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## Enhancing students' productive skills in English Language Teaching through Project-Based Learning at Foreign Trade University – HCMC campus

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### ABSTRACT

Many students at Foreign Trade University - Ho Chi Minh City Campus (FTU HCMC Campus) are challenging with productive skills. Therefore, in response to the calls for involving students in the learning process, various approaches and methods based on the constructivist approach of learning are being adopted, such as Project-Based Learning, Task-Based Learning, Cooperative-Learning and Problem-Based Learning (Ali & Kassem, 2018). This article presents the research findings of the current application of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in the teaching of English productive skills to students at FTU HCMC Campus and how students can improve them. The research also provides insights into the expectations of students and entrepreneurs on that matter. The research group used the 5-point Likert scale in a questionnaire to collect data from students and interviewed FTU - HCMC's English teachers and entrepreneurs to give further suggestions. Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to analyze whether or not there is a significant difference in students' English productive skills before and after using PBL in English language learning. This study found a significant difference in learners' speaking skills before and after participating in PBL activities. The students improved their comprehension, range and the ability to deliver their ideas to the target reader for writing skills. However, no difference was found in their content, cohesion, and accuracy. The interviewed teachers and entrepreneurs supported the implementation of PBL in schools. Overall,

*PBL is encouraged in the settings of higher education institutions. The research findings may vary in different contexts. They also provide further reliable information for the instructors in adapting the curriculum and the teaching and learning strategies to enhance Vietnamese students' productive skills.*

**Keywords:** *productive skills, project-based learning, speaking, writing*

## **1. Introduction**

With the integration among different countries of the world becoming more popular, new opportunities to become a global citizen are attracting more and more people. Due to those conditions, the need to know an international language has become indispensable, which is English in this case. According to Melitz (2016), English dominates in every aspect. Traditional media to the Internet, publishing or trade, English is at the top of the number of jobs that use it. If people want the international public to know about them, they need to work in English. Naturally, learning English has become more important than ever. Like any other languages, learning and using English will mean trying to master four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, the two skills mentioned here are productive skills - speaking and writing.

As both speaking and writing involve the activity of 'producing' a language in the context of communication, these skills are commonly labelled as productive language skills (Astawa et al., 2017). Students will be given opportunities to explore these two skills themselves in the educational environment. In speaking, a person communicates with others or influences someone by saying something that may affect another person's point of view or thought (Clark & Clark, as cited in Astawa et al., 2017). Writing, according to Harmer (1991), is the sole language skill that allows students to produce a touchable and readable work.

At first, English learners will get to know the traditional method for studying a second language-grammar-translation, which focuses more on writing and reading skills. Even though this method has become obsolete and is criticized for not developing speaking skills, it is still used widely depending on the cultures and countries (Hinkel, 2011). Traditional teaching is getting old and boring compared to the fast pace of changing things. It is important now that a person has to use all four language skills smoothly. Many new techniques and methods of language learning have appeared to help learners get to their goals as fast as possible. One of the methods gradually applied to the academic environment is project-based learning. Project-based learning (PBL) is an approach to instruction that shifts from traditional teaching practices characterized by short, isolated, and teacher-centered lessons. Instead, it emphasizes learning derived from long-term

activities, which are interdisciplinary, student-centered, and integrated with real-world issues and practices (Soleimani et al., 2015). This method will enable teachers to teach students in new creative ways and let them learn by completing small tasks.

In Vietnam, higher education institutions are bringing this method into real-time language classes. Allison, E. S., & Do, T. (2018)'s findings show that PBL provides opportunities to enhance Vietnamese students' language skills and soft skills. More crucially, during the initiatives, a diverse range of knowledge from many cultural viewpoints may be gathered. It may explain that project-based learning is being implemented more and more in schools with many innovative efforts.

