

Benefits of Implementing Project-Based Learning in An English for Business Course

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Abstract: This paper reports on the benefits of Project-based learning (PBL) for the lecturer and the students in an English for Business course at a university in Vietnam. This qualitative study employs classroom observations of how the projects are carried out and interviews with five student representatives and the lecturer about the benefits of PBL. As most research focuses on how PBL develops learners' language and project-related knowledge, this paper points out positive effects provided by PBL for personal, professional, and notably social development, which has been understudied in current literature. The findings showed that although the development existed in all three areas, it happened with a considerable disparity in which social development was surprisingly regarded by the learners as highly valuable. Besides, the lecturer in this study pointed to the benefits gained in terms of motivation and discipline-based knowledge. Based on a wide range of benefits provided by PBL, the study provides recommendations for a better implementation of PBL in EFL/ESP education so that learners' successful experiences in their future careers can be further supported.

Keywords: Project-based learning, English for business, personal development, professional development, social development.

English language major has become highly favored at Vietnamese colleges as high school graduates usually associate English language proficiency with professional prospects (Pham, 2011). However, a huge number of Vietnamese college graduates do not appear to meet the English language and professional skills required for their intended professional areas (Nguyen & Pham, 2016). Therefore, numerous higher education institutions have included English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses to help learners advance English language proficiency and professional knowledge (Gaye, 2020; Irshad & Anwar, 2018; B. H. Nguyen et al., 2019; T. T. H. Nguyen & Pham, 2016).

The problem in these courses is that the traditional lecturing method is not appropriate as ESP courses require much interaction and numerous practical experiences to apply the learned knowledge in career-based situations (Billet et al., 2018; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Strevens, 1977). In response to that matter, it is essential to find appropriate teaching approaches that can develop learners' autonomy, learning motivation, experience, and knowledge of their intended professional fields. These features are what Project-based learning (PBL) is claimed to possess. This paper consequently reports on the implementation and benefits of PBL in an English for Business (EB) course for English-major students at a university in Southern Vietnam. The study highlights how PBL benefits both the students and the lecturer in their personal, professional, and social development. Accordingly, future pedagogical implications of PBL in EFL/ESP education are provided.

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Literature review

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Education in Vietnam

Strevens (1977) noted, “Special Purpose English teaching occurs whenever the content and aims of the teaching are determined by the requirements of the learner rather than by external factors” (p. 186). This definition is subsequently elaborated as the provision of knowledge of the English language for a specific professional area to equip learners to be able to use English to cope with situations that can occur in their intended professions (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Johnson, 1993; Rico et al., 2019). However, it should not be conceptualized that learners gain only the terminology of a particular discipline as an ideal ESP course serves the purpose of *learning for profession* referring to both English for further use in learners’ career paths and the transmission of specialized knowledge and skills in certain areas (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Nguyen et al., 2019). This view is supported by Johnson (1993), who stated that teaching Business English covers both language and the specialized knowledge necessary to understand how business terms are used for successful communication. However, these goals are also among the challenges in ESP education, which T. T. H. Nguyen and Pham (2016) have specifically highlighted in the case of ESP education in Vietnam.

T. T. H. Nguyen and Pham (2016) have pointed to the challenge regarding the linguistic and specialized knowledge of both teachers and learners in ESP courses. According to Johnson (1993), a word in General English can have another meaning in Business English, so a combination of linguistic and professional knowledge is necessary for ESP education to make sense of ESP content. However, many Vietnamese EFL learners are not ready for ESP courses because General English programs, which are seen as the foundation for further English courses, are insufficient to help learners cope with the content of ESP courses (T. T. H. Nguyen & Pham, 2016). Even teachers encounter challenges with discipline-based language and knowledge in ESP courses despite being well-trained in General English. An example of this is English for Nursing, in which educators need not only the English language but also an understanding of the Nursing discipline, patient consultation skills, or reading and writing health reports, which even a well-educated English teacher may not be well aware of (Basturkmen, 2010; Gaye, 2020; B. H. Nguyen et al., 2019; Tudor, 1997). This is a major disadvantage of EFL teachers in ESP courses.

Another obstacle that researchers in the ESP area have discussed is the method of teaching and learning. ESP courses prepare learners’ language and knowledge for their professional needs, so learners should be seen as the center of curriculum design and teaching and largely exposed to career-related settings to gain necessary skills and knowledge as well as use English for authentic communication (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Irshad & Anwar, 2018; Strevens, 1977). In contrast, English language learners in Vietnam are far more familiar with the traditional form of teacher-centered education than the learner-centered education where teachers are still seen as the master of knowledge, and learners are passive knowledge recipients (B. H. Nguyen et al., 2019; T. T. H. Nguyen & Pham, 2016).

