

INTEGRATING PROJECT-BASED LEARNING INTO ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES CLASSES AT TERTIARY LEVEL: PERCEIVED CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS

Le Van Tuyen*, Ho Hai Tien

Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology (HUTECH)

475A Dien Bien Phu Street, Ward 25, Binh Thanh District, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

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Abstract: In the last decade, EFL educators have attempted to experiment with various teaching methods to discover more effective ways of teaching and learning English, including English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Such methods as outcome-based learning (OBL), project-based learning (PBL), or cooperative learning (CBL) have received a lot of attention. Investigating the benefits and challenges of these methods in different contexts is really necessary. The current exploratory study, therefore, aimed to explore students' perceived challenges and benefits of integrating PBL into ESP classes with the 'English for marketing' course designed for students majoring in Business English at Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology (HUTECH). With the participation of 64 fourth-year students and the employment of three main data collection instruments including the questionnaire, student interviews and journals, the findings of the study reveal that the integration of PBL into ESP classes has brought more benefits to the students than challenges. Specifically, they could enhance their language and content knowledge, workplace-related skills, self-responsibility and motivation. Meanwhile, they mainly encountered challenges related to classmates such as lack of skills, English proficiency, and negative attitudes. It is expected that the findings of the study would partly contribute to the existing knowledge of the study field and shed light on the role of PBL in ESP education at HUTECH in particular and at the Vietnamese tertiary level in general.

Key words: integration, project-based learning, ESP class, benefit, challenge

1. Introduction

Since the early 1960s, ESP has become one of the most remarkable fields of teaching in universities around the world leading to the design and implementation of such ESP courses as English for Engineers, English for Aviation, English for Advertising, English for Marketing, English for Banking, and so on (Kırkgöz & Dikilitaş, 2018). Obviously, there has been a growing need for undergraduate students to develop

their proficiency in ESP knowledge and skills in the increasingly globalized world (Kırkgöz, 2014), which puts much pressure on universities to deliver successful ESP courses.

Regarding teaching and learning methods or approaches used in ESP, in many places, teachers seem to adhere to the traditional teaching of ESP generally focused on the delivery of language information through reading

* Corresponding author.

Email address: lv.tuyen@hutech.edu.vn

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comprehension, writing, vocabulary and grammar exercises without paying attention to the need of integrating it with the development of skills (Mamakou & Grigoriadou, 2011). Nonetheless, since the first years of the 1990s, ESP has undergone significant transformations influenced by changing trends in approaches and methodologies in English language teaching (Kırkgöz & Dikilitaş, 2018). That means educators began to make changes in their ESP teaching (Stoller, 2002). They turned to content-based instruction and project work to encourage students to be engaged in learning both language and content. By doing so, they motivate students to be 'absorbed' in the world of work; project work helps to bridge the gap between language study and language use. In addition, educators have also thought that soft skills such as interactive teamwork, critical reading and writing, communication skills, negotiation, creative and critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making and presentation are needed for today's academic and future work environment (Guo & Yang, 2012). They believe that these skills could be developed through introducing an integrative pedagogical approach incorporating PBL into ESP classes. PBL, one of the learner-centered approaches, has been recommended highly in ESP education at universities because it provides an effective way for students to develop those above soft skills. PBL in ESP allows students to acquire both language knowledge and skills more quickly and easily (Noom-ura, 2013). Given this current situation, ESP teachers and students at tertiary level are required to be more aware of the challenges and benefits of PBL.

Nevertheless, Kırkgöz and Dikilitaş (2018) indicated that there is a significant gap between implementation and assuring quality of ESP offerings, and it is essential for English educators and researchers to discover what factors may make that gap.

How do we 'fill that gap' for ESP education while responding to current pedagogical and workplace-skilled trends? Many successful cases of PBL implementation in EFL or ESP education have been discussed in the literature (e.g. Stoller, 1997; Beckett, 2002; Beckett & Slater, 2005; Miller, 2006; Mamakou & Grigoriadou, 2011; Noom-ura, 2013; Díaz Ramírez, 2014; Alsamani & Daif-Allah, 2016; Indrasari, 2016; & Wahyudin, 2017); nevertheless, most of them are in other EFL contexts. In Vietnam the application of PBL in ESP education seems to be still little addressed or investigated. It is found in literature that several studies have been conducted at the Vietnamese tertiary level (e.g. T. V. L. Nguyen, 2011 & V. K. Nguyen, 2015). Nonetheless, those are not empirical but literature review articles. In this sense, the current study aims to investigate the integration of PBL into ESP classes at Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology (HUTECH) in Vietnam. The study attempted to explore students' perceived challenges and benefits in the implementation of PBL in the 'English for marketing' course designed for students majoring in Business English. The course is part of the curriculum of a four-year English language undergraduate program.

The study attempted to address the two following research questions:

1) What challenges do students perceive in the integration of PBL into ESP classes at tertiary level?

2) What benefits do students perceive in the integration of PBL into ESP classes at tertiary level?

It is expected that this study will shed light on ESP instruction at tertiary level and the importance of the integration of PBL into ESP classes. The study will certainly contribute to the existing knowledge of the field of study.

2. Literature Review

2.1. English for Specific Purposes

Definitions of English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) arose as a term in the last several decades of the 20th century as it turned to be more and more obvious that English students not only needed general English but English in specific fields like technology, science, business, media, etc. as well. That is why the need for ESP has been increasing rapidly, especially in Asian countries where English is now used as a medium of instruction at universities or as a lingua franca in the workplace. So far ESP has been defined in several ways. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 19) “ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the student’s needs.” Another definition given by Anthony (2018) states that ESP is an approach to language teaching that targets the academic or occupational needs of students, focuses on the language, skills, discourses, and genres required to address these needs (p. 10). In addition, Day and Krzanowski (2011) state that ESP involves teaching and learning the specific skills and language needed by particular students for a particular purpose.

The above definitions state that ESP is a student-centered, innovative teaching approach. Its aim is to meet students’ needs in schools or universities-(academic needs) and in workplace settings-(occupational needs). Obviously, ESP needs to focus on students’ skills of working effectively and ability to use English in a specific domain, not purely English language.

