Strengths and challenges of PBL in ESP classes: Teachers and students' perceptions

Những điểm mạnh và thách thức của hình thức học theo dự án ở các lớp tiếng Anh chuyên ngành: Nhận thức của giảng viên và sinh viên

Ton Nu My Nhat[a*], Bui Thi Kim Phung[b], Kieu Thi Dong Thanh[b], Le Thi Kim Uyen[b],
Phan Thi Nhu Gam[b]
Tôn Nữ Mỹ Nhật[a*], Bùi Thị Kim Phụng[b], Kiều Thị Đông Thanh[b], Lê Thị Kim Uyên[b],
Phan Thị Như Gấm[b]

[a]*Institute of Linguistics, Duy Tan University, Da Nang, 550000, Vietnam*
[a]*Viện Ngôn ngữ, Trường Đại học Duy Tân, Đà Nẵng, Việt Nam*
[b]*Faculty of English, College of Foreign Language, Duy Tan University, Da Nang, 550000, Vietnam*
[b]*Khoa Tiếng Anh, Trường Ngoại Ngữ, Đại học Duy Tân, Đà Nẵng, Việt Nam*

Abstract

Spanning approximately ten years, the integration of Problem/Project-based Learning approach through three modules in the curriculum in all faculties at Duy Tan University has generally been perceived as beneficial to the undergraduates in a range of areas; this initiation has also driven a large number of researches which are concerned with the effectiveness of this student-centered approach. In the same direction, this study was aimed to contribute to this growing body of literature; it explored the key stake-holders' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of implementing PBL in ESP classes at DTU. Data were obtained from the questionnaire distributed to the students from three faculties (N = 264) and the interviews with teachers of English from the Faculty of English (N = 4). The major findings indicated a generally positive attitude of the students to the benefits of PBL in all the areas investigated; most of these advantages were agreed on and justified by the lecturers interviewed. With respect to the challenges, the opinions of the two groups were similar in some and different in others. The qualitative data also suggested immediate measures so as to enhance the strengths of this approach.

Keywords: English for specific purposes (ESP); Project-/Problem-based learning (PBL); Inter-disciplinary approach.

Tóm tắt

Phương pháp Học tập dựa trên vấn đề /dự án thông qua ba mô-đun trong chương trình giảng dạy tại tất cả các khoa thuộc Đại học Duy Tân (DTU) sau một thập kỷ áp dụng nhìn chung đã mang lại nhiều lợi ích cho sinh viên ở nhiều ngành học; đồng thời nó cũng thúc đẩy một lượng lớn các nghiên cứu về tính hiệu quả của phương pháp lấy người học làm trung tâm này. Với mong muốn bổ sung vào số lượng các nghiên cứu ngày càng lớn về PBL, bài viết của chúng tôi khảo sát nhận thức của cả người học và người dạy về những thuận lợi và hạn chế trong việc triển khai PBL tại các lớp Anh văn chuyên ngành tại DTU. Dữ liệu thu được từ bảng câu hỏi phát cho sinh viên của ba khoa (N = 264) và các cuộc phỏng vấn với giảng viên của Khoa tiếng Anh (N = 4). Kết quả cho thấy thái độ tích cực của sinh viên đối với những lợi ích của PBL, hầu hết được các giảng viên tham gia phỏng vấn đồng tình và diễn giải. Về mặt hạn chế, giữa

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hai nhóm có cả ý kiến tương đồng và khác nhau. Dữ liệu định tính cho thấy cần có các biện pháp kịp thời để phát huy ưu điểm của phương pháp này.

Từ khóa: Tiếng Anh chuyên ngành (ESP), Học theo vấn đề/ dự án (PBL); Tiếp cận liên ngành.

1. Introduction

1.1. Rationale

Teaching methodology plays a critical role in the maintenance and more importantly the enhancement of outstanding quality of any educational body. To sustain unstoppable development of Duy Tan University (DTU), the board of managers have always endeavored to innovate teaching and accordingly learning methods at this institution. At the time when Project-based/ Problem-based learning (PBL) approach was seen as 'almost unknown to teachers and students' [8, p.53], or 'fairly unfamiliar to Vietnamese teachers and students' ('*khá xa lạ với giáo viên và học sinh Việt Nam'*, [9, p. 140], DTU integrated this approach to the curriculum with three compulsory modules [2, 3, 4, 7, etc.]. This timely, direct, and practical top-down policy has not only benefited students academically and socially but also triggered a large number of research to evaluate the implementation of PBL in many disciplines and faculties at DTU, with the ultimate aim to both increase the benefits and tackle the daunting challenges.

