

Faculty of Education

English Language Teaching Program

**THE EFFECTS OF PROJECT -BASED LEARNING ON STUDENTS' LEVEL OF
ENGAGEMENT IN LANGUAGE LEARNING ACTIVITY IN 9TH GRADERS IN A
EFL CLASSROOM.**

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By

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1. Abstract

This study was classroom-based research aimed at identifying the effects of PBL on students' engagement levels at the moment of doing language learning activities in a Chilean EFL context. This investigation was conducted using a project assessment applied by the school in two 9th-grade classrooms. The data was gathered using focus groups with the students, an interview with the main teacher, and two semi-structured written observations from the training teacher. The result suggested that concerning how a project is apply, the effects on students will be positive or negative concerning students' engagement in language activities. The learners' autonomy and the groups' dynamics were the most relevant elements. Nonetheless, further investigations on this approach might be needed to raise a more holistic understanding of the use of PBL in EFL contexts in our country.

1.Resumen

Este estudio fue una investigación basada en el aula para identificar de los efectos de PBL en el enganche de los estudiantes al hacer actividades de aprendizaje de idiomas en un contexto chileno de EFL. Esta investigación se hizo usando un proyecto aplicado por el colegio en dos cursos de primero medio. La recolección de datos fue con grupos de enfoque de los estudiantes, una entrevista con la profesora principal y dos observaciones escritas semiestructuradas hechas por el docente en práctica. Los resultados sugirieron que la aplicación del proyecto afecta en el compromiso de los estudiantes al hacer actividades de la lengua si serán positivos o negativos. La autonomía del los estudiantes y las dinámicas de grupo fueron los elementos mas relevantes. Sin embargo, futuras investigaciones con este enfoque podrían ser necesarias para aumentar una comprensión más holística en el uso de PBL en los contextos EFL de nuestro país.

Key concepts: Engagement, Project-based learning, students, autonomy, motivation, teamwork, English development, language learning experiences, meaningful experiences.

2. Introduction

2.1 Background

In recent decades, the use of projects as a new form of learning in schools has been the focus of many further studies. This research explores the effect that project-based learning might have on students' engagement levels when developing language learning activities (LLA). In contrast, one of the critiques through the years about English learning has been the tendency to use the traditional methodologies of grammar-translation or Audio Lingual. In this sense, some investigations have shown that some Chilean schools primarily focus on listening and reading (Curinao & Gonzales, 2008), while some teachers still prefer grammar-translation methods to teach English (Ramirez, 2015).

In this regard, it might sound predominantly traditional and old-fashioned; however, this is the standard form of education commonly used in numerous schools in our country. However, the idea of using projects in education has recently attracted the interest of many researchers for their effect on academic outcomes and other variables. Given this context, this research aims to investigate the potential of project-based learning (PBL) in a classroom of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to affect students learning experiences, precisely their engagement level, when they seek to develop their language skills. It will also provide valuable data to EFL teachers and school programs on pedagogical methods that contrast with the traditional grammar method.

2.2 Context

The context in which this research took place was in a private school located in Providencia. It was undertaken with two different 9th-grade EFL classes in the school, and each class size ranged from 16 to 18 students, with students aged 14 and 15 years old. One main characteristic of the school was that, in terms of foreign language, students had English classes since nursery school. Thus the English proficiency level of students generally ranges

from A2 to B2. Additionally, the school offers four pedagogical hours of English classes per week. Nonetheless, students worked in an online context due to the COVID-19 situation, which presented a decrease in spoken production and writing skills. Therefore, to prepare students for the B1 Preliminary Test (PET) certification from Cambridge English Qualifications, the school has been working with a textbook called *English File Intermediate Multipack A* and listening activities from the same material.

During the observations, it was noticed that the English lessons primarily relied on grammar, which was taught explicitly and through individual activities. Moreover, the four different skills development was primarily focused on reading and listening, and spoken interactions were mostly between students and the teacher. Furthermore, the planning of each lesson was directly guided by the units and activities from the textbook. In summary, students had just experienced two years of having limited English learning experiences. They were now facing explicit grammar knowledge and exposure to a foreign language with high school standards. According to some teachers at the school, this decreased their levels of motivation and engagement toward English language learning.

In addition, my host teacher advised me that the students were going to prepare a group project called “Travel Agency.” They were supposed to present themselves as travel agents with a written assignment, a brochure, and a speaking presentation. During the previous classes at the start of the project, in monitoring the class, I noticed that some students demonstrated similar patterns of behaviours. Most students were not paying attention to the classes or learning activities. However, when they were asked to do a short task in the class—which was not explicitly associated with grammar, and they had to speak—they demonstrated an openness to perform it and to participate.

2.3 Rationale

I wondered if there was an association between doing activities outside the grammar-based pedagogy, which required speaking and writing, and the low engagement level demonstrated by the students who routinely ignored grammatical activities. Firstly, it was intriguing to observe that the teaching grammar strategies employed in the school were contrary to what I was instructed. Instead of teaching grammar by emphasizing communicative instances and verbal development, the school teaches explicit grammar features. Secondly, it was perplexing because the students, in general terms, exhibited a high level of proficiency in English when they talked. Therefore, the grammatical teaching strategies were effective, but as previously mentioned, the level of engagement towards this could have been more consistent for some students.

Because I had access to test results, I realized that the level of engagement needed to be more closely linked to the proficiency levels. Among the course, some demonstrated a low level of communicative development, while others could communicate easily; however, both groups showed disinterest in the classes. This situation was constant, except for those lessons in which they were asked to complete a task. This relationship could be related to the difficulty of using productive skills or perhaps the lack of engagement that students sometimes feel when they have to participate in speaking (Stepani, 2015). Since several studies investigate the benefits of using Task-based learning (TBL) and PBL in speaking and writing development, I wonder if language development was also related to the levels of engagement students perceived throughout the process.

