

Developing Important Life Skills through Project-Based Learning: A Case Study

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Abstract Project-based Learning (PBL) is regarded as an effective teaching method to help students develop their life skills to meet the needs of the 21st century. However, PBL has not been widely implemented in Vietnam. Therefore, this case study was conducted to explore how effective PBL was to students' life skills development. Thirty-three students and an instructor in a university participated in the study. Data were collected using six classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews with nine students and the instructor. The study showed that PBL dramatically helped improve the students' problem-solving, critical-thinking, time-management, and interpersonal relationship skills. PBL also promoted some students' creativity, information technology (IT), research, leadership and film-making skills. The benefits and difficulties they encountered while doing projects motivated them to love projects that they even suggested that the school should incorporate more projects into the curriculum. The study recommends that PBL should be more widely implemented to maximize the development of students' life skills at universities.

Keywords: case study, life skills development, Project-based learning

Introduction

Improving students' life skills is considered as one of the key factors in higher education because those skills are equally important as academic skills (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Until recently, variety of teaching methods has been investigated to help develop students' life skills. Among them, Project-based learning (PBL), known as learning via doing projects, is regarded as an effective means to help develop students' life skills to meet the needs of the 21st century (Boss, Larmer, & Mergendoller, 2013). This approach is believed to be "highly student-centered and offers students freedom to work at their own pace that provides them opportunities to practice life skills" (Wurdinger & Rudolph, 2009, p. 117). For its positive impacts, both educators and alumni students, who experienced this approach, report that PBL enables them to learn and practice life skills (Wurdinger & Enloe, 2011). As projects require completed products, students are expected to employ variety of skills. Thus, this study was designed to explore whether projects helped foreign language learners develop their life skills while studying.

Defining Life Skills

Life skills are defined as "abilities for adaptive and supportive behaviors that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life" (World Health Organization, 1994, p. 1). They include critical thinking skill, decision-making skill, problem-solving skill, effective communication, interpersonal relationship, IT skills, and somehow foreign languages. These skills are crucial to strengthen the students' abilities in order to meet the demands and needs of the society (Prajapati, Sharma, & Sharma, 2017). Moreover, according to Dinesh and Belinda (2014), people who want to live meaningfully need life skills. This means that equipping students with life skills is

a need and a must for educators and teachers. Hence, in order to equip students with life skills, new, active and experiential teaching methods should be applied. Connectedly, PBL's student-centered features and its positive impacts on students' development can be potential means to develop life skills.

Project-based Learning

Literally, Project-based learning refers to learning via doing projects. It underscores constructivism theory, where students “create rather than receive knowledge and the teacher guides or facilitates this process of discovery” (Henniger, 2005, p. 45). However, PBL is “a more complex instructional concept than the term suggests” (Stoller, 2006, p. 21). In fact, Fried-Booth (2002), for example, emphasizes both process-orientation and product-orientation of PBL. He even defines PBL as a student-centered approach in which students are expected to collaboratively create completed products. Beckett (2002) agrees with those ideas about duration and no article integration of PBL. Nevertheless, he treats PBL as doing a research. In fact, he believes that PBL is like long-term sets of individual or collaborative tasks, which include researching and collecting information, analyzing and presenting data orally or in written language.

In support to these accounts, Mukalel (1998) describes no article 10 central features of PBL: “*creative imagination; novelty is basic; coordination of skills; visual expression; coordination of multiple stimuli; a research bent of mind; learning through enquiry; organizes thinking and imagination; principle of Do and Learn, and achievement motivation.*” These features best characterize PBL in terms of duration, integration, motivation, creation, and expression.

Project-based Learning and its Impacts on Life Skills Development

It is believed that PBL approach requires variety of skills as students often do not work alone. Conversely, to involve in a project set-up, students work in groups to relate with other students and their facilitators, as well as to many people in and outside their classroom. It brings many benefits for students in developing their technical skills, and many other life skills, which are crucial for young people to develop their full potential and become more productive in the society (Wurdinger & Rudolph, 2009, p. 117). Hsieh (2012), for example, indicated in his study on twenty-five college senior students that besides critical thinking, problem-solving and decision-making skills, participants' collaboration was improved tremendously by doing group work. In the same year, Tanner (2012) conducted a study on PBL in a vocational school with seven educators, administrators, teachers and five senior students. He agreed with Hsieh (2012) that PBL promoted students' collaboration, as well as provided students with opportunities for attaining and assimilating knowledge. Moreover, by interviewing with educators and administrators, teachers and students, he found that PBL approach enhanced students' innovation and other skills, which help close the gap between skills and knowledge needed in future workforce and what is provided in school. These conclusions are consistent with what Nassir (2014) claimed in his study that PBL has positive effects on students' academic performance, problem-solving skill and creativity. It also develops students' intellectual, social, emotional and moral skills. Similarly, Wurdinger and Qureshi (2015) summarized in their study that all life skills were improved after students conducted projects. Therefore, using projects to teach students is a useful choice for the needs of the 21st century (Boss et al., 2013).

