

## A Review of Literature on Project-Based Learning inside Language Education

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### Abstract

Project-based learning (PjBL) was introduced into language education during the 1980s to implement student-centered teaching principles (Hedge, 1993). Since then, a growing number of researchers have been promoting it as an effective means to content and language learning (Alan & Stoller, 2005; Mohan & Beckett, 2003; Stoller, 2006). While multiple studies on PjBL have reviewed PjBL in the mainstream education (e.g., Harmer & Stokes, 2014; Thomas, 2000, Helle, L., Tynjälä, P., & Olkinuora, E., 2006, Ralph, R. A. (2016), none of them has surveyed the existing empirical studies on PjBL in the context of language education. Hence, this research study aimed to review the quantitative and qualitative studies conducted inside language Education from 1997 to 2020. The meticulous analysis of 43 studies revealed that existing empirical research on PjBL inside language education has been rapidly growing in the last ten years (2010-2020). Several language areas have been investigated; however, studies linking PjBL to macro-skills still take the lion's share. This research study is so significant that it will be of interest to the foreign language

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teaching practitioners and the emerging researchers interested in exploring PjBL inside language education.

**Keywords:** Project-based learning, language education, empirical studies, project work.

## **Introduction**

The PjBL approach has been reported to have numerous benefits both from inside and outside foreign/second language education. While the cited advantages in general education have been sufficiently justified empirically, those reported in the context of foreign and second language education are merely anecdotal reports related by practitioners from different educational settings (Stoller, 2006). This literature review aimed to survey the existing empirical research studies that incorporated PjBL in foreign and second language education from 1997 to 2000. More specifically, the review explored how project-based learning is defined by advocates in language education, what are the language areas addressed, what research instruments are used during data collection, where are the studies conducted, what educational level addressed, and what are their findings. For the researcher to locate relevant studies that have implemented and measured PjBL impacts on language learners, multiple keywords were utilized. The keywords used were project work, inquired-based learning, project method, project approach, project-based instruction, experiential and negotiated language learning, project-oriented approach, and projects. Having used these keywords to dig out a wide variety of resources (including computerized databases, bibliographies, and the online major ELT journals were consulted), the researcher managed to locate a total number of 43 studies. This study analyzed and grouped them into subsections depending on the themes having been treated in each study. It is worth highlighting that this review has some limitations. First, the language used to locate relevant studies was English, which means that there might be other relevant studies written in different languages. Second, this review treated the labels associated with PjBL as synonymous.

## **Literature Review**

### *Project*

Before moving to project definitions, it is pertinent to cast light on the historical background of the term project. According to Stevenson (1921), the concept project has been employed for

many years in business with vague meaning. In an unknown letter, Kilpatrick (1918) admitted that he did not originate the term and had no idea about its history (as cited in Knoll, 2010). However, Kilpatrick declared that David Snedden (a professor of education in teacher's college, 1905-1909) was probably the first person to use the term for agricultural education. "As far as I know, it [project] was first used by David Snedden (. . .) I am not too sure, but as I understand Snedden's plan, it was for agricultural education" (as cited in Knoll, 2010, p.6). Citing Heald's assertion about the project in a brief historical sketch, Stevenson (1921) pointed out that the term project has been utilized for many years in agricultural science and used to designate carefully planned investigations within a considerable period, frequently demanding several years. As the concept of the project suggested the idea of value in connection with the practical phase of teaching, the secondary school teachers of science and manual arts first borrowed it.

### *Project-based Learning*

Insights from studies and books investigating the scope of PjBL have shown that a single agreed-upon definition does not exist. PjBL has been treated under various concepts that some scholars sometimes consider complementary and interchangeable with no difference in meaning. The scope of PjBL is captured by several terms given to classroom approaches that integrate projects (Beckett, 2002; Stoller, 2006). The two authors cited various terms widely used in general education and L2 education literature. Among the names mentioned are Experiential and negotiated language learning (e.g., Eyring, 2001; Legutke & Thomas, 1991; Padgett, 1994); Investigative research (e.g., Kenny, 1993); Problem-based Learning (e.g., Savoie & Hughes, 1994; Wood & head, 2004); Project Approach or Project-based Approach (e.g., Diffily, 1996; Ho, 2003; Levis & Levis, 2003; Papandreou, 1994); Project Work (e.g., Fried-Booth, 2002; Haines, 1989; Henry, 1994; Lee et al., 1999; Shoring, 1990; Phillips, Burwood, & Dundford, 1999); Project Method (Kilpatrick, 1926), Project Oriented Approach (Carter & Thomas, 1986). These labels disclose plenty of features commonly associated with PjBL: experiential learning, negotiated meaning and experience, research and inquiry, problem-solving, and projects (Stoller, 2006).

Although PjBL is not uniformly defined in the context of language learning, most definitions are complementary and display common features. For example, Beckett (2002) defines

PjBL as “a long-term activity that involves a variety of individual and cooperative tasks such as developing a research plan and questions, and implementing the plan through empirical or document research that includes collecting, and reporting data orally and/or in writing” (p.54). Similarly, according to Fried-Booth (2002), “project work is a student-centered and driven by the need to create an end-product. However, it is the route to achieving this end-product that brings opportunities for students to develop their confidence and independence and to work together in a real-world environment” (p.6). The Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics defines PW as an activity that centers around completing a task and usually requires an extended amount of independent work either by an individual student or by a group of students. Much of this work takes place outside the classroom. PW often involves three stages: classroom planning, carrying out the project, and reviewing and monitoring (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 3). Morgan (1983) defines PjBL as “an activity in which students develop an understanding of a topic or issue through some kind of involvement in an actual (or simulated) real-life problem or issue and in which they have some degree of responsibility in designing their learning activities” (p.1).

