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The challenges of implementing Project-Based Learning in English medium school

Project-Based Learning is a student-centered approach used to assist in developing learners' collaboration, communication, and critical thinking skills. Although there are great deals of benefits of this approach, the implementers struggle with the existence of challenges. This study aims to explore the challenges of implementing Project-Based Learning in one of the English medium schools in Kazakhstan. As a result, teachers' perceptions of PBL and ways of overcoming difficulties were investigated. The participants were teachers with extensive experience in implementing PBL in English medium schools. Data was collected through qualitative method and techniques, including oral and written interviews, which were analyzed to identify teachers' perceptions of their roles in PBL. Moreover, the way of these issues was questioned to succeed. The findings of the study demonstrated that there are several challenges of PBL, such as lack of experience, time, and language acquisition. In addition, PBL is used as a tool for assisting in gaining some skills for the teachers and learners.

Keywords: Project-Based Learning, challenges, EFL teachers, teacher's role, perception, implementation, English medium school, contemporary methods.

Introduction

The use of new contemporary methods or approaches to teaching is required to gain knowledge in the modern world, and teachers should be able to provide capabilities and methods that can be changed easily according to students' aptitudes. Consequently, scientists for more than a century have conducted a large number of researches and studies to consider learners' demands and needs. From these studies, new teaching methods and practices have emerged, and the Project-Based Learning (PBL) methodology started to expand and be popularized as one of the beneficial methods to apply in the education sphere. Project-Based Learning is a teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by doing projects for an extended period. Students with teacher assistance try to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging, complex question, problem, or challenge [1].

PBL aims to combine the lesson with real life. Thus, students gain knowledge through solving problems in a real authentic environment, discovering new things with the utilization of their critical thinking and communicative skills. Nevertheless, there are some challenges in implementing PBL. Although this approach is student-centered, it is challenging for teachers to instruct learners to be more comfortable while facing difficulties and integrating with other subjects. Besides, it is one of the most time-consuming approaches in the educational sphere [1].

The purpose of the research: The study aims to investigate English medium teachers' perceptions of their roles while using PBL and identify the difficulties of its implementation, and subsequently explore how to overcome these challenges.

Research questions:

The study has attempted to respond to the following set of questions:

1. What are the teachers' perceptions of the teacher's role in PBL?
2. What challenges do teachers face while implementing PBL?
3. How do teachers respond to these challenges?

Theoretical framework

Historical background

In terms of historical background, American educational reformer Dewey is the founder of the PBL methodology, for which he is regarded as the ideological father. Dewey formulated the slogan "learning by doing" and conceived and devised PBL between the 19th and 20th centuries [2]. In addition, he proposed to

improve responsibility and personality of learners towards their own learning, as the main point of PBL is learning through experience in the process.

Challenges of implementing PBL at school

Despite the fact that it offers many advantages, implementing PBL in schools has always posed a number of barriers and difficulties for teachers — it demands to overcome and solve some challenges to succeed. There are major challenges associated with PBL, such as lack of time, a new facilitator role, organizing group work, and others.

Most teachers do not have enough time when it comes to designing and preparing projects [3]. As an example, the challenges of implementing PBL in middle school in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, were examined [4]. The researcher used a sample of 105 teachers from different fields, such as math, social studies, language, reading, and art, by taking an online questionnaire about data on the preference for using PBL and teachers' perception. The result of his study indicates that teachers did not have sufficient time to carry out or implement PBL, and they had to pay more attention to planning projects.

The requirement for teachers to adopt a different role in PBL from the traditional classes presents another important barrier to its application. It was claimed as evidence that teachers have to find a way of dealing with their new role as facilitators [5]. In obedience to a requirement of PBL, teachers should not conduct themselves as lecturers; on the contrary, they should behave like mentors and advisors. Most teachers respond that to alleviate learners' lack of knowledge, they still utilize the teacher-centered teaching method while doing projects, and this can be explained as a legacy of the Soviet time where the teacher was the dominant person in the classroom [6].

The last obstacle listed was the lack of available materials and resources that take into account the support of school's administration. One respondent replied that some projects might need expensive special tool which learners cannot afford [6]. In addition, some respondent teachers highlighted other problems: implementing projects within the schedule of school; fitting projects within all of the standards, meeting all of the testing accountability requirements, and collaborating with other teachers [4].

In conclusion, PBL has several obstacles that teachers may face during its implementation.

As has been mentioned before, teachers struggle with lack of time, organizing groups work and communication with the school's administration, the changing role of teachers to become facilitators and unavailable resources, and materials while utilizing PBL.