Characteristics of English for Specific Purposes

Researchers such as Strevens (1988) and Dudley-Evans and St John (1998)

identify several major characteristics of ESP as follows. (a) Specific needs are the first key feature of ESP. That means ESP courses are designed to meet the needs of students in specific contexts regarding disciplines they major in or are interested in. (b) Authenticity is another feature of ESP. Authenticity refers to authentic language materials and tasks. This is also referred to as target genre students’ need to engage in the real-life work situations, and the use of tasks and activities should reflect the students’ specialist areas. (c) Underlying methodology-a student-centered approach is adopted in ESP. That means all aspects of learning and teaching are about addressing students’ needs (Muñoz-Luna & Taillefer, 2018) based on situations they are in, their disciplines and the context in which they work; and presentation of ESP methodology is organized around the concepts of input and output (Basturkmen, 2006). Furthermore, a student-centered approach allows for such developments as cognitive, more challenging and real-life learning tasks, and autonomous and responsible language students (Jendrych, 2013). (d) The last feature of ESP is its learners. ESP mainly deals with learners who are at intermediate or advanced level, and who have achieved a certain level of English and are relatively mature; therefore, students’ cognitive and linguistic levels are critical in ESP course design, material development and pedagogical considerations. An ESP course is designed for adult learners or for working professionals (Day & Krzanowski, 2011). It focuses on when, where and why students need the language either in study or workplace contexts (Basturkmen, 2010) in order to increase students’ employability and promotion opportunities (Jendrych, 2013).

2.2. Project-Based Learning

Definitions of project-based learning

Literature reveals that so far researchers and educators have used

different terms which are equivalent to the term 'project-based learning'. Those terms are project work, project approach, project-oriented approach, and project-based instruction (Beckett, 2002). They have also defined 'Project-based Learning' in several different ways. For example, Project-based Learning (PBL) is a constructivist-based and comprehensive approach which is designed to engage students in investigating real life problems (Barron, 1998; Sidman-Taveau & Milner-Boloti, 2001). In addition, Miller (2006) defines PBL as an active student-centered learning approach characterized by students' goal-setting, collaboration, communication, autonomy, constructive investigations, and reflection within real-world practices. By using another term, Blank (1997) and Harwell (1997) define project-based instruction as an authentic instructional model in which students plan, implement, and evaluate projects that have real-world applications beyond the classroom, or a teaching model that organizes learning around projects (Mergendoller & Thomas, 2010). Another definition is given by Mamakou and Grigoriadou (2008). These researchers define PBL as a term describing an instructional method that uses projects as the central focus of instruction in different disciplines, including language learning. Similarly, in his article, Stoller (2006) uses the term 'Project-based Instruction' (PBI) instead of PBL. According to him, PBI is a term describing an instructional method which involves a process and product, lasts over a period of time, requires students to use integrated skills to develop knowledge and skills through the integration of language and content, and collaborate with other students to reflect on both the process and product. In fact, whichever term is used, PBL has been considered as an effective method used for teaching various disciplines to students in various educational establishments.

In this article, "project-based learning" is defined as a long-term task that involves various activities performed individually or collaboratively by students to gain language knowledge, content knowledge and workplace-related skills. Such activities as selecting the topic, making questions, searching documents, analyzing data, writing the report, evaluating and presenting the products related to ESP.

Characteristics of project-based learning

Project-based learning takes constructivism as its theoretical basis. Constructivism holds that knowledge cannot be taught, but must be constructed by students (Benson, 2005). Students need to be provided with opportunities to receive comprehensible input so that they can produce comprehensive output. PBL can help achieve this goal (Beckett & Miller, 2006). The project forms the core of PBL and it requires students to follow a variety of steps to complete project work. Students need to engage in authentic and interesting tasks and work collaboratively to improve language skills, language and content knowledge. The teacher orchestrates the whole project and guides the learning process (Block, 2015). One of the major characteristics of project work is that it has both a process and product orientation and provides students with opportunities to focus on fluency and accuracy at different project work stages (Stoller, 2002). The end product of project work may be an oral presentation, a poster session, a report, a stage performance, a marketing plan, or a tour program for tourists. Furthermore, PBL is a student-centered (Stoller, 1997) and integrated approach (Beckett, 2002) and is considered to be motivating, stimulating, empowering, and challenging because it uses real-life tasks to develop students' confidence and autonomy (Díaz Ramírez, 2014). Through project work students are

able to improve their language skills and workplace-related skills, content knowledge and cognitive abilities (Ushioda, 2010). Unlike traditional language learning tasks which were designed and controlled by teachers, project work requires students to be active and responsible for learning tasks.

2.3. Rationale for Integrating Project-Based Learning Into ESP Classes

Literature reveals that so far both empirical and review studies have been conducted with an attempt to discover whether integrating project-based learning in ESP classrooms is beneficial or not. Results of different previous studies show that PBL enhances the teaching and learning of ESP. Firstly, once the students' main field of study is business English (Noom-ura, 2013), PBL will stimulate students' constructive instincts and provide a sense of achievement in ESP classes. Secondly, the incorporation of PBL into ESP classrooms helps develop different language skills for students, i.e. speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Alsamani & Daif-Allah, 2016) and language areas such as vocabulary and grammar (Wahyudin, 2017). Thirdly, as stated by Mamakou and Grigoriadou (2008), PBL has become the central part of ESP practice in higher education. ESP contains instruction of both language and content. Integration of language and content has long been supported as a sound teaching practice. PBL is particularly effective in ESP settings or in business English classes because it easily lends itself to (a) authentic language use, (b) a focus on language at the discourse rather than the sentence level, (c) authentic multi-skill tasks and student centeredness (Haines, 1989; Robinson, 1991; Sheppard & Stoller, 1995). Fourthly, PBL not only requires students to learn content-specific knowledge, but it develops problem-solving skills as students seek diverse solutions to meaningful questions (Mamakou & Grigoriadou, 2008), and new study habits by

promoting self-directed, independent, cooperative learning as well as out-of-classroom learning (Alsamani & Daif-Allah, 2016) and confidence. Finally, by doing project work, students are engaged in decision-making, self-determination in a future profession and identification of their future prospects (Alan & Stoller, 2005), and are motivated to get additional information in the field of studies.

