Highlighting Students' Voices of Learning English Through Project-Based Learning During Covid-19 Pandemic: A Case Study

Vina Kautsar Rahmania

English Language Education Department, University of Jember, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: vinakautsarrahmania@gmail.com

Bambang Suharjito

English Language Education Department, University of Jember, Indonesia

Rizki Febri Andika Hudori

English Language Education Department, University of Jember, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

All the students need to adapt to the new version of the learning and teaching process. The use of project-based learning in the COVID-19 pandemic can help students who struggle to make an interaction with other students. This approach can help vocational high school students more easily understand the topic by using projects that relate to their workplace. This project aimed to explore the students' voices using Project-based learning in English learning in the pandemic era. This case study used semi-structured interviews to interview five students from one of the vocational high schools in Jember that had already used the project-based learning method during a pandemic. This research results show that project-based learning was one method teachers might employ to help students learn English. The student's English abilities and creativity could be enhanced while developing the project.

Keywords: *COVID-19 Pandemic; Online Learning; Project-Based Learning*

ABSTRAK

Semua siswa perlu beradaptasi dengan versi baru dari proses belajar dan mengajar. Penggunaan pembelajaran berbasis proyek di masa pandemi COVID-19 dapat membantu siswa yang kesulitan dalam berinteraksi dengan siswa lain. Pendekatan ini dapat membantu siswa sekolah menengah kejuruan lebih mudah memahami topik dengan menggunakan proyek yang berhubungan dengan tempat kerjanya. Proyek ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi suara siswa menggunakan pembelajaran berbasis Proyek dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di era pandemi. Studi kasus ini menggunakan wawancara semi terstruktur dengan mewawancarai lima siswa dari salah satu SMK di Jember yang sudah menggunakan metode pembelajaran berbasis proyek di masa pandemi. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran berbasis proyek adalah salah satu metode yang mungkin diterapkan guru untuk membantu siswa belajar bahasa Inggris. Kemampuan dan kreativitas bahasa Inggris siswa dapat ditingkatkan sambil mengembangkan proyek.

Kata Kunci: Pandemi COVID-19; Pembelajaran Daring; Pembelajaran Berbasis Proyek

Vina Kautsar Rahmania,
Bambang Suharjito, Rizki Febri
Andika Hudori

Highlighting Students' Voices of Learning English Through Project-
Based Learning During Covid-19 Pandemic: A Case Study

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the aspects which are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, the students need to adapt to the new version of the learning and teaching process. In Indonesia, many students are still not familiar with online classes, and this also makes the students struggle during online classes at the beginning of the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic is adapting not only to an online learning environment a technical issue but also to pedagogical and instructional challenges (Ali, 2020). In face-to-face class, some students cannot understand well about the lesson well, and it also is an obstacle for teachers to find a teaching strategy that is appropriate for the students during the COVID-19 pandemic for online class.

Project-based learning is essentially characterized as "a guidelines approach that contextualizes learning by showing learners with issues to illuminate or products to create" (Moss & Van Puzer, 1998 as cited in Yiying (2015). Project-based learning can be a solution in teaching strategy implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using project-based learning in Covid-19 pandemic can help students who struggle to make an interaction with other students. As Stoller (2002) said project work helps students replicate real-life tasks and gives them the chance to collaborate in small groups where they can exchange resources and ideas to complete a specific project. Project-based learning also allows the students to explore their interest.

