking skill acquisition among students. This reflection includes adapting PjBL strategies to better meet learning objectives, which has not been extensively explored in prior studies focused solely on student outcomes (Riswandi, 2018; Latifah et al., 2019).

Methodology

This research applied a qualitative case study approach aiming at the English teacher's reflection on the PjBL to promote speaking skills for the sixth grader of elementary school. The case study method involves examining an event in depth rather than breadth (Wellington, 2000). In achieving the objective, a purposive sampling method was used to select a participant, an elementary English teacher with a 20-year tenure dedicated to continuously refining her teaching methods who works in a private elementary school in Sleman.

Data collection was meticulously conducted through a semi-structured interview and diary teacher's reflection notes to delve into the reflective practices in exploring her insights and strategies for employing PjBL to enhance students' speaking abilities of grade 6 students in a private elementary school in Sleman. Research data were collected through face-to-face interviews with the participant. The interview was conducted by the author of the study. An agreement was reached on the place and time of the meeting with the participant before the interview. The interview was voluntarily done and recorded on November 25th, 2024. The questions asked to teachers in the study have been proofread by peer review and are as follows:

1. What were your initial thoughts on using project-based learning (PjBL) in EFL classroom, and how have your views changed after implementation?
2. How do you observe student engagement and effectiveness during PjBL activities?
3. What challenges have you encountered while integrating PBL into your teaching, and how have you addressed these challenges?
4. How do you assess student performance in PBL activities, particularly in relation to speaking skills?
5. Based on your experience, how do you see the future of PBL in EFL teaching? What changes or improvements would you consider essential for its continued effectiveness?

The qualitative data was obtained from open-ended questions. The responses were first transcribed and organized. Next, the responses were identified and categorized into themes and patterns. This data analysis gave researchers information about the participants' experiences, opinions, and attitudes in detail. The qualitative analysis provides rich, contextualized insights that complement quantitative data, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic and the underlying reasons behind the participants' perspectives (Creswell, 2018).

Results and Discussion

1. A teacher's Reflection on PjBL to enhance Speaking Skills Effective

The results of interviews and teacher's diary on teaching reflection are analyzed to answer question how is a teacher's reflection on PjBL to enhance speaking skills effective. The findings of the reflections will be thematically explained as follows:

Promoted Students' Engagement and Participation

Based on the consistent diary on the reflection, it is found that PjBL activities can enhance students' engagement and participation. As on the notes: “ 'As the project unfolds students' engagement has visibly improved. Today they participated more actively in discussions and project tasks' (Meeting-3). It is strengthened from the interview about the promotion of the engagement and participation. *“I don't want students to be confined to what is given in class but also to explore their abilities through projects”*. In short, project-based learning leads students to be more active in the projects and participate well. PjBL has been found to significantly boost student engagement and participation. It aligns with Aghayani (2024) in her reviewed studies indicating that PjBL positively affects language skills, fostering active learner involvement.

Improved in Collaborative Skills

The collaborative nature of PjBL enhances students' teamwork abilities. Cahyono et al. (2024) conducted a meta-analysis revealing that PjBL significantly improves EFL learners' writing skills, partly due to increased collaboration among students. This study finds that by implementing PjBL, students can enhance their collaborative skills within a team. Teachers observed that the collaborative nature of PBL helped students develop their teamwork skills. This is evident from repeated observations. The document of the teacher's reflection note due to the teamwork. The collaborative aspect of the projects has enhanced their work abilities with students taking more initiative and responsibility for their roles within the groups' (Meeting 4). Aligning with evidence from the interview, she highlighted the role of PjBL in fostering collaboration. She mentioned, “PjBL makes better coordination among the team and there is a clear division of tasks among students). It means that PjBL can promote collaboration among group members.

Developed Students' Critical Thinking and Creativity

As far as I concern, creativity and critical thinking are the 21st century important skills. Through the reflection note, PjBL gives a proof to improve students' critical thinking and creativity. “The PBL activities not only focused on speaking skills but also on improving writing skills and critical thinking. Teachers planned projects that required students to think critically and creatively.” (Meeting 6). Based on the interview, it is stated that “It is important for students' to have high order thinking skills and creative thinking in the learning process. PjBL helps to improve it”. It is supported by Shi et al. (2024) study, which found that PjBL enhances EFL learners' public speaking performance by promoting critical thinking and creativity.

Important of Teachers' Involvement and Feedback

To be successful in achieving the target during PjBL implementation, it is important to have teacher's involvement and feedback. Effective PjBL implementation requires active teacher involvement and timely feedback. Anderson (2024) emphasizes that teachers play a crucial role in facilitating PjBL by providing guidance and feedback, which helps students stay on track and enhances their learning outcomes. This study found that the purpose of this activity is to respond to students' progress and to prevent any other mistakes. “Feedback sessions have been crucial in this progress allowing students to

reflect on their work and receive constructive criticism' (Meetings 5). Besides, in the interview the respondent states that "PjBL will be effective if the teacher is not hands-off and actively checks on progress." It indicates that the teacher should actively observe the PjBL progress to make sure that the students' steps are on the right track.

