Journal of
Language and Translation
Volume 11, Number 1, 2021, (pp.47-64)

Implication of Face-to-Face Project Based Learning in Teaching Speaking Skills

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Received: 18 January, 2020 Accepted: 03 April, 2020

Abstract
This study aimed to examine the extent of familiarity of speaking instructors with the notion of Project Based Learning (PBL) and to find the effect of face-to-face PBL method on speaking ability of university language learners at different language proficiency levels. To reach this goal, four university speaking instructors' were asked to score the learners after some sessions of instructions. Then, to have teacher education sessions, the instructors were interviewed and given handouts on the basis of PBL themes. After the teacher training, their classes were observed and video recorded. To find the effect of the instruction on both teacher education and students learning, the instructors were asked to score the learners at the end of the speaking courses. To examine the differences in the speaking scores of language learners before and after the teacher education, a paired samples t-test was performed. The results indicated that all participants in the groups progressed in their speaking skills by comparing their pretests and posttests. The outcomes suggest the policy makers should provide opportunities for university instructors to observe principles of PBL in language teaching and replace the traditional methods and methods with it.

Keywords: Face-to-Face language learning, Project Based Learning (PBL), speaking skill, teacher education.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is a means through which learners can communicate with others to achieve certain goals or to express their opinions, intentions, hopes and viewpoints; hence, speaking can be defined as an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving, and processing information (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997).

Learning speaking skills is a necessary preference for English language learners in EFL contexts (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). As Lazarton (2001) argues, the ability to communicate orally is equal to knowing the given language. Meanwhile, individuals who learn a language are referred to as the speakers of that language (Ur,

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1996) and the success of language learners is measured in terms of their abilities to perform conversations in the target language (Nunan, 1991).

To improve speaking skills, a good number of methods, approaches, and techniques have been developed over the years. In line with such suggestions, sources of speaking difficulty that impede the improvement of language learners' speaking skills have also been studied among which ineffective teaching methodology (Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013) is the most important. However, as Aleksandrzak (2011) states, there are inevitable criticisms on available methods, techniques, or resources that claim to remove the speaking problems. To provide answers to the aforementioned problems, the present study employed an innovative method, i.e. Project Based Learning (PBL) that has recently attracted language teaching practitioners to examine the improvement of language learners' speaking skills and their expected barriers in a university context from the perspectives of university instructors. This study was guided by the following research questions.

1. How are teachers working on the speaking skill familiar with PBL in the context of universities in Iran?
2. Are there any statistically significant differences in using PBL for teaching speaking skill to beginner, intermediate, and advanced language learners?

To find answers to the research questions formulated for the purposes of this study, a mixed method design was employed.

Face-to-face speaking classes

Speaking seems to be the most important language skill and probably a priority for most learners of English as a foreign language to keep pace with the modern world (Alam, 2016). Thus, the ability to use English effectively and accurately in communication should be the major goal of all English language teaching (Davies & Pearse, 2001). Speaking instruction has been investigated from different angles. Teachers and textbooks writers use either direct methods that concentrate on particular aspects of oral interaction or indirect methods which provide situations for oral interaction through group work, task work, and other strategies (Richards, 1990).These methods generally suggest face-to-face conversations which allow speakers to get immediate feedback (Cornbleet & Carter, 2001). One of the necessities of face-to-face teaching of English speaking skills in different classes is implementation of appropriate teaching techniques, i.e. exercises, activities, or tasks, to improve the teaching quality and enable the learners to overcome their lack of speaking ability.

Regardless of what type of activities are used in speaking classrooms, according to Ur (1996), there are four characteristics of successful speaking activities that should be taken into account by speaking teachers. First, learners should talk a lot in class. Second, all learners should have equal chances to speak. Third, motivation should be high. And finally, the level of language should be acceptable. These activities are expected to be employed in Project Based Learning which is introduced in the next section.

Project Based Learning

PBL was first employed in American vocational agriculture classes (Beckett, 2006). According to Hedge (as cited in Beckett, 2006) PBL was introduced into the field of L2 education in 1980s as a way to reflect the principles of student-centered teaching. Brubacher (as cited in Beckett, 2006) states that the essence of PBL is purposeful activity performed by the learners.

