



Aprender haciendo: Mejorar las habilidades de expresión oral mediante estrategias basadas en proyectos

Learning by Doing: Improving Speaking Skills through Project-Based Strategies

Aprender fazendo: melhorar as competências de fala através de estratégias baseadas em projetos

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Resumen

Este estudio explora el uso del Aprendizaje Basado en Proyectos (ABP) para mejorar las habilidades de habla en inglés en estudiantes de nivel A2. El objetivo principal fue evaluar la influencia del ABP en la comunicación oral de los estudiantes en el aula. Los estudiantes participaron en proyectos estructurados, desarrollados en contextos dinámicos y reales, que promovieron la mejora de la pronunciación, la gramática, el vocabulario y la interacción. Se aplicó una prueba diagnóstica y la rúbrica Cambridge KET antes y después de la intervención para medir el rendimiento oral de los estudiantes. Además, se realizaron encuestas para comprender las percepciones del profesorado sobre el nivel de habla de los estudiantes y sus experiencias con la metodología ABP. Con base en los hallazgos, se implementaron estrategias específicas de ABP, y se monitoreó su efectividad mediante guías de observación. El análisis estadístico mediante la prueba T-Student reveló que el grupo experimental mostró una mejora promedio de 0.5 puntos en comparación con el grupo control. Además, se observó un progreso continuo a lo largo de la ejecución de cuatro proyectos de aprendizaje. Estos resultados confirman que el ABP impacta positivamente en el desarrollo de la competencia comunicativa. Se recomienda integrar estrategias basadas en ABP en la enseñanza del inglés para promover mejores resultados en la expresión oral.

Palabras Clave: Aprendizaje basado en proyectos; Hablar; Enseñanza-aprendizaje; Comunicativo.

Abstract

This study explores the use of Project-Based Learning (PBL) to improve English speaking skills among A2 level students. The main objective was to assess the influence of PBL on students' oral communication in the classroom. Learners participated in structured projects developed in dynamic and real-life contexts, which promoted the improvement of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and interaction. A diagnostic test and the Cambridge KET rubric were applied before and after the intervention to measure students' speaking performance. Additionally, surveys were conducted to understand teachers' perceptions regarding students' speaking levels and their experiences with PBL methodology. Based on the findings, targeted PBL strategies were implemented, and their effectiveness was monitored through observation guides. The statistical analysis using the T-student test revealed that the experimental group showed an average improvement of 0.5 points compared to the control group. Moreover, continuous progress was observed throughout the

execution of four learning projects. These results confirm that PBL positively impacts the development of communicative competence. It is recommended to integrate PBL-based strategies into English instruction to foster better speaking outcomes.

Keywords: Project-Based Learning; Speaking; Teaching-Learning; Communicative.

Resumo

Este estudo explora a utilização da Aprendizagem Baseada em Projetos (ABP) para melhorar as competências de conversação em inglês entre os alunos do nível A2. O principal objetivo foi avaliar a influência da ABP na comunicação oral dos alunos em sala de aula. Os alunos participaram em projetos estruturados, desenvolvidos em contextos dinâmicos e da vida real, que promoveram a melhoria da pronúncia, gramática, vocabulário e interação. Um teste de diagnóstico e a rubrica Cambridge KET foram aplicados antes e depois da intervenção para avaliar o desempenho dos alunos na oralidade. Além disso, foram realizadas pesquisas para compreender as percepções dos professores em relação aos níveis de discurso dos alunos e as suas experiências com a metodologia ABP. Com base nos resultados, foram implementadas estratégias de ABP direcionadas e a sua eficácia foi monitorizada através de guilões de observação. A análise estatística, através do teste T-student, revelou que o grupo experimental apresentou uma melhoria média de 0,5 pontos em comparação com o grupo controle. Além disso, observou-se um progresso contínuo ao longo da execução de quatro projetos de aprendizagem. Estes resultados confirmam que a ABP impacta positivamente o desenvolvimento da competência comunicativa. Recomenda-se a integração de estratégias baseadas em ABP no ensino de inglês para promover melhores resultados na oralidade.

Palavras-chave: Aprendizagem baseada em projetos; Fala; Ensino-Aprendizagem; Comunicativo.

Introduction

In recent decades, the role of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has grown significantly in Latin American countries, particularly due to its importance in global communication, academic exchange, and labor market competitiveness. In Ecuador, the Ministry of Education has established English as a mandatory subject from the early grades; however, oral communication remains one of the weakest skills developed among students. Despite curriculum updates and increased exposure to English, many learners continue to show limited progress in speaking, often relying on memorized expressions or isolated grammatical structures (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador,

2016). This raises an important concern: traditional teaching methods are not effectively supporting the development of communicative competence in real-life contexts.