Consequently, I needed to ask if there was a relationship between task activities and engagement. In addition, it is pertinent to appreciate if the strategies used in any educational contexts provide meaningful learning experiences for students, so the connection between their experience and the new knowledge can be mentally integrated (Anderson et al., 2001). Consequently, I decided to use the project they had of creating a travel advertising agency as

an instance to observe and research the relationship and effects on their engagement when they must develop English skills. Therefore, knowing if this influence students' level of engagement, it would be valuable to encourage the usage of PBL in other grades or to reduce its implementation.

Finally, this study was designed to contribute positively and benefit the school. As teachers, since the development of any language can be frustrating for students and might block and interfere with any development of new knowledge, it is essential to consider the levels of engagement inside the classroom (Willis, 2009). In this sense, depending on the findings, the results of this research could be beneficial for other teachers who would like to apply PBL to increase student engagement and develop language skills. To conclude, it can present valuable data to the teachers if they want to know how the students understand the project concerning their learning process.

3. Review of the Literature

In this section, the concepts underpinning this research will be considered. This section will individually illustrate the concepts, why they are relevant to the research, and their role in this investigation.

3.1 Engagement

The first concept to understand in this research is engagement since it is part of the leading research questions and the main element of this investigation. The concept of engagement is considered a way to understand the outcomes of students, which might be manipulated to encourage positive behaviour in educational performances (Christenson et al., 2012). This definition might lead us to consider how students' development regarding English might be conducted and then affected. In addition, some researchers have emphasised that the engagement presented by students might be mainly influenced by their motivation or external non-institutional factors (Zepke et al., 2010). It is accentuated that student engagement is

considered a complex construct with many components affecting it. For example, the educational environment or implementation of an LLA y might be highly moulded by the teacher's decisions, attitudes and behaviours (Zepke et al., 2010).

However, some studies described engagement as involvement and commitment to passion and enthusiasm, which described engagement as an emotional involvement rather than external factors (Schaufeli, 2013). This suggestion might also be observed in the classroom, which supports the idea that sometimes students actively participate in the classroom by bringing their focused effort to the LLAs. Nonetheless, according to Trowler (2010), this idea might need to be completed since engagement is more than involvement or participation, illustrating several groups of different engagement types, such as behavioural, emotional, and cognitive. Her definition suggests that engagement has different dimensions that require feelings and a sense of belonging (Trowler, 2010). In this regard, when students' behaviour demonstrates enthusiasm to participate or is emotionally interested in LLA, it is when the levels of engagement can be demonstrated.

Furthermore, some researchers redirection the definition of Engagement against the previously mentioned but by combining it into an intersection. Thus, Engagement has been considered a meta-concept in higher education since its theoretical perspective remains debated because of its measurement challenges (Queiroz, 2020). Moreover, Student engagement can be constructed and reconstructed through the perceptions held by students and the meaning they make of their experiences and interactions. Such as a sense of competencies, the dynamic between students, space, structure, technologies, opportunities to engage, location, readiness to engage, and learning activities are considered in this conceptualisation. A proposal supported by the perception that Student engagement involves emotions, thinking behaviour and dimensions influenced by different social, cultural and political aspects, a similar conceptual framework that Trowler (2010) suggests (Zepke, 2019).

Therefore, Engagement might be presented in a more holistic and complex way that is also affected by each student's social environment beyond the classroom learning experiences (Queiroz, 2020).

3.2 Motivation.

The second concept to be considered is motivation because it is one of the most, if not the central, aspects that influence learners' positive attitudes toward learning achievement. According to Gardner (1985), motivation can be considered as the arrangement between effort towards achievement and the desire of the same concerning language learning goals plus favorable attitudes. In addition, motivations might be reflected in the amount of effort students are willing to spend on an activity. Similarly, Root (1999) indicates that motivation is the combination of four elements, which can be measured in the classroom, an objective, the desire to attain the objective, effortful behaviour through the process, and a positive attitude towards the goal. Both definitions help teachers understand that motivation may be perceived as the impulse in students to persist, create interest to complete a task, and preserve engagement. An element that, according to Saranraj & Shahila (2016), plays a substantial role in the achievement of second language education in a classroom.

However, instead of four aspects, as Gardner and Root mention, Cohen and Dörnyei (2002) suggest that motivation is a conceptualized mental process with constant dynamic change. In the classroom, this may be seen as the self-confidence or students' autonomy that is demonstrated according to the assigned activity, which hypothetically explains students' behaviour and thinking (Dörnyei, 2001). Motivation could be observed by making learning enjoyable or promoting learner autonomy. Hence, students remain engaged in a class and willing to invest their effort to pursue and complete an activity. (Dörnyei, 2001). In addition, several years of substantial investigations of the role of motivation provide an effective and

positive predisposition toward foreign languages and foreignness cultural components (Dörnyei, 1994).

In the same way, motivation has a direct influence on students but notably a significant role in success in the learning of L2, especially in a classroom (Saranraj & Shahila, 2016), which can be seen in students with low levels of proficiency that do not show interest within the classroom. It is suggested that its role is a relevant, if not crucial, component in autonomy and self-determination, which increases students' commitment (Cohen & Dörnyei, 2002). Moreover, motivation is a fundamental element of the human mind to determine success or failure in any learning circumstance (Dörnyei, 2001). Therefore, the role of this concept in this research is not just about the application of different ways to motivate in an EFL classroom but the aspect that would directly influence the application of the project.

3.3 Project-based learning.

The third concept is project-based learning, and, as the last concept mentioned, this has several different definitions that categorize its qualities and characteristics as well. Project-based learning is an approach that has its foundations in the theory of Dewey (1938), who argued that learning achievement comes from learner readiness and the experiences the learners pass through, guided by the teacher in contextual learning. In this sense, it is mentioned that the use of experiences for learning is central to activities that involve research, decision, making, and problem solution (Graff & Kolmos, 2003), which gives the students a sense of belonging to the knowledge they are discovering in a regular classroom. Hence, it might be suggested that learning through PBL may lead to developing their autonomy in a prepared classroom environment where students show disinterest.