It seems that among the teaching methods and approaches used in English language learning, PBL is an open-ended process-oriented method based on critical theory that values inquiry, reflection, negotiation of meaning, case and problem-based learning, discussion and collabo-

ration, and self-directed learning (Barrett, 2005). Patton (2012) stated that PBL refers to a method allowing to do the designing, planning and carrying out tasks in order to produce, publish, and present a product. Barrows (as cited in Dewi, 2016) refers to seven features as the key components of PBL as: learner-centered environment, collaboration, curriculum content, authentic tasks, multiple presentation modes, time management, and innovative assessments. Meanwhile, Stoller (2002) also summarized features of PBL as: focus on content learning rather than on specific language targets. Real-world subject matter and topics are based on students; is student centered; is cooperative rather than competitive; leads to the authentic integration of skills and processing of information; culminates in an end product; and is potentially motivating, stimulating, empowering, and challenging. It usually results in building student confidence, self-esteem, autonomy and improving students' language skills, content learning, and cognitive abilities.

Many scholars referred to the benefits of using PBL. The most commonly reported benefits of using project works is the authenticity of students' experiences and the language they are exposed (Stoller, 2006); motivation, engagement, enjoyment and creativity of students (Levine, as cited in Stoller, 2006) ; and improvement of students all four language skills, especially speaking and listening (Fragoulis & Tsiplakides, 2009). More importantly, as Thomas (2000) states, "PBL projects do not end up at a predetermined outcome or take predetermined paths" (p. 4). Meanwhile, since students can follow their own interests, student autonomy and learning responsibility are developed.

The implication of PBL in examining language related issues could also improve other ability and skills of language learners. Stoller (2006) reported the additional benefits of employing PBL as

- Gaining cross-cultural knowledge
- Practicing social, collaborative and communicative skills
- increasing content knowledge acquisition
- building students' confidence and self-esteem
- providing students with autonomy and independence
- fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills

In contrast with the studies in which PBL proved to be helpful, some other studies found negative effects of PBL on language learners. For example Becket (1999, as cited in Becket, 2002) found using PBL could be a source of anxiety and stress for language learners; Moulton and Holmes (2000) experienced low course completion rate; and Leki (2001)found dissatisfaction of international ESL students with group works.

The effect of PBL on speaking ability of language learners has widely attracted the attention of scholars in language education. For example, Dewi (2016) emphasizes the positive effect of the PBL on the process of teaching and learning speaking. In the same vein, Maulany (2013) also found that PBL had positive effects on speaking ability of young EFLs. Furthermore, as Lasauskiene and Rauduvaite (2015) argue, the utilization of PBL in educational contexts, although reasonable and recommended, is not given full attention. Therefore, the current study was an attempt to find the effect of PBL on speaking ability of language learners in an Iranian university context.

METHODS

Participants

Two groups of participants were employed in this study. The first group included four university instructors who were teaching speaking skills at different language proficiency levels.

All the four instructors were chosen based on convenience sampling, from Qa'emshahr Islamic Azad University. Instructor 1 had been teaching basic listening and speaking course. He had 25 years' experience of teaching English of which 20 years have been at the university. Instructor 2 taught listening and speaking course at intermediate level. He had been teaching at language school level for 19 years including 15 years of teaching at the university. Instructor 3 had been teaching advanced listening and speaking course. He had 21 years of teaching experience at a language institute and, simultaneously, 16 years at different universities. Instructor 4 had been teaching the basic story telling course. She had been teaching English language for four years at an English language institute, and nine years at different universities (totally 13 years).

The second group of participants were 49 English language learners (male=9 and female=40). They were all chosen based on convenience sampling, from Qa'emshahr Islamic Azad University. The language level of the participants was checked using the Oxford Placement Test (OPT). Table 1 shows the distribution of participants at the three levels of speaking and listing courses.

Table 1.
Distribution of the Participants' Numbers at Different Levels of Proficiency

	Frequency	Percent
Listening and speaking Level 1	15	30.6
Listening and speaking Level 2	19	38.8
Story Telling Level 3	15	30.6
Total	49	100.0

Materials

In this study, four instruments were employed. The first was the OPT which was used to have homogenized members based on their language proficiency. Secondly, the instructors used the Oral Assessment Rubric of (Huang & Gui, 2015) to score the learners' speaking ability at the beginning and then at the end of the course. The gain scores of the participants would expect to show the effect of the instruction on both teachers teaching and students learning. Thirdly, an interview sheet was used to find the instructors' familiarity with PBL. The interview questions were based on the basic assumptions of PBL. Fourth, a classroom observation checklist was used to find the instructors practices of PBL in their classroom contexts. The classroom observation in this study was believed to be unique as both learners and instructors' performances were taken into account.