Project-based learning is one of the methods of learning and teaching processes. As a result of the pandemic, several school systems revised their grading system; the teachers shared abilities and lessons that can be taught independently (Khoiriyah & Setyaningrum, 2017; Avneet & Emma, 2021). According to Yiying (2015), Project-Based Learning is different from traditional teaching methods because it emphasizes learning through student-centered, interdisciplinary, and integrated activities in real world situations. PBL can make students more independent and well-planned during pre-learning. It makes `them learn how to socialize and improve their creativity and ability. It also helps students improve their curiosity or critical thinking. Learning should be social, real, meaningful, and controlled by the learner. PBL differs from other constructivist learning methods in that it includes the co-creation of artifacts in addition to the development and sharing of understandings and knowledge (Punyapat, Komkrit, Elizabeth, 2020). Project-based learning is also one of teaching models which manage the learning activity through projects and it also can be a media for students to learn about using English in real life (Thomas, 2000, as cited in Sirisrimangkorn, 2018; Yiying, 2015). The tasks

Vina Kautsar Rahmania,
Bambang Suharjito, Rizki Febri
Andika Hudori

Highlighting Students' Voices of Learning English Through Project-
Based Learning During Covid-19 Pandemic: A Case Study

of project-based include designing projects, problem solving, decision making, investigating activities, etc. (Sirisrimangkorn, 2018).

In Project-Based Learning (PBL), the perspective of students is not just valuable but essential. PBL is an instructional approach that centers around students actively engaging in real-world, complex problems or projects. Hence, this study aims to explore and highlight the students' perception regarding the implementation of online PBL. Studying students' perceptions is crucial in education since it highlights how students perceive their learning experiences helps educators tailor their teaching methods to better suit students' needs. This can lead to more effective learning outcomes and increased student engagement.

METHOD

This research used a case study design to explore students' stories in English learning through project-based learning specifically. According to Creswell (2012), the case study design focuses heavily on examining a constrained system (such as an activity, an event, a process, or even an individual). The school that we have chosen was one of the vocational high schools in Jember because the teacher used a project-based learning method during the pandemic. The use of project-based learning has also been done in both offline learning or face-to-face learning and online learning. The participants of this study were 5 students from one of the vocational high schools in Jember. The students were from the same school but in different major to get the various experiences in using project-based learning in English class during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project could be in the digital or manual form. Projects carried out during the pandemic can be digital products, and can be real products.

This research used semi-structured interviews as data collection method. Semi-structured interview was chosen because we wanted to explore students' story deeply but still within limits. Therefore, data collection is carried out directly in schools. I did an interview for 2 days. Three students were conducted on the first day, and the other two students were on the second day. The duration of the interview is about 15 minutes for each student. The interview used the Indonesian language due to the participants' understanding of the questions. Besides using semi-structured interviews for collecting the data, we also used the document for the data sources. The document that was used was the students' projects. It helped me to correlate the students' stories and the result of using project-based learning in the class. Furthermore, the data from this research was analyzed by using thematic analysis. The data from the interview was transcribed into written data and then the data was processed with the next step, through stages of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2016).

Vina Kautsar Rahmania,   Highlighting Students' Voices of Learning English Through Project-
Bambang Suharjito, Rizki Febri   Based Learning During Covid-19 Pandemic: A Case Study
Andika Hudori

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this thematic analysis are taken from interviewing 5 students who used project-based learning as one of the methods of learning English during the COVID-19 pandemic from one of the vocational schools in Jember. Project creations, PBL impact on students, and PBL in students' voices were founded on this research.

Project Creation

The project can be one of the methods used by teachers in developing students' abilities in learning English. Limited teaching during the last pandemic made teachers and students had to undergo online learning for the first time. According to the interview results, three of the students conducted a group project that allowed these students to interact more with other students during a pandemic that required them to study at their respective homes

Students' Creation (this section is under subsection 1)

Online learning has been done by the students since they just entered vocational high school. This made them get used to the tasks of using online platforms. One of the tasks was in the form of a project. Students conducted several types of projects during online learning. Five students who were interviewed had different projects, three of which were video projects and the other were Gallery Walk.

The students who had a video project were from the same class. Online learning at that time the class was discussing recount text. The students were instructed to make a video featuring them reimagining the holidays. This project was also an individual project.

"One of the assignments is make a video about experience or recount" (student A)

Other students from different classes had done two projects for learning with the project-based learning method. It was a company interview and a Galery Walk. These two types of projects were group projects.