The aim of this paper is to contribute to this on-going research in DTU, focusing on the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes. This study sought to obtain data which helped to address two questions: (1) What are the benefits of the PBL approach to students in ESP classes at DTU and (2) What are the challenges faced by students in carrying out the projects in ESP classes at DTU?

A large body of literature has expounded the theoretical grounds of PBL, such as definitions, underlying theories, categories, steps of implementation, advantages and disadvantages.

Within the constraints of a paper, in the following sections, first, we provide a critical review of the latest and accessible empirical/ experimental studies concerning the implementation of PBL approach at DTU, which is then followed by a description of our study - the research methods, findings and discussion. The paper closes with practical implications and suggestions for further studies.

1.2. A critical review of previous studies on PBL implementation in DTU

In this section, we review only the papers presented in the latest International Research Symposiums on PBL, Aalborg, Denmark, which have attracted many studies of young researchers at DTU in the last ten years. These papers investigated PBL in various courses including entrepreneurship education, business administration, international business, accounting, English for tourism, and English as a foreign language (EFL).

Nguyen and Tran [7]'s research aimed to assess the role of PBL in entrepreneurship education at DTU. The questionnaires and interviews were used to examine students' perception of the effects of PBL in entrepreneurship education, involving 250 samples. The findings showed that the implementation of PBL in entrepreneurship education brought tremendous effects, such as the improvement of student's motivation, awareness to become an entrepreneur and enhancement of skills for start-ups.

Ha, Nguyen, and Hsu [4] examined the effectiveness of PBL activities in business administration classes. It reported the use of teamwork games to enhance the success of problem-based learning course. Data were

collected through class observations and interviews with the instructors. The results showed that teamwork games leveraged students' skills, such as creative thinking skill, effective collaboration, versatile communication, and academic performance.

Hoang, Nguyen & Luu [5]'s study was concerned with learners' attitudes to PBL courses in Business Administration Faculty. Participants included 324 sophomores and 18 instructors. The results indicated that due to large classes, students showed negative attitude to teamwork, teachers' role, self-directed learning, learning objectives, efficiency, diversity, practicality of projects; there was no effective instructor - student and student - student interaction, which lead to gradual loss of their interest. According to the lecturers, large classes resulted in no timely intervention, appropriate guidance, quality assessment; the repeated use of projects from one class to another, semester after semester was also reported. The paper also introduced the games for handling large teams and reported the positive impacts on both students' perceptions and academic performance.

Thien, Dat and Ngon [10] explored the value of using foreign textbooks with PBL in an international business course. The results showed that, compared to the traditional teaching method, the ratio of students who passed got higher over time, and so did their good score range.

Hoang and Nguyen [6] focused on the instructor's role as a facilitator when implementing PBL approach. The study was concerned with Accounting Faculty, involving 8 teachers and 125 seniors; data were collected through questionnaires and focused group interviews. The findings suggested that the application of PBL positively transformed their learning attitude, equipped them with professional skills, and developed their autonomy. Concerning the instructors' role as facilitators, the analysis revealed that PBL instructors should ensure flexibility and contextualization.

Regarding EFL classes, Bui and Nguyen [2] identified the major challenges faced by lecturers and students. The participants were 200 English-majored freshmen and sophomores and 20 teachers from Faculty of Foreign Languages. Data were obtained via surveys and interviews. The obstacles founded were students' fluctuation in learning styles of different language skills, inadequate proficiency level, poor critical thinking and problem-solving skills, lack of motivation and large classes; collaboration and work arrangement were the least challenging. On the lecturers' part, major difficulties comprised insufficient time, assessment, and using updated resources. Later, Bui [3] examined the effectiveness of PBL approach in an English for Tourism course. The participants were 172 juniors and four teachers. The research had students implement four PBL projects, namely designing travel brochure, making a video, operating a city tour and creating a Facebook travel page, concerning different topics related to Danang tourism. The findings revealed that students learned how to use English and technology to fulfill their projects rather than pay much attention to language skills. The advantages reported were: enhancing academic achievement, improving content knowledge and English proficiency, developing autonomy and life skills, and more involvement in learning; especially, field trips to businesses and tourist attractions helped students bridge the gap between theory and practice. The challenges were out time-pressure, technical terms, work division, digital skill, overuse of Vietnamese, avoidance of hurting others' feelings in peer

evaluation, and shyness during presentation of products.