Procedure

Firstly, after some sessions of holding their classes, the instructors were asked to score their students (before teacher education). Second, the logic behind PBL was extracted in the light of the available related literature. Then the instructors were interviewed on the basis of PBL themes, i.e., the principles and the extracted features of PBL method (appendix 1), to become aware of the English language speaking teachers' assumptions regarding the use of PBL and what really happened in their classrooms. The interviews aimed to explore firstly the instructors' familiarity with PBL in general and the possible implications of it on the learners in their speaking classrooms in particular. Next, the researchers discussed with the instructors about the tenets of PBL. They were both orally explained and received a handout in which all the underlying assumptions of PBL were precisely written. In order to check how much they got familiar and how good they performed PBL in

their speaking courses, all their teaching sessions were observed and recorded. During these observation sessions, the teachers received explanations and their questions were answered if needed. Finally, to examine the differences in the speaking scores of language learners before and after teacher education on PBL, the same achievement test used at the beginning of the study was administered as the posttest.

Design and Analyses

For the qualitative part, a thematic structured interview technique was employed. The speaking instructors were interviewed on the basis of the suggested themes in PBL. For the quantitative part, a paired samples t-test was performed to compare the speaking scores of participants in three levels, i.e., beginner, intermediate, and advanced.

The analyses of the data collected for the purpose of this study will be presented in two sections. In the first section, the instructors' answers to the interview questions related to the themes of PBL before their classroom activities will be presented. This is followed by making the instructors familiar with the notions of PBL in face to face talk or by a telephone call. Finally, the results of classroom observation will be reported. In the second section, a statistical analysis of the students' scores participated in these courses will be presented.

Familiarity of speaking instructors with PBL

Literature on PBL suggests that the keys to successful projects are exhibition, multiple drafts, and critique. Meanwhile, designing, planning, carrying out a project, and publicly exhibited output are distinctive features of PBL (Patton, 2012). Many educators as Barrows (as cited in Dewi, 2016), Coufalová (as cited in Kalabzová, 2015), Barron and Darling-Hammond (as cited in Pecore, 2015), and Stoller (2006) referred to other features of PBL. These features are almost included in Steinberg (1997) 'six As' of PBL that is Authenticity, Academic rigor, Applied learning, Active exploration, Adult relationship, and Assessment.

To explore the view of instructors related to the principles of PBL, they were asked to elaborate on features and keys of PBL under more general topics mentioned by Patton (2012) considering Steinberg (1997) principles and Stoller (2002) summary. The views of instructors appear in the following sections.

Familiarity with distinctive features of PBL

In the interviews with the four instructors, regarding their familiarity with PBL in general, it was found that these instructors were familiar with the tenets of PBL, although the degree of their familiarity differed. Their views appeared below:

> **Instructor 1:** [I am familiar with PBL to some extent. However, many projects can be designed on the basis of the nature of the class, type of the course, and levels of the students.]
>
> **Instructor 2:** [I am familiar with tenets or basic principles of PBL. It is mostly based on constructive language learning and I have mostly been using it in my private classes.]
>
> **Instructor 3**: [I am familiar with the concepts and principles of PBL. It is a branch of participatory method in language learning which is in line with sociocultural theory.]
>
> **Instructor 4**: [I do not know much about the tenets and basic principle of PBL. What I do in my classroom may be close to PBL but, in working on projects, I may not follow all the principles of PBL.]
>
> **Observation:** Although all instructors mentioned they were to some extent familiar with the tenets and underlying assumptions of PBL, the

observation showed that they did not completely followed all the processes and there was a little flaw in their work except for instructor Four. There are some assumptions behind what instructor One, Two, and Three did not observe in doing PBL. They may not be sufficiently familiar with PBL, they may not care about some of its assumptions, or they may be very professional so they did not consider it necessary to go through all the processes. But since instructor Four, in her interview, stated that she is not very familiar with PBL, the researchers exactly explained her about PBL step-by-step. The researchers referred to tenets and all process involved ln PBL. In performing PBL in her speaking course, story-telling, the researchers cooperated with the instructor from the beginning to the end.

