

Exploring Project-Based Learning in English for Tourism Course: Enhancing Students Engagement and Practical Communication Skills

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Abstract

This study explores the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in an English for Tourism course to enhance student engagement and develop practical communication skills. In the context of the tourism industry, effective communication in English is essential for success. Therefore, this research focuses on how PBL, a student-centered learning approach, can improve learners' abilities to communicate in real-world tourism scenarios. Weekly projects were assigned to university students, requiring them to work in groups and present tourism-related topics, such as cultural heritage, tour packages, promoting tourist destinations, and hospitality services. The study utilized qualitative methods, including classroom observations and student interviews, and analysis of project presentations, to evaluate the impact of PjBL on their language proficiency and engagement. Findings reveal that PjBL significantly increased students' engagement and practical communication skills. Participation promoted collaborative learning, and enhanced their practical use of tourism-specific English. Furthermore, students demonstrated improved confidence in public speaking and better application of communication strategies adjusted to the tourism. The research concludes that PjBL is an effective learning model for bridging theoretical learning with practical, industry-relevant skills in English for Tourism courses.

Keywords: Practical Communication Skill; English for Tourism; Project Based Learning; Student Engagement

INTRODUCTION

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) has emerged as an innovative instructional approach in language education, offering students authentic learning experiences that foster engagement and practical skill development. In the context of English for Tourism, where communication and cultural competence are very important, PjBL serves as a dynamic framework that bridges theoretical knowledge with real-world application. Project-Based Learning (PjBL) has become an effective tool for raising student interest and fostering the development of useful communication abilities (Nayak, A., Satpathy, I., & Jain, V., 2024; Firdausih, F., & Yusnelli, Y., 2024; Menggo, S., Pramesti, P. D. M. Y., & Krismayani, N. W. (2023). Unlike traditional methods that often emphasize rote memorization, PjBL promotes teamwork, active engagement, and the use of knowledge in practical contexts, making it particularly suitable for courses such as English for Tourism (Reyes, A. M., 2024; Thomas, 2000; Purnawati, M., & Sari, N., 2023). Effective English communication is essential for success in the tourist sector in a world that is becoming more interconnected by the day, as the global tourism landscape evolves, professionals are required to possess not only linguistic proficiency but also the ability to navigate cultural nuances and engage with diverse clientele (Ho, Y. Y. C. (2020; Pérez, 2020). Traditional language teaching methods often fall short of equipping students with the

practical skills needed for real-world applications, leading to a disconnect between theoretical knowledge and practical execution (Smit, 2018;). PjBL offers a transformative approach to language education, emphasizing active learning and collaboration. This student-centered pedagogical model immerses learners in hands-on projects that reflect authentic challenges within their field of study (Kurniadi, D., & Cahyaningrum, I. O. (2023; Tambunan, E. E., Ramadhani, Y. R., & Sibuea, B., 2024; Omelianenko, O., & Artyukhova, N., 2024). In the context of an English for Tourism course, PBL facilitates the integration of language skills with essential industry competencies, promoting not only linguistic proficiency but also critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork (Lattuca & Stark, 2009).

Recent studies have shown that PjBL enhances student motivation and fosters deeper learning by connecting academic content to practical application (Yu, H.,2024; Vaithianathan, V., Subbulakshmi, N., Boopathi, S., & Mohanraj, M., 2024). According to Dewi (2017), PjBL focuses on central concepts and principles, enabling students to engage in problem-solving activities while fostering autonomy and critical thinking. This method encourages students to identify, describe, analyze, and evaluate problems, thereby enhancing their reasoning and decision-making skills (Setiawan et al., 2020). The benefits of PjBL include promoting active participation, encouraging critical thinking, and enabling students to synthesize information and develop solutions to real-world problems (Ewenddy, S. S., Gailea, N., & Syafrizal, S., 2023; Moustafa, A., & Al-Rashaida, M. (2024; Tafakur, T., Retnawati, H., & Shukri, A. A. M. (2023). Murniarti (2016) highlights that PjBL trains students to conduct evaluations and compile summaries of their findings, effectively preparing them for real-world challenges. This approach aligns well with the demands of the modern educational landscape, especially during the pandemic era, where traditional face-to-face interactions have shifted to online platforms.