However, most of the studies on PBL concentrated on quantitative data, such as those of Wurdinger and Enloe (2011), Wurdinger and Qureshi (2015), Wurdinger and Rudolph (2009). There has been a minority of qualitative analysis of no article students' progress as well as their experiences with project works. Additionally, although teachers' difficulty "less teacher talk requires more teacher time" has been recognized by Cornell and Clarke (1999, p. 94), no article students' challenges and advantages have not been well defined. Moreover, the non-agreement on the teachers' and students' attitude toward this approach still exists (Beckett, 2002). Some still show dissatisfaction with PBL though "most project-work proponents assert that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages" (Alan & Stoller, 2005). Furthermore, despite the benefits PBL brings to students, in Vietnam, it seems that PBL has not been effectively and widely implemented. Even in higher education, the current awareness level of Vietnamese students on PBL is indeed limited (Felipe, Amouroux, Pham, & Stojcevski, 2016).

Purposes of the Research

Therefore, through implementing PBL in higher education context in Vietnam, the study aimed to develop an understanding of the PBL's impacts on students' life skills development, as well as their advantages and challenges while doing projects. Particularly, the study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How can Project-based learning help improve students' life skills?
2. What advantages and challenges do the projects bring to learners?

By employing qualitative modes of enquiry, the study was expected to make an important contribution to the field of developing life skills for students in higher

education. The study was designed by employing a tool proposed by Beckett and Staler (2005), *The Project Framework*. However, while Beckett and Staler (2005) focused on the impacts' of PBL on students' language skills and other skills, this study emphasized students' life skills development rather than language skills. Therefore, the researcher modified the Project Framework to suit the study.

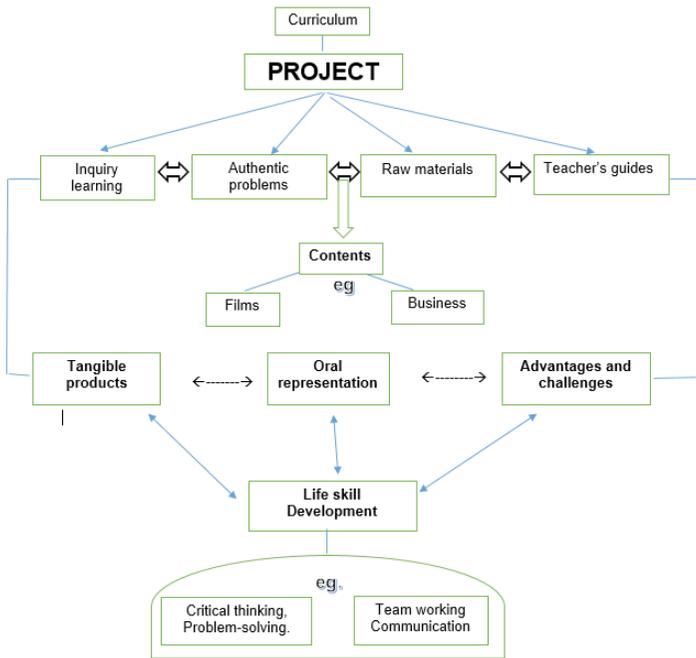


Figure 1. PBL Integration into the Curriculum.

As illustrated in the diagram, the project was integrated into the curriculum. As PBL underscores constructivism and constructionism theory, students construct knowledge by themselves. In fact, students encounter inquiry learning, authentic problems, raw materials and teachers' guides to solve problems sourced from the two topics in their textbook. They work

collaboratively to tackle the problems and are encouraged to search for their own solutions. Teacher's guides or questions are only utilized to coach or facilitate students' learning process. Students use their textbooks on a limited basis but are encouraged to solve problems from their own perspectives. By doing projects, they construct tangible products and make oral presentations. They also encounter some advantages and challenges in the learning process. Fortunately, they learn to develop their life skills both by doing their projects, and by taking the best use of their advantages and challenges. Conversely, the development of life skills also contribute to better oral presentations, and facilitate the use of advantages effectively and help them overcome their disadvantages. In short, this diagram adequately illustrates the process-oriented and product-oriented features of PBL as well as its embedded theory.

Methodology

This study aimed at discovering the impacts of PBL into students' life skills development as well as the advantages and challenges they encountered while doing projects. The study seeks for a detailed description of an English language teaching approach within a specific population and setting. Therefore, a case study design was selected for this study for its appropriateness.

