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Investigating EFL Iraqi Primary School Teachers' Perceptions toward Using Project Technique

A B S T R A C T

Project techniques offer rich opportunities for helping students make interdisciplinary connections, address academic objectives and goals, problem solving , design making , promote social skills, and use technology. Within a topic of study, projects help students connect personal interests with course content as they explore a theme in greater depth.

The study aims at Investigating EFL Iraqi Primary school teachers' perceptions toward using project technique in their classes.

To fulfill the aim of the present study, a sample of (85)Iraqi EFL primary school teachers taken randomly from different schools . To achieve the aim of the study, teachers' questionnaire consists of (20) items is applied as instruments .From the analysis of the data, a t-test analysis shows a statistically significant difference according to teacher perceptions toward using project technique. It is recommended to use project techniques since they are very effective for the developing students' language and social skills and it is very helpful for the teacher as a procedure for learning language through a social context.

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استقصاء آراء معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية في المدارس الابتدائية العراقية نحو استخدام تقنية المشروع

م . نسرين كاظم خضير / وزارة التربية

الخلاصة:

توفر تقنيات المشروع فرصاً غنية لمساعدة الطلاب على إجراء اتصالات متعددة التخصصات ، ومعالجة الأهداف والأهداف الأكاديمية ، حل المشكلات ، صنع التصاميم ، وتعزيز المهارات الاجتماعية ، واستخدام التكنولوجيا. ضمن موضوع الدراسة ، كما ان المشاريع تساعد الطلاب على ربط الاهتمامات

الشخصية بمحتوى المادة الدراسية أثناء استكشافهم لموضوع ما بعمق أكبر. تهدف الدراسة إلى استقصاء آراء معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المدارس الابتدائية العراقية نحو استخدام تقنية المشروع في صفوفهم.

ولتحقيق هدف الدراسة الحالية ، تم أخذ عينة من (85) معلمًا للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بشكل عشوائي من مدارس مختلفة. وتم استخدام أداة الدراسة وهي عبارة عن استبانة خاصة للمعلمين تتكون من (20) فقرة .

من خلال تحليل البيانات ، باستخدام الاختبار التائي وجد هنالك فرقًا ذا دلالة إحصائية وفقًا لآراء المعلمين تجاه استخدام تقنية المشروع.

أوصت الدراسة باستخدام تقنيات المشروع لأنها فعالة جدًا في تطوير مهارات اللغة والمهارات الاجتماعية لطلاب المرحلة الابتدائية وهي مفيدة جدًا للمعلم كإجراء تعليمي لتعلم اللغة من خلال سياق اجتماعي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المدرسة الابتدائية ، آراء المعلمين ، تقنية المشروع .

1. Introduction

1.1 The Problem and its Significance

Though we all agree that the world has changed ,we also know that schools have not. with this growing awareness, we have started to see some shifts around the world .many schools and districts working toward more student-centered approaches that include inquiry learning, personalized learning, performance - based assessments(Boss,2018,p:14).

Learning strategies are operations and routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval, and use of information . They are also “specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self - directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations” . The term learning strategies then refers to what learners know and do to regulate their learning(Kumaravadivelu ,2006,p:36).

A study by Donato and Adair-Hauck (1992) concluded that the social context in which instructional intervention is delivered plays a crucial role in facilitating second language development in the classroom.

Project-based learning is a comprehensive method to classroom teaching and learning that is designed to engage students in investigation of complex, real,

authentic products and tasks. Projects offer rich opportunities for helping students make connections, address academic objectives and goals, , develop social skills, and use technology (Demirhan, 2002,p:35).

This study intends to answer this question:

What are the EFL Iraqi Primary school teachers' perceptions toward using project technique in their classes ?

1.2 Aim of the Study

The study aims at investigating IEFL Iraqi primary school teachers' perceptions toward using project technique in their classes .

1.3 The Hypothesis

The use of project technique has no impact on improvement of the primary school students' achievement.

1.4 Limits of the study

This study is limited to:

- EFL Iraqi primary school teachers
- Using project technique in teaching .