Implicit from the abovementioned definitions is that there has been no uniformly agreed-upon model of PjBL. Two main reasons have made it hard to articulate one single definition. First, the multi-disciplinary nature of the term has made the concept of project hard to clarify (Pecore, 2015; Welsh, 2006). Second, the versatility of PjBL considers the numerous ways in which the term can be put into practice (Stoller, 2006). According to Thomas (2000), the absence of a uniformly-greed upon definition has resulted in an array of PjBL research and development activities.

However, scrutinizing the definitions mentioned above in terms of content reveals that the definitions are complementary, as they exhibit some shared features. These features perfectly align with both the underlying principles of constructivism and the impetus for project method development away from traditional teaching. Unlike traditional classrooms, where students receive information passively, PjBL is a teaching model that stresses the active construction of knowledge through a set of activities under the umbrella of projects. For example, students develop a research plan, collect data, interview, report the finding, and evaluate language learning and content

knowledge. The word act or action on the part of learners is the most significant PW contribution (Stevenson, 1921). Another common feature of PjBL is a student-centered activity. Unlike the usual classroom practices of short, isolated, and teacher-based lessons, students in the PjBL classrooms have the opportunity to enhance their understanding and knowledge while exploring the subject matter content. In so doing, students develop their reasoning away from passive reception of information, assume the responsibility of their tangible outcomes, and develop their knowledge ownership. Thus, students become producers and constructors of knowledge rather than passive receivers. Another feature embedded in the definitions is that the PjBL tasks are long-term activities usually done collectively or individually outside the classroom. While traditional teaching and learning were restricted to four classroom walls, the PjBL approach originally came to bridge the yawning gap between what is taught in the classroom and the real world. Central to the PjBL approach is the assumption that learning is effective only when students relate theory to practice (Harmer & Stokes, 2014).

In the same vein, Stoller (2006) articulated the conditions and the features that productive PW should physically manifest:

- PjBL should have a process and product orientation.
- PjBL should be defined, at least in part, by students to encourage students' ownership of the project.
- Extend over a period of time (rather than a single class session).
- Encourage the natural integration of skills.
- Make a dual commitment to language and content learning.
- Oblige students to work in groups and on their own.
- Require students to take some responsibility for their learning by gathering, processing, and reporting information from target language resources.
- Require teachers and students to assume new roles and responsibilities.
- Result in a tangible final product.
- Conclude with student reflections on both the process and the product (p.24).

### **Empirical Studies**

As stated earlier in the introduction, the primary purpose of this study was to survey PjBL quantitative and qualitative studies conducted in the context of language and second education. Accordingly, 43 studies published from 1997 to 2020 were located online, meticulously examined, and grouped in categories based on the themes they addressed. Below is a brief description of these studies.

### *Mastery of language skills*

PjBL has been reported to enhance learners' mastery of language. These assumptions have been recently proven quantitatively and qualitatively in a number of studies conducted in several second and foreign language education settings. This section reviews the studies measuring the impact of using PjBL on the mastery of language macro-skills, along with both vocabulary and language forms.

#### Speaking skills

Studies have found that the PjBL approach helps students improve their students' speaking skills. Maulany (2013) reported on two-cycle action research conducted at one primary school in Bandung to determine whether PjBL could improve young learners' speaking skills or not. More specifically, the study aimed at identifying what speaking aspects were improved and what speaking activities were used in PjBL to improve learners' speaking skills. Comparing the pre- and post-test results generated the conclusion that students' speaking skills aspects adapted from Harries (1984) and Brown (2004) improved, namely comprehension and vocabulary. Concerning the speaking activities employed in PjBL, the findings revealed that among the 21 activities proposed by Brown (2004) and Kayi (2006), nine were used, namely drilling, storytelling, directed response, picture-cued, translation of limited stretches of discourse, question and answer, discussion, games, and role-play. Similarly, Yaman (2014) investigated the efficacy of PjBL on EFL students' attitudes towards the development of speaking skills. Two randomly chosen groups in the prep school at Ondokuz Mayıs university were administered pre- and post-treatment attitude inventories, pre- and posttests, and set for post-study interviews. The researcher provided 25 different topics for PW. Upon completing each project, the students (in groups) singled out a new topic for the next project. The end projects took different tangible forms. After one semester of

treatment, the statistical analyses concerning both attitude and speaking proficiency dimensions highlighted a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups. The findings of the study also exhibited that the PW group students had more positive attitudes towards the course compared with the coursebook group students. In Jordan, Areej and Hamzeh (2014) conducted a quasi-experimental study investigating the effect of a proposed project-based program on oral performance skills enhancement of tenth graders EFL students and their attitudes towards these oral skills. An oral performance test (debate), an oral attitude survey, and a rating scale were used to gather the data. Eighty 10th grade female students were randomly selected from Um Nowareh secondary public school in Amman during the 2013-2014 academic year. Having used MANCOVA to analyze the data, the researcher found out that there were statistically significant differences ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) in tenth grade EFL students' mean scores with regard to their oral performance and their attitudes towards oral skills in English. Those differences were in favor of the students who were taught using PjBL. Likewise, after having been exposed to 10 sessions of speaking instruction using the PW approach, Zare-Behtash, Khoshshima, and Sarlak's (2016) participants improved their speaking performance significantly following the posttest taking. Two homogenous groups were selected from mixed-class students enrolled in a general English course at Islamic Azad University of Chabahar (IAUC). While the control group underwent a conventional teaching method (teacher-centered method), the treatment group underwent a PW method (student-centered method). Since the pre- and post-test comparison results showed significant improvement in favor of the experimental group, the researcher recommended the PW method as a useful teaching speaking method. In the Colombian context, Vaca Torres and Gómez Rodríguez (2017) examined how a group of ninth-graders enhanced their speaking skills in an EFL classroom using the PjBL approach. 30 EFL ninth graders (19 girls and 11 boys) worked in small groups to complete three projects through which they were encouraged to speak about their lives and environment. The analysis of the data elicited through field notes, transcripts of learners' oral performance, and one interview revealed that PjBL helped students increase their oral production through lexical competence development, overcome fears of speaking English and increase their interest in learning about their school life and community. In a very recent quasi-experimental study, Bakar, Noordin, and Razali (2019) investigated the effectiveness of using the PjBL strategy in improving

