

Applying Project-Based Learning to Enhance Students' English Public Speaking Skills at MTs YMPI Rappang

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ABSTRACT

Speaking skills are a fundamental aspect of learning English as a foreign language, essential for academic and professional success. However, many students, especially in non-English-speaking environments, face difficulties in communication due to limited vocabulary, low confidence, and lack of practical speaking opportunities. This study explores the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in enhancing students' English-speaking abilities at MTs YMPI Rappang. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through classroom observations, interviews with teachers and students, and an analysis of students' speaking performance before and after PBL implementation. The results show that PBL significantly improved students' speaking skills in terms of fluency, pronunciation, grammar, and confidence. Students became more motivated to speak and actively participated in classroom discussions and group projects. The collaborative nature of PBL fostered peer learning and provided students with authentic speaking experiences, enabling them to practice English in real-world contexts. This study highlights the potential of PBL as an effective method for improving speaking skills and recommends its broader application in language teaching to create more engaging and meaningful learning experiences.

Keywords: Speaking Skills; Project-Based Learning; Student Motivation

INTRODUCTION

In the context of English as a foreign language (EFL), speaking skills are among the most crucial components for language mastery. The ability to speak fluently and confidently in English is essential for students, as it opens doors to academic achievement, career opportunities, and social integration in an increasingly globalized world. Speaking skills enable students to express ideas, engage in

meaningful conversations, and participate actively in academic and professional settings. Despite its importance, many students in non-English-speaking environments struggle to develop effective speaking skills due to various obstacles, including limited vocabulary, anxiety, and inadequate exposure to real-life communication practices.

At MTs YMPI Rappang, many students experience significant difficulties in speaking English. A lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes often discourages them from participating in speaking activities. Additionally, the traditional teacher-centered methods commonly used in the classroom focus heavily on grammar and written exercises, leaving little room for interactive speaking practice. These challenges hinder students' overall language development and prevent them from becoming confident speakers. As a result, there is a growing need for innovative teaching approaches that can create a supportive environment and provide students with authentic speaking opportunities.

One of the most effective strategies for addressing these challenges is Project-Based Learning (PBL). Unlike traditional teaching methods, PBL is a student-centered, inquiry-based approach that emphasizes active learning through real-world projects. It allows students to engage deeply with the subject matter, collaborate with peers, and apply their knowledge in meaningful contexts. In language learning, PBL encourages students to practice speaking in authentic situations, improving fluency, pronunciation, grammar, and overall communication skills. Additionally, PBL promotes critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork—skills that are essential for success beyond the classroom.

Research has shown that PBL can be a powerful tool for fostering student engagement and motivation. By giving students ownership of their learning and focusing on projects that align with their interests and real-life experiences, PBL creates a dynamic and motivating learning environment. For language learners, these authentic experiences are particularly valuable, as they provide a natural context for practicing communication and developing speaking confidence.

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of PBL on improving the speaking skills of students at MTs YMPI Rappang. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research focuses on how PBL influences students' fluency, pronunciation, grammar, and confidence in speaking. Classroom observations, interviews with teachers and students, and an analysis of students' speaking performance before and after PBL implementation are conducted to gather data. Furthermore, the study seeks to identify the broader benefits of PBL, including its ability to foster collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and social interaction among students.

By highlighting the effectiveness of PBL, this research aims to contribute to the development of more innovative and student-centered teaching practices. It emphasizes the importance of providing students with meaningful, real-world learning experiences that build their communication skills while boosting their

confidence and engagement. The findings are expected to offer practical insights for educators seeking to enhance speaking skills through more interactive and dynamic teaching methods, ultimately helping students become more confident and competent speakers of English.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Effective language learning strategies have long been a topic of research, particularly regarding the development of speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Among these strategies, Project-Based Learning (PBL) has gained considerable attention for its potential to improve students' engagement and speaking proficiency. This literature review highlights the significance of speaking skills in language acquisition, the challenges students face in mastering these skills, and the role of PBL in addressing these challenges.

Speaking skills are often regarded as the cornerstone of language learning and a key indicator of language proficiency. According to Richards and Renandya (2002), speaking is essential for students to participate in academic and professional contexts effectively. It allows learners to articulate ideas, engage in discussions, and function in real-life situations requiring immediate verbal responses. For students in non-English-speaking environments, the ability to communicate fluently and confidently in English opens doors to broader academic and career opportunities (Brown, 2007).

Despite its importance, many students struggle to develop speaking skills due to various factors such as anxiety, lack of motivation, and insufficient practice opportunities. Tsui (1996) noted that students lacking confidence in their speaking abilities often avoid verbal communication, which further hinders their progress. This issue is compounded in traditional classrooms, where teacher-centered instruction limits interactive speaking practice, leaving students as passive recipients of information (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

One of the primary challenges in teaching speaking skills is providing students with meaningful opportunities for authentic communication. Ur (1996) pointed out that many language learners face difficulties because they rarely encounter real-life contexts for practicing speaking. Traditional approaches tend to prioritize grammar and vocabulary acquisition over fluency and real-time interaction, which does little to help students develop spontaneous speaking skills for everyday communication (Nunan, 2003). Furthermore, psychological barriers such as fear of making mistakes and negative evaluation contribute to speaking anxiety, reducing students' willingness to participate in conversations (MacIntyre, 1999).