According to Mackey and Gass (2005), a case study "provides a holistic description of language learning or use within a specific population and setting" (p. 171). Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) also stated the same viewpoint that "case studies investigate and report the complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance" (p. 253). Moreover, as the research focuses on investigating deeply into the impacts

of PBL and the students' experiences, a case study may "provide insights into the complexities of particular cases in their particular contexts," which "rarely can be found in correlational, survey, and experimental research" (Johnson, 1993, p. 7 as cited in Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 172).

Participants

This study was conducted to an intact class of second level English major of thirty-three students at a university in Vietnam. Specifically, four male and twenty-nine female students, and their instructor in Listening-Speaking integrated skill course participated in this study. The entire data collection process lasted for nearly four months from late September 2016 to January 2017. Students were allowed to choose their group members to form six groups: Sky, Winner, Zebra, Perfect Pitch and Glasses.

Before starting with their projects, the instructor oriented the students on their active roles in the learning process as well as her role as a facilitator. In the study, the participants were required to conduct two projects, with themes coming from no article two units Films and Business in their course book. In the first project, students were required to design posters to compare and contrast two films of the same type. For the second, they created multimedia projects that presented their plans for a Startup business. The instructor guided the class on no article steps of doing projects, evaluated their progress, and assessed their oral presentation performance. Each project lasted for four weeks ranging from instruction section to oral presentation section.

Instruments

In order to avoid the researcher's bias, this study employed different methods to collect data. There were six observations during the implementation of PBL. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine students

and the instructor. These research tools were used due to their appropriateness.

Observation

Firstly, class observation was used to “provide the researcher with the opportunity to collect large amounts of rich data on the participants’ behaviour and actions within a particular context” (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 175). Moreover, observation has no article “potential to yield more valid or authentic data” which “enables researchers to understand the context of programmes, to be open-ended and inductive” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 396). In this study, the research used field notes and video-recordings to record detailed descriptions of the class, and to “involve detailed impressions of the researcher’s intuitions, impressions and even questions as they emerge” (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 175). The observation focused on students’ *critical thinking* (ability to explain the issues, use evidence to investigate a viewpoint, analyze the context and make assumptions, conclusion and related outcomes), *problem-solving skill* (ability to identify the problems, and strategies, propose the solutions, evaluate potential solutions, implement the solutions and evaluate outcomes); *creativity* (connecting, synthesizing, transforming, innovative thinking); *teamwork* (contribute to team meetings, facilitates the contributions of team members, fosters constructive team climate, and respond to the conflicts); *communication* (organization, language, delivery, supporting material, central message), and other skills like *Information Technology* (IT), *public speaking*, *time-management*, etc. (see Appendix I)

Interview

According to Cohen et al. (2007), interview can be used as “an explanatory device to help identify variables and relationships” (p. 351). The interviewing questions

help elicit additional data to dig deeper into the problems that one may feel skeptical in the observation process (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

In order to collect data from all the groups, the researcher asked each group to recommend two students who were willing to participate in the interview. In total, there were ten students who agreed to be interviewed. However, in the latter point, because of difficulties in time arrangement, one of the ten students could not take part in the interview. The interview was, therefore, conducted with nine students (encoded Interviewee No.1 to No. 9) and the instructor in English. There were five interview questions for students related to their feelings, the life skills that they improved after the projects; their advantages and challenges; and their suggestions for future implementation of PBL (appendix 2). The instructor was also interviewed with other five similar questions, obviously, from the instructor's viewpoint (appendix 3).

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection lasted for four months from late September 2016 to January 2017. The researcher conducted six observations: the instruction sections, the students' preparations and the oral presentations of all groups on October 28th 2016 for the first project, and December 2nd 2016 for the second one. The students' activities were recorded using field notes and video recordings. After the final presentation and before the course ended, the researcher conducted a pilot interview with two students in the class to modify the interview questions. Once the questions were modified, interviews with nine students and their instructor were conducted. Each interview lasted for 30 to 45 minutes and was recorded by voice recorder. This process lasted from December 23rd 2016 to January

20th 2017. Generally, the data collection procedure was illustrated in Table 1:

Table 1. Summary of Processes

Phase	Procedure & Instruments	People in charge	Time
I. Before the implementation	Design 2 projects to integrate projects into the curriculum	Instructor and researcher	September 2016
II. During the implementation	Implement PBL into the lessons		Week 6
	1 st project presentation		Oct 28, 2016
		Instructor	
	2 nd project presentation	Students	Week 12 Dec 2, 2016
	Classroom observation	Researcher	
III. After the implementation	Pilot interview	Researcher	Dec 21 2016
	Interview with students	Researcher	Dec 23 2016- Jan 16, 2017
	Interview with instructor	Researcher	Jan 20, 2017

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was “considered the most appropriate for the study which seeks to discover using interpretation” (Alhojailan, 2012, p. 41). Data from observation and interview were transcribed, and categorized into different themes based on the conceptual framework, underscoring the two major themes, namely students’ life skills development and students’ advantages and challenges. For the first theme, the students’ life skills development was classified into specific skills, such as critical thinking, communication, etc. The second theme was about the advantages and challenges that the researcher recognized while observing and the participants’ ideas while interviewing.

