



Debunking Race and Gender Stereotypes in a Greek EFL Classroom Setting through Project-Based Lessons Based on Historical Events

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Abstract

Project-based learning (PjBL) can connect foreign-language learning with authentic events, research, collaboration and critical thinking. This study examines four PjBL lessons based on historical events and their potential to help EFL teenagers reconsider race and gender stereotypes. Ten C1–C2 students aged 14–16, from mixed Greek and Albanian backgrounds and attending the same English school, participated. The lessons incorporated texts, videos, films, discussion, research and group presentations. After the four lessons, an anonymous ten-question questionnaire was used and responses to open questions were examined through directed content analysis. The findings indicate high satisfaction and engagement, willingness to participate in similar projects, perceived development of investigation, presentation, collaboration and language skills, and greater awareness of the historical and social roots of stereotypes. The study suggests that historical-event PjBL can provide an appropriate EFL framework for language development, active thinking and broader intercultural awareness, while further research with larger and more diverse samples is required.

Keywords: *Project-based learning; stereotypes; English as a foreign language in Greece; racism; technology in EFL; gender discrimination*

1. Introduction

Project-based learning has received increasing attention in EFL because it can motivate learners, promote interaction and develop cognitive and interpersonal skills. PjBL integrates reading, speaking, listening and writing while requiring learners to investigate a topic, evaluate information and present an outcome. It can therefore move language learning beyond isolated classroom practice and place learners in the role of active investigators.

A central rationale for the present study is that learners benefit when language is connected to meaningful, real-world issues. PjBL draws on multiple sources, including texts, podcasts, videos and films, and encourages learners to connect information rather than receive it passively. The approach also supports the Four Cs—critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication—and positions the teacher primarily as facilitator. The Greek EFL context provides a relevant setting for examining this approach because research on PjBL remains comparatively limited. Historical events can provide authentic content through which learners explore social issues, question received information and consider perspectives beyond their immediate social context. The present study therefore investigates whether PjBL based on historical events can engage advanced EFL learners and contribute to reconsidering race and gender stereotypes.

The research questions were: (1) To what extent can these lessons help students reconsider stereotypes and become active thinkers? (2) How motivated and engaged are students when historical and socially significant topics are introduced in an EFL environment? (3) How committed are students to further investigation of the issues discussed?

2. Literature Review

PjBL is generally described as a learner-centred instructional approach organised around complex projects and real-world problems. Its characteristic features include learner autonomy, constructive investigation, goal setting, collaboration, communication, reflection and a tangible product or presentation. The approach is experiential: learners develop knowledge through purposeful activity rather than through language practice detached from context.

In EFL, project work can integrate language and content while encouraging learners to use all four skills. Research and information selection require reading and comprehension; group discussion develops speaking and listening; and project reports or presentations require written and spoken production. The freedom to investigate a topic can also increase learner autonomy, responsibility and confidence, while collaborative work may strengthen communication and self-esteem.



Another important benefit identified in the literature is motivation. Projects can arouse curiosity, provide manageable challenges and give learners responsibility for a meaningful outcome. The teacher's role shifts from primary source of information to facilitator, allowing learners to debate, refine ideas, exchange perspectives and make decisions. Such features are particularly relevant when the content concerns complex social and historical issues.

Previous work in Greek EFL contexts has reported benefits including autonomous learning, critical thinking, engagement, language development, collaboration and motivation. However, the limited research base supports the need for further classroom-based studies examining PjBL in different age groups, proficiency levels and cultural settings. The present study contributes a small-scale examination of historical-event projects focused specifically on race and gender stereotypes.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants and Context

The participants were ten EFL students aged 14–16 attending a C1–C2 advanced/proficiency class in the researcher's English school and preparing for the Michigan Proficiency (ECPE) examination. The group consisted of three boys and seven girls. Students had Greek and Albanian backgrounds, although all had been born and raised in Greece. They had experienced project-based lessons at the school from an early age and were therefore familiar with the procedures. Their advanced English proficiency was necessary for the historical-event projects used in the study.

3.2 Research Design and Data Collection

The study followed a small-scale quasi-experimental classroom design. Four project-based lessons were implemented and an anonymous ten-question questionnaire was administered after completion. The questionnaire combined closed and open items: two yes/no questions, two Likert-type questions, one listing question, one ranking question and open-response items. The questions addressed satisfaction with PjBL, perceived learning, prior knowledge, engagement, willingness to conduct further research, changes in views of race and gender stereotypes, willingness to undertake similar projects, the project with the greatest impact, perceived development as active thinkers, and appropriateness of the approach in an EFL classroom.

3.3 Data Analysis

Closed responses were organised in Microsoft Excel and presented descriptively. Open responses were coded into categories using directed qualitative content analysis. Predetermined categories were used in relation to the theoretical framework, while additional categories were created when responses could not be accommodated. The analysis focused on students' engagement, perceived learning, language development and reflections on stereotypes and active thinking.