In addition, Thomas (2000) defined PBL as a model that develops learning around various tasks aimed at problem-solving, decision-making, investigation, or struggling with

questions. Thus, since the relevance of PBL is to allow students to work relatively autonomously over extended periods, it could be helpful to culminate the projects in realistic productions or presentations (Thomas, 2000). However, Nguyen (2011) focused predominantly on problem-solving, defining PBL as a learning method that focuses on the learner through activities frequently integrated with real-world matters. Hence, advertising or developing ideas to sell a product as in the context project might provide proper data that reflect this definition. Following a similar line, Sirisrimangkorn (2018) defined PBL as a model to organize projects which connect to real-world issues so that learner might demonstrate their learning in practical ways. In this sense, she supports the statement that applying PBL to focus on a realistic production is beneficial, which in this research is by using drama in role-playing and developing productive language skills.

In addition, Levine (2004) mentions the global simulations inside the PBL approach, in which students engage in language learning by allowing them to forget what they are doing in a simulated learning environment. According to this perspective, modifying the classroom to a structured environment in which the students must behave and act as travel agents following the play-acting rules might help them develop their oral and writing skills (Levine, 2004). Similar studies also support that this notion, which is the use of a PBL, particularly in role-acting plays, increases motivation toward the content and understanding through that experience (Gorjian et al., 2010). In this sense, The use of role-playing and the assignment the students have might define the authenticity of the language learning environment, such as simulating an advertising circumstance. To summarize, PBL focuses on using experiences through action to achieve learning. As the subject of this research, project-based learning will consider the characteristics of decision-making, investigations, and autonomous work in the classroom to end with a realistic production (Thomas, 2000).

4. Research question

In order to explore if the application of projects to the school's programs increases or decreases the engagement of the learners, the following research question is: What are the effects of project-based learning on students' level of engagement in language learning activities in 9th graders in an EFL classroom?

5. Research Methodology

This research focuses on finding possible improvements regarding teaching practices and identifying practical learning benefits for students in the classroom.(Kostoulas & Lammerer, 2015). Hence, to collect data from a natural social perception of human experiences, which is how students engage with the project, it was decided to use classroom-based research and a qualitative method (Saldaña, 2011). In this regard, the qualitative method might support the collection of valuable data to respond to the research question: What are the effects of project-based learning on students' level of engagement in oral skills development in a 9th-grade EFL classroom? Therefore, to obtain a broad and helpful spectrum of data, three instruments were designed that could provide data for the research drawn from the participants and the teacher. Appropriately, the data collection tools selected were semi-structured observation to obtain spontaneous and natural reactions from students, a focus group to provide reliable data direct from the students, and an interview with the main teacher to contrast the students' perception. In addition, because of the context where the students must do a travel agency presentation, the integration of real-world matters in a global simulation by using play-acting will be an essential part when considering the implementation of the project (Levine, 2008).

6. Data Collection Strategy

A "Travel Agency" project was used as the investigation set to implement this research. In this sense, the data collection strategies were divided into two periods for the sake of time and school planning. In the first period, the process of the project and its

presentations were observed. The research tried to find spontaneous behaviour and attitudes towards the process in the working sessions. Additionally, in the presentation sessions, the observations tried to focus their aim on the students' final production. These observations lasted two weeks, across four lessons of 45 minutes each per week. Once the project ended, the students and teacher were interviewed in two focus groups and an individual interview accordingly. Likewise, two focus groups were made since these were conducted within school hours. The focus groups were divided into two groups; when each group had an English class with the main teacher and the researcher to avoid inconvenience with the other school teachers. Finally, the teacher interview was done individually.

7. Data Collection Instruments

7.1 Observations

Firstly, classroom observations were designed to collect evidence on student responses in the classroom while they were working on the project-based activity. The observations were developed by taking records of two main facets. Their final productions at the end of the project and the engagement students demonstrate through the working sessions. In this sense, semi-structured observations are helpful in qualitative research to check nonverbal reactions and to look for specific behaviours (Mertler, 2017). Therefore, this specific observational method was suitable for the research because it might provide reliable data on how the students honestly reacted toward the learning activity.

In addition, in gathering data, the observer took notes of 8 groups working on the first sessions and the second time, when they had to present their project results. The observations were developed using a chart (see Appendix A) which contained five different sections in which was considered: the organization presented by the group, the presentation overall, individual and group attitude, checking of their working process, and a comment made by any of the students within the process. Moreover, they were selected because they might

provide information about their attitude, behaviour, and perception through the process, their result, and the outcomes of their autonomous work.

7.2 Focus groups

Secondly, a focus group was conducted with seven selected students from two different 9th grades. The reason behind this selection was to collect different perspectives from students with different characteristics, such as the ones with high English proficiency, low proficiency, and interested or disinterested in the classes. Furthermore, the purpose of using focus groups was because, through these instruments, it is possible to collect a significant enough amount of information quickly. Besides, it is a good strategy for the research because it lets you know the honest perception and opinions of students in a space where they might feel comfortable. In this sense, the questions designs concerning the project and their experience are illustrated below (Appendix B).

Since not all the students can communicate entirely and freely in English, the focus group was implemented in Spanish. In addition, the focus group was recorded with the consent of the participants, and they were informed about anonymity and confidentiality (Gill et al., 2008). In this sense, the participants were also informed about the dynamic rules the entire group had to follow. At the same time, the observer went through the established protocols of a focus group interview by welcoming the students, grounding the rules for the discussion, separating the discussion into different topics establishing the time set, and thanking them for participating and sharing their opinion. (Harrell & Bradley, 2009).

7.3 Teacher Interview

Finally, an interview was conducted with the guiding teacher to collect detailed information (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). the reason behind the interview is to gather data about the teacher's perception since this teacher has been one of the evaluators of projects in this school. Thus, it would be possible to get a variable in the analysis of students'

engagement from a different perspective by the position of someone who also observed and tried to promote engagement in the class. To gather the data, the researcher decided to develop an interview with semi-structured questions to guide it according to the teachers' answers to get more data when the answers were insufficient, which contain two sections: engagement and final production. At the interview, the researcher also applied the protocols and notified the teacher that the data would be confidential and only used for the research analysis (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). In this sense, the teacher was thanked for participating, the topics were divided to facilitate understanding the questions, and it was recorded. In this sense, it was a series of questions aimed at engagement when developing LLA (Appendix C). In addition, the questions focused on two main aspects: how the project could have affected the engagement in the final result and what the teacher observed according to the project results. As a result, the answer might provide valuable data for answering the research questions.