1.5 Procedures

To achieve the aim of the present study, the following procedures will be adopted by the researcher to collect and analyze data:

1. Choosing a number of Iraqi EFL primary school teachers' (at random) to represent the study sample.
2. Preparing a questionnaire for EFL primary school teachers' under the supervision of a number of specialists who examine its validity and given some suggestions and modifications if necessary.
3. Interpreting the results in the light of the hypothesis by using the proper statistical means that suit the study.

1.6 Value of the Study

The present study is expected to be value for English language teachers to promote their professional skills that will increase students achievement.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Teaching English as a foreign language

Over the past two decades, research has established that the “process and success of teacher development depends so much on the context in which it takes

place. The nature of this context can make or break teacher professional development efforts” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992,p.13).

Globalization and reform movements as recently witnessed around the world invite waves of change impacting aspects of human life, including the language and culture of communication and exchange (Canagarajah, 2005,p.16). With English becoming the lingua franca of the global community in major professional fields such as science, technology, commerce, and education, there is an increasing demand for effective teaching and learning of English in many world contexts. Effective English language skills are seen as vital for the workforce of countries which seek to participate actively in the global economy and want to have access to the information that forms the basis of social, educational, and economic development (Burns & Richards, 2009 ,p.42).

Teachers need to search and investigate for a good way to reach goals of teaching and learning objectives. A better way is that one which gives the students' the motivation to cooperate and exchange information with teacher from one side and with students from the other side (Ismail,2019,p1).

2.2 Theoretical Perspectives

Experiential learning refers to the learning process that based on the basis of the pedagogical principle of “learning by doing”, which means that learners have knowledge after experienced something new (Kotti, 2008,p.32). since “learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984,p.63). Experiential learning the process in which learners participate in real activities that enable them to experience what they are learning about and the opportunity to reflect and work on those activities (Silberman, 2007,p.8).

Experiential learning is related to the project technique . The project technique is “an open learning process , real extension of what is already taking place in classroom ” (Stoller, 2002,p.109). The project technique originates from Pragmatism, the philosophical movement which appeared in the middle of the 19th century and promotes action and practical application of knowledge in everyday life (Frey, 1986,p.31). Major proponents of Pragmatism are J. Dewey (1935) and W. Kilpatrick (1935) in the U.S.A, and H.Gaudig and G. Kerschensteiner in Germany.

The theoretical foundation of Project-based learning is strongly grounded in constructivism. In this regard, Railsback (2002,p. 6) argues that project strategies have their roots in the constructivist approach. Moreover, project technique borrows its principles from pragmatic constructivism, cognitive constructivism and social constructivism, which constitute the main stands of the constructivist learning theory.

A good language learner is described as a learner who acquires sufficient comprehension of a second language or abroad, and has a low emotional candidate to allow data entry on language acquisition (Yassin, and Mosa,2021,p,485) .

2.3 Cooperative Learning and Project Work

Cooperative Learning is an educational approach to teaching and learning English language that involves making groups of learners to work together in order to solve a certain problem, complete a task. In the Cooperative Learning environment, the learners are challenged both socially and emotionally as they listen to different perspectives, and are required to defend their ideas. In a Cooperative Learning learners have the opportunity to engage with peers, exchange ideas, discuss diverse beliefs, and are actively engaged (Srinivas, H., 2011 ,p.68).

Cooperative Learning occurs when groups of learners help each other to learn. It is not having learners talk to each other, either face-to-face or in a computer conference, while they do their assignments. It is not having them do the task individually and then have those who finish first help those who have not yet finished. Five fundamental factors involved in cooperative learning, are: Positive interdependence, peer or group work, Interpersonal and social group skills, Face-to face authentic interaction, and Group processing(Klemm, W.R., 1994 ,p.91).

Cooperative projects the topics ,resources selected by learners, discovery learning based on the following:

- Topics may be different for each group
- Learners identify subtopics for each group member
- Steering committee may coordinate the wok of the class as a whole
- Learners research the information using resources such as library reference, interview, visual media.

