Improving EFL Undergraduate Learners' Speaking Skills Through Project-Based Learning Using Presentation

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ABSTRACT

Project-based learning has been variously integrated into EFL instruction to promote learners' language learning and skills. The objectives of this research study were to examine the effects of project-based learning using presentation on EFL undergraduate learners' speaking skills. Furthermore, this study sought to explore learners' opinions on the use of project-based learning using presentation. The participants of this study were 31 second-year undergraduate students who majored in Business English. The research instruments in this study included speaking tests, project-based learning instructions, questionnaires, and interviews. The obtained data were analyzed by quantitative and qualitative methods for the result interpretation. The findings of this study revealed that students' speaking skills had significantly improved after the project-based learning implementation. Moreover, the students expressed positive opinions towards project-based learning using presentation as it was perceived to have helped improve their speaking skills. The findings from the interviews revealed that the project-based learning using presentation was positive for learners' speaking skills according to their presentation tasks, scaffolding activities, and practice of integrative skills. A cooperative learning environment is perceived as useful for learners' speaking skill improvement. However, time constraint posed a major challenge in the study. Further studies are recommended to encompass a community-based context for speaking skill improvement. Instructional implications derived from the findings include implementing project-based learning using presentation in order to provide learners with an authentic English speaking context and to promote the integrated skills.

INTRODUCTION

At the tertiary level, good communication skills are essential for the success of EFL undergraduates in their study and their future careers. English learners should be motivated and provided with opportunities to use English for communicating effectively. Good speaking ability is important for the learners' progress in the university, and it is also seen as an essential requirement for getting a job out in the working market. This emphasis on the importance and requirement of effective English speaking skills has spurred educational institutions to focus on training their learners to be effective English speakers in order to prepare them for the employment market. Sharma (2014) explains that students' qualifications should respond to the workplace requirements, and they should be trained in the subject that corresponds to those requirements. Moreover, effective communication is advantageous for a graduate's career development in the future workplace (Bhattacharyya, Nordin and Salleh, 2009). Consequently, there should be thorough considerations given to the communicative needs of the students so that they can develop their learning and prepare themselves for their future working careers. This importance placed on English communication skills has spurred Thai educational institutions to concentrate their efforts to improve their students' English communicative skills. Generally, English instruction in Thailand emphasizes CLT as a major method to develop learners' English language proficiency and learning skills. However, surveys have found that Thai learners have very low English proficiency as shown in the EF Proficiency Index (2019), with Thailand being ranked 74 out of 100 countries. Many Thai students have difficulties in communication skills, especially speaking skills. They are still reluctant to speak and are not able to express their ideas effectively. Several other factors that contribute to

Thai students' ineffective speaking skills are low motivation, a lack of confidence, and few opportunities to speak English. Sasum and Weeks (2018) mention that Thai students hardly have a chance to speak English and do not have enough vocabulary to communicate with each other. It is suggested that the students can develop their English skills by practicing English through activities and learning from each other. Thus, it is necessary to integrate a pedagogy that can provide learners with an authentic and communicative context so that they can practice and enhance their speaking skills for communicative purposes.

Speaking skill is an important tool for learners of English to deliver a message and communicate for different purposes effectively. When a person can speak a language, he or she is seen as one who knows the language as speech is the most basic means of human communication (Celce-Murcia, 2001). For ESL or EFL learners, speaking skill is important since it reflects the ability to converse in the second language, and it is a skill highly desired by many second and foreign language learners (Nunan, 2003). The factors affecting students' speaking performance include performance conditions, affective factors, listening ability, and feedback during speaking activities (Tuan and Mai, 2015). Inhibition, lack of topical knowledge, low or uneven participation, and mother-tongue use further lead to speaking difficulty. Other problems are a limited vocabulary and difficulty in pronouncing the word correctly (Celce-Murcia, 2001; Ur, 2009). This importance of English speaking ability for English learners has resulted in many attempts to encourage learners to practice speaking skills for effective communication. It is suggested that teachers should prepare the spoken English production section of a lesson in order to allow the students to express themselves in the target language and to cope with various functions of language (Brown & Yule, 1983). Moreover, further encouragement for learners to speak should incorporate authentic speaking activities so that the students are given a format for using real-life conversation. Methods of teaching speaking are also important and should be carefully planned so as to provide support in improving the speaking ability of the learners. Brown (2000) refers to the method of teaching speaking to include a planned design for teaching materials, lesson procedures, and controlling and manipulating the activities for speaking skill.