8. Data Analysis Approach.

The approach selected was concept-driven to analyse the data gathered from this research. Essentially, This approach is used to explore if a design can satisfy the need and desires of a specific group for future models, such as the implementation of a project within a particular school context to get improvement (Stolterman & Wiberg, 2010). In addition, it helps to get how peoples react and respond to analysing an intersected with the theoretical considerations, in this case, using the concepts of the literature review previously selected about the PBL. In this regard, the concept-driven approach might be a convincing way of data analysis since its primary purpose of producing knowledge outcomes comes from theoretical development (Stolterman & Wiberg, 2010). In this study, the concerns about the possible outcomes are if they are valuable to contrast with other research in the PBL spectrum. Thus, in this case, the analysis implementation by using this approach with the literature concepts

previously mentioned might give a solid connection with other investigations and then generate a theoretical insight of value to the field (Stolterman & Wiberg, 2010).

Furthermore, to analyse and organise the data, the coding system will be integrated by categorising the finding of the information into different codes. Coding is understood as a summative of words that captured the essence by attributing an interpreted meaning, in this case, at the finding (Saldaña, 2015). Therefore, the usage of codes to classify information will be according to the outcomes that influenced the students' level of engagement. The process of classification will be through the codes extrapolated from the findings: autonomy and freedom, group work, English development, meaningful experiences, variety in assessments, and attitude during the process.

Finally, triangulation will be an essential part of the research to validate if the finding provided a realistic conclusion about the effect on students' engagement and how the school evaluates them according to their project production. In this respect, triangulation uses multiple data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of a particular phenomenon, as is the effect of PBL (Carter et al., 2014). The procedure involves collecting diverse data types from people or groups to gain multiple perspectives, which will be exhibited in the discussion section.

9. Primary Research Findings

9.1 Autonomy and Freedom of the Learner

The first finding was that the levels of autonomy and freedom were two relevant factors when doing language learning activities. These factors were significant in the outcomes because it was considered a highly significant effect when doing LLAs. Most of the students demonstrated different levels of engagement through all the stages and processes of the project according to the different levels of autonomous or guided work. The observations showed that the project process, where students had autonomy in crafting their designs, was

more effective toward their engagement due to their positive attitude and participation than when presenting and searching for specific information. Which could be visualised in of the observational charts in the following image:

Observations group 1, section III and VI.

VI. Work Process	Most of the time	Highest level
1) The participant work during the first week	6	7
2) The participant work during the second week	6	6
3) The participant work during the rehearsals	7	7

III. Attitude	Most of the time	Highest level
1) Participant demonstrated respectful behaviour toward their partners when presenting. Participant 1	4	5
2) Participant demonstrated respectful behaviour toward their partners when presenting. Participant 2	3	5
3) Participant demonstrated respectful behaviour toward their partners when presenting. Participant 3	6	7

From appendix D, Images 1 & 2.

As it is possible to see, there is a decrease in values in the attitudes that the participant demonstrated during the presentations and more participation in working during the project process. Besides, there is a pattern quite similar to this result in other groups as well, in which the values of the attitudes are lower compared to the work process numbers.

In the focus groups, most students mentioned that more freedom within the project would have positively affected their engagement; however, a significant minority did not express a clear preference for it. This outcome emerged on one of the questions when they

were asked about what was missing in the project according to their opinion, which is illustrated in the following quote from the focus groups:

“Pre-service teacher: Last questions to close here, Do you think that there was an element that perhaps was missing to you feel even more motivated ?

Student 1: Yes! Freedom and flexibility.

Student 2: More freedom. Something as simple as choose our country.

Student 3: Freedom and autonomy. yes.

Student 2: They were like, this is what you have to do, this is your groups, this is your country, these are your cities, I would have liked to decide.

Student 4: I consider that don't.

Pre-service teacher: Ok...

Student 4: if they would have added more freedom, even if I would have love it, the project would have change, it would have been “travel agency” any more.

Student 5: I would have change anything.

Student 6: Me either.

Pre-service teacher: Ok, thank you”

- [Translated from Spanish]

Moreover, the ones who positively bend toward autonomy would have preferred to have more freedom when deciding the characteristics of the project. For instance, their work team, the reason for the project, or the information required to investigate. In addition, they stated that it was demotivating to memorise all the compulsory aspects asked in the rubric (Appendix E) because they considered that the rubric requested specific elements which did not allow them to explore beyond those aspects. For example, every group had to find information about a city, tour attractions, food, and the weather for a specific country, instead of deciding what they found fascinating about a country and what was important to them to

be advertised. Furthermore, regarding the teacher interview, the teacher mentioned that the levels of engagement could have been higher if the project had a smaller extent of evaluating requirements. According to the teacher, the percentage of students that presented higher levels of engagement was 75% in the working sessions; however, this was only observable from the initial stage of the project rather than at the final stage of presenting.

9.2 Teamwork dependency.

The second finding was that using teamwork in the project is an influential factor in the levels of student engagement because of the dependency among the participants. The data collected from the focus groups and the teacher's interview demonstrated a negative inclination about how depending on others in group work affects engagement and motivation when this is not effectively implemented. However, some students considered that "the group work is useful and necessary, and the project was more holistic and complete because of that" [translated from Spanish] in terms of teamwork. Within this framework, around half of the students from the focus groups stated that depending on others when working on a project might harm their motivation to participate in LLA.

Likewise, in the interview, the teacher also remarked that working in teams might sometimes negatively influence the work process if there are some absences in the working sessions and when presenting. According to the teacher, this was because when some team members were missing, it might break the meaning of the presentations for the other participants. In addition, the teacher considered another factor as well which could affect the levels of engagement related to teamwork dependency, which is the cooperative organisation made by the teachers. It was mentioned that at least 25% of the student's engagement could have been affected because they were obligated to work with classmates considered acquaintances and not their regular partners. The way groups were formed was comparable to what students mentioned, in which they were asked about a motivational factor in the project.

