

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD PROJECT BASED LEARNING AS STIMULI FOR INTEGRATING THE LANGUAGE SKILLS

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Abstract

Encountered with ever-changing curriculum within its different teaching model arouse vary attitudes from the students. However, negative or positive students' attitude toward teaching strategies will influence their learning process. Students' low motivation as the negative attitude become one factor which makes literacy of Indonesian students belongs to the low level group. The implementation of new 2013 curriculum tries to maintain this problem by offering new teaching models which project based learning is one of the offered models. The purpose of the study was to investigate the students' attitudes toward project based learning as stimuli for integrating the language skills. This study applied cross-sectional survey-based design which was carried out in 2014–2015 education-instruction year in a private vocational school. Totally 33 students in the second grade of this school participated in the study. The close-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interview was applied to elicit students' attitudes toward the implementation of project based learning. The questionnaire and interview data were qualitatively analyzed. Results of the study revealed that students show a positive attitude towards the implementation of project based learning and they have the same voice regarding their integrating language skills which stimulated by the project based learning. Finally, some pedagogical implications that would help increase the students' attitudes were presented.

Keywords: students' attitudes, project based learning, integrated skills

1. Introduction

Students' attitude is one of the main factors that determine their success in language learning. Attitudes towards the target language, its speakers and the learning context may all play some part in explaining their success or failure (Candlin and Mercer, 2001). Previous researches have been conducted on the role of attitude in second language acquisition, spurred by the knowledge that negative attitudes can be changed. Factors like better teaching strategies, classroom and social environment can help reduce negative attitudes. Fortunately, attitudes do not remain static; they can be changed through the learning process such as by using appropriate materials and teaching techniques.

Related with finding the appropriate teaching strategies especially in teaching language, commonly accepted perspectives on language teaching and learning recognize that, in meaningful communication, people employ incremental language skills not in isolation but in tandem (Hinkel, 2006, p. 113). Many procedures have been adopted to integrate the four language skills into the curriculum for teaching and learning language skills. Fried-Booth (2002) highlights project based learning allows the integration skills and provides students with opportunities to communicate, therefore enabling them to develop their communicative competence. In addition, project-based learning provides opportunities for "the natural integration of language skills" (Stoller, 2006:33). Thus, the project based learning has been chosen as one of teaching models included in Indonesia current curriculum called as 2013 curriculum. However, the frequent changing of the curriculum within its different teaching model arouse vary attitudes from the students. As noted earlier that students' attitude toward teaching strategies will influence their learning process.

Accordance with the issues presented, this study can be considered as part of this recent trend in the field of language teaching, and focuses on exploring students' attitude toward project based learning and its relationship to their performance in the specific language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Therefore, the formulation of the problem of this research states "How does student's attitude toward the use of project based learning as stimuli for integrating the four languages?"

This study is set to give the benefit for the readers particularly the English teachers, the practitioners, and the further researchers. Theoretically and practically, this study can be a reference for English teachers to implement project based learning because this study contains several theories about it. Besides, the practitioners can also use this study as a reference to assist the English teachers to implement project based learning.

2. Methods

In this descriptive study, cross-sectional survey-based design is employed. In a cross-sectional survey design, the researcher collects the data at one point in time in order to measure current attitudes or practices (Creswell, 2012, p. 377). It examines current attitudes, beliefs, opinions or practice in ways individual think about issues, whereas practices are their actual behavior. This study was conducted to identify vocational school students' attitudes toward project based learning as stimuli to integrating the four language skills. To achieve this objective, two research tools were used namely, questionnaire and interviews. In this study researchers were used personal interviews whereas the researcher conducts face-to-face interview with the participant. The rapport can be established, questions can be clarified, unclear or incomplete answers can be followed up (Fraenkell. J. R. et al, 2012, p. 398)

The participant pool for the study was 33 students. All the participants were enrolled in a private vocational school (second graders) located in Cimahi. They have already conducted the project based learning since the very beginning of the semester of 2014/2015 academic year. On the other hand, only 6 of these students were involved in the interview which chosen randomly. The measuring instrument was an attitude questionnaire with close ended questions which focused on the attitudes towards project based learning. Additionally, it aimed to explore their attitudes toward the integration of four language skills facilitated by the project based approach. The items were partly adapted from Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) designed by Gardner (2004) and it is worthwhile mentioning that the researcher translated the questionnaire into Bahasa as participants' first language in order to avoid misunderstanding. On the whole, there were 10 items concerning language attitudes in terms of: behavioral, cognitive, and emotional aspects of attitude. The items were put in a 4-point Likert scale from Level 1: Strongly Disagree to Level 4: Strongly Agree.