the oral communicative competence of Malaysian English language learners. 44 diploma students enrolled in a Communicative English course at a technical college were purposely selected to participate in the study. For 16 weeks, the students were taught the Communicative English course using the PjBL teaching strategy, which consisted of eight activities based on the principles proposed by Larmer et al. (2015). Data were collected using a speaking test and a listening test, which were administered as pre- and posttest, and a student questionnaire administered at the end of the study. Having used MANOVA and descriptive statistics to analyze the data, the researchers revealed a significant improvement in the learners' overall oral communicative competence. In another recent study, Winasih, Cahyono, and Prayogo (2019) measured the effect of PjBL with the use of e-poster on students' speaking ability. With this purpose in mind, two intact classes (N = 61) at a vocational high school in Indonesia were assigned randomly into treatment and control groups. The statistical analysis of pre- and posttest results of students from the two groups revealed that students who were instructed through PjBL using E-poster significantly outperformed those who were instructed through a conventional method.

#### Reading skills

In the same vein, prompted by the assumption that inquiry learning can potentially enhance students' reading abilities and interests, Chu et al. (2011) empirically investigated the effect of the mingled collaborative teaching approach and inquiry PjBL on students' reading abilities in a local Hong Kong primary school. One hundred and thirty-two students, 11 teachers, and 25 parents took part in the study. After comparing students' PIRLS scores before and after the inquiry PjBL using t-tests, the findings showed that students' reading performance improved after the inquiry PjBL projects. Also, improvements were found in overall reading performance as well as in informational and literary reading performance. Finally, prompted by the need to decide if there is a link between the application of PjBL and students' level of reading comprehension skills EFL students at the university, Kavlu (2015) investigated whether EFL learners' reading comprehension ability and vocabulary skills improve with the application of PjBL or not. Forty-five first-year faculty of education students at Ishik University (Iraq, Erbil) were randomly split into experimental and control groups. While the experimental group was taught reading comprehension using the PjBL method, the control group students were taught conventionally. The results showed a



statistically significant positive difference in favor of the experimental group was observed after the treatment.

#### Writing skills

Syarifah and Emiliasari (2018) investigated the use of PjBL to develop students' abilities and creativity in writing narrative text and the students' perception about the implementation of PjBL in a writing course. To this end, the second-semester students of the English language education at a private university in Majalengka at West Java participated in the study. The participants were required to produce a book containing narrative stories about different topics of students' interests. The analysis of the field notes, final products of the project, and the pre- and post-interviews exhibited that the research participants improved their writing skills embodied in their increase in their understanding of the topics they wrote, social functions, structures, and linguistic features of narrative essay. Furthermore, as to their perceptions, "almost all students gave positive responses. They argued that working on projects was more fun because they could determine the final project output based on their interest and agreement" (p. 91).

#### Listening skills

Bakar, Noordin, and Razali (2019) also conducted a quasi-experimental study to measure the effectiveness of using PjBL activities as a teaching strategy in enhancing the listening competency of ESL learners in a Communicative English course in Malaysia. Forty-four diploma students enrolled in a Communicative English course at a technical college in Peninsular Malaysia were purposely selected to participate in the study. For 16 weeks, the students were taught the Communicative English course using PjBL, which consisted of eight activities based on the principles proposed by Larmer et al. (2015). While a PjBL teaching module including some listening activities was used in the experimental group as a treatment, the control group was taught using the conventional teaching strategy. A listening competency test was administered as a pre- and posttest on both groups. Data were analyzed using t-tests, ANOVA, and Tukey post hoc test. The findings revealed that the learners in the PjBL group significantly outperformed those in the control group in their listening competency and dialogue listening comprehension with a large effect size.

*Merging language macro-skills and academic achievement*

Following from the above, research studies have concluded that students have improved their language macro-skills after completing their projects. For example, in Greece, Fragoulis's (2009) 15 research participants at a primary school reported having improved all four-language skills (especially speaking and listening) after six months of conducting projects on the history of the area where they live. Similarly, in an EFL classroom in a major regional Thai university, Simpson (2011) examined whether PjBL could enhance students' English proficiency, learning skills, and self-confidence. A total number of 26 third-year students majoring in English for Tourism course were divided into three groups (high, medium, and low groups) based on the three pretests scores. To gather data, four quantitative instruments (TOEFL PBT, a writing test, a speaking test, and an observation schedule) and five qualitative instruments (student surveys, project diaries, open-ended questionnaires, field notes, and work-in-progress discussions) were employed. The study results revealed that PjBL had a statistically significant effect on the development of low and medium achievers' English skills. The high achieving students showed progress in speaking and writing, but not in listening and reading skills. Poonpon (2008) explored learners' opinions about how PjBL in the form of the interdisciplinary-based project can be implemented in a language classroom to encourage learners to apply their language skills and knowledge of their specific field of study to complete a task. Forty-seven undergraduate students (36 females and 11 males) taking an English course on Information Science during the second semester of the 2009 academic year were required to work in groups to complete an interdisciplinary-based project. Based on the semi-structured interviews data, "the students perceived that their reading, writing, and speaking skills, as well as vocabulary knowledge and translation skill, were improved because they used these skills to acquire, analyze, and synthesize information as they worked on their project" (p. 8). In the Palestinian EFL context, Nassir (2014) investigated the effectiveness of the PjBL strategy on ninth-graders achievement level (language macro-skills) and their attitudes towards English in state-owned schools. A total number of 76 ninth graders from Halima Assadia girls' pre-school in Annazla, Jbalaia, were purposively chosen for the experiment. PjBL strategy was used in teaching the experimental group (n=38), while the traditional method was used with the control one (n=38) during the first term of the school year