Based on the above discussion of literature, it can be concluded that many educators have proved that PBL can be one of the effective ways in teaching ESP courses. Through project work, students not only learn theoretically but practically as well. They can improve their workplace-related skills by designing projects. That is why PBL is encouraged to be applied in ESP courses in higher education. Nonetheless, little literature related to challenges and problems encountered by both teachers and students has been found. That only benefits of PBL in ESP courses are explored is not equal. Challenges and problems arising in the integration of PBL into ESP courses should also be discovered so that teachers and students may find out measures to solve them.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Participants

This study was conducted at Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology (HUTECH) in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. For an exploratory study, non-probability sampling should be employed (Kothari, 2004). That is why the participants of the current study were purposefully chosen. They were 64 fourth-year students from 2 classes majoring in Business English at HUTECH. 46 of them are female (71.9%); and 18 of them are male (28.1%). Their ages range from 22 to 25. "English for Marketing" is one of the compulsory courses they have to complete to meet the

requirements of the undergraduate program. The number of years of learning English varies more significantly as students in the study come from different parts of the country with different English programs at school in lower levels of education. However, 34 of them (42%) have spent over 9 years studying English.

3.2. Instruments

Exploratory research design was used in this study. Its main emphasis was on the discovery of insights into the integration of PBL into ESP classes. It provided an opportunity for considering different aspects of the problem under study (Kothari, 2004). To obtain information about students' perceptions of challenges they encountered and benefits they gained from doing project work in the 'English for Marketing' course, three instruments were employed to collect both qualitative and quantitative data in this study, namely the students' journals, the closed-ended questionnaire and the semi-structured interview. Firstly, the students were required to keep a journal for expressing opinions and beliefs (Marion, 2011) about their project work after every class session. Secondly, the survey questionnaire was employed at the end of the project. The survey of the study was an experience survey of students who had practical experience with the problem to be investigated, and the objective of such survey was to obtain insight into the relationships between variables relating to the research problem (Kothari, 2004). The questionnaire contains three parts with 54 items. The items were designed based on the theoretical foundation of PBL and adapted from several previous studies (e.g. Musa, Mufti, Latiff & Amin, 2012; Efendi, 2017). To avoid a neutral option, the questionnaire used a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly disagree, Disagree, Agree, to Strongly agree. The reliability of the items was tested via Cronbach's Alpha with the

coefficient of .653 for 14 items used to measure students' perceptions of the challenges and .934 for 37 items used to measure students' perceptions of benefits of PBL. Thirdly, the semi-structured interview with 8 open questions was used to obtain more insight from the students' perceptions about the project work they implemented.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

3.3.1. Implementation of the Project

The textbook used for the course "English for Marketing" at HUTECH is *Cambridge English for Marketing* (Robinson, 2010). The students take this course in the 7th semester of the 8-semester English language program. The course lasts 9 weeks. Educators divided projects into three types: (a) structured projects which are decided by the teacher; (b) semi-structured projects which are decided by both the teacher and students; and (c) unstructured projects which are decided by students (Stoller, 2002). The project of the current study is a semi-structured project. It was specified and organized by the teacher and students in terms of topic, materials, methodology and presentation as well as the end product. In addition, the implementation of the project lasted 9 weeks, with one class session in each week and followed 3 phases with 6 steps adapted from Stoller (2002) in two ESP classes with 64 students as follows:

Phase 1: Planning

Step 1: The teacher and students discussed the theme for the project – marketing strategy planning in an organization – which, according to the syllabus, is the focus of the course *English for Marketing*.

Step 2: Students were then made aware of the final outcome of the project, i.e. a "marketing plan" for a new product of their newly-formed business together with a short presentation and Q and A section to defend their plan. Each class was divided into small

groups of four students who were clearly assigned to specific parts of a marketing plan including analysis of the company situation, target market and the 4 Ps (product, place, promotion and price).

Phase 2: Implementation

Step 3: Students discussed in their group in further details to complete the project such as the tasks of each member and how to find information, brainstorm ideas, work together and reach agreements. Importantly, each group had to determine a specific new product for their plan.

Step 4: In each session of the course from Session 2 (week 2) to Session 9 (week 9), students themselves acquired new knowledge, and along with it – the language, to write each part of the final plan with the support and constructive feedback from the teacher and other classmates. They worked collaboratively to gather information, solve problems and present their understanding. Students were asked to keep a record of daily notes on what they did, what they gained and the difficulties they faced in each session.

Phase 3: Evaluation

Step 5: Preparation for the final presentation: students agreed on the roles of each member prior to the presentation. They also made a slide show to summarize key points in their plan.

Step 6: Presentation of the final product: Each group presented the final product they selected. Group participants took turns to present what he or she has been assigned to as well as answer questions from the teacher.

3.3.2. Data Collection

Regarding data collection procedure, firstly, the students of the two ESP classes were required to write journals. They wrote about problems or challenges they coped with during and what they learned after each stage of the project work. All the students

were instructed how to write their journals at the beginning of the course. However, only ten volunteer students' journals, 5 from each class, were selected for analysis. Secondly, to collect quantitative data, in the 5th class session of the course, 64 questionnaire copies were administered to all the students of the two classes taking the "English for Marketing" course. The instructions on how to complete the questionnaire were clarified and explained carefully to them. All the questionnaire copies were collected in the last class session. That means students were given 3 weeks to complete the questionnaire. Thirdly, 10 students, 5 from each class, volunteered to participate in the interview sessions. Each interview lasted almost 20 minutes. During each interview, a sheet of interview questions was used. Each student's responses were systematically written on the sheet based on the interview questions for later analysis and interpretation.

