

EFL LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF PROJECT-BASED LEARNING: MOTIVATION, ENGAGEMENT, AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is known as a student-centered approach that fosters active learning, cooperation and authentic use of language in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class. This study explores EFL learners' opinions and experiences of PBL, especially their motivation, engagement, attitudes, preferences, obstacles, and support needs. The design was an explanatory sequential mixed techniques design. Quantitative data were collected from 135 undergraduate EFL learners through a structured questionnaire, and qualitative data were obtained through open-ended questionnaire replies to give more in-depth insights into learners' experiences. Descriptive statistics were used to evaluate quantitative data and qualitative responses were thematically analyzed. The results indicated that learners' perceptions of PBL were typically good. The perception item that received the highest score was "PBL makes English learning more interesting" ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.95$) while the highest score for motivation and engagement was active participation during project activities ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.92$). Learners also indicated positive perceptions about PBL, with the statement "I participate more when project topics are interesting" having the highest mean score ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.96$). The most preferred characteristic of PBL was creative activities (82.2%), followed by technological integration (63.7%). The most important criteria driving participation were interesting themes for projects (85.9%) and the opportunity to develop new skills (74.1%). Learners experienced some drawbacks with these benefits including Unequal group involvement (74.1%), Communication problems with group members (65.9%) and concerns over unfair marks (56.3%). The most important sorts of assistance for teachers were feedback (84.4%) and clear guidance (83.0%). The study suggests that PBL offers significant collaborative and engaging English language learning experiences. However, its success depends on good group administration, open assessment processes and continued teacher assistance.

Keywords: Collaborative Learning, EFL Learners, Engagement, Motivation, Project-Based Learning.

INTRODUCTION

In the present world of globalization, it is necessary to teach English as a foreign language. English is utilized globally as a language franca for communication, trade and cultural exchange. The acquisition of English as a non-native language in an EFL classroom is supposed to result in competency for several objectives such as travel, profession, academic research, and personal growth (Bayyurt, 2006; Dewaele & Leung, 2022; Ouanhlee, 2023). Teaching English as a foreign language is fraught with difficulties for both teachers and learners. However, for many of the EFL learners, there is limited exposure to English outside the classroom. This can be a barrier to language learning and fluency.

EFL learners may not have as many opportunities for practicing and using English in authentic circumstances as ESL learners since they do not live in a community of English speakers. It can be really difficult to get EFL learners to be active participants in the process of learning the language, especially when they don't see the immediate relevance or benefits of studying English. Enhancing learners' motivation and creating an engaging learning environment are among the most important goals for EFL teachers (Sokolova et al., 2018; Zhao, 2024). However, the paradigm has shifted from the grammar-translation method to Communicative Language Teaching, popularly known as CLT where learners acquire the language in more communicative ways. In this approach, the main focus is not on drilling and memorization, rather it focuses more on interaction and communication.

According to concepts of Project-based learning (PBL), CLT is built on meaningful engagement, authentic communication and task-based learning. That is, group projects are meant to give learners the chance to acquire new knowledge and skills (Condliffe, 2017; Parker et al., 2013; Thomas, 2000). In addition, Guo et al. (2020) noted that PBL is an approach which highlights a collaborative pedagogy based on inquiry. This means that the knowledge is constructed when learners are engaged in collaboration in solving the problem in their learning. This is how CLT evolved and was integrated to the ideas of PBL. In conclusion, Project-oriented Learning (PBL) is in keeping with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in that it is task-oriented, meaningful and based on authentic communication. If CLT principles are embedded in PBL-oriented language education, teachers can contribute stimulating, authentic, and communicative learning opportunities that facilitate mastery, fluency, and proficiency in language. PBL has been proved to have a higher academic achievement compared to traditional teacher-led education (Balemén & Keskin, 2018; Chen & Yang, 2019).

Project-based learning (PBL) is a pedagogical approach in which students acquire information and skills through a prolonged engagement with an authentic, engaging, and complicated issue, problem, or challenge (Almulla, 2020; Karan & Brown, 2022; Laur, 2013). PBL focuses on inquiry-based inquiry, student autonomy, collaborative problem solving, and active learning to improve learners' ability in critical thinking and questioning, as well as their ability to use information and skills in meaningful contexts (Sasson et al., 2018). Learners are expected to become autonomous learners who can cope with the uncertainty and open-endedness of PBL projects and teachers often have to be designers, pioneers, facilitators and managers at the same time (Cole, 2022; Schutte et al., 2025; Yuliasri et al., 2023).

PBL provides a dynamic and immersive language learning technique in the EFL environment, which goes beyond the standard teaching methods and allows learners opportunity to improve language fluency, cultural awareness and 21st-century skills in authentic and meaningful contexts. Incorporating PBL into the EFL classroom can provide teachers with opportunities to promote dynamic, student-centered learning experiences that prepare learners for success in a linked, globalized world. PBL is designed to engage learners in authentic research in which they use and construct knowledge much as scientists do (Novak & Krajcik, 2019). PBL enables students to understand the connection between scientific practice and the real world, the importance of learning, carrying out investigations, and the transparency of the problems studied (Hasni et al., 2016).

There are several theoretical frameworks that support the use of Project Based Learning (PBL) in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. These frameworks are used to guide the conception and implementation of PBL projects to promote language fluency and learning. Three major theoretical frameworks that underpin PBL in EFL context are constructivism, socio-cultural theory and task-based learning theory. Project-based learning (PBL) is a constructivist learning approach that is context-dependent and fosters self-awareness of learning and knowledge (Tamim & Grant, 2013a). It needs the formation of knowledge with diverse viewpoints in social activities.