4. Results

The quantitative responses indicate strong satisfaction and engagement with the four projects. Sixty percent of participants were extremely satisfied, 30% very satisfied and 10% satisfied; no participant selected a negative satisfaction category. When asked what they gained from the projects, the most frequent response was working in groups (29%), followed by becoming an active thinker (21%). Fourteen percent selected learning how to conduct investigation and 14% shifting their point of view on important issues. Smaller proportions selected learning to present, acquiring historical knowledge and creating a successful presentation.

Prior knowledge of the historical events was limited: 30% rated their knowledge at 4/10. Interest was high, with responses ranging from 8 to 10 and 50% selecting 10/10. Half of the participants reported that they were likely to conduct further research on the topics. Regarding stereotypes, 50% reported that their ideas had changed, while 40% reported no change; classroom discussion indicated that several students already rejected the idea that minorities or other genders were inferior, but felt that the projects helped them understand the historical and social origins of inequalities. All participants expressed willingness to work on similar projects in the future. The project receiving the greatest impact rating was "Suffragette" (60%), followed by the other three projects. Ninety percent reported that the projects were very helpful in becoming active thinkers and reconsidering stereotypes, while all participants responded positively regarding becoming active thinkers. The final



questionnaire item also produced predominantly positive responses concerning the appropriateness of historical-event PjBL in an EFL classroom.

Measure

Satisfaction

Main perceived gain

Prior historical knowledge

Interest in projects

Further research

Shift in stereotypes

Future participation

Most impactful project

Active thinking / stereotypes

Key finding

60% extremely satisfied; 30% very satisfied; 10% satisfied

29% group work; 21% active thinking; 14% investigation; 14% changed views

30% rated prior knowledge 4/10

Responses 8–10/10; 50% rated 10/10

50% likely to conduct further research

50% yes; 40% no; remaining respondents unsure

100% willing to undertake similar projects

“Suffragette”: 60%

90% very assisted; all responses positive

4.1 Qualitative Findings

4.1.1 Better Understanding of History

Students reported that the lessons clarified historical concepts they had previously encountered without understanding their significance. The Suffragette movement was particularly memorable, and students connected historical struggles with more recent events and social issues.

4.1.2 Active Thinking

Students described using evidence and further research to refine information and reconsider ideas. Their comments suggested a move from receiving information to questioning and evaluating it.

4.1.3 Race, Gender and Broader Perspectives

Participants reported greater understanding of stereotypes and of the different perspectives associated with cultures and social groups. Some referred to discrimination in their school context and connected the projects with their own experiences.

4.1.4 Language Development

Students reported learning new vocabulary and practising listening, speaking, reading and writing through research, discussion and presentations. Presenting findings also increased confidence in using English.

4.1.5 Cooperation and Self-confidence

Group work required students to refine information together and prepare presentations. Successful presentations were associated with greater confidence and stronger cooperation among classmates.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The findings suggest that historical-event PjBL can combine language learning with meaningful content and active investigation. The high satisfaction and engagement reported by participants are consistent with previous research describing PjBL as a motivating, collaborative and learner-centred approach. The projects required students to work with multiple sources, communicate in English and produce presentations, thereby integrating language skills with research and critical-thinking processes.

The results also indicate that the projects created opportunities for learners to reconsider how stereotypes develop and how historical events shape present-day social attitudes. Importantly, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence that all participants held race or gender stereotypes before the intervention. Several students explicitly stated that they had not considered minorities or other genders inferior; rather, they reported gaining a deeper understanding of the history and social pressures behind inequality. The 50% reporting a change in ideas therefore needs to be considered alongside the 40% reporting no change and the qualitative



explanations.

The study also supports the pedagogical value of the teacher-as-facilitator role. During the projects, students increasingly communicated with one another, supported less confident classmates and used examples from their everyday lives to discuss marginalisation and inequality. The combination of authentic historical content, collaborative research and presentation created opportunities for language practice and intercultural reflection within the EFL classroom.

5.1 Pedagogical Implications

Teachers may adapt historical-event PjBL to their own EFL contexts by selecting age-appropriate events, combining authentic texts with audiovisual material, allowing learners to investigate questions in groups, and requiring a final product or presentation. The approach may be particularly useful when the aim is to integrate language skills with critical thinking, collaboration, research and intercultural awareness. Historical topics should nevertheless be selected and scaffolded according to learners' proficiency, maturity and classroom context.

5.2 Limitations and Further Research

The main limitation is the small, non-random sample of ten students from one English school, which restricts generalisability. Participants had also experienced PjBL previously and were familiar with the researcher's teaching methods, potentially influencing their responses. Time was another limitation: each project was restricted to two lessons, which limited the depth of discussion. Finally, historical-event PjBL may not appeal equally to all learners. Future research should examine larger and more diverse samples, include learners at different proficiency levels, and investigate the approach with younger EFL students.

6. Conclusion

This small-scale study indicates that project-based lessons built around historical events can create an engaging EFL environment in which learners practise language while researching authentic issues, collaborating and reflecting on stereotypes. The participants reported gains in investigation, presentation, cooperation, confidence and active thinking, while qualitative responses highlighted greater awareness of historical and social dimensions of race and gender discrimination. The findings support further investigation of this approach across broader EFL populations and contexts.

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