3.4. Data Analysis Procedure

Regarding data analysis, both qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed. To analyze the data obtained from the questionnaire, SPSS 20.0 was employed so that descriptive statistics including Percentage, Mean (M), Standard Deviation (St. D) were processed. Based on the calculated interval coefficient for four intervals in four points ($4-1=3$), intervals with the range of 0.75 ($3/4$) were arranged. The following criteria in the Likert type scale were used to interpret the data: Strongly disagree (1.00 - 1.75); Disagree (1.76 - 2.50); Agree (2.51 - 3.25); Strongly agree (3.26 - 4.00); whereas "content analysis" was employed to deal with qualitative data collected from the students' journals, and student interviews. Based on the research questions and each theme related to the topic, the students' interview responses and notes in journals were classified, analyzed and coded as C1 for

context-related challenges, C2 for teacher-related challenge, C3 for student-related challenges; and B1 for benefit 1-language and content knowledge, B2 for language skills, B3 for workplace-related skills, B4 for self-responsibility and personal qualities, and B5 for internal motivation. In addition, to present the data from the interviews, the students were coded as SI-1,... to SI-10, and to present the data collected from students' journals, some excerpts were extracted and the students were coded as SJ-1,... to SJ-10.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Challenges of the Integration of PBL Into ESP Classes at Tertiary Level

Research question 1 attempted to investigate challenges that students perceive in the integration of PBL into ESP classes at tertiary level. The results presented and interpreted below were based on the data collected from the questionnaire, students' journals and interviews.

4.1.1. Context-Related Challenges

The data displayed in Table 1 below give some insights into the context-related challenges that participants encountered when working on the project. Regarding the time allocation to the project, most of the students did not think that they were not given sufficient time to carry out the activities and to complete the whole project (item 1, 2) with $M = 2.14$ & 2.06 and $St. D = .687$ & $.560$ respectively. Additionally, the students did not agree that PBL was unsuitable to ESP classes and the project type was difficult for them (item 3 & 5) with $M = 2.34$ & 2.45 and $St. D = .648$ & $.754$ respectively. Nonetheless, it is interesting to explore that over half of the students agreed that they faced challenges because PBL was a new approach to them. Many activities were unfamiliar to them and they had to deal

with too much work during the implementation of the project (item 4 & 6) with $M = 2.69$ & 2.72 and $St. D = .639$ & $.786$.

Data gathered from students' journals and interviews are also consistent with those of the questionnaire. Some of them expressed their perceptions as follows: "*the teacher requires students to do too much work: homework, mini tests, written assignments, real questions and presentation*" (SJ-1); "*it seems this is a complicated subject with too many things to do*" (SJ-2).

More interestingly, no students thought that the course was boring or PBL was unsuitable to ESP classes. For example, several students reported, "*I feel excited because I know more information about marketing and how to do marketing*" (SI-1); "*I gained lots of knowledge about marketing, the way to use Google doc, and pronunciation of some new words, so I feel this course is very helpful and necessary for me*" (SI-6); "*with the teacher's new method of teaching, I become better with the amount of knowledge and feel excited if I have a chance to work in marketing field in future*" (SI-8).

However, some students reported that they encountered challenges stemming from the textbook. For example, SJ-4 reported, "*the lesson has too many new concepts and information. I can't fully understand. I think this chapter is quite difficult and I only understand a small part of the lesson*"; or "*there are many different terms that I did not learn before, so I had some difficulties understanding the content of this course book... To be honest, when I read this book, I cannot summarize the main points or the key words in each part. It makes me confused and I don't focus on the important objectives*" (SJ-5).

Table 1*Descriptive Statistics of Context-Related Challenges*

No	Items	N	M	St. D
1	Students are not given sufficient time for carrying out all the activities needed for the project, e.g. choosing the topic, assigning tasks, or discussing the methods.	64	2.14	.687
2	Students are not given sufficient time for implementing the whole project.	64	2.06	.560
3	Students face challenges because applying project-based learning for learning ESP is not suitable.	64	2.34	.648
4	Students face challenges because project-based learning is a new approach; all the steps and activities are unfamiliar to students.	64	2.69	.639
5	The project type is too difficult for students to implement.	64	2.45	.754
6	That too much work needs to be dealt with in the process of implementing a project causes challenges for students.	64	2.72	.786

The above-mentioned findings of the study reveal that the two challenges the students encountered are related to PBL approach and the workload they had to deal with (item 4, 6). This finding of the study is consistent with that of Devkota, Giri, and Bagale (2017) showing that PBL is new to students; and students feel difficult with project work because they are habituated to traditional instruction. Actually, the PBL approach is more innovative, attractive compared with traditional didactic ones. It is an effective educational tool which helps students to develop language and specialized knowledge, ability to apply knowledge, communication, problem-solving and critical-thinking skills in real life. Nonetheless, it might be because the students have been taught in traditional, teacher-directed ESP classes that demand little inquiry on behalf of the students. As a result, when they are put into self-directed learning situations they have to struggle with the responsibility of performing a variety of inquiry activities on their own (Kirschner, Sweller & Clark, 2006). Therefore, challenges cannot be avoided. The findings of the study are similar to Thomas's (2000) viewpoint that project work involves

complex tasks based on challenging problems that require students to participate in design, problem-solving, decision making, or investigative activities; and that TBL approach requires students to be no longer passive recipients of knowledge; instead, they are expected to be actively engaged in the learning process and take responsibility for absorbing concepts and content, constructing knowledge, and developing new skills (Levine & Mosier, 2014).

4.1.2. Teacher-Related Challenges

Regarding teacher-related challenges, it can be seen in Table 2 below that most of the students did not think that the teacher caused challenges for them in the process of doing the project. It can be seen that most of the students believed that the difficulties they encountered did not stem from the teacher's side, including guidance, attitudes, capability of instructing how to conduct a project, knowledge of ESP or ability to communicate and assess students' work (item 7 to 11) with $M = 1.97, 1.84, 1.70, 1.56$ & 1.56 respectively. The data collected from the interviews also revealed that the students received much support from

their teacher. Here are two opinions from the students: “I was really motivated to learn this subject; the teacher provided the format of the plan and all the information we needed to implement and complete the project” (SI-2); or “the first motive is

myself. If I grasp the knowledge well this subject will help me get a good job in the future. The second is my teacher. He is always happy to help us answer our questions” (SI-10).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Teacher-Related Challenges