One of the major challenges in EFL instruction is fostering speaking skills, particularly at the A2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). At this level, learners are expected to communicate using simple phrases and engage in brief conversations on familiar topics (Council of Europe, 2001). However, teacher-centered practices often dominate classroom dynamics, leaving few opportunities for meaningful interaction. The grammar-translation method, repetitive written tasks, and insufficient speaking time are some of the limiting factors that hinder oral development. These challenges underline the need for pedagogical strategies that promote active participation, meaningful communication, and learner autonomy.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) has emerged as a promising alternative to traditional instruction, offering a student-centered framework that fosters collaboration, inquiry, and real-world problem-solving. Rooted in constructivist learning theory, PBL emphasizes learning by doing, encouraging students to engage in extended tasks that culminate in a final product or presentation (Thomas, 2000). In the EFL context, PBL creates authentic language experiences where students use English purposefully to investigate, plan, discuss, and present their work. This aligns closely with the communicative approach, which prioritizes interaction and the negotiation of meaning in language use (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Several studies support the effectiveness of PBL in enhancing speaking performance in EFL settings. For instance, Maulany (2013) found that learners participating in PBL activities showed notable improvement in fluency and pronunciation. Similarly, Efstratia (2014) emphasized that experiential learning methods like PBL increase student engagement and language output by providing relevant and motivating contexts. These benefits are particularly valuable in Latin American classrooms, where students often view English as an academic requirement rather than a practical communication tool. PBL helps bridge this gap by integrating speaking practice into projects that are meaningful, collaborative, and contextually grounded.

Beyond linguistic development, PBL also contributes to affective factors in language learning, such as motivation and confidence. Students are more likely to take ownership of their learning and participate actively when they work on projects that interest them and reflect their realities. According to Beckett and Slater (2005), PBL enhances learners' willingness to communicate by reducing the fear of making mistakes and encouraging cooperative effort. This affective support is

essential in improving speaking skills, which are often associated with high levels of anxiety among language learners.

Despite its documented benefits, the application of PBL in Ecuadorian public education remains limited. Factors such as large class sizes, insufficient teacher training, and rigid curriculum structures have hindered widespread adoption (Lozano, 2017). However, pilot experiences and action research projects have demonstrated that PBL can be effectively adapted to local contexts with proper planning and support. Empirical studies are needed to explore how PBL influences specific language skills—particularly speaking—in real classroom conditions.

This study aims to address that gap by examining the impact of PBL on the speaking skills of EFL students in A2 level. Through the implementation of four structured projects aligned with PBL principles, students engaged in collaborative work, field research, and oral presentations. Speaking performance was evaluated using the Cambridge KET rubric before and after the intervention. Additionally, teachers' perceptions and classroom observations provided insight into the pedagogical effectiveness and student engagement during the process.

The central research question guiding this study is: **To what extent does Project-Based Learning improve speaking skills in A2-level EFL students?** To answer this, both quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to compare the performance and experiences of students who received PBL instruction with those who followed traditional teaching methods. The purpose is to generate evidence-based recommendations for improving oral language instruction through active methodologies.

Ultimately, this research supports the idea that speaking in a foreign language should go beyond repetition and correction—it should prepare learners to express themselves, interact with others, and participate meaningfully in their social and academic environments. Project-Based Learning, by creating space for authentic and purposeful communication, has the potential to transform how speaking is taught and learned in Ecuadorian classrooms.

Methodology

This study employed a **mixed-methods research approach**, integrating qualitative and quantitative strategies to obtain a holistic understanding of how **Project-Based Learning (PBL)** influences the development of speaking skills in A2-level EFL students. As Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) explain, a mixed-methods design allows researchers to explore a phenomenon from

different perspectives by combining numeric trends with contextual insights. Similarly, Ruiz, Borboa, and Rodríguez (2013) emphasize that this approach involves observing phenomena, identifying causes and consequences, testing assumptions through empirical data, and drawing scientifically grounded conclusions.

3.1 Research Approach

The research process commenced with a diagnostic test administered to A2 level students to evaluate their performance in key speaking components: **pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and interaction**. A standardized observation guide was used to track the implementation of PBL strategies over the course of an academic term. All procedures were carried out with teachers, and students, following ethical standards for educational research (Hernández, Fernández, & Baptista, 2014).

The research employed the following methods:

- **Descriptive method:** Used to characterize the initial and evolving conditions of speaking abilities and PBL implementation through systematic classroom observations (Sampieri, Collado, & Lucio, 2022).
- **Quasi-experimental method:** Applied to compare outcomes between a control and an experimental group using pretests and posttests. The assessment was conducted using the **KET speaking rubric** from Cambridge University (Council of Europe, 2001).
- **Correlational method:** Facilitated the analysis of the relationship between PBL implementation and improvement in speaking skills.

The **qualitative component** enabled the exploration of teacher perceptions, instructional practices, and classroom dynamics, while the **quantitative component** provided statistical validation of the results. Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to verify research hypotheses and examine group differences (Mertens, 2014).