There are a number of reasons why research on the use of Project-Based Learning in EFL classrooms is important. PBL is a promising language teaching strategy, which has the potential to improve the outcomes of language acquisition for EFL learners. In addition, collaborative projects give learners opportunities to practice speaking, listening, reading and writing in English, and to develop their communicative competence and confidence. Finally, PBL highlights the development of language use and communication skills as learners are involved in communication which is meaningful and much exposure on real-life tasks.

There have been numerous studies on the pedagogical benefits of Project-Based Learning for language teaching in earlier studies. Research has proven that PBL can improve learners' creativity, engagement and language abilities via realistic and relevant learning experiences (Husna et al., 2019; Syarifah & Emiliasari, 2019). Equally, Condliffe (2017) also found that the performance of PBL is significantly shaped by contextual factors including the support from the school and the commitment from the school leadership. These results show the potential of PBL for active learning, but the results are not just affected by the instructional design, but also by institutional and contextual factors.

The focus and scope of the existing studies are varied. Some studies examine particular learning outcomes, such as creativity and language development (Husna et al., 2019; Syarifah & Emiliasari, 2019), whereas other studies consider broader educational contexts that enable or inhibit PBL implementation (Condliffe, 2017). This difference shows that the impacts of PBL cannot be understood only by achievement measurements, as the efficacy of the approach may also depend on the attitudes, preferences and learning experiences of the learners. While the research base for PBL is developing, there has been relatively little focus on the mechanisms by which learners' perspectives influence their engagement in project activities.

PBL has also been shown by research to be learner-centered. The technique provides flexibility, autonomy, and differentiation, and enables teachers to alter instruction based on the needs, interests, and competence levels of learners (Ali, 2019; Amerstorfer & Freiin von Münster-Kistner, 2021). At the same time, research has suggested that teachers tend to have good perceptions of PBL since it promotes cooperation, student-centered learning and improved linkages between theory and practice (Harun et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2021).

The studies emphasize however implementation issues such as need for extensive planning, evaluation complications, and lack of institutional support. This contrast

between the known benefits of PBL and the actual challenges of its successful implementation is reflected in the literature. Furthermore, numerous studies have examined various dimensions of learners' experiences in PBL, such as their attitudes towards the method, satisfaction with project activities, and their perceived benefits and challenges (Amin & Shahnaz, 2022; Hong et al., 2014; Nassir et al., 2025; Yew & Goh, 2016). In EFL contexts, recent research has explored the effect of PBL in fostering learner engagement, cultural awareness, motivation and language learning results (Sánchez-García & Reyes-de-Cózar, 2025; Smith et al., 2022). These studies do assist understand the learners' impressions of PBL, but they mostly focus on the learners' experiences, rather than investigating whether and how learners' attitudes and preferences affect their level of participation. Learners' perception and involvement, therefore, are not yet well known.

Studies on inclusion and equality have also found that PBL can promote culturally responsive teaching and provide more equitable learning experiences (Cheng et al., 2023; Lavado-Anguera et al., 2024; Tierney et al., 2024). These studies extend the understanding of PBL beyond academic accomplishment and highlight the complexity of the learners' participation in various educational environments. The literature reveals that PBL has the capacity to positively impact learning, creativity, motivation and involvement. However, there is still a paucity of empirical information on how learners' attitudes and preferences affect their engagement in PBL activities, especially in the setting of English as a foreign language (EFL). Hence, the present study seeks to analyze learners' perception and experiences of PBL in EFL context and to examine the impact of learners' attitudes and preferences on their engagement in project-based language learning.

Previous studies have consistently shown that Project-Based Learning improves learners' creativity, motivation, engagement, language abilities, and general learning experiences (Husna et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2022; Syarifah & Emiliasari, 2019). In addition, learners' perspectives, satisfaction, benefits, and obstacles of PBL implementation in different educational settings have been explored in studies (Amin & Shahnaz, 2022; Hong et al., 2014; Nassir et al., 2025; Yew & Goh, 2016). While such studies offer interesting insights into the experiences of learners of PBL, they are limited to the description of attitudes, perceptions and learning outcomes.

However, what remains unclear is the extent to which learners' views and inclinations towards PBL influence their actual involvement in project activities. Previous studies focused on perceptions, motivation, and engagement as separate categories and did not examine the interactions among them. Therefore, there is a lack of empirical information on the extent to which positive or negative opinions of learners lead to active participation and persistent engagement in PBL-based language learning. Moreover, the literature on this topic in the EFL setting is still very limited, especially in the contexts in which PBL is still developing as an instructional strategy.

This current study attempts to fill this vacuum by studying the interaction between learners' attitudes, preferences and involvement and their views and experiences of Project-Based Learning (PBL) among EFL learners. Specifically, the study intends to investigate the learners' perceptions and preferences towards PBL on their degree of involvement and engagement in the project activities. This study moves beyond past

research by connecting learners' perceptions with engagement-related outcomes to go beyond the descriptive accounts of PBL experiences and to provide a more holistic picture of the factors that enable or impede meaningful learner engagement in EFL classrooms. The results are expected to inform the development of more effective and learner-responsive practices of PBL in language instruction.

