

Designing and Implementing Project-based Learning in an ESP course: A Path Way to Hands-on Students

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Abstract— This study aims to present the outcomes of applying project-based learning through the English for Advertisement and Public Relations course to enhance hands-on experiences of Thai EFL students at Rajamangala University of Technology Isan, Sakon Nakhon Campus (RMUTI.SKCN). The students' feedback was investigated the benefits of project-based learning instruction in this study in enhancing the understanding and the ability of students in applying English for advertisement and public relations and design concepts to create their works and achieving the objectives of the subjects and preparing them for being hands-on graduates to serve the need of the global market. The results of this study revealed that the project-based learning instruction in this study could reinforce the concepts learned in class and enhance the students' hands-on experiences.

Index Terms— Project-based learning, PBL, Hands-on students, ESP

I. INTRODUCTION

English language teaching has been changed over the decades. Learning in a traditional classroom settings, providing only concepts and models, might not be able to enhance skills such as soft skills, technical skills, interpersonal skills and ICT literacy for working and solving problems in their future careers. In other words, teaching an English for a specific purpose (ESP) with a traditional instruction might not be able to bridge the gap between classroom tasks and the real-world problems.

Apparently, Rajamangala University of technology Isan, Sakon Nakhon campus, located in the Northeastern part of Thailand has a vision in producing hands-on graduates to serve the needs of community. Curriculum committee of both sciences and social sciences fields need to adjust each curriculum so as to relate to the vision of the university. As the matter of the fact, the policy drives a considerable change of each curriculum. For, English for International Communication program, the prior movement was expected from ESP courses of the program. The focus of this study was

on English for Advertisement and Public Relations course. The subject is designed to achieve specific outcomes that cover not only the language uses in advertisement and public relations, but also the principles of advertisement and public relations. [1] explained that student-centered had become a trend of teaching pedagogy, together with the need for international communication skills in various situations: therefore, the activities of ESP courses should enhance students' professional development and communication.

Since the subject is composed of two related fields, it is difficult to find a course book suit the contents of the course. Formerly, the teacher composed the materials from different sources: however, it was not attracted the students' interest on the subject. In addition, it was not able to expose the students with hands-on students. A major concern was about graduates who learns only concepts for forming the language might have a rough competition with full-skill learners in global market. Therefore, there is a challenge in designing teaching instruction for reinforcing students' interest in the subject as well as exposing them to hands-on experiences to strengthen their language skills and 21st century skills.

Concerning the 21st learning pedagogy, more attention should be given to develop thinking skills, makes used of project-based learning, and use problem solving as a tool [2]. As a result, many recent studies were carried out to help the students to overcome the problems by providing or making more opportunities to expose the real world for the students. It is to say that constructivism which reinforces "perceives learning as a process of constructing knowledge by learners themselves [3]", is playing a key role on the changing of teaching pedagogy. In constructivism, learning process is related to think about the context, find the answers or solve the problems of the learning context. One of the most recent teaching pedagogy under the constructivism is project-based learning (PBL) [4], an instructional pedagogy involving students' learning process with group projects. It was relevant to [1] that project-based learning was suitable for ESP courses. By implementing project-based learning instruction, teachers can enhance hands-on experiences for students to understand how to work and solve problems in the real world [5] as well as develop and reinforce 21st necessary skills for the learners [6]. In addition, project-based learning help raising learners' autonomy as they can see and control their own learning process [7].

To achieve the vision of the university and the global market, it is necessary to design teaching activities by integrating

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project-based learning in an ESP course within Rajamangala University of technology Isan, Sakon Nakhon campus context.

II. THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study were to design and implement project-based learning in a course of English for advertisement and public relations, and investigate the effects of project-based learning.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, the English for Advertisement and Public Relations course is a junior-level undergraduate course that is mandatory in the English for International Communication program curriculum at RMUTI.SK. At the time when the study was conducted, there were 28 students. The subject is designed to achieve specific outcomes that cover not only the language uses in advertisement and public relations, but also the principles of advertisement and public relations.

The Project-Based Learning instruction of this course required the students to create a brand-new product which have never been designed or invented in the world to be the main subject of their project. The project covered some fundamental topics in both advertisement and public relations including: English for designing a radio script, a story board, leaflet, and exhibition. The students had to attend a three-hour lecture class to get the concepts and language used in each work. The students were required to submit a proposal about the project they intend to do and approved by the course instructor before starting working on the project. Every group is asked to propose a first and second drafts before submitting their final works. The role of the teacher is the mentor of their projects. By the end of the semester, the students had to present all their works in the exhibition that their class had organized. In addition, a portfolio of their project was required for the final assessment. Three evaluators would walk around between the evaluating their work such as: student's presentation skills, team work, design, understanding and problem solving skills. Every member of a team would also turn in a peer evaluation form valuating from their perspective other members of the team.