In that context, approximately 25% of them responded that teamwork dependency was one element that did not help. Answers that could be illustrated in the following quotes:

“Student 4: Referring the situation, [...] it turns tedious to consider aspect out of your control, if your classmate comes, if your classmates don't come, in my case my partner didn't come for example, and all that is demotivational, very tedious”

Student 3: There are some situations that take the motivation away in some cases, for example when you are obligated to provide a house to work with classmates that you don't know”

- [Translated from Spanish]

Similarly, it can be observed how the components of “teamwork” might negatively influence students' perspectives and what they consider demotivational during the project.

Furthermore, regarding the observations, in some groups, several participants demonstrated different levels of engagement in language learning activities, which was illustrated by different behaviours. Some of the students in which the groups were incompleting exhibited disruptive behaviour, moments in which they were not participating, and struggles to maintain a constant working rhythm during the working sessions. Besides, in some groups, the absence of some students exhibited adverse effects on the performances of some presentations. Hence, this might demonstrate that the presence of every participant in the different stages of the project influences how engaged the other students might be while working and when presenting.

9.3 English development

The third finding was that there is a direct relationship between the students' English proficiency when undertaking an English project and how much engagement they might

demonstrate. The working sessions and presentations demonstrated that the students with high levels of English proficiency were not the most engaged, nor were the ones with the lowest levels of English.

The evidence from the observations suggested that the students who had more issues using the language in the presentations and the ones that needed more help from the teacher during the process exhibited less personal interest and complications in maintaining stable participation. In this regard, in the focus groups, some students considered it was harmful to face speaking learning activities and labelled it as demotivational and annoying. For example, when they have to present because they struggle with speaking in public in a language, they need more practice.

In addition, the students who, in the observations, tended to lead the different groups and demonstrated advanced uses of the language in the presentations did not demonstrate a lack of interest. However, they were the ones that expressed negative opinions in the focus groups. Moreover, these students with higher English proficiency also considered that the project did not affect their motivation to develop oral skills. One of them mentioned, "I don't believe the evaluation we had was focused on speaking to see a tangible improvement" [translated from Spanish]. In addition, they would not prefer to repeat a project because they consider it an "experience with a lack of challenging opportunities." Furthermore, the students with high English capability stated that they perceived the project as equal to a regular assessment. This perception was directly expressed by the focus groups when one of these students communicated: "I do this because of the grade, I am not winning anything, I am not winning knowledge, I already know this, and it is just memory, so it is useless for me" [translated from Spanish] while others high proficiency students agreed.

Additionally, according to the interview, the teacher thought that student demotivation came from the lack of language use and practice. Moreover, the teacher, who

also expressed a similar statement, said that some students' English proficiency directly affected their engagement level at the moment of presenting because of their speaking skills.

Peculiarly, these outcomes not only can be comparable with the ones gathered in the observations but also from the focus groups.

9.4 Reason behind - Meaningful experience.

The fourth finding is that it is critical to provide a reason behind PBL for the participants to give them a meaningful learning experience, such as solving a problem, finding a new solution and implementing it in the real world. This reason might increase or decrease the engagement level. In this regard, most of the students consider that the reason behind the project was only a regular grade; in fact, they considered that the project did not affect them on an emotional level for them to perceive it as meaningful. Although a few mentioned that even if the project were ungraded, they would have presented an assessment with quality, most of them rejected that idea and mentioned that they did it because of the grade. Besides, a minority described the experience of the project as meaningless. According to the reasons they gave, some of them expressed that "Doing a presentation is boring because it is mainly memorizing rather than understanding. It is only memory, so I will forget it, and it ended being just another grade that is not learning" [translated from Spanish].

In addition, the teacher mentioned similar statements expressing that not only the presentation quality would have been affected but also the same engagement of the students if this had not been a reason. In this regard, from previous experiences, the teacher described that the students showed better performances and engagement when the reason for the activity was a grade or in peer evaluations. According to the teacher, the students perceived the written task of the project as meaningful because the reason behind it was to design and construct. In this sense, it was directly expressed that: "there was the most emphasis in the

written part, and that was shown in students' work demonstrating more dedication because they have to design a create something" [Translated from Spanish].

Furthermore, regarding the observations, it was observed that the attitudes and behaviour toward the project exhibited more participation and engagement in the stages when students knew the teacher would assess them. At the same time, in the peer assessment, which was ungraded, the interest decreased. This observable change might also be compared with a statement that one of the students expressed: "The grade influences a lot in the performances because if you don't have a grade, there is nothing to exchange for your effort" [Translated from Spanish].

10. Secondary Research Findings

10.1 Attitude during the project

A secondary finding was that the student's attitude during the process changed throughout the whole project, as the students were more engaged in the first part, and this drastically decreased reaching the presentation. According to the teacher, 75% of the students engaged were enthusiastic about doing the different stages in the beginning. The teacher suggested that engagement was more present in the beginning since students were willing to present quality work in the written area than when developing oral skills because of the dedication and participation in that area. The observations showed differences in the dedication they demonstrated depending on the language learning activity they did; for example, the students doing the brochure instead of the presentation were quite enthusiastic. Moreover, in the focus groups, a few students remarked that working on the written part (Appendix F, Images 1 & 2), which was creating a brochure was enjoyable. However, it changed when they had to present because it was in English and front of everyone.

10. 2 The variety of assessments

The last finding was related to the use of different types of assessment concerning traditional tests. Most students considered that using different assessments positively affected them because it is more dynamic than standardized tests. They stated, “I feel that doing a project go outside the frames of normal English evaluations” [Translated from Spanish]. According to the teacher, using different evaluations helped motivate them.

11. Discussion

The four primary findings of this research are associated with the effects of the use of PBL in language learning activities. The data analysis has revealed that the different outcomes affect students' engagement and how they are correlated and might influence among themselves.