METHOD

Research Design

The study used a mixed methods research design with an explanatory sequential approach. The first phase included the collection and analysis of quantitative data. The second phase comprised the collection and analysis of qualitative data to explain, elaborate and provide deeper insights into the quantitative findings. The explanatory sequential design is, according to Creswell (2012) “particularly useful when researchers wish to use qualitative evidence to explain, interpret, and elaborate quantitative findings. This methodology allows statistical trends to be integrated with the perceptions of participants, so offering a more complete picture of the study subject than either quantitative or qualitative methods alone.

Research Context and Participant

This study was carried out in the English Education Program at Universitas Negeri Semarang, in which Project-Based Learning has been integrated into English language courses to improve collaborative learning, critical thinking, and authentic language use. The participants were 171 undergraduate EFL students enrolled in the English Education Program at Universitas Negeri Semarang. The quantitative phase is purposive sampling of 135 students to participate. This sample size was considered sufficient to provide a comprehensive insight into students' perceptions and experiences of PBL implementation in EFL classrooms. The samples are third-year students of English Education Program, Universitas Negeri Semarang.

Research Instrument

Quantitative data are collected through a structured questionnaire, using a Likert scale of five points (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). The questionnaire is designed to measure students' perceptions of Project-Based Learning, their learning motivation, engagement levels and challenges faced during project implementation. The instrument was subjected to expert review for content validity and measured for reliability before the main study. The questionnaire was developed based on an extensive review of pertinent literature and established theoretical frameworks related to the studied constructs. In order to ensure content validity, the items of the questionnaire were evaluated by a panel of experts consisting of specialists in the field of education and research methodology. Their feedback was used to assess the relevance, clarity, comprehensiveness and appropriateness of each item. Instrument was revised as necessary before being administered to participants. With regard to its reliability, internal consistency is calculated by using Cronbach's alpha and a coefficient of 0,93382, which is considered as high reliability.

Following the quantitative phase, qualitative were gathered using the open-ended questionnaire to acquire a deeper understanding of the survey results. The open-ended question provided an opportunity for all participants (135 students) to actually describe their experience and perspectives about PBL. Participants were asked to answer a question: What is your opinion on learning English through Project-Based Learning? The qualitative responses included more detailed explanations and contextual information, which complemented the quantitative findings and helped in gaining a fuller picture of students' experiences with PBL in EFL environments.

In this qualitative phase, open-ended replies to the questionnaire were used to complement the quantitative findings and to allow participants to describe their experiences in their own words. This approach was chosen appropriate as it allowed for data gathering from a larger number of participants, whilst enabling the respondents to think about their experiences before providing detailed answers. Open-ended questions decreased the possible bias and allowed the participants to express their ideas more freely. The qualitative data were not intended to produce in-depth individual narratives but rather to enrich and clarify the quantitative findings. Therefore, open-ended questionnaires were an appropriate data collection approach for the explanatory sequential mixed-methods design used in this study.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were calculated for each questionnaire item and concept (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations). These statistics summarized participants' replies and identified patterns in students' impressions of Project-Based Learning, their motivation to learn English, their engagement in project activities, and the problems they encountered in the implementation of the projects. To facilitate interpretation, mean scores were categorized according to the following scale (Table 1):

Table 1. Interpretation of Mean Scores

Mean Score	Interpretation
1.00–1.80	Very Low
1.81–2.60	Low
2.61–3.40	Moderate
3.41–4.20	High
4.21–5.00	Very High

Quantitative results informed the identification of key issues and patterns that were further explored through the open-ended questionnaire responses. The quantitative and qualitative findings were then integrated to provide a more comprehensive understanding of EFL learners' perceptions and experiences of Project-Based Learning (PBL).

The qualitative data generated from the open-ended questionnaire answers were analysed through thematic analysis in order to achieve a deeper knowledge of learners' experiences and viewpoints. This strategy was picked because it allows researchers to detect, arrange, and understand repeating patterns of meaning in qualitative data. The

analysis was carried out systematically based on the framework of (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021) to investigate the topics linked to the learners' perspectives, motivation, engagement, obstacles, and support required in Project-Based Learning (PBL). Responses to the open-ended questions were then carefully reviewed, coded, and categorized to identify recurring patterns, themes, and insights related to learners' perceptions, motivation, engagement, challenges, and support needs in PBL. The table 2 shows the coding and theme development emerged from their responses. During the interpretation stage, the qualitative findings were integrated with the quantitative results to provide deeper explanations of the statistical trends and to enhance understanding of learners' experiences with Project-Based Learning.

Table 2. Coding and Theme Development

Initial Codes	Sub Theme	Major Theme
Increased motivation	Enhanced learning experience	Effectiveness and engagement
Active learning		
Enjoyable learning		
Better comprehension	Improved understanding	
Knowledge retention		
Practical learning		
Real-life application	Authentic language use	Real-world application and skills development
Meaningful communication		
Practical English use		
Communication skills	Development of 21st-century skills	
Collaboration		
Critical thinking		
Self-confidence	Increased confidence	Challenges in group work
Reduced anxiety		
Language confidence		
Passive members	Unequal participation	
Free-riding		
Unfair workload		
Scheduling conflicts	Coordination difficulties	
Communication issues		
Time constraints		
Independent work	Preference for individual work	Need for balance and guidance
Greater autonomy		
Personal responsibility		
Grammar support	Balancing PBL with language instruction	

To strengthen the credibility of the qualitative findings, triangulation was used to compare the patterns that emerged from the quantitative survey results with the themes found from the open-ended questionnaire replies. The credibility was further increased by rigorous coding and careful examination of participants' replies to ensure that the discovered themes were representative of their perspectives and experiences. Dependability and confirmability were achieved through a complete documenting of the methods for data gathering and analysis. Transferability was strengthened by providing rich descriptions of the research setting, participants and research techniques.