(2013-2014). The analysis of pre- and post-achievement tests and an attitude scale (with pre- and post-applications) exhibited that the experimental group outperformed the control group in terms of achievement, and their attitude levels were reported to have changed positively. In a different context where the course content and time allocation were fixed, Newprasit and Seepho's (2015) study attempted to find a systematic way to incorporate project-based lessons into regular foreign language teaching situations and investigate whether they could help improve students' overall language skills. To this end, a single-group pre- and posttest design was employed to measure the effects of the PjBL lessons on students' overall language ability. Forty-seven students who took an English I course over 12 weeks at a university in Thailand participated in the study. Semi-structured PjBL lessons were proposed. Written and speaking tests, student diaries, portfolio assessment, and semi-structured interviews were used for the data collection process. The results revealed that the overall English language skills of the participants were improved significantly after being exposed to the proposed PjBL lessons. Equally, Putri et al. (2017) investigated the effect of PjBL on students' English productive skills and how the activities influence the teaching and learning process in a public junior high school in Bali-Indonesia. Twenty-eight students in the seventh grade participated in the study. While the speaking and writing tests were used to elicit quantitative data, an interview guide, along with an observation checklist, an open-ended questionnaire, and field notes were served to collect the qualitative data. Following the data analysis, using a paired-sample t-test, the results demonstrated that PjBL significantly impacts students' productive English skills. Students found that PjBL improved their enthusiasm, confidence, creativity, self-directed learning, and collaborative learning skills. Teachers found out that PjBL promotes teaching motivation and satisfaction. Baş (2011) investigated the effects of PjBL on students' academic achievement of ninth-grade students in a high school in Nigde, Turkey. While the control group studied a unit on past activities through the textbook, the experimental group studied it through PW. The ultimate goal of the treatment group was to create study calendars and determine control points in those calendars. Following the comparison of pre- and posttest results, the researcher concluded that "the findings of posttest at the end of the four-week implementation (...) indicate that the experimental group performed better than the control group" (p. 9).

### *Vocabulary*

In accordance with the above, whether Iranian learners who learn new vocabulary through PjBL recall the meaning of the words learned effectively and have a better retention rate was at the heart of a research study conducted by Shafaei and Rahim (2015). Forty EFL students were randomly selected and assigned to an experimental group (PjBL method) and a control group (conventional). After the treatment, the findings suggested that learners who were taught using the PjBL approach had better retention of new vocabulary with a higher level of difficulty. Reisi and Saniei (2016) also found that using a word web strategy and PjBL significantly helped EFL students learn vocabulary in a private school. Ninety female students at the intermediate level of language proficiency from a high school in Tehran were randomly divided into three groups: experimental group 1, experimental group 2, and the control group. While the first and the second experimental groups received vocabulary using a word web strategy without PjBL and with PjBL, respectively, the control group received the same new words without PjBL and word web. After the pre- and posttests were compared using descriptive statistics, the results revealed that the participants in both experimental groups significantly outperformed the participants in the control group in terms of vocabulary learning, and the learners who received word web with PjBL outperformed those who received it without PjBL. In another research paper, Migdad (2016) investigated the effectiveness of the PjBL strategy on developing third graders' achievement levels in vocabulary and their leadership skills. For the investigator to answer the research questions, a pre- and posttest experimental design was used. A total number of 76 third graders from Al Zaitun Co-ed Elementary C School in Gaza were purposively chosen for the experiment. PjBL strategy was used in teaching the experimental group, and the traditional method was used with the control one during the first term of the school year (2015-2016). A pre- and post-achievement test and an observation card for the leadership skills were used. After the data were statistically analyzed with the help of the SPSS software, the results revealed statistically significant differences in the mean scores of the pre- and post-test and the observation card in the post-application in favor of the experimental group. In a very recent study, Mohamadi (2018) aimed at identifying whether there is a statistically significant difference in learning and retention of idiomatic expressions through PjBL and e-PjBL from both achievement and learner perspectives. Ninety intermediate students studying English at a local institute in Karaj district in Iran were assigned into three groups: control,

PjBL, and E-PjBL. After 15 sessions of treatment based on a specific lesson plan and procedure, learners' knowledge of idioms was measured on posttests and delayed posttests. The multivariate analysis of variance suggested that PjBL and E-PjBL groups outperformed the control group in learning and retention. The PjBL group outperformed E-PjBL in retention and sustainability of the knowledge.

