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Project-Based Assessment in English for Specific Purposes

Siti Asmiyah¹, Hilda Izzati Madjid, Ike Puji Lestari

English Language Education Department
UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya
Surabaya, Indonesia
siti.asmiyah@uinsby.ac.id

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Abstract: Project Based Learning (PBL) in English for Specific Purpose (ESP) has been believed to enable student to have hand on and contextual experiences related to their English Language Learning. In addition to the teaching and learning process, project can also be used as an assessment instrument through PBL. Despite the possible project-based assessment, the existing studies have mainly focused on the PBL as a teaching and learning approach with less attention on assessment. This paper describes the use of project based assessment in two ESP courses in an Islamic college in East Java. The stages of the assessment and students' responses on the benefit and challenges are presented. Implication for PBL in English language teaching and learning and other possible implementation of project-based assessment are also presented in the paper.

Keywords: *Project Based-Assessment, English for Specific Purposes*

INTRODUCTION

The teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) should enable students to acquire and develop their English skills using real situation in such a way that they can comprehend the English discourse as used in their disciplinary area use English in their profession (Lamri, 2016). To achieve the above purpose, Project-Based Learning (PBL) can serve as a suitable teaching model for ESP. This is because PBL teaches not only content but also skills that enable students to function in the society as they learn

through real tasks in collaboration, either with their peer or with group of people in certain community (Zancul, Sousa-Zomer, & Cauchick-Miguel, 2017). Through PBL, student can develop their thinking skills in a more flexible learning environment (Doppelt, 2003). In Indonesian EFL context, PBL in particular can serve as a good method in English teaching particularly that of high school level. This is because the teaching of English in high school is recommended to apply scientific method that can suit well with PBL (Muryanti, 2015). The stages in conducting PBL according to Kriwas (1999 in Fragoulis, 2009: 114) include speculation or selection of project topic, designing the project activities, conducting the project activities and evaluating the project. This last stage of PBL, the evaluation, suggest that PBA is an inseparable part of PBL as assessment relates very closely to the attainment of the expected learning outcome, which is assumed to be achieved through the project completion.

The existing studies have provided a breadth of information on the use of PBL in different contexts and level of students. In a classroom action research in a high school Spanish classroom, the use of PBL can facilitate better development of student vocabulary and grammar but not in writing performance (Collier, 2017). In addition to such development of students skills in foreign language, a number of studies also found reflected benefits of PBL. A study on teacher perception on the use of PBL in a music course in Lithuanian university found that lecturers perceive that PBL can develop students' self-dependence, responsibility, social competency while at the same time brings students' satisfaction on lecturer and students involvement in project activities and improvement of lecturers' capacity in developing meaningful tasks for students (Lasauskiene & Rauduvaite, 2015). A study on the use of video project in PBL setting found that such a project develop student confidence in English speaking (Nikita, 2009). Students reflected that PBL bring enjoyment for junior high schools students in Surabaya. authentic situation of learning, student centered activities and use of ICT have stimulated student's positive perception toward PBL in grammar learning (Efendi, 2017). PBL also provides both comprehensible input and output (Muryanti, 2015) and can develop students' English speaking skill even for young learners in primary education (Maulany, 2013). Research finding also suggest that PBL can not only

promote student better speaking skills (Loi, 2017) but also their autonomy in learning (Loi, 2017, Lasauskiene & Rauduvaite, 2015).

These breadth of foci in previous studies on PBL, however, have not yet touched upon the issue of project-based assessment (PBA) as an integrated part of PBL. One study that explored PBA also focused more on the teaching staffs's perception on the rubric used in PBA (Azhar, 2015), and not yet on how such model of assessment is implemented. Hence, there is still an open area for further investigation on how PBA is applied particularly in English Language Teaching (ELT) and more specifically on ESP. This paper describes the implementation of PBA in two ESP courses in a state Islamic university in East Java, Indonesia