The study was carried out in compliance with the ethical standards. All subjects were aware of the goal and methods of the research and gave their informed consent before their participation in the research. Participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw from the research at any time without penalty. All personal identifiers from the data set were removed to protect confidentiality and anonymity and the data obtained were stored securely and used solely for academic purposes.

All research records and reports were de-identified to safeguard the confidentiality and identity of the participants. All the data obtained were secured and utilised only for academic purposes. The research process consisted of the following stages: (1) identifying the population and sample, (2) developing and validating the questionnaire, (3) collecting quantitative data from 135 EFL students, (4) analysing quantitative data by descriptive statistics, (5) collecting qualitative data through open-ended questionnaire responses, (6) analysing qualitative data by thematic analysis, and (7) integrating and interpreting quantitative and qualitative results. The use of this sequential explanatory mixed methods design was expected to provide an in-depth understanding of EFL learners' perceptions and experiences of Project-Based Learning (PBL) particularly with regard to motivation, engagement, attitudes, challenges and support needs in English language learning.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study in the context of teaching English as a foreign language suggested that Project-Based Learning could be an effective language learning technique with possible benefits.

Findings of qualitative and quantitative evaluations showed that PBL is more attractive and motivating for learners than traditional teaching techniques. The findings were in line with the major tenets of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which places interaction, task-based learning and authentic communication as the main variables in language learning.

Learners' perceptions of PBL

The findings show positive perspectives of EFL learners towards PBL. All four items were rated high with mean scores from 3.79 to 4.06 indicating positive evaluations towards the approach. The highest rated item was PBL makes English learning more interesting ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.95$) suggesting that learners perceived the project-based activities as making English learning more appealing. Next was PBL helps me work well with classmates ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 0.92$), which showed that students recognised the collaborative advantages of PBL. Moreover, respondents found that PBL helps them learn

English better ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.90$), which indicates the perceived contribution of PBL to language learning. The item “I enjoy learning English through projects” received the lowest mean score ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 0.97$), which was still at a high level, showing that learners generally liked project-based activities. In general, the results of this study suggest that PBL was viewed positively as an interactive teaching method that promotes learning English language and cooperative classroom participation.

Table 3. Perceptions of PBL as a Learning Approach

Item	Mean	SD	Interpretation
PBL helps me learn English better.	3.88	0.90	High
PBL makes English learning more interesting.	4.06	0.95	High
PBL helps me work well with classmates.	3.99	0.92	High
I enjoy learning English through projects.	3.79	0.97	High

One reason for these positive evaluations may be that PBL gives learners with opportunity to engage in real and purposeful language use. Unlike traditional methods, which tend to focus on knowledge transfer, PBL involves students in active problem solving, decision making, teamwork and project design. These kinds of learning experience may increase the learners’ sense of responsibility and ownership and so, may raise their interest and satisfaction in learning English. This view is similar with Tamim & Grant (2013b) who suggested that PBL provides immersive and collaborative learning environments which lead to meaningful learning experiences.

The results of these studies indicate that PBL supports active learning by shifting learners from passive consumers of information to active participants in the learning process. The interactive nature of the project work may increase the learners’ motivation and engagement as a consequence of increased autonomy and responsibility given to the students. This conclusion confirms Tamim & Grant (2013a) who have stated that PBL promotes student-centered learning and meaningful involvement. The findings also further support the statement of English & Kitsantas (2013) that project-based learning fosters active participation, learner autonomy and self-regulated learning, which are important elements determining students’ motivation and engagement. The findings support the theoretical approach of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which emphasises meaningful engagement and authentic conversation as crucial components of language learning.

The positive opinions given by learners show that PBL provides opportunity for pupils to apply English in meaningful circumstances, rather than learning linguistic forms in isolation. The results might also be explained by the constructivist learning theory which suggests that knowledge is actively built through social interactions and real-life experiences. The positive learner ratings of teamwork and collaborative project activities suggest that learning occurs through both individual reflection and social knowledge production. An interesting finding was the high value that students placed on the

collaborative aspect of PBL as indicated by the positive score on the statement “PBL helps me work well with classmates” ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.90$). This implies that students perceived that teamwork was beneficial for their learning process.

The collaborative aspect of project work may have offered opportunity for students to communicate with peers, share ideas and support each other, all of which are essential for successful language learning. This finding is consistent with Cho & Brown (2013) who found that good learner attitudes towards PBL are generally related with realistic learning experiences and collaborative group activities. Similarly, Almulla (2020) believed that PBL is an active learning method that trains students to solve issues and apply knowledge in meaningful contexts instead of being passive users of information.

Moreover, the outcomes have educational importance. The good attitudes towards PBL suggest that EFL teachers should benefit from using project-based activities in their teaching approaches. When teachers involve students in real tasks and collaborative projects, they can create more student-centered learning settings that stimulate communication, creativity, critical thinking and teamwork. This supports the statement of Bhardwaj et al. (2025), student-centered techniques, such as PBL, can improve students' confidence, creativity, collaboration, motivation, and classroom involvement. Hence, PBL can be regarded as a language learning approach and a means of building wider twenty-first century skills that are increasingly valued in educational settings.

