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Integrating Project-based Learning in Oral Presentation Assessments: Lessons Learnt and Way Forward

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ABSTRACT

Project-based learning (PBL) promotes student-centred learning and encourages students to learn by actively participating in authentic or meaningful projects. PBL is usually adopted in science or mathematical subjects, but limited research explores its use in an Academic English context. This paper aims to explore the use of PBL in supporting students' development of contextualised oral presentations in an Academic English classroom. A qualitative study was conducted to gain insights into the impact of PBL on students' learning and outcomes, and to explore challenges faced by students and areas for improvements. Data collection tools include student reflective journals, instructor's observations, and semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate that the process that students have undergone through PBL resulted in a more authentic and meaningful presentation content (for most students). Students also reported being more aware of their audience when preparing for presentations and developing important soft skills like teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking and leadership. Students, however, highlighted concerns with logistic issues, quality of teamwork, and inaccessibility to information which might have impacted their project outcome and their final oral presentations. Recommendations are provided for improved integration of PBL in oral presentation assessments and future research.

KEYWORDS: Academic English (AE), oral presentations, project-based learning (PBL), soft skills development

INTRODUCTION

Developing students' communication skills has constantly been recognised as essential for success in academic and professional settings. Oral presentation skills play a vital role in fostering students' ability to organise and articulate their ideas clearly and engage with audiences. Traditional approaches to oral presentations, however, often result in superficial learning as students often rely on readily available materials found on the internet, producing content that lacks authenticity, and depth (Aiedah & Lee, 2012).

For oral presentations to be meaningful, the objectives of the oral presentations must be authentic and related to real world contexts. Students must also present to real audiences. By doing so, students would be encouraged to produce content that is relevant to the real world, resulting in more purposeful and impactful communication. However, in many language classrooms, there are limited opportunities for students to practise their oral skills other than in the classroom context (Bakar, Latiff & Hamat, 2013; Torres & Rodriguez, 2017; Yahaya, Madzlan & Muhammad, 2021). Furthermore, many students perceived subjects focused on oral skills development as uninteresting, unengaging, and less relevant if compared to other core subjects (Aiedah & Lee, 2012). This highlights the need for language instructors to make oral presentations more engaging and meaningful for students.

One strategy that language instructors can consider is to embed project-based learning (PBL) in their oral presentation classroom. According to Buck Institute for Education's website, PBL is a "teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging, and complex question, problem, or challenge." It is one of the leading methods adopted by many educational systems in the 21st-century skill (Khánh, 2015; Torres & Rodriguez, 2017; Rubrica, 2019; Teng et. al., 2021).

PBL embodies a constructivist approach to learning (Bell, 2010). It encourages learners to actively engage in real-world, authentic, and meaningful projects or tasks. It promotes a learning process through social interaction and group work over an extended period (Kavlu, 2017; Markula & Aksela, 2022). In PBL, students demonstrate their learning through the creation of a public product or presentation for a real audience. If it is well implemented, PBL can help students achieve deeper learning outcomes through meaningful, authentic, and real-world learning (Lathram, Lenz & Vander Ark, 2016; Teng et. al., 2021).

PBL is commonly employed in science and mathematical subjects where students naturally explore topics through authentic projects (Cakici & Turkmen, 2013; Redmond, 2014; Cervantes, Hemmer & Kauzekanani, 2015; Khaliq, Alam & Mushtaq, 2015). Numerous studies have also explored the impact of PBL in language classrooms and this will be discussed in the following section.

LITERATURE REVIEW
PBL in the Language Classrooms
Fundamentally, PBL is supported by the theoretical framework of experiential learning. This framework emphasises that knowledge is best acquired through direct experience, aligning with PBL's focus on real-world applications. Experiential learning, through Kolb's (2014) learning cycle,

highlights the importance of concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. In the context of PBL, students engage in authentic tasks that mirror real-world scenarios, providing these concrete experiences. They then reflect on their processes, form conceptual understandings, and actively apply those understandings through the project's completion.