- Learners synthesize their information for a group presentation :oral and written. Each group member plays a part in the presentation.
- Each group presents to the whole class.
- This method place greater emphasis on individualization and learners' interests.
- Learners need plenty of previous experience with more structured group work for this to be effective(Richards & Rodgers2014,p.251).

2.4 Project-Based Learning

Thomas (2000,p.1) defines project-based learning as a method that organizes learning around projects. Projects are complex tasks, based on challenging problems, that involve learners in designing, problem-solving, decision making, or pro activities; give students the opportunity to work relatively autonomously over extended periods of time; and culminate in realistic products or presentations. Other defining features found in the literature include authentic assessment, teacher facilitation but not direction, cooperative learning, reflection, and incorporation of language skills .

Richards and Rodgers (2001,p.75) state that “project work is an educational idea which came to the fore in vocational education, moved into general education classrooms and is now being studied more intensively as a possible technique for supporting the particular goals of second language learning”. Project-based learning is consistent with many approaches to language learning that are seen in the language learning literature today. After a revolution in theory-based learning on cognitive and behavioral models, educators put emphasis on the value of project-based learning for students.

Teacher professional development can be realized by observation. It is a method for teachers to gather documents about their teaching performances. Gathering information about the instruction process can be realized by making a study, granting a questionnaire, speaking about education or by using an audio or video tools (Sami,2021,p,438).

Through projects technique learners represent their learning by using multimedia presentations, print materials, role play, models, simulations, or other means e.g., videotapes, brochures, plays or skits, recitals, musical scores, computer-assisted presentations (Fleming,2000,p.22). The application of this approach begins by determining the one global objective that the individual or

group of students have. This can be achieved by doing a need-assessment, such as looking at what learners are interested in and what topics they really need to know (Adebileje & Akinola,2020,P,1021).

2.5 The Need for Project-Based Teaching

Project-based learning has a lot of potential to enhance 21st century skills and engage learners in authentic-world tasks . It's not enough to just “do projects.” Today's projects need to be rigorous, engaging, and in-depth, and they need to have student voice and choice built in. Such projects require careful planning and pedagogical skill (Lamer ,et al, 2015 ,p.5).

Collaborative learning is the both the strategy and the goal of Project based learning .It is an umbrella term for a variety of educational approaches involving joint intellectual effort by students, or students and teachers together. Usually learners are working in groups , in order to understanding, solutions, or meanings, or creating a product. Collaborative learning tasks vary widely, but most focus on learner's discovery or application of the syllabus , not simply the teacher's presentation or explication of it (Smith, B.L. & Mac Gregor, J.T., 1992,p.14).

Enjoyment and motivation also stem from the fact that classroom language is not predetermined, but depends on the nature of the project (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:149). In project-based learning activities learners work in a group to solve certain problems which are authentic, learners engage in creative problem solving ,and it is also an achievement as learners work together. learners can create an product through intellectual inquiry and fulfill many meaningful tasks. Moreover, because project work activities address the different learning styles of learners, project-based learning focus on individual differences by giving learners opportunities to choose their own topics (Wrigley, 1998 ,p.12).

2.6 Phases of projects

By putting newly acquired skills and knowledge to use through serving others, students can develop a sense of caring and accomplishment. Service learning projects usually encompass five phases:

1. identifying an appropriate project determining student and community needs
2. planning, preparation, and organization deciding who will do what, with whom, and when
3. engaging in a service experience following through on commitments

4. documenting and reporting on the experience observing and analyzing the service

5. reflecting on the experience developing new understandings and next steps(Fleming,2000 ,p.48)

The type of project selected should be a legitimate vehicle for achieving curriculum standards and should match the learners' needs and interests. In some cases, this may mean rekindling a sense of place through community study, environmental investigation, or service learning. Or it could mean cultivating career choices through field studies, senior projects, or service learning. Project-based learning strategy: According to Hedge (2002,p.22), projects are extended tasks which usually integrate language skills by means of a number of activities. These activities combine in working towards an agreed goal and may include the following: planning; the gathering of information through reading, listening, interviewing, and observing; group discussion of the information; problem solving; oral and written reporting; and display.