Learners' Motivation and Engagement in PBL

The results are evidence that Project-Based Learning (PBL) can effectively motivate and engage EFL Learners to learn English. The mean scores for all items were rated highly 3.78 to 3.98. The item rated the most highly, “I am actively involved during project work” ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.92$) indicates that learners are engaging in active participation in tasks where projects are based on. Overall, the results suggest that PBL promoted learners in terms of motivation, confidence, participation and attention levels towards English learning endeavours.

Table 4. Motivation and Engagement In PBL

Item	Mean	SD	Interpretation
PBL increases my motivation to learn English.	3.79	0.87	High
I participate actively during project activities.	3.98	0.92	High
I feel more confident when doing projects.	3.78	0.92	High
I pay more attention during PBL activities.	3.81	0.93	High

One possible explanation for these findings is that PBL provides learners with opportunities to actively participate in meaningful learning activities rather than passively receiving information. Through project completion, learners are encouraged to investigate topics, collaborate with peers, solve problems, and produce tangible outcomes. These experiences may increase learners' sense of involvement and ownership

of learning, which consequently enhances motivation and engagement. This interpretation supports Tamim & Grant (2013a) argument that PBL promotes active, student-centered learning environments that encourage meaningful participation.

The multiple-response survey data shed light on which aspects of PBL learners value the most. The most popular feature, as illustrated in Figure 1, were creative activities (111 responses; 82.2% of respondents). Third was applying technology, chosen by 86 respondents (63.7%); next came topics from real life, chosen by 78 respondents (57.8%), and group work by 73 respondents (54.1%). The least liked were presentations (n = 34; 25.2%). These include; the provision of opportunities that foster creativity, use of technology, authentic learning experiences, and collaborative work which can contribute to increasing student engagement and motivation through PBL.

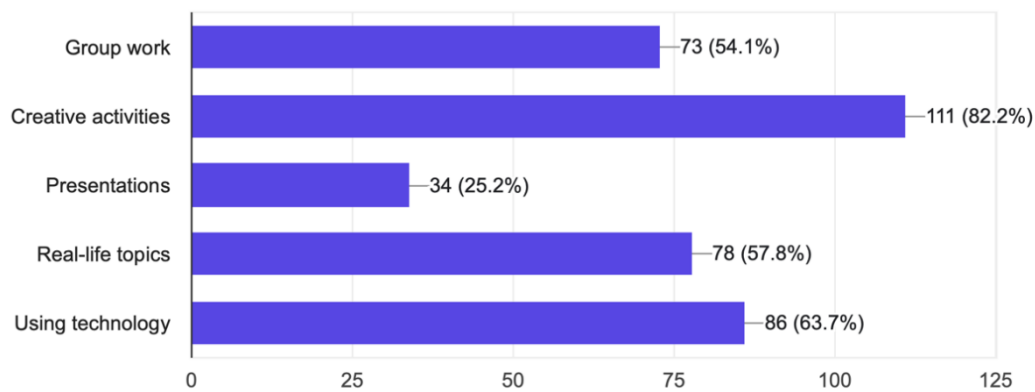


Figure 1. Favourite Features of PBL

The results concerning participation factors show how most interesting topics is the biggest motivator factor for learners 116 respondents (85.9%) have indicated this very reason as answer in terms of actual learning motivation. The third main reason was acquiring new skills, selected by 100 respondents (74.1%). Other motivators were involvement of friends (54.1%), encouragement from the instructor (50.4%) and good academic performance (45.2%). It indicates that learners were mostly motivated by the content itself and self-development opportunities, not external rewards. Study findings emphasise the value of Project Activities that are relevant and meaningful whilst enabling interests to be developed as well as personal growth.