Besides the questionnaire, interviews were used to obtain data to supplement and cross validate the students' responses to the questionnaire. The students were asked questions related to their attitudes towards Project based learning which stimulate their integrated language skills. The interviewees were asked about 1) their difficulties in completing a project, 2) their favorite parts in the project based learning, 3) their opinion about language skills which practiced in project based learning.

All participants were tested in large group fashion in their classrooms at school by one of the investigators. They were asked to complete one page survey. The questionnaire designed especially for present study. To ensure that all participants were listening to the directions and performing task, the examiner read each question aloud, paused, and allowed time for them to mark their own answer. Once they finished answering the questionnaire, they were requested to check their responses for incompleteness or missing answers. Before conducting the interviews, the subjects were briefed on the aims and procedures of the interview sessions. To reduce their fear of exposing their honest views and to ensure better and valid results, the interviewees were informed that their answers would be treated with complete confidentiality. To record the interviewees, a voice recorder was used. The data collection process was conducted twice, on October 29th 2014 and November 5th 2014.

The data collected in the present study was of two types i.e. quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative data of the questionnaires were analyzed in terms of means, using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and percentages. For analyzing the qualitative part of the data, on the other hand, a content analysis method was used. In the analysis process, the interviewees' responses for each question were firstly translated into English and then transcribed. After that, the responses were analyzed in terms of themes related to the study objectives.

3. Result Discussion

3.1. Students' attitudes toward project based learning

Concerning the students' English language attitudes, on the other hand, interesting findings were obtained. With regard to their attitudes toward project based learning, the findings reveal that whilst most of the students responded positively to the idea that by working on the project they feel motivated in using their language skills and also their communicative ability. It is not surprising that students agreed that project based learning facilitate the students to practice their language skills. This finding corroborates results from a large number of studies in this field, which show that PBL activities allow students to integrate language skills and content knowledge to complete the projects (Fried-Booth, 1997; Poonpon, 2010, Simpson, 2011; Solomon, 2003; Srikrain, 2008; Stoller, 1997; Willie, 2001). In line with the theory from Harmer who stated that one of activities best fits in practicing the both receptive and productive skills is by conducting the project based activity. In order to complete the project, students will not only write what is on their mind or speak spontaneously as involve in the conversation. They will need to look at the book, internet, interview their friend s or neighbor and even watch video or news. This kind of project work will involve students' four language skills which integrated (2007, p. 278).

Moreover, students tend to have a positive attitude toward the group work on completing their project. There are more than half of the students (64 %) agreed that they are happy working in group to completing their project, it is in line with the result that 73 percents of the students get the input from their friend especially in the discussion part as the process to completing their project. In line with theory from Bruner (1983) who thought that the child's learning is a process, not merely a product, which can be accelerated or enhanced by social and group processes. Providing a method whereby student groups become experts on different topics, then are regrouped to share their knowledge with others Brown (1992). It is essential to maintain curiosity and challenge throughout the whole project, for instance by progress reports or continuous assessment scheme. In addition, there should be a climate of mutual trust from the beginning till the end. Haines further recommends encouraging students to make use of all their talents and distributing potentially difficult students among the various working groups. (Haines, 1989: 8).

However there are 18 percent of the students who did not feel happy in working with groups. Group- and self-efficacy were found to depend largely on the quality of the group process (Weng-yi Cheng, et al., 2008) while high school students struggled to work positively in small groups. It is supported by the information gathered from the interview; they tend to have a negative attitude toward the group work in completing the project because there is an uneven job for members of the group. There also problem in deciding the time for them to be able to working on the project outside the classroom.

