

Enhancing Speaking and Collaboration Skills Through Project-Based Learning: A Case Study of Indonesian EFL University Students

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Abstract

This study explores the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in enhancing speaking and collaboration skills among Indonesian university students in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Employing a qualitative and quantitative case study design, twenty-eight undergraduate students participated in a semester-long PBL program, engaging in a series of communicative and collaborative projects designed to foster active language use. Data were collected through systematic classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and performance-based assessments. The findings indicate that PBL significantly improved students' speaking fluency, lexical richness, pronunciation accuracy, and overall communicative competence. Moreover, students demonstrated notable development in teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities. Participants also expressed increased motivation, engagement, and autonomy in managing learning tasks. The results suggest that PBL offers substantial pedagogical value in promoting both linguistic proficiency and essential social competencies in EFL learning environments. The study concludes with implications for language pedagogy and recommendations for future research to further explore PBL's long-term impact.

Keywords: Project-Based Learning; Speaking Skills; Collaboration; EFL Students; Case Study

INTRODUCTION

Mastering speaking skills and fostering collaboration are essential components for success in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, particularly in higher education settings. To support this, Amalia et al. (2024) emphasise that speaking skills are one of the most important parts of language mastery when it comes to EFL. Students need to be able to speak English fluently and with confidence because it helps them do well in school, get jobs, and make friends. In Indonesia, despite numerous curriculum reforms and methodological innovations, many university students still encounter significant difficulties in achieving communicative competence, especially in spoken English (Latifah et al., 2019). Traditional teacher-centered instruction often prioritises grammar translation and rote memorisation, offering limited opportunities for students to practice speaking authentically and collaboratively. Consequently, there is a growing need for more interactive, student-centered approaches that can bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical language use. This need is echoed in several recent studies. For example, Arifin et al. (2024) observed that traditional face-to-face teaching often ignores students' emotional needs and speaking practice, which can make them anxious and limit their ability to communicate. Similarly, Wijaya (2023) highlighted in his systematic review that the use of grammar-translation methods in Indonesian EFL classes makes it harder for students to improve their speaking skills. They called for more learner-centered practices such as collaborative speaking projects, storytelling, and interactive simulations. One such promising approach is Project-Based Learning (PBL), which immerses students in meaningful projects requiring active use of the target language. Prior research highlights that PBL

significantly improves students' speaking fluency, vocabulary acquisition, creative thinking, and presentation skills (Latifah et al., 2019). In addition, studies conducted in specific fields, such as English for Tourism, demonstrate that PBL not only enhances linguistic abilities but also fosters practical communication skills critical for real-world applications (Nehe et al., 2025). From a broader perspective, PBL has been shown to significantly enhance critical thinking, language acquisition, and employability skills among EFL learners, reinforcing its relevance in modern education (John & Levshits, 2024). Moreover, findings from a study conducted in Kosovar secondary schools indicate that PBL effectively develops students' creativity, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking abilities, positioning it as a vital strategy for English language acquisition (Latifaj & Latifaj, 2023). Project-Based Learning consistently fosters not only speaking proficiency but also collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking skills, making it an essential pedagogical approach in contemporary EFL education contexts (John & Levshits, 2024; Latifah et al., 2019; Latifaj & Latifaj, 2023; Nehe et al., 2025). Such synthesis highlights the growing global consensus regarding the transformative impact of PBL on both linguistic and social competencies. Furthermore, integrating technological tools into PBL frameworks further enriches the learning experience. Recent studies demonstrate that incorporating media such as podcasts in project-based activities fosters students' creativity, boosts their speaking skills, and enhances their learning engagement (Agung Buwono & Surono, 2024). Such integration is particularly crucial in a post-pandemic educational landscape where digital literacy and autonomous learning skills are indispensable. Addressing these developments, the present study investigates the implementation of Project-Based Learning in the English Literature Study Program, Faculty of Arts and Letters, Universitas Pasundan, Indonesia. The study aims to examine how a semester-long PBL program can enhance undergraduate students' speaking fluency, communicative confidence, and collaboration skills. Employing a qualitative case study design, this research seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of PBL's pedagogical impact within an Indonesian EFL university context. It is expected that the findings will contribute to the growing body of literature advocating for dynamic, student-centered approaches in language education.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative and quantitative case study design to investigate the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in improving speaking and collaboration abilities among Indonesian EFL university students. The study was conducted at the English Literature Study Program, Faculty of Arts and Letters, Universitas Pasundan, during the 2024 academic year. According to Creswell (2014), a case study approach is particularly effective for exploring a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context through detailed and comprehensive data collection from multiple sources, making it highly suitable for this research.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of twenty-eight third-year undergraduate students enrolled in the English Literature Study Program. They were selected through purposive sampling based on their enrollment in a speaking course integrating PBL as the primary instructional strategy. All participants were at an intermediate English proficiency level, as determined by academic performance and initial placement tests.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and performance-based speaking assessments. Observations were conducted throughout the semester to record students' active participation, collaborative behavior, and language use during project activities. Semi-structured interviews were administered at the end of the