Tran [11] investigated the advantages and disadvantages of the undergraduates and lecturers in Faculty of English in terms of empowering students through PBL activities and possible solutions to upgrade the quality of students' graduation theses. Participants included 72 fourth-year English majors and 30 lecturers. Data were collected through 3-scale questionnaires consisting of two questions and focused group interviews. Regarding the advantages and disadvantages, basically, the findings are similar to those reported in Bui and Nguyen [2] and Bui [3]. Then, the positive impact of PBL approach on the *quality* of graduation theses was proven by the comparison of proportion of students graduating in the four consecutive academic years. According to the statistics, there was an amazing increase in the number of students graduating in the last two years. However, the research method suggests unconvincing correlation between the implementation of PBL and 'positive' learning outcome. Firstly, methodologically, there was no computation in terms of correlation between PBL implementation as an independent variable and scores of graduation theses as a dependent variable. Secondly, it was the percentage of students who graduated that was reported, not the quality of the graduation theses, which had to be based on a number of assessment criteria of an academic work. Thirdly, the graduation figure in the last years was based not only on the quality of graduation theses but also, more importantly, on meeting the targeted level of English proficiency.

In another study, Tran [12] explored the stake-holders' perceptions on the advantages and disadvantages of PBL approach and the impact of PBL on developing English speaking and writing skills to non-English freshmen. The

research involved 61 freshmen and two lecturers. To investigate the participants' opinions on the merits and shortcomings of PBL approach, the author used 3-point scale questionnaires - 'yes', 'no' and 'little' to students - and 'high', 'medium' and 'low' to lecturers together with semi-structured interviews. To evaluate students' communicative skills, the author performed a LIWC analysis of students' writing and speaking tests. The findings showed the positive effects were improvement of students' communication skills, self-confidence, collaboration and creativity; meanwhile, it was time-consuming on the part of the teacher. Regarding the impact of PBL on developing the undergraduates' two productive skills, although the paper reported some improvement, issues such as the technical *intervention* and how the pre-PBL and post-PBL activities were conducted in terms of topic, time duration and manner of administration failed to be logically described. The choice of only four indicators - Analytic, Clout, Authentic, and Emotional tone were more psychologically important than linguistically significant on the part of EFL learners. There was no account of the reasons to choose these four variables out of more than 70.

The studies presented thus far have provided important insights into the implementation of PBL at DTU in the last decade in various faculties across many disciplines. First, together, these studies indicate this student-centered approach is highly appreciated as helpful by both the students and lecturers. The benefits lie with content knowledge, skills and attitude on the part of the students. Another theme emerged was the disadvantages associated with this approach, particularly faced by the lecturers. These studies call for innovation in methods of assessment both in the theoretical modules and of practical products. The lecturers also voice concern about the tight

schedule which has constrained the implementation and management of the PBL-based modules.

Because no prior studies have taken an inter-disciplinary perspective to investigate the implementation of PBL approach at DTU, to fill in this gap, the current study involved both the English-majors and non-English majors who came from a number of faculties and disciplines in DTU rather than limited to just one single faculty or discipline.

2. Methodology

This section focuses on the methodology implemented to address the aims this study put forward. The mixed-method approach was employed to obtain and analyze the data through the questionnaire and the interviews.

2.1. Research participants:

There were two groups of participants – students and teachers. The *student* participants included 264 undergraduates from three faculties at DTU - Faculty of English, Faculty of Business Administration and Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. The criteria for the students to have been invited to participate in this study are that they (1) had completed PBL theoretical course (ENG 296) and (2) had carried out a project in English. The *teacher* participants included 04 lecturers from Faculty of English. The criteria for the lecturers to have been invited to participate in this study are that they (1) had ever been in charge of PBL theoretical course (ENG 296) and (2) had experienced in instructing their classes to carry out a project in English.