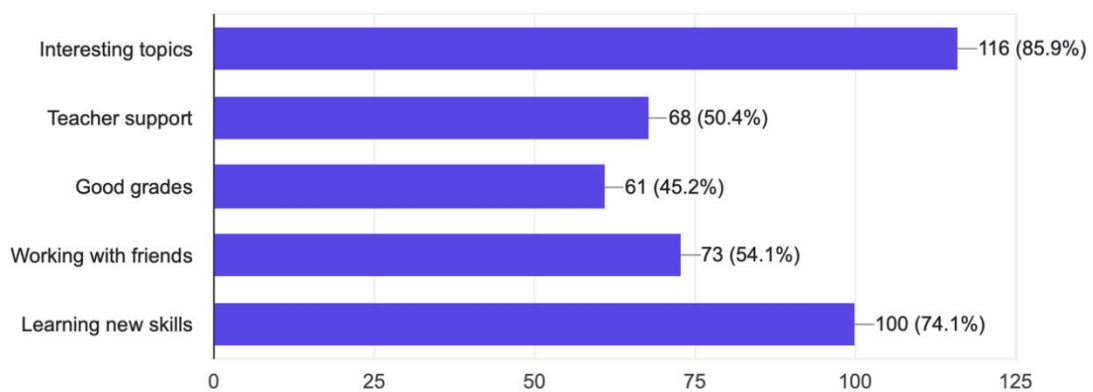


Figure 2. Factors of Participation in PBL Activities

To further explain these quantitative findings, qualitative data from open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis generated four major themes, as presented in Table 5. The qualitative findings largely supported the quantitative results, particularly the theme of Effectiveness and Engagement. Learners described PBL as more interactive and enjoyable than traditional instruction because it allowed them to actively participate in meaningful learning activities. Participants consistently described PBL as more interactive and motivating than traditional teacher-centered instruction. Several students emphasized that project activities encouraged them to actively participate in learning and increased their interest in English. One participant stated, "I think project-based learning is more fun, creative, and flexible because we usually have enough time to do the project and work together with friends" (S11). Similarly, another participant explained, "I'm delighted to be working on the project with my friends, gaining more experience and discovering new things" (S3). As also another respondent (S12) stated, "So in my opinion, project-based learning (PBL) offers a more focused way to assess students' understanding through their level of engagement, self-confidence, and active participation in solving challenges by completing projects relevant to their daily lives. This approach can be seen as a combination that stimulates students' ability to tackle challenges and helps address some of the gaps they experience in the learning process." These comments imply that learners viewed the PBL to be a more relevant and engaging learning experience compared to the standard instructional methodologies.

Table 5. Analytical Interpretation of Qualitative Findings

Major Theme	Interpretation
Effectiveness and engagement	Most students have a positive outlook on Project-Based Learning (PBL), considering it to be very effective, fun, and engaging in contrast to traditional techniques. PBL is to move the focus from theory to practical application, to make learning livelier and engaging, to boost motivation, and to stimulate active involvement.
Real-world application and skills development	PBL is recognized because it enables students to use English in real-life meaningful circumstances and practice the language through activities such as presentations, films and group work to increase communication, creativity, teamwork, critical thinking and confidence.
Challenges in Group Work	A major drawback many remark is the difficulties of group projects. Members not actively participating, poor cooperation or communication, and trouble managing schedules. Some students said they liked to do independent projects, or "self-projects," to avoid these problems
Need for Balance and Guidance	PBL involves clear instructions, evaluation criteria and instructor monitoring to reduce possible injustice or unequal involvement among students. Others also thought that PBL can be monotonous or overwhelming if used too often and that the best strategy is to combine it with regular English practice such as vocabulary and grammar exercises.

Another important finding is that learners appreciated the use of authentic and real-life topics in project activities. This emerged from the prominent theme that concerned the value of authentic learning experiences and skills development as shown in Table 5. Learners reported that PBL enabled them to apply English in meaningful contexts through activities such as presentations, collaborative projects, and technology-based tasks. Beyond language learning, participants highlighted the development of communication, teamwork, creativity, and critical thinking skills. For example, one learner noted, “In my opinion, learning English through project-based learning is actually fun because the material is related to real life. It makes learning easier to understand.” (S19). Likewise, another participant stated, “It is very helpful to deepen the understanding of the material because it provides real-life topics and we can challenge ourselves to collaborate with friends.” (S5). This finding helps explain why learners reported higher levels of motivation and engagement. When learning activities are connected to real-life situations, learners are more likely to recognize the relevance and usefulness of English, which increases their willingness to participate actively. This interpretation supports the findings of Latifah et al. (2025), who reported that authentic project tasks positively influence learners’ motivation and language development. In addition, The findings align with Lin & Wang (2021), who reported that real-life project tasks positively influence learners’ motivation and language development.

The findings also have substantial pedagogical consequences. As learners were strongly motivated by skills development, engaging themes, cooperation, and technology integration, teachers should carefully create project activities that include these components. Projects should be relevant to students’ interests and create opportunity for meaningful communication, creativity and teamwork. Such learning spaces may promote continued engagement and develop more favourable attitudes towards English learning.

One interesting finding was that the mean score for confidence in project work was the lowest of all motivation and engagement measures ($M = 3.78$), yet it still fell in the positive range. This points to some learners still being insecure about project-based activities especially when they have to do challenging tasks, work with other people or present their work in English. The finding is consistent with the observation of Phage et al. (2023) that learners who are unfamiliar with open-ended learning environments may have difficulties adapting to the requirements of PBL. Therefore, good teacher facilitation is still important. As suggested by Yew & Goh (2016), structured guidance, monitoring, and scaffolding can help learners gradually develop confidence and autonomy while engaging in project-based tasks.

Generally, the outcomes show that PBL promotes the learners’ motivation and engagement as it offers chances for active participation, skill development, real learning experiences, collaboration and creative expression. More crucially, the findings reveal that learners’ motivation is mainly motivated by meaningful learning experiences rather than extrinsic rewards, which underlines the potential of PBL to develop more engaging and learner-centred EFL classrooms.

Attitudes and Preferences Towards PBL

Table 6 illustrates the descriptive statistics of the learners’ attitudes and preferences towards PBL. The table highlights the learners’ view of their preference for PBL,

experience of working in groups, participation in project activities and the influence of their attitude toward English on their engagement in PBL.

The results show that learners had a positive attitude towards PBL since all items fall into high level with means from 3.56 to 4.11. The item with the maximum agrees was by saying that, I participate more when project themes are interesting ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.96$), indicates the Importance of core theme engaged learners to attend in the participation and serve as a factor for them. Learners also showed a positive attitude toward group work ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.99$), preferred PBL to conventional learning ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 1.03$), and declared that their attitudes toward English affected the participation of them in PBL activities ($M = 3.80$, $SD=0.90$). In general, the results showed that learners had a positive attitude toward PBL and that they were more likely to engage as learners when learning activities were meaningful.