program to capture students' perceptions and reflections regarding their learning experiences. Additionally, students' final project presentations were evaluated using an analytic rubric focusing on fluency, vocabulary range, pronunciation clarity, and teamwork skills.

Data Analysis Techniques

Thematic analysis was employed to examine qualitative data from observations and interviews, identifying patterns and themes related to the development of speaking proficiency, collaboration, and learner motivation. Quantitative descriptive analysis was utilized to assess improvements in speaking performance based on the rubric evaluations. Data triangulation from multiple sources was applied to enhance the credibility and validity of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings of the present study clearly demonstrate the positive impact of Project-Based Learning (PBL) on the speaking and collaboration skills of Indonesian EFL university students. Data were collected through three primary methods: classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and performance-based assessments. Each data source provided rich insights into the students' language development and engagement throughout the semester-long intervention.

Classroom Observations

Systematic observations conducted during project activities revealed significant behavioral and linguistic changes among participants. Initially, students were hesitant to engage in English conversations, often relying on brief, grammatically simple sentences. As the semester progressed, there was a visible shift: students began using a wider range of vocabulary, formed more complex sentences, and initiated spontaneous interactions with their peers. Group discussions became more dynamic, with students negotiating meaning, clarifying misunderstandings, and offering constructive feedback to one another. These developments are aligned with García's (2023) assertion that PBL fosters both social and academic competencies transferable to real-world contexts.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The thematic analysis of interview responses revealed that students perceived PBL as a highly motivating and empowering learning method. Many participants emphasized that working on meaningful, real-life projects reduced their speaking anxiety and enhanced their willingness to use English actively. Several students noted that collaborating with peers on joint tasks gave them the opportunity to practice speaking in a less intimidating environment, fostering a sense of community and mutual support. This finding resonates with the results of Hilario (2023), who showed that interdisciplinary PBL significantly improves both speaking skills and learner motivation.

Performance-Based Assessments

Assessment scores, measured through rubric evaluations focusing on fluency, vocabulary usage, pronunciation, and collaboration, reflected substantial gains. The students' average fluency scores increased from 65% pre-project to 80% post-project. Vocabulary usage improved from 60% to 78%, pronunciation from 62% to 77%, and collaboration from 68% to 85%. These improvements suggest that PBL not only enhanced individual speaking abilities but also strengthened students' interpersonal communication and teamwork capacities.

Table 1. Students' Speaking and Collaboration Performance Before and After PBL Implementation.

Criteria	Pre-Project Average Score	Post-Project Average Score	Improvement (%)
Fluency	65	80	23%

Vocabulary Usage	60	78	30%
Pronunciation	62	77	24%
Collaboration	68	85	25%

To further illustrate the overall improvement, Figure 1 shows the comparative growth across skills:

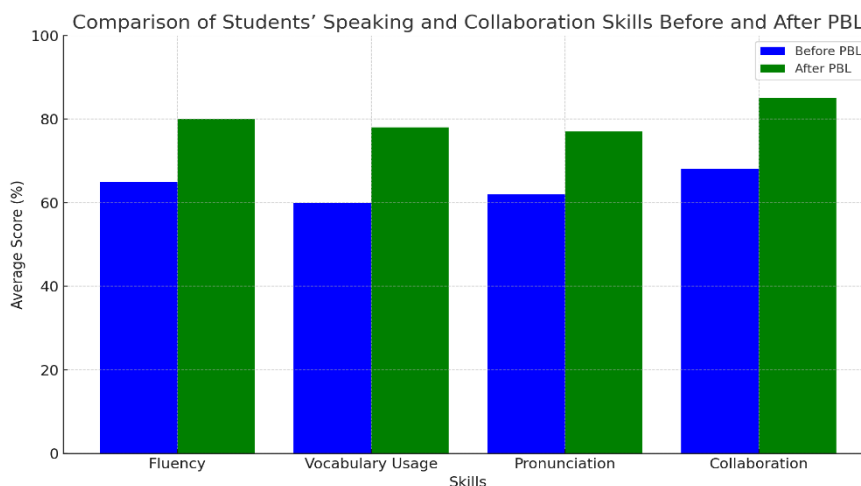


Figure 1. Comparison of Students' Speaking and Collaboration Skills Pre- and Post-PBL Program.