METHOD

This study involved two teachers, each teaching an ESP course in a state Islamic university in East Java. One teacher taught English for Islamic Studies and the other taught Business English classes. These two teachers were interviewed and asked to reflect on the practice of using project based assessment in their classes. These teachers were asked and reflected on the purpose of using project-based assessment, the design and procedure of the assessment and some possible merits and challenges. Ninety nine students, forty eight from English for Islamic Studies classes and fifty one from Business English classes were asked to respond to a survey questionnaire. The four semi-structured questionnaire mainly asked about the class they were in, the project they did and the benefits and challenges they experience while doing the project-based assessment in their classes. The questions on benefits and challenges provide several possible options which the students may tick all that apply. Responses from the interview were transcribed, coded and thematized based on the main questions of this study and the corresponding main points reflected by the teachers. The responses from the questionnaire were calculated and put into percentages. These percentages, however, are not aimed to generalize the finding but rather to enable simpler and more succinct data analysis and discussion.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

In order to bring a general overview of the two ESP courses and to enable better flow of data presentation of the finding and discussion, the first part of this section describes the expected learning outcomes of the two ESP courses. The teachers reflected that both English for Islamic Studies and Business English aim to develop students' knowledge and understanding on the concepts and theories related to the respecting courses and build students skills to use English both in oral and written forms in the contexts of Islamic studies or business. This main aim is then broken down into objectives depending on the characteristics of each course. The objectives of English for Islamic Studies course are to develop students' skills in understanding and producing factual information, interpreting and producing scientific information and reviewing and producing academic information, all in both oral and written form. Meanwhile, the objective of Business English course is to develop student communication skills both in oral and written forms in the context of business.

Teacher responses in the interview indicate that the use of PBA is aimed to better assess the development of students' ability in using English to attain the expected learning outcomes. Teacher A who taught English for Islamic Studies reflected that as students are still in the second semester and have just passed the basic English courses, it may be difficult for students to get the required skills if they only learn from text books and in class activities and are assessed in conventional ways of paper based quizzes. The use of PBA, Teacher A reflected, *"will assess students' skills better when we know what they have learnt in the real context, so I can know if they already achieve the expected outcome"*. This statement is further confirmed by Teacher B who taught Business English. As she is not a person doing business, she considered that *'having students working on the project involving not only English but also real experience from real 'business' (she gestured apostrophe signs with her fingers) will enable not only me to assess their skills as used in real context but also students themselves to self evaluate what they have learnt and what they need to learn more,'* that is, whether or not they have achieved the learning outcomes.

To do the assessment based on projects, both teachers reflected that they went through the stages of preparation, realization, presentation and evaluation. In the preparation stage, both teachers reflected that they first discuss with the students the expected learning outcomes of the course based on the curriculum. Teacher A mentioned that by considering that the expected learning outcomes are to enable students to facilitate students' understanding on the concepts related to Islamic studies and develop their skills to use English orally and in the written forms in the context of Islamic studies, Teacher A further reflected *'we then discuss in our first meeting the objectives of the learning and the possible projects that students want to be assessed with.'* This is also confirmed by Teacher B who said that *'we first look at the expected learning outcomes, then the objectives and we explore possible projects that help them [students] to achieve the objectives and can be used as a form of evaluation of their achievement.'*

Responses of both teachers suggest that in analysis of learning outcomes and objectives and discussion on the possible projects related to the attainment of such outcomes and objectives the students want to be assessed with are important processes in the preparation stage of PBA. From such analysis and discussion, as Teacher A stated, the English for Islamic Studies course determined that the students in groups were to develop research posters on various topics such as rhetorical moves of article abstracts in Islamic studies, corpora of Islamic-related vocabulary from various authentic materials of Islam, and common topics discussed in journal articles of Islamic studies. Meanwhile, Teacher B who taught Business English mentioned that the students agreed to develop a short *madrasah* (Islamic school) video profile. When asked on the relevance of *madrasah* to business, she argued that *madrasah* can be seen as education industry or business as each *madrasah* needs to build a good image and 'communicate' their branding to the stakeholders as their 'customer'. Also, the selection of *madrasah* is to bring the institutional context of the college to the project.