No	Items	N	M	St. D
7	During the time for executing the project, students receive little guidance from the teacher.	64	1.97	.992
8	Teachers’ attitudes towards students’ work make students demotivated in the implementation of the project.	64	1.84	.801
9	The teacher lacks the capability of instructing how to carry out a project.	64	1.70	.634
10	The teacher lacks knowledge of ESP.	64	1.56	.560
11	The teacher lacks the ability to communicate and assess the students’ projects.	64	1.56	.560

As presented above, the findings of the study show that the teacher did not cause challenges for the students regarding his roles, attitudes, instructional capability, knowledge of ESP, and communication and assessment ability. It can be ascertained that the teacher was aware of what he needed to do to integrate PBL into his ESP classes. The success is mostly determined by the teacher’s abilities and characteristics. According to Mikule and Miller (2011), PBL requires careful planning from both sides: teachers and students. Through the students’ perceptions, it might be confirmed that the teacher carefully implemented various tasks such as determining the goals and objectives of the course and deciding how the project might help achieve these goals. In addition, it can be assumed that the teacher transformed their role from authoritative to facilitator, coordinator, initiator, and guide working with the students, helping them solve problems related to both ESP knowledge and learning strategies. He might help them grasp both English and specialized language, English and

professional skills like compiling, analyzing, and synthesizing the information that they have collected from different sources for the project. He might also apply different formative assessment methods to measure students’ achievement. Those are the factors that might make many students think that they did not encounter challenges stemming from the teacher.

4.1.3. Student-Related Challenges

In terms of student-related challenges, three aspects are mentioned in Table 3 below, namely: skills, English proficiency and attitudes. The mean scores of the three items (12, 13, 14) show that over half of the students agreed that those three aspects caused challenges for them during the implementation of the project work with M = 2.56, 2.63 & 2.84 and St. D = .794, .678 & .912 respectively. More interestingly, data collected from the students’ journals and interviews are also in line with those of the questionnaire. For example, some students thought they encountered challenges due to lack of English and specialized knowledge:

“I found the information in the book confusing and not really clear. Besides, I do not have much knowledge about marketing which makes it ineffective to discuss how to solve problems” (SI-10); *“the problem for me is formal language. I can’t get their meaning and know how to use it”* (SI-1); *“although the teacher’s attitudes are really useful, this subject is very difficult and there is a lot of vocabulary, marketing knowledge”* (SI-3); *“the problems I faced in implementing project work were mainly due*

to the lack of specialized knowledge in marketing which made it difficult to clearly understand the concepts. On the other hand, due to my limited vocabulary, I had difficulty in reading as well as using specialized words” (SI-10). In addition, teamwork which is commonly required in learning with projects was a problem for some students, e.g. *“group discussion should be more effective because group members cannot agree on opinions”* (SJ-6).

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics of Student-Related Challenges

No	Items	N	M	St. D
12	Students lack skills such as discipline, teamwork, and activeness in completing the project.	64	2.56	.794
13	Students’ different English proficiency levels cause problems for group members.	64	2.63	.678
14	Students’ different attitudes towards the project cause problems for the completion of the project.	64	2.84	.912

Based on the above-presented data, it can be confirmed that many students encountered such challenges related to themselves as skills, English proficiency and attitudes. The project challenges students to create products for real-world purposes, and an ESP course requires students to develop both language and content knowledge and skills, which put much pressure on every student in an ESP class like in the context. Moreover, it might be because it was the first time the students taking the “English for marketing” course were required to implement project work, so lack of skills was unavoidable. Moreover, when students worked in groups of four, nevertheless, their English proficiency levels vary, the less able students might not be able to follow the learning process, and they might not have positive attitudes towards the teamwork and collaborate with their partners that might be because they lack the skills of working in groups, causing some challenges in working

collaboratively (Johnson & Johnson, 1989); meanwhile, the more able students might feel frustrated because they had to do all the work. It might be said that if the teacher had been aware of the difference in the self-efficacy, autonomy, learning styles, and proficiency levels of individual students, he would have chosen other ways of organizing the class.

In conclusion, the findings of the study showed that among three categories of challenges: context-related challenges (M=2.40), teacher-related challenges (M=1.72), and student-related challenges (M=2.67), the students perceived that during the time they implemented the project work in the marketing course, they encountered challenges related to their classmates due to their lack of skills, low English proficiency levels and attitudes towards to PBL of some students; especially, it is evident that most of them did not think that the teacher caused challenges to them.

4.2. Benefits of the Integration of PBL Into ESP Classes at Tertiary Level

Research question 2 attempted to explore the benefits that students perceive in the integration of PBL into ESP classes at tertiary level. The results presented and interpreted below were based on the data collected from the questionnaire, students' journals and interviews.

4.2.1. Language and Content Knowledge

Both quantitative (see Table 4) and qualitative data presented below show that most of the students agreed that the integration of PBL into the ESP class helped them enhance general and specialized English knowledge (item 1, 2), content knowledge (item 3), and knowledge of how to do things in real life working environment (item 4) with M = 3.27, 3.05, 3.16 & 3.09 and St. D = .718, .677, .511 & .526

respectively. Particularly, most of them also thought that with the support of PBL in the ESP class, they could create a product in real life working environments (item 5) and increase their knowledge of the process of producing a product (item 6) with M = 2.95 & 3.16 and St. D = .547 & .541 respectively. The data collected from students' journals and interviews also reflected students' similar perceptions. For example, "I learned to pronounce ESP words correctly and a lot of new ESP vocabulary" (SJ-4); or SJ-6 said, "I could increasingly improve listening and understanding skills, learning new knowledge about marketing"; and "By doing project work, I have more vocabulary and grammar that I didn't know before, especially after finishing the class" (SJ-2). Similarly, when being interviewed, some students also reported that they learned a lot of vocabulary of marketing. E.g. "I think I learned vocabulary the most and then content knowledge and key terms" (SI-3).