2.2. Research instruments

Data for this study were obtained from two instruments: questionnaires and focused interviews. The questionnaire aimed to get quantitative information consists of 30 questions grouped into six clusters and the value for Cronbach's Alpha was $\alpha = 8.2$. Each cluster includes from 3 to 7 questions. All the questions were designed on a 4-point scale, with 1 being the lowest 'strongly disagree' and 4 the highest 'strongly agree'. The questionnaires were distributed via a Google form (Appendix A). The interviews aimed to get qualitative information were conducted after the questionnaire data had been collected and analyzed; the questions focused on the themes emerged from the data obtained and the reasons underlying the statistic figures (Appendix B).

3. Findings and discussion

Generally, compared to the findings of the previous works, those of this study in terms of the advantages to the students are consistent with those of the other studies, whereas those concerning the challenges reveal a more optimistic picture of the students' perception, which more or less fails to accord with the lecturers'.

3.1. Strengths of implementing PBL in ESP classes at DTU

Data obtained from the questionnaires indicate positive attitudes of students to the PBL approach in ESP classes. Overall, PBL activities have been found to be beneficial to students' (1) specialized knowledge, (2) development of basic English language skills, (3) development of soft skills, (4) researching skills, and (5) affective issues. First of all, as can be seen from Table 1, PBL approach brought the participants advantages towards specialized knowledge, with Mean of this cluster being 3.28. A majority of students either agreed or strongly agreed that PBL help them memorize more effectively (Mean = 3.27), have better understanding (Mean = 3.26), apply specialized knowledge to real-life situations

(Mean = 3.26), evaluate and choose the right information (3.30), and create a specific

product based on specialized knowledge (3.28).

Table 1: Benefits to students' specialized knowledge

Questions	SD	D	A	SA	Mean
1. PBL helps students memorize more effectively specialized knowledge.	4 (1.5%)	16 (6.1%)	148 (56.1%)	96 (36.4%)	3.27
2. PBL helps students have better understanding of specialized knowledge	4 (1.5%)	19 (7.2%)	136 (51.5%)	105 (39.8%)	3.29
3. PBL helps students apply specialized knowledge to real-life situations.	5 (1.9%)	27 (10.2%)	125 (47.3%)	107 (40.5%)	3.26
4. PBL helps students evaluate and choose the right information.	3 (1.1%)	15 (5.7%)	139 (52.7%	107 (40.5%)	3.30
5. PBL allows students to create a specific product based on specialized knowledge.	4 (1.5%)	17 (6.4%)	144 (54%)	99 (37.5%)	3.28
Cluster's Mean					3.28

According to the lecturers, implementing PBL is beneficial to students because '*they have opportunity to analyze and interpret data or other cognitive processes that lead to deep understanding.*' As regards applying specialized knowledge to real life situation, one lecturer stated that '*PBL helps to reduce the gap between theoretical concepts and those needed in real-life situations.*'

The second benefit lies with the improvement of English proficiency. Students' responses to the questions in this cluster in terms of the percentages of the different levels of disagreement or agreement are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Students' development of basic English language skills

Questions	SD	D	A	SA	Mean
6. PBL helps students improve their English speaking skills.	4 (1.5%)	12 (4.5%)	106 (40.2%)	142 (53.8%)	3.46
7. PBL helps students improve their English writing skills.	6 (2.3%)	29 (11%)	127 (48.1%)	102 (38.6%)	3.23
8. PBL helps students improve their English listening skills.	6 (2.3%)	40 (15.2%)	132 (50%)	86 (32.6%)	3.12
9. PBL helps students improve their English reading skills.	6 (2.3%)	13 (4.9%)	130 (49.2%)	115 (43.6%)	3.34
Cluster 2's Mean					3.29

Regarding four English skills, the results reveal that the participants had positive experiences (Mean = 3.29). More than 80% of the students either agreed or strongly agreed that PBL helped them improve English skills. A closer examination unfolds the Mean of speaking skills ranks the highest, followed by reading, then writing, and the lowest mean is with listening.