Project-based learning is an effective method used to promote learners' English language learning and skills. In recent years, project-based learning has been variously integrated into the EFL context to promote authentic learning and teaching of English. Research results showed that project-based learning has positive effects on students' English learning performance and skills (Wahyudin, 2017; Poonpon, 2011). Project-based learning is an effective method that contributes to learners' development of speaking skills as it aims to develop learners' skills through meaningful activities based on the project (Rochmahwati, 2015). Poonpon (2011) suggested implementing project-based learning in a language classroom as a way to enhance learners' English skills. Furthermore, working on the project allows learners to demonstrate their knowledge in practical ways.

Project-based learning is seen as a bridge between using English in class and using English in authentic situations outside the class, and it contributes to the increase of students' L2 oral performance (Wahyudin, 2017). Among various communicative methods, presentation is an effective one used to develop students' speaking skills. Presentation requires the student to put together a prepared talk and give a presentation on a given topic of their choice. Brooks and Wilson (2014) explain that an oral presentation is beneficial for learners as it provides them with the opportunities to use their L2 to communicate with others in a natural way. When the students stand in front of their classmates and speak, it is an excellent preparation for their authentic speaking (Thornbury, 2005).

Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University (NRRU) recognizes the importance and requirement of effective English speaking ability. NRRU learners are encouraged to communicate and use English language effectively in their studies. To develop learners' English competency, a variety of English courses are offered aiming at promoting communicative skills. Various activities and methods are used to motivate learners to learn English and practice language skills. Project-based learning is implemented into various language instructions in order to develop EFL learners' language progress and learning. To fulfill the goal of the university, project-based learning has been integrated into the curriculum so as to enhance learners' speaking ability and serves as a communicative environment for English speaking practice. This research study aimed to improve learners' speaking skills through project-based learning using presentation. The study was designed to improve learners' English speaking skills based on the following reasons. Firstly, project-based learning has positive effects on learners' speaking skills as it engages learners in an authentic environment which allows them to use language in real life situation. This was explained by Haines (1989) who showed that project work provided learners with opportunities to recycle known knowledge and skills in a relatively authentic context. Moreover, presentation provides students with realistic language tasks that are close to real language use, and it also provides them with an opportunity to develop communicative skills (Brooks and Wilson, 2014). Thus, this study aimed to investigate the effects of project-based learning using presentation on learners' speaking skills. Moreover, it aimed to explore learners' opinions on the effectiveness of project-based learning using presentation. The results of this research study might shed some light on a useful communicative methodology to promote learners' speaking skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Project-based learning is an instructional technique that has been used to develop learners' English fluency and improve their learning skills. The characteristics of project-based learning include engaging in meaningful activities, collaborative learning and decision making, problem-solving, and the changing role of teachers (Howard, 2002). Through project-based learning, learners are engaged in performing meaningful tasks and working on projects. There are vari-