### *Communication*

In addition to language macro-skills and vocabulary, PjBL has been reported to foster students' communication. Bulach (2003) analyzed students' reactions to learning communication in a PjBL setting. Developing the skills necessary to begin, maintain, and finish a conversation and learning basic presentation skills were also the major-specific language goals. Sixty-eight female students majoring in English Literature in their third year at a women's university in Tokyo participated in the research study. In groups of four or five, the research participants were asked to interview five foreign residents in Japan on the topic of culture shock. Students were asked to assess their interviewees' degree of cultural adjustment according to Kalvero Oberg's essay on the four stages of culture shock: honeymoon, hostility and aggressiveness, feelings of superiority, and acceptance. Following the analysis of students' questionnaires and journals, the findings appeared to confirm the view that PW is an instructional approach that can be used to teach English communication to Japanese university students. Similarly, Vicheanpant and Ruenglerpanyakul (2012) explored whether a teacher and students agree that PjBL helps students learn English communication more effectively with a positive attitude. To this end, the researchers collected the data using students'/teachers' reflections on classroom projects and semi-structured interviews. The subjects in the study were high school students from Darunsikkhalai School. Results indicated that the teachers and students believed that using PjBL to teach English communication could help the students understand the lesson easily and stimulate their interest in learning English communication. It was also concluded that participants, irrespective of their gender, shared the same point of view about PjBL.

### *Cultural awareness*

PjBL in the context of language education has been reported to successfully help students increase their understanding of their own and other cultures. In the Chinese EFL context, Gu (2002) conducted a 12-week study on PW at Suzhou University in China. Twenty Chinese college students and twenty-eight American junior college students participated in the study. The two groups were required to work in small groups to conduct investigations into business opportunities or cultural topics in China or America. Students' end product took the form of research reports to be presented orally in class in the form of web pages or PowerPoint slides. Then they were required to share them with their American counterparts. Groups were named after the topic being investigated: Chinese groups had the following names: "Pajamas," "Pearls", "Restaurants", "Culture," and "Campus". After classroom observations, interviews, email messages, and other electronic texts were analyzed, the results showed that Chinese students "have promoted their critical awareness of cultural differences (...) and they enjoyed learning from their American holidays and their education system" (p. 205). In the Japanese university context, some of Bulach's (2003) research participants reported having gained some knowledge about culture shock and changed some of their perspectives towards foreigners. This improved cultural awareness was also reported by Hsu's (2014) research subjects. To identify the extent to which the PBI approach affects students' perceptions of the development of cultural knowledge, thirty-four college students at a national university in northern Taiwan were required to collaboratively investigate the world festivals that were of interest to them. Each group was responsible for the gathering and reporting of festivals within a particular foreign country or region based on their own choice. Based on the questionnaire and semi-structured interview data, the research participants reported understanding other cultures. Liu et al. (2006) explored the learning benefits of an inquiry-based module to enhance middle school students' awareness about Japanese culture, history, and geography through the topic of food. Sixty-four sixth graders from two middle schools in the USA were asked to create the food section of a Japan travel guide in groups of four during five 45-minute class period. After the research participants submitted their electronic copies of their travel guide using a web-based form, they were administered a post-content knowledge questionnaire, survey instruments, and interviewed. The results found out that students' understanding of Japanese food and culture was enhanced as a result of completing their inquiry-based web projects. Ngo (2014), in a pilot study,

implemented PW in the teaching of intercultural communication at Vietnam National University. Twenty MA English-majored students explored four micro-project topics related to the cultural values of environmental protection for 15 weeks. The purpose was twofold. The first purpose was to provide students with opportunities to develop their English language ability and intercultural communication skills. The second purpose was to present PW as an alternative to teaching an intercultural communication course in Vietnam. After students presented and discussed their reports, interview-based findings revealed that the students learned about cultural values and behaviors towards the environmental protections between cultures and knew about these issues in terms of inter-cultures (p. 221). In Indonesia, Irawati (2015) elaborated on the application of cultural PjBL in the hope of helping students develop their academic writing ability. In groups of four to five, a total number of 20 students of the fourth semester, at the English Department, College of Teacher Training and Education “PGRI” were required to write essays on any cultural topics, within six weeks, to be compiled into one mini-journal consisting of 4-5 essays as their end-products. Although developing cultural understanding was not the core purpose of the study, the analysis of classroom observations, students’ essay scores, and interviews revealed that students enhanced their cultural understanding as a result of being exposed to culture through PjBL. In the Moroccan context, Bouchouk (2017), in a recent study, asked 16 American high school students to explore some aspects of Moroccan cultures using PW to develop their cultural knowledge of the host country. The participants enrolled in the Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program sponsored by “the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.” At the end of the academic year, each individual was required to accomplish a research study on Moroccan cultural aspects of their interest. After the participants were interviewed, the different chosen themes were religious tolerance, Moroccan bread, rap music, Moroccan Hammams, pottery in Morocco. Data from interviews exhibited that participants successfully expanded their cultural knowledge of the host country (Morocco). They reported having learned about the “fascinating lives of women in Hammams”, “the history of pottery in Morocco”, the religion of Islam, and other complexities of Moroccan cultures. Similarly, to decide whether the PjBL approach can help students develop their intercultural knowledge, Kim (2019) explored the potential of culture learning through PW for intercultural knowledge construction and its experiences within pre-service English teacher

education. After 16 weeks of learning about American, Korean, and other international cultures through PW using Stoller's seven-step process, students completed four projects on four themes (Race and ethnicity, Education, Religion, and Politics). Based on the data elicited from group projects, weekly journals, and post-project written reflections, the findings revealed that students "built deep and broad intercultural knowledge based on the four cultural topics" (p.8).