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics of Language and Content Knowledge

No	Items	N	M	St. D
1	Project work helps me enhance general English language knowledge such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation.	64	3.27	.718
2	Project work helps me enhance my ESP vocabulary.	64	3.05	.677
3	I benefit from the content knowledge from project work.	64	3.16	.511
4	Project work helps me enhance knowledge of how to do things in real life working environments.	64	3.09	.526
5	Project work helps me to create a product in real life working environments.	64	2.95	.547
6	I can increase my knowledge of the process of producing a product.	64	3.16	.541

It is undoubted that the above-mentioned findings of the study reveal that PBL is a valuable way to promote the simultaneous acquisition of language, content, and skills (Stoller, 1997; Beckett & Slater; 2005). The students in the ESP classes could see the value of learning ESP through projects. They learned how to do

things in a real life working environment, which may help them to cope with challenges in their future careers. Obviously, this study has shown that the integration of PBL into ESP classes has a significant impact on students' fluency and accuracy (Huzairin, Sudirman & Hasan, 2018). During the time they make some products,

they work in groups, using the language, solving problems, and supporting each to accomplish the goal, which helps enhance both language and content knowledge.

4.2.2. Language Skills

Table 5 displays the data collected from the questionnaire to measure students’ perceptions of the four language skills. It can be seen that most of the students agreed that they could improve their reading, speaking and writing skills thanks to the integration of PBL into the ESP classes (items 8, 9, 10) with M = 3.17, 3.17, 3.03 and St. D = .680, .656, .712 respectively, and over half of them thought that they could improve listening skills (item 7) with M = 2.69 and

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics of Language Skills

No	Items	N	M	St. D
7	Project work helps me to improve my English listening skills.	64	2.69	.794
8	Project work helps me to improve my English reading skills.	64	3.17	.680
9	Project work helps me to improve my English speaking skills.	64	3.17	.656
10	Project work helps me to improve my English writing skills.	64	3.03	.712

This finding of the study is consistent with that of Farouck’s (2016) and Efendi’s study (2017) showing that PBL enables students to develop language skills, complex grammar structures and advanced words, creates opportunities for students to practice listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in English and enables them to see their language learning needs (Beckett, 2002); those opportunities are doing interviews, making presentations, seeking information, and answering questions in English, and that students’ performance in the target language is better in PBL (Kelsen, 2004). Obviously, PBL can be more effective than traditional instruction and it is a valid approach to improve the English language proficiency (Moss & Van Duzer, 1998, Thomas, 2000; Rousová, 2008; Ke, 2010,). That is because the students are

St. D = .794. Obviously, the students had various opportunities to use the four skills as SI-5 said, “*I spoke English to my instructor and classmates... I talked in English about the definition and role of marketing, and customer values... I read about the importance of marketing in the course book... I read about some advertisement samples of non-profit organizations on the internet after learning...*” (SJ-5); or another student reported: “*I discuss with friends in English and read more information in the textbook about marketing, together with my classmates answer questions, solve problems and write each part of the marketing plan*” (SI-7).

required to use English as the target language in completing the project, especially reading, speaking and writing skills. Nonetheless, the finding also revealed that the students were not exposed to enough listening materials besides teacher talk and peers’ presentation.

4.2.3. Workplace-Related Skills

Regarding students’ perceptions of workplace-related skills, four categories were investigated, namely: teamwork, communication, interpersonal, and problem-solving skills. The data shown in Table 6 reveal that most of the student agreed that by doing project work they enhanced their teamwork skills, contributing to the successful outcome of the project; they could make their own decisions when discussing something with students of

various proficient levels and preferences (items 11-14) with M = 3.14, 3.16, 3.13 & 3.13 and St. D = .814, .672, .655 & .577 respectively. In terms of communication skills, many of them thought that they could enhance negotiation, persuasion, presentation, and time management skills (items 15-18) with M = 2.81, 2.83, 3.12 & 2.80 and St. D = .664, .656, .745 & .694 respectively. Actually, by doing project work, the students experienced effective teamwork skills and communication skills.

For example, SJ-10 reported: “...we let each person in the group state their point of view and then sum it up... when we couldn’t agree on the group’s opinion, we should vote to choose the opinion with the most support”; or “I learned presentation and teamwork skills... I gained a lot of experience while giving the presentation through the teachers’ comments for the group... I learned that a good presentation requires the best preparation. Try to say not too long. Keep it short but convincing” (SJ-4).

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics of Teamwork and Communication Skills

No	Items	N	M	St. D
Teamwork skills				
11	Project work enhances my team work skills.	64	3.14	.814
12	Good team-work contributes to a successful outcome of the project.	64	3.16	.672
13	I can make decisions when discussing something with my group members	64	3.13	.655
14	I have a chance to work with students of different proficient levels and preferences.	64	2.98	.577
Communication skills				
15	Project work increases my negotiation skills with other group members about something in the project.	64	2.81	.664
16	Project work enhances my persuasion skills when working in a group.	64	2.83	.656
17	Project work helps us develop our presentation skills in public.	64	3.12	.745
18	I learn how to manage my time so that I can finish all my tasks on time with a satisfying result.	64	2.80	.694

In terms of students’ perceptions of interpersonal and problem-solving skills, it can be seen in Table 7 that the students agreed the project work created opportunities for them to work with other groups, use formal and informal English, and meet and talk with other group members (items 19-21) with M = 2.56, 2.97 & 2.70 and St. D = .639, .689 & .659 respectively. Nonetheless, they did not learn how to interrupt classmates during interactions (item 22) with M = 2.44 and St. D = .639. Finally, the project work was thought to

enable students to share and exchange ideas in finding solutions to the problems they encountered at their real-life working activities. When doing the project work, the students were required to work in groups to identify problems, give solutions, evaluate solutions and draw conclusions from the results of the project (items 23-26) with M = 2.84, 2.84, 2.83 & 2.80 and St. D = .511, .570, .521 & .540 respectively. The students who perceived PBL positively said that they enjoyed it because doing project work was challenging but they had opportunities to

enhance workplace-related skills. E.g. SJ-5 wrote in her journal: “when solving a problem, I need to identify the correct problem to be solved and Identify the correct causes of that problem... discuss together to assign work and solve arising problems in the team, divide the workload equally among members and ensure the work is completed

on schedule... When answering the question, focus on the keywords in the question and then continue to develop the content of the answer”. Similarly, SI-8 reported, “I learn some useful skills like presentation skills and decision-making from working in my group, how to make a project and deal with difficult problems. I learn new vocabulary and new phrases.”