After particular projects were agreed, the next stage the students went through was creating the general structure of the activities and timeline, forming the group and

producing the assessment guideline. Teacher B emphasized that assessment guideline is an important element in PBA as from the guideline shared in the project preparation will *'enable students to better plan their projects, share the tasks among the members and self-assess if they have achieved the objectives.'*

This preparation stage of PBA in the two ESP courses to a certain extent reflect that of speculation stage of PBL proposed by Kriwas (1999 in Fragoulis, 2009: 114). The difference lay on the selection on the topic for the project in that the project in PBL may root from the real problem from the environment while the project reflected by the teachers were drawn from the expected learning outcome and from the assumed possible topics that can be used as the projects.

The next stage of PBA is realization. Teacher A reflected that in the realization process he asked students to collect sources of information related to the project through extensive reading. The students were to read journal articles on Islamic studies and authentic materials in any possible forms. Students collected articles from different journals for the groups of rhetorical moves analysis and common topics of the articles. *'Interestingly,'* he said, *'students brought various authentic materials about Islam from resources I have never expected before such as English newspaper published in America and Australia and even flyers and videos.'* For the Business English project, each group went to *madrasah*, collected information by interviewing the principle, the teaching staffs and students and even the parents. *'Students also collected information from relevant documents such as records of students and school achievement,'* Teacher B reflected.

These activities of students meeting the stakeholders of the *madrasah* reflect what Zancul, Sousa-Zomer & Cauchick-Miguel (2017) statement that learning through project enable students to do real tasks through collaboration not only with peer but also with community. In the case of this Business English course, students do both while doing the project as part of their assessment while in English for Islamic Studies because the project is more of content analysis, the students only do peer collaboration. Also, the students getting information both from the resources they collected and from

interview can be seen as students getting comprehensible inputs related to the materials in each of ESP courses. This confirms Muryanti (2015) in that PBL can provide comprehensible input.

After the students collected information, they then process the information they got. In this process the two courses went through different processes. In English for Islamic Studies class, the students worked in group, either shared the reading or work on corpus processing software, and have an intensive discussion with the teacher. Because Business English class each group has relatively the same type of information but from different sources, each group first shared the information to the class and each group identify the distinctiveness of each *madrasah*. So, each *madrasah* will have different point that may be ‘marketable’ which then is publicly informed through the video profile project the students develop.

Referring back to the realization stage of PBL as proposed by Kriwas (1999 in Fragoulis, 2009: 114), the realization process of PBA in the two courses well reflect the proposed stage of PBL. Students reading on the journal articles and authentic materials about Islam and their going to the *madrasahs* and interviewing the principles, teaching staffs and students can be considered as what Kriwas (1999 in Fragoulis, 2009: 114) as information gathering cycle of the project realization. Meanwhile, students working on content analysis using software for corpus processing in English for Islamic Studies course and students’ discussion and sharing on information collected from each *madrasah* can be considered as information processing cycle in this realization stage.

The next stage of PBA conducted in the two ESP courses under the study is presentation and evaluation. At this process the both courses required students to present their drafts to the class. The purpose of such presentation is ‘*to pre-assess the project, so the students can get feedback from their peers and the teacher and make any possible improvement,*’ Teacher A stated. This is also confirmed by Teacher B statement in that ‘*when they presented their video to the class, we can together evaluate what points have met the expected learning outcome and which ones have not; whether the video met the agreed rubrics or not.*’ These reflection of the two teachers highlight that the

presentation itself at the same time serve as the initial part of the evaluation. The presentation also stimulates students' self-assessment and self-evaluation on the projects.

The last stage in the implementation of PBA as reflected by both teachers in the interview was evaluation. They both stated that while they have had a bit of overview of the project output during the presentation stage, they went into further details of the assessment based on the rubric as agreed on the first meeting on the learning contracts with the students. *'I can actually predict the score of the students from their presentation in the previous stage but I need to go to further details because they may do revision after the feedback session,'* Teacher B stated. She further reflected that *'two projects improved significantly after the presentation. This shows that students also learn while doing the project.'* The two projects mentioned, she added, improved particularly on the duration of the video and on the presentation of highlighted information related to the 'marketable' points of the madrasah. Such an improvement can be considered as comprehensible output as mentioned by Muryanti (2015). The improvement, particularly on better development and presentation of madrasah's point, indicates that through the project as a form of assessment, the students can produce something comprehensible for the audience, particularly that of the 'customer' (to use business term) of madrasah as the 'service provider' within the discourse of Business English.