Regarding the degree of agreement among students to continuing the implementation of project based learning in their future learning process was quite high with 55 % agreement and 18 % strongly agreement. In contrast, there were 27 percent of the students who did not agree for having the project based learning in their next learning process. These findings can be strengthening by the results of the interview which revealed the difficulties in project based learning. There is an urge for the students for having the consultation session in the process of completing their project. They also elaborated that the topic of the project that they need to work on is influenced their motivation. Thomas (2000) elaborated students' difficulties in working on the project as follow (a) generating meaningful questions, (b) managing complexity and time, (c) transforming data, and (d) developing a logical argument to support claims. He added there is a need to consider a range of scaffolds from teachers, peers, and technology that can aid students in examining the scientific worth of their questions, the merits of their designs and data collection plans, the adequacy and systematicity of their conduct of the investigation, and the accuracy of their data analysis and conclusions.

In responding to the item about the benefit of English language skills that they have experienced in completing their project, more than half (58%) of the subjects responded positively by saying agree and even 27% percent of the students strongly agree that they feel the benefit of English language skills whenever they working in their project. The least percentage (15%) of the students did not feel the benefit of English language skills in completing their project. The information from interview support the reason why they did not feel the its benefit because there is a lack of exposure in using English. Teacher did not force

students to have group discussion using English and in the gaining the data stage the students frequently consult to the internet using their first language. Then the data gained from the internet was then translated first into English before they compile it into their project.

Furthermore the findings from the interview to support their attitude toward the benefit of English language skills that they have experienced in completing their project will be elaborated in the next section which focuses on the integrating language skills.

3.2. Students' attitude toward integrating the language skills

With regard to their attitudes towards integrating the language skills, the findings reveal that most of the students responded positively to the idea that project based learning can stimulates their integrating language skills. It is proven by the interview data which revealed that they realize by working on the project, they practice their language skill. Some of the students admitted that they can practice all the four language skills by following the steps to completing the project. They explained that they practice their listening skill through the group discussion session inside their group and also within another group when the others groups present their project. They also practice their listening skill when they have to listen to the audio tape or video when the data that they need are provided in audio or video. While in the reading skill, they practice it when they have to read the information or data from the internet or newspaper.

Moreover, for the productive skills writing and speaking skills, the practice is easy to be explored by the project based learning. In writing, they need to try their best in compiling the data they gathered and compose it into written text to be presented in the classroom. While in speaking skill, they will deal it in the last stage of project based learning which is presenting stage. In this stage students will present their completed project. Stoller (1997) explained his research finding related with the project based learning and integrated skills which revealed that the students perceived that their reading, writing, and speaking skills, as well as vocabulary knowledge and translation skill, were improved because they used these skills to acquire, analyze, and synthesize information as they worked on their project. These findings indicate that authentic integration of language skills and processing information from a variety of sources can enhance language skills, and this mirrors real-life tasks.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of students' questionnaire and interview data revealed students have a positive attitude toward the implementation of project based learning which also can stimulate the practice of their language skills. The students believed that the implementation of this project based learning was feasible and valuable. They can get more knowledge regarding the current issue surround them and English skills they learned from the English class when they carried out the project. They found that the project can help them aware of their own English ability and improve English skills in real life contexts. They also suggested future implementation of project based learning in the English course. However, the students' opinions have revealed some limitations of the study. There is an important role taken by the teacher as the tutor or consultant which can be the place for the students to consult their problem in completing the project. There also the consideration of enough time to help them prepare their project effectively. Last but not least the topic chosen for the project should be considered by the teacher in a way to motivate them in working on the project. So, better-planned implementation procedures in these three aspects are needed.

The study provides two important pedagogical implications. First, it is reasonable to include such project based learning in an English class especially in EFL contexts where opportunities to use English are limited. Second, since PBL can encourage learners to use language skills learned from the English class and support learners' confidence in using English, using the project as part of the grading system seems reasonable. However, this study is an exploratory investigation about enhancement of learners' language skills through project based learning. The extension of the study is thus limited. Future studies may focus on using a variety of project-based activities in the classroom and focus on one language skill.

5. References

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