Therefore, there is a need to look for teaching approaches that can help develop teachers’ and learners’ language proficiency and specialized knowledge, and learners’ active learning. When searching for different teaching approaches that can satisfy those demands in an ESP course, PBL appears to be relevant to the goals of ESP education. Therefore, the next section will discuss the principles of PBL and its usefulness in ESP courses.

Project-Based Learning in ESP Courses

Most discussions about the characteristics and goals of ESP education refer to the development of specialized knowledge and language proficiency under the learner-centered

principle, to which PBL is highly relevant (Basturkmen, 2010; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; T. T. H. Nguyen & Pham, 2016; Stoller & Myers, 2019; Tudor, 1997).

Projects in education are seen as opportunities for experiential learning where learners create knowledge through practical experiences for developing discipline-related language and knowledge (Billet et al., 2018; Cadwell et al., 2017; Fragoulis & Tsiplakides, 2009; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Puangpunsi, 2021; Sartika et al., 2022; Stoller & Myers, 2019). In other words, PBL is a form of knowledge construction where existing knowledge is utilized in building new experiences so that learners can form new understanding (Brown, 2015; Foss et al., 2007; Fragoulis & Tsiplakides, 2009; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Petersen & Nassaji, 2016; Stoller & Myers, 2019). Projects also contain a series of activities or tasks that are often in the form of problem-solving cases stimulating learners' higher-order thinking skills to complete the projects (Fragoulis & Tsiplakides, 2009; Nunn et al., 2016). If a project is undertaken in groups using communication, leadership, and cooperation skills, learners gain a sense of responsibility to complete the projects (Puangpunsi, 2021). Besides, projects are considered to motivate learners and increase their interests in learning (Stoller & Myers, 2019) as they are encouraged to decide the focus or specific topics as well as the way to undertake their projects. To illustrate, Stoller and Myers (2019) have conceptualized the cycle of PBL consisting of a *preparation stage* in which students make plans for their project including topic selection and possible tasks for completion, then an *information gathering stage* to acquire information and knowledge related to the project. However, students need to *process* the information and the knowledge that they currently obtain to identify how this information could be used and if further information is required. Students subsequently *display* the information and the projects in different modes and *reflect* on the knowledge and skills that they have gained when the projects have been completed (Stoller & Myers, 2019). Hence, projects which require teamwork, outside-classroom research, and autonomy are more interesting to learners than traditional lectures (Foss et al., 2007; Petersen & Nassaji, 2016; Puangpunsi, 2021).

It is possible that PBL as experiential learning is undertaken differently as per the conditions in which it takes place, which requires more research on how PBL is implemented and what benefits its implementation offers. Bell and Gilbert (1994) and Fung (2000) have pointed to personal, professional, and social benefits that the knowledge construction process through interactions can result in. These aspects respectively refer to the development of personal motivation, professional achievements in work or study, and social relationships tightened through interactions (Bell & Gilbert, 1994; Brown, 2015; Fung, 2000). While much research has concluded the advancement in motivation and knowledge (Cadwell et al., 2017; Deveci & Nunn, 2016; Foss et al., 2007; Puangpunsi, 2021; Stoller & Myers, 2019), the aspect of social development is still questionable. In addition, exploring personal and professional development for students and lecturers in ESP courses is necessary for a comprehensive understanding of how beneficial PBL is in ESP education. To further investigate the benefits of PBL in ESP courses, the current study seeks answers to the following questions:

1. How is PBL implemented in an English for Business (EB) course?
2. What benefits do EFL teachers and learners gain in terms of personal, professional, and social development when using PBL in the EB course?

Research Methods

The current research is a qualitative case study to investigate the implementation of PBL in the context of an ESP course at the college level and to gain insights into the benefits of PBL based on participants' attitudes, beliefs, and experiences (Creswell, 2009; Simons, 2009).

Context

This study focused on English for Business courses offered to English-major students at a university in Vietnam. The 15-week English for Business course aimed to develop Business English language and Business-related knowledge for students. The course textbook used was *Market Leader* (intermediate level), published by Pearson Longman, with supplemental materials provided by the course lecturer. For the first ten weeks of the course, the lecturer introduced the course and went through the first five units covering topics of product brands, travel, organization, change, and money. Each of these topics prepared the students' language and professional knowledge about different business settings, and then students were provided with a case study at the end of each unit. The remaining five weeks of the course focused on students' conducting group projects and project presentations.