### *Autonomy*

One of the major goals for the inclusion of PjBL in the context of language education is to promote learner autonomy. Recent literature has shown that PjBL helps language learners foster their autonomy. For example, in the context of English Access classrooms in Pakistan, Imtiaz and Asif (2012) explored the impact of PjBL on students' development of autonomy. Fifty-two female students (aged 15-18) of the English Access Micro-scholarship Program at a state-owned school were required to choose a book from the Access library and present it in the form of posters to a real audience. The analysis of students' questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions indicated that PjBL helped students improve their language skills and develop learners' autonomy. Irawati's (2015) participants reported the same. After completing their projects, "they admitted that they were more independent" (p. 32). Likewise, in an attempt to know about the role of PW on learners' autonomy in an ESP class in Colombia, Ramírez (2014), in an action research study, asked a group of 16 environmental engineering undergraduate students (10 boys and six girls) at the university to create a magazine about environmental issues over an academic semester using Stoller (2002) 's ten-step model of PW. The analysis of students' field notes, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, artifacts, and video recordings showed that students developed learner autonomy in different ways with respect to three aspects: "(a) making decisions through cooperative work, (b) the development of self-regulation, and (c) intrinsic motivation" (p. 65). Similarly, in Vietnam, Loi (2017) conducted a study to report on the impact of PW in teaching English language skills on students' learner autonomy in an English language teacher education program. Over two consecutive semesters, 50 English teaching-majored second-year students were asked to complete two projects. The first one was to generate a videotaped skit, report, story, or any production regarding a topic or an issue in the course. The second one was to create a booklet, manual, or guidebook on the course topic. After the project completion, the subjects' learner



autonomy was assessed through a self-assessment questionnaire and two group interviews. The findings revealed that the students gained a higher degree of learner autonomy after participating in the PW. The gain was primarily due to increased self-decisions on learning. However, other aspects of learner autonomy, such as self-regulated learning actions, self-responsibility, and attitudes to social interaction, remained unchanged. In the same vein, whether PjBL could enhance Indonesian learners' autonomy in an EFL classroom or not, Yuliani and Lengkanawati (2017) asked six junior high school students in the ninth grade to work in groups and write three journals about three PjBL stages: planning stage, implementation stage, and monitoring stage. After students' journals, classroom observations, and interviews were analyzed, the findings exhibited that PjBL enhanced learner autonomy, with particular reference to self-instruction, self-direction, self-access learning, and individualized instruction.

### *Self-efficacy*

In a French-language context, Mills (2009) evaluated how PjBL increased students' level of self-efficacy, or perceived competence, in the five goal areas of the Standards for foreign language learning. Forty-six college students enrolled in false beginner French courses at a university in the northeastern United States were asked to travel virtually to different francophone destinations across Europe every week and report on their experiences in a travel diary. The purpose was to develop a personal guidebook, which would lead to a book chapter on a different city in francophone Europe. A self-efficacy survey, along with pre- and post-tests, were used to collect the data. Significant improvement was found in students' self-efficacy in the areas of Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities after participating in the PjBL course.

### *Attitude*

Studies have concluded that introducing culture through PjBL helps induce positive attitudes towards the culture being explored and the learning strategy used. For example, Gu (2002) 's Chinese participants "showed great enthusiasm toward the authentic and purposeful cross-cultural communication" (p. 201) after completing their projects. Similarly, in an exploratory study, Kwe and Kean's (2014) research findings implied that PBI is a more viable and effective

alternative instruction to teaching culture not only to the students but also to their foreign language teachers. In the Japanese context, as a result of exploring different phases of culture shock and its impacts on foreign residents in Japan through PjBL, some of Bulach's (2003) research participants reported having felt motivated to speak with foreigners after the projects and expressed their interest to learn about culture shock. Similarly, Hsu's (2014) participants found it interesting to learn about foreign culture after completing their projects on international festivals; their favorable attitudes towards learning cultures through PBI were reported. The same positive feelings were voiced out by Bouchouk's (2017) American students after completing their projects on different aspects of Moroccan cultures. For example, some participants were fascinated by "the culture of Hammam and how it is a way of socializing with your community" (p. 63). Also, their attitudes towards PjBL as an approach to learning about Moroccan cultures were very positive. In the same vein, Kim (2019)'s participants reported having developed "their genuine interest in the countries they explored, as well as a sense of connection with the cultures. Some even showed a desire for further research" (p. 8).

In accordance with the above, it was also found that teaching and learning language via the PW approach was found to encourage a positive attitude towards language learning, language lessons, and aspects of the PW approach. Peterson (2004) conducted a mixed-research study at two Canadian ESL schools in Victoria to explore teachers' and students' perspectives and their use of PjBL. From two different schools, 33 teachers and 88 students with different ages, cultural backgrounds, and purposes for learning ESL classes participated in the study. Although the researcher was not explicit about how the PjBL approach was dealt with by the teachers in the research setting, the analysis of the data elicited through questionnaires, interviews, and artifacts, suggested that both the teachers' and the students' perspectives on PjBL were found to be generally positive. They were favorable to more common practices in ESL classes and exhibited positive perspectives towards aspects of PjBL, too. In the Turkish context, Başı and Beyhan (2010) investigated the effects of multiple intelligences supported PjBL and traditional foreign language-teaching environment on students' achievement and attitudes towards English lessons. Results showed that the research subjects "who have been educated by multiple intelligences supported project-based learning method have been found out to have more positive attitude levels to English