Designing

Designing includes deciding what teachers plan for their students to learn. That is when an idea for a project (which may be based on curriculum content, students' problems or interests, teachers' inspiration, other colleagues' successful projects, online topics, etc.) is achieved; it should be sharpened up in a discussion with a colleague (Patton, 2012) . To reach a better conclusion, the researcher checked the projects against Steinberg (1997)'six As' and Stoller (2002) summary of PBL.

Observation: None of the instructors worked on designing, which is talking to other colleagues or making contact with experts outside of the university favoring their ideas, except for instructor Four. But all of them were almost aware of Steinberg (1997) 'six As' and Stoller (2002) summary including authenticity, academic rigor, applied learning, active exploration, adult relationships, and assessment practices.

Planning

Projects can be designed in a way that they help students to get involved in the content that they are required to learn. 'Backwards planning' is best way to do it. 'Backwards planning' is writing down everything that is expected the students to learn from doing a project. It could include all kinds of things from knowledge of course-specific content to personal attributes. Then, it's much easier to plan the project using a template from this document. Following a template will ensure that the important things are not forgotten (Patton, 2012).

Observation: Although having a template is very helpful in planning a project, none of the instructors had any templates excluding instructor Four. In fact, instructor Four did not have any written template since she and I worked together and she followed every steps of the processes that had to be pursued for students to master the content.

Carrying out a project

Stoller (2002) suggested some steps to carry out a project. Summary of these steps include: agreeing on a theme for the project, determining the final outcome, structuring the project, gathering information, compiling and analyzing information, presenting final product, and evaluating the project. At the heart of these stages are Patton (2012) important keys to a successful projects that are topic selection, multiple drafts, and critique sessions.

Topic selection

The topic of a project could be selected by the learners with the help of the teacher. It may be structured in which the instructor will make

most decisions but students are encouraged to fine-tune the project theme (Stoller, 2002).But sometimes, it is based on curriculum content (Patton, 2012). Whichever way the topic is selected, it has to be authentic, i.e. to see whether it comes from a problem or question that has meaning to the student, the problem or question that might actually be tackled by an adult at work or in the community, or students create or produce something that has personal or social value (Steinberg, 1997). Regarding the issue of topic selection, the instructors in this study stated that:

> **Instructor 1:** [The topics in my classes, are either more general topics or based on the learners interests. However, the topics are sometimes based on curriculum contents, i.e. the topics that are going to be taught in the classroom since they are related to the content of their textbooks.]
>
> **Observation:** Topic selection process were exactly based on the premises of PBL.
>
> **Instructor 2:** [In my classes, mostly, students themselves choose the topic. They work together and choose their favorite topics. Although, sometimes, I delineates the topic but the learners select the story themselves.]
>
> **Observation:** This process were wholly based on the tenets of PBL in instructor Two's class.
>
> **Instructor 3:** [I believe that one of the best ways to specify some topics for the students in the classroom is to do needs analysis at the beginning of the course. I ask the learners to write down the topics of their interest and based on the frequency of the topics I focus on the most favorite one mentioned by everyone. But this fact that the book in hand is good source for the topic selection should not be forgotten because the contents in the chapters specified in the books should be covered throughout the semester, so even if some students are not interested in those topics there is no choice and they cannot be deleted.]
>
> **Observation:** Although instructor Three was theoretically familiar with PBL, and as he said he practically run it in his off-university listening courses, observation of his university speaking class showed that in the process of topic selection there was no needs analysis and the topics ware not selected on the basis of learners' interest. They were some audio files sent to students to transcribe them that might be close to the content of the books taught in the classroom.
>
> **Instructor 4:** [In my classes, learners themselves select the topics. However, I, sometimes, with the help of learners select the topics.]
>
> **Observation:** The instructor and the researchers consult about the topics. Those topics were based on the learners' book contents. Although, learners themselves introduced some topics of their interests. Then, the students were divided in to groups. However, some of them, because of some personal reasons, asked to work individually.