Participants

This study involved observing how projects were carried out in a class of 30 students at a university in Vietnam. Five English-major students, nominated from a group of 30 students, and their lecturer, were involved in interviews. At the time of data collection, the students were in their sixth semester and obtained at least The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) level B2 due to completing the courses in their first five semesters. This group of participants was selected because projects require a certain level of proficiency to prepare and present outcomes (T. T. H. Nguyen & Pham, 2016). The lecturer held a Master's degree in English Language Teaching and had no experience teaching ESP courses. Both the instructor and the students in this study were well-informed about the project information and data collection procedure. The researcher met with the instructor to introduce the study and request permission from the instructor to conduct the study in his class. Then, a brief meeting was scheduled for the researcher to introduce the project to the students and invite their participation. It should be noted that peer observations as a form of quality assurance were common at the institution where this research took place. Therefore, both the instructor and the students were familiar with having someone visit and observe their teaching and learning activities as well as responding to post-lesson interview questions.

Data Collection

The study employed classroom observations and interviews to answer the research questions regarding *the act* of implementing PBL in ESP education and the associated benefits as *the reasons* for this implementation, which case studies aim to explore (Simons, 2009). The researcher observed four class sessions in the second part of the course, including the presentations on the key features of the projects. The fifth session was not focused as this was mainly on the lecturer's announcement of the final exam format. Before the observations, a discussion with the course instructor was undertaken to understand his plan for this second part. Observation sheets were prepared to capture students' and instructor's activities.

Although the target was 2-3 volunteers from each group for the interviews, it was surprising that group members only nominated the leader of each group, accounting for five student interviewees plus the lecturer. Therefore, a group interview was conducted with the students, and an individual interview was performed with the lecturer. The interview questions were designed to focus on (1) the perceptions of using projects in the EB course and (2) the benefits that they gained in terms of personal, professional, and social development (see Appendices 1 and 2). Having interviews with these participants helped to clarify the decisions on the topic and the implementation as well as how such implementation of PBL in the EB course offered them benefits for their future careers.

Data Analysis

To explore the implementation of PBL, information on teaching and learning activities that took place over four weeks was collected. The facilitation of PBL in this study is explored concerning the procedure suggested by Stoller and Myers (2019) to see whether there are alignments between the guidelines of conducting a project and the principles of experiential learning.

Learners were equipped with basic business knowledge and terminology in the first ten weeks of the course. The projects were used as experiential learning to apply what they had learned in extensive discussions with the lecturer, business agents, and peers. Similar processes of knowledge construction have been identified with potential personal, professional, and social development (Bell & Gilbert, 1994; Brown, 2015; Fung, 2000). These three categories of development guided the analysis of the interviews with both the lecturer and students. This study employed a deductive thematic analysis approach in which codes were identified and grouped as evidence to support the themes of personal, professional, and social development (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fung, 2000). The interviews were first transcribed and carefully read through. Segments that were relevant to the PBL benefits expressed by participants were then noted. These segments were given initial codes and then grouped into relevant themes.

To ensure the reliability of the data, another lecturer was invited as an external coder to code twenty percent of the data and check the transcripts of the interviews, the selected codes, and the relevant themes. A meeting was organized to discuss how the coding had been conducted as well as the resulting codes and themes. There was only minor confusion about whether some codes would be designated to professional or social development themes. However, we discussed and agreed upon these codes and themes.

Findings and Discussion

The Implementation of PBL in an English for Business Course

This section describes how PBL was implemented in the second part of the English for Business course. This section was divided into (1) a description of the process of implementing PBL in the course and (2) the features of the students' final projects.

The projects were completed in groups, and thirty students worked in five groups of six. The students were instructed on the elements of the project, including (1) project name and some basic information, (2) products or services provided, (3) marketing plan, (4) human resources, (5) potential successes and challenges they may encounter, and (6) suggested solutions. The lecturer did not assign specific topics for students' projects but instead limited them to Business, Finance, and Banking areas since this was an English for Business course.

From observations, it was clear that the lecturer followed the steps that Stoller and Myers (2019) suggested for conducting projects, which have been mentioned previously. The application of these steps was indicated through the activities that the students participated in during four weeks with the instructor's facilitation. During the first week of *preparation*, after receiving instruction about the project's elements and deciding on their topics, the students made plans to gather the information needed to meet all elements of the project. The lecturer encouraged the students to visit companies, shops, and other places to observe and gain experience through discussions with experienced people in related fields, particularly by seeking advice on starting a new business and succeeding. As T. T. H. Nguyen and Pham (2016) noted, ESP teachers may lack specialized knowledge, and the lecturer in this course filled that gap by exposing students to authentic business contexts and field experts (Kavlu, 2022).