All the lecturers interviewed generally agreed with the figures. One lecturer said that 'Students have chance to practice public speaking, and for some projects, they are required to write reports or subtitle for their videos.' Concerning listening skills, one lecturer said that the finding was obvious, as 'not many students enjoy listening to their friends' presentation; some of them complain

about the unstable internet when learning online. Some others said that they cannot grasp the information because of their friends' poor pronunciation.' Also, the lecturers said that PBL was apparently beneficial to students' reading skills, because '*they are encouraged to read course book, reference books and online sources to find the information themselves.*'

Thirdly, carrying out a project is perceived to help students develop their soft skills. As can be seen from Table 3, well over 90% of

students indicated that PBL helped them promote communicative skill, collaboration, problem-solving skill, critical-thinking skill, and autonomous learning; most of them chose either *agree* or *strongly agree*, making Mean for each of these be 3.51, 3.50, 3.47, 3.39 and 3.32 respectively. It is only with 'time management skill' that the proportion opting for *agree* and *strongly agree* is less than 90% (89.1%).

Table 3: Students' development of soft skills

Questions	SD	D	A	SA	Mean
10. PBL helps students promote communicative skill.	6 (2.3%)	6 (2.3%)	99 (37.5%)	153 (58%)	3.51
11. PBL helps students promote the habit of working in groups and teams.	5 (1.9%)	7 (2.7%)	101 (38.3%)	151 (57.2%)	3.50
12. PBL helps students enhance problem-solving skill.	4 (1.5%)	8 (3%)	110 (41.7%)	142 (53.8%)	3.47
13. PBL helps students enhance critical thinking skill.	3 (1.1%)	15 (5.7%)	122 (46.2%)	124 (47%)	3.39
14. PBL helps students develop autonomous learning.	6 (2.3%)	17 (6.4%)	126 (47.7%)	115 (43.6%)	3.32
15. PBL helps students develop time management skill.	6 (2.3%)	23 (8.7%)	134 (50.8%)	101 (38.3%)	3.25
Cluster's Mean					3.41

From the interviews, the explanation was that '*Students have to collaborate with their team members. Sometimes, they have arguments before agreeing on their best solution.* Concerning time management skill, one lecturer attributed it to the assessment criteria, saying that '*Since punctuality is one of the assessment criteria, students always try to manage their time.* Another said that '*I think PBL helps learners gain such important life skills because they themselves plan what to do, when to finish and what to obtain during their project.* All of the interviewees agreed that PBL helps to promote students' autonomy. '*Students are allowed to choose their group members and topic.*' said one lecturer. Another added that '*Projects help them feel more self-motivated*

and freer to choose what to learn and set their own target, which helps increase their ability to learn autonomously.' However, one lecturer disagreed to the belief that PBL helped improve students' communicative skills. She said that '*not many students are confident enough to express their opinions in class. It is partly because of their learning style, but I think the main reason is they are ill-prepared and don't want to lose face.*

We are also concerned with the issues fundamental to doing scientific research, namely digital literacy, online collaboration, and data analysis and statistic skills. Mean of this cluster is 3.19, indicating that PBL is perceived as favorable to developing these skills. (Table 4).

Table 4: Students' researching skills

Questions	SD	D	A	SA	Mean
16. PBL helps students develop digital literacy.	8 (3%)	39 (14.8%)	132 (50%)	85 (32.2%)	3.11
17. PBL helps students develop online collaboration skills.	7 (2.7%)	17 (6.4%)	135 (51.1%)	105 (39.8%)	3.28
18. PBL helps students develop data analysis and statistic skills.	10 (3.8%)	18 (6.8%)	149 (56.4%)	87 (33%)	3.18
Cluster's Mean					3.19

All of the lecturers agreed that carrying out a project was beneficial to doing scientific research. According to one lecturer, 'students show their interest in working on projects which may state them in the fieldwork, conduct various observations, and gather materials'. Another lecturer analyzed the benefits one by one as follows: 'PBL develops students' digital skill because they learn how to use applications to design slides, videos or games. Due to the pandemic situation, students had to do everything online'. However, one lecturer disagreed that PBL helps students develop data analysis and statistic skills, saying that these skills have not been improved much in her classes.

With respect to affective benefits, Mean of this cluster is 3.25 (Table 5). Over four-fifths of the undergraduates showed their positive opinions on the application of PBL in ESP classes and hoped to learn more subjects using PBL (Mean being 3.20 and 3.16 respectively). This is because PBL gave them chance to cooperate and pleasure to share ideas with team members, when they could learn a lot from one another (3.24, 3.32, and 3.33 respectively).