"... the project that I have done is galery walk and interviews in the company." (Student D)

The students also said that both of them enjoy all types of projects but they chose Gallery Walk as a project they wanted to tell the researcher.

"Both of them I enjoy, but I like Galery Walk the most" (student E)

"galery walk is like make a wall magazine for each major, so the theme is in accordance with the major." (student D)

According to the excerpt above, students from the same vocational high school could have a different project, whether it is the type of project or it is a group or individual project. It made the data used could have many variations in it. It would affect each student's experiences with the use of project-based learning in English language learning.

Vina Kautsar Rahmania,
Bambang Suharjito, Rizki Febri
Andika Hudori

Highlighting Students' Voices of Learning English Through Project-
Based Learning During Covid-19 Pandemic: A Case Study

Student Preparation for The Project

Each student had a difference in preparing their project. Those who had the task of making a video would prepare the script and also the tools needed to make a video. Script preparation took different amounts of time for each student, they used Indonesian in compiling the script, then converted it into English using Google Translate.

> *"... . Start from making a good script, start from taking a video until the result of editinhasve to be maximum."* (Student A)

> *"the script was made in Indonesian first when the teacher gave me the task. That's e- I use google translate ..."* (student C)

For the equipment used in making videos, students used handphone which was the easiest tool for them to use, starting from took a video until the editing process.

> *"I just used a handphone, used a handphone. Editing also using handphones"* (student B)

It was different for students who made a Galery Walk project. The student who made this project prepared more tools and materials. The students used their ability to design clothes and wall magazines that were displayed during the presentation. The materials they used tend to be the same but there was a uniqueness in each group. They also took a longer time compared to the students who made videos. This project was a project group with huge number of group members, they were students in the class. The implementation of English in this project was that students must present the results in front of other class students using English.

> *"... the sterofoam is painted first yellow, then we design it [...] sticked with pin [...] For the design itself, it's not all drawn, so there are those after we sketch, we continue not using dyes but using cotton and glitter"* (student D)

> *"For its definite preparation, the materials used for the galery walk itself, such as styrofoam size 95 cm [...] we prefer to use used materials, sis, [...] so it does not cost a lot..."* (student E)

Student Creating the Project

The project given by the teacher was a project that had a relationship with the department of each student. The purpose of it was for students not only to learn English but also to improve their skills in their major. It emerged in Alsamani and Daif Allah (2016) study that Project-based learning includes certain group-based activities and group working also makes an impact on the students to develop their skills that are important for the professional world. As a result of the interviews, two students were from fashion and design major, they are Student D and Student E. They gave an explanation how to create the project relating to their major.

Vina Kautsar Rahmania,
Bambang Suharjito, Rizki Febri
Andika Hudori

Highlighting Students' Voices of Learning English Through Project-
Based Learning During Covid-19 Pandemic: A Case Study

"... the styrofoam is painted first yellow, then we design it [...] sticked with pin [...] For the design itself, it's not all drawn, so there are those after we sketch, we continue not using dyes but using cotton and glitter" (student D)

"Start with a white styrofoam, it was originally sticked with manila paper [...] after that we create a design [...] In the next stage after the design is finished, we use a maroon patchwork cloth that is placed on it in the picture [...] We also still have to make a work ethic using English, right, brother, now that we need time to make the right vocabulary for our field, we also consult to the teacher about the word selection" (student E)

Based on the excerpt, student created a project with design topic. They also learned about the work ethic in fashion design field. However, not only both of them, the other three students also made a project related to broadcasting area. Making a video project started with creating the scripts, the last step was editing, they did not only learn English but also broadcasting skill.

"... I made the script and the finalization the script in about one and a half day, [...] next on the third day I take a video and then edit the video in about 3 days" (Student A)

The length of video making was different from one student and another. It depended on their ability to develop the story to be used on the video. As a result, from interview, time for made a script was different but time for took the video and editing was almost the same. They were also considering the word selection for the script.