To achieve the outcomes of each project, the students had to show their understanding on the key concept of their works, the process of their works, the accuracy of the language used in their works, and the effective presentation skills. To measure the benefits and the difficulties which were gained by students through the projects-based learning, a survey questionnaire adapted from [5] and an interview were conducted. The results are discussed in the next section.

IV. RESULTS

After implementing project-based learning in the ESP course, a survey on the benefits of the instruction were investigated. The data were analyzed to find statistical results of this study. The summary of the results was shown in Table 1. In addition, the data from the interview was used to gain a deep understanding on the students' feedback on the group project activities.

TABLE I:
THE SUMMARY OF THE DATA ANALYSIS

Q No.	Question	Mean	S.D.
Q1	The projects reinforced concepts learned in class.	4.36	0.49
Q2	The projects raised my interest in the language used in the activities related to advertisement and public relations.	4.43	0.51
Q3	Learning through problem solving made the project more interesting.	4.29	0.61
Q4	The projects raised my teamwork capabilities.	4.14	0.53
Q5	The number of the projects is sufficient	4.36	0.49
Q6	The projects enhanced hands-on experiences.	4.29	0.61

The first question aimed to measure the perception of the students on the benefits of project-based learning among students. The participants were asked to assess how the project has reinforced concepts of English for advertisement and public relations that they had learned before doing the project. The results revealed that the mean of the students' answers was 4.36. It could be indicated that the integration of the project-based learning in an EFL context could powerfully strengthen their knowledge. Most of the interviewees also mentioned in the interview that it was different from the traditional instruction that they could learn not only the models of the language used in the projects, but also how to use and apply it to achieve the goals of the project.

The second question dealt with the effectiveness of project-based learning in the ESP course. The highest mean of the answers was given to this question (4.43) which indicated the project-based activities could raise the students' interest in English for Advertisement and Public Relations. One of the interviewed revealed that the activities drove the students in language used for each activity. They needed to search via the internet sources to study how the language was used in each activity in different way.

The third question concerned about the feedback on learning through problem solving. The mean was 4.29 which showed that learning through problem solving made the projects more interesting for the students. Most of the interviewees gave a similar answer that they must find the best way to promote our products. It was very challenging because our products had not been introduced to the real market.

The fourth question aims to investigate the effects of project-based learning on the students' teamwork capabilities. The mean of 4.15 showed that project-based learning enhanced their teamwork capabilities. One of the interviewees revealed that good teamwork was needed in order to achieve the goal of each project. They were able to learn how negotiate and compromise the concepts of the project. However, the interviewee revealed that they were worried about the grading process as it was a group work.

The fifth question dealt with the number of the projects throughout the course. The mean of 4.36 showed a satisfactory feedback on the number of the projects throughout the course. Some students mentioned that the number of the projects throughout the course was sufficient as they have to concern about many elements such as the accuracy of the language,

principles of designing and working with photo editing software as well as drafting and consulting with the lecturer.

The last question aims to investigate the benefits of the project-based learning on enhancing hands-on experiences of the students in the ESP course. The result revealed that mean was 4.29 that indicated that the students could expose to hands-on experiences through project-based learning instruction. There was a consensus on this question that even though there were some limitation in implementing project-based learning instruction in the ESP course or within the learning context, however, it was a good learning atmosphere that the classroom was changed into the international offices, and the classmates became the colleagues. The students also revealed that it was a pleasant that they can design and control the learning process. Finally, their negative attitudes toward the lecturer and English language learning had been reduced.

V. DISCUSSION

This was achieved through designing a guideline and a framework for integrating project-based learning in the ESP course project-based learning in the ESP course together with investigating the students' feedback on the activities. Besides enhancing English language learning, the result of this study indicated that project-based learning could powerfully reinforce the students' hands-on experiences. The results of this study was relevant to some recent previous studies, for example, [8] founded that project-based learning was suitable for ESP courses as "this kind of work emphasized creativity over productivity through providing a relaxed learning environment in which students worked together freely and at their own pace away of the traditional classroom setting to accomplish group tasks as well as enabled the students to focus on their learning process and allowed them to see their progress. (p. 61)." [9] asserted that the students could learn how to work in group collaboratively and manage conflict among their group members as well as leadership skills and thinking skills. [9] further explained that teacher's role in project based learning was to guide the students to the right track and accompany them along their learning process. It was also relevant to [10] that project-based learning can solve the problem about teaching materials, as it was mentioned earlier in this paper that lack of appropriate teaching materials was one of the difficulties in planning the lesson for the course. However, it does not mean that the teacher does not have to prepare any materials. The teacher still has to prepare other materials supporting the students' projects.

VI. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, policy makers, curriculum developers and teachers should consider appropriate way in integrating project-based learning in their courses in order to bridge the gap between theories and the real world. In addition, it could help extending the students' skills and performance. Some further studies should be carries out in other ESP courses and different research framework of project-based learning.

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