Results and Discussion

By categorizing data into themes, strong evidence was found that PBL helps improve students' life skills. Interestingly, besides typical skills (critical thinking, problem solving, time management, communication skills, teamwork) that the previous studies have stated, the current study accentuates that PBL is capable to develop some new skills for students. Moreover, in response to the second question, variety of perspectives were expressed to show benefits and difficulties that students experienced with their project works.

Project-Based Learning Helps Develop Students' Life Skills

Critical thinking is the most important life skill that all interviewees acknowledged to incur with big improvement. All of them stated that their thinking is more and more critical when they had to conduct research and choose the most noticeable piece of information to present in front of the class. Moreover, they did think more critically when they were required to give feedbacks for their peers.

When we do the project, we have to choose the most significant information to show the audience. We don't have enough time to present everything, we have to choose the best information to show. So we have to think critically. In addition, when I listen to my friends' presentation, I have to listen to what they were talking, after that, I gave them some feedbacks, I need to listen carefully and think critically about what their strengths are, what their weaknesses are to give them feedbacks. (Interviewee No. 1)

Additionally, they said that as the instructor did not go deep into details in her instruction, students had to work independently and hence, develop their ability to deal with a vast variety of information

The topics required us to think deeply, from various aspects. For example, the start-up business, we need staffs, budgets, etc. So we really think deeply. I used to think simply before the projects, I just saw things from one aspect, and didn't care much about the others, but now, after projects, I changed. I viewed things from various angles. (Interviewee No. 3)

Observation from their working and oral presentation also showed that their critical thinking was improved significantly while doing projects. For example, in the first project, except for Glasses group, all of the groups could not organize their presentation tightly and informatively. Sky group could not even present their ideas in a poster. However, in the second project, all groups presented great jobs with informative visual aids and tight, well-organized presentation.

Likewise, their problem-solving skill improved well. In the first project, students were expected to present their ideas in A0-paper-size posters. Because of narrow space, some of them could not successfully design informative posters. In contrast, in the second project, their lack of experience in multimedia presentations caused them many difficulties, yet finally, they did fantastic Prezi and PowerPoint presentations. Their performance was so impressive that the instructor applauded their success. She stated “*I just guided them to some sources that they can find solutions for their problems.*”

Working in teams is another skill that all student noted to have significantly improved. As the two projects were

group-projects, they had to cooperate with other members that promoted their team spirit. The participants confirmed that they could negotiate and persuade others better after the two projects. As one interviewee said:

Our group has seven members, the most number of members, so we had different ideas, and sometimes, we argued a lot to defend our opinions. But then, we tried to gather the opinions, took into consideration all the opinions and chose the best solutions for the project. I meant we could persuade others and negotiate well to come to a conclusion. (Interviewee No. 7)

The instructor also mentioned working in team as the first skill that students improved. She further claimed that “*when working in teams, students know how to dedicate work; know what their friends’ strengths and weaknesses are; know how to assign appropriate work to the right person, and how to cooperate well with each other.*” There may be two discrete reasons that have emerged from this. Firstly, it was compulsory for students to work together in their projects, therefore, they negotiated with each other for the completion of their tasks. Secondly, students were allowed to choose their partners. As such, they knew each other’s strengths and weaknesses to assign appropriate responsibilities.

Additionally, all students stated that their communication skill including communication within teams, presentation and public speaking skills while interacting with audience improved significantly. The observation showed that there was a progress in their communication skills. For example, students made lots of hesitations, avoided eye-contacts with the audience, transited unnaturally among members in project I. Yet, in project II, they spoke so naturally that some speakers appeared to be like experts. The instructor commented that “*they spoke like professionals. They knew*

how to play roles, how to make their speech more interesting and attractive to the listeners.” Another student shared *“I used to be shy when communicating with the teacher or standing in front of the class, but in project II, I was more confident and comfortable, I can use my eye-contact more effectively”* (interviewee No. 4). This finding further supports the idea of Munezero and Bekuta (2016) that students improved their interpersonal skills when they “listen to team members, voice out ideas no matter how small or significant they might have been” (p. 213).

These results of the study are also consistent with those of other studies conducted by Hsieh (2012), Tanner (2012), Nassir (2014), Wurdinger and Qureshi (2015), which suggest that critical-thinking, problem-solving, team-working and communication skills are well developed after students participated in doing projects.

