STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS PROJECT-BASED LEARNING 2.0 IN AN ESP COURSE

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ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
Received:	10/3/2022	Technological advances, particularly Web 2.0 tools, have been applied widely in courses of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and ample research has been conducted to discuss the use of these modern tools in ESP classes. Nevertheless, very few studies have dealt with the implementation of Web 2.0 in project-based learning (PBL) practices. To obtain more insights into this issue, this paper aims at exploring learners' attitudes towards a web 2.0 project in a course of English for Tourism. Specifically, learners were inquired about their perceptions of how the project impacted their language, knowledge, skills and learning motivation. The study adopted an action research cycle in ten weeks and data collection instruments included students' written and oral reflections as well as questionnaire. It is found that in general, the learners acknowledged positive effects of the project 2.0 on all surveyed areas, especially when it came to vocabulary, writing, specialized knowledge, IT skills and motivation from external sources. The findings of this study are hoped to contribute to the literature of PBL with web 2.0 and facilitate teachers and learners when integrating PBL 2.0 in their courses.
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THÁI ĐỘ CỦA NGƯỜI HỌC ĐỐI VỚI MÔ HÌNH HỌC QUA DỰ ÁN 2.0 TRONG MỘT KHÓA HỌC TIẾNG ANH CHUYÊN NGÀNH

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO		TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài:	10/3/2022	Các thành tựu công nghệ, đặc biệt là các công cụ Web 2.0, đã được ứng dụng rộng rãi trong các khóa học tiếng Anh chuyên ngành. Tuy nhiều nghiên cứu đã được thực hiện nhằm bàn luận về các công cụ này trong lớp học tiếng Anh chuyên ngành, nhưng chưa có nhiều công trình tìm hiểu về việc ứng dụng Web 2.0 trong mô hình học qua dự án. Để tìm hiểu thêm về vấn đề này, bài báo này tập trung nghiên cứu thái độ của người học với một dự án học tập dựa trên nền tảng Web 2.0. Cụ thể, người học sẽ bày tỏ quan điểm về ảnh hưởng của dự án tới khả năng ngôn ngữ, kiến thức, kỹ năng mềm và động lực học tập của họ. Bài viết dựa trên một nghiên cứu hành động trong 10 tuần với phương pháp thu thập số liệu là hoạt động viết và chia sẻ suy tưởng cũng như bảng câu hỏi khảo sát. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy nhìn chung người học đánh giá dự án học tập có tác động tích cực tới các lĩnh vực được khảo sát, đặc biệt là từ vựng, kỹ năng viết, kiến thức chuyên ngành, kỹ năng công nghệ thông tin và động lực học tập bên ngoài. Hy vọng rằng các kết quả nghiên cứu này sẽ góp phần làm phong phú những hiểu biết về mô hình học qua dự án 2.0 cũng như hỗ trợ người dạy và người học khi ứng dụng mô hình này.
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1. Introduction

The emergence of ESP dates back to the 1960s due to a number of converging occurrences like the Second World War, the rapid scientific and technological developments, and the increasing use of English as an international language in all fields [1]. While Mackay and Mountford claim that ESP must stem from practical purposes, Hutchinson and Waters consider ESP as an approach to language teaching mainly based on learners' needs [1], [2]. The concept of ESP is also further illuminated with *absolute characteristics*, principally dealing with learners' needs and the language relevant to the activities of the discipline it serves, and some *variable characteristics*, largely linked to learners' language levels, knowledge and age [3]. In the other words, the motivations for ESL learners are not limited to their interests in English language and cultures of English-speaking countries, but clearly inclusive of the goal to achieve specific target situation language skills which will support their future professions.

The rapid expansion of information and communication technology has exercised profound impacts on ESP classrooms because it considerably empowers learners who are already "digital natives" and makes learner-centered education a reality [4]. Especially, the turn of the 21st century has marked the increasing integration of Web 2.0 tools into ESP courses. Since its introduction in 2004, Web 2.0 has gradually shaped the way English is taught and learnt with its well-established attributes like production, creativity, information sharing, and collaboration [5]. Substantial research on the use of Web 2.0 tools, such as wikis, blogs, social networking sites and Internet forums, in ESP classrooms has proved their efficiency in enhancing learners' academic performance, sharpening their social skills, and improving their attitudes towards the courses [6], [7]. These tools are also acknowledged for their contribution to the learners' growing sense of self-discovery and community learning [8], [9].