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics of Interpersonal and Problem-Solving Skills

Interpersonal skills		N	M	St. D
19	I learn to work successfully with students from different groups in the class.	64	2.56	.639
20	I learn to use formal and informal language in the appropriate context of discourse.	64	2.97	.689
21	I enhance my social skills by meeting and talking to other group members and the instructor.	64	2.70	.659
22	I learn how to interrupt my classmates appropriately during interactions.	64	2.44	.639
Problem solving skills				
23	I learn how to identify problems arising during the implementation of the project.	64	2.84	.511
24	I learn how to give solutions to problems arising during the implementation of the project.	64	2.84	.570
25	I learn how to evaluate solutions and good opinions among group members.	64	2.83	.521
26	I learn how to draw conclusions from the results of the project.	64	2.80	.540

PBL is a constructivist instructional approach which requires students to be engaged in an organized and cooperative manner to investigate and solve problems, resulting in a product. Based on the findings of the study, it can be ascertained that workplace-related skills such as communication, problem-solving, teamwork and interpersonal skills can be learned from PBL. These findings of the study are consistent with those of the study conducted by (Musa, Mufti, Latiff & Amin, 2012), and that the students might be instructed how to work in teams. Many students might know that PBL requires collaborative work; it

helps students enhance their teamwork skills. Therefore, they had to work cooperatively with their group members to share common work for a mutual goal, i.e. making a product or a presentation of a product. They might also learn that effective teamwork skills involve the combination of interpersonal, problem-solving, communication and time management skills. It is undoubted that during the time of doing the project work, the students had opportunities to discuss something, negotiate with their partners, solve problems, and present products and many other skills that may help them encounter in

real life and meet the requirements of employers (Rousova, 2008) when they are engaged in real working environments. It can be concluded that the integration of PBL into ESP classes may not only provide students with both language and content knowledge but also to equip learners with 21st century workplace-related skills such as communication, team-working and problem-solving skills.

4.2.4. Self-Responsibility and Personal Qualities

Other benefits that PBL may bring to students are self-responsibility and personal qualities. Most of the students agreed that project work helped them to enhance the sense of responsibility and become more independent, creative and active learners (item 27, 28) with $M = 3.33$ & 3.28 and $St. D = .506$ & $.576$ respectively. In addition, many of them also thought that the project work also provided them with opportunities to discover their preferences and qualities,

demonstrate their responsibility, and to learn dependently and develop critical thinking skills (item 29-31) with $M = 3.05$, 3.05 & 3.17 and $St. D = .653$, $.628$ & $.680$ respectively. Similarly, all the ten students who participated in the interviews also reported they could enhance autonomy through assignments given by the teacher. They had to do some work independently before working collaboratively with classmates. For example, “*when doing project work, I take responsibility for my work; I need to complete my assigned job. I have time to research and gain lots of knowledge. I feel this method helps us work in groups effectively and we have responsibility with each other.*” (SI-6); or SI-10 reported, “*I know how to select the main information from a book, how to study by myself. Moreover, this course helped me to be confident to present in a crowd. I can apply the knowledge that I learned in class to make a final project by myself. It is very important.*”

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics of Self-Responsibility and Personal Qualities

No	Items	N	M	St. D
27	Project work helps me to enhance my sense of responsibility.	64	3.33	.506
28	Project work helps me to be a more independent, creative and active learner.	64	3.28	.576
29	Project work gives more opportunity for the students to discover their preferences and qualities.	64	3.05	.653
30	I learn how to respect others and be a responsible member in my group.	64	3.05	.628
31	Project work provides students the chance to learn independently and develop critical thinking skills	64	3.17	.680

Based on the mean scores of the five items displayed in Table 8 and students’ responses from the interviews, it can be ascertained that many students agreed that doing project work helped them enhance self-responsibility, personal qualities, and learner autonomy. The finding of the study is consistent with that of Yuliani and

Lengkanawati’s study (2017) showing that learner autonomy can be enhanced through project work. When the students engage themselves in the development of above-mentioned workplace-related skills, they may become more active, confident, independent, and productive in discussing and producing ideas. It cannot be denied that

PBL can expose students to various skills so that they can gradually perfect themselves, and well prepare students for future in terms of both English skills and social ones (T. V. L. Nguyen, 2011).

Moreover, according to Fried-Booth (2002), by doing project work, students develop such personal qualities as tolerant, open-minded, disciplined and responsible so that they will not get shocked when they get involved in the real working environment because they have experienced working in a group.

4.2.5. Internal Motivation

That last benefit which more than half of the students thought PBL brought to them is internal motivation in learning ESP. They agreed that project work increased their interest in learning ESP, brought them enjoyment in making a product, changed their attitudes towards learning ESP, and

make them happy to participate in English class activities (item 32, 33, 34 & 35) with $M = 2.77, 2.75, 2.84$ & 2.66 and $St. D = .611, .535, .597$ & $.597$ respectively. Especially, most of them thought that the application of PBL in the ESP class helped them learn something good for their future jobs (item 37) with $M = 3.03$ and $St. D = .597$. The only one aspect that the students disagreed with is “learning ESP is not so difficult” (item 36) with $M = 2.48$ and $St. D = .563$, which means that some of them think learning ESP is challenging. This finding is consistent with the one mentioned in section 4.1.3, and with some students’ responses, e.g. “*After finishing the course, I feel relieved because this subject is very difficult and a little unfamiliar to me*” (SI-3); or SI-4 reported, “*Project work gave me lots of useful information and knowledge, but it’s hard for students to know and gain all of the contents.*”

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics of Internal Motivation

No	Items	N	M	St. D
32	Project work increases my interest in learning ESP because it is fun, motivating, and challenging.	64	2.77	.611
33	Executing projects in the classroom brings enjoyment because I can make a product like in a real-life workplace.	64	2.75	.535
34	Project work changes my attitudes toward ESP learning.	64	2.84	.597
35	Project work makes me happy to participate in English class activities.	64	2.66	.597
36	Project work makes me think that learning ESP is not so difficult for me.	64	2.48	.563
37	Project work helps me really learn something good for my future job.	64	3.03	.597

Motivation is one of the key factors that influence students’ achievement of learning a foreign language. The findings of the current study show that the project work has a great influence on students’ motivation in learning ESP. This is evident in the mean scores of the aspects investigated relating to motivation mentioned in Table 9. Although not all the students agreed with those

aspects, it is undeniable that over half of them were interested in doing the project work. This finding of the study is in line with that of Shin’s study (2018) that revealed that PBL has positive effects on students’ motivation in learning English. PBL might cause them to change their attitudes towards learning ESP, which for long they might have thought that it was difficult. PBL

caused them to pay more attention to their class activities, involved in the process of learning, and enjoyed making some things which they thought would be good for their future job.