Problem in Creating Project

Every project had different difficulties. Whether it was from what the project was doing or how many people were working on it. Based on the interview, the student who worked individually has more technical problems rather than students who worked in a group. However, students who worked in a group project will work with a lot of people, and it could make a group had many ideas.

"Mainly it's in the process of the teamwork, sis. My group can't be invited to cooperate..." (student D, 19th August 2022 9:11 (06:06.76)) (appendix D pg. 81)

"Not all people work [...] they also did not want to ask what their job desk..." (student E, 19th August 2022 9:33 (03:27.55)) (appendix D pg. 88)

When Student D and Student E were asked about the problems they encountered while working on the project, the first problem they raised was poor teamwork. Some group members could not perform good team working. Lack of team working among group members might result in unpleasant experiences for all participants (Bashan & Holsblat, 2012; Gardiner & Robinson, 2009). This problem had an impact on the project making time which was getting longer and the student's voice about their Project-based learning experience. However, they were looking for

Vina Kautsar Rahmania,
Bambang Suharjito, Rizki Febri
Andika Hudori

Highlighting Students' Voices of Learning English Through Project-
Based Learning During Covid-19 Pandemic: A Case Study

the solution so that the project could be completed on time and the solution of both was a method with the members. They also vote to get results when they had a lot of ideas.

> *"... We do a voting system and (the result is) more who choose glamour themes. for friends who don't want to work, we tell them to be a bit pushy but finally they want to be told, ..."* (Student D)

> *"... I think we've been subdivided into two big groups to explore this project. There is a misunderstanding about the cost that we want to use so we have a fight. But after being explained, they finally understood that the cost of using cash class"* (Student E)

Technical problems also occurred, but they did not have such a significant effect in the creation of project. They could get a way out quickly. However, the technical issues that arose on individual project were more difficult. Script making was a problem that Students A, Student B and Student C face. When making scripts in English, they felt that lack of English skills made it difficult for them to create scripts.

> *"... my English (skills) itself is in the process of learning or not very fluent [...] in pronunciation and vocabularies. ..."* (Student A)

The three students used google translate to help translate the Indonesian script into English. Student A consulted with the teacher in making a script to determine the choice of words for the script. They also improvised when they forgot the script while taking the video.

> *"... for the English (skills) I had a consultation with my teacher sometimes"* (Student A)

> *"... I'm just talking spontaneously, a kind of improvisation"* (Student C)

Another problem that also arose in individual projects was the problem related to the tools they used in video creation.

PBL Impact for Student

The use of project-based learning in English language learning was a way for students to learn through a process. In the process of creating a project, students would be able to realize what they had to learn not only about English itself but also others. This stage had an impact on students, be it a positive impact or the absence of a significant impact that students get. This section will explain how project-based learning impacts students and what they get after doing project-based learning.

PBL Impact on Student English Ability

Each student would have his or her own way of learning and understanding the learning. Similar to the use of project-based learning as a method in the learning process, some students had a positive and significant impact, but some of them felt that the use of project-based learning was not considered to have a significant impact.

Vina Kautsar Rahmania,
Bambang Suharjito, Rizki Febri
Andika Hudori

Highlighting Students' Voices of Learning English Through Project-
Based Learning During Covid-19 Pandemic: A Case Study

As a result of the interviews that had been conducted, all participants felt that project-based learning had a positive impact in different ways. In Students A and Student B the use of project-based learning impacted on activeness, and they felt more confident in using their English skills the public.

"*If the activeness is increasing, in English learning activities or every learning I try my best to always be active in class activities*" (Student A)

"*... speaking in front of the camera, I think it can train the level of confidence...*" (Student B)

Unlike the 3 students who felt that project-based learning impacted their activeness, Student C and Student E said that project-based learning did not have a significant impact on it.

"*For my activeness in class, it's not good, sis, I'm a shy person, sis, so it's still difficult to be active during lessons....*" (Student E)

"*it should be, (but) I don't want to answer if the teacher doesn't ask me to answer [...] I don't want to look flashy*"(Student C)

Student D said that project-based learning did not have much impact on her activeness, but this method had an impact on her confidence to communicate using English.