11.1 Primary findings Discussion

The primary outcomes suggest that autonomy is one of the main factors that affect students' engagement levels when doing LLA. Dornyei (2001) indicated that autonomy has significance in self-regulation in the L2 field, and students who can learn independently might gain more language proficiency. In this sense, the relevance of this outcome lies in how much autonomy the teachers must promote in the activities when using PBL to increase the student's engagement levels and develop the English language. In practical terms, it is essential to avoid overly guiding the process of PBL, so the students might perceive they are developing something new and valuable. This limit is because PBL projects are not made to provide predetermined outcomes or paths since they focus on authentic problem-solving approaches that incorporate students' autonomy (Tomas, 2000). For this reason, the autonomy of working in PBL might be represented as students' will to recognise their work as significant learning.

In addition, the learner's autonomy is also connected to teamwork usage in the project because it might bring consequences that generate collaboration among students or delay the

working process. In this regard, it is known by several studies that grouping is a consistent pattern for PBL, which sometimes is to form groups so that novice students can learn from experienced students (Mergendoller & Thomas, 2005). Regarding the data, the essence of this outcome relies upon the consideration of perceived teamwork as a bidirectional influencing factor. For instance, even when it might positively affect the students' engagement experiences, it might be necessary to use techniques to promote full participation, so this will be manageable. This was experienced in the research due to the dynamic some groups had when they worked. In this vein, while in some groups, the participation was significant, and they worked together, in others, it was enough that one participant did not contribute for the whole group to be affected.

Furthermore, the data has also demonstrated that meaningful experiences in LLA directly affect students' perceptions of PBL and how much engagement they will exhibit. In this sense, Trowler (2010) stated that a student who is emotionally engaged might experience affective reactions such as interest and a sense of belonging, reflected in collaborative behaviours and interest to participate. Moreover, according to the finding, this is because it might define the difference between a project capable of providing emotional engagement in students or making them perceive it as a regular assessment inside the classroom. According to the evidence, the project's design may make a difference if it provides a meaningful experience. For example, as Tommas (2000) mentioned, ask students to generate a solution to a problem which could be implemented or make them follow a predetermined path.

In addition, it is essential to highlight that the English development level is seen to be another element that affects positively and negatively the engagement levels of students. Queiroz (2020) stipulated that external sociocultural factors might influence students' performances, such as the need for achievement or fear of failure. In this case, regarding their English proficiency, they considered what they can or cannot achieve, which increases or

decrease their engagement. In these circumstances, the importance behind this outcome might be in how challenging a project must be applied to develop student engagement. Based on these findings, it is suggested that, in a PBL context, students demonstrate a lack of interest and low levels of engagement when the LLA is hugely challenging for them or not challenging at all.

11.2 Secondary findings Discussion

The first outcome of this section was the presence of participative and passive attitudes toward the PBL process in students, which is more than a factor that influences engagement. The observations demonstrated that this is a consequence of the levels of engagement. Nonetheless, in general terms, the following secondary finding suggests that applying PBL might influence other aspects of the learning process of EFL students, such as their attitude toward an assessment and how much they enjoy having different evaluations. Even though students manifest this perspective directly, there needs to be more evidence to claim this based on the amount of data.

11.3 Limitations

Nonetheless, some limitations concerning this investigation must be highlighted in this research. One limitation to consider was the type of implementation of the PBL in this context. Firstly, the implementation of PBL in this context refers to how the project was designed based on the textbook the school uses and not the regular units from the Ministerio de Educacion de Chile (MINEDUC). Thus, only the schools that use this textbook could apply the same aspects of this project to get the study results. Since the investigation was based on a project from the school with its characteristics and not from the MINEDUC, the outcomes and findings may be primarily helpful for schools with similar characteristics or schools that want to apply it in the future. Secondly, some of the typical PBL characteristics were not considered by the teachers when implementing the "travel agency" project, such as

problem-solving or decision-making. These traits could have affected the study outcomes by providing data more comparable with other studies about regular PBL applications.

Regarding this, the presence of problem-solving or decision-making could have provided more information, and the division of the adverse effects could have been fewer and more impartial.

Furthermore, other limitations to consider are related to the data collection. At the beginning of the observations, there needed to be more clarity about what the researcher was looking for because the project started before the study, which made the gathering process challenging. Since it was an unstructured observation, the elements observed in the process were too many. This situation made it difficult to organise everything and categorise it as relevant. Some of the observed factors might have been missed or not considered relevant before the research took form. Therefore, the data collected using this instrument could have been more helpful in interpreting this study in a way that provided more evidence to analyse to know more effects toward the engagement. Moreover, in one of the focus groups, it was also challenging to guide them to get the students' perspective on engagement because the students tended not to answer what the questions were asking, significantly decreasing data collection.

12. Implications

Regarding the implications of this research, it could be interpreted as the complexity of PBL and its characteristics. In this sense, the use of it when using language learning activities (LLA) exhibits several factors that influence the applications of projects which impacts the development of EFL students inside the classroom. Additionally, this analysis has provided an exploration of the use of PBL to support the understanding of its effects on student engagement. This comprehension was by observing the qualities the project had and

how those qualities influenced students' perception at the moment or did language learning activities.

In this regard, the outcomes suggested that the characteristics of this project and its applications directly affected students' engagement. In this vein, it is claimed by De Graft & Kolmos (2003), who announce that it is most common for students to feel motivated and work harder with PBL models rather than traditional teaching methods. In this regard, De Graft & Kolmos (2003) claim that in a PBL context, students need to be involved in research, decision-making, and problem-solving experiences, which gives students a sense of belonging and provides engagement. This concept of autonomy in PBL is also supported by Margendoller & Thomas (2005), who claim that there is a conflict associated between the benefits of student autonomy and the effectiveness of teacher control toward the language learning process of EFL students. This statement might explain how teachers need to promote autonomy and simultaneously provide engagement to apply PBL. If that is not the case, the engagement level will decrease, affecting the students' development. As Trowel (2010) explained, students might show disruptive behaviour or rejection toward the LLA.