2.7 Features of Project Work

Thomas, (1991,p.14), there are many features that have taken into account in the ELT classroom. These include: done

- Integrated four skills – all four skills are used in English teaching .
- Learner -centered : syllabus and tasks can be decided by learners to promote autonomy learning.
- promoted motivation : by using project work in classroom learners become personally involved in the project
- Collaborative and cooperative : interpersonal relations are developed among learners through the cooperative rather than competitive .
- process and product : provides focus on fluency and accuracy work throughout the project work .
- Providing opportunity for useful feedback and self or peer assessments .
- Providing opportunity for reflective thinking in learning.

Providing opportunity for using many types of authentic assessments (portfolios, interview, observation, journals, etc.).done

The learning goals will be achieved as the project moves along and with the use of the tasks that will promote effective practice on the content collected by learners and presented by the teachers. the stage in which learners have to make sense of all the information gathered during the inquiry demands a great deal of scaffolding. This term, first used by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) and derived from Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of learning, defines the support given by an adult to enable the learner to perform a task they would not be ready to accomplish on their own (Tavares, 2018, p.55).

Moreover, learners pursue their purpose through active exploration that involves people, settings, materials, and information that are meaningful to them. Student-generated interests, ideas, questions, or needs are considered in the project's design. Students apply learning as they confront real world dilemmas: Problem situations are sometimes ill-defined, complex, and messy. New information or new perspectives must be considered as they emerge (Fleming, 2000, p.22).

2.8 Benefits of project work in second and foreign language settings

According to Dornyei (2001, p.100-101), among other potential benefits, project work increases motivation, group work cohesiveness, promotes synthesis of academic and social goals, reduces anxiety in learning, encourages the learners' ability, and promotes effort-based engagement.

The language that has to be learned is divided into three stages:

- language of learning : the learning of the keywords and prompts that the learners will need to access the content worked on.
- language for learning: it focuses on the language that the learners will need to carry out the projects in their classroom.
- language through learning: it focuses on the unpredictable language that will arise as the learners move through a certain project (Tavares, 2018, p.41).

Because students engage in useful communication to complete authentic and real tasks, they have the opportunity to use language in a real context (Haines, 1989, p.21) and engagement in purposeful activities which require real language use.

The main goal of the project is to make the problem solvers aware of what they know, what they can do, whether they are doing it correctly, and whether the process is reasonable. Even when the problem solver fails to solve the problem, both students can get benefit from monitoring the thought processes involved. Through this strategy, implicit thought processes can be brought into the open and observed by both learners(Hameed,D.,T. & . Al-Jubour 2022,p.5).

Brophy and Alleman (1991,p.9) defined authentic activities as anything learners are expected to do ,beyond getting information through reading or listening, in order to learn, practice, apply, evaluate ,or in any other way respond to specific content . Other benefits of Using Student Projects as an Instructional Strategy:

1. promoting motivation learners "own the questions" and spend more time working on projects outside of school,
2. increased autonomy learners become more responsible and self-directed learners,
3. improving achievement learners practice higher levels of thinking through direct application of factual knowledge in making interpretations, conclusions, and critical judgments(Fleming, ,2000 ,p.14).

2.9 Teacher's Role in Project-Based Learning

Project work offers students the opportunities to make choices at many levels, each with different implementations, some choices are procedural, and functionally intrinsic to the activity. Choices have implementations for learning in social, cognitive , emotional, even in moral areas (Katz ,and Chard, 2000,p.76).

Teachers also need to develop and coach learners on social skills, teaching them how to work in groups and respect each other's ideas. Setting deadline and giving constant feedbacks on learners activities is important to keep them on task ,motivated and involved. Instructions and step by step detailed directions must be clear in the mind of teachers and understood by the learners. therefore teachers must try to map the project and define roles, tasks and strategies. Moreover teachers should realized that they are co-learners .The teacher knows what skills and academic standards students will accomplish based on the project's design and focus of inquiry. The student knows what result he or she is working toward and the criteria by which it will be judged (Tavares,2018,p.31) .