ous benefits of using project-based learning on the learners' progress and skills. The advantages include improved cooperation and responsibility, problem-solving ability, communication ability, creative thinking, critical thinking, and self-directed learning ability (Baillie & Fitzgerald, 2000). Project-based learning has been integrated into the field of second and foreign language acquisition to develop teaching and learning. Moreover, it is popularly used to develop learners' language learning at different levels and contexts. Project-based learning is learner-centered and provides learners with opportunities to use language in a meaningful and authentic context. According to Fragoulis (2009, as cited in Dewi, 2016), project-based learning is useful for teaching speaking as it provides students with contextual and meaningful learning, and the students can practice speaking English in an optimal environment with enjoyment. Project-based learning is student-centered and driven by the need to create an end-product (Fried-Booth, 2002). Projects are extended tasks that usually integrate language skills with different activities (Hedge, 2002). Project work is seen as an authentic task that is similar to real-life tasks and the language input is more authentic (Gallacher, 2004). Students' language skills are improved through working on the projects as their four skills are integrated with other skills such as developing interpersonal communication. Dewi (2016) explains that when learners work on projects, they are engaged in purposeful communication in a natural context. Moreover, participation in meaningful activities encourages the learners to use EFL language skills authentically.

Learners' speaking skills can be developed through various communicative tasks including presentation. One benefit of presentation on students is that it helps develop important elements of communicative competence (Munby, 2011). Presentation is effective for learners as it helps bridge the gap between language study and language use. It also requires them to use all four skills in a naturally integrative way (King, 2002). Oral presentation is authentic speaking and listening activities where the speaker and audience have an opportunity to interact and process language and information in real-time (Morgan, 2012). Presentation has a positive effect on language learners' affective factors as it helps increase learners' self-confidence and reduces their anxiety by encouraging them to present oral works in front of their classmates. In addition, learners can have enjoyable learning experiences that allow them to interact with others using only their L2 in their presentation (Brooks & Wilson, 2014). There are other advantages of using presentation. For example, presentation positively affects learners' differences in language learning since it allows for a broader perspective on learner competence and performance. Group presentation is useful for English learners since the learners are engaged in a cooperative task. As a result, the learners are encouraged to use English to explain their ideas and negotiate meaning with other learners during the planning and practicing of their presentation.

Various studies have shown the effectiveness of project-based learning and presentation on learners' English speaking performance. Firstly, Anuyahong (2015) imple-

mented a project-based approach to enhance students' English speaking ability. The participants included 60 first-year undergraduate students. The results of the study showed that students' speaking achievement was improved, and they were satisfied with using a project-based approach to enhance their English speaking ability. Moreover, Fauzi (2016) used a multimedia-based presentation to improve students' speaking skills. Thirty university students participated in this study. The findings showed that students' speaking and presentation skills, including speaking confidence, had improved. Next, Worawong, Charttrakul & Damnet (2019) investigated students' English ability in oral presentation employing project-based learning. The participants of this study consisted of 44 third-year undergraduate students. The results revealed that the oral presentation technique is useful to promote students' oral skills. Since speaking skills are highlighted in English teaching and learning, project-based learning was an appropriate method to promote learners' speaking skills. Furthermore, the presentation was also taken into consideration as it could motivate learners to speak English and enhance learners' speaking skills. To sum up, the implementation of project-based learning using presentation could provide learners with a communicative context to practice and improve their speaking skills.

METHOD

Research Design

This study included one group pre-test and post-test design which employed a mixed-method approach. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyze the data which investigated the effects of project-based learning using presentation on EFL learners' speaking skills.

Participants

The study included 31 second-year students, 24 females and 7 males, who majored in Business English in English for Business Presentation course during the second semester of 2019 academic year at NRRU. The students were purposively selected for the purposes of this research study. They were Thai native speakers whose age range was between nineteen and twenty years old.

Research Instruments

To respond to the research objectives of this study, speaking tests, project-based learning instructions, questionnaires, and interviews were used to collect data. Firstly, the speaking tests aimed to gauge students' improvement in their speaking skills. At the beginning of the semester, the participants of the research study were individually pre-tested on their speaking skills in five areas: accent, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (Hughes, 2003). Then, the students were taught using project-based learning instructions and created presentation projects. The students were then individually post-tested on their speaking skills after the project-based learning implementation. A five-point Likert scale ques-

tionnaire was used to elicit participants' opinions on the project-based learning implementation. Finally, interviews were used to explore students' detailed opinions towards the project-based learning implementation. From this, eight students with mixed levels of speaking ability were interviewed based on the focus group interviews. The data collected from these tools were quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed for the final interpretation of the study.