Determining the final outcome

Determining the final outcome entails defining an end point, or the final outcome. Students and the instructor consider the nature of the project, its objectives, and the most appropriate ways to end it up (Stoller, 2002).The final outcome of a project might be a product, a performance, or a service (Patton, 2012).In this regard the instructors stated that:

> **Instructor 1:** [When the topics are selected, I try to assure that the learners understood what they should do during working on their projects. Then they cooperate and decide on what each group is

going to do and what is the final products of their project works.]

Instructor 2: [After selecting the topics, I explain the learners what they are supposed to do. They consult and work together on what will be the end product of the projects.]

Instructor 3: [Thereafter the process of topic selection, my students and I talk about what will be the end product of doing the projects.]

Instructor 4: [She did not talk about this issue in her interview.]

Observation: After selection of the topics by the groups and individuals in the four classes, the instructors precisely explained them what they need to do to complete the projects. Although instructor Four did not refer to the final outcome in her interview, she followed this process. She along with the other three instructors tried to ascertain that all of the individual learners know what would be the end product of their projects.

Structuring the project, gathering information, and analyzing information

These steps refers to the ways learners think about the information that is needed to complete the project, the way this information is obtained (e.g. a library search, interviews, letters, E-mail, the World Wide Web, watching videos, etc.), and how the information is compiled and analyzed. Gathering and analyzing information are done by the help of instructor in consultation with the students (Stoller, 2002).

Observation: In this process, students worked together, distributed their duties, and consulted each other on how to obtain and analyze information. When they faced any problem, they asked their instructors for help. The instructors, sometimes, introduced the sources of information and consult them how to organize and analyze data. However, this did not happened in class 4, since their project work did not need gathering information.

Multiple drafts

Multiple draft means presenting the work more than once. The work demands evaluating, refining, and improving which is possible through multiple drafts (Berger, 2003, as cited in Leat, 2017). This can be done by the learners but it is mostly the instructors' responsibility. Regarding multiple drafts none of these instructors directly referred to it but they stated that:

Instructor 1: [When the learners face any problems, at each level of doing the projects, I answer the learners' questions individually or collectively either in the classroom or through social media.]

Instructor 2: [During the weeks that the learners are working on projects, if they face any problem, they come to me to solve their problems. I try to give them some feedback, based on their individual differences, in a way that they were not embarrassed or did not feel disrespected.]

Instructor 3: [During the process of carrying out the projects, I always advise learners to refer to the course books and transcripts, or to consult one another in case of problem arises on the work. And if they do not get their problem solved I want them come to me as a last resort to give them feedback to get their problems solved. In order to consider the humanistic aspects of teaching in my classes, I do not try to interrupt my students when they have a speaking problem. I usually take notes of their shared problems and every now and then throughout the class I present the problems on the board. Sometimes, I review my students work and try to solve their problems individually.]

Instructor 4: [If the learners face any problems, I take notes. Then at the end of

the class I explain the learners and try to solve their problems.]

Observation: In their interviews, none of the instructors referred to the process of multiple drafts. They all talked about the way they solve students' problems. However, during this process, some of the students consulted each other or their instructors in the classroom or through social media when the encountered a problem. This is like having multiple drafts. However, this process was not followed by instructor Three. What happened in class 3 was that instructor Three assigned a one-week long project to the learners to work on, either individually or in groups. Unfortunately, not all the learners who were supposed to do the projects in groups worked on the assigned assignment. Some of the members of the groups transcribed the audio files and the other members copied them. Meanwhile, because it was a one-week long project, there was no enough time for students to meet their instructor or each other to have multiple drafts sessions.

Critique

Creating multiple drafts of work is especially effective when students are critiquing each other's drafts. In formal critique sessions students have the opportunity to learn from each other's work and feedback. It can include critique of both the process and product. These sessions provide the opportunity for teachers to present concepts and skills to students. They also clear students' misconceptions or misunderstandings about the project so that the group can respond to them (Patton, 2012).Critique sessions are very valuable in doing a project since they help students to learn from each other's problems.

Observation: Although there were informal multiple drafts sessions in classes one, two, and four, only the instructor critiquing the learners. There was no peer critique. It seemed that they were not either knowledgeable enough to express their ideas and criticizing their classmates' work or they afraid their classmates be ashamed or get upset. Meanwhile, since there were no multiple drafts sessions in class three, there were no critiques on the part of the instructor and the learners.