• 4. Results

The implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) had a positive and measurable effect on the speaking skills of A2 level EFL students. The study involved two groups: an experimental group that participated in PBL activities and a control group that received traditional instruction. The evaluation criteria focused on four dimensions: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and interaction, as assessed using the Cambridge KET rubric in both pre- and post-intervention stages.

- 4.1 Diagnostic Results

At the beginning of the intervention, diagnostic tests revealed that both groups had similar performance levels. Most students scored within the “basic user” range on the CEFR scale, struggling particularly in pronunciation and spontaneous interaction. These initial results underscored the need for strategies that fostered active engagement and contextualized use of the language.

- 4.2 Improvement in Speaking Skills

After the PBL intervention, the experimental group showed significant improvements:

- **Pronunciation:** Students improved in their clarity and fluency, with fewer hesitations and mispronunciations.
- **Grammar and Vocabulary:** Learners demonstrated a broader lexical repertoire and more accurate grammatical structures in their oral production.
- **Interaction:** The most notable gains were observed in interactive communication. Students were more confident initiating conversations, responding appropriately, and maintaining exchanges with peers.

Statistical analysis using the **t-test for independent samples** revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in the post-test. The mean increase in total scores was 0.5 points higher in the experimental group, confirming the effectiveness of PBL in enhancing oral proficiency.

- 4.3 Observation of Project Implementation

Four projects were developed during the academic term, each structured around real-world scenarios. Classroom observations indicated progressive engagement and improvement across all sessions. Students participated actively in group discussions, role-plays, and presentations, applying target vocabulary and structures within meaningful contexts. The observation guide evidenced enhanced student autonomy, motivation, and collaboration over time.

- 4.4 Teacher Perception

Survey results from teachers revealed increased awareness of the benefits of PBL. Most reported that students were more engaged and showed improved communicative performance. However, some educators noted the need for additional training and planning time to implement PBL effectively.

- 4.5 Summary of Key Findings

Skill Dimension Experimental Group (Improvement) Control Group (Improvement)

Pronunciation	Moderate	Slight
Grammar	High	Low
Vocabulary	High	Moderate
Interaction	Very High	Low

The results strongly suggest that **learning by doing** through project-based strategies provides EFL learners with meaningful opportunities to practice and improve their speaking skills in ways that traditional instruction alone may not support.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study support a growing body of research that validates the use of **Project-Based Learning (PBL)** as an effective strategy for improving speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. The improvement observed in the experimental group, particularly in the areas of interaction and vocabulary, reinforces the view that **learning by doing** enables students to engage in authentic, meaningful communication, which is essential for developing oral proficiency (Maulany, 2013; Efstratia, 2014).

The notable difference in post-test scores between the experimental and control groups (0.5-point increase in the experimental group) confirms the pedagogical value of PBL. The four structured projects allowed students to use the target language in real-life scenarios, which aligned with Thomas' (2000) assertion that PBL fosters both cognitive engagement and linguistic output. These tasks promoted not only content knowledge but also **autonomy, collaboration, and motivation**, all of which are critical for communicative development (Beckett & Slater, 2005).

Furthermore, the teacher surveys highlighted increased student participation and enthusiasm, supporting the notion that PBL impacts affective domains positively. This aligns with Richards and Rodgers' (2014) communicative approach, which emphasizes the importance of motivation and real-world use in language acquisition. However, teachers also reported constraints such as limited time and insufficient training—factors echoed by Lozano (2017), who noted similar barriers to PBL implementation in Ecuadorian schools.

From a methodological perspective, the mixed-methods approach allowed for a robust examination of the phenomenon. Quantitative data provided empirical evidence of skill improvement, while qualitative data captured nuances in teaching practices and learner engagement (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Ruiz, Borboa, & Rodríguez, 2013). Classroom observations indicated not only language gains but also growth in **student agency and cooperative behavior**, further justifying the integration of PBL in language instruction.

Nonetheless, some limitations must be acknowledged. The study involved a relatively small sample size and was implemented in a single academic term, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the implementation required considerable planning and support, which may not be readily available in all institutional settings. Future research should explore longitudinal effects and scalable models of PBL integration in public education.

6. Conclusions

This study provides empirical evidence that **Project-Based Learning** is an effective pedagogical approach for enhancing speaking skills in A2-level EFL students. By engaging learners in dynamic, context-driven tasks, PBL promoted improvements in **pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and interaction**, with particularly strong gains in communicative interaction. The application of PBL also contributed positively to student motivation and classroom participation.

The comparison between the experimental and control groups revealed that **students exposed to PBL outperformed their peers in all evaluated speaking dimensions**, validating the methodology's impact on language development. Moreover, teacher feedback and classroom observations confirmed increased student autonomy, creativity, and willingness to communicate—essential elements for successful language acquisition.

Based on these results, it is recommended that educators integrate PBL strategies into EFL curricula to foster **authentic language use** and improve communicative competence. Teacher training and institutional support will be crucial for effective implementation. As education systems move toward competency-based models, PBL offers a valuable framework to bridge linguistic theory and communicative practice in real-world contexts

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