Methodology

To achieve the aims of this study qualitative method and techniques were used to collect the needed data. The purpose of the qualitative method is to define the teachers' perceptions of PBL and the challenges of implementing this approach and the ways of responding to those difficulties by means of semi-structured interview.

Qualitative research

“The qualitative method can refer to research about peoples' lives, lived experiences, behaviors, emotions and feelings as well as about organizational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena and interactions between nations. This means that qualitative research is not statistical and it incorporates multiple realities” [7].

The choice of the qualitative method was justified by the fact that people's opinions, feelings, and backgrounds needed to be taken into account. In addition, this method allowed the direct connection between participants and the researcher, providing an opportunity for investigating data in-depth with the quantitative method.

Doing projects during PBL requires teachers to change their role to guide learners into achieving by themselves. Thus, this study considers teachers as the main participants who contribute to the development of PBL in the Kazakhstan Education System. Furthermore, thematic analysis was used to group the participants' responses [8].

Participants

The target participants for this research were seven teachers who had the experience of using PBL within their subjects with English as teaching medium schools from three different regions. The interview questions were designed and written in the English language. The participants were two male and five female teachers of various ages of English and Global Prospect subjects. Some of the teachers had experience teaching abroad and in Kazakhstan.

Instrumentation

To get more accurate responses from teachers, a semi-structured interview data tool was used. As the interview is known for being a flexible and widely utilized method, it helps to seek in-depth answers from teachers' perspectives. Semi-structured interview is justified as there are several key questions that contribute to define the areas to be explored, but also allow the researcher the flexibility to pursue an idea in a response in more detail this is a medium between structured and unstructured interviews [9]. Interview questions for teachers were semi-self-structured, as they have ample experience and ideas. During the questioning, sequential questions might have occurred, so interview did not follow certain strict order. It was designed to find out the teachers' attitudes towards PBL, teachers' role and challenges of implementing PBL and how teachers respond to these challenges. Interview contained four main questions and sub-questions. In the first part of questions, teachers were allowed to talk about their mood, a little about themselves, experiences of working at school and what subject they teach. The second part of questions concerned teachers' attitude, understanding and the perception of PBL, whereas the third and fourth parts of questions were related to the challenges with questions, such as "What challenges have you faced while implementing PBL?", "If you need help on PBL whom do you usually address your query to? (Why/not?)", "What factors could help you to overcome these problems?", "How do you respond to these challenges?". The researcher tries to ascertain what the drawbacks of PBL teachers deal with and how they reply to those difficulties. The purpose of this study was to reveal opinions of teachers, moreover, to know how Kazakhstan teachers understand, describe PBL comparing to other countries teachers which were mentioned in literature review.

Results

The following indicated results of the research which were gathered during the investigating the study. Firstly, data was collected with the help of the semi-structured interview from teachers who utilize PBL in English medium schools. This interview was audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher.

Table 1

Overall teaching experience of teachers.

№	Participants	The age of the participants	Overall teaching experience	PBL teaching experience
1	1SSKN	26	4	2
2	2FMSK	42	13	1
3	3SGEV	28	7	2
4	4MAKR	30	6	2
5	5MLEO	38	5	3

By looking at the first and second parts of questions of teachers' responses, PBL is a new approach in the Kazakhstan Educational system; thereby, most of the teachers implementing PBL are young experts, as indicated in Table 1. By the term of expert teachers, they are foreigners who had experience in this sphere before abroad. In accordance with Table 1, the people who had taken the interview were young and pre-serve teachers and elderly experts. The second column demonstrates the experience of teachers at school and two teachers have been working between 1–5 years. According to the third column, teachers have been implementing PBL for less than three years and more than five years. 5MLEO claimed: "Before the applying PBL, teachers had an experience abroad and were educated about PBL".

The attitude and understanding of teachers towards teacher's role in PBL and the aim to investigate how teachers perceive the implementation of PBL were covered in the interview. The results of these questions display that teachers, first of all, understand PBL as a student-centered approach which is participatory, interdisciplinary and can assist in enhancing collaboration, communication, and critical thinking skills of learners as was mentioned by 3SGEV. Moreover, replies from teachers demonstrate that while implementing PBL teachers should play the role of a facilitator, guide, and instructor. Some of them answered that being in a monitor, moderator roles are considered crucial. Besides these, teachers admit that playing facilitator role is the most challengeable part of the implementation of PBL because it requires a lot of patients and time and completely different role compared to other approaches. As an example, 2FMSK justifies: "While I was implementing PBL, I struggled with playing roles, like being a facilitator and guide". However, other teachers also consider that after having experience on PBL, it is not difficult on nowadays. 4MAKR mentions: "Cur-

rently, I feel confident and certain on doing projects rather than the first experiences, because I know how the process goes further”.