Research Procedure

The project-based learning framework utilized in this study was adapted from Stoller (2010). The procedure consisted of 1) Agree on a theme for the project; 2) Determine the final outcome; 3) Structure the project; 4) Information gathering cycle; 5) Information compilation and analysis cycle; 6) Information reporting cycle, and 7) Evaluate the project. Firstly, the teacher and students agreed on the theme of project work which was local tourist attractions. Secondly, the teacher and students determined the outcomes of the project. Presentation projects were introduced to the students. Thirdly, the students structured their projects in groups of three with the teacher acting as a facilitator. After that, the teacher provided students with the language and strategy demands of information gathering. The next step involved the teacher prepping the students for language and strategy demands when compiling, analyzing information, and reporting their projects. Students then presented their projects. Finally, their projects were evaluated. Useful feedback and suggestions were also given to the students by the teacher. The projects were extended tasks that consisted of different activities which included a poster project and a PowerPoint (PPT) project aimed at providing the students with the opportunities to practicing speaking English in an authentic context through working on presentation tasks.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Results of Speaking Skill Improvement

To meet the first objective of the study, the following table shows the results of the speaking pre- and post-tests.

According to the above Table 1, there were 31 participants in this study. The mean pre-test score of students' speaking skills was 46.67 (S.D.=12.40), while the mean post-test score was 57.66 (S.D.=12.55). The results of the tests revealed that the post-test scores of students' speaking skills were significantly higher than their pre-test scores at 0.01 level after project-based learning implementation. Therefore, it can be concluded that students' English speaking skills had improved after the study.

Table 1. The comparison of pre-test and post-test scores of students' speaking skills

Test	N	Mean	S.D.	t.	Sig
Pre-test	31	46.67	12.40	1.69	<0.01
Post-test	31	57.66	12.55		

*p< .01

The Results of Students' Opinions

To respond to the second objective, the following part summarizes students' opinions on the project-based learning implementation.

Firstly, students' responses from the questionnaire about the project-based learning implementation were positive as the total mean scores of the questionnaires fell into the 'high' level of interpretation. This showed that students agreed that the project-based learning activities were useful for their speaking skills. Next, semi-structured interview results revealed that the students had positive opinions towards the project-based learning implementation. Generally, all interviewees had positive opinions towards project-based learning using English presentation. They reported that project-based learning implementation was useful for their speaking skill improvement. Moreover, other learning skills (i.e., listening, reading and writing skills) were also promoted because of the project-based learning implementation.

DISCUSSION

The Effects of Project-Based Learning using Presentation on Students' Speaking Skills

The results of the research study showed that project-based learning using English presentation was effective for improving students' English speaking skills. The quantitative data analysis showed that students' speaking skills significantly improved after the project-based learning implementation. The qualitative data analysis revealed that considerable outcomes came from the presentation tasks, scaffolding activities, and practice of integrative skills. Project-based learning using English presentation provided students with opportunities to practice speaking through presentation tasks. Working on the projects allowed the students to practice their speaking skills and got them involved with speaking tasks in an authentic environment. In doing this, they engaged in real communication and could utilize their topical knowledge, language, and speaking skills. The steps of project-based learning encouraged the students to practice speaking skills during the learning and working process. When students work on a presentation project, they research a topic and search for important information in English. They can vary their exposure to sources of knowledge via the genuine use of the target language, which is positive for language improvement (Al-Issa, 2006). In this study, students worked on two projects: a poster project and a PPT project. The presentation tasks were beneficial for learners' speaking skill improvement and encouraged them to use the English language meaningfully and purposefully. This study's results are similar to other studies which report the effectiveness of presentation tasks. Firstly, a poster presentation is useful for learners' speaking skills as it promotes effective communication skills and encourages individuals to be confident (Boggu & Singh, 2015). In addition, the delivery of a PPT presentation enable students to develop their English speaking and oral presentation skills, including building their speaking confidence (Mabuan, 2017). When students worked on project-based learning,

they could practice speaking skills through presentation tasks in an authentic context, which led to improvement of their speaking skill. The following extracts are examples of how the project-based learning using presentation helped improve the students' speaking skills.