Another important finding was that the students improved their time-management skill noticeably after the two projects. Specifically, four out of five groups had five or even ten minute overtime in the first project. They, however, completed their second presentations in due time. Eight out of nine students confirmed that doing projects promoted their time-management skill dramatically. Two possible explanations for these results may due to their limited time to present their ideas (only around two minutes per person) and their heavy study schedule in school. These elements motivated them to learn ways to manage their time effectively. As one student claimed,

In presentation, we only had 15 minutes for 7 people, so we had to practice a lot, to restrict our time to the time limit. After the course, I know the ways to put things in logical order to save time. (interviewee No. 6)

In response to the question on how their time-management was improved, another individual added “*we had very tight schedule that time, so we had to manage our time by listing of what to do.*”(Interviewee No. 8). Obviously, the fact that students were put under pressure enabled them to find their own solutions to complete their required tasks on time.

Visibly, another skill seen to have a considerable progress is students’ creativity. In the first project, except for Sky group, which has a poorly designed poster, all groups created impressive and eye-catching posters. Some groups like Glasses and Winner had as real as advertising posters to announce new films (*see Appendix 4.1*). The creativeness was more visible in the second multimedia projects. Four out of five groups used Prezi software to present their ideas. Even though they were not that familiar with Prezi before, they made great impressions (*see Appendix 4.2*). For example, Winner group attached background music to make their presentation more professional; Perfect Pitch group added a short self-made film to introduce their product. The most remarkable thing was that the Perfect Pitch group organized a talk-show instead of the usual monotonous speech. These results marked a turning point in students’ creativity and illustrated that doing projects enabled students to be more creative than expected.

However, projects did not bring equal benefits for all students in developing their creativity. In fact, only those who directly involved in creating visual aids took all advantages providing by doing projects. For example, one student commented that “*actually, I am not the one who designed the visual aids, so my creativity did not change very much, but I think my friends who did the visuals develop their creativity.*” (Interviewee No. 1)

Similarly, for Information Technology (IT) skill, whilst a minority mentioned that their computer skills were not improved, because “*I’m not the one who design the multimedia presentation for my group, so I cannot see any improvement*” (Interviewee No. 6), most of them agreed that their IT skills improved dramatically. As one interviewee put it:

The most important thing I can improve is IT. In the second project, I learnt the way to use Prezi, which is completely new for me. But later, when I used it, I found it much easier than PowerPoint. In the future, if I make any presentation, I will choose Prezi instead of PowerPoint. It is really valuable. (Interviewee No. 2)

However, the findings of the current study on students’ creativity and IT skills do not completely support some previous research. Tanner (2012), for example, found out that his students develop their creativity and IT skills after engaging in the projects. This result may be explained by the fact that in his study, all participants engaged themselves in using technology to make presentation, while in this study, technology or computer was not compulsory for all participants.

What is surprising is that the instructor thought that doing research and film-making are new skills that her students did excellently. She reported that students acted as directors, cameramen, actors and actresses in their own short films. They also had great improvement in searching for information in Project II in comparison to the Project I. The findings are unexpected and suggest that within project class, students can flourish with their best potential. In addition, it is somewhat surprising that some members were more over-productive than others in a group. They assigned tasks for others, arranged the meeting time for the whole group, and

led group discussions. Thus, it can be suggested that project works helped some students develop their leadership skills.

In short, researching, film-making and leadership skills have not been well mentioned in previous studies but were evident in this study. Therefore, it should be added to the literature that projects promoted students to develop a variety of life skills which are essential for their future.

In sum, students gained lots of benefits from doing projects. All these results account for the improvement of students' critical thinking skill, problem-solving skill, team-working skill and time-management skill. Some, especially those who took charge of creating visual aids, did enhance their creativity and IT skills. Moreover, a number of students improved their leadership skill, doing research and film-making skills as well. It can be clearly seen that not all of them acquired the same skills, because different people possess different abilities and faced different challenges. Therefore, the following parts described the students' advantages and disadvantage while doing projects.

Student Encountered Advantages and Difficulties in Doing Project Works

As setting out with the aim of exploring students' advantages and disadvantages while doing projects, the study found that students faced different experiences in their learning process. However, the most striking finding was that students all reported receiving adequate intellectual support and encouragement from the instructor.

I got a lot of support from my teacher. She gave me several methods to do research, and the feedbacks as well, such as the ways to open and end a presentation, transition among members, etc. The guideline or instruction for each project was also clear and easy to follow,

so we know what we need to do. I also learnt the ways to master presentation effectively. (Interviewee No. 2)

Other student felt excited when talking about the teacher's support

It was remarkable. Teacher gave us enough instruction but she didn't really speak too close to it. She didn't draw our ways but let us create our own ways. That is why the products were various, and interesting. I think this is the most surprising, amazing and interesting class I have ever taken. (Interviewee No. 3)

Visibly, students appreciated encouragement and compliments from the teacher that one student expressed “*actually, I don't think our project were good enough, but I am happy when receiving her (the teacher's) compliment. It was a big encouragement.*” (Interviewee No.4) This finding has an important implication for the teacher's instruction in the future. Specifically, instructors should only provide general themes and instruction without going into details, so that no article students can have opportunities to develop their works sourcing from their understandings.