Table 6. Learners' Attitudes and Preferences toward PBL (Items 9–12)

Item	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I prefer PBL to traditional learning.	3.56	1.03	High
I like working in groups during projects.	3.63	0.99	High
I participate more when project topics are interesting.	4.11	0.96	High
My attitude toward English affects my participation in PBL.	3.80	0.90	High

A possible explanation for these positive opinions is that PBL provides more chances for learner autonomy and participation than traditional educational methodologies. Learners are not passive recipients of information but rather active participants in the discussion of ideas, problem-solving and the production of project outputs. Such involvement may enhance learners' sense of ownership of the learning process and may lead to more favourable attitudes toward classroom activities. Additionally, the learners' preference for PBL over traditional learning further demonstrates that students appreciate learning environments that enable them to get involved rather than just being provided with information by teachers.

Another noteworthy conclusion is the effect of project subjects on learners' engagement. The highest mean in this category was for the statement "I participate more when project topics are interesting" ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.96$), implying that the relevance of the topic is an important factor for inspiring students to participate. The study findings indicate that students are more likely to be active participants if the project themes relate to their interests and experiences. Motivating for students and making learning assignments more pleasurable and meaningful are interesting and relevant themes.

This finding supports Tseng et al. (2013) argument that learners' interests, preferences, and attitudes should be considered when designing project-based learning activities. The results therefore highlight the importance of selecting authentic and

relevant project topics that can maintain learners' enthusiasm and participation throughout the learning process.

The findings also reveal that learners' attitudes toward English itself influenced their participation in PBL activities. Students who perceived English positively appeared more willing to engage in project work and collaborative learning tasks. This finding suggests that successful implementation of PBL depends not only on instructional design but also on learners' existing attitudes toward language learning. Consequently, teachers should create supportive learning environments that help students develop positive perceptions of English as a useful and meaningful means of communication.

The positive attitudes reported in this study provide further support for Tamim & Grant (2013a) argument that PBL promotes meaningful, student-centered learning experiences. However, the findings extend previous research by showing that learners' preferences are influenced not only by collaborative learning opportunities but also by the relevance of project topics and their personal attitudes toward English learning. This suggests that motivation and participation in PBL emerge from the interaction between instructional design and learner characteristics rather than from project activities alone.

Challenges and Support Needs in PBL

Finding indicates in Table 7 that the highest-rated challenge was learners' concern that group scores might not accurately reflect their individual effort ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.08$), followed closely by unequal participation among group members ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.98$). These findings suggest that learners were concerned about fairness in collaborative learning environments. Although group work is a central feature of PBL, learners may perceive collaborative tasks as problematic when contributions are uneven or when assessment fails to recognize individual efforts.

Table 7. Challenges in PBL

Item	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Some group members do not participate actively.	3.75	0.98	High
It is difficult to divide tasks fairly in group work.	3.29	0.99	Moderate
I worry that group scores may not reflect my individual effort.	3.79	1.08	High
The assessment criteria for projects are sometimes unclear.	3.41	1.02	High

Despite the positive perceptions, the findings also reveal several challenges that may limit the effectiveness of PBL implementation as illustrated on Figure 3. The most often stated problem was unequal engagement in groups (100 learners, 74.1%). This data implies that in PBL teamwork, it is not always the case that all group members contribute equally. Sometimes some of the kids are carrying more of the burden, and some are less engaged. This can have an impact on how equitable the group work is, and how well it works in general.

The second most frequent problem was communication with group members, identified by 89 learners (65.9%). In the EFL environment, students have to face the demands of the project and communicate in English, which may be an added challenge. Such differences in language skills, confidence and interpersonal skills might inhibit successful collaboration and diminish the efficiency of project activities. The findings suggest that successful implementation of PBL depends on supporting cooperation and communication skills to facilitate constructive group interaction.

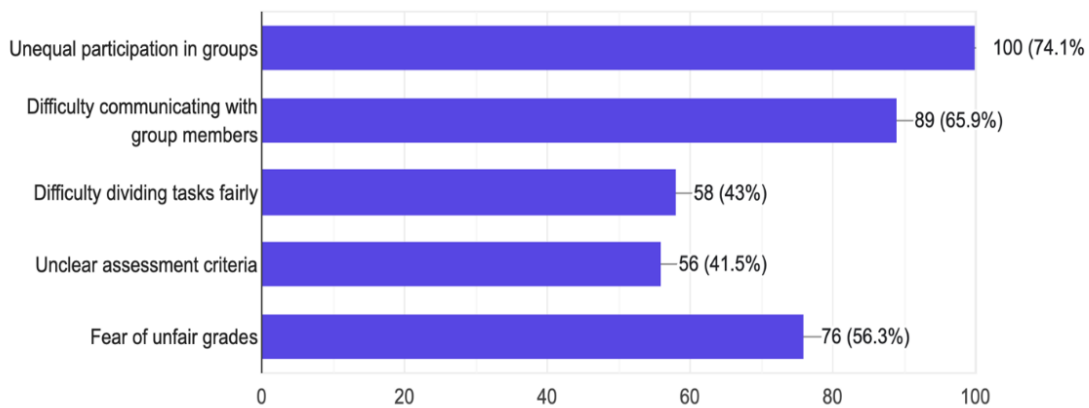


Figure 3. Challenges Faced during PBL

Assessment-related concerns also emerged as an important issue. More than half of the participants (56.3%) expressed concerns about receiving unfair grades, while some learners reported uncertainty regarding assessment procedures. These findings suggest that learners value transparency and fairness in project evaluation. When assessment criteria are unclear, students may become more concerned about grades than learning outcomes, potentially reducing the motivational benefits of PBL. This finding supports the argument of Brighton et al. (2022), who emphasized the importance of transparent assessment rubrics and clear evaluation criteria in project-based learning environments.

