Invigorating the EFL Students

by Agis Andriani

Invigorating the EFL Students in Acquiring New Linguistic Knowledge: Language Learning through Projects

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Abstract

English as an International Language has contradicted to another paradigm (*the Old Native-Speaker Dominated Framework*) (Llurda, 2014) adoring the native English language teachers as demigods in EFL contexts currently. However, such problems remain fossilized because of the insufficient awareness of the EFL teachers on their roles as the non-native ones. Hence, Project-Based Learning was implemented to invigorate their linguistic competences and performances to be relative comparable to the native English language teachers. This study involved 98 EFL students of a state university in Tasikmalaya, West Java. The data were collected through field notes and document analysis. They were analyzed based on the steps of conducting PBL. The findings revealed that PBL facilitated the students to invigorate their cognition, work ethics and interpersonal skills, provoked their serious thinking processes, attained their linguistic competences and performances and maintained their identities as NNSTs.
Keywords: Linguistic knowledge, EFL students, PBL

INTRODUCTION

Since English has vastly been considered as the language with the world's largest number of speakers coming from the *expanding circle* countries (Kachru, 1992), it is no longer spoken by merely its native speakers (NS) or exclusively possessed by the native-speaking communities (Widdowson, 1994). This paradigmatic shift leads to the emergence of English in new global images, such as *World Englishes (WE), English as Lingua Franca (ELF)* and *English as an International Language (EIL)* (Llurda, 2004; Jenkins, 2006; Berns, 2008; Kirkpatrick, 2012; Zhu & Hamid, 2013; Marlina, 2014). From that point, EIL accommodates the use of English in diverse L2/FL speakers of English originated from similar or distinctive cultural backgrounds instead of only accentuating on L1 speakers of English (Sivasubramaniam, 2011, p. 3). Hence, it advocates a heterogeneous global English speech community with heterogeneous English and various modes of competence (Canagarajah, 2006).

The rapid development of EIL implementation and its implications in English Language Teaching (ELT) have fascinated a number of scholars' attention. To illustrate, Llurda (2004) studied the vital roles of Non-native speaker teachers of English in English as an International Language context (EIL). It was assumed that the convergence of the current investigations on EIL and the burgeoning acknowledgment of the existing NNs teachers accelerated the acceptance of English as *Lingua Franca*. Besides, Matsuda & Friedrich (2011) scrutinized the existing literature on teaching English as an International Language (TEIL) for international communication and its impacts on pedagogical determination and practices in the classroom. They found that a blueprint of EIL for curriculum was mapped into several components,

namely the selection of the instructional model (s), convincing exposure to Englishes and their users, facilitating strategic competence, supplying proper cultural materials and sharpening awareness of the Englishes politics. In addition, Kirkpatrick (2012) explored English as an International Language in Asia and its implications for language education. He claimed that the adoption of the *Lingua Franca Approach* to English language teaching offered valuable advantages of supporting the primary school to concentrate on local languages (e.g. subjects taught in school, such as maths and science should be taught in local languages) to promote literacy development and enrichment. Moreover, van den Hoven (2014) analysed how to teach teachers teaching English as an International Language in Korean educational context. She described the responses of the Korean English language teachers towards intercultural and bilingual users of English. Additionally, she claimed that the teachers' awareness on using EIL concept while teaching English can support them to reconceptualise what English is and does (van den Hoven, 2014, p.126). Therefore, EIL-led teaching enables the teachers to develop insightful teaching materials, select proper assessment tools, and raise the students' awareness on the diverse cultural identities, faith traditions and current practices of English speakers around the world.

On the contrary, there are a number of challenges encountered by the teachers, linguists and TESOL practitioners while applying such a concept (EIL). For instance, the aggressive invasion of English is regarded as the process of language attrition leading it to the language endangerment. For this reason, English as 'a killer language' (Pakir 1991; Mühlhäusler 1996) and 'tyrannosaurus rex' (Swales 1997) are a few extreme terms to describe how dangerous it is viewed from the lens of multilingualism and the preservation of the wealth and variety of languages in the world (Llurda, 2004, p.314). Likewise, it is claimed as a tool of 'linguistic imperialism' (Phillipson a, 2007; Isik, 2008; Phillipson b, 2012). In this case, 'linguistic imperialism' encompasses the dominance, supremacy, and hegemony of one language towards other languages (Isik, 2008, p.124). Additionally, the role of English in the contemporary world is regarded as a medium making the individuals helpless victims of linguistic and cultural hegemony (White, 1997). Nonetheless, language proficiency in the world of post-modern globalization requires the language users to negotiate in particular variables, such as language awareness, sociolinguistic sensitivity and negotiation skills (Canagarajah, 2013). Consequently, teaching English as an International language (EIL) has led to the paradigmatic shift in English language teaching, namely viewing English as a heterogeneous and global language.