Realizing that the use of PBL for teaching is gradually becoming popular, the authors conducted the research involved in the application of PBL in English Language Teaching and Learning at the Foreign Trade University, HCM Campus in the hope of improving the quality of teaching and learning English. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the current situation and issues of applying PBL to students' productive skills teaching at Foreign Trade University - Ho Chi Minh City Campus. Then, the expectations from students and entrepreneurs are also focused. In the light of findings, some suggestions are proposed to enhance students' productive skills teaching at the university.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Project-based learning**

#### *2.1.1. Definition*

Project-based learning (PBL) is defined as using authentic, real-world projects based on a highly motivating and engaging question, task, or problem to teach students academic content in the context of working cooperatively to solve the problem (Bender, 2012).

From the perspective of Fang (2008), PBL means learning through experiences. In PBL, students work in groups to solve challenging problems, which challenging problems are authentic, curriculum-based, and often interdisciplinary. When team teachers decide which specific projects learners meet in groups to plan, they will create websites and digital media presentations. They collaboratively gather information from various sources, synthesis, and analysis, and derive knowledge from valuable inquiries.

#### *2.1.2. Benefits of project-based learning in language learning*

The impact of project-based learning on learners' growth and abilities is numerous. Improved cooperation and responsibility, problem-solving abilities, communication abilities, creative thinking, critical thinking, and self-directed learning abilities are just a few of the benefits (Baillie & Fitzgerald, 2000). When students work on projects, they participate in purposeful communication in a natural setting. Furthermore, engaging in

Dang Thi My Dung, Phan Thi Nhat Phuong, Pham Nguyen Khanh Thuong, ... -Volume 4 - Issue 4-2022, p.107-124.

meaningful activities allows students to apply their EFL language skills in real-life situations. To improve teaching and learning, PBL has been implemented into the field of second and foreign language acquisition. Furthermore, it is often employed to improve learners' language learning at many levels and circumstances.

Learners can use language in a relevant and authentic setting using project-based learning, which is learner-centered. According to Fragoulis (2009), project-based learning is beneficial for teaching speaking because it gives students contextual and relevant learning while also allowing them to practice speaking English in a fun environment.

Students are at the heart of project-based learning, which is motivated by the need to produce a final result (Fried-Booth, 2002). When students work on projects, they participate in purposeful communication in a natural setting. Furthermore, engaging in meaningful activities allows students to apply their EFL language skills in real-life situations.

### *2.1.3. Teacher role in project-based learning*

Teachers that engage their students in PBL activities, according to Stivers (2010), find their own roles shifting as well. Rather than simply disseminating information, they learn that their major responsibilities are to guide, coach, and mentor their students. They teach their students how to ask questions, establish hypotheses, and devise information-gathering procedures. They become co-learners when their students take on a variety of learning initiatives, some of which may be new to them.

Otherwise, after completing a tertiary level study, Xiaoxia Wei (2019) proposes that when implementing PBL, teachers should decide on the project topic and evaluation technique, and provide sufficient and detailed help to students.

Secondly, on a more conceptual level, teachers should have the upper hand in areas where students' decision-making powers are limited, as this would tremendously benefit students' learning. A teacher, for example, cannot let undergraduate students choose the type of project that will benefit them or the methods that will be used to assess them.

## **2.2. Project Works**

### *2.2.1. Definition of Project Works*

Projects are extended tasks that usually integrate language skills with different activities (Hedge, 2002). Project work is seen as an authentic task similar to real-life tasks, and the language input is more authentic (Gallacher, 2004).

### *2.2.2. Criteria for a project to be considered as an instance of PBL*

The project is an important aspect of the PBL teaching and learning technique. PBL projects that are not based on the curriculum will be disqualified (Thomas, 2000).. According to Thomas (2000), project-based learning has five characteristics: Curriculum-based, student- driven, constructive investigations, autonomy, and realism.

Curriculum-based: The project is an important aspect of the PBL teaching and learning technique. Students use the project to investigate and learn about the concept and application, therefore projects that aren't centered on the curriculum aren't deemed PBL (Thomas, 2000).

Student-driven: Another characteristic of PBL is projects that Projects focus on questions or challenges that encourage students to relate their conceptual knowledge to project duties. The projects could include activities, products, performances, and presentations that test the students' cognitive and learning abilities. Academic work, life, and the students' work abilities in completing the assignment must all be connected (Railsback, 2002).