Many studies on PBL in language classrooms have shown promising outcomes (Mejang, 2008; Simpson, 2011; Castañeda, 2014; Poonpon, 2018; Teng et. al., 2021). Such an approach combines language learning with real-world applications, and this creates engaging and immersive experiential learning for students, which has an impact on learners' motivation and confidence (Poonpon, 2018). With PBL, students are often forced to use English for communication purposes, and this may have a positive impact on learners' proficiency (Poonpon, 2018). Apart from developing proficiency, a study by Simpson (2011) has also demonstrated that the PBL approach improved learners' soft skills such as presentation skills, communication and teamwork. Other studies which explore the benefits and implementations of PBL in language classrooms are the following: Figure 1: Studies on PBL in language classrooms

Research by	Research objectives	Research findings
Zhong (2023)	To investigate PBL as a transformative teaching method in the context of English education in Chinese universities.	PBL significantly enhanced student engagement and comprehension compared to the traditional method.
Giliazova & Valeeva (2022)	To feasibility of PBL in developing presentation skills among engineering students.	PBL helped improved students' English language communication skills for professional and academic purposes.
Brooks (2022)	To explore the potential of PBL in enhancing active learning, learner autonomy, collaboration among students, and in improving both linguistics and non-linguistics skills of German language.	PBL enriched students' learning experiences and contributed to their overall academic and professional growth.
Su (2022)	To explore the effects of PBL in English writing courses at college level.	PBL resulted in students' enhancement in higher-order thinking skills, their ability to collaborate with peers, their capacity to apply knowledge in real-life situations. It also resulted in increased motivation and effectiveness in learning.
Cahyana (2022)	To investigate the effectiveness of PBL in enhancing speaking skills.	PBL significantly improved students' speaking skills.
Anyushenkova et al., (2020)	To explore the effectiveness of teaching a foreign language through PBL and develop students thinking and soft skills.	PBL encouraged teamwork and boosted motivation to learn a foreign language. It also facilitated language acquisition and prepared students for real-world applications of their language skills in professional contexts.
Shen (2018)	To explore the effectiveness of PBL in English teaching by assessing its impact on students' learning interest, cooperative ability and overall learning efficiency.	PBL significantly improved students' autonomous learning and English performance.
Liu (2016)	To investigate the feasibility of incorporating PBL into college English courses.	PBL motivated students and helped them acquire practical skills necessary for the workplace.

| Hartatik (2016) | To explore how PBL affects students' speaking abilities. | PBL provided optimal opportunities to explore and practise their speaking skills. |

These studies further emphasise the potential of PBL in developing language skills (written, speaking), communication, thinking and soft skills, enhancing language acquisition and students' ability to apply practical skills and knowledge to real-life situations. However, it is important to acknowledge the scarcity of studies conducted to specifically examine the impact of PBL on the quality or content of oral presentations, which is the primary focus of this study.

Implementing PBL in the language classrooms
Given its numerous benefits, PBL emerges as one effective strategy for language classrooms. However, successful implementation of PBL presents several challenges. Several reviews of literature on PBL identify obstacles to effective PBL implementation, for example time constraints, assessment issues, instructor readiness, managing teamwork, scarcity of relevant information, and practical execution (Sedubun, 2024; Mouden et al., 2024; Song et al., 2024).

For effective PBL implementation, Song et al., (2024) recommend that language instructors, 1. Integrate real-world challenges that are relevant to learners' context for an engaging and meaningful learning experience; 2. Emphasise the importance of teamwork and collaboration and encourage students to work in their groups; 3. Assign learning tasks that are authentic and have practical applications; 4. Provide facilitation and support to students particularly in navigating challenges; 5. Encourage students to continuously reflect on their project and learning; 6. Provide regular feedback; and 7. Incorporate technology to enhance PBL experience and reduce issues with logistics. Additionally, Sedubun (2024) suggests the importance of ensuring that 1. PBL is designed to cater to diverse learners; 2. Instructors are mindful of time limitation and plan feasible projects within the available timeframe; and 3. They are always prepared to adopt a facilitator role and guide students through the learning process. Liu's study (2016) resonates with these more recent findings, but she also emphasises the importance of a well-structured PBL that has clearly defined learning objectives.