To address these challenges, alternative teaching strategies that promote interaction and real-world communication are essential. Project-Based Learning (PBL) has emerged as a promising approach. Unlike traditional methods, PBL emphasizes active learning through real-world projects, encouraging students to apply their

knowledge while collaborating with peers. According to Thomas (2000), the focus on project completion and problem-solving promotes student autonomy and creates an environment where students feel more comfortable taking risks and experimenting with language.

In the context of language learning, PBL offers numerous benefits for developing speaking skills. Stoller (2006) and Lee (2007) found that PBL significantly improves speaking fluency, vocabulary use, and pronunciation through activities such as group presentations, debates, and discussions. These activities provide students with authentic contexts for practicing English, helping them build confidence and refine their communication skills.

Moreover, the collaborative nature of PBL plays a crucial role in enhancing speaking proficiency. Johnson and Johnson (1999) emphasized that cooperative learning fosters a sense of community and encourages peer interaction, enabling students to learn from one another. Working together on projects exposes students to diverse perspectives and language use, contributing to both linguistic and social development. Peer and instructor feedback throughout the project cycle allows students to reflect on and refine their speaking abilities continuously.

Several studies have explored the specific application of PBL in EFL classrooms. Saha and Tuan (2018) found that students engaging in project-based activities showed significant improvements in speaking fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary. The low-pressure, collaborative environment of PBL helped reduce speaking anxiety and boost students' confidence in using English. Additionally, PBL promotes active learning by encouraging students to take ownership of their projects. Unlike traditional methods that rely on passive learning through lectures, PBL requires students to engage with the language in practical, meaningful ways. This continuous exposure to speaking tasks leads to noticeable improvements in both fluency and accuracy.

In summary, the literature underscores the importance of speaking skills in EFL learning and the numerous challenges students face in developing these skills. It also highlights Project-Based Learning as an effective approach to overcoming these obstacles by fostering real-world communication, collaboration, and student autonomy. By integrating PBL into language teaching curricula, educators can create more engaging and interactive learning experiences, ultimately helping students become more confident and proficient English speakers.

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically a case study approach, to investigate the impact of Project-Based Learning (PBL) on improving students' speaking skills at MTs YMPI Rappang. The case study approach was

chosen to explore students' experiences in a real classroom setting and understand how PBL affects their speaking proficiency, including fluency, pronunciation, and confidence. The participants included 30 secondary school students (aged 14 to 16) enrolled in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program. These students were selected based on their willingness to participate and represented a mix of proficiency levels. The class was taught by an experienced English teacher familiar with PBL methods. Both the students and the teacher were key participants, offering valuable insights into the learning process.

Instrument and Procedures

Three primary methods were used for data collection: classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and speaking performance analysis.

1. Classroom Observations:

The researcher observed six weeks of PBL-based lessons to document student behavior, engagement, and verbal interactions during speaking tasks. Activities such as group discussions and presentations were closely monitored, with detailed field notes taken to track the development of students' speaking skills over time.

2. Semi-Structured Interviews:

Interviews were conducted with both students and the teacher at the beginning and end of the study.

- a. Student Interviews. Focused on their experiences with PBL, including perceptions of improvement in speaking skills and challenges encountered.

- b. Teacher Interview. Explored the planning and implementation of PBL lessons, as well as the teacher's observations of students' progress in speaking proficiency.

3. Speaking Performance Assessment

Speaking performance was evaluated before and after the PBL intervention. Students were assessed through individual presentations, group debates, and collaborative discussions. A detailed rubric measured fluency, pronunciation, grammar accuracy, and vocabulary usage.

The PBL tasks involved real-world scenarios requiring English communication, such as:

- a. Group presentations and debates on assigned topics.
 - b. Interactive discussions on relevant themes.
 - c. Collaborative projects, such as creating promotional materials or planning events.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Observations, interviews, and performance data were coded for recurring themes related to speaking skills, such as fluency, confidence, and vocabulary use. A before-and-after comparison of students' speaking performance helped assess the effectiveness of PBL in

improving speaking abilities. Ethical standards were adhered to throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their privacy was protected through pseudonyms and data anonymization. The study received approval from the school administration, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal that Project-Based Learning (PBL) significantly enhanced students' speaking skills in key areas such as fluency, pronunciation, grammar accuracy, vocabulary usage, and confidence.

Fluency

One of the most notable improvements was in students' speaking fluency. Prior to the PBL intervention, many students experienced frequent hesitations and long pauses during conversations, struggling to maintain a natural flow of speech. However, after participating in PBL activities, students demonstrated greater ease and fluidity in their speaking. Classroom observations revealed that students were more willing to speak, even on unfamiliar topics, and were able to communicate their ideas smoothly during group discussions and presentations. The emphasis on real-world projects provided continuous, meaningful speaking practice, which gradually reduced students' fear of spontaneous communication.