Table 5: Affective benefits

Questions	SD	D	A	SA	Mean
19. I feel it could be more interesting if the lecturer used PBL in ESP classes.	9 (3.4%)	30 (11.4%)	124 (47%)	101 (38.3%)	3.20
20. I hope to learn more subjects using PBL.	8 (3%)	35 (13.3%)	126 (47.7%)	95 (36%)	3.16
21. PBL gives students pleasure in sharing ideas with team members.	6 (2.3%)	12 (4.5%)	137 (51.9%)	109 (41.3%)	3.32
22. PBL helps students learn a lot from team members.	7 (2.7%)	18 (6.8%)	119 (45.1%)	120 (45.5%)	3.33
23. PBL helps students get co-operation from team members.	8 (3%)	20 (7.6%)	135 (51.1%)	101 (38.3%)	3.24
Cluster 's Mean					3.25

From the interviews, we learned that this positive attitude came from the topics and the tasks assigned in the learning program. One lecturer explained that '*ESP is never easy for students, even the English-majors. Traditionally, the vital role of teacher maybe* *suitable for students to get high scores at the end of the course. However, the learners' outcome is not just that. Learning ESP by doing projects, students can improve their interpersonal skills and have long-term memory for the future application of knowledge*

learned'. Another lecturer added that '*as students choose their own project and set their own objectives, they will be aware that their work is valuable in solving the problems or being beneficial to the community. They are personally involved in the project and simulated to hard work.*

Finally, besides the benefits to the students, all of the lecturers expressed their pleasure in having their classes work on projects because they found the experience rewarding. One interviewee put it: '*I'm really happy in every PBL class because there I'm not only a teacher but also a motivator, a guide and a companion who encourages students to explore their own ability, develop their creativity and enjoy their freedom in learning'.*

3.2. Challenges of implementing PBL in ESP classes at DTU

The second objective of this research was to explore what challenges students faced when carrying out a project. The issues under focus were information search and analysis, time management, motivation, peer evaluation, dealing with specialized terms, and English proficiency. The perceptions of the students are summarized in Table 6.

Concerning all areas, most of students were optimistic about the difficulties they may have faced. The results suggest that dealing with special terms was the most problematic to students (Mean = 2.72). Their second challenge was English proficiency (Mean = 2.90). Only about one-fourth of the students found searching information challenging (Mean = 2.99). Even less found analyzing information difficult (Mean = 3.08). Still less found time management a problem, with almost one-tenth (Mean = 3.20). They were confident in commenting on other teams' products (Mean = 3.22).

Table 6: Students' difficulties in project processing

Questions	SD	D	A	SA	Mean
24. I have no difficulty in searching information.	10 (3.8%)	58 (22%)	120 (45.5%)	76 (28.8%)	2.99
25. I have enough time to complete every stage in implementing the project.	5 (1.9%)	24 (9.1%)	146 (55.3%)	89 (33.7%)	3.20
26. PBL helps students be more confident in giving feedback to other teams' products.	6 (2.3%)	20 (7.6%)	147 (55.7%)	91 (34.5%)	3.22
27. I have no difficulty in analyzing the information.	8 (3%)	44 (16.7%)	130 (49.2%)	82 (31.1%)	3.08
28. I feel motivated in participating in the project.	10 (3.8%)	58 (22%)	120 (45.5%)	76 (28.8%)	2.68
29. I do not have many difficulties in using specialized terms in completing the project.	17 (6.4%)	97 (36.7%)	91 (34.5%)	59 (22.3%)	2.72
30. English competence is not an obstacle in completing the project.	10 (3.8%)	63 (23%)	134 (50.8%)	57 (21.6%)	2.90
Cluster's Mean					2.97

However, the quantitative findings did not match the lecturers' perceptions. Most of the lecturers disagree, pointing out these as challenges. The lecturers indicated '*Searching and analyzing information is usually done individually',* and '*insufficient time to finish a*

project happens to groups whose members have not known each other well'. Regarding giving comments, one lecturer strongly disagreed to the figure; she commented that *'very few students are willing to give their comments on the others' product if not asked'.* As for technical terms, one lecturer did not consider them a problem because *'students can search for the meaning of the terms on the internet'.* On the part of the lecturers, they pointed out some problems such as they had to spend much time preparing before classes and attending training sessions to effectively enact the principles of BPL. They also indicated a need to *'help students feel comfortable in an environment that may be quite different from their previous learning experiences'.* Finally, all of the lecturers interviewed agreed that most students at DTU have tight schedule at school, which prevents them from completing the project on time.