Haines, (1989,p. 4), outlines the teacher's stage-by-stage role as the following:

- the teacher should arouse interest and elicit learners' ideas for the topic direction, planning for activities ,methods of teaching, timetable, suitable end product and resource implications.
- During the project, the teacher should take on the role of facilitator, which involves becoming a resource of ideas , facilitate and helping learners to resolve arguments or disagreements, chairperson during groups' reports to the whole class.
- Finally, teacher's functions are related to efficient organization of displays and productions. His/her role is one of organizer and evaluator.

3. Procedures

3.1 Population and Sample

The total number of the teachers' population of this study is the EFL primary teachers school of the General Directorate of Al –Kharkh the second .

To achieve the aims of the study, the researcher has randomly chosen the sample of this study which is the 85 EFL primary teachers school of the General Directorate of Al –Kharkh the second .

3.2 Instrument

In order to achieve the aims of the study, a questionnaire has been constructed to be the main instrument used .

3.2.1 Construction of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire is typically composed of a developed answers the certain questions raised in the problem statement or to meet the needs of research objectives outlined during the early stages of the research (Neelankavil, 2015,p. 161).

In order to gain information about the EFL primary teachers' perceptions toward using project technique in their classes a questionnaire has been constructed drawing on the following sources:

- 1- Related literature: They are books, journals, and articles related to the problem of the research.
- 2 - Consulting specialists in the fields of ELT, and linguistics;

The rating scale includes the following options:

always (1) , often (2), sometimes(3) , rarely(4) , and never(5), as shown in (Table 1).

Components and Items		always	often	some-time	rarely	never
1	Project technique can improve students imagination.					
2	It can increase students' efficiency in the using of certain grammar rules in their context.					
3	Develops critical and active thinking skills.					
4	Develops communication and social skills.					
5	Improve students communicative competence					
6	Motivates high-order learning outcomes and thinking skills.					
7	Can achieve students' needs and interest					
8	Familiarizes students with using language in the real contexts.					
9	Encourages students to create their own project.					
10	Makes language learning meaningful as it helps students acquire literacy.					
11	Can improve students learning new vocabulary					
12	It can increase students' self confidence					
13	Can focus on students' language proficiency more than textbook do					
14	project technique is time consuming of learning					
15	May direct students towards different cultural content					
16	Project technique makes the lesson					

	learnable and enjoyable					
17	Contributes to a relaxed classroom atmosphere					
18	Projects encourage students to develop self and peer evaluation skills					
19	It can motivate students for problem solving through language use					
20	It can promote all four language skills					

3.2.2 Face Validity of the Questionnaire

Face validity indicates that the task or measure in the research, measures what it purports to measure (McInerney & Putwain, 2016, p.19).

In order to ensure the face validity of the questionnaire, its first version has been exposed to *the experts in the fields of linguistics and methodology of teaching EFL. The experts have been requested to judge whether the components of the questionnaire are suitable or not. In the light of the experts' views some items have been added and others have been omitted. However, the items 13 & 18 from the teacher's questionnaire have been changed.

And, the final form of the teachers' questionnaire consists of 43 items distributed into five components: 1.=4 , 2.=19 , 3.=3, 4.=8 , 5.=8.

3.2.3 Construct Validity

Construct Validity concerns whether a test adequately measures some construct and exploring how the researcher's theory had changed in response to the data (Goodwin, 2009, p.132). In order to find out the construct validity, the questionnaire has been applied to the pilot sample. Then, the construct validity has been achieved by using "Pearson Correlation Formula" .

3.2.4 Reliability of the Questionnaire

Reliability means consistency. A measure is considered reliable if it would give the researcher the same results over a given time (Trochim et al, 2015, p.41).

However, the questionnaire has been ministered to the same pilot sample after two weeks. The statistical manipulation of the data has been obtained from the

two administrations. By using Pearson Correlation Coefficient formula the result yields 0.81, whereas, by using Alpha Cronbach Formula the result yields 0.82 .