According to the learning experiences concerning the reason behind PBL, students expressed that they did not consider that the reason behind the project was meaningful or valuable. Although the academic performances were not necessarily affected by the absence of meaningful learning experiences, they did affect the engagement levels, and the interest students demonstrated towards the project. As Levine (2004) indicated, the importance of global simulation inside the PBL approach influences students' perception of the project. This perception was also observable since students claimed that the project was just another grade and that the presentations were not perceived as an actual advertising situation. This perception contrasts with Sirisrimangkorn (2018), who specified that PBL needs to be connected with the real, authentic, and realistic world, so learners will be willing to

demonstrate their knowledge. Moreover, Supporting Levine's idea (2004), Trowler (2010) suggests that engagement has different emotional dimensions that require a sense of belonging to function. Therefore, this could suggest that it is significant for teachers to consider the factor that impacts EFL learners when using PBL and the characteristics needed in the PBL projects to get the most benefits possible.

13. Conclusions

To achieve the purpose of this investigation, the use of the project was the setting of the study and to collect the data. To achieve the purpose of this study, I decided to align my investigation with a qualitative study to help me understand my research question. Regarding the outcomes, it was found that several factors might be directly affected when teachers want to apply the PBL approach concerning students' engagement. The outcomes presented here portray evidence of some alternative consequences of using PBL beyond the academic. However, the project did not have the main principle of PBL, so the finding demonstrated how its implementation in context might generate different consequences. In addition, this research highlights how engagement related to PBL is a factor that, according to its complexity, has notable elements that can directly influence it.

In addition, a consequence of the research is that it is vital to acknowledge the different factors influencing students' engagement when applying it. Besides, it is also relevant to mention that the way a project is applied and its characteristics in a school context will generate in students a positive or negative perception of the project. Thus, this perception and their learning experiences will be reflected in their learning process. However, this research will provide helpful information about how PBL could provide the most effective outcomes when doing language learning activities. In this regard, this study would promote awareness of what pedagogical decisions must be in consideration, so the effect of PBL might improve the learning development of EFL students.

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15. Appendixes

15.1 Appendix A

The Observational Measurement of Engagement

Date ___/___/___ Groups Number _____ Grade _____

Observer _____

1) Very negative	2)Negative	3)Somewhat negative	4)Neutral	5)Somewhat positive	6)Positive	7)Very positive
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Use scale above to rate:

Section at the end of the project: I, II, III

I. Organization		Most of the time	Highest level
1) They displayed a clear organization in the order.			
Comments:			

II. Presentation Overall		Most of the time	Highest level
2) The visual Aid design showed a dedication , with photos and colours.			

Comments:	
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3) The participant presented and embodiment of the roleplaying by using the specific chunks taught in the lessons and the space to present		
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Comments:	
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III. Attitude	Most of the time	Highest level
1) Participant demonstrated respectful behaviour toward their partners when presenting. Participant 1		
2) Participant demonstrated respectful behaviour toward their partners when presenting. Participant 2		
3) Participant demonstrated respectful behaviour toward their partners when presenting. Participant 3		

Comments:	
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Sections at the middle of the project: IV, V.

VI. Work Process	Most of the time	Highest level
1) The participant work during the first week		
2) The participant work during the second week		
3) The participant work during the rehearsals		

VI. Comments during the working process.	
Comments of the participant 1:	
Comments of the participant 2:	
Comments of the participant 3:	

Inspired from template net.

Focus Groups:

Rules: Cada una de las reglas debe ser leída y revisada con todos los participantes y todos ellos deben estar de acuerdo con ellas, si uno no está de acuerdo esto, deberá dejar el focus grupos y por ende no ser participe del estudio.

- 1) El uso de esta data será particular y únicamente para este estudio, una vez terminado esto con fecha 2 de diciembre, esta información será eliminada y borrada de cualquier archivo.
- 2) Esto será completamente confidencial, y la información obtenida será totalmente anónima.
- 3) No se requiere la entrega de datos personales y tampoco se los pedirán.
- 4) Las preguntas se limitarán únicamente a las experiencias y percepciones del proyecto *Travel agency* para el ramo de Ingles.
- 5) Una vez terminada esta instancia, los participantes podrán en el futuro arrepentirse y se dejarán de lado su data para no ser usado en el estudio.
- 6) Los participantes están de acuerdo con ser grabados.
- 7) Este Focus groups será de forma abierta, por ende, los participantes entienden que no pueden hablar mientras los otros tengan la palabra, y que se trataran con respeto en todo momento, inclusive cuando no estén de acuerdo.

Estas preguntas están relacionadas a las instancias de *Speaking* dentro en el proyecto en donde ustedes tuvieron que hablar en inglés ya sea preparándose o al momento de presentar.

Desarrollo Oral:

- 1) Cuando hablan en inglés. ¿Qué efectos creen que tuvo en ustedes mismo el hacerlo y presentarlo dentro de un proyecto? EJ: fácil, difícil, entretenido, etc.
 - ¿Creen que hubo efectos negativos al enfrentarse al tener que hablar?
¿Cuales?
 - ¿Creen que hubo efectos positivos? ¿Cuales?

- 2) Si comparamos la primera evaluación de *Speaking* a principio de año. ¿Cómo lo experimentaron si lo comparamos con el proyecto?
- 3) ¿Dirían que fue más motivante el hacer y/o preparar un proyecto?
 - ¿En qué sentido?
- 4) ¿Consideran que el hacer un proyecto afecto su compromiso por aprender lo que debían al momento de hablar y presentarlo?
 - ¿Como?

Impresión:

- 1) ¿Les gustaría repetir el hacer un proyecto en lo que respecta a hablar y escribir en inglés?
 - ¿Por qué?
- 2) ¿Recomendarían el uso de proyecto en el aprendizaje a otros estudiantes?
 - ¿Por qué?
- 3) Si el proyecto no tuviera nota, ¿Creen que hubieran presentado la misma calidad que si no?
 - ¿por qué?
- 4) ¿Creen que hay algún otro elemento que quizás falto, para haberlos motivado aún más?
 - ¿Cual?