Constructive investigations: Constructive investigation, which includes planning, decision-making, problem-solving, and discovery, should also be a characteristic of projects. For students to have a variety of options for information inquiry and study, it must be fairly complicated and open-ended (Kauchak and Eggen, 2003). A good PBL should provide students with new understanding and knowledge, as well as new abilities (Thomas, 2000). At the same time, it should encourage students to think critically as they research and uncover information (Railsback, 2002).

Autonomy: They are expected to take responsibility for the project from its inception to its completion. Autonomy, choice, unsupervised work time, and accountability must all be given to students. They define their own goals and carry out the project in order to complete their mission. Instructors must also act as facilitators in this regard, assisting students according to their abilities to handle the project independently (Thomas, 2000).

Realism: The produced or given themes, tasks, roles, and products are practical or logical for execution (Thomas, 2000). The projects' outcomes can be shared with the intended audience (Railsback, 2002).

### 2.2.3. *Types of Project Works*

According to Haines (1989), there are four categories of projects:

- Information and research projects which include such kinds of work as reports, displays, etc.
- Survey projects which may also include displays, but more interviews, summaries, findings, etc.
- Production projects which foresee the work with radio, television, video, wall newspapers, etc.
- Performance/Organizational projects which are connected with parties, plays, drama, concerts, etc.

All of these projects have in common a focus on student participation, collaboration, and responsibility. In this way, project work resembles cooperative learning and task-oriented activities, which are generally advocated by educators who want to help students develop

Dang Thi My Dung, Phan Thi Nhat Phuong, Pham Nguyen Khanh Thuong, ... -Volume 4 - Issue 4-2022, p.107-124.

communicative competence and study a language for a specific purpose. It varies from similar approaches in that it often involves students collaborating across multiple days or weeks, both within and outside the classroom, and often with speakers of the target language who are not normally involved in the teaching process.

### ***2.3. Productive language skills***

#### *2.3.1. Definition*

Learning a language is usually divided into two domains of skills: productive and receptive skills. Productive skills consist of speaking and writing skills while listening and reading skills are receptive skills (Harmer, 2017). Enlightening the student's skill can be started from receptive skills, and then they can continue to productive skills as the outcomes of their language learning.

#### *2.3.2. Factors influencing learners' productive language skills*

According to Ryan (2015), the learner's affective side substantially impacts on their language acquisition process. The emotional elements are associated with moods, feelings, and attitudes regarding language learning (Meng & Wang, 2006), particularly learning to speak, which is the subject of this study. Anxiety, shyness, self-consciousness or confidence, and fear of making mistakes are all affective elements that had an impact on speaking fluency in this study. As components of negative sides in speaking skills, these emotive factors are intimately related to one another. Anxiety obstructs learning because people are afraid of seeming "wrong, stupid, or incomprehensible" (Brown, 2001), which will devalue their speaking performance. Furthermore, excessive anxiety reduces one's readiness to speak (Wu & Lin, 2014).

When it comes to factors that influence fluency, students' success in speaking classes has an impact on their fluency level. According to some researchers, different performance determinants include planning time, time pressure (Thornbury, 2005), and the quantity of support (Nation & Newton, 2009). Time pressure, on the other hand, relates to the haste with which learners must complete their speaking duties, potentially increasing the difficulty of their performance (Thornbury, 2005). According to Nguyen and Tran (2015), time pressure causes poor speaking performance. Furthermore, the quantity of peer and instructor support makes things easier since presenting a topic with others is easier than doing the same alone (Thornbury, 2005).

Lack of motivation, limited reading activities, and the influence of the mother tongue all affect the process of learning to write English as a foreign language (Ngoc Anh, 2019).

Writing is a skill that must be learned and practiced on a daily basis. This means that in order to improve their writing skills, students must spend time creating and reading a variety of texts. According to studies by Eisterhold (1997) and Harmer (2006, 2017), the more people read, the newer language they will be exposed to, allowing them to grasp

better vocabulary structure, idioms, sentence structure, idea organization, and weaknesses to support writing skills.