Table 2

Mentioned challenges, causes and ways of overcoming the implementation of PBL by respondents

№	The challenges of implementing PBL	Causes of the challenges	Ways of overcoming those challenges
1	Lack of English language acquisition	The majority of the students are from villages, which means that all students are unable to speak English fluently.	Conducting the additional lessons in English.
2	Inconvenient curriculum of the school	Students have great deals to do apart from doing projects.	Requesting the school administration to reconsider the curriculum in the beginning of the academic year.
3	Lack of time to carry out the researches	PBL requires frequently long-term plan to obtain the result.	Setting the deadlines properly works well.
4	Insufficient financial support of school administration	Carrying out the investigations on PBL in various subjects need to have special tools or goods.	The final product should be aligned with the financial support of the school. Teachers should take into account in advance.
5	Lack of experience and skills of the teachers on PBL	PBL is getting popularized in Kazakhstan recently. In addition, some of the teachers are pre-service. Therefore, there is insufficient experience of teachers who were holding the lessons on PBL.	Advising with experts on PBL; Receiving feedback from students; Searching for the reliable resources on certain issues.

In the next part of the interview, the researcher interrogated teachers about the challenges they encounter in the process of utilizing PBL, as demonstrated in Table 2. As for the replies of participants, lack of language acquisition is considered the first limitation of PBL due to all Kazakhstani students are incapable of speaking the English language properly. 1SSKN replied that “In our school, students are collected from villages and other cities” considering the quality of teaching English in villages or in ordinary schools, “it is really tough to conduct the project with students”. Moreover, 5MLEO responded that the school’s inconvenient curriculum influences to implement PBL unsuccessfully because when the making project demands much time and students are usually busy with other tasks. The next challenge was lack of time. 1SSKN claims that to take satisfying results, PBL requires a long time to hold it. Preparing assignments for every week and setting deadlines are one of the difficulties for teachers. In addition, 4MAKR indicates that students struggle with time consumption. In order to prevent their challenges, teachers should control by setting deadlines. Finally, as 1SSKN justified the financial support of school administration, assessing students were challenging for the teachers.

Moreover, the researcher tried to identify the responses to those challenges teachers encounter while conducting PBL. The participants of this study justified that if they need help conducting lessons, they address their colleagues and expert teachers who have sufficient experience in conducting PBL. For example, 2FMSK claims: “Planning and conducting the lessons were challengeable for me on PBL, because I do not have sufficient skills. Therefore, I am always advised by those teachers who are experienced”. In addition, participants gain knowledge and seek relevant information from various books and reliable Net sources. 4MAKR: “I actually search for the net to find a solution.” Furthermore, feedback from students helps to overcome those challenges which were mentioned above. For instance, 1SSK indicates that providing and receiving feedback from students is the most crucial support for them to do a project in the right way. Besides these, 5MLEO justified that changing the mindset of teachers is one of the challenges because, in real life, teachers have plenty of jobs, e.g., conducting lessons, preparing lesson plans, and checking the assignments of learners. Furthermore, 1SSKN mentioned one more way of overcoming the difficulties of financial reports. It was stated that this issue should be retaken into consideration at the beginning of the academic year. According to 3SGEV, the main drawbacks of PBL, such as time and language acquisition, are solved by setting the deadlines properly and having additional English lessons.

One of the peculiarities of this study is to discover the information unexpectedly. The respondents consider that despite the existence of several challenges, carrying out the research through PBL paved the way to

gain certain skills. These skills were advantageous for teachers and students as well. The particular reason for the utility of PBL for both sides is if the teachers are skillful, then there is too much hope that students will obtain the abilities as capability and proficiency as well. The procedure of the implementations has demonstrated that the scores of students in the end with the comparison of the beginning were increased. Furthermore, they became capable of completing the tasks at high speed and were collaborative, creative, as well as one of the interviewees, 4MAKR, mentioned in a semi-structured interview. As a justification there is a statement of 4MAKR: “My learners acquired some skills by experience of PBL as me. For the reason that is, likewise I learned a lot during the implementation and made attempts to teach how to be skillful in accordance with my role of guide on this approach. I completely agree with the definite expression- learning by doing.”

Discussion

The results demonstrate that there are many challenges which teachers encounter in the process of conducting lessons on PBL are similar to [3] and [4] the studies. The most difficult and frequent challenges are a lack of knowledge, time, experience, etc. Lack of knowledge is considered the basic and important problem on implementation of PBL as it can lead to other challenges, such as scaffolding, time-consuming, and group work problems. Also, this problem is taken into account as the main one in this study compared to the works [3] and [4]. As in [5], survey participants believe that the essential role of PBL is facilitators. Likewise, teachers roles paved the way the certain skills as stated before.