Student 2: "The project-based learning promotes my confidence in speaking. Moreover, it promotes my pronunciation as I am required to practice pronunciation too."

Student 8: "I practice speaking skills through project-based learning activities. I'm allowed to speak a lot."

Secondly, scaffolding is seen as helpful for students' speaking skill improvement. Hammond and Gibbons (2001) refer to scaffolding as "the temporary assistance that teachers provide for their students to assist them to complete a task or develop new understanding so that they will later be able to complete similar tasks alone". Also, Bell (2010) refers "scaffolded instruction" to the supports provided to students to assist them in making cognitive growth just beyond their reach. Hence, the teacher is seen as a facilitator who is a more knowledgeable person and helps students to learn and maximize their existing levels of understanding or present competence. According to the steps of project-based learning, students were provided with language demands of information gathering, information compilation and analysis, and information reporting. They were introduced to useful examples, sources, language devices, and linguistic demands used in the presentation. These implied that teacher scaffolding was important for students as they needed to use the knowledge learned from class in order to accomplish their assignment. Teacher scaffolding was an important part in promoting students' confidence in language use and encouraging them to become competent and autonomous learners of their language skills (Simpson, 2011). The following extract is an example of how the scaffolding activities helped improved their speaking skills.

Student 1: "In class, we first learned about vocabulary and language structure for presentation, and then we integrated those in our presentation. We learned how to present step by step. These activities were useful for speaking skills."

Thirdly, project-based learning using presentation encouraged students to speak English through integrative skill practice. Working on the projects required students to integrate their four learning skills to accomplish the tasks. In doing this, they searched for useful information to implement in the projects. Then, the students read various texts and wrote the content for their presentation. Presentation rehearsal was also important as students were required to rehearse using speaking scripts and prepared themselves in listening for questions from the actual audiences. Consequently, the students were required to integrate all four skills to finish their projects. These integrative skills were important for delivering an effective presentation. Performing an oral presentation is an integrative approach that helps develop students' English macro skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Al-Issa & Al-Qubtan, 2010). Integrating skills is useful as it allows students to interact in a more authentic or natural form in the classroom (Oxford, 2001). As a result, the students have more opportunities to practice English in the classroom mimicking how natural interaction occurs. Frances (2018) integrated the four skills through a project-based course focusing on culture and found that the students who studied this course gained confidence in speaking English and were also able to learn more vocabulary through recycling of words in listening, reading, writing, and speaking activities. The following extract is an example of how the students worked on integrative skills.

Student 6: "I practiced my listening skills from in-class activities. Useful examples were provided to us, so we practiced listening skills. For reading, I practiced by reading the content that I had searched on the Internet. Moreover, I practiced writing skills on writing assignments."

Students' opinions towards project-based learning using presentation

As mentioned earlier, the interview data indicated that students' opinions towards the implementation of project-based learning were positive, and they agreed that it was effective in improving their speaking skills. The results from the open-ended question in the questionnaires and the interviews revealed that students agreed that project-based learning activities led to their speaking skill improvement. An important factor for students' positive opinions towards the project-based learning using presentation is a cooperative learning environment. When students work in such an environment, they are actively involved with the content being learned and interactively involved with others. The students worked together on tasks and were expected to explore, apply, generate information, and solve problems. Project-based learning is a form of cooperative learning that contextualizes learning in which the learners are given the problems to solve or allowed to develop products (Katz, 1994). In doing this, the students worked cooperatively and helped each other to reach the learning goals and complete the tasks. Group activities were assigned to each individual so that each one was responsible for their work. This process of cooperative learning allowed learners to develop their affective factors, learning processes, and communicative abilities. Moreover, cooperative learning is effectively used to develop learners' oral communication skills (Deng, 2007). A cooperative learning environment resulted in students' increased motivation to work with their friends and the improvement of their speaking skills. They worked in a cooperative and non-threatening environment in which each student supported each other to learn. Communicative tasks in project-based learning challenged the students to accomplish the set goals of the projects. The following extracts are examples of how the students worked cooperatively.