### *2.3.3. Productive skills in the contexts of PBL*

Overall, PBL has a positive effect on improving productive skills. Astawa et al (2017) implemented a research on the effect of PBL on students' English productive skills and how the activities influence teaching and learning process. The results of the analysis showed a significant effect of PBL on students' English productive skills. PBL was found to improve enthusiasm, confidence, creativity, self-directed learning and collaborative learning skills.

When it comes to speaking skill, Wahyudin (2017) did a study to confirm if students' foreign language oral performance in English for Business Class is considerably changed after PBL is tailored. Students were randomly allocated to an experimental class (learning EFB through PBL) and a control class before the learning process began (learning EFB through Presentation, Practice, Production). The study's findings revealed that PBL's characteristics, such as improving vocabulary, grammar, fluency, pronunciation, and organization, made it a beneficial strategy for improving speaking skills. The findings of the study showed that PBL had a greater influence on learning to speak than traditional techniques. Chrisce (2017) and Bakar et al (2019) also had the same conclusion that Project-based learning could improve the students' speaking skill.

To examine the effects of PBL on writing skill, Mariana et al. (2016) did research to find out how PBL enhances student engagement, how PBL can improve students' writing skills, and how students respond to PBL. The findings suggest that PBL can increase student engagement in the teaching-learning process. Additionally, students grow more creative and acquire experience working in groups. Furthermore, when PBL was adopted, writing scores improved dramatically. In Vietnam, Diem (2018) investigates the effectiveness of the PBL technique in improving students' writing performance at School of Foreign Languages - Thai Nguyen University and makes some pedagogical recommendations for teaching writing skill. The findings of the study suggest that the PBL technique is effective in motivating students' self and active learning. However, there are some drawbacks of this method, such as time consumption and students' unreliable assessment in the learning process but these drawbacks can be improved by using adaptive teaching programs and strategies. The result of the research by Praba et al. (2017) and Budianto, Langgeng (2017) also showed that PBL has a significant effect on students' English writing skill.

## **3. Research methods**

### *3.1. Research question*

Our research question focuses on the impact of Project-based learning on the two productive skills: Writing and Speaking of the students of Foreign Trade University - Ho

Dang Thi My Dung, Phan Thi Nhat Phuong, Pham Nguyen Khanh Thuong, ... -Volume 4 - Issue 4-2022, p.107-124.

Chi Minh Campus (FTU2). The research also finds out if PBL have a positive impact on writing/speaking skills (productive skills) of FTU2 students.

### ***3.2. Research methods***

The research team uses an embedded mixed-method design involving the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, but one of the data types plays a supplemental role within the overall design that is qualitative data from interviews with teachers and corporations. Quantitative data were obtained from the context of before and after taking part in the PBL activities. They played a major role in providing information about the extent to which project-based learning affects students' productive skills. For quantitative data, we choose questionnaires as the main method of data collection. For qualitative data, the research also gets more insightful viewpoints from lecturers and entrepreneurs about their opinions on the impacts of PBL on students' productive skills as well as their expectations from it.

### ***3.3. Contexts and Participants***

Quantitative data was gathered through a list of questionnaires in the form of an online survey. They were crucial in supplying data on the extent to which project-based learning influences students' productive skills (writing and speaking skills).

The study participants were selected through a non-random sampling technique, an online survey from among 193 students who study English as a foreign language at Foreign Trade University Ho Chi Minh campus. The respondents are from freshmen to senior students whose majors are in Business (International Trade) and External Economics. Those students in majority have a long period of studying English to prepare for the National Examination, so their English skills are strong in Reading and Vocabulary. However, Speaking and Writing skills are the two most of them find difficult. In addition, those students also take part in courses which involve PBL at Foreign Trade University, HCMC. Therefore, the participants are suitable samples for our research.

For more insightful information, we interviewed lecturers and entrepreneurs. Our interview questions for English lecturers focus on the difficulties that they and their students encounter in PBL classes. Moreover, we consult for their opinion on whether PBL classes help the students to improve their productive skills. For entrepreneurs, our questions focus on their opinions on the impact of PBL on students' productive skills and their expectations from PBL activities. In addition, we ask for their viewpoint about whether PBL activities should be encouraged at the university.