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) not only provides benefits in enhancing speaking skills but also contributes to the development of students' social and emotional competencies. According to Jeng (2019), PjBL allows students to work in groups, effectively building collaborative and communication skills that are essential in the modern workplace context. The interactions that occur during the project process help students develop empathy, tolerance, and adaptability, all of which are crucial in an increasingly diverse professional world (Bell, 2010). Moreover, this method encourages students to become more independent in their learning, as they are responsible for planning, executing, and evaluating the projects they undertake. This aligns with the principles of experiential education that emphasize the importance of relevant and contextual learning, which can enhance students' intrinsic motivation (Gulikers et al., 2008). Thus, PjBL serves as a powerful tool not only for developing linguistic skills but also for equipping students with life skills that will support them in their future careers.

Several studies on developing teaching materials for English for Tourism courses show that PjBL helps students improve their skills in comprehending the English material. First, Lestari & Sutrisna (2022) found out that the use of PjBL in learning English in the tourism study program is assumed to be able to help students prepare for the future well in terms of English skills and, at the same time, help lecturers to organize a more meaningful English learning process. Second, Makrifah & Widiarini (2019) also indicated that the development of teaching materials based on PjBL allows students of the Travel Business Department to actively and creatively develop specific competencies and help improve English skills actively. Third, Syafiudin et al. (2016) stated that the project-based learning model builds students' understanding constructively by sharing knowledge and information through discussions and learning processes that focus on completing outcomes following their cultural background. By working on projects that simulate real-world tourism scenarios, students can improve their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in English.

From the theories above, it can be concluded that Project-Based Learning (PjBL) emerges as a transformative approach in English for Tourism education, bridging theoretical knowledge with

practical application. By engaging students in collaborative, real-world projects, PjBL not only enhances their language proficiency but also develops critical communication, cultural competence, and problem-solving skills essential for the tourism industry. The integration of local culture and industry-relevant tasks further enriches the learning experience, fostering deeper engagement and autonomy. As studies have demonstrated, PjBL equips students with the tools necessary for success in a dynamic global marketplace, making it a valuable pedagogical framework for preparing future tourism professionals.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design with case study to explore the impact of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) on student engagement and practical communication skills in the English for Tourism course at a private University in Indonesia. The primary focus was on understanding how PjBL can enhance students' engagement and practical communication skills. The participants consist of 8 undergraduate students enrolled in the English for Tourism course during in the 5th semester. PjBL was implemented in one semester, during which students participated in weekly projects covering various tourism-related topics, such as cultural heritage, tour packages, promoting tourist destinations, and hospitality services. Students were organized into working in groups to finish the project (individual presentation in the classroom) of encouraging collaboration as they observed and presented their findings. Each group was tasked with selecting a specific aspect of tourism to explore in depth, enabling them to engage with real-world issues and develop practical solutions. Throughout the semester, students utilized various resources, including academic articles, visit the places, and multimedia content, to support their projects. Weekly progress meetings were held to facilitate group discussions, allow for feedback from peers and a lecturer, and ensure that all members were contributing effectively to the project. The culmination of each project involved individual presentations after they work together in the projects, where students showcased their findings and proposed initiatives related to their chosen topic. This not only honed their presentation skills but also fostered an environment of constructive feedback and shared learning among peers.

Data were collected using observations checklist and oral presentation. The researcher conducted classroom observations throughout the project presentations and collaborative activities. Observation sessions focused on assessing student engagement levels, interaction quality among group members, and the overall classroom atmosphere. Specific attention was paid to indicators of engagement are behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, cognitive engagement and social engagement. While the speaking rubrics are used to asses students' fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary usage, grammar accuracy. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which observation checklist and speaking rubrics which focus on students' engagement and practical communication skills.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study aims to evaluate the level of students engagement through the implementation of project-based learning in the *English for Tourism* course. Project-based learning was chosen to provide a more contextual and relevant learning experience aligned with the tourism industry. The research data were collected through classroom observations and student presentation.