Table 1*Key Features of the Students' Projects*

	An English language center	A flower shop	A restaurant	A tourist company	A fashion shop
Reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team members' part-time jobs • Easy access to information • High demand for learning English 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily need • Team members' knowledge of flower • Easy access to flower provider 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily need • Team members' knowledge of cooking Vietnamese and Western food • Easy access to meat and vegetable providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience and interests in tourism • Good English skills • Enthusiasm in communication and socialization • A hot trend in the local career market • Good contact with local tourist destinations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a girls' group known as Fashionistas • Daily need • People's care about appearance • People's high income and expense for clothing
Location	City center	City center	City center	City center	City center
Opening hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mon – Fri: 8 am – 9pm • Sat- Sun: 8 am – 4 pm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every day: 8am – 5pm • Special holidays: 7am – 9pm 	7 am – 9pm	Office hours <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mon – Fri: 8am – 5pm • Sat- Sun: 8 am – 12 pm 	8am - 9pm
Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English for all levels and purposes (General, Communicative, IELTS/TOEFL, English on Demand) • Extracurricular activities (Speaking clubs, movie nights, field trips) • Translation services • Consultation on studying overseas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different kinds of flowers for different occasions • Advising on choosing flowers for customers • Flower wrapping and delivery • Special discount on holidays • Online order and delivery • Free shipping for special cases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both Vietnamese and Western cuisines • Also vegetarian food • Breakfast – Lunch - Dinner • Coffee shop • Holding parties • Online order and delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local tours for domestic and international visitors including package tours • All services (tickets, accommodation, food, entertainment) • Training tour guides • Tourist consultation services • Recreation, educational and religious tours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clothing for all genders, ages, and incomes • Various and high-quality clothing and accessories • Fashion consultation services • Discount for frequent customers
Human resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director • Managers • Administration staff • Teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager • 2-3 storekeepers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager • Administration staff • Waiters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managers • Administration staff • Tour guides 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager • 4 storekeepers

<p>Successes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Diverse classes for learners • Many activities •Rewarding policies for staff, teachers, and learners for excellent performances • Good marketing campaign (Facebook, local newspapers, visits to local schools for advertising) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can sell a lot as people’s daily needs • Many special occasions for flower gifts • Can get flowers at a low price from the familiar provider (local farmers) • Much knowledge of flowers and decorations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily needs which ensure frequent income • Be highly competitive with good services and diverse food • Good promotion programs • Be suitable for a wide range of customers • Have a coffee shop for additional income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High demands and volume of tourists • Very well-trained staff • Diverse services and destinations • Good contacts with local restaurants, ticket companies, and other service providers • Good promotion packages • Training programs for tour guides for additional income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good quality of clothing and services • Good promotion • Well-trained staff
<p>Challenges</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High competition with other centers • Lack of qualified teachers (especially native speakers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to preserve flowers • High competition with other stores 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to maintain the quality of food and services • Need to update new dishes • Ensure food safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High competition with other companies • Need to maintain good service • Insurance and safety when traveling • Ensure qualified tour guides 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High competition with other stores • Need to keep up with trends • Need to have items for different people, interests, and incomes
<p>Solutions</p>	<p>Hire qualified teachers from the local university</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only buy enough flowers for sale • Check with many farmers for a cheaper price • Special discount if cannot sell • Some free flowers for those who buy a lot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit highly qualified chefs and waiters • Apply customer’s feedback for improvements • Frequent meetings to solve problems immediately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit highly qualified staff and tour guides • Use customers’ feedback for improvements • Frequent training for staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit highly qualified staff • Frequent contact with fashion stores in big cities and companies for the latest trends and items • Frequent discount programs