Student 2: "In my group, we searched information together. One student translated, the other prepared PPT slides. It depended on individual performance. Even though one might have problems in remembering long scripts, he might do well in other work."

Student 8: "I was assigned to search information. Then we compiled the data and selected what we'd like to present and create PPT slides. My friends helped check the quantity and quality of information."

Other benefit and suggestion

One interesting benefit that students derived from working through project-based learning using presentation was technological skill integration. Students explained that they used technological tools to prepare their presentations. They added that they searched for information from the Internet and used technological skills to create visuals for the presentation. To do this, technical tasks were assigned to the students in each group according to their abilities and preferences. In project-based learning, the students can use technological skills to participate in learning activities to pick up language skills. In Fauzi's (2016) study, students' speaking skills and speaking confidence were improved through the multimedia-based presentation. One important step in project-based learning involved students searching for information for their presentation. In the process, they discovered facts about the tourism of their local community: general background, local lifestyle and customs, tourist attractions and their highlights. An interesting feedback from one student about further studies related to project-based learning involves incorporating a local community product as a theme for the next project. She explained that when she had researched her topic, she found that there were many interesting local products from famous tourist attractions. Such a local product project could be helpful since it could introduce and promote community products publicly. The student's suggestion was valuable as it revealed that not only did she learn about the topical content of her project, but she also realized that her learning experience could be usefully adapted in a community context. She gained not only language skills but also an awareness of how to be a productive member of that community.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the effects of project-based learning using presentation on EFL undergraduate learners' speaking skills. It also aimed to explore the learners' opinions towards the project-based learning using presentation. One-group pre-test and post-test design was adopted to compare students' speaking skills before and after the project-based learning implementation. Speaking tests, project-based learning instructions, questionnaires, and interviews were used as research instruments for the purposes of the research study. The obtained results from data collection were quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed for the research interpretation. The results of the research study showed that project-based learning using presentation had significant effects on students' speaking skills. The quantitative data analysis revealed that students' speaking skills after the project-based learning implementation had significantly improved. Moreover, the qualitative data revealed that the students had positive opinions towards the project-based learning using presentation as it was supportive of their speaking skill improvement. The usefulness of project-based learning using presentation in this study showed that such communicative activities as

presentation tasks and integrative skill practice were beneficial for students' speaking skills. The activities helped improve the students' speaking skills and develop their ability to use language in an authentic way. Scaffolding activities were also useful as the students were given the necessary language and information before working on the speaking activities. Feedback from the students' opinions showed that a cooperative learning environment was an important factor in speaking skill development since it encouraged the students to cooperatively complete the tasks. In addition, technological skill integration was cited as an important criterion as it was creatively combined into their projects. Nevertheless, this study was limited to the time constraints in working on the projects. This problem can be addressed by allowing more flexible time for the students to work on their projects. Further studies may implement project-based learning into a community-based context to improve learners' speaking ability. The study provides two important pedagogical implications. Firstly, project-based learning using presentation should be considered and implemented to improve learners' language learning and skills since it bridges using English in class and in an authentic context. Moreover, delivery of group presentation provides the learners with a cooperative learning experience that allows them to interact with others using their English speaking skills. Secondly, project-based learning using presentation can be used to promote integrated skills which are essential to improve students' communication ability in real life context. Oxford (1996) mentions that by teaching students to improve their skill in one area, it can often enhance performance in other language skills. The results and interpretation of this study can shed light on useful practices for EFL learning and teaching, especially on speaking skill improvement.

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