



COMPARING TRADITIONAL TEACHING AND PROJECT- BASED LEARNING IN EFL CONTEXT

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Abstract: This article presents a comparative analysis of traditional teaching and project- based learning in the EFL context. It examines differences across key instructional and motivational dimensions, highlighting their distinct features and classroom implications. Finding shows that PBL promotes active learning, engagement, and learner- centered practice, while traditional methods offer structured guidance.

Key words: grammar translation method, audio- lingual method, collaborative tasks, cognitive engagement, school newspaper project.

Introduction

The evolution of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogy has generated significant discussion regarding the effectiveness of Traditional Teaching and Project-Based Learning (PBL). Traditional approaches, emphasizing rote memorization and teacher-led grammar instruction, have long offered learners a structured foundation. However, contemporary emphasis on communicative competence has shifted attention toward PBL, which encourages students to acquire language through meaningful, collaborative tasks. This article explores the transition from passive instruction to active engagement, evaluating how each approach influences learner motivation, autonomy, and the capacity to apply English in authentic, real-world contexts.

Theoretical background of Teacher- centered approach and project-based learning.

Traditional approaches have historically shaped English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction by establishing a structured and teacher-directed model of learning. These approaches prioritize systematic explanation of grammatical rules, controlled practice, and gradual progression from knowledge to use. Earlier methods such as Grammar-Translation and Audio-Lingual were designed to provide learners with a stable linguistic framework through repetition, pattern drills, and explicit instruction. In this model, the teacher assumes a central role in organizing input and guiding



learners through structured stages of language development, allowing them to internalize linguistic forms before applying them in practice [4].

From the perspective of second language acquisition theory, this structured orientation finds support in the work of Ellis, who emphasizes the importance of explicit instruction in raising learners' awareness of language forms. Conscious understanding of grammatical structures contributes to the development of linguistic competence and prepares learners for later communicative use. Through repetition and focused attention on form, learners construct a cognitive foundation that supports both accuracy and long-term language development. Although traditional instruction typically follows predetermined learning paths and prioritizes correctness, it continues to provide stability and clarity in language learning [3].

Project-Based Learning (PBL) represents a shift from teacher-directed instruction toward learner-centered engagement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Unlike traditional approaches that emphasize controlled practice, PBL encourages students to acquire language through meaningful tasks and collaborative inquiry. Project-based learning is grounded in the idea that knowledge is constructed through active exploration rather than passive reception.[4] Similarly, Beckett emphasizes that PBL integrates language learning with authentic problem-solving, enabling students to use English as a tool for communication rather than merely an object of study.[5]

From a pedagogical perspective, PBL promotes autonomy, interaction, and the practical application of knowledge. Project-based instruction allows learners to engage in sustained inquiry, collaborative decision-making, and real-world language use, thereby fostering deeper understanding and communicative competence. Through task completion and shared responsibility, students develop not only linguistic skills but also critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. As a result, PBL creates a learning environment in which language is experienced as meaningful and functional, supporting both engagement and long-term skill development.[6]

Key comparative dimensions.

The distinction between traditional teaching and Project-Based Learning (PBL) becomes particularly evident in classroom roles, learner responsibility, and patterns of interaction. In traditional instruction, the teacher typically serves as the primary authority who directs learning and controls the pace of instruction, while students follow structured guidance and focus on absorbing information. By contrast, PBL shifts this dynamic toward facilitation, encouraging learners to take greater responsibility for decision-making and task completion. This shift promotes learner autonomy and transforms communication from structured practice into meaningful collaboration. While



traditional classrooms often emphasize accuracy through controlled drills or dialogues, PBL creates opportunities for functional language use as students negotiate ideas, solve problems, and work collectively toward shared goals.

Differences also emerge in assessment, skills development, and cognitive engagement. Traditional teaching frequently evaluates learners through outcome-based testing that measures correctness and retention of knowledge, often focusing on discrete language components such as grammar and vocabulary. In contrast, PBL adopts a more process-oriented perspective, valuing participation, collaboration, and practical language application alongside the final product. Through project work, learners engage multiple skills simultaneously and apply language in integrated ways. Moreover, while traditional instruction may emphasize the reproduction of knowledge, PBL encourages analysis, interpretation, and decision-making, thereby supporting critical thinking. This participatory environment often enhances learner motivation by fostering a sense of ownership and purposeful engagement in the learning process.