Planning, designing, making decisions, discovering new ideas, solving problems, reflecting, critiquing and revising are some parts of PBL (BIE). PBL is indeed complex, thus students' learning must be well-supported and scaffolded. Instructors must also be aware that PBL is a student-driven approach to learning and that they should be given some autonomy to make decisions about their projects (Liu, 2016). Reducing control over the decision-making process as the project ensues is one strategy that could develop learner autonomy (Thomas, 2000; Mejang, 2008) and encourage students to take ownership of their project (Liu, 2016).

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Oral presentation (i.e. persuasive speech) was one of the key assessment components for ENG1050, a subject on English for Academic and Professional Communication, designed for Communication students. The subject has two main components: research writing skills and oral presentation. In their 20-minute persuasive speech presentations, students showcased their planned tasks and convinced the

examiner of the most interactive and engaging activities they conducted, supported by audience feedback and their reflections on their successes and challenges.

In previous semesters, students' oral presentations often lacked depth and authenticity, relying heavily on available internet resources and materials. These presentations often failed to showcase students' unique perspectives and their critical thinking abilities, partly due to generic assessment questions. To address this issue, PBL was integrated into the assessment. By requiring students to present ideas grounded in meaningful, real-world tasks derived from their PBL experiences, it was hoped that the overall quality of students' oral presentations, especially their content would be significantly enhanced.

Fifty-three ENG1050 students were tasked with a project involving brainstorming, planning, designing, and executing a 20-minute interactive activity for approximately 60 private secondary school students (15 to 19 years old).

Students were briefed on the project in the first week of the semester. In their respective teams (5 students per team), they were given 5 weeks to prepare for the activity. During the implementation, students were given the opportunity to implement their interactive activity to two groups of 6 to 8 participants. After the first implementation, students would reflect on the feedback received from the instructor and the participants and improve on their second round of implementation, after which students gathered more feedback. Students were debriefed after the sessions, where generic feedback was given and the information on the next course of action, which was to prepare for their final persuasive presentation, was provided.

The final presentation's main objective was to persuade a new audience, an 'examiner' and their peers to choose their interactive activity as the most interesting, inspiring and unique. Students kept a reflective journal to document their journey and learning from Week 1 till Week 11. Several discussion and feedback sessions were held to support students' project work. Figure 2 below provides an overview of the implementation of the PBL as part of the oral presentation assessment.

Figure 2: Overview of the integration of PBL in oral presentation assessment

Week 1 – Week 5	Week 6 – Week 7	Week 7 – Week 12
Students kept a reflective journal during the project		
- Students were briefed on the project (W1). - Students worked in their teams to produce an interactive activity.	Students implemented their interactive activity to two groups of secondary school students. After each implementation, students collected feedback from participants and their instructors.	- Students worked collaboratively to produce the final oral presentation where they need to persuade their audience to choose their interactive activity as the most inspiring, engaging and unique. - Students presented their ideas in Week 12.

The project that students were challenged with had significant PBL features:

Figure 3: PBL features of the ENG1050 project

PBL features	PBL for ENG1050
Integration of real-world challenges that are relevant to learners' contexts (Song et. al., 2024)	ENG1050 students majored in Communications. The challenge that they were tasked with was highly relevant to their own learning contexts. Engaging a group of secondary school students (15-19 years old) through an interactive activity is a real-life challenge that they may encounter in the future.
Assigning tasks that are authentic and having practical application (Teng et. al., 2021; Song et. al., 2024)	The tasks that were assigned to students were authentic. They engaged with a 'real audience' (the secondary school students) in an authentic setting (the private school), and their final oral presentation was based on real evidence and experience. The skills they developed might have practical workplace applications in future projects they engage with.
Emphasis on teamwork and collaboration (Anyushenkova et al., 2020; Brooks, 2022)	Students worked in groups to complete the tasks in the project. Their group learning was monitored through consultations conducted throughout the project.
Integration of reflection to support learning Žerovnik & Nančovska Šerbec, 2021)	Students were required to keep a journal where they document their reflections before, during, and after the project. Several open-ended questions were provided to support their reflection and to help them to internalise what they have learned; for example, what they did well and what they could have done better. Feedback forms were also distributed to the secondary school students and their responses were also reflected upon.
Student—driven learning (Brooks, 2022; Liu, 2016)	Students were guided in their planning, brainstorming of new ideas, reflecting and revising the plans. However, most decision-making was left up to the students. Students were given the flexibility to choose the theme of their interactive activity (based on a list provided). Students were taught a persuasive speech framework, but the design of their oral presentation was left up to them, with some guidance from the instructor.
Supporting students through feedback, clear guidelines and facilitation (Brooks, 2022; Zhong, 2023)	Throughout the project, the instructor played a facilitative and consultative role. Students were briefed on the project (objectives, expectations, requirements) at the beginning of the semester. Students were provided feedback on their projects through several consultations within the 12-week time frame. A checklist for the project was also provided to ensure that students were on track. Templates for interactive activity were also provided to support students' design thinking.
Integration of technology to support PBL (Dooly & Sadler, 2016)	Online materials that support students' PBL were accessible through Blackboard eLearn throughout the project. Students' reflective journals were stored on Google Doc for easy access.