### ***3.4. Data collection and analysis***

To collect data for the model research, we carried out an online survey from among 193 students in the mentioned above characteristics. We then filtered the outliers according to their responses, especially in the contrast between question 1 and 2 in the Speaking



section, question 9 and 20 in Writing one. We asked the same questions in different ways, one was positive and one was negative to see if the survey was carefully made. The method of deduction was applied to clean the data.

The questionnaire has two main sections with a list of questions about Speaking and Writing skills based on the ranges of standard. We consider pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, accuracy and fluency applied for Speaking. For Writing, we care about the comprehension, content, organization and cohesion, accuracy, range and target reader. Moreover, we also add in 3 demographic questions for initial filtering. The data will be collected and processed through SPSS. We choose to transform the 5-point Likert scale into a grade scale as listed below: from Strongly Agree (5 points) to Strongly Disagree (1 point).

- (1) Strongly Disagree = 1 point
- (2) Disagree = 2 points
- (3) Neutral = 3 points
- (4) Agree = 4 points
- (5) Strongly Agree = 5 points

In addition, we conduct short interviews with three questions teachers who have applied PBL activities in their teaching and entrepreneurs for more add-in insights.

This study used bivariate analysis, which indicated the analysis of two variables, dependent variable (writing skill or speaking skill) and independent variable (PBL activities).

Hypothesis testing which was used for bivariate analysis was Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test is a nonparametric test that is similar to a dependent t-test. Because the Wilcoxon signed-rank test does not assume that the data is normal, it can be used when the dependent t-test isn't applicable. It's used to compare two groups of scores from the same people. This can happen when we want to look into any changes in scores from one-time point to the next, or when people are exposed to many conditions.

There are three assumptions required for the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test that our research has. The dependent variable is measured at the ordinal level. The Likert scale - the 5-point item from "strongly agree" through to "strongly disagree")" used in our research is an example of ordinal variables. Second, the independent variables consist of two categorical, "related groups" or "matched pairs". "Related groups" indicates that the same subjects are present in both groups. It is possible to have the same subjects in each group because each subject has been measured on two occasions on the same dependent variable. Third, the distribution of the differences between the two related groups is symmetrical in shape.

## 4. Empirical results and discussion

### 4.1. Empirical results

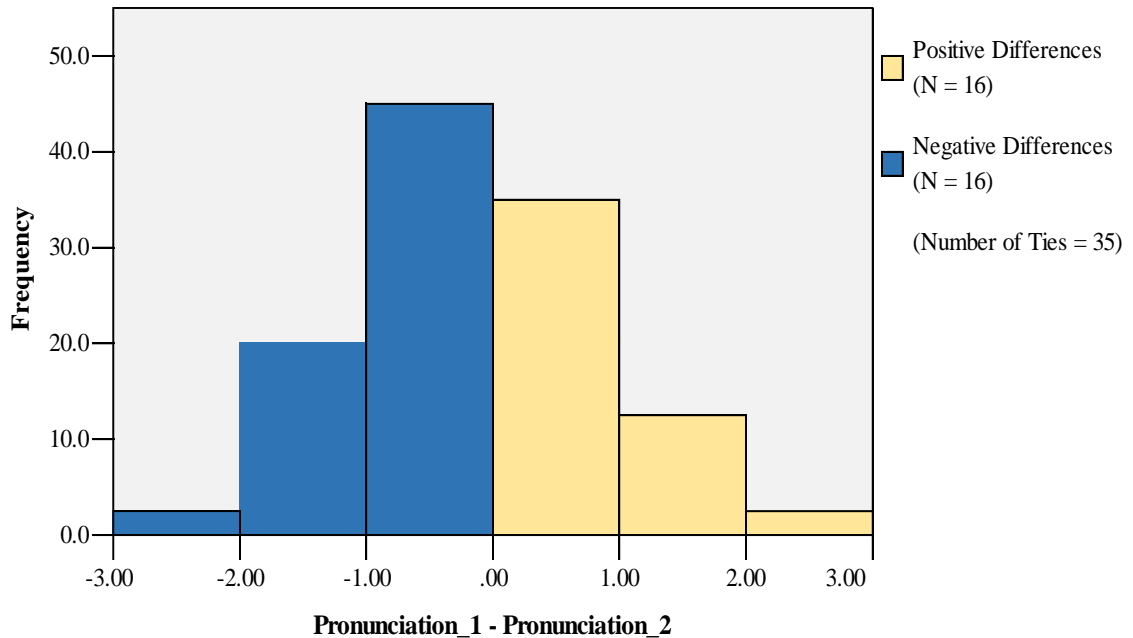
TABLE 1: Wilcoxon signed-rank test summary.