15.3 Appendix C

Teacher Interview:**Teacher Interview:**

Rules: Cada una de las reglas debe ser leída y revisada con todos los participantes y todos ellos deben estar de acuerdo con ellas, si uno no esta de acuerdo esto, deberá dejar el focus grupos y por ende no ser participe del estudio.

- 1) El uso de esta data será particular y únicamente para este estudio, una vez terminado esto con fecha 2 de diciembre, esta información será eliminada y borrada de cualquier archivo.
- 2) Esto será completamente confidencial, y la información obtenida será totalmente anónima.
- 3) No se requiere la entrega de datos personales y tampoco se los pedirá
- 4) Las preguntas se limitarán únicamente a el engagement de los estudiantes y percepciones del producto final del proyecto *Travel agency* para el ramo de Ingles.
- 5) Una vez terminada esta instancia, el entrevistado podrá en el futuro arrepentirse y se dejaran de lado su data para no ser usado en el estudio.
- 6) El participante está de acuerdo con ser grabado.
- 7) Esta entrevista será de forma semi estructurada, óseas preguntas semi específicas para luego indagar un poco más en ellas.

Estas preguntas están relacionadas a las instancias de *Speaking* dentro en el proyecto en donde usted tuvo que evaluar en inglés a los participantes de este estudio.

Engagement:

- 1- Habiendo recibido los broucher como el resultado físico del trabajo, y las presentaciones, ¿Crees que hubo presencia de Engagement en al menos el 50% de los estudiantes?
 - Si es más ¿Cuánto más? ¿Por qué?

- Si es menos ¿Cuánto menos? ¿Por qué?
- 2- ¿Cómo y de qué forma crees que el uso de proyecto afecto el engagement de los estudiantes al momento de hacerlo y de presentarlo?
 - ¿En qué momentos en particular?
- 3- Tomando lo que percibimos en el aula de clases y en comparación a las otras formas de evaluación ¿Crees que hacer un proyecto es más efectivo al momento de aprender acerca de algo?
 - ¿De qué forma?

Final Production:

- 1- Entre la producción de escritura y la producción de discurso oral, ¿En cuál crees que hubo una mayor motivación y ganas de presentar algo de calidad de los estudiantes hacia dicha producción?
 - ¿Cómo?
- 2- ¿Dentro de los resultados del proyecto, que elementos externos al proyecto e internos al proyecto crees que influenciaron en este?
 - Externos primero.
 - Internos siguientes.
- 3- Dentro de los resultados finales en relación con las producciones orales, hay elementos que quizás faltaron para proporcionar un engagement más presente, en aquellos estudiantes que consideras no dieron el 100%.
 - ¿Cuáles elementos podrías identificar?
 - ¿Cómo se pudieron haber aplicado?

15.4 Appendix D

The Observational Measurement of Engagement

Date 1/1 Groups Number 1 Grade 9th
 Observer Diego delencina

1) Very negative	2) Negative	3) Somewhat negative	4) Neutral	5) Somewhat positive	6) Positive	7) Very positive
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Use scale above to rate:
 Section at the end of the project: I, II, III

I. Organization		Most of the time	Highest level
1) They displayed a clear organization in the order.		4	7
Comments:	they have good organisation most of the time some of them hesitate, nervous?		
II. Presentation Overall		Most of the time	Highest level
2) The visual Aid design showed a dedication , with photos and colours.		6	7
Comments:	the design was good, good colours, the images are related to the country.		
3) The participant presented and embodiment of the roleplaying by using the specific chunks taught in the lessons and the space to present		4	6
Comments:	in general, it is possible to observe the role-playing of students, and all of them used the chunks required.		
III. Attitude		Most of the time	Highest level
1) Participant demonstrated respectful behaviour toward their partners when presenting. Participant 1 <u>HG</u>		4	5
2) Participant demonstrated respectful behaviour toward their partners when presenting. Participant 2 <u>MZ</u>		3	5
3) Participant demonstrated respectful behaviour toward their partners when presenting. Participant 3 <u>PC</u>		6	7

(Image 1)

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Work Experiences Coordination

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Comments:	<p>- (1) he had issues presenting, anxious, lack of preparation</p> <p>- (2) not totally prepared, he is probably not advertising</p> <p>- (3) he prepare himself. Fully immerse in the role.</p>	
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Sections at the middle of the project: IV, V.

VI. Work Process	Most of the time	Highest level
1) The participant work during the first week	6	7
2) The participant work during the second week	6	6
3) The participant work during the rehearsals	7	7

VI. Comments during the working process.

Comments of the participant 1:	<p>he used, but he used. of path. 3, he is concentrated and participating</p>
Comments of the participant 2:	<p>he participate, no monitoring needed.</p>
Comments of the participant 3:	<p>he make other work! participated a lot, "leader" of the group. he doesn't need monitoring.</p>

Inspired from template net.

(Image 2)

Rubric - Travel Agency

Brochure

Names: _____

Class : _____ **Score:** ____ / 56 points

Mark: _____

Aspect	Observation
<p>Presentation 8 points / _____</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design (adequate use of colours, texts and images) • Format (clear type of font and size) • Organization (appropriate arrangement of texts and images) • Neatness (clean and without smudges) 	
<p>Content 14 points / _____</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brochure cover (2.5) • Destinations (2) • Attractions & Activities (3) • Tour packages (2) • Additional information (2) • Contact information (2.5) 	
<p>Comparison 8 points / _____</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 comparative sentences • 3 superlative sentences • 1 as... as (equality) • 1 not as... as (inequality) 	

<p>Vocabulary 8 points / _____</p> <p>8 different adjectives to describe places</p>	
<p>Grammar 5 points / _____</p> <p>Every 2 mistakes, 0.5 will be deducted</p>	
<p>Spelling & Punctuation 5 points / _____</p> <p>Every 2 mistakes, 0.5 will be deducted</p>	
<p>Classwork 8 points / _____</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class 1: Brochure cover • Class 2: Destinations • Class 3: Destinations • Class 4: Attractions • Class 5: Activities • Class 6: Tour packages • Class 7: Additional info. • Class 8: Contact info. 	

15.6 Appendix F



(Image 1)



(Image 2)