Challenge and Solutions in Implementing PjBL

In doing such a project, of course some challenges appeared within the process. It is the collaboration of both the teacher and students to identify the problems and find the solutions. The reflection note written: "Initial reflections before the PBL implementation highlighted challenges such as low student engagement and declining writing skills, which the teachers aimed to address through carefully planned projects." It was found that there were two problems, namely low student' engagement and poor writing skills. To solve the problems, the participant said that the timeline as prepared before should be strictly followed. "The challenges such as the need for a consistent timeline and the importance of teacher support to overcome obstacles. The extended time required and the necessity of adhering to a strict timeline for PBL to be effective." One study supports this statement. Benlaghrissi and Ouahidi (2024) highlight the necessity of adhering to a strict timeline and the importance of teacher support to overcome obstacles in PjBL implementation.

To sum up, the teacher's reflection was absolutely important and effective to be implemented in daily teacher's activities. Reflection in PBL enables educators and students to regularly analyze and change their teaching and learning methodologies, ensuring that speaking skills are effectively developed through real-world applications and collaborative projects. Reflective practice aids in the identification of effective solutions as well as areas for growth, allowing for individualized educational methods that address students' various requirements.

2. PjBL enhance Speaking Skills Effectively

The implementation of PjBL was observed by the participant to know whether the approach can enhance speaking skills. Reflecting on these experiences, she can identify key aspects that contribute to this improvement, as follows:

Authentic Communication Contexts

Project-based learning is designed in such a way to give a chance to all participants to communicate naturally with others. PjBL provides students with real-world scenarios where they need to actively use language, thereby enhancing their speaking skills. Therefore, PjBL provides students with a real-world where they can practice speaking skills. As stated "When students work on projects, they are often required to communicate their ideas, present their findings, and collaborate with peers, all of which involve a lot of speaking practice." This aligns with the findings of Latifah et al. (2019), who reported that students involved in PjBL improved fluency and confidence because of frequent communication during project activities.

Increased Student Collaboration

Team work in PjBL absolutely needs communication regularly among the members of the group to improve their speaking skills. As stated in the daily journal "Students work in groups, which necessitates regular communication. They have to discuss their ideas, negotiate roles, and solve problems together." (Meeting 4-5). PjBL requires students to engage in discussions, negotiations, and problem-solving. As highlighted by Shi et al.

(2024), this intensive collaboration builds speaking confidence and teaches students to articulate ideas coherently. This intensive interaction helps them practice speaking in a natural way. It also teaches them to listen actively and respond appropriately, which are essential components of effective communication. By working together, students gain confidence and improve their ability to articulate ideas clearly and coherently.

Exposure to New Vocabulary and Language Structures

Afandi et al. (2019) reveal that contextualized vocabulary practice enhances speaking accuracy and fluency. For instance, if students work on a project about environmental conservation, they acquire and apply topic-specific terms, which strengthens their ability to use new language structures effectively. PjBL activities lead students to acquire new vocabulary and structures related to the project's topics. The teacher explained in the interview "if the project is about environmental conservation, students will learn specific terms related to that topic. They use these new words in context, which aids retention and understanding." This practical application reinforces their learning rather than. Using language in context helps students grasp the meaning and usage of new terms, enhancing their speaking accuracy and fluency.

Public Speaking Opportunities and Boosting Confidence

Confidence is an important factor in creating communication. Through PjBL, students gradually build confidence by participating in various speaking activities, from group discussions to formal presentations. According to Zarei and Gilani (2015), EFL students gain confidence by participating in activities such as debates, presentations, and group discussions. Riswandi (2018) similarly noted that public speaking tasks help students overcome hesitation and improve articulation. This is reinforced by the findings of Lenz et al. (2015), who highlight that repetitive practice in a supportive environment gradually builds confidence, motivating students to communicate more openly and effectively. By giving presentations in front of other students and the teacher, students will be more confident by practicing many times. The interview result, "Students often start out hesitant, but as they engage more in projects and see their progress, their confidence grows. They become more willing to speak up and share their ideas."

Thus, the increase of the confidence and supportive environment will boost students to communicate effectively.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important for the teacher's reflection to know the effectiveness of daily teaching practices. The purpose of the reflection is to enable teachers and students to analyze teaching methods ensuring that speaking skills are effectively developed through real-world applications and collaborative projects. Analyzing the interview results and the teacher' daily journal, PjBL can improve speaking skills for grade 6 of elementary school and key themes such as authentic communication, collaborative work and enriching the vocabularies. By doing so, students will have a chance to talk more to increase their confidence. Finally, PjBL creates a dynamic and supportive learning environment that equips students with the necessary skills for effective communication both inside and outside the classroom.

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