4. Conclusion and implications

This study explored students' and lecturers' perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of PBL activities in the ESP classes at Duy Tan University. Regarding the merits, carrying out a project benefited the students in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitude. PBL helped them be efficient in different levels of learning specialized knowledge - memorizing, understanding, applying, evaluating, and creating; it also helped improve their English proficiency and enhance their soft skills together with researching skills. Students also found PBL approach helpful in the affective issues. Most of these positive findings were clarified by the lecturers, based on their first-hand experiences. As far as the disadvantages are concerned, whereas most of the students were optimistic, the lecturers were more cautious; they pointed out time management, technical terms and reluctance to criticize their peers as the potential difficulties in ESP classes.

These results suggest some implications for lecturers and students to deploy PBL in ESP classes. Firstly, it is crucial that students be informed and aware of the benefits of PBL in ESP learning. The expected learning outcomes should be clearly introduced at the beginning of the course so that students are motivated and oriented. Also, the lecturers should provide students with adapted scaffolding based on their English proficiency level to help them gradually develop specialized knowledge as well as language skills. Secondly, the role of lecturers as a facilitator should be underscored in PBL classes. Although lecturers are not the 'knowledge giver' anymore, ESP students always need their support with jargon at the early stages. The topics for project can be elicited if needed, and students should be introduced with more ESP materials to help the groups save time searching information. Thirdly, ESP lecturers should engage students in a more active learning environment where they can maximize their learning autonomy. Besides lecturers' instructions, students should be allowed to choose who to work with and what to do for their project. The final implication is that students should be equipped with more effective strategies of online PBL. Both lecturers and students have gradually adapted to online teaching and learning for the past two years. Thus, there is a need for an updated curriculum to support the continuity of e-learning. Further studies, which take these above-mentioned implications into account, should be undertaken.

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Appendix A: Students' questionnaire (Vietnamese version)

Phiếu câu hỏi dành cho sinh viên

Xin chào bạn!

Chúng tôi đang tiến hành nghiên cứu trải nghiệm của các bạn về việc tham gia các hoạt động học theo giải quyết vấn đề/ dự án (PBL) trong các lớp Anh văn chuyên ngành. Kết quả khảo sát sẽ là cơ sở giúp chúng tôi có những kiến nghị và giải pháp nhằm giúp nâng cao hơn nữa hiệu quả của việc sử dụng phương pháp dạy-học này của nhà trường.

Nghiên cứu này không nhằm đánh giá năng lực giảng dạy của giảng viên cũng như kiến thức, kỹ năng của sinh viên. Mọi thông tin bạn cung cấp sẽ được bảo mật trong quá trình nghiên cứu. Rất mong sự tham gia nhiệt tình của bạn.

Bộ câu hỏi dưới đây gồm có 2 phần và mất khoảng 10 phút để hoàn thành. Xin vui lòng đọc kỹ hướng dẫn và chọn câu trả lời phù hợp nhất với bạn.

Cảm ơn các bạn rất nhiều!

Thay mặt nhóm nghiên cứu

Th.S. Bùi Thị Kim Phụng

Nếu các bạn có bất kì câu hỏi nào liên quan đến việc nghiên cứu này, xin hãy liên lạc với người nghiên cứu chính của nhóm – Bùi Thị Kim Phụng – qua địa chỉ email: buitkimphung@dtu.edu.vn

Phần 1. Thông tin chung

1. Giới tính:

   a. Nam   b. Nữ   c. Khác

2. Bạn đang là sinh viên năm mấy?

   a. Năm hai   b. Năm ba   c. Năm tư

3. Bạn đang theo học ngành gì?

…………………………..