PBL was introduced to foster more authentic and meaningful presentations that showcase students' voices and engagement. The study's main objective is to investigate the effectiveness of PBL in enhancing the quality (specifically, the content) of students' oral presentations. Secondary objectives include exploring the influence of PBL on the development of soft skills and examining the impact of

pedagogical strategies on student learning and outcome. The study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What are the impacts of PBL on students' learning and outcomes?
2. What are the key challenges and recommendations for improvement regarding the PBL experience?

METHODOLOGY

To answer these research questions, a classroom action research approach was adopted. Classroom action research involves a reflective, systematic process where instructors investigate their own practice to address some educational dilemmas or issues and to improve learning outcomes (Hong & Lawrence, 2011). The study employed a basic qualitative research design which is a type of research that aims to provide in-depth insights and understanding of real-world problems without having to quantify data (Moser and Korsrjens, 2018).

To comprehensively evaluate the impact of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) on students' oral presentation, five data collection tools were utilised:

- A pre-PBL questionnaire, employing a Likert scale ranging from 1 ("*never*") to 5 ("*always*"), to gauge students' understanding of PBL features. The results of this questionnaire highlighted specific areas where students required further clarification regarding the PBL process before embarking on the project.
- Students' final oral presentations were analysed to extract authentic evidence of learning and the practical application of knowledge gained through their PBL experiences.
- Students' reflective journals that were examined to gather qualitative insights into their personal journeys and experiences throughout the project implementation.
- Direct observations, conducted during project activities at a private school to document students' ability to execute their planned tasks, their interactions with their audience, and the emergence of both positive outcomes and challenges.
- Semi-structured interviews, consisting of 17 carefully designed questions, to gather their perceptions of PBL, their detailed experiences during project implementation, and the perceived development of their English language skills, particularly in oral presentations.

Students were conveniently sampled, and out of 53, 11 agreed to participate in the study. Based on the pre-PBL questionnaire, only five students had some experience with PBL while the rest had no experience with this method. Interviews with the 11 students were only conducted after students received their grades for their oral presentations. Only these students' final oral presentations and reflective journals were analysed.

The principal investigator was the instructor of ENG5010. To reduce bias, two co-investigators of the study conducted interviews with students and carried out observations during the implementation of the interactive activities.

To analyse the data derived from the interview sessions, qualitative content analysis was conducted. Qualitative content analysis is a "research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of

text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, pp. 1277-1288). Triangulation of data from various sources provided a comprehensive understanding of the students' PBL experience and its impact on their oral presentation. Analysis of final oral presentations was cross-referenced with reflective journal entries, and observations of student interactions and plan execution during the project were compared with both presentation analyses and journal entries. Insights from the semi-structured interviews, capturing students' overall perceptions, were triangulated with all other sources to validate and contextualise the findings.

FINDINGS

1. What are the impacts of PBL on students' learning and outcomes?

Analysis of student interviews revealed students' perceptions of the benefits derived from their PBL experience, organised into three key themes: *Development of language skills*, *development of soft skills*, and *others*. Students reported that PBL facilitated the development of language skills particularly in their communication and presentation skills. A dominant theme, however, was the development of soft skills, with the following subthemes: *Time management, task management, organization skills*, *teamwork abilities*, *conflict management strategies*, *critical thinking*, and *developing relationships*. Beyond skill-based benefits, students highlighted the acquisition of new knowledge, a boost in confidence and creativity, the discovery of new abilities, and a heightened awareness of real-world challenges.