In conclusion, based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that there is evidence that the integration of PBL in ESP classes brought benefits to the students, including (a) language and content knowledge ($M = 3.11$), (b) language skills ($M = 3.01$), (c) teamwork, communication, interpersonal and problem-solving skills ($M = 2.87$), (d) self-responsibility and personal qualities ($M = 3.17$), (e) internal motivation ($M = 2.75$).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The current study aims to explore the challenges and benefits of the integration of PBL in ESP classes at the Vietnamese tertiary level. Based on the findings of the study it can be concluded that among three categories of challenges including context-related, teacher-related and student-related challenges, the students perceived that they encountered challenges related to their classmates most. Regarding their perceptions of benefits, it is evident that all five categories received the students' positive attitudes; especially, most of the students perceived that PBL brought them benefits of language and content knowledge and skills, and enhancement of self-responsibility and personal qualities.

For long language educators have believed that PBL is an effective educational tool and is considered a combination of enhancing language and content knowledge, and language and employability skills. Students have opportunities to use English in real life situations through project tasks and activities. To do a project, students need such skills as making decision to choose the topic, solving problems related to the project, negotiating with their group

members to reach a compromise about an issue, arranging work for every group member or deciding how to perform different tasks of the project, presenting to final product to the whole class and many other skills. Moreover, ESP courses provide students with language and content knowledge which they need to perform in professional situations. Integrating PBL into ESP courses will certainly promote independent, active, autonomous and creative learning and enhance students' competences and competitiveness in the job market.

Apart from benefits, the integration of PBL into ESP classes will certainly have challenges to both teachers and students. Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that the teacher should clearly understand what stages, tasks and activities to be implemented during project work. He/She should instruct students how to carry out each task carefully so that less able students can know what to do and thus they will not think that it is difficult for them. More cooperation between the teacher and students is highly recommended so that students can receive more support from the teacher because PBL is still new to Vietnamese students anyway. The findings also revealed that students encountered challenges in teamwork. More careful instructions on how to work in groups effectively and on what skills need to be used in group work when executing a project are also highly suggested for ESP teachers. For students, it is necessary that they be actively involved in and have positive attitudes towards project work so that they can contribute to the learning process and they will be the beneficiary in ESP learning.

Even though the present study has confirmed the benefits and challenges of the integration of PBL into ESP classes at tertiary level, several limitations need to be considered. This study was conducted with the participation of 64 students majoring in

Business English at only one university and did not investigate ESP teachers' perspective towards the benefits of PBL. That is why it is recommended that further studies can be conducted with the participation of more students and teachers at more universities to explore the effects of PBL more comprehensively.

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ÁP DỤNG PHƯƠNG PHÁP HỌC THEO DỰ ÁN VÀO LỚP HỌC TIẾNG ANH CHUYÊN NGÀNH Ở BẬC ĐẠI HỌC: THÁCH THỨC VÀ ÍCH LỢI

Lê Văn Tuyên, Hồ Hải Tiến

*Trường Đại học Công nghệ TP. Hồ Chí Minh (HUTECH)
475A Điện Biên Phủ, Phường 25, Quận Bình Thạnh, TP. Hồ Chí Minh*

Tóm tắt: Hơn thập niên vừa qua, giáo viên giảng dạy tiếng Anh đã thử nghiệm nhiều phương pháp giảng dạy khác nhau để khám phá những cách dạy và học tiếng Anh hiệu quả hơn, bao gồm cả tiếng Anh chuyên ngành. Các phương pháp như phương pháp học dựa vào chuẩn đầu ra, phương pháp học dựa theo dự án, phương pháp học hợp tác đã thu hút rất nhiều sự chú ý. Tìm hiểu những lợi ích và thách thức của các phương pháp này trong các môi trường học tập khác nhau là điều rất cần thiết. Do đó, bài nghiên cứu này nhằm tìm ra các thách thức và lợi ích mà sinh viên gặp phải khi áp dụng phương pháp học tập theo dự án vào các lớp tiếng Anh chuyên ngành trong một học phần “Tiếng Anh chuyên ngành tiếp thị” cho sinh viên ngành Ngôn ngữ Anh tại trường Đại học Công nghệ Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh (HUTECH). Với sự tham gia của 64 sinh viên năm cuối ngành Ngôn ngữ Anh và sử dụng 3 công cụ thu thập dữ liệu gồm bảng câu hỏi khảo sát, phỏng vấn và nhật ký học tập, kết quả của nghiên cứu cho thấy việc áp dụng phương pháp học tập theo dự án vào các lớp tiếng Anh chuyên ngành đã đem lại nhiều ích lợi hơn là trở ngại. Đặc biệt, sinh viên đã có thể cải thiện kiến thức về ngôn ngữ tiếng Anh và chuyên ngành tiếp thị, các kỹ năng ứng dụng trong công việc, tinh thần trách nhiệm và động lực. Trong khi đó, các vấn đề sinh viên gặp phải chủ yếu liên quan đến bạn trong lớp bao gồm sự thiếu kỹ năng, trình độ tiếng Anh và thái độ không tích cực. Hy vọng nghiên cứu này phần nào đóng góp vào kiến thức thuộc lĩnh vực nghiên cứu, và làm sáng tỏ hơn vai trò của phương pháp học tập theo dự án trong giảng dạy tiếng Anh chuyên ngành tại HUTECH nói riêng, giáo dục đại học tại Việt Nam nói chung.

Từ khóa: áp dụng, học tập theo dự án, lớp tiếng Anh chuyên ngành, ích lợi, khó khăn