Assessment

There should be opportunities for regular assessment of student work (Steinberg, 1997).It is not something that happens once, at the end of projects. Assessment is done throughout the process of doing the projects (Patton, 2012) and at individual and group level (Fragoulis & Tsiplakides, 2009). There are variety sources of assessment that are essential to PBL: self-assessment, peer assessment, teacher assessment, and outside expert/audience (Patton, 2012). On the issue of assessment, all of the instructors only talked about teacher assessments in their interviews:

Instructor 1: [I use both formative assessment during the course and summative assessment at the end. Although, to me, formative assessment is more important than summative assessment. The assessment is done both individually and in groups.]

Instructor 2: [The learners' evaluation is both formative and summative assessment and both of these assessment types are important to me. What happens during the term is very important. Meanwhile, the learners' achievement of the whole process is very important too. However, if I want to assess them I do not give the lion share to these processes, I give the lion share to their achievement at the end. If I gave the weight of evaluation to this processes and cooperation, they will be away from the purpose of the classroom

which is the ability to speak English. Assessment happens at both individual and group levels.]

Instructor 3: [I believe in both formative and summative methods. I have some criteria set at the beginning of the course and tell my students what they are expected to do throughout the semester. I believe that every single effort on the part of the students will be counted and their contributions and participations in the class activity will affect their final score.]

Instructor 4: [Both types of assessments are equally important. I assess my students' work during and at the end of the project work, both individually and in small groups.]

Observation: Instructors One, Two, and Four did both types of assessments, i.e. they assessed students both during and at the end of the course, individually and in groups. Meanwhile, it seemed that there were assessments inside the groups but not between or among the groups, and not individual assessments. They may concern about their classmates' worries. Furthermore, no self-assessment was seen. It seemed that it was because of lack of their knowledge or their lack of confidence. Additionally, no outside expert evaluation happened. Notwithstanding, what instructor Three did was very strange. Although he was almost quiet familiar with PBL and as he said he has been using this method in his off-university listening courses, none of different types of assessment performed in his class except teacher assessment of the learners' speaking ability at the end of the course. He did not even assessed the projects. The projects were gathered by the researchers at the end of the course, after students' final exam.

I) *Publicly exhibited output*

When students know that their project will be displayed publicly, this changes the nature of the project from the moment they start working (Patton, 2012). Presenting the end or final product to classmates, students and teachers of other classes, parents, community members and friends increase students' motivation. Then, they work hard because they know that they may talk about their projects to other people and may have to answer their questions (Aldabbus, 2018).

Instructor 1: [In my idea the circumstances did not call for such things. The processes in which students involved are more important than the end product. I believe that students learning take place during the processes of doing projects.]

Observation: One of the interesting point that attracted the researchers' attention was that although for instructor One the end product of the projects was not as important as the processes involved in PBL, what the learners did at the end of the course was astonishing.

Instructor 2: [The end product is very important. Although, to me, the end product is the learners' ability to speak English. What is important is the ability to cooperate with each other, the ability to navigate the whole process, and the most important one, the ability to come up with speaking.]

Observation: To this instructor, the end product of doing a project was any improvement in the learners' speaking ability. However, the development of the learners' speaking ability should not be considered as the end product of doing a project. Actually, it is the most important goal of a project work in PBL. Observation of this class revealed that since instructor Two cared about what the learners did during all the processes and because he supervised the learners carefully and

rigorously, not only the end products of the projects were highly precise and fascinating but also their progress and development in their speaking ability were tangible.

Instructor 3: [The end product is very important. The ultimate goal of doing a project is students' learning which is reached throughout the processes of doing the project.]

Observation: Unfortunately, in class 3, the most important and outstanding feature of PBL, i.e. public exhibition of the end product, was absent.

Instructor 4: [The end product is the major goal of my students' project works. The end product could be in any form. If it is shown publicly, it will be more motivating.]