The qualitative findings further support these results. The theme of “challenges in group work” (Table 5) revealed that learners frequently encountered problems related to unequal participation, communication, and coordination among group members. Some participants reported that not all group members contributed equally to project completion, which occasionally led to frustration and reduced the effectiveness of teamwork. As a result, some learners expressed a preference for individual or self-projects to avoid such difficulties. These findings suggest that collaboration in PBL does not automatically guarantee equal participation. Instead, successful group work requires clear role distribution, effective communication, and shared responsibility among learners.

The findings on needed supports (Figure 4) give some further insight into how these difficulties may be addressed. The most important form of support was feedback (84.4%), followed by clear instructions (83%). The findings indicate that PBL is not considered by students as a completely autonomous learning process but as a guided process that needs constant supervision from teachers. Good feedback helps learners to know how they are doing, to solve problems and to improve the quality of their projects. Clear instructions can remove doubt and improve task management. It supports Tamim & Grant (2013a) view that teacher facilitation and scaffolding remain essential components of successful PBL implementation.

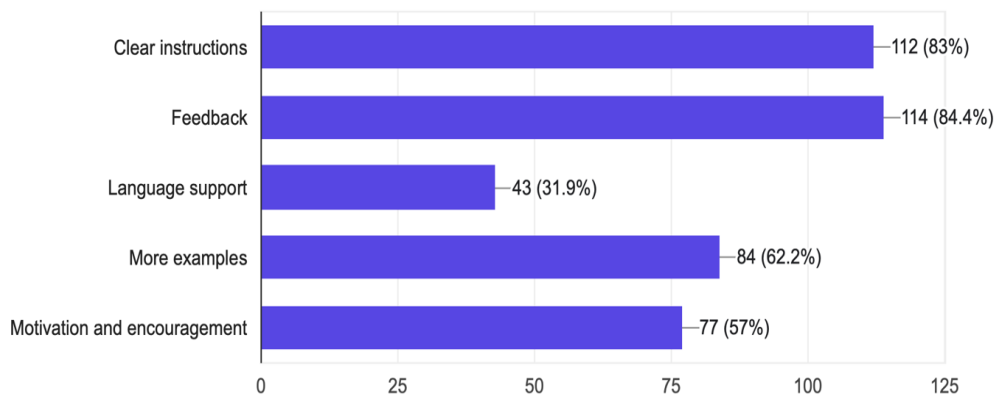


Figure 4. Needed Supports

The qualitative findings further support these results. The theme of “need for balance and guidance” revealed that participants emphasized the importance of teacher guidance and clear project structures in ensuring successful PBL implementation. Learners highlighted the need for clear instructions, transparent assessment criteria, and regular feedback from teachers. Some participants also suggested that excessive use of PBL could become overwhelming and recommended combining project activities with conventional language instruction, such as grammar and vocabulary exercises. These findings indicate that learner autonomy in PBL should be balanced with appropriate scaffolding and teacher support. Effective facilitation may help reduce uncertainty, improve group management, and ensure fair assessment practices. This finding supports Yew & Goh (2016), who argued that structured guidance and scaffolding are essential for learners who are unfamiliar with self-directed learning approaches. Similarly, Brighton et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of transparent assessment practices in project-based environments.

A noteworthy discovery, however, is that although students indicated positive impressions in all questions, none of the mean scores fall into the “very high” group. This shows that PBL was received positively by learners overall, but that some areas of the implementation may still be challenging. Qualitative findings suggested that the effectiveness of project work was sometimes compromised by factors such as uneven engagement of group members, time restrictions and the demands of project completion. This study shows that positive attitudes toward PBL do not automatically lead to optimal learning experiences. PBL does work, but it has to have projects carefully created with instructional direction and help that is meaningful during the learning experience.

Overall, the data indicate that PBL can be an excellent strategy to provide meaningful, collaborative and engaging experiences in learning English language. More importantly, the results suggest that learners’ positive perceptions stem not merely from the novelty of project work but from the opportunities PBL provides for authentic communication, active participation, collaboration, and learner autonomy, which are central principles of effective EFL instruction.

CONCLUSION

This study explored EFL learners’ perceptions and experiences of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in terms of motivation, engagement, attitudes, preferences, challenges,

and support needs. The findings indicate that learners generally perceived PBL positively because it promoted motivation, active engagement, collaboration, and meaningful language learning through authentic and interactive tasks. However, challenges related to group participation, communication, and assessment were also identified. The findings have several practical implications. For teachers, PBL activities should incorporate authentic topics, clear instructions, regular feedback, and structured monitoring to support learners throughout the project process. For curriculum developers, PBL should be integrated into EFL curricula to promote learner-centered, collaborative, and real-world language learning experiences. For educational institutions, adequate support should be provided through teacher professional development, access to technological resources, and transparent assessment policies to ensure effective implementation of PBL. Future research may investigate the long-term effects of PBL on language proficiency and communicative competence and explore its implementation across different educational and cultural contexts.

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