Analysis of students' final oral presentations indicates an improvement in the quality of their content. In the past, students were merely lifting information from sources like Google. But since the oral presentation assessment was part of a project, students were able to produce content that was more authentic and had more substance. For example, to persuade the audience during their final oral presentation, students used evidence in the form of the feedback received from the participants of their interactive activity, their observations of participants' responses to the activity and their reflections as strategies to convince the audience. Students even used photographs from the session they conducted to show the unique features of their activity and how successful the event was in achieving the outcome they intended. The information that they shared in their oral presentation was authentic, more reflective and meaningful.

Students also shared that the authentic nature of the task pushed them to think creatively and innovatively. S6, for example, admitted that designing the activity was not his strength but he felt that the project forced him to create something original and not merely relying on existing ideas. This indirectly improved the originality of their final oral presentation, as all students relied on their projects experiences to form the content of the presentation, and no students relied on internet resources to produce their final presentation. One other significant impact, noted by the instructor, was students appeared more confident when delivering their final presentation. This could be because they were confident with the information that they shared since it was based on their experiences and concrete evidence.

An unexpected benefit from the PBL was that the interactive activity that they conducted for the secondary school students provided them with a valuable opportunity to practise their oral presentation

skills. The experience of presenting outside of the classroom and to a real audience was appreciated by many of those who were interviewed, with some (S3, S4 and S6) noting that it improved their sense of confidence. For example, S3 shared that presenting to strangers made him want to perform well, leading to him conducting the interactive activity without long pauses or fillers. S3 also shared that communicating with a group of secondary school students *"helped me overcome my fear of speaking in front of others."*

Another benefit of the PBL was that it heightened students' sense of audience. When communicating with secondary school students, S1 for example was trying his best to switch his style so that he made more sense to the participants of his session. He acknowledged the need to "*constantly adapt*" when communicating with the school students during the implementation of their interactive activity. S11 felt a heightened awareness of "*all kinds of secondary school students*" and the need to respond appropriately by choosing *"my words appropriately and ensure that my intonation and pace are okay"*. S4 also shared that during the implementation of her group' activity:

> *We were thinking about the audience and how like whatever we were saying like the things we were presenting could relate to them because like, sometimes like we feel that it relates to us but since they are like a different education level, we didn't know that it could relate to them, you know.*

Such an experience may have likely heightened their awareness of the importance of adapting their presentation to suit their audience or to effectively connect with their listeners.

Apart from developing communication skills, students also reported developing skills in critical thinking and teamwork. S11 for example shared her experience of having to resolve "*problems on the spot. We take on the challenge immediately and propose a solution.*" S8 also reported how team members helped her improve her work: "*I, prepared my script, and then one of my teammates helped me correct the script such as correcting the errors and adding more points to it."* Those who were assigned leadership roles also benefitted from the project. Being the leader of her group, S11 felt the need to ensure that all group members were aware of their task at hand and how the delegated tasks would be implemented.

Students' reflective notes provide further evidence that the PBL was able to make students think on their feet and take ownership of the process of learning. When reflecting on 'what did you do first in getting the PBL started?', students shared their experiences of analysing the project aims to guide their project, researching for details, starting off with individual brainstorming and presenting those ideas in their team, before deciding on one idea. S10 shared how his group tried to understand the "*age group*" before designing the activity for the intended audience. Students seemed to have also developed time management skills. For example, before executing their plans, one student shared how her group timed their interactive activity so that "*they stay on schedule*". S6 shared how his group came up with a timeline "*for the group to refer to…The timeline enables my team to come up with deadlines that we mutually agreed on, to complete the task*". Students also thought ahead: *"As the leader of the group, I compiled all the work…and created document packages for the students to have which we can later use for our presentations."*

When asked to reflect on what they could do differently to make the project better, students displayed ability to evaluate their experiences and identify areas for improvement, for example on the quality of the interactive activities that they had designed and implemented, and their discussion and group work, and the importance of preparation and planning:

> *Have a rehearsal to see how well the activity functions when put in practice as well as the opportunity to point out potential flaws in the design. I would have also considered the entirety of the activity as it seemed to be boring for the audience.*

This implies that his group might not have done enough preparation and being in such a situation made him realised the importance of practicing and anticipating the audience. S9 also discovered some hidden strengths: *"I learned that I am more patient than I initially thought"*, while S1 and S9 became more aware that *"trying to gain engagement from an audience is not easy"*.