"*Yes, because we are trying to talk to other people, sis, so if I talk to other people, I can finally use it or have an opponent if I want to have a conversation [...] So it if for ordinary English skills, it's not too effective. If creativity is effective, brother, because we are trying to decorate so that the mading is attractive*" (Student D)

Outcomes after Using PBL

In this section, according to the excerpt, the students said about what they got after learning English through creating projects. The interview results reported that during the creation of the project, students' vocabularies increased, and they learned how to pronounce it.

"*... I get new vocabulary also continue to be able to learn the vocabulary too, the pronunciation ...*" (Student B)

"*... in using English, whether it is the practice of regular pronunciation everyday friends or assignments, I talways try to be confident...*" (Student A)

Some of them also learned new formal vocabulary, which of them were relating to their major.

"*... but indeed, I learned some new vocabulary that was specific in the field of design.*" (Student D)

"*Because even in the mading, the code of work ethics also uses English so I learned some more formal vocabulary*" (Student E)

Vina Kautsar Rahmania,
Bambang Suharjito, Rizki Febri
Andika Hudori

Highlighting Students' Voices of Learning English Through Project-
Based Learning During Covid-19 Pandemic: A Case Study

Student C admitted that with project-based learning, she could learn about new vocabulary, especially formal vocabulary. After that, she applied it when she learned to use a book. During the teacher's explanation, she changed the formal vocabulary that she did not understand to the vocabulary that were easier for her to understand.

> "... the script was in formal so it is long [...] continue to spontaneously talk about what is the sentence that is what yah is not convoluted." (Student C)

According to the result of the document analysis, student C changed some of the vocabulary from the script which use more formal vocabularies into informal vocabularies when taking the video.

Project-Based Learning in Students' Voices

Each student had his own way of understanding the topic given by the teacher. As Grossman et al. (2019) mention, although the PBL approach is appropriate for all students a single instructional strategy is not always suitable. The use of project-based learning in English language learning also had a different efficiency for each student. Therefore, the results of the interviews that had been conducted show that the students had various of opinion regarding the use of project-based learning. Some of them said that project-based learning was one of the learning methods that could help them improving their English skills. However, the other students said that the use of this method did not have any impact on their English skills.

Project-Based Learning as English Learning method

In project-based learning, students are able to review their practices during learning by interaction and exchange experiences (Wassell & LaVan, 2009). Some students said that project-based learning is one of interesting methods to do.

> "... The learning method is very interesting and also includes effective. Because from there we also practice our English as well as practice our field skills in taking videos..."
> (Student A)

Student A also added that this method could help him improve his skills in his field, namely broadcasting. This happened to Students B and Student E who said that the use of project-based learning methods aided them in improving skills; it was increasing their English skills or self-confidence.

> " I think it's very, very useful, which at first, I lacked confidence to talk in front of the class, so I was brave." (Student B)

> "Quite interesting, sis, I also think that learning using projects like this can also improve my English skills even if it's just a little bit." (Student E)

Vina Kautsar Rahmania,
Bambang Suharjito, Rizki Febri
Andika Hudori

Highlighting Students' Voices of Learning English Through Project-
Based Learning During Covid-19 Pandemic: A Case Study

On the other hand, Students C and Student D said that using project-based learning methods was still ineffective for the learning process. Student C said that the use of project-based learning could not change her habits in learning English because she had already done things that could improve his English skills just like the way she did when she created the project. She added that using songs and videos such as vlogs on Youtube could be easier to improve her English skills.

> *"emm-   it's not effective, because I'm actually used to it, it's actually not the one who used to talk in front of the camera. But it's speak English,"* (Student C)

As stated in the previous part, student D had problems regarding teamwork at the time of project creation and this affected the experience he felt. Student D admitted that she enjoyed the learning process through the creation of projects. She said that big projects were very tiring. Apart from the lack of teamwork, she did not enjoy this kind of learning because large projects had to use a lot of ideas and costs.