Observation: In class 4, the end products were great. Comparing the first session of their speaking course, they made an observable progress in their speaking skill, too.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine the extent of familiarity of speaking instructors with the notion of Project Based Learning (PBL) and to find the effect of face-to-face PBL method on speaking ability of university language learners at different language proficiency levels. To summarize, this study showed that the familiarity of instructors with PBL differed. Some of the instructors, in their interviews, stated that they absolutely knew what PBL basic assumptions were and that they had been using PBL in their off-university classes. For some other instructors, the picture that they had in mind about PBL were not precisely in agreement with the underlying assumptions of PBL. It was found that some of these instructors were considerably but not completely familiar with the underlying assumptions of PBL. However, because of some personal and institutional reasons, some instructors ignored a number of outstanding features and important keys to a successful project work. As an example, three of them did not work on designing or backward planning. And, for any reason, they did not use a template for their students' projects. The processes of multiple drafts and critique sessions were absent in some classes, too. Other processes like assessment was not done precisely. It was only Instructor Four who almost considered and followed all the processes because she was fully trained in PBL.

Despite all the shortcomings on the part of the instructors in the proper use of PBL, the speaking ability of all the learners was improved. It seems that PBL is a practical, effective, and fruitful method in teaching speaking skills.

Comparing students' speaking scores before and after implementing PBL

A paired sample t-test was performed to compare the speaking scores of participants who took parts in three levels on instructions, i.e., beginner, intermediate, and advance, before and after the implementation of PBL. The results, as Table 2 shows, indicate that all participants have progressed in their post-test and the difference is statistically significant ($t_{(48)}$=15.03, p <0.000). A comparison of participants' pre and post-scores across the three levels of instruction, as Table 3 shows, also indicates a statistically difference. In the light of the statistical analyses, the null hypothesis can be safely rejected.

Table 2.
Comparing all the Participants' Pre- and Post-test Scores

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	t	df	sig
All Participants	Pre.test	15.86	49	1.60	-15.035	48	0.000
	Post.test	18.03	49	1.82			

Table 3.
Comparing all the participants' Pre and Post-test Scores at Three Levels

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	t	df	sig
Level 1	Pre.test	16.83	15	1.42			
	Post.test	18.40	15	1.22	-9.320	14	.000
Level 2	Pre.test	15.68	19	1.04			
	Post.test	18.34	19	1.10	-14.478	18	.000
Level 3	Pre.test	15.13	15	1.95			
	Post.test	17.26	15	2.71	-6.709	14	.000

CONCLUSION

In this study, considering the instructors' opinions about the learners' performances and receiving higher scores after the implementation of PBL, as statistical analysis of learners' scores shows, PBL has a positive effect on students speaking ability. It was also found that doing project works provides students with opportunities to speak English; therefore, it can be concluded that PBL can improve students' pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary domain, and fluency as assessed using the rubric of Huang and Gui (2015). Along with the improvement of students' speaking skills, this study concludes that the students' experience in cooperation and collaboration through the group and pair works could develop their social skill, too. Moreover, active participation of the learners in every and each step of this study and expressing their positive ideas regarding PBL (in the interviews held in the last session of the study) indicates that this method makes learning speaking skill enjoyable to them which in turn positively affect the learners speaking skill.

Considering the challenges the teachers encountered while controlling and guiding the learners, it would be better to use PBL in small number of learners in each group. Meanwhile, respecting the time, it is necessary to follow designing and specifically planning processes in carrying out projects. To make this method more effective, it is also suggested teachers follow all processes of PBL precisely and convince policy makers to make university instructors observe principles of PBL method and replace the traditional methods and methods with it.

Project Based Learning is almost a new method in language learning and our instructors and learners seem not to be experienced enough to use it. In PBL, students acquire knowledge through group works, cooperation and collaboration, use of authentic information sources, processing and evaluating the gathered information, making decisions, and having exhibited end product. Since PBL is a fairly new method, it may be frightening for both instructors and learners at the beginning. Therefore, care should be taken by the teachers while performing this method till they are more experienced and are able to help students to decrease their fear of learning and increase their involvement. As witnessed in the study and confirmed by all instructors, the use of PBL could increase the involvement of the language learners as well as their motivation to learn materials on their own. This, as believed by the researcher, can lead to autonomy of language learning on the part of the students. As a result, PBL is expected to reduce the burden put

on the shoulders of the teachers and, accordingly, enhance the process of language teaching.