Conclusions

PBL is a participatory, student-centered approach that allows students learning by doing projects, discovering knowledge by themselves which connects situation with real life, increases the engagement and helps to enhance skills, such as problem solving, communication, and collaboration. The purpose of this study is to investigate the perception of teachers towards teacher’s role on PBL and the challenges of implementing this approach and the ways of responding to those difficulties in Kazakhstani education system.

The researchers utilized qualitative method and semi-structured interview data collection in order to respond to questions of study. The interview was conducted among seven teachers who use PBL in English medium at NIS in various regions of country. According to the responses of teachers, participants perceive teachers’ role positively in PBL as a facilitator, guide, moderator, monitor, and instructor. Playing different role in this approach was challenging at the beginning of teachers’ experience, but nowadays they are accustomed to these roles. In obedience with participants’ answers, we examined the challenges of implementing PBL: lack of knowledge, time, experience, and others (inconvenient curriculum, financial support of school administration, grading). To implement PBL and get a satisfying result need a long time duration and sufficient knowledge. To find the solutions to these challenges, teachers always address to the expert teachers, other colleagues and search sources, such as books and websites. In addition, giving feedback to students is also one of solution to the issue of a lack of knowledge.

As a result, in order to prepare future school graduates to the real life, students need to gain profound knowledge and skills. Nowadays, the requirements of successful work or study places for students are demanding a high quality of knowledge and competent specialists. For country’s flourishing future, if teachers and Kazakhstani educational system understand the importance of implementing PBL better, then all students will get an opportunity to reinforce themselves. Then, teachers surely bring up well-organized, responsible, self-directed, prepared and creative generation from the foundation.

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Ағылшын тіліндегі орта мектепте жобалық оқытуды жүзеге асырудың қиындықтары

Жоба негізінде оқыту — бұл оқушылардың топтық жұмыс, қарым-қатынас және сыни ойлау дағдыларын дамыту үшін қолданылатын оқушыларға бағытталған тәсіл. Бұл тәсілдің көптеген артықшылықтары бар болғанымен, оны жүзеге асыру барысында бірқатар проблемалар туындайды. Зерттеу жұмысы Қазақстандағы ағылшын тілді мектептердің бірінде жобалық оқытуды енгізу мәселелерін зерттеуге бағытталған. Сонымен қатар, бұл зерттеу мұғалімдердің жобалық оқытуға деген көзқарасын және қиындықтарды жеңу жолдарын қарастырды. Қатысушылар ағылшын орта мектебінде жобалық оқытуда тәжірибесі бар мұғалімдер болды. Деректер сапалық әдіс арқылы, соның ішінде жобалық оқытуда олардың рөлін қабылдауды анықтау үшін ауызша және жазбаша сұхбаттарды қолдана отырып жиналды. Сондай-ақ, бұл жобалық оқытуда туындаған проблемаларды шешудің жолдары анықталды. Зерттеу нәтижелері тәжірибе, уақыт және тілді меңгеру сияқты жобалық оқытудың бірнеше проблемалары анықталғанын көрсетті. Сонымен бірге жобалық оқыту мұғалімдер мен студенттерге белгілі бір дағдыларды игеруге көмектесетін құрал ретінде қолданылады.

Кілт сөздер: жобалық оқыту, проблемалар, ағылшын тілі мұғалімі, мұғалімнің рөлі, қабылдау, жүзеге асыру, ағылшын тілі тереңдетілген мектеп, оқытудың қазіргі әдістері.

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Проблемы реализации проектного обучения в английской средней школе

Проектное обучение — это ориентированный на учащихся подход, который используется для развития навыков командной работы, общения и критического мышления у студентов. Несмотря на то, что такой подход имеет много преимуществ, его разработчики сталкиваются с рядом трудностей. Данное исследование направлено на изучение проблем внедрения проектного обучения в одной из англоязычных школ Казахстана. Кроме того, в процессе этой работы изучалось отношение учителей к проектному обучению и способы преодоления трудностей. Участниками были учителя с большим опытом внедрения названного выше обучения в английской средней школе. Данные были собраны с использованием качественного метода и методов, включая устные и письменные интервью, которые были проанализированы для определения восприятия их роли в проектном обучении. Результаты исследования показали, что было обнаружено несколько проблем проектного обучения, таких как отсутствие опыта, времени и овладение языком. Кроме того, проектное обучение используется в качестве инструмента, помогающего учителям и учащимся приобрести некоторые навыки.

Ключевые слова: проектное обучение, проблемы, учителя английского языка, роль учителя, восприятие, реализация, школа с уклоном английского языка, современные методы обучения.