Although Web 2.0 tools have become the subject of various studies in ESP, most of the attempts are associated with the use of Web 2.0 in ESP instruction or specific language skills. Relatively little has been done to investigate the application of PBL 2.0, that is project-based learning conducted in a Web 2.0 environment, in ESP courses. It is a widely-accepted belief that PBL and ESP make a perfect match as they share common principles and PBL can effectively tackle problems of ESP courses regarding insufficient resources, mixed-level classes, and passive learning styles [10], [11]. The practice of PBL is also evidenced to facilitate self-directed, cooperative and out-of-classroom learning, which would promote learners' self-development [12]. Obviously, PBL 2.0 has the great potential to offer far more remarkable benefits. The scant research attention over the use of PBL 2.0 in ESP courses has urged further investigation into how this modern approach contributes to the success of these courses. Therefore, the current paper hopes to fill in this literature gap by presenting some findings from an action research about the impact of a web 2.0-based project on learning the course *English for Tourism* from students' perspective. With the research question "What are learners' attitudes towards PBL 2.0 in their course of *English for Tourism*?", the paper would specifically examine their perceptions over the effects of the project on their language, knowledge, soft skills and motivation. It is hoped that the research results would generate helpful notices for teachers and learners during the implementation of PBL 2.0 in their ESP classes.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The study was conducted with 32 English majors at School of Foreign Languages. At the time of the research, they were from 20 to 22 year olds and achieved upper-intermediate level of English. Opting for the English Language program, these learners would pursue a wide range of careers in tourism industry and the course of English for Tourism is expected to provide them initial preparation for their specific occupation choices. The materials were compiled from

different resources and designed according to the integrated model of tourism proposed by Cook et al [13]. Comprised of four main sections, namely *Travellers, Tourism promoters, Tourism Suppliers* and *External Environment* as presented in the model, the course equips learners with general knowledge of tourism industry, target situation language skills, tourism-specific skills and positive attitudes towards the industry.

2.2. Action research

The four-phase framework by Ferrance (2000) – including planning, acting, observing, and reflecting - was applied in the present study [14]. In the first step, it was recognized that though PBL 2.0 has been adopted in language classrooms, its effects have not been well-documented in the literature of ESP. The researcher, hence, decided to integrate a Web 2.0-based project into the second and third sections, *Tourism promoters* and *Tourism Suppliers*, of the course English for Tourism. The teacher-learner negotiation over the final outcome and structure of the project was then carried out. It was agreed that each group of learners would design a tourism website offering basic information about a certain destination, like tourist attractions, transportation, services, relevant package tours and tourism tips. To prepare for the project, a brief training on how to create a website was run and the learners were informed of the specific project requirements.

The second phase, acting, was a ten-week intervention in the course. The students wrote their articles which underwent peer correction before being posted on the websites. Members from other groups would read their writings and leave comments and/or emoji reactions. The teacher's weekly feedback on the article content and language would be provided for the groups' adjustments. The acting phase ended with a class presentation where groups displayed their final websites and discussed their experiences in the project procedure.

The learners' attitudes towards the project were first observed through their reflections in which they revealed their opinions, feelings and obstacles during and at the end of the project procedure. The data for observation was also gained from the administration of the endline questionnaire.

The final step in the action research cycle dealt with the evaluation of how the learners perceived the project in their course. Possible problems related to the adoption of PBL 2.0 were categorized and presented for further implications.

2.3. Data collection instruments

The research findings were drawn from both qualitative and quantitative data generated from reflection and questionnaire respectively.

2.3.1. Reflection

As PBL is a learner-centered approach and encourages learning by doing, students' self-reflection plays a significant role [15]. On the one hand, reflecting allows learners to evaluate their own work and, therefore, become better at analyzing and critiquing. One the other hand, the students can identify their problems and be aware of how to improve their upcoming performance. In the project, ongoing reflection written every week was an authentic opportunity for learners to share what they had done, what they enjoyed with the project that week, what could have been better, and any other matters. Also, a class debriefing session at the end would enable the students to voice their opinion over the entirety of the project and help the teacher to obtain a deeper understanding of the participants' attitudes towards to the project.