		Null Hypothesis	Sig. (p)	Decision	Standardized test
Speaking skills	1	The median of differences between Pronunciation_2 and Pronunciation_1 equals 0.	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.	-5.615
	2	The median of differences between Grammar_2 and Grammar_1 equals 0.	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.	-7.576
	3	The median of differences between Vocabulary_2 and Vocabulary_1 equals 0.	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.	-3.469
	4	The median of differences between GrammarAccuracy_2 and GrammarAccuracy_1 equals 0.	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.	-4.334
	5	The median of differences between Fluency_2 and Fluency_1 equals 0.	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.	-6.190
Writing skills	6	The median of differences between Comprehension_2 and Comprehension_1 equals 0.	.039	Reject the null hypothesis.	2.060
	7	The median of differences between Content_2 and Content_1 equals 0.	.093	Retain the null hypothesis.	-1.678
	8	The median of differences between Cohesion_2 and Cohesion_1 equals 0.	.232	Retain the null hypothesis.	-1.195
	9	The median of differences between Accuracy_2 and Accuracy_1 equals 0.	.483	Retain the null hypothesis.	-0.702
	10	The median of differences between Range_2 and Range_1 equals 0.	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.	-4.774
	11	The median of differences between TargetReader_2 and TargetReader_1 equals 0.	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.	-4.696

**Note:** To see if there are significant differences between the groups, comparison can be made between Z and a standard normal distribution. If the p-value is greater than 0.05, we can reject the null hypothesis that the medians of the two groups are the same. This can be translated as there are positive differences recorded after applying PBL in teaching English.

Our group decided to use the Wilcoxon signed-rank test to see if PBL had any effect on the students at Foreign Trade University - HCMC. Table 4.1 and Appendix 1 summarizes the final results. The test revealed a significant difference ( $Z = -5.615$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between the pronunciation scores given before and after participating in PBL learning activities.

After using the PBL approach, the median score for pronunciation was 4, compared to 3 before using it. The grade scales are then classified as either positive (students do not believe PBL improves their pronunciation) or negative (students do believe PBL improves their pronunciation). Because there are largely negative ranks, the histogram suggests that FTU - HCMC students rated their pronunciation higher after participating in PBL learning activities than before (69 compared to 16 positive ones). We may conclude that there is considerable evidence of a positive difference in pronunciation before and after attempting PBL in FTU - HCMC.



Total N	120
Test Statistic	603.000
Standard Error	218.066
Standardized Test Statistic	-5.615
Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)	.000

**Figure 1.** Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test for Pronunciation of speaking skills. Same as above, for grammar, there is a significant difference ( $Z = -7.576$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between the scores given before and after participating in PBL learning activities. The median score for grammar was 4, compared to 2 before using the PBL approach. As shown in the histogram, the student's grammar was rated higher after participating in PBL learning activities than before (88 compared to 7 positive ones). We may infer that there is substantial evidence of a beneficial difference in grammar before and after participating in PBL at FTU - HCMC.

As previously stated, there is a significant difference in vocabulary scores ( $Z = -3.469$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) before and after participation in PBL learning activities. There was no difference in the median. The student's vocabulary was scored higher after participating in PBL

learning activities than before, as seen in the histogram (55 compared to 20 positive ones). We can see a positive difference in vocabulary before and after participation in PBL at FTU - HCMC.

There is a significant difference in accuracy ratings ( $Z = -4.334$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) before and after participation in PBL learning activities. In terms of median, there was no difference. As seen in the histogram, the student's accuracy was higher after participating in PBL learning activities than before (59 compared to 21 positive ones). At FTU - HCMC, we can see a positive change in accuracy before and after participating in PBL.