Pronunciation

Pronunciation also showed significant improvement. Throughout the PBL process, students were consistently exposed to speaking opportunities that required them to articulate their thoughts clearly. Activities such as debates and presentations encouraged students to focus on accurate pronunciation. Feedback from both the teacher and peers played a crucial role in helping students correct common errors and refine their pronunciation. Over time, students' speech became more clear and intelligible, which contributed to improved overall communication.

Grammar Accuracy

Improvements in grammar were also observed, particularly in the areas of sentence structure and verb usage. Post-intervention assessments showed that students demonstrated a stronger grasp of basic grammatical rules. While some errors persisted in more complex sentence constructions, students generally displayed better accuracy in forming grammatically correct sentences during conversational tasks. This progress reflects their increased exposure to authentic language use and the integration of grammar in meaningful communication contexts.

Vocabulary Expansion

Vocabulary usage expanded as students engaged in diverse project-based tasks. These activities required them to apply new vocabulary in context, particularly words related to their project topics. As students collaborated and presented their projects, they began incorporating a broader range of vocabulary into their speech. This not only improved their ability to express ideas more precisely but also contributed to their overall language development.

Confidence and Motivation

The most remarkable change observed was in students' confidence in speaking English. Initially, many students were hesitant to participate in speaking tasks due to fear of making mistakes or being judged. However, the collaborative and supportive nature of PBL helped alleviate these anxieties. Group work created a low-pressure environment where students felt encouraged to take risks and actively participate. Over time, students became more comfortable expressing their ideas in both formal and informal speaking tasks. Their increased self-assurance was evident during presentations and group discussions, where they spoke with greater enthusiasm and clarity.

The improvement in speaking fluency can be attributed to the increased frequency of speaking opportunities provided by PBL. As students were required to present their ideas in both individual and group settings, they had more chances to practice their speaking skills in realistic, stress-free situations. This constant exposure to speaking in front of others helped reduce the anxiety associated with speaking, leading to smoother communication. Similar findings have been reported in other studies (Stoller, 2006; Saha & Tuan, 2018), where project-based methods led to higher fluency in language learners. Collaboration played a key role in enhancing students' speaking skills. Working together on projects allowed students to practice English in real-life scenarios, where communication was not only required for learning but also for completing tasks.

The peer feedback loop, where students corrected each other's mistakes and offered suggestions, was crucial in helping them refine their language skills. This aligns with Johnson and Johnson's (1999) assertion that cooperative learning fosters a sense of community, motivates learners, and enhances language acquisition through peer interaction. PBL's emphasis on real-world applications of language contributed significantly to students' speaking development. By engaging in authentic tasks—such as debates, presentations, and creating promotional materials—students saw the relevance of English in everyday situations, making learning more meaningful. According to Thomas (2000), real-world projects allow students to use language in a practical context, which boosts motivation and retention. In this study, students who may have previously viewed English as an academic subject began to appreciate its practical utility, increasing their motivation to practice and improve their speaking skills.

PBL also fostered greater engagement and motivation among students. The interactive nature of the method, where students worked on projects that aligned with their interests, made learning more enjoyable and less monotonous. This finding mirrors Stoller's (2006) conclusion that PBL increases student motivation by providing them with opportunities to engage in authentic, challenging tasks. Students expressed excitement about the projects and showed an increased willingness to speak up during lessons, demonstrating a direct link between motivation and improved speaking performance. While the results of this study are promising, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. The study was conducted in a single school with a small sample size, which may limit the generalizability of the findings.

Additionally, despite improvements in speaking, some students still struggled with grammatical accuracy and vocabulary usage, particularly in more complex contexts. Future research could examine ways to integrate targeted grammar instruction within PBL activities to address these gaps more effectively. Moreover, the study relied on observational data and self-reports, which may be subject to biases. This study highlights the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in improving students' speaking skills in English. By providing students with regular opportunities for meaningful verbal communication in a supportive, real-world context, PBL fostered increased fluency, better pronunciation, expanded vocabulary, and greater confidence. The results suggest that PBL is a valuable approach to language teaching, particularly for enhancing speaking skills, and should be integrated more widely into EFL curricula. Future research could further explore how specific PBL elements, such as peer feedback and real-world tasks, contribute to language acquisition.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Project-Based Learning (PBL) is an effective approach for improving students' speaking skills at MTs YMPI Rappang, particularly in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and confidence. Through real-world projects, students had meaningful speaking practice, leading to more coherent speech, better pronunciation, and expanded vocabulary use. The collaborative nature of PBL boosted students' confidence and motivation, encouraging active participation and reducing their fear of speaking. While students made significant progress, some still struggled with grammatical accuracy, highlighting the need for targeted grammar support in future PBL activities. Overall, PBL offers a practical, engaging way to develop speaking skills in EFL learners. Its wider implementation is recommended to help students become more confident and capable English speakers. Future research can explore strategies to strengthen grammar integration within the PBL framework.

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