> *"Honestly I don't enjoy it, sis. Because it's draining, it's draining of mind, it's draining of money, it's also because it's a big project [...] Maybe if the project is small even though it is a group but in a small number of people (I) can enjoy it more ..."* (Student D)

However, she added that if the project was done with a smaller scale, maybe he could enjoy the process more.

The students also said that they were still curious about the use of project-based learning as a method in English language learning. The results of the interview showed all students wanted to make projects in the learning process with different types of projects.

Discussion

Based on the finding of the research, conclusion can be drawn that the use of project-based learning was one of the methods that teachers could use in the English learning process. It could be done individually or in groups. It could help students in learning to interact with other students. The different types of projects carried out by the students affected the experience they got from using this method. The students who did individual projects learned to observe a case with their own views. As reported above, student A, Student B, and Student C had the same project but different cases and ways of solving them. These 3 students were from the field of cinema and the project they had to work on was video making. This project was aligned with the field they were engaged. Similar to the other two students, Student D and Student E were students in the field of fashion design and the project they were working on was making a Gallery Walk or we could call it madding with the topic of fashion design. Gallery Walk is a large-scale project with many members. In addition, besides learning about English, group work would allow

Vina Kautsar Rahmania,
Bambang Suharjito, Rizki Febri
Andika Hudori

Highlighting Students' Voices of Learning English Through Project-
Based Learning During Covid-19 Pandemic: A Case Study

students to collaborate in groups where they could exchange resources and ideas in order to complete a certain assignment, which leads to mirroring real-life tasks (Stoller, 2002). However, project groups had a common problem, namely the lack of teamwork. This issue occurred at a time when Students D and Student E were creating a project. The lack of communication between members made them often disagreements. Then the awareness of members in doing their part was also a problem that they encountered. Approaching members who had problems and improving communication was the solution they both chose to make the project creation process more straightforward.

In addition to the problems related to the technicalities of project creation, the students experienced difficulties in terms of English proficiency. The creation of the project was not far from the use of English in it. They usually learned to use Google Translate to find out the exact pronunciation of the new vocabulary. Some of them conducted consultations with teachers for the word selection for their project.

The use of project-based learning used projects as a learning medium. This had an impact on students, whether it was an impact on their English skills or their ability to socialize. In addition, the use of project-based learning in vocational schools would have an impact on their abilities in their work field. This is in accordance with the statement of Hakkinen et.al (2017) which stated Project-based learning is an efficient technique to foster 21st-century skills in English learners by encouraging critical thinking, problem-solving, interpersonal communication, information and media literacy, cooperation, leadership and teamwork, innovation, and creativity. In addition, this was also in line with some of the students' that with the creation of a project, they could learn other skills related to their work area. Besides their English skills, their creativity could be improved during the project creation process. During the process of creating a project the students learned a lot about new vocabulary, be it formal or informal and some of them were vocabulary related to the field they were engaged.

The problems and impacts they faced during the use of project-based learning in schools had an impact on students' perceptions. Not all students could adapt and enjoy using project-based learning methods to learn English. As was presented from the results of the data analysis above, 2 students said that the use of project-based learning did not have any significant impact on their English skills. One of them could not even enjoy every learning process because she felt overwhelmed by this project.

CONCLUSION

The findings part of the research indicated that project-based learning was one of the that teachers might employ to help students learn English. According to some students, the use of

project-based learning can help them in learning English. They can enjoy every process of learning English during project creation. However, not all students find the use of this method effective in the classroom. Furthermore, the application of project-based learning in vocational schools would affect their competency in their line of work. This was in line with the claims of some students who said that by developing a project, they could pick up new abilities relevant to their field of work. Certainly, there are numerous avenues for further research in Project-Based Learning (PBL). Here are some suggestions for areas where research could contribute to advancing the implementation of PBL in online environment and its impact. Research could explore the effectiveness of online platforms for implementing PBL and how to maintain collaboration and engagement in virtual environments.

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