Effectiveness of PBL in practice

Project-Based Learning (PBL) has been shown to enhance student engagement, motivation, and language use when applied in real classroom settings. In secondary school EFL contexts, studies indicate that learners exposed to PBL participate more actively, collaborate effectively, and apply English in meaningful ways. For example, research by Ngadiso (2023) demonstrated that students working on collaborative projects showed higher levels of intrinsic motivation compared to peers in traditional classrooms [8]. Similarly, Zaafour reported that teachers observed increased student interaction, autonomy, and willingness to communicate when tasks were project-oriented [9].

Beyond engagement, PBL also contributes to holistic skill development. Through sustained inquiry and collaborative problem-solving, learners simultaneously practice reading, writing, speaking, and listening, integrating these skills in authentic contexts. Task-based projects allow learners to experience language as functional, not merely academic, promoting long-term retention and communicative competence. Additionally, PBL encourages critical thinking, creativity, and decision-making, which traditional instruction may not prioritize. Overall, evidence from classroom studies and meta-analyses suggests that PBL provides meaningful advantages over conventional teaching, improving both learner motivation and practical language application.

One practical example of Project-Based Learning in EFL classrooms is a school newspaper project, which engages students in authentic language use while integrating multiple skills. In this activity, the teacher introduces the



project and divides the class into teams, such as reporters, editors, and designers. Each team selects topics, conducts research, drafts articles, and rehearses oral interviews in English. Throughout the process, students collaborate to revise content, share feedback, and produce a final newspaper that can be printed or shared digitally. The teacher acts as a facilitator, guiding language use and supporting problem-solving rather than giving direct instructions. By completing the project, learners practice reading, writing, speaking, and listening in meaningful contexts, develop critical thinking, and experience increased motivation and ownership over their learning. Assessment considers both the process—including collaboration, effort, and participation—and the product, reflecting the real-world application of language skills.

Challenges and limitations of project-based learning

Despite its many advantages, Project-Based Learning (PBL) presents several challenges that educators must consider. Implementing PBL is often time-consuming, as teachers must carefully design authentic projects, prepare materials, and guide students through multi-step tasks [7]. Classroom management can also be demanding, particularly in larger classes, where monitoring multiple groups and ensuring balanced participation may be difficult. Additionally, PBL requires teachers to act as facilitators rather than traditional instructors, which demands expertise in guiding inquiry, scaffolding student work, and maintaining motivation without taking over the project [1].

Assessment is another significant challenge in PBL, as both the process—including collaboration, effort, and participation—and the product must be evaluated, often requiring new rubrics and strategies beyond traditional tests. Resource limitations, such as lack of technology or access to materials, can further restrict the scope or quality of projects. Moreover, some students may initially struggle with the autonomy and responsibility that PBL demands, which can temporarily reduce motivation. Scholars such as Thomas (2000), Beckett & Miller (2006), and Stoller emphasize that while these challenges exist, careful planning, teacher training, and clear assessment strategies can mitigate difficulties and allow students to benefit fully from the approach [6, p. 19].

Implications for Secondary Schools

The findings of this study suggest that Project-Based Learning (PBL) can significantly enhance EFL instruction in secondary schools by promoting learner autonomy, motivation, collaboration, and authentic language use. To implement PBL effectively, teachers should receive training in facilitation, classroom management, and process-oriented assessment, while schools should provide adequate resources and technological support. Projects should be



scaffolded, starting with smaller guided tasks before moving to larger, independent assignments, helping students adjust to increased responsibility. Integrating PBL with traditional teaching methods can provide a balanced approach, allowing students to build foundational knowledge while applying English in meaningful, real-world contexts.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) offers a learner-centered alternative to traditional EFL instruction, emphasizing meaningful, real-world language use, collaboration, and critical thinking. Compared to traditional teaching, PBL encourages autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and the integration of multiple language skills, helping students apply English beyond the classroom. While challenges such as time constraints, assessment complexity, and classroom management exist, careful planning, teacher training, and appropriate scaffolding can address these issues. For secondary schools, incorporating PBL alongside traditional methods provides a balanced approach, enriching learners' experience, promoting engagement, and preparing students to communicate confidently and effectively in authentic contexts.

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