2. What were the key challenges and recommendations for improvement regarding the PBL experience?

Analysis of student interviews revealed significant challenges across three key themes during project implementation: *Teamwork, the project itself,* and *language and proficiency*. With teamwork, students faced difficulties with *task delegation*, *navigating different approaches to project tasks*, and *managing free riders and ineffective peers* within their groups. Another theme, *language and proficiency* covered communication issues faced by students with group members that were not proficient in the English language which inhibited communication within groups. The most dominant theme is the project itself. When managing the project, students encountered numerous challenges including *time allocation issues*, *logistical hurdles*, *difficulties understanding the project requirements and its relevance*, *struggles with engaging the audience during the project*, *challenges in managing the audience*, *inappropriate communication channel*, and *a perceived lack of reference materials*.

The challenges students faced during the project were interconnected. S11 shared that communicating with peers, due to varying language proficiencies, presented a real challenge. Because of this, teamwork was affected for her group and put her team at a disadvantage, since the quality of the interactive activity would affect the final oral presentation and their final marks. Apart from this, S10 also revealed that communicating through informal channels like WhatsApp was not helpful as it often led to misunderstandings. As a result, students from S10's group were forced to meet their team members face-to-face outside of class hours, which was problematic for some members of the group. Ineffective team members was another challenge that students faced during the PBL. S11, for instance, shared how she had to make an extra effort to support her team and to delegate work because some members were of different nationalities. S10 shared issues with unequal contribution by team members with some being more productive than others. He shared his disappointment when group meetings were only attended by some. This, according to S10, impacted the quality of the discussion as members who attended the meeting would "assert their own ideas over the project" because they were there and not because of consensus decision making. S6 shared a more serious concern regarding teamwork:

> *Establishing friendlier relationships with the team members is important. The team did not have team spirit when working together. A lot of them just kept quiet. I feel that some of them could do more than what they were assigned to do so. For example, one needs to voice out more ideas and provide opinions instead of keeping quiet. The best part was some members did nothing and just showed up during the implementation stage.*

Similarly, S1, S5, and S7 experienced similar issues with uncooperative team members.

Apart from communication problems, students faced other issues which impacted on their PBL experience. Students who were unfamiliar with PBL reported their lack of understanding of what they were doing and why they were doing things in different ways. S5 raised her concerns with the relevance of PBL to her language subject. While S6 struggled to complete the interactive activity as part of the assignment as he was not able to see the relevance. S4 highlighted her concerns with no samples to refer to since they were the first cohort that experienced PBL for ENG1050:

> *Because we were like the first cohort to do PBL tasks, we did not have feedback or comments from our seniors. So, we had no idea what to expect and how to plan all of these appropriately.*

One of the participants also shared problems they faced during the implementation of the interactive activity. For instance, S11 shared that her group was not informed that one of the secondary school students was a special needs student. During their activity, the secondary school student did not appear comfortable and none of her group members knew how to handle such a situation. It was only resolved when another classmate aided the disabled student.

A bigger problem that students faced was in sustaining the engagement of the secondary school students. During the implementation, S5 found that engaging students was not an easy task. S3 and S10 highlighted that their groups struggled when some of the secondary school students were reserved or passive:

> *This project was the most challenging task as I had never had such experience, presenting the planned activities to this age group. Despite (some experience with) PBL activities in the past, this current project did little to prepare me for this group of secondary students. The secondary students showed less interest in the activities, and they thought the activities were less interesting. The students treated us like 'serious teachers.' Therefore, they were reluctant to communicate with us. Most of them were just looking down at their papers.*

Four students also found the location of the private secondary school quite inconvenient as it was quite far from the university. S4 and S11 highlighted that "... *for some of my classmates we had to, we all had to carpool or 'Grab' together, so the transportation problem was kind of hard. Also, all of us agreed that instead of taking a bus, we just use, we just carpool.*" S6 and S9 proposed a closer venue which would have reduced their travelling time and would have been more convenient for them.