Another interesting finding is that all students stated that information for the project is easily accessible. They mostly searched for information from the Internet, from their friends in other schools, and from reading books. In other words, the projects helped them develop researching skills. Interestingly, this finding does not support a previous research, in which Munezero and Bekuta (2016) reported a limited access of information for the participants in doing projects. The reasons may be due to the fact that participants in this study were well-equipped with computers and internet access while studying.

Besides, the advantages differed from one group to the other. As the poster design and multimedia presentation required special skills such as drawing or designing, some groups had big advantages when their group members were good at it. Moreover, the fact that the instructor let students choose their group members helped create harmonious atmosphere for them. They affirmed that “*our team knows each other before, and we have a close relationship, so we can sympathize with each other, even with some arguments or late coming to the group meetings*” (interviewee No. 8).

However, students still faced some difficulties. All students and the instructor mentioned time pressure as one of the most challenging things that the students faced. While they were doing projects, they had many mid-term examinations in other subjects. Therefore, they sometimes felt stressed and overloaded. Fortunately, they realized that “*pressure builds diamonds*” (interviewee No. 1), or “*I have to stay up late to practice, but it’s worth the efforts*” (interviewee No. 9). Two-minute speech for each person was also a challenge for them. It, therefore, required them to “*think of what to talk about in the time limit*” (Interviewee No. 2). Obviously, time pressure forced students to think faster and more critically, manage time more appropriately, and hence, improve their critical thinking as well as time-management skills.

Another difficulty, as five out of nine students mentioned, is the unfamiliar topics. They felt “*the topics were unfamiliar at first*” (interviewee No. 1) or “*topics weren’t familiar, so we need lots of time to decide the website, the content*” (interviewee No.8). Fortunately, unfamiliarity of the topic provided opportunities for them to enhance their problem-solving skills “*topics were unfamiliar at first, so we faced lots of difficulties in collecting information. But from those challenges, we figured out the methods for them.*” (interviewee No. 1) It is

surprising because students learnt to solve their problems and learn lessons from those difficulties.

Surprisingly, one student felt risky and competitive in project class, as everyone in the class showed their best efforts, the class turned out to be like a contest where each person was a potential candidate

It seems risky and too competitive. I am a bit under pressure and am worried when other groups come to the stage. I am afraid that other group can be better than ours, especially the group of A. I feel pressure when she is on the stage. For the second project, for example, they wear formal clothes, like a real company. I feel intimidating, but I really admire her in speaking, natural but academic. (Interviewee No. 3)

Accordingly, the spirit of competitiveness motivated students to work harder and more seriously. This can be considered as their challenges and their benefits as well. To some students, their speaking and presentation skills were also their challenges, “*My speaking skill was not good at first, so I was a little bit scared. But then, I overcome it, so I feel very lucky*” (interviewee No. 7). A possible explanation for this difficulty may be their lack of opportunities to practice public speaking skills in class, as “*in traditional class, for speaking, the teacher may provide some interesting topics for us to discuss, express ideas and then go home*” (interviewee No. 3). These reasons may define interviewees’ confirmation that project class enabled them to learn more than in a traditional class. In fact, both instructor and students who participated in the interviewing process showed their positive attitude towards PBL. They all suggested that the university should incorporate more projects in the curriculum. According to them, “*project is practical and prepares for our*

future” (interviewee No. 8); “*all in all, it’s great for most sides, it helps students develop all of their ability*” (Interviewee No. 9). The instructor even added:

I highly appreciate this approach. I think it is very interesting to implement in class, it’s very beneficial for the teacher, because teacher can reduce her workload and transfer a part of her workload to students, and make students more active in their learning. They are not passive receivers of knowledge from the teacher, but they are active participants in the process of learning new things.

Moreover, the instructor and students proposed some points to make better implementation of projects in class. In terms of scoring, the instructor advised that “*in order to motivate students, we should transfer the score for students’ performance into official rates, such as midterm score, or part of final score.*” Some students expressed that “*the score is just a subordinate issue, but it definitely encourages us to work harder*” (interviewee No. 1). For such, in order to successfully implement projects into the curriculum, the school should consider to include the evaluation of projects as official rates for students. Additionally, students also need more specific instructions including the assessment criteria for each project before it starts “*so that we would base on the criteria to do it better*” (interviewee No. 8). Besides, students feel that they need to equip themselves more carefully with speaking skills and other life skills so that they can be more confident to perform their ability on the stage.