The overall implementation of PBA as reflected by these two teachers of two ESP courses highlights that the use of project as a form of assessment seem to well reflect the stages in PBL rather than a distinctive PBA as such. The process of going through preparation can be considered as Kriwas' (1999 in Fragoulis, 2009: 114) speculation and design stages of PBL while the realization as the conduct of project activities and presentation and evaluation as the evaluation stage of PBL. This; however, can be well accepted as in every teaching and learning process, assessment and evaluation is an integrated and inseparable part. Hence, a model adopted in teaching and learning will also be adopted in the form of assessment.

The teachers reflection on the use of PBA as a form of assessment in ESP courses also highlight the possible benefits of the implementaion. This include stimulation of students' creativity, facilitation of collaboration, development of communication skills and critical thinking. Teacher A statement that students '*brought various authentic materials ... I have never expected before*' highlights that the project stimulate creativity. Students working with their peers, doing the presentation and collecting information from *madrasahs* (particularly for Business English class) show that the project facilitate students collaboration while at the same time developing their communication skills.

Improvement on student projects can be thought of as a form of critical thinking because to do the improvement they need to evaluate their own work and feedbacks from the peers. This confirms Doppelt (2003) that project provides more flexible learning environment and help student develop their thinking skills. In addition to these benefits, the teachers also reflected on students learning through real context to achive the expected learning outcome assessed through the projects.

These benefits reflected by the teachers is further confirmed by students respondents. When asked on the benefits they experience from PBA, students also ticked 'learn from real context' option (81%). This learning from real context enabled them to 'connect in class material to real experience' (88%). In addition, students in majority (83%) responded that PBA motivate them better compared to paper based quizzes and assignment. Such motivation and positif perception toward real life experience or authentic situation of learning was also found in Efendi (2017). PBA also brings students satisfaction as the projects they did 'can be useful for others' (88%). This finding on satisfaction and usefulness of PBA is in line with findings by Lasauskiene & Rauduvaite (2015) that project can brings students satisfaction as they are working on meaningful tasks. Students' responses also highlight 'ability to collaborate' (74%) as a benefit of PBA in their courses. This finding on ability to collaborate and teachers' reflection on benefits of students having chance to work with peers and communicate with *madrasahs* signifies the development of students' collaboration skill and social competency as found by Lasauskiene & Rauduvaite (2015).

While PBA can bring benefits on the development of students skills, students responses to questionnaire reveals some challenges students have while doing PBA. The most challenging issue with PBA is time consuming (59%). Referring back to teacher reflection on the implementation of PBA, this challenge may be because the process of PBA begins as the teaching and learning begins. Also, when students need to do extensive reading to find resources for poster project in English for Islamic Studies or go to *madrasahs* to collect information, they need to spend a certain amount of time to do so. Another salient challenge is difficulty to organize the group (37%) and the information (29%).

Findings on the implementation, benefits and challenges of PBA as a form of assessment in the two ESP courses of English for Islamic Studies and Business English in the Islamic college under the study highlights that the PBA implemented reflects that of PBL and that despite the challenges students face, students get more benefits particularly in their cognitive development, practical skills and personal and social development.

CONCLUSION

The paper presents the four stages of PBA, namely the preparation, realization, presentation and evaluation stages, in English for Islamic Studies and Business English courses. The implementation of PBA through the stages seems to be an inseparable part of PBL although the teachers do not specifically mentioned that they use such a model in their teaching. This indicates that teaching-learning model influence the form of assessment. Data shows that the implementation of PBA facilitates students cognitive development of the materials in the courses as they learn through meaningful tasks in the real life context. Through PBA students also develop their creativity, collaboration, communication and critical thinking skills. In addition, PBA also stimulates better motivation and bring satisfaction to the students. Hence, PBA can serve as a good form of assessment in ESP course particularly and may be also applicable in other more general courses. Any course that plan to use PBA; however, needs to be aware of the challenge of length of the time frame to do the assessment as well as possible

difficulties in tasks distribution among the members of the group and organization of information collected to develop the end product of the project.

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