A hegemony of implementing EIL in English language teaching, notably ESL and EFL contexts may automatically affect to the roles of English language teachers either as native English teachers or non-native ones. In particular, since the L2 and FL speakers extensively outnumber the native speakers (NS) of English, the facts that non-native speakers (NNS) of English playing a significant role seem to be an inevitable consensus. This generates the formal and informal gatherings to motivate them in conducting research publications on their roles as non-native teachers in ESL/EFL contexts and endorse their significant attainments in TESOL and affiliate leadership positions (Braine, 2013). Similarly, the teaching performance of NNs English teachers are assumed to be as good as NS English teachers due to they can apply their first languages, identify their learning difficulties and reveal valuable language learning strategies (Chang, 2016, p.59). On the contrary, an opposing perception towards NNs English teachers are represented through test-driven teaching style, non-authentic pronunciation, and over-correcting students' grammatical mistakes (Chang, 2016). As a result, the limitations of NNs English teachers reverse it as the strength of Ns English teachers.

Despite the role of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNSTs) has gained its prominence in the recent decades (Tomlinson, 2016; Chang, 2016; Akcan, 2016; Kamhi-Stein, 2016), the traditional teachers' model is still adopted, such as the representation of authority,

seriousness, resources of knowledge and teaching and learning material suppliers (Solak & Bayar, 2014, p.1). Further, this can lead the students to be less equipped for higher education (HE) (McInnis 1999), insufficiently 'qualified' and ill-prepared (Casey, 1999), highly dependent and instrumental (Keane, 2006), reliant on rote-learning 'to the test' approaches, unable to think for themselves and expecting to be 'spoon-fed (Walshe, 2009). To illustrate, the implementation of student-centered approach seems less dominant than teacher-centered one for all subject areas in Indonesian educational context though the promotion of student-centered approach has obtained increasing attention (Liando, 2010, p.199). This is likely affected by the cultural background of the Indonesian EFL teachers (Dardjowidjojo, 2001). With this in mind, advocating the paradigmatic shift towards the autonomous learning approach can be a proper alternative to help the students accept their responsibility for learning (Chan, 2003; Kettanun, 2015).

One of the teaching techniques that merit such a perspective is Project-Based Learning (hereafter PBL). PBL refers to a learning strategy focusing on promoting intellectual and social growth of the students. More specifically, it enables them to vigorously engage in the process of acquiring knowledge and skills with inadequate monitoring of the teachers (Kettanun, 2015, p.567). In this case, facilitating the students to be autonomous ones is a pivotal and universal duty of the entire foreign language teachers, particularly English (Yagcioglu, 2015, p. 428). Overall, it presumably encourages the students to have self-development on general and subject competencies (Lasauskiene & Rauduvaite, 2015, p. 788).

Empirically, numerous studies have appeared as a response to the importance of PBL in miscellaneous foci, such as the design and development of mobile apps for learning 2D-animation (Jumaat & Tasir, 2013), U- learning instructional model (Inthachot, et. al.:2013), pedagogy of tolerance strategy (Voronchenko, et. al., 2015) engineering students' viewpoint on PBL (Kapusuz & Can, 2014), the lecturers' attitudes towards the application of Project-Based Learning in the process of music education studies (Lasauskiene & Rauduvaite, 2015), virtual groups (Garcia, 2016). More specifically, much research has been addressed on the implementation of PBL in English Language Teaching (ELT) (Beckett & Slater, 2005; Foss, et. al. 2008; Fragoulis, 2009; Bolsunovskaya, et. al., 2015; Dooley & Sadler, 2016; Alsamani & Daif-Allah, 2016; Petersen & Nassaji, 2016; Bondar et. al., 2016). Conversely, there may have not existed the empirical investigation of the use of PBL to facilitate the EFL students in acquiring linguistic knowledge, notably in the Indonesian EFL context.

Given these facts, the present study explored how Project-Based Learning invigorates the EFL students in acquiring linguistic knowledge and how it shapes the EFL students' learning autonomy.

Therefore, FL education requires its revitalization with the introduction of PBL, in which learners learn how to think critically and to be transformed into active constructors of knowledge, with selection of meaningful materials, interaction with each other and solution of real-life problems, by giving up old textbooks and developing a deeper approach to learning (Jaleniauskiené, 2016, p. 269). Further, this study addresses to the following research question: How does Project-Based Learning invigorate the EFL students in acquiring linguistic knowledge?