The literature survey supported that PBL help improve students’ life skills such as critical-thinking, problem-solving, communication, time-management skills. The study findings also added to the literature that students developed their leadership skills, film-making, and research

skills while they conducted projects. Besides, project works promoted students' learning autonomy when they experienced advantages and when they found solutions for their challenges. The worthy lessons learnt from challenges did promote their self-learning, so both instructor and students agreed that they love doing projects and expected to have more projects in their curriculum. This finding contradicts with Beckett (2002), who found that the teacher and students had no agreement on evaluating PBL. However, result of the current study was consistent with what Kapusuz and Can (2014) stated that "they want to see more real-world projects and learn about the application areas of the theoretical information they learn during the lectures" (p. 4191).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study was conducted to investigate the impacts of PBL on the development of students' transferable skills as well as their encountered advantages and difficulties while doing projects. The study was purely qualitative which added to the literature of PBL. Moreover, it helped fill the gaps in literature about students' difficulties while doing project work, and raise the awareness level of Vietnamese students on PBL.

Specifically, the most obvious finding that emerge from this study is that the PBL approach improved dramatically students' life skills, especially critical thinking skill, problem-solving skill, time-management skill, and communication skill. Moreover, it helped some students improve their creativity and IT skills while they directly got involved in creating things. Another significant finding which has not been widely mentioned in previous studies is Projects helped improved students' leadership, film-making, and research skills.. The noticeable skill development can be explained by the fact that PBL enables students to develop their full potential.

In addition, students encountered many advantages and challenges while doing projects. They were facilitated by teacher's support, team atmosphere, accessible information; and challenged by time pressure, unfamiliar topics, and competitiveness. However, the key finding was that they all took the advantages and learnt worthy lessons from countered challenges. Among these challenges were time-management skills from the heavy schedule, critical thinking from unfamiliar topics, problem-solving from competitiveness. Taken together, these results suggest that PBL has great positive impacts on developing students' life skills and promote students' learning autonomy. These findings have important implications that projects should be incorporated widely and seriously in the curriculum. Thus, the study may have contributed to the theory of experiential learning in general and project-based learning in particular. It also suggested some implications for teachers to implement project effectively in their teaching.

However, as the nature of a case study, the samples for this study was not randomly chosen which may affect the study's generalizability. Moreover, as the study only lasted for one semester, several questions remain unanswered at present. For instance, the questions of whether PBL approach has long-term impacts on students' development, or the roles of administrators and educators in incorporating PBL into curriculum have not been well explored. Therefore, further research should investigate the long-term impacts of PBL on larger population as well as responsibilities of administrators and educators to incorporate PBL successfully in their teaching programs.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Observation Scheme

Observation Scheme

Groups		Winner	Perfect Pitch	Glasses	Sky	Zebra
Skills						
Critical thinking	explain the issues					
	use evidence to investigate a viewpoint					
	analyze the context and make assumptions					
	Conclude					
Problem solving skill	identify the problems					
	propose the solutions					
	evaluate potential solutions					
	implement solutions					
	evaluate outcomes					
Creativity	Visual aids					
	Ideas					
	Presenting					
Teamwork	contribute to team meetings,					
	facilitates contribution of other members					
	fosters constructive team climate					
	respond to the conflicts					
Communi- cation	Organization					
	Language use					
	delivery					
	supporting material					
	central message					
Information Technology	Design					
	Special effects					
Time management	Preparation					
	Presenting					
Other skills						

Appendix 2: Questions for interviewing students

1. What do you like about doing the projects?

2. What life skills (public speaking, critical thinking, etc.) can projects help you to improve? How? Could you explain in details?

3. What were your advantages/opportunities when conducting the projects?

4. What challenges or difficulties have you encountered during conducting the projects? How have you overcome those challenges, your strategies/ suggestions?

5. Do you have any suggestions to make the implementation of the projects better? Do you think project-based learning should be incorporated in your curriculum?

Appendix 3: Questions for interviewing the instructor

1. Have you ever used the PBL approach before? If yes, how did you use it? If no, will you use this approach in the future?

2. What life skills (public speaking, creativity, teamwork, etc.) can the projects help students improve, in your opinion? How? Could you explain in details?

