

# English Games as a Constructivist Approach in Project Based Learning

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**Abstract:** Project-based learning, also known as project-based learning (PBL), is a dynamic constructivist approach to teaching in which students explore real-world problems and challenges, simultaneously developing cross-curriculum skills while working in small collaborative groups. Since project-based learning is filled with active and engaged learning, it inspires students to obtain a deeper knowledge of the subjects they are studying. Research also indicates that students are more likely to retain the knowledge gained through this approach far more readily than through traditional textbook-centered learning. In addition, students develop confidence and self-direction as they move through both team-based and independent work. The purpose of this study is to explore the students' perception towards the English Fun Games activity, as one of the project based learning activity; whether it is indeed beneficial and feasible to be implemented as one of the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom activity or should it be dissolved. The findings from this study revealed that the respondents had responded positively towards this English Fun Games activity.

**Keywords:** project-based learning, constructivist approach, games activity

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Like most of the higher education institutions in Malaysia, the medium of instruction in UNITEN is English. Where English has been used as the medium of instruction in the college, the proficiency in the language is a must for students to understand what their teachers teach them. Project-based Learning (PBL) is one of the methods in language teaching to accomplish this aim. In project-based Learning, students go through an extended process of inquiry in response to a complex question, problem, or challenge. Rigorous projects are assigned to help students learn key academic content and practice variety of skills such as collaboration, communication and critical thinking and create high-quality, authentic products and presentations.

Project-based Learning is an instructional approach built upon authentic learning activities that engage students' interest and motivation. These activities are designed to answer a question or solve a problem and generally reflect the types of learning and work people do in the everyday world outside the classroom.

### A. Objectives of the English Fun Games

Language plays an important role in communication and thinking, and is a tool for exchanging ideas and concepts between individuals. However, even though English is the medium of instruction, most students are reluctant to speak in English especially after class. Most students claim that English is difficult especially when it comes to the speaking part. Hence, this activity is hoped to achieve these objectives.

- To encourage students to use English language outside the classroom.
- To improve students' communication skills through conversation.

- To build students' confidence to speak in English.
- To increase students' motivation to learn and use English, thus eventually improve the language.
- To expose students to the wider usage of English language for reading, writing, speaking and listening.

### ***B. Purpose of the study***

The purpose of this study is to investigate the students' perception of English Fun Games activity.

### ***C. Research Question***

What are the students' perceptions of the English Fun Games activity?

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***A. Project-based learning***

In the past, learning has focused on teacher centeredness. Later on, there was a shift towards learner centeredness in language learning. Different instructional approaches have been developed to assist language acquisition in the objective of having learners participate actively in their learning, It is a shift from a traditional way of teaching which requires students to go through a structured method of learning lessons separately which are grammar, reading, writing, listening and speaking [1].

One of the approaches of learner centeredness is project-based learning where students have to experience learning by participating more on problem-based activities. This is also based on a constructivist approach which has always emphasized learners in learning. In this approach, students need to construct their own meanings from their practical experience, thus, constructing their knowledge while the teacher mainly acts as a facilitator who models "good learning strategies for learning and thinking rather than an expert in the content itself" [2].

There are many benefits of PBL found in literatures. Students seem to be more responsible towards learning since they need to organize themselves, discuss among themselves and seek information to compete their tasks [3]. It provides a platform for students to communicate among themselves in an authentic setting while solving the tasks given in the project [1]. Students may also acquire skills that are highly valued in the workplace such as creative thinking, critical thinking, independent learning, problem-solving and teamwork[3],[4]. [5]reported that students may engage in fun learning without actually realizing that they are learning certain content. The activities help students build confidence and more importantly, they are interested and excited to learn without being forced to participate as in the traditional method of teaching and learning.

Although many students view project-based learning as positive, there are also students who have mixed feelings on the approach [1]. Students who favor this method of learning value the independence in learning process, learned teamwork and felt that they have improved overall language skills. Other students felt that they have difficulties in making the shift from traditional learning to more experiential type learning and still yearns for teacher-centeredness approach with major reliance on textbooks rather than projects and activities.

### ***B. The English Fun Games***

Students were divided into 5 to 7 students per group. Each group will create a brand-new language game or replicate any language game to be displayed during the presentation day. The language games created must be a game that can assist students to improve their English language. Each group was required to hold a meeting, discussing the task given. Six weeks after the instruction is given, all students were asked to display their created language games at the carnival. Each group was allocated a booth to display their materials. Among some of the information to be displayed were the rules of the game and the steps to play the games. Students were also requested to perform a short demonstration of the games during the carnival.

### III. METHOD

Data were collected through questionnaires. The questionnaire consisted of 2 sections: In Section A, 10 positive statements concerning the benefits of the English Fun Games activity were presented to the respondents [6], [7]. Section B served to elicit students' opinion whether this activity should be continuously implemented in the future or not. The questionnaires were randomly distributed to 182 respondents from the Foundation program and respondents were asked to rate their preference according to a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), as in Table 1. Prior to respondents completing the questionnaires they were informed of the study's purpose and were briefed on how to fill in the questionnaires. Respondents were also not encouraged to interact among themselves as this might influence their responses. Instead a researcher was there to entertain any queries regarding the completion of the questionnaires. All collected data were analyzed using percentages and mean scores.

### IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To reiterate, the purpose of the study is to elicit students' view on the practicability of English Fun Games in their English subject; whether it is indeed feasible and useful to be used in the ESL classroom. In general, the students were receptive to the activity and were positive as well about the implementation of English Fun Games activity to learn and teach English.

Overall, students reacted positively towards the benefits of English Fun Games activity to facilitate English learning as indicated in Table 1. Students felt that the English Fun Games activity was meaningful (M=4.56), provided an authentic learning experience (M=4.22), encouraged high order thinking skills (M=4.09), encouraged cooperative learning (M=4.51) and provided an appropriate challenge that can motivate the students to learn English (M=4.45). These results strengthen the potential of English Fun Games activity as an effective learning tool in fostering critical thinking skills and providing ample benefits in the teaching and learning of English [8]. [9].

In addition, Table 1 also indicates that students viewed the English Fun Games activity useful as they found themselves engaged in using their knowledge and skills to seek meaningful solutions (M=4.28), helped students understand the content being taught (M=4.33), allowed them to explore knowledge (M=4.39), helped improve their English language skills (M=4.33) and made them feel more confident to use English after the activity (M=4.31).

TABLE 1: STUDENTS' VIEW ON THE BENEFITS OF ENGLISH FUN GAMES ACTIVITY

|  | Mean   |
|--|--------|
| 1. This activity is meaningful to the students.  | 4.5500 |
| 2. It provides an authentic learning experience.   | 4.2167 |
| 3. It encourages higher order thinking skills.   | 4.0862 |
| 4. This activity encourages students to learn cooperatively with other students.         | 4.5172 |
| 5. It provides an appropriate challenge that can motivate the students to learn English. | 4.4500 |
| 6. It involves students in problem solving tasks.  | 4.2759 |
| 7. It helps students to understand the content being taught.                             | 4.3276 |
| 8. This activity allows students to explore knowledge.                                   | 4.3879 |
| 9. This activity helps improve my English language skills.                               | 4.3325 |
| 10. I feel more confident to use English after this activity.                            | 4.3103 |

**TABLE 2: STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF WHETHER ENGLISH FUN GAMES ACTIVITY SHOULD BE MANTAINED IN THE FUTURE**

|              | Percent      | Frequency  |
|--------------|--------------|------------|
| Yes          | 99.45        | 181        |
| No           | 0.55         | 1          |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>182</b> |

As Table 2 indicates, 99.45 percent of the students in the study agreed that English Fun Games activity should be continued in the future.

## V. CONCLUSION

Based on the participants' perceptions, the English Fun Games activity is found beneficial for students to assist them in language learning. The students also became more confident in speaking in English. They spoke more in English towards the end of the English Fun Games process. Furthermore, this activity enabled students from different levels of proficiency to work and learn together. It provided the environment for these respondents to participate in group discussions and contribute towards accomplishing their tasks as a team. Students who were from the lower language proficiency were able to learn at their own pace.

The main focus of the use of project- based learning in an ESL classroom is not on the solution to the problem. Nor is it on the product. Though the solution or product may be the logical outcome, the emphasis was on how the process of conducting the games benefited the students' language skills.

All the respondents had to be actively involved in the process of conducting the games in order to benefit from it. Those students who were weak in their language but participated actively in the group discussions can gain more benefit in terms of language and generic skills compared to those who were weak and did not participate actively. This innovative method of learning and teaching is important especially for classes which have learners from different levels of proficiency. They can still learn together in the same class but those students who are better in their command of the language can learn faster while those who are weaker learn at a slower pace.

Besides that, the interaction between the teachers and the students will create a strong rapport which will facilitate more learning to take place. The learning environment is not stressful as the students work together in groups, determining for themselves how much to learn at one time.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The present situation is such that many teachers are not aware of the benefits of the use of project-based learning in language teaching and learning. In actual fact, there are a lot of teachers who do not have any inkling of what project- based learning is all about. They either have very little knowledge about project- based learning or the fact that this method can be used in teaching language. They may be ignorant of the benefits of this method of teaching and learning language. If these teachers are provided with information pertaining to how beneficial project- based learning can be in the language classroom, they will be more confident to use project- based learning and might want to incorporate this method in their teaching.

Teachers and lecturers alike can be trained to use project- based learning as a novel way of teaching and learning which allows the learners to take charge of their learning experience. Special courses can be conducted to share with these educators the hows in the use of project- based learning in the classroom. However, probably the best way to train these educators is to let them learn project- based learning hands-on, which is, to go through the project- based learning process themselves. Then they will understand what is meant by active participants in using prior knowledge and knowledge gaps to construct new knowledge. It cannot be denied that there are challenges to be ironed out if project- based learning is used in the language classrooms, and after that there will still be more challenges. However, if project- based learning is an approach that can prove beneficial, then no matter how challenging the task may be in using project- based learning in the language classrooms, language teachers should be all out for it. If a paradigm shift is deemed necessary, then no matter how challenging the task may be, a shift in paradigm will be the answer.

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