2.3.2. Questionnaire

The endline questionnaire, comprised of four major parts, was delivered to the students after they had experienced the ten-week project. In the first three parts, 26 items, which were mainly in five-point scale, were administered to discover how the learners evaluate the effect of PBL 2.0 on their language, tourism-related knowledge and soft skills. The respondents indicated their extent

to which they agreed or disagreed with the statements by choosing (1) *Strongly disagree*, (2) *Disagree*, (3) *No idea*, (4) *Agree*, and (5) *Strongly agree*. The final section of the questionnaire aimed to identify the impact of the project on the students' learning motivation through six multiple choice and open-ended questions.

3. Results and Discussion

While the ideas from the learners' written reflections and debriefing session were summarized and categorized for convenient sorting, their responses in the questionnaire were also processed and visualized. In this part, the researcher would present their attitudes towards the four aforementioned areas with corresponding evidences from data collection instruments.

3.1. Language

Twelve questions were raised to uncover how the learners rate the impact of the PBL 2.0 project on different language aspects and skills. Figures from Table 1 reveal that students generally had positive perceptions about the website project on their language knowledge and use.

Table 1. *Learners' attitudes towards the use of the project on their language*

Thanks to the project, I could …	Mean	S.D
correct grammar errors I used to make.	3.91	.64
learn new grammatical structures.	3.87	.66
expand my vocabulary in general.	4.15	.85
expand my tourism-specific vocabulary.	4.25	.88
improve my reading skill in general.	4.06	.67
be better at dealing with tourism-specific difficult texts.	3.81	.82
work with different kinds of writing effectively.	3.84	.88
express my ideas in writing better.	4.21	.83
speak better through group discussions.	3.56	.80
speak better through class presentations.	3.96	.69
enhance my listening skill through relevant listening resources.	3.40	.79
improve my listening skill through group discussions.	3.53	.76

It can be seen that the 2.0 project was most appreciated when it came to vocabulary, writing and reading. In ESP courses, vocabulary plays a vital role as it enables learners to understand their field of study and express themselves effectively. As presented in the table, the mean scores that rank the impact of the project on learners' expansion of English general vocabulary and tourism lexical repertoire are relatively high (4.15 and 4.25 respectively). Learners also kept reporting in their weekly reflections that they could discover a variety of tourism-specific words and gain a thorough understanding of these words as they were found in different resources. Clearly, vocabulary acquisition is considered an incremental process [16], and the constant exposures to target vocabulary have created favorable conditions for the students' deeper insights and long-term memory of these specialized lexical items.

Besides, learners held the opinion that they could express their ideas in writing more effectively thanks to the project with the mean score of 4.21. This is also demonstrated with the progression in the way they structured and presented their answers in the ongoing reflections. However, in the final debriefing session, some justified that it was the first time they posted articles, announcements, advertisements and other kinds of writing on a website. Thus, their ability to deal with different writing genres went with a lower score (3.84). Similarly, the figure for learners' improvement in general reading skill is slightly higher than that for capacity to work with specialized resources (4.06 and 3.81). While reading was one of the frequently commented items in the students' reflections, they rarely mentioned listening activities. The reason might lie on the fact that they tended to research textual resources for references. It was also found that of all language areas, listening seems to be the least affected aspect as beheld by the learners (3.40 and 3.53).

3.2. Knowledge

Content knowledge is a matter of particular concern in ESP courses since teachers of these courses, who are usually not specialists in the fields, have to struggle with the workload on course materials [11], [17]. PBL appears to be a conducive approach to this matter as students are supposed to actively find and discover learning materials on their own under teachers' guidance [11]. This practice not only lessens teachers' pressure on course design and material development but also empowers learners to access resources relevant to their own language levels and interests. Responses to the item 13 in the questionnaire revealed that websites are the main sources for learners' project information (100%), followed by printed newspapers and magazines (34.37%). Meanwhile, very few of repondents mentioned other sources like books, printed brochures or flyers.