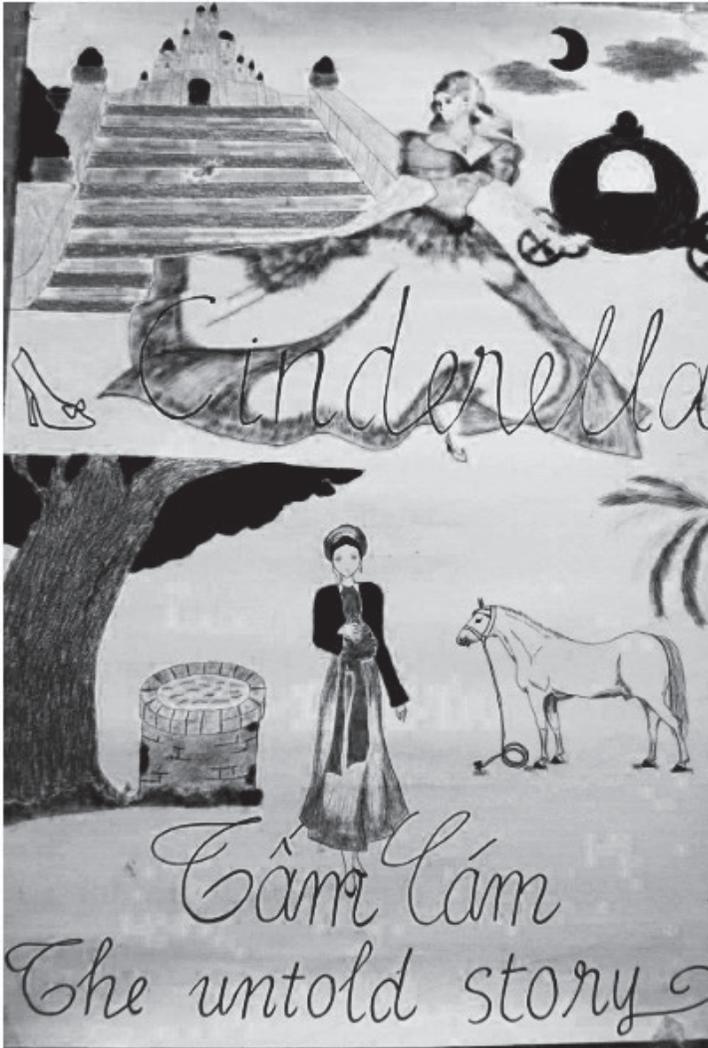
3. What advantages did the students have when they were conducting the projects?

4. What were their disadvantages when conducting the projects, in your opinion?

5. In your opinion, what should be improved for better implementation of projects in the future?

Appendix 4: Students' Outputs

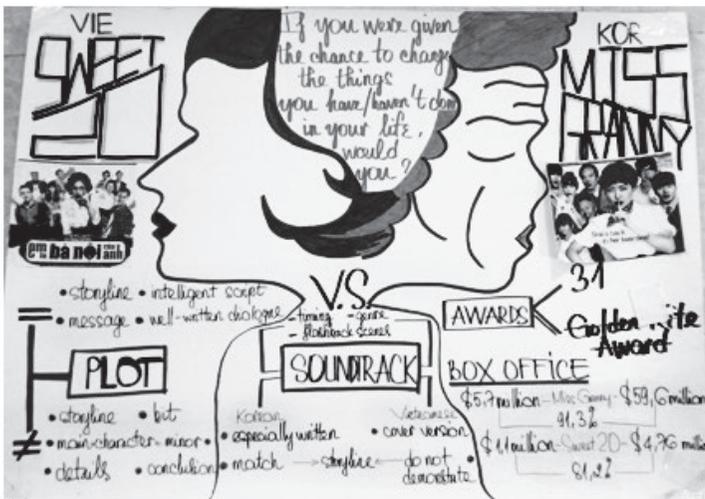
4.1. Project I: Designing Posters to compare two films of the same type



Sky Group's project



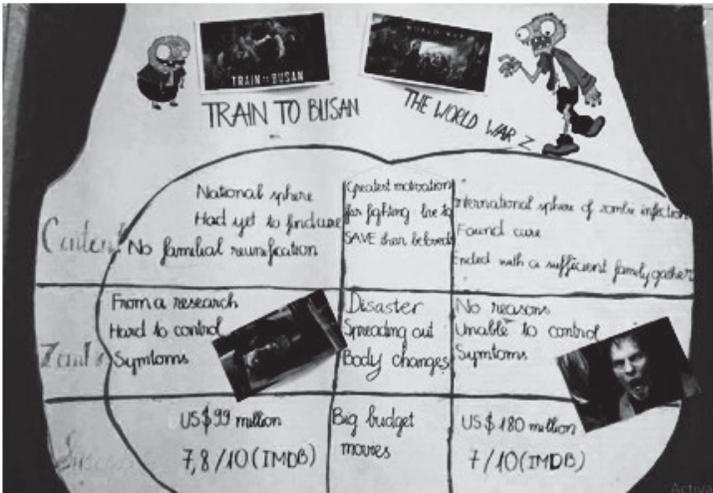
Glasses Group's Project



Perfect Pitch Group's Project



Winner Group's Project



Zebra Group's Project

4.2 Project II: Business Start-up Plans

Perfect Pitch Group

https://prezi.com/4d7hke__9t8f/project-3b2/

Winner Group

<https://prezi.com/khignjlbxsbx/ipro-project/>

Zebra Group

https://prezi.com/dlpqm-2x1gbd/untitled-prezi/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy

Sky Group

<https://prezi.com/h4opazmiytly/ii/>

Glasses Group

<https://www.slideshare.net/secret/coRN2FJ2PtFFYP>