lessons than those who have been educated by the traditional language teaching methods” (p. 378). In the same context, Baş (2011) also concluded that “the students who were educated by project-based learning had developed more positive attitudes towards the lesson than the students who were educated by the instruction based on student textbooks” (p. 10). In the same vein, Yaman (2014) investigated the efficacy of PjBL on EFL students’ attitudes towards the development of speaking skills (see above). After one semester of treatment, the statistical analyses concerning their attitude dimension revealed a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups. The PW group students had more positive attitudes towards the course than the coursebook group students. Equally, Hsu’s (2014) research subjects generally had a positive attitude toward the PBI because it offered them more opportunities for active learning, enhancement of their English reading skills, and their ability to use online resources (p. 79). Shin’s (2018) research findings exhibited that students’ perceptions towards PjBL were very positive in the sense that over 70% of the participants had strong confidence in English learning through PjBL and hoped that this approach could be incorporated into the future classes (p. 108). In a very recent study, Kartika (2020) examined students’ perceptions about PjBL by implementing a half-semester project in the Critical Reading class in Universitas Sebelas Maret in Indonesia. Fourteen students who joined the Critical Reading class of the 4th semester at the English Education Department participated in the study. They were divided into groups of three and were required to search the issue of K-pop critically through authentic readings outside the classroom for five weeks. After the end-products (posters) were presented, all participants filled in a questionnaire, and three were randomly selected for the interviews. The findings indicated that the research participants were positive about using PjBL in critical reading class.

While the research participants in the abovementioned expressed their enjoyment of their learning experiences through PjBL, Eyring’s (1997) participants were not largely satisfied with the experience with project work instruction despite the huge amount of time spent on planning, researching, and assessing project-related activities. The findings revealed that expected group solidarity and empathy were absent. It was also reported that, unlike female students, male students were not responsive to the project approach, and the problems of focus were observed, somewhat more in the project group than in the control group. However, participants were positive about the

student-teacher rapport and the level of freedom they were allowed during the project process. Beckett's (1999) participants also reported these dilemmatic perceptions of PW on the part of students. Beckett's findings revealed that while 25 % of students had mixed feelings about projects (they liked them for some reasons and disliked them for other reasons), 57% of them negatively evaluated PBI. They reported that PW was not a good way to learn (p. 137).

Finally, while implementing the PjBL approach implies a new role in the language classroom for both students and teachers, attitudes towards these roles alternate from acceptance and resistance. For example, Gu (2002) observed a high level of discomfort, particularly at the beginning of the project, to the extent that "six students quit the class after the first week saying it was too hard for them" (p. 206). However, those who stayed expressed their enjoyment of cooperation and collaboration. This resistance to the facilitative role of the teacher was also observed by Bulach (2003) in that the research participants had some reservations about the role of the teacher as a facilitator and as a guide in the study. Simpson (2011) observed the same negative reaction to the new role of the teacher at the beginning of the study, but later on, it was appreciated as students got used to it. Switching from the teacher-centered approach to the student-centered approach was reported as the top challenge experienced by the researcher during the first stages of PW. However, Kean and Kwe's (2014) participants "felt comfortable participating actively in the project" (p. 196).

### *Motivation*

Research studies concluded that integrating PjBL in the context of language education fosters students' motivation. For example, in an attempt to understand the impact of CALL projects on students' motivation, Gu (2002) conducted a 12-week study on PW at Suzhou University in China. Twenty Chinese college students and 28 American junior college students participated in the study. The two groups were required to work in groups to conduct investigations into business opportunities or cultural topics in China or America. Students' were required to compose a research report (end products) to be presented orally in class in the form of web pages or PowerPoint slides. Then they were required to share them with their American partners. Groups were named after the topic being investigated: Chinese groups had the following names: "Pajamas," "Pearls",

“Restaurants,” “Culture,” and “Campus.” After the classroom observations, interviews, email messages, and other electronic texts were analyzed, the results showed that students increased their motivation following the competition of their projects. Students reported their “great enthusiasm” and “enjoyment” (p. 201). Similarly, to investigate how teacher’s intrinsic motivation is related to student’s intrinsic motivation in PjBL, Lam, Cheng, and Ma (2009) asked 631 students from four different secondary schools in Hong Kong to work in small groups and study a topic of their interest under the supervision of a teacher (126 teachers in total). The topics were various and multidisciplinary. Students were required to submit a written report and give an oral presentation on what they have learnt at the end of the projects. A week after the study, “students were asked to indicate their intrinsic motivation in the PjBL activity by responding to a scale of student intrinsic motivation that was adapted from the one used in Elliot and Church’s study (1997)” (p. 11). The results showed that students’ intrinsic motivation increased because of the teachers' intrinsic motivation who provided sufficient instructional support during three months of PjBL activities. Equally, prompted by the need to explore the extent to which the PW approach can be a producer of authenticity in English for specific purposes (ESP) in Tunisia, Trabelsi (2013) assigned group projects to two classes of 25 third-year university students majoring in business at the Graduate Business School of Sfax. Students were allowed total freedom to choose topics of interest. Following the project completion, the analysis of students’ questionnaires revealed that “motivated feelings of a strong interest in the communicative language use of English and their desire to break up the routine of the class” (p. 87) were reported. Likewise, in the hope of understanding the effects of PjBL on students’ motivation in a general English language classroom, Myeong-Hee Shin (2018) asked 79 students to work collaboratively in order to produce a “resume and cover letter video” project in which the students prepare their future job interviews. The English motivation questionnaires based on Keller’s (1987) model of motivation were applied in the pre- and post-study. The results showed that the mean of the posttest was significantly higher than that of pretest ( $t(79) = -4.042, p = .000 < .5$ ), suggesting that the project task had a great impact on students’ motivation to learn English. More specifically, while motivational factors of attention (A) and relevance (R) were significantly different in the pre- and posttest results, confidence (C) and satisfaction (S) did not improve in the short term.