In addition to quantitative improvements, qualitative gains were also evident. Students increasingly exhibited meta-cognitive strategies such as planning their speech, using circumlocution when encountering unknown vocabulary, and actively seeking peer feedback to refine their performance. This evolution supports the broader body of research advocating for PBL's role in promoting self-directed learning and critical thinking. Furthermore, students' use of digital tools to collaborate and present projects expanded their technological literacy. This outcome aligns with Ishtiaq Khan et al. (2021), who reported that mobile-assisted language learning platforms enhance both vocabulary development and speaking practice. Overall, the combination of observational, interview, and performance data suggests that PBL is an effective, multidimensional pedagogical strategy for fostering speaking skills, collaboration, and learner autonomy in an EFL university context.

Discussion

The results affirm the effectiveness of PBL in enhancing EFL students' speaking performance and collaborative abilities, as consistently reported across previous studies. Firstly, the use of authentic, real-world projects aligns with Hilario (2023), who demonstrated that interdisciplinary PBL significantly improves young learners' speaking outcomes compared to traditional methods. Similarly, Bashori et al., (2024) emphasized that integrating automatic speech recognition (ASR) technologies in language learning websites supports better pronunciation and vocabulary acquisition, providing immediate feedback that aids oral skills development. Secondly, findings from Cahyono et al., (2024) showed that PBL fosters writing proficiency through student collaboration and inquiry-based tasks. Although focused on writing, the same collaborative dynamic applies to speaking skills, particularly in group project discussions and presentations.

Moreover, reflective learning strategies during PBL activities, as discussed by Yulhendri et al., (2023), contributed to students' improved critical thinking and teamwork in this study. Reflection helped learners evaluate their speaking performances and identify areas for further improvement. The online integration aspect in this research was consistent with observations by Asfihana et al., (2022), where Virtual PBL promoted skills in digital literacy, critical thinking, and communication. Artificial intelligence (AI) support in language learning environments, as explored by Zou et al., (2023), also finds resonance here: social network-based interaction using digital platforms helped maintain speaking practice outside traditional class settings. Students' engagement and motivation mirrored results from Phoeun and Sengsri (2021), who found that flipped classrooms using communicative language teaching (CLT) approaches significantly improved speaking abilities. Additionally, the interdisciplinary approach embedded in PBL activities, where speaking tasks involved multiple academic subjects and real-life contexts, supported students' holistic language development, consistent with Hilario (2023). Overall, the current study not only corroborates but extends prior research findings by providing empirical evidence from Indonesian EFL university students that PBL fosters meaningful improvements in both speaking proficiency and collaborative competence, especially when integrated with reflective practices and technology-enhanced learning tools.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in enhancing the speaking and collaboration skills of Indonesian EFL university students. The findings confirmed that the implementation of PBL significantly contributed to improvements in students' speaking fluency, vocabulary usage, pronunciation, and collaborative abilities. Observational data revealed that students became more engaged, confident, and autonomous in using English during project activities. Semi-structured interviews further confirmed that students perceived PBL as a motivating and empowering approach that encouraged authentic communication and teamwork. Performance-based assessments showed consistent improvement across all evaluated speaking indicators, demonstrating the tangible impact of PBL on students' language competencies. The integration of digital technologies within project tasks also supported the development of students' technological literacy and self-directed learning strategies. The results affirm that PBL is an effective pedagogical strategy for addressing common challenges in EFL classrooms, such as limited speaking practice, low student motivation, and insufficient collaborative learning opportunities. Furthermore, the study's findings align with previous research highlighting the broader educational benefits of PBL, including the promotion of critical thinking, creativity, and 21st century skills. In conclusion, the adoption of Project-Based Learning in EFL contexts provides a powerful framework for fostering language proficiency and collaborative competencies, thereby better preparing students for academic and professional success. Future research could explore the long-term impacts of PBL across different language skills and learning environments.

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