As suggested by the lecturer, the second and third weeks—information gathering and processing—were devoted to discussions on the information they had gathered for their projects and drafting their projects for presentations. The lecturer facilitated the discussions and provided suggestions for groups, which was evidence for the advocacy of learner autonomy. During these two weeks, the students discussed the relevance of the information that they had gathered for their projects. They shared the information that they had found with their peers to ensure that their team members agreed with the ideas. For any ideas that were not relevant, they could ask for advice from the lecturer and even visit the organizations and experts for further information. The second week was primarily devoted to discussing the information collected for the projects and the problems that emerged, such as imbalanced information for project elements and irrelevant information. The students in groups decided what solutions should be used to solve these problems. To illustrate, one group was working on the Language Center project and had collected information about the courses at a local language center. However, the lecturer suggested broadening their views by asking about other services that a language center could offer. The students took note of this idea and decided to re-visit the local language center for clarification. In the third week, the students discussed how the problems had been solved and they planned how to design their presentations and the sections that each member would be responsible for. At the fourth meeting – the display, the students presented their projects to the lecturer and peers for assessment, questions, and feedback. The fifth stage of reflection could be implied through evaluation, feedback, and questions from both the instructor and peers. In terms of the project details, the key features of the projects that were observed during the presentations can be found in Table 1.

Regarding how the projects were evaluated, the lecturer used the SMART model which includes Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound components to assess students' projects. The lecturer provided the link to access the SMART model source. The lecturer did not create his evaluation criteria due to time limitations but found the SMART model relevant to the project elements. This model emphasized Specific, Measure, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound aspects (University of California, n.d.). I referred to the project of opening an English language center to clarify how the SMART model was used to assess the students' project. For example, *Specific* referred to the goals of project (e.g., opening an English language center with several services) and the necessary actions or plans to complete the project and achieve those goals. In the *Measurable* criterion, the lecturer would look for the information or evidence and its quality to judge whether the pre-established goals had been reached (e.g., the number of classes and students, activities, and income of an English language center). *Achievable* meant the feasibility of the project as the students had to demonstrate that they obtained the required skills and resources to complete the project successfully (e.g., human resources, location, teaching facilities, potential solutions to foreseeable problems of an English language center). For the *Relevant* feature, the students had to explain and convince the lecturer of the alignment and relevance of the project components (e.g., human resources, teaching facilities, and services) to the overarching goals. The last feature, *Time-bound*, required a detailed timeline for the entire project and its components. Admitted by the lecturer, some of the SMART features were missing in the students' projects. For example, the students neither discussed the timeframe for the Time-bound feature nor the statistical data to prove the effective implementation of their projects for the Measurable feature. Therefore, the lecturer was more likely to holistically assess the projects regarding how well the students presented their projects and answered the follow-up questions. As observed, most follow-up questions for the five projects referred to the challenges and solutions.

It was evident in the data from the observations that the lecturer effectively practiced the principles of PBL for experiential learning to construct students' knowledge in accordance with PBL procedure and experiential learning proposed by other researchers (Billet et al., 2018; Cadwell et al., 2017; Devenci & Nunn, 2016; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Stoller & Myers, 2019). The

students actively decided how their projects should be completed and assessed the relevance of the information for their projects. In this manner, the students were active agents in learning and were well aware of the actions that they needed to take to gain more knowledge. The students understood that knowledge would be actively constructed through interactions with business agents, teachers, and peers. Hence, their understanding of the project and business-related knowledge could be developed. Similarly, Brown (2015) discussed the experiential constructivist approach as when new knowledge is actively constructed through learners' experiences and can be tested and re-constructed. The students in this study critically evaluated the information they had received, identified what they still needed to obtain, and sought further actions to successfully complete their projects, such as additional services at a language center, the common challenges of business organizations, and solutions to those problems.

The Benefits of Implementing PBL in an English for Business Course

In this EB course where PBL was implemented, the completion of projects included the process of knowledge construction through active learning. Students' existing knowledge supported their interactions to develop new knowledge (Billet et al., 2018; Cadwell et al., 2017). This process of knowledge construction is identified with potential personal, professional, and social development (Bell & Gilbert, 1994; Fung, 2000), all of which occurred when PBL was implemented in the course. This section discusses these benefits in detail.

Personal Development

Personal development refers to feelings and attitudes, meaning an individual may feel motivated or empowered to act (Bell & Gilbert, 1994; Fung, 2000). This study showed that PBL helped students and the lecturer develop motivation in teaching and learning.

In contrast to the traditional classroom environment where teachers are the main provider of knowledge and learners are passive knowledge recipients, the students in this study were engaged in an active learning process for knowledge construction (Bell & Gilbert, 1994; Fung, 2000; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Puangpungsi, 2021; Stoller & Myers, 2019). Speaking for their group members, all five student representatives agreed that the project topics met their interests and future work fields. Hence, they felt comfortable devoting time and effort to undertake these projects. For example, Student 1 of the English Language Center project stated that:

I like PBL because I can choose my favorite topic for my project to work on. It is very important to give us the topics that we like because we will not devote much effort to the assignment if it is not what we enjoy. Anyway, it was good that we could choose the topic, not the teacher assigning one for us.

In addition, Student 5 on the Fashion project team highly valued PBL as she "could visit a lot of clothing stores to check the prices of the items," which was her and other group members' favorite activity; she further commented that PBL was a good combination of learning and entertainment. In this study, PBL generated *professional motivation* when the projects were relevant and triggered students' professional interests, as indicated by Student 1 previously. Therefore, applying PBL in this EB course was an appropriate strategy to stimulate students' motivation and subsequent autonomy in learning, which are very important for successful learning outcomes (Puangpungsi, 2021; Spratt et al., 2002; Stoller & Myers, 2019).

From the lecturer's perspective, PBL also greatly motivated him in teaching, as he could try something new rather than follow the textbook. He explained that he always wanted to

design tasks that made his students more active in learning and using the target language. However, he admitted that he had very little experience in facilitating active learning because of his prior experiences primarily using the lecturing method. When assigned to teach this EB course, he was concerned that the students would not be motivated in their learning process.

This was my first-time teaching English for Business, and I was not sure if my students liked the course or the way I taught. I was afraid that they would find my lectures boring when they had to listen to my instructions and do the exercises in the book.

The instructor in this EB course was challenged when he realized the students were less engaged in the first ten weeks of the course when he used lecturing as his main teaching approach. However, he initiated a new approach in this course as an experiment to see how students reacted to the projects. The result was positively perceived by the lecturer as he stated that:

I could see how active they were in my teaching periods through their discussion and participation. I enjoyed seeing them engaged in the activities, which means that what I was doing was effective. I was sure the use of projects was a wise decision, and now I feel much confident and willing to teach ESP courses. I think that this is a success in my teaching career because teachers should make their students active in learning.

While much research on PBL has primarily focused on students' motivation in learning under the PBL approach (Cadwell et al., 2017; Foss et al., 2007; Sartika et al., 2022), very limited research has investigated teaching motivation associated with PBL (Petersen & Nassaji, 2016; Sartika et al., 2022). Both the lecturer and students stated that applying PBL in the EB course increased their motivation in teaching and learning. The students were given plenty of time to work on the projects of their interest and they were the agents that played the central role in completing the projects. Also, the instructor was able to reach his goal of creating an active environment in his class, which raised his interest in teaching ESP courses.

Professional Development

Professional development refers to the advancement of knowledge and skills relevant to one's profession so that one can work effectively (Bell & Gilbert, 1994; Fung, 2000). In this study, professional development was applied to both the lecturer and the students. While Hutchinson and Waters (1987) generally discuss ESP courses in terms of developing learners' discipline-based knowledge and language, this study varies as specialized knowledge was more attended to by the participants.

Although the students had not yet entered their professional world, they did indicate how useful PBL was for their intended professions. Student 1 praised PBL for its support of his understanding of how an English language center could be run, which could be an aid for his future career as he had thought of applying to be the academic manager of a language center. He admitted that he had not been well aware of the services that a language center might offer, in addition to teaching and the challenges of managing a center. Through completing the project, he was able to identify additional services, such as academic consultation and translation, and some possible challenges, such as competition with other local centers and the lack of qualified human resources. He stated that:

I have been working there for over a year, but I just care about teaching. After I talked to the staff there, I learned what services the center has, and I was surprised that we have a translation service. I thought that a center is just to teach English. (Student 1)

Other participants also commented on the specialized knowledge that they acquired from the projects they had conducted. Student 3 of the Restaurant project was very happy when she knew where to get cheap and fresh ingredients for dishes. She reported that: “I could make a contract with local supermarkets for daily meat supply at wholesale price with an online order service [through social networking sites] and a desirable discount policy.”

A very surprising point for her was the sale of vegetables at farmers’ markets where she could find fresher and cheaper vegetables than those at the supermarkets. This knowledge, in her belief, was very useful for her business in the future. The projects successfully brought this new understanding to the students.

Despite the motivation to teach an EB course, the instructor encountered a lack of specialized knowledge and language, as declared by Nguyen and Pham (2016) and Nguyen et al. (2019). It was admitted by the lecturer that

The risk of using PBL was that I was not able to provide them [the students] with sufficient knowledge and language in Business because that was not my area. I was worried that I could not give them good instructions on completing the projects or answer their questions related to the Business area.

The implementation of PBL turned this challenge into a benefit as the instructor reported learning specialized knowledge through listening to his students in each discussion session and the presentations. He joined the discussions with the students to check their progress, and through that, he learned about the projects and the associated knowledge.

I did not know the names of the flowers or the food, but my students explained those to me very clearly. I think that can be useful for me as a teacher of English. Also, I learned different ways to search for cheap air tickets online from my students in the Tourism group.

Another benefit that the lecturer received from PBL was teaching experience. The lecturer was concerned with the effectiveness of his teaching methods. Although this was the first time that he employed PBL in his teaching, he might realize the positive effects of this approach. PBL was reported as useful in making himself and his students interested in teaching and learning. This approach was also useful for his professional development, as he learned an innovative teaching approach to support his teaching. Therefore, he commented that he would apply PBL in other classes and learn more about this approach from readings and peers to improve his teaching ability. In addition, he learned that using tasks that fit students’ interests would be very supportive in teaching, which he referred to as a valuable experience in his teaching career:

I can see that PBL is very useful. I think I can try PBL with other classes, especially in my Speaking classes. I will search for some more materials about PBL to know more about it. I think my first try at PBL was quite successful.

ESP teachers are entitled to understand students' career-related goals, the language of the ESP fields that they are teaching, and hold adequate specialized knowledge, which leads to the need for professional development to qualify for the courses (B. H. Nguyen et al., 2019; Sartika et al., 2022; Zhang, 2017). To illustrate, the instructor in this study claimed that implementing PBL in the EB course developed his business-related knowledge so that he would become more capable of teaching future EB courses.

However, the students admitted that their language skills were not used or developed much. Although several business terms had been taught in the course, they did not find it necessary to use them. From their reports, they only paid attention to whether their messages were clear or not rather than what so-called business terms should be used.

I think I only know more about the English names of the flowers I sell in my project. When I talked to the owner of the flower store, she explained how to keep the flower fresh, but I did not know how to explain those in English. I think I prefer making everything easy to understand by using simple words like watering, cutting leaves.
(Student 2)

It was a challenge for the students when deciding how to transmit their project information to peers who were unfamiliar with the disciplinary terminology. For example, Student 2 explained that she could have used the word "prune" to mention cutting the leaves or branches, but she was afraid that her peers would not understand this. Therefore, using a more common word such as "cutting" would be a better choice for her.

Both the instructor and the students in this study appeared to benefit from professional development. While research on PBL primarily focuses on students' knowledge development (Cadwell et al., 2017; Liton, 2015), the lecturer's specialized knowledge was also developed through PBL as he engaged in discussions with his students' projects. He also became more interested and experienced in using PBL, which could be applied in his other courses with potential positive outcomes. However, professional development for students may not closely align with what Hutchinson and Waters (1987) expect from an ESP course as despite knowing some words that were relevant to their topics, the students refused to use those terms as their peers might not comprehend them. Interestingly, the widely claimed benefit of developing learners' specialized language was not much discussed by the learners in this study. The acquisition of specialized language seemed to be restricted due to the students' awareness of the unnecessary use of the specialized language. In other words, the students tended to use general English for their listeners' comprehension. In this study, the avoidance of using ESP vocabulary for their communication is explained because it is neither relevant to their needs nor necessary for making meaning of the messages (Liton, 2015). ESP teachers need to ensure that students understand the necessity of ESP terminology in career-based settings. Besides, there should be innovations in the ESP curriculum where projects are assessed not only in terms of content but also language use. Learners should be provided with several opportunities to apply ESP language. This can be noted for further pedagogical implications when specialized words should be more encouraged and assessed if language is a key point to develop in ESP education.

Social Development

Social development indicates how relationships among individuals can be established and strengthened through interactions, making them members of professional communities (Bell & Gilbert, 1994; Bengtson et al., 2018; Fung, 2000). While most research on PBL in ESP courses refers to the development of language and specialized knowledge (Hutchinson &

Waters, 1987; Johnson, 1993; T. T. H. Nguyen & Pham, 2016), social relationships with business organizations are not considerably emphasized. This paper, in contrast, shows a notably positive point of PBL in terms of students' social development with business agencies, which could be understood as student engagement in not only the projects (Stoller & Myers, 2019) but also the relevant business communities.

The students indicated their surprise about the relationships that they established with the organizations that they visited. The students did not think that these organizations would be interested in their projects or promise potential collaboration with them. One of the students said:

I talked to the manager of a tourist company near my house many times about the project and he said that I can apply to work for his company after graduation. I was shocked but he said that because I have learned a lot about his company for my project. (Student 4)

Student 2 of the Flower Shop team also declared that the project was very helpful in connecting them with local business organizations for the present and future. She said:

The flower shop owner said that if I bought her flowers, she could give me a discount. Therefore, I am thinking of buying her flowers and reselling those for people at [the institution] on some special occasions like Valentine's Day, Teachers' Day, or Graduation Day. I can make some money and have experience.

Since the projects were relevant to the students' job orientations, they saw completing the projects as a stepping stone in getting to know the organizations and the experts (Kavlu, 2022) that they would like to work for or collaborate with. Therefore, students agreed that social relationship development was possibly the most valuable benefit that they could gain from their projects. Bengtson et al. (2018) are interested in whether business relationships can go beyond the project life cycle. In this study, projects are a foundation for long-term business relationships which promise the recurrence of future projects and partnerships. The implementation of PBL in this study highly accommodated learners' career interests as the project created opportunities for them to interact with specialists in their career fields for knowledge and long-term relationships through engagement with their business community (Stoller & Myers, 2019), as commented by Students 2 and 4.

In addition to potential partnerships with business organizations, relationships with the teacher and peers were also established in this study. However, this kind of relationship was not strongly emphasized by either the lecturer or the students. To explain, the lecturer and the student participants shared that they had always been in good and active relationships in other courses, and they did not think PBL had promoted much further development. An exceptional case was that the students saw the relationship with their peers to be strengthened only when they had the same prospective career directions that could lead to further cooperation. One student mentioned that:

I think I have worked with my friends and teachers for a long time. We have been very friendly and helpful as usual. However, I find some friends with the same job interest and I can discuss more with them about our job in the future. Maybe we can cooperate to open our own language center. (Student 1)

As can be seen, social engagement and development was remarkable benefit of PBL in the ESP course, as claimed by the students. They developed their relationships with business organizations through interactions for more information to support the completion of their projects. This study offers a significant point and can be considered for pedagogical implications to help students complete their projects and develop their relationships as the foundations for their future businesses.

Conclusion

Implementing PBL in the EB course is evidently beneficial in terms of personal, professional, and social development, in which social development is highly attended to through projects and interactions with local business agencies. This study has provided evidence-based insights into the benefits of PBL beyond the development of language and specialized knowledge. As both the lecturer and the students benefitted from PBL, this approach should be more widely employed in ESP education for students' future professional prospects.

In addition, this study offers some pedagogical implications. Firstly, when implementing PBL in ESP courses, it is strongly suggested that students be able to choose projects that fit their professional interests. Secondly, ESP instructors should provide detailed guidance on conducting projects, including the project elements, the tasks that the students need to consider in completing the projects, and the use of various sources, such as individuals and business organizations relevant to the students' projects. Thirdly, ESP instructors need to encourage students to employ more ESP terms in their projects. This could be achieved by assessing both disciplinary content knowledge and language in students' projects, which should be announced to students before commencing their projects. Teachers' professional development seems to be a critical issue in implementing PBL (Sartika et al., 2022), and having experts in the disciplines and in the PBL approach, as suggested by (Kavlu, 2022), could be considered to develop EFL teachers' competence in applying PBL in their classes.

This qualitative case study involved a small group of participants in only one class. Future research is therefore recommended with a larger group of students and an extended timeframe to keep track of the students' longitudinal development. This study has shed light on the perceived benefits of implementing PBL through the participants' perspectives and experiences. However, surveys or questionnaires are recommended to further explore the participants' evaluations of the effectiveness of PBL in EFL/ESP education and the extent of their advancements through PBL. While English for Business was selected in this study, other ESP courses or discipline-based courses can be considered to explore the benefits of PBL benefits in other areas.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview questions for students

1. What is your group project?
2. What did you learn from working on your project? Possible follow-up questions
 - Did you know more about [your topic]? Please explain.
 - Did you know more terms used in that area? Please explain.
 - Did you develop relationships with other people including your teacher and peers during completing your project? Please explain.
3. In general, what do you think about doing projects in this course?

Appendix 2. Interview questions for lecturer

1. What did you learn from your students' projects? Possible follow-up questions
 - Did you know more about doing business from those projects? Please explain.
 - Did you know more business terms from facilitating and evaluating the projects? Please explain.
 - Did you develop relationships with other people including your students through using projects in your class? Please explain.
 - Did you improve your teaching skills through using projects? Please explain.
2. In general, what do you think about using projects in your English for Business course?