Project Based Learning is an method which could be used as a complement to other methods in a classroom. Hence, practicing PBL along with other methods and methods makes teaching and learning more effective. Since education is not offered with "impersonal teaching methods and educational tools" (Fragoulis & Tsiplakides, 2009, p. 117), knowledge of modern teaching methods and methods and willingness to practice them are powerful tools for the achievement of teaching aims. However, this demands further research. It seems that further enquiries are needed to examine the manageability, practicality, and effectiveness of PBL in methods of making language teachers more familiar with PBL, to develop unique PBL teacher education programs, and finally to investigate the possible influences of contextual factors in the process of adopting and implementing PBL in teaching different language skills in classroom contexts.

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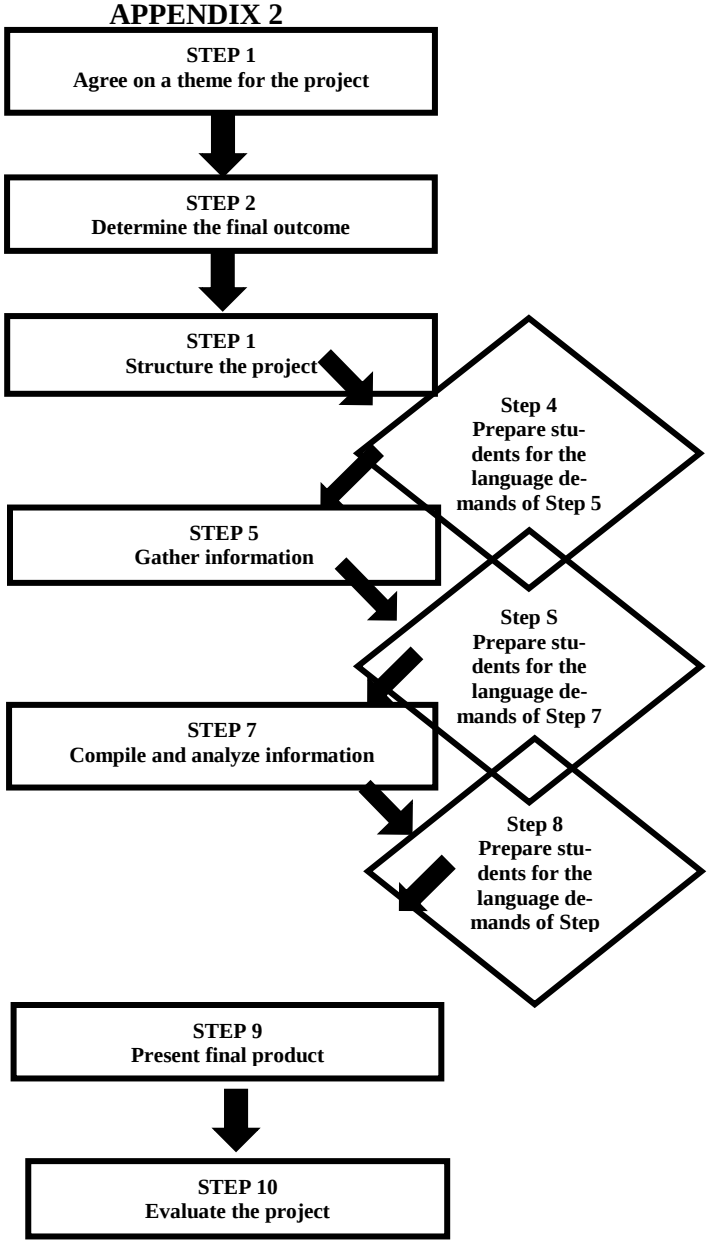
APPENDIX 1

PBL interview questions

1. Did you learn the PBL approach? If you did, would you have the chance to apply it? Or you just learn the theory and the learning processes in PBL?
2. What is your opinion about the PBL approach?
3. How do you
   a. Design and plan projects?
   b. How do you choose the topic?
   c. How do you give feedback?
   d. How do you evaluate?
   e. What about the end-product?
4. Which process is the most important one?
5. Is working on projects at the service of your teaching or learning?
6. What are the most important ability and skill that your students will gain in doing PBL?
7. Do you think your students' awareness or consciousness is modified while doing PBL?
8. What are the advantages of using the PBL approach?

APPENDIX 2



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