Table 1. Aspect of Students' Engagement

Students' Engagement	Indicator	Findings	Notes
Behavioral Engagement	Attendance, participation in discussions, project presentations, group work.	Students actively participate in weekly project-based assignments that is presentation.	all students were present and participated actively, and there were no technical obstacles during group work.
Emotional Engagement	Positive attitude, enthusiasm, interest in the material.	Students show enthusiasm and interested when preparing projects such as creating a tourist itinerary.	all students understand technical terms in tourism.
Cognitive Engagement	Understanding of material, creativity, ability to solve problems.	Students are able to apply theory into practical projects as cultural heritage, tour packages, promoting tourist destinations, and hospitality services.	Creativity increases, and understanding of technical terms increases.
Social Engagement	Interaction between group members, productive presentation and collaborative.	Students collaborate effectively in teams to complete projects such as tourism promotional videos.	all students were involved in group discussions, presentation and collaboration went well.

The 2nd table examines how a project-based learning model can enhance students' practical communication skills in an English for Tourism class. The findings indicate that the project-based approach allows students to practice communication relevant to real-world contexts, such as presenting about cultural heritage, tour packages, promoting tourist destinations, and hospitality services in English. Students' practical communication skills are reflected in various aspects, including speaking fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary usage, and grammar accuracy in tourism contexts. Moreover, project-based activities encourage students to overcome communication barriers, such as nervousness and lack of confidence, through hands-on experiences and collaborative group work. However, certain challenges need to be addressed, such as the varying levels of English proficiency among students, which affect the quality of interaction and presentations. Nonetheless, the findings suggest that project-based learning provides significant opportunities for students to develop practical communication skills that are applicable in the professional world.

Table 2. Aspects of Students' Practical Communication Skills

Aspect	Indicator	Findings	Notes
Fluency	Fluency in speaking, minimal pauses when speaking.	Students spoke fluently during the tourist and tour guide simulation although there were some pauses due to searching for words.	5 students are good and 3 Students need more practice to reduce pauses in speaking.
Pronunciation	Clarity and accuracy of pronunciation.	students have clear enough pronunciation,	5 students are good and 3 students showed improvement after being given pronunciation practice (drilling).
Vocabulary Usage	Use of contextually appropriate technical terms.	Students use tourism-specific vocabulary, such as itinerary, destination, attraction, travel agency, tour package, guide, check in, check out, reservation, ticket, train station well.	Students are more confident with their understanding after a session teaching technical terms.

Grammar Accuracy	Accuracy of sentence structure and use of tenses.	Most students use simple grammar correctly	Common mistakes in the use of past tense and compound sentences.
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Discussion

1. Students' Engagement

Behavioral engagement indicate a high level of student participation and enthusiasm in the weekly project-based assignments by doing presentation in the classroom. The 100% attendance rate and active involvement in discussions, project presentations, and group work demonstrate the effectiveness of the project-based learning approach in fostering engagement. Collaborative activities not only capture students' interest but also encourage a sense of responsibility and teamwork. Additionally, the absence of technical obstacles during group work further highlights the smooth implementation of this approach, emphasizing its potential to enhance both engagement and learning outcomes in an English for Tourism course. The students in this study were involved actively as behavioral engagement is recognizable as an act of active participation in classroom activities and interaction with peers, teachers and the content (J. Lee, et.al, 2019; Johnson, C. S., & Delawsky, S., 2013; Chang, Y., Choi, J., & Şen-Akbulut, M., 2024). Emotional engagement reveal that students exhibit enthusiasm and interest, particularly when presenting all projects in front of the classroom. Their positive attitudes towards the tasks indicate that the project-based learning approach resonates well with their learning preferences and stimulates intrinsic motivation. The fact that all students demonstrated an understanding of technical terms in tourism further supports the effectiveness of this method in making the material engaging and accessible (Johnson, C. S., & Delawsky, S., 2013; Chang, Y., Choi, J., & Şen-Akbulut, M., 2024).