4. Bạn đã/ đang theo học học phần nào sau đây?

a. Anh văn Thương mại   b. Anh văn Thư tín Thương mại

c. Anh văn Đàm phán   d. Anh văn Lễ tân

Phần 2. Câu hỏi chi tiết về việc bạn đã tham gia vào hoạt động dạy-học theo dự án

Xác định mức độ đồng ý của bạn đối với các ý kiến sau, theo các mức độ:

1. Hoàn toàn không đồng ý   2. Không đồng ý

3. Đồng ý   4. Hoàn toàn đồng ý

1. Tham gia dự án nhóm giúp tôi nhớ kiến thức bộ môn hiệu quả hơn.

2. Tham gia dự án nhóm giúp tôi hiểu rõ kiến thức bộ môn.

3. Tham gia dự án nhóm giúp tôi ứng dụng kiến thức bộ môn vào thực tiễn.

4. Tham gia dự án nhóm giúp tôi đánh giá, chọn lọc tài liệu/ thông tin tiếp cận được.

5. Tham gia dự án nhóm giúp tôi sáng tạo từ kiến thức bộ môn.

6. Tham gia dự án nhóm giúp tôi phát triển kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh.

7. Tham gia dự án nhóm giúp tôi phát triển kỹ năng viết tiếng Anh.

8. Tham gia dự án nhóm giúp tôi phát triển kỹ năng nghe tiếng Anh.

9. Tham gia dự án nhóm giúp tôi phát triển kỹ năng đọc tiếng Anh.

10. Tham gia dự án nhóm giúp tôi phát triển kỹ năng giao tiếp trong nhóm.

11. Tham gia dự án nhóm giúp tôi phát triển kỹ năng cộng tác với các thành viên trong nhóm.

12. Tham gia dự án nhóm giúp tôi phát triển kỹ năng giải quyết vấn đề.

13. Tham gia dự án nhóm giúp tôi phát triển kỹ năng tư duy phản biện.

14. Tham gia dự án nhóm giúp tôi phát triển kỹ năng tự học.

15. Tham gia dự án giúp tôi phát triển kỹ năng quản lý thời gian.

16. Tham gia dự án nhóm giúp tôi phát triển kiến thức số.

17. Tham gia dự án nhóm giúp tôi phát triển kỹ năng cộng tác trực tuyến.

18. Tham gia dự án nhóm giúp tôi phát triển kỹ năng phân tích dữ liệu và thống kê.

19. Tôi thấy hứng thú với bộ môn hơn khi tham gia dự án nhóm.

20. Tôi thích có hoạt động dự án nhóm trong nhiều môn học hơn nữa.

21. Tôi cảm thấy thoải mái khi chia sẻ các ý tưởng với các thành viên trong nhóm.

22. Tôi học hỏi được nhiều từ các thành viên trong nhóm.

23. Tôi nhận được sự hợp tác từ các thành viên trong nhóm.

24. Tôi không gặp khó khăn trong việc tìm nguồn tư liệu để hoàn thành dự án.

25. Tôi có đủ thời gian để hoàn hoàn thành từng bước của dự án theo kế hoạch.

26. Tôi cảm thấy thoải mái khi nhận xét và đánh giá kết quả dự án của các nhóm khác một cách khách quan.

27. Tôi dễ dàng phân tích và xử lý thông tin khi thực hiện dự án.

28. Tôi có động lực trong việc tham gia dự án.

29. Tôi không gặp khó khăn với khối lượng từ chuyên ngành khi thực hiện dự án.

30. Năng lực tiếng Anh không phải là rào cản để tôi hoàn thành dự án.

CHÂN THÀNH CÁM ƠN THỜI GIAN QUÝ BÁU CỦA BẠN!

Appendix B: Questions to lecturers in interviews

Please have a look at the data obtained from the questionnaires to the students in ESP classes at DTU.

1. In your opinion, why is PBL beneficial to students' content knowledge?

2. Why is PBL helpful for students' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills?

3. In what way does carrying out a project in English help students promote their communicative skill, collaborative skill, problem-solving skill, critical thinking skill, time management skill and autonomy?

4. To what extent do you agree with the students' perception in terms of the benefits of PBL to their specialized subjects?

5. To what extent do you agree with the students' perception in terms of the benefits of PBL to their soft skills?

6. To what extent to you agree with the students' perception in terms of the benefits of PBL to their researching skills?

7. To what extent to you agree with the students' perception in terms of the affective benefits of PBL?

8. To what extent to you agree with the students' perception in terms of the challenges for projects in their ESP class?