Analysis of interview data identified specific areas for improvement particularly for the project itself. Several subthemes were identified: *Provide adequate information about potential audience*, *increase number of students per presentation (on-site)*, *increase time allocation per presentation, choose a suitable time/ day for the presentation (on-site), improve feedback practices, and choose a better location for the project, improve clarity on project requirements*.

Recommendations provided suggested a need for clarity, and a more structured and supportive learning environment. S6 shared the importance of ensuring that all students were aware of the project

requirements. He highlighted that initially, he was not clear that the interactive activity would be conducted at a place that was outside of the university. S11 emphasised the importance for students to have some background information about the students whom they were required to engage with. For example, students only knew that there were secondary students with special needs during the implementation of their activities. This added to their anxiety and nervousness as they did not know how to handle such participants. S5 and S7 suggested that a short tour of the private school might give them more ideas about the school and its students and would help with the preparation. S1, S3 and S8 suggested that engagement with the secondary school students would have been better if they were of a good size of about 10 to 12 participants and not 6 to 8 per group. Most importantly, students highlighted that the time given to conduct the interactive activity, which was about 20 minutes, was too short. Since students only met the secondary school students on the day of the activity, S1 suggested that 30 minutes would "*have been excellent.*" Most groups appeared to improve the quality of their interactive activity and managed their time better, in the second round of implementation through the feedback received for the first implementation.

DISCUSSION

The study investigated the effectiveness of integrating PBL in oral presentation assessments. Findings show that the PBL improved the content of students' final presentations. By engaging in real-world tasks with a real audience, students were able to draw upon real experiences to support their persuasive arguments in their final oral presentations. Moreover, the PBL experience heightened students' awareness of the audience and the importance of tailoring content and delivery for optimum audience engagement. Apart from this, students also reported experiencing situations that helped improve their confidence in public speaking, their time management, critical thinking skills, leadership and teamwork, which echoes similar findings in other studies on PBL for example, Brooks (2022) and Giliazova & Valeeva (2022).

The study demonstrates that integrating PBL with oral presentation assessments is a highly effective strategy. It provides students with real-world experiences and concrete evidence to incorporate into their presentations, contrasting with traditional presentation formats where content is often sourced generically from the internet. This approach also fosters deeper learning, and a more meaningful outcome for both students and instructors.

Furthermore, some of the pedagogical strategies applied worked well in ensuring a positive learning experience for students. Considering an authentic project as a base for students to develop real experiences and gather evidence for their persuasive oral presentation worked, as demonstrated in the study. Embedding PBL into the oral presentation assessment also helped students develop critical soft skills like teamwork, problem solving and critical thinking not only in developing ideas and executing them but also in dealing with immediate problems during the implementation of the interactive activity. In addition, giving students flexibility in the planning and the design of their interactive activity also seemed to result in a positive outcome as students strived to create something original and innovative and not merely copying their ideas from others. These findings are aligned with the findings in other studies on PBL in language classrooms, for example Arifatin (2023), Brooks (2022), and Su (2022).

While the study found that integrating PBL with oral presentation assessments is a highly effective strategy, it also identified some challenges. The authenticity of the project, while valuable in providing

real-world experience, created logistical issues for students. The off-campus location and limited access to information about the participants affected project implementation for some groups. Additionally, the presence of special needs students among the participants presented unexpected challenges for some, highlighting the need for greater student support when managing diverse learning environments. These inconsistencies in the authentic learning experience across different groups also raise concerns about equity and assessment fairness. This is because the quality of their implementation directly impacted their final oral presentations as participants' feedback served as crucial evidence to support their arguments in their persuasive presentations. This finding echoes Chi's (2023) study on PBL in EFL classrooms which revealed that PBL experiences led to disparities in her students' learning outcomes. As mentioned by Arifatin (2023), implementing PBL across diverse educational settings, like the one reported in the study, presents unique challenges. Instructor should anticipate potential difficulties and prepare students for them. Throughout this process, students should be provided with tailored support and guidance as suggested by Chi (2023). To ensure a more equitable experience and fairer assessment, implementing the PBL in a setting where the instructor has more control over the audience and the environment is one strategy that should also be considered.