METHODS

Methodologically, this study employed Action Research (AR) to explore how Project-Based Learning invigorates the EFL students in acquiring linguistic knowledge. In particular, Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon (2014, p. 2) contend that "Action research itself is a social practice, a practice-changing practice, which cannot ignore the theoretical terrain that might help participants to work from a critically informed perspective on social life." Additionally,

AR functions to change the people practices, their comprehension on such practices and the situations where such practices are performed (Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon, 2014; Widodo, 2015). For these reasons, the practices of implementing PBL to teach linguistic knowledge in the classroom can be considered as a proper issue to be investigated further with AR since it seeks 'a change' as the impact of using such a technique (PBL) contextually.

The participants of this study were 98 students coming from four classes of an English Education Department at an Indonesian University. They were the sophomores of their four years academic program. Practically, field notes and document analysis were applied to collect the data. Field notes constitute a way of conveying observations, reflections and reactions towards problems in the classrooms aimed at documenting each event occurring during teaching and learning process in the classroom and provides a captivating bibliographical record for the teachers' professional development (Hopkins, 2008, p. 104-105).

Another data collection procedure was document analysis which refers to the investigative process involving documents as a tool to examine the social phenomena and explore the individual or institutional records (Gibson & Brown, 2009, p.66). The data of this study were the students' linguistic knowledge representing in their final project of the *Introduction to Linguistics* course in one semester. It is analysed based on the steps of implementing Project-Based Learning (Mathews-Aydinli, 2007) and how the teacher's roles involved (Jaleniauskiené, 2016).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The four steps of implementing PBL in language learning are meeting the problem, exploring *knowns* and *unknowns*, generating possible solution, and considering consequences and choosing the most viable solutions. To meet the problem, the students were given the linguistic knowledge about what language is, the origin of language, functions of the language, what *Linguistics* and its position in language teaching is. This meeting problem step encouraged the students to find out the problem (s) in their surrounding that can be their focus of the project-based discussion. Basically, their themes focused on language of the teacher while teaching, language in advertisements, poetry, public announcements, social media, songs, newspaper articles and language use of popular people. In exploring *knowns* and *unknows*, the students were motivated to think critically related to their selected foci. This functions as a springboard to the further step, namely problem-solving.

In this sense, the teacher conducted pre-teaching activities to emphasize the benefits of implementing PBL in teaching linguistic knowledge on the students' use of English in classroom discussion, reporting their research findings, familiarizing them with the researchable linguistic phenomena, enriching their English vocabulary mastery and habituating them to learn collectively.

The teacher also provides resources through some critical guiding questions. Wilen (1991) contended that 'Questions play a central role in the processes of teaching and learning because students' learning, thinking, participation and their level of engagement depend on the kind of questions teachers formulate and use in the classroom "(in Albergaria-Almeida, 2010, p.751). The questions are about how people, object, phenomena, process, or action named (nomination), what characteristics represents the naming (prediction), what is the questioning argument related to the problem focused on (argumentation), and for what perspective that argument is arisen (perspectives) and is that argument delivered obviously, intensively or mitigated (intensifications) (Wodak, 2009) to arise the their critical thinking, therefore the students can find more information in research articles, news, books, magazines, and other recourses taken from internet. To these activities, the teacher serves and supports them by giving feedback in every meeting for each group, follows up and assesses their participation in

such activities. According to Lasauskiene & Rauduvaite (2015), "The results of the research highlighted lecturers' positive experience in project-based teaching, which is related to enhancement of self-dependence, responsibility for the attainment of the project goals and development of teachers' social competency (collaboration, communication, activity in groups, openness to critics, solidarity) (p. 790). In relation to this, Zerkinaa, Lomakina, & Kostina (2015) state that "The English teaching process must be a process of forming humanistic values, which then have a major impact on human relationships with others. Thus, methods, means and techniques, which instil these values most effectively, are developed" (p.257). For instance, Anthony and Kadir (2012) claimed that PBL enhanced students' engagement, motivation, their confidence level and the ability to develop new skills necessary for their future. In addition, the students have applied all the steps of learning. It means the steps of remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating (Krathwohl & Anderson, 2002, p.215) in Bloom's taxonomy (revised). Technically, such learning steps can be realized through PBL.

CONCLUSION

Project-Based Learning invigorates the EFL students' cognition, work ethics and interpersonal skills, provoked their serious thinking processes, attained their linguistic competences and performances and maintained their identities as NNSTs. In other words, language teachers require to have interlocking competence and performance to help the students attain the target competence and expected goals in language learning. Competence constitutes the knowledge of language and all complex things related and performance is the ability to realise such a competence into practices. Following this concept, the NNSTs are expected to have comparable teaching quality to the NSTs without changing their inherent identity as the non-native speakers of English.

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