3.2.5 Pilot Administration of the Questionnaire

After ensuring the validity of the questionnaire, a pilot version is administered to a sample of Twenty English language teachers have been chosen randomly from different primary school for the pilot administration. Results of the pilot administration can be a good indicator for making any necessary modifications in the final version of the questionnaire and to determine the effectiveness of the items in the light of the subjects' responses.

3.2.6 Final Administration of the Questionnaire

The Final version of the questionnaire was distributed to the participants at the mid of August 2018 .The teachers were asked to give their views on the items according to scale. The period of distributing and receiving the copies of the questionnaire lasted from the mid of August to the mid of September 2018.

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1 Results

In order to achieve the aim of the study entitled "Investigating Iraqi EFL primary School Teachers' Perceptions toward using project technique in their class". The responses of the subjects were investigated by using the mean and the hypothetical mean formula .The weighted means for all items are above 4.00 and their weighted percentiles are above 90 % ,and as shown in Table (2). This proves that there is statistically significant differences at in the Iraqi EFL primary School Teachers' Perceptions toward using project technique in their class .

Table (2) : Weighted Mean of the Questionnaire items

<i>No. of item</i>	<i>Weighted mean</i>	<i>Weighted percentile</i>
18	4.24	85.00
4	4.30	86.00
16	4.31	86.00
11	4.54	91.00
17	4.56	91.00

5	4.58	92.00
2	4.60	92.00
1	4.66	93.00
6	4.67	93.00
13	4.67	93.00
20	4.67	93.00
7	4.69	94.00
14	4.71	94.00
9	4.73	95.00
19	4.77	95.00
15	4.79	96.00
12	4.81	96.00
10	4.84	97.00
8	4.91	98.00
3	4.95	99.00

4.2 Discussion of the Results

The research sought to disclose teachers' reasons for using project technique in an English language classroom. Some of the Iraqi EFL primary school teachers have negative perception towards using project as a learning technique. Some of them think that the language project technique is nothing more than time consuming and that it does not have any educational value on student achievement.

By using project technique the students played many roles in the class as communicators, problem solvers, and design makers. These roles promote them to acquire and employ English language more easily in different contexts.

The others believe that a language project technique has its educational value in classroom tasks, but use it rarely in their classes. Finally, there are few teachers who recognize the advantages of language project technique on student's achievement, and learning language skills. Teachers should be aware of their students' needs and promote them to choose the suitable projects.

This research has likewise been based on the supposition that although project technique is fun, it also has its educational value. And for this reason, it should be introduced in language classes.

4.3 Conclusions

The data collected and the subsequent analysis have yielded the following major conclusions:

Teachers have positive perspectives towards using project technique as an aid in promoting their students' achievement and promote high order thinking skills. The teacher's experience does not affect his/her perspective towards using project technique as an aid in promoting students achievement.

Throughout projects technique students to develop self and peer evaluation skills. This type of activity can also be a perfect way for practicing and learning a language since it usually includes a variety of language structures that students will later use in everyday contexts and can focus on students' language proficiency more than textbook do.

Consequently, project technique is not a new method and it has connection with many other approaches as their contributions to concepts such as role play, design making skills, learning by doing, experiential learning , problem solving and interactional skills.

Through project technique positive interaction and collaboration are increase among learners and peers , project technique can be used for improving students confidence, self-esteem, and for practicing and learning vocabulary. Project technique makes the lesson learnable and enjoyable .The results of this study indicate strong support for the use of project technique as a teaching and learning method. When learners are exposed to fulfill a particular task in a class setting they are highly engaged in the learning process and are practicing reflective learning and it improves students communicative competence.

4.4 Recommendations

Based on the conclusions made, the following recommendations are forwarded:

1-The Ministry of Education is recommended to train teachers on the different methods of using project technique.

2-Syllabus designers have to allocate time and give more emphasis to the using project technique when they design any syllabus for language learning .

3- English language teachers should use project technique as an aid in promoting their students communicative competence with other language skills.

4-English language teachers should develop their skills in language teaching by using novel techniques in teaching such as web sites ,educational sources, online discussion, and promote online webinars to share ideas and exchange experience for effective teacher development through collaborate extensively with colleagues.

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