Cognitive engagement indicate that students successfully bridge theoretical knowledge with practical application through the projects. Their ability to demonstrate creativity and solve problems highlights the effectiveness of project-based learning in fostering higher-order thinking skills (J. Lee., 2019; Johnson, C. S., & Delawsky, S., 2013; Chang, Y., Choi, J., & Şen-Akbulut, M., 2024).). The 100% increase in creativity and improved understanding of technical tourism terms reflect the students' growing competency in applying academic concepts to real-world scenarios. Social engagement demonstrate that students collaborate effectively in completing all projects in cultural heritage, tour packages, promoting tourist destinations, and hospitality services. This active interaction not only facilitates productive discussions but also enhances students' ability to work cohesively towards shared goals (Johnson, C. S., & Delawsky, S., 2013; Chang, Y., Choi, J., & Şen-Akbulut, M., 2024).).

The implementation of project-based learning in the English for Tourism course has proven highly effective in fostering comprehensive student engagement—behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social. The high levels of participation, enthusiasm, creativity, and collaboration observed throughout the course underscore the method's ability to enhance learning outcomes, stimulate intrinsic motivation, and prepare students for practical applications in real-world scenarios. This approach demonstrates significant potential for cultivating essential skills and deepening students' understanding of technical tourism concepts while promoting teamwork and responsibility.

2. Students' Practical Communication Skills

The fluency of students during the tourist and tour guide presentation promising level of speaking ability, with minimal pauses for most participants. This indicates that the students are developing their confidence and ability to convey ideas in English effectively, despite occasional hesitations when searching for appropriate vocabulary. The observation that 5

students performed well, while 3 students need more practice, highlights the varying levels of proficiency within the group. The analysis of students' pronunciation during the simulation revealed generally clear and understandable speech, reflecting a solid foundation in phonological awareness. Among the participants, 5 students demonstrated consistently good pronunciation, indicating their ability to articulate sounds accurately and effectively. Meanwhile, 3 students showed noticeable improvement following targeted pronunciation practice through drilling. This highlights the effectiveness of explicit pronunciation activities in addressing articulation challenges and enhancing clarity. The variation in performance suggests that structured and repetitive drills can serve as a crucial intervention to support students who struggle with certain phonemes or intonation patterns.

The students' use of tourism-specific vocabulary during the simulation demonstrated their ability to incorporate technical terms relevant to the context, such as itinerary, destination, attraction, travel agency, tour package, guide, check in, check out, reservation, ticket, train station. However, common errors in the use of past tense and compound sentences highlight areas for improvement in grammatical accuracy. These mistakes suggest a need for more targeted instruction in sentence structure and verb tense usage, particularly in integrating technical vocabulary into grammatically correct sentences. The students displayed a satisfactory level of grammatical accuracy, particularly in their use of simple sentence structures and basic tenses. This demonstrates a foundational understanding of grammar, which supports clear communication. However, recurring errors in the use of past tense and the formation of compound sentences suggest a need for deeper practice in these areas. These mistakes may stem from limited exposure to complex sentence construction or insufficient focus on tense consistency during practice. Addressing these challenges through targeted grammar exercises and contextual sentence-building activities could help students refine their accuracy.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of project-based learning (PjBL) in the English for Tourism course significantly enhanced both students' engagement and their practical communication skills. PjBL fostered active participation and enthusiasm among students, evidenced by their behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social engagement. Students actively participated in project tasks, displayed positive attitudes towards learning, applied critical thinking skills to solve real-world problems, and effectively collaborated in teams. The integration of real-world scenarios into the learning process motivated students to take ownership of their learning, leading to higher levels of involvement and meaningful engagement throughout the course. Students demonstrated substantial improvements in various aspects of practical communication. Their fluency in speaking increased, though occasional pauses suggest a need for further practice in spontaneous conversations. Pronunciation clarity improved, although challenges with specific sounds require more focused phonetic training. Students effectively used tourism-specific vocabulary, enabling them to communicate professionally, though there remains a need for expanded exposure to advanced terms. Grammar accuracy showed progress in simple sentence construction, but additional attention is needed for complex sentence structures. Moreover, students excelled in interactive skills, particularly in familiar scenarios, demonstrating the ability to respond to questions and engage in professional conversations, albeit with room for improvement in handling unexpected situations. By integrating realistic tasks and collaborative learning, PjBL not only motivates students to participate actively but also equips them with the communication tools necessary for success in the tourism industry.

Future implementations should incorporate more diverse and challenging simulations, intensive feedback, and targeted skill-building activities to further optimize outcomes.

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