Evaluating the sources they browsed and selected, learners frequently left comments such as "useful", "never seen/ known before", "interesting" and "abundant" their written reflections. Their opinions are also reported quantitatively in other five-point questionnaire items. For example, the majority of students agreed that the knowledge gained from the project would be of immense help for their future career in tourism industry (4.18) and the authenticity of materials have triggered their motivation for further exploration of knowledge (4.12).

3.3. Soft skills

Table 2 below displays the learners' attitudes about the influence of PBL 2.0 on their different skills. The mean scores ranging from 3.65 to 4.4 indicate that they also held varied perceptions about the surveyed skills. Obviously, most of the participants were of the opinion that their IT and computer skills have been considerable improved, illustrated with a high mean score of 4.4. This technology skill was frequently mentioned in their reflections and debriefing when they shared about what they have gained from the project. Not only could they build a website with appropriate pages but also sharpen their research skill with different search engines. For many learners, it was the first time they created and contributed to a website from scratch, which resulted in their great excitement. However, it is also technical matter which seemingly makes the learners' biggest difficulty. Despite acknowledging the enhanced IT skills, the learners added that they encountered a number of problems when working with their group's website. While some reported that several parts of their websites like layout or navigation did not meet their expectations, the others found creating websites rather time-consuming due to their lack of relevant skills. That may be the reason why many of them did not think their time management ability was fostered as much as all other skills (3.65).

Table 2. *Learners' attitudes towards the use of the project on their soft skills*

Thanks to the project, I could …	Mean	S.D
work with the others more effectively.	4.21	.75
communite and express what I mean better.	4.15	.57
be more creative.	3.90	.64
evaluate reources, others' ideas and my own work better.	3.81	.59
persuade the others more easily.	3.78	.79
make decisions better.	4.03	.89
be better at problem-solving.	3.87	.87
improve my IT and computer skills.	4.40	.75
manage my time better.	3.65	.65

Of the 4C skills in the 21st century, it is observed that collaboration and communication are two areas affected most by the project (4.21 and 4.15 respectively). Though a few reflected that they had some problems assigning tasks and sharing ideas at first, the regular group discussions helped them understand their partners to make their own teams. One student shared that after some first weeks of inefficient working, they had to hold a meeting where the group problems

were frankly discussed for timely solutions. The experiences of working in a team and negotiating would be helpful for their development in social skills and communication in all kinds of workplaces.

3.4. Motivation

Increasing learners' motivation is often cited as an outstanding upside of PBL and the web 2.0-based project has triggered the participants' motive for learning in a particular way. The questionnaire result reveals that internal and external factors equally affecting their motivations towards the use of PBL 2.0 in their course. For example, most of them agreed with the statements that they find themselves proud and responsible for their product (4.18) and online positive reactions from others would definitely delight them (4.21). Besides, learners expressed that they would pay the most attention to comments left by the teacher and members of other groups, rather than those made by their group members. It is apparent that the bi-directional interactions, which characterize Web 2.0, have become an outstanding advantage to motivate learners to improve themselves in the course.

Furthermore, for the question about what aspect of the project on which the learners would like allocate more time, many referred to exploring further materials even though these might be a little beyond their reading competence. They explained that browsing the materials selected by themselves and aimed for their own purposes have brought them a strong sense of autonomy and responsibility, which would encourage them to develop their self-study.

4. Conclusion

Overall, the Web 2.0 – based project has offered obvious strong points for the learners in the given course. Regarding language aspects, the project has allowed learners to significantly expand their general and specialized vocabulary and their ability to express themselves effectively in writing. It is also found that learners' knowledge greatly benefits from the project as they are exposed to rich sources of authentic materials. Computer, collaboration and communication skills are perceived as the most influenced aspects by the learners. In general, the participatory nature of the Web 2.0 tool has contributed to the learners' increasing motivation for working in the project and investigating content knowledge on their own.

However, it is reported that website designing and time managing are matters which should be taken under consideration. Specific guidelines on technical issues and project planning, thus, should be provided for the learners, in order that they could keep on track properly. It is also necessary for teachers to remind learners about appropriate time allocation for their language and content of the project, instead of mainly focusing on elements of web designing.

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