In addition, a key area for refinement in the PBL implementation is the approach to fostering effective teamwork. While students encountered teamwork challenges, these issues surfaced primarily in reflective journals and interviews, rather than during the project itself, despite opportunities for students to raise concerns during consultations. This suggests the need for a more structured approach to promoting teamwork and ensuring equal contribution. Implementing a reward system that incentivises effective collaborations as suggested by Simpson (2011), could be beneficial.

Additionally, ensuring the relevance of all learning tasks is crucial. For instance, while reflective journals effectively captured students' project experiences, they should be adapted to also explicitly prompt reflection on the challenges of preparing oral presentations based on real-world experiences. In fact, most of the questions in the reflective journals only prompt students' reflection on the project and none focused on the preparation of the oral presentation which should have been the focus. This adjustment would address the disconnect some students felt between the project and the oral presentation assessment. By strengthening teamwork support and refining the alignment between PBL activities and assessment requirements, a more balanced and impactful learning experience can be achieved (Brooks, 2022).

A notable observation is that the integration of PBL seemed to primarily enhance students' soft skills development rather than their language proficiency or presentation skills. While the content of their presentations improved and some students became more confident in public speaking, students' participation in the project did not have much impact on their delivery. Future project integration in an Academic English context must place some emphasis on language skills development, apart from authentic content development. This ensures that the project complements and strengthens the core objectives of the Academic English subject and its intended learning outcomes.

Instructors can integrate PBL into oral presentation assessments within Academic English by ensuring the scope of the project remains realistic and manageable (Sedubun, 2024). To prevent students from using available resources on the internet, projects that students embark on must be personalised and only allow the use of authentic evidence. For instance, students could explore a local issue relevant to

their lives and use concrete evidence such as photographs or interview data to support their proposals for change, in their oral presentations. This aligns with the suggestions of Torres & Rodriguez (2017), who found that having EFL students base their oral presentations on a survey resulted in more meaningful and reflective outputs that did not resemble a traditional "schoolwork."

Another pedagogical strategy to consider is to design interdisciplinary projects that bridge a discipline-specific subject with an Academic English subject. This approach allows students to engage in PBL within their field of study and present their findings or proposals through oral presentations in the Academic English context. This strategy offers a more authentic and engaging learning experience while simultaneously addressing the critical elements of audience and purpose in oral presentations. Another example is to consider combining an Academic English subject with a community engagement project, that could be offered in subjects like Community Service. This could immerse students in real-world issues and challenges that they can address through persuasive or informative speeches.

CONCLUSION
This study explored the integration of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in oral presentation assessments to enhance the content of students' oral presentations. The study found such strategy significantly improved the content of students' final presentations, primarily due to the authentic project that gave students the opportunities for real-world experience. The integrated PBL also fostered soft skills development, such as teamwork, problem-solving, and critical thinking, boosted students' confidence in oral presentations and gave them an awareness about their 'audience'.

However, the study also identified challenges, for example, logistical issues arose from the off-campus location, limited access to information about the participants, teamwork difficulties and inconsistencies in the authentic learning experience across different groups. Additionally, while the content of presentations improved, there was limited progress in students' language proficiency and presentation delivery, indicating a need for greater emphasis on these aspects in future implementations.

For future PBL integrations in oral presentation assessments, a more balanced approach that emphasises both project-related and oral presentation skills development is recommended. Other areas that should be given focus are refining teamwork support through a realistic reward system, enhancing the relevance of learning tasks, and ensuring manageable project scope. To address the critical elements of audience and purpose in oral presentations, instructors can incorporate personalised projects that utilise authentic evidence in their Academic English curriculum or collaborate with other subjects that have embedded projects, which students can present on in their Academic English classroom.

This study has shown that PBL can be an effective pedagogical strategy for enhancing student learning and the content of their oral presentations. However, it is important to carefully consider the challenges of implementing PBL in oral presentation assessments and to continuously adapt strategies to suit the specific needs of students and to ensure the achievement of the intended outcomes. Future research is needed to further explore the potential benefits and limitations of PBL in oral presentation assessments.

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