### *Research skills*

To identify how well students develop their research skills through IBL, Chu, Chow, Tse, and Kuhlthau (2008) reported on two phases of IBL projects undertaken by a convenient sample of 141 students at a primary school in China, each phase lasted for two to three months. The projects were guided by general studies teachers, Chinese-language teachers, the information technology teacher, and the school librarian. In groups of six, students were required to do a project on two general themes: “the earth” for the first phase and “the history of Hong Kong and China” for the second. Students were allowed significant freedom to choose their specific topics under the two general themes. At the end of each group project, students were asked to submit a written report and give a presentation. The analysis of the lesson plans, in-class exercises, homework assignments, written reports, presentations by students, and data collected through surveys and interviews showed that a collaborative students’ research skills and other various skills were significantly enhanced in the process of PW.

### **Summary of the studies**

The two significant criteria followed by the researcher to locate the relevant research studies were the following. First, for the study to be considered relevant, it had to involve PjBL or other related labels (e.g., PW, IBL, PBI, and project method). Second, the study had to be conducted in the context of language education between 1997 and 2020. As a result, the researcher managed to locate a total number of 43 studies, which were meticulously inspected for their date, locations, themes, research methods, data gathering tools, purposes, and findings. After having inspected the studies, the researcher drew the following conclusions:

First, PjBL is not uniformly defined inside language education. Two basic reasons have made it difficult to articulate one agreed-upon definition. The multi-disciplinary nature of the term has made the concept of project hard to clarify (Pecore, 2015; Welsh, 2006). Also, the versatility of PjBL considers the various ways in which the term can be translated into practice (Stoller, 2006). Thomas (2000) pointed out that the nonexistence of a uniformly-greed upon definition has resulted in an array of PjBL research and development activities.

Second, the review indicated that the number of studies conducted on PjBL in the context of language education is still small compared to the number of studies done in mainstream education. However, the number has been rapidly growing in the last ten years, with a total number of 33. Third, as to the geographical location, the review has shown that studies were conducted in 21 countries, but some locations were represented more than six times: Canada (Beckett, 1999; Eyring, 1997; Peterson, 2004), Turkey (Baş & Beyhan, 2010; Baş, 2011; Yaman, 2014), Indonesia (Irawati, 2015; Maulany, 2013; Putri et al., 2017; Syarifah & Emiliasari, 2018; Winasih, Cahyono & Prayogo, 2019; Yuliani, 2017), Iran (Mohamadi, 2018; Reisi & Saniei, 2016; Shafaei & Rahim, 2015; Zare-Behtash, Khoshsima, and Sarlak, 2016), Malaysia (Bakar, Noordin & Razali, 2019a; Bakar, Noordin & Razali, 2019b; Kwe & Kean, 2014), Thailand (Newprasit & Seepho, 2015; Poonpon, 2008; Simpson, 2011; Vicheanpant & Ruenglerpanyakul, 2012), Taiwan (Hsu, 2014); Palestine (Migdad, 2016; Nassir, 2014), Greece (Fragoulis, 2009), the United States (Liu et al., 2006; Mills, 2009), Morocco (Bouchouk, 2015), Japan (Bulach, 2013), Korea (Kim, 2019; Shin Myeong-Hee, 2018), Tunisia (Trabelsi, 2013), China (Gu, 2002; Lam et al., 2009), Jordan (Areej & Hamzeh, 2014), Pakistan (Imtiaz et al., 2012), Colombia (Ramirez, 2004; Vaca Torres & Gómez Rodríguez, 2017), Vietnam (Loi, 2017; Ngo, 2014), Iraq (Kavlu, 2015).

With respect to the educational levels involved, the review indicated that the postsecondary level has taken the lion's share of the total studies. Nineteen studies were conducted at the tertiary level, nine studies at the secondary school level, six studies at the junior high school level, four studies at the primary school level, two studies at private institutions, two studies at a teacher training program, and one study at an English access program. Thematically, the review concluded that multiple themes have been addressed by the studies: students' achievement in macro skills (writing, reading, speaking, and listening), vocabulary, learner autonomy, motivation, self-efficacy, students and teachers' attitudes, self-confidence, creativity, communication, and culture. While numerous themes have been highlighted, the review found out that language macro-skills have taken the lion's share of the total studies.

Regarding the findings, almost all of the findings have qualitatively and quantitatively concluded that students' learning of language and content through PjBL successfully helped them boost their learning outcomes. Research participants reported that they improved their research

skills, self-efficacy, autonomy, cultural awareness, language macro-skills, academic achievement, communicative skills, self-confidence, critical thinking skills, and cultural awareness as a result of completing their projects. Findings also highlighted those research participants reported positive attitudes following their exposure to language through PjBL.

While the implementation of PjBL in the reviewed studies was reported to be a useful tool to merge both language, content, and skills, several challenges were reported on the part of the research subjects (e.g., time-consuming for both students and instructors, free-riding, stress, adapting to student' centered teaching, teamwork conflicts).

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this review uncovered the place of PjBL inside language education with the focus on their date, locations, themes, data gathering tools, purposes, and findings. The review concluded that PjBL benefits that have been reported in mainstream education have also been confirmed in the context of language education. Also, while the number of studies from 1997 to 2010 was negligible, it has significantly grown in the last ten years (2010 to 2020). Moreover, while several language-related areas have been addressed, some of these areas are still marginally researched, for example, self-efficacy, self-confidence, critical thinking, communication, writing, and reading skills. Finally, the studies conducted at the tertiary level far outnumber those conducted at the primary and secondary school levels.

Based on these conclusions, this literature review has unfolded some areas for future research. While a number of areas have not been sufficiently researched yet, future research could address them. The effect of PjBL on students' self-confidence, critical thinking, reading and writing skills, self-efficacy, to name but a few. Additionally, since the main challenges highlighted were time and free-riding, future research could address these issues by addressing the restructuring of the groups and the suitable amount of time for PjBL in educational settings where time and content are limited.



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