



The Effectiveness of Project-Based Learning in Improving Public Speaking Skills Among Moroccan Undergraduates

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Abstract

Effective English public speaking has become one of the most challenging aspects of language learning faced by the current Moroccan English as a Foreign language (EFL) undergraduates from non-English academic contexts. Latest research studies reported that many undergraduates still struggle to present, discuss, and negotiate their ideas orally, clearly, effectively, fluently, confidently, and persuasively in English, whether in an academic or professional setting, due to limited opportunities to speak publicly in the teaching and learning process. The Project-Based learning (PBL) approach has been proven to be a significant, innovative pedagogical strategy for developing various language skills, especially speaking. This research was designed to investigate the effect of Project-Based English learning strategies on the public speaking performance of Moroccan undergraduate students. It specifically aims to explore the extent to which PBL can develop 21st-century skills, verbal elements, and non-verbal cues of our participants. To achieve the goal of this research, pre-and-post-intervention speaking assessments, and interview research designs were used to collect the data. A sample of $n = 93$ third-year Marketing students from the Department of Economics of a Moroccan University were purposely selected to participate in this work. The results from the post-test showed that the implementation of PBL strategies significantly improved the English public speaking performance of the participants, with a $MD = 13.26$; $SD = 3.24$; $P = < 0.001$. The findings of this study demonstrated the effectiveness of PBL not only in enhancing communication, creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving, but also in developing non-verbal communication skills among S5 Marketing students. These results contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting the adoption of the Project-Based learning approach in EFL teaching, particularly in contexts where enhancing the English-speaking skills is a priority. The findings suggest that further research should explore integrating PBL across different educational levels, and disciplines to maximize its pedagogical impact in diverse learning contexts.

Key words: PBL, Public speaking, scores, 21st-century skills, verbal, non-verbal communication

Introduction

Effective public speaking skills involve several key components, including: content organization, delivery, audience engagement, verbal and non-verbal communication, and 21st-century skills. Recent research has reported that many Moroccan undergraduates across disciplines still struggle to present, discuss, and negotiate their ideas orally, clearly, effectively, fluently, confidently, and persuasively in English, whether in an academic or professional setting. Due to, the fear of making pronunciation mistakes; low confidence in their own speaking abilities [1]; fear of public speaking [2]; ineffective use of non-verbal communication; limited vocabulary; minimal understanding of the communication techniques; absence of real-world speaking environments; lack of audience engagement [3]; low students motivation and self-efficacy [4]; sweating, nervousness, lack of concentration [5]; poor content organization; cultural and linguistic barriers [6]. The Project-Based Learning (PBL) approach has been presented as one of the most innovative methods for overcoming these challenges. Given these concerns, this research aims to explore the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning in developing the English public speaking performance among Moroccan undergraduate students from non-English academic settings.

Review of Literature

1. Project-Based Learning in ELT



Project-Based Learning strategy represented an educational shift from traditional, passive learning to a dynamic, student-centered approach. It encourages students to collaborate, research, and present solutions to real-world projects in English. This approach empowered students to take charge of their learning journey, from project planning to execution [7]. It encourages students to engage in real-world meaningful projects, which enhance their language skills through an immersive, contextualized learning experience [8]. Research shows that PBL offers various benefits in language learning. It has been proven to enhance students' confidence, fluency, and ability to structure ideas logically, improve English language proficiency [9]; [10] and [11]; promote critical thinking, enhance self-efficacy and collaboration [12]; improves the learning process, enhance students' social and communication skills, promote a growth mind-set [13]; [14]; help students express themselves verbally and non-verbally, improve various English sub-skills; such as, grammar and vocabulary mastery [15]; [16]; increases students' 'intrinsic motivation in completing their own projects [17]; increases students learning engagement, and discussions, encourages students to be actively, and deeply involved in strengthening learning outcomes, fosters teamwork, and collaboration in the classroom, create strong connections between students, learning materials, and team members [18]; improves students' speaking skills [19]; enriches students' learning experiences and contribute to their overall academic, and professional growth [20]; improves students' English language communication skills for professional, and academic purposes [21]; provides optimal opportunities to explore, and practise their speaking skills [22]; increases participation and speaking confidence [23]; develops students' speaking and critical thinking skills [24]; strengthens speaking skills in EFL [25]; improves English language technical presentations and discussion skills [26]. The results of the above research studies concluded that this pedagogical approach facilitated the application of English in authentic, communicative scenarios, thereby enhancing not only linguistic accuracy and pragmatic competence, but also the ability to engage and persuade diverse audience[27].

2. Previous studies on the Implementation of Project-Based Learning in English Public Speaking

The use of PBL pedagogy in English has drawn a considerable attention from academics regarding its effectiveness in developing English public speaking skills in higher education. It has been studied in various educational settings worldwide. For instance, [28] analysed the effect of PBL on the public speaking skills among n=130 first-semester students of Political Science at Siliwangi University. The results of their research study showed that PBL significantly affects participants' public speaking skills with a contribution of 50.8% ($r=0.713$; $p<0.001$). The study found that students actively involved in the PBL process showed increased fluency, self-confidence, and were able to convey their ideas orally in English. In another study, [29] investigated the effect of PBL in improving English Public speaking performance of n=60 university students in the context of China. Their findings demonstrated a significant improvement in the English public speaking performance of the experimental group. In the same vein, [30] examined the impact of PBL on speaking skills performance among n=91 Moroccan secondary school students. The outcome of their experiment showed an improvement in learners' overall speaking performance. In another research study, [31] reported a positive impact of PBL on the outcome of the oral presentations in an academic English classroom of n=53 Malaysian students. Similarly, [32] analysed the effectiveness of PBL in improving the oral communication skills of n=24 second-semester students in the English Language Education study program at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo. The results from both the classroom observations, and interviews demonstrate the effectiveness of PBL in improving students' language use, collaboration, and self-confidence. Their study demonstrated the effectiveness of PBL as an instructional strategy for developing participants' professional, and academic skills. Furthermore, [33] explored the impact of PBL on the English-speaking confidence among n=19 students in the MIPA class. The findings from their qualitative study proved the effectiveness of PBL in enhancing the self-confidence of their participants. Their study found that through PBL, students are encouraged to collaborate, learn independently, and participate in meaningful tasks that develop their public speaking and communication skills. The same results were confirmed by a [34] study, which showed that PBL increased students' self-confidence, enriched vocabulary, and developed sentence structure in context. Within the same line of thought, [35] examined the effect of PBL on enhancing the speaking abilities of Economics students. The findings show that PBL greatly enhances students' speaking abilities, especially their confidence, accuracy, and fluency. [36] confirmed the significant improvement of PBL on n=18 second-semester students' speaking skills in the context of Universitas Ma'arif Lampung. In addition to that, [37] examined the effectiveness of PBL strategies in enhancing critical thinking, creativity, communication, and



collaboration among $n=30$ students in the context of Tangerang. The findings revealed significant increases in students' 21st-century skills after participating in various project-Based learning activities, such as group presentations, digital literacy projects, and social projects. The study highlighted the potential of PBL to foster both academic achievement, and essential soft skills. The review of the above research studies showed that very few published works have explored the effectiveness of the PBL approach in developing English public speaking skills among current Moroccan undergraduates from non-English speaking contexts. Given this concern, this research specifically aims to examine the extent to which PBL can develop 21st-century skills (such as, creativity, collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving), verbal communication (fluency and vocabulary), and non-verbal communication (gestures and body language) among the participants of this study. To fulfil the objective of this work, the following research questions were addressed:

RQ1: Does the implementation of PBL in the context of the Department of Economics of a Moroccan University enhance the English Public speaking score of S5 Marketing students?

RQ 2: To what extent does the integration of PBL in public speaking develop 21st-century skills, verbal and non-verbal elements, in the participants of this study?

Methodology of Research

To comprehensively evaluate the impact of PBL on students' English public speaking performance, a mixed-methods design was used to enhance the validity, credibility, and reliability of the findings [38].

1. Context and Participants

This research study was conducted at the Department of Economics of a Moroccan University during the academic year 2024-2025. The target population of this research study is $n=93$ Marketing third-year students who are learning English as a Foreign language in one of the Bachelor of Excellence programs. This study includes $n=24$ males and $n=69$ females. They belong to different regions of Morocco. Their ages range from 20 to 27 years old. The participants have varied English language abilities, different learning styles, levels of self-confidence, motivation and backgrounds.

2. Research Instruments

2.1 Pre-and-post Tests

Pre-and-post-tests were used to compare participants' public speaking scores before, and after integrating PBL over a one-semester period. An oral exam was used as a pre-test to evaluate the English public speaking performance of the participants of this research prior to the integration of the PBL approach. However, presenting their own projects to experts from different domains served as a post-test for this study, to measure the participants' improvement in public speaking after the implementation of PBL.

2.2 Semi-structured Interviews

In addition to pre-and post-tests, semi-structured interviews were used to provide an in-depth analysis of how PBL affects our participants' English public speaking skills. The interview was designed to explore participants' experience regarding the effectiveness of PBL in developing their 21st-century skills, verbal, and non-verbal communication skills. These interviews were conducted with a total of $n=7$ third-year students from the target population. The participants were selected based on their involvement in the course, and prior experience with the PBL approach. Their active engagement in public speaking tasks made them suitable subjects for assessing the effectiveness of PBL in developing English public speaking performance at the university level.

3. Data Analysis

To analyse the collected data, quantitative and qualitative analyses were used to answer the two research questions of this study. A paired-t-test was used to analyse, and evaluate the statistical significance of changes in public speaking scores before and after the PBL intervention. Whereas, qualitative content analysis was employed to identify the most effective themes, patterns, and learning strategies of the PBL approach in the the Department of Economics at a Moroccan University.



Results and Discussion

1. Results

1.1 Quantitative Results

1.1.1 Effectiveness of PBL approach in Developing English Public Speaking Skills

RQ1: Does the implementation of PBL in the context of the Department of Economics of a Moroccan University enhance the English Public speaking scores of S5 Marketing students? The first research question explores the efficacy of the use of PBL strategy in enhancing English public speaking performance among third-year Marketing students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The results of the pre-post tests were analysed by using paired t-test. The post-test results showed that students' public speaking skills increased significantly, from MD=11.46 to MD=13.26. The paired t-test results conclude that the Project-Based learning strategy is very effective in improving S5 students' public speaking performance with a P-value of <0.001. It was found that through active involvement in real project activities, participants were encouraged to use English contextually and authentically. The findings in **Table 1** confirm the robustness of PBL in the context of the Department of Economics.

PBL	Number of Students	Mean Difference (MD)	Standers Deviation (SD)	Paired T-test
Pre-test	n=93	11,46	4,16	< 0.001
Post-test	n=93	13,26	3,24	

Table 1. Paired T-test of the participants' score before and after the use of PBL

1.2 Qualitative Results

2. Effectiveness of BLP in Enhancing 21st Century Skills, Verbal And Non-verbal Communication

RQ 2: To what extent does the integration of PBL in public speaking develop 21st-century skills, verbal and non-verbal elements, in the participants of this study? The second research question of this study seeks to explore the effectiveness of PBL in enhancing the verbal and non-verbal communication skills, creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving among S5 Marketing students. Analysis of student interviews indicates a significant improvement in participants' communication skills, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and problem-solving. For example, most of the interviewed participants claimed that working out on their real projects forced them to create original, and innovative projects. They also confirm that their involvement in such projects helped them to become more active with their teams." The presentation of our projects in English language, and in front of some experts from different disciplines taught us, how to think about real problems that our region faces, and how to solve those problems in a creative way.... the information that we shared with our audience was completely based on our real experience." Apart from developing the participants' 21st century skills, the majority of students stated that they were motivated to learn English because they felt directly involved in the creative process. They also reported an improvement in their self-confidence, vocabulary development, sentence structure, and fluency, which were enhanced through repeated practice in discussions, and project presentations. "I feel more confident speaking in English now."In addition to that, a large number of participants reported a significant improvement in their non-verbal communication, including gestures, eye contact, body language, and facial expression. Students learned that appropriate body language strengthens the message, and improves the delivery of their presentations. "I learned to use gestures better during my presentation because it helped me to make my point clear"



3. Discussion

The post-test results indicate a significant improvement in students' English public speaking scores after incorporating PBL, with an MD of 13.26 and a P-value of <0.001. Similar findings were supported by [21]; [23]; [24]; [25]; [26]; [27]; [28]; [29] and [34] research studies. The findings of this study demonstrate the effectiveness of PBL in developing some of the 21st-century skills of S5 Marketing students such as, creativity, collaboration, problem-solving, self-confidence, and critical thinking. Similar results were reported by [8]; [10]; [11]; [12]; [15];[16];[26]; [30]; [31];[32]; [33]; [34]; [36] and [37]. It was also found that the integration of PBL in the process of English language teaching not only enhanced students' vocabulary, sentence structure, and fluency, but also it improved their non-verbal communication skills as in [8]; [9];[10],[11]; [15]; [16]; [21] and [25].

Conclusion

This research study explored the effectiveness of PBL pedagogy in developing public speaking skills of Moroccan undergraduates from non-English academic contexts. It specifically investigated the impact of PBL on the development of English public speaking performance, 21st-century skills, and verbal and non-verbal communication abilities among n=93 third-year students studying English as a foreign language in one of the Bachelor of Excellence programs. The results of the English public speaking post-test showed a significant improvement in students' scores, (P-value of <0.001). Furthermore, the findings of this study demonstrated its effectiveness not only in enhancing communication abilities, creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and problem solving, but also in developing the non-verbal communication skills of the participants in this work. The findings suggest that further research should explore integrating PBL across different educational levels, and disciplines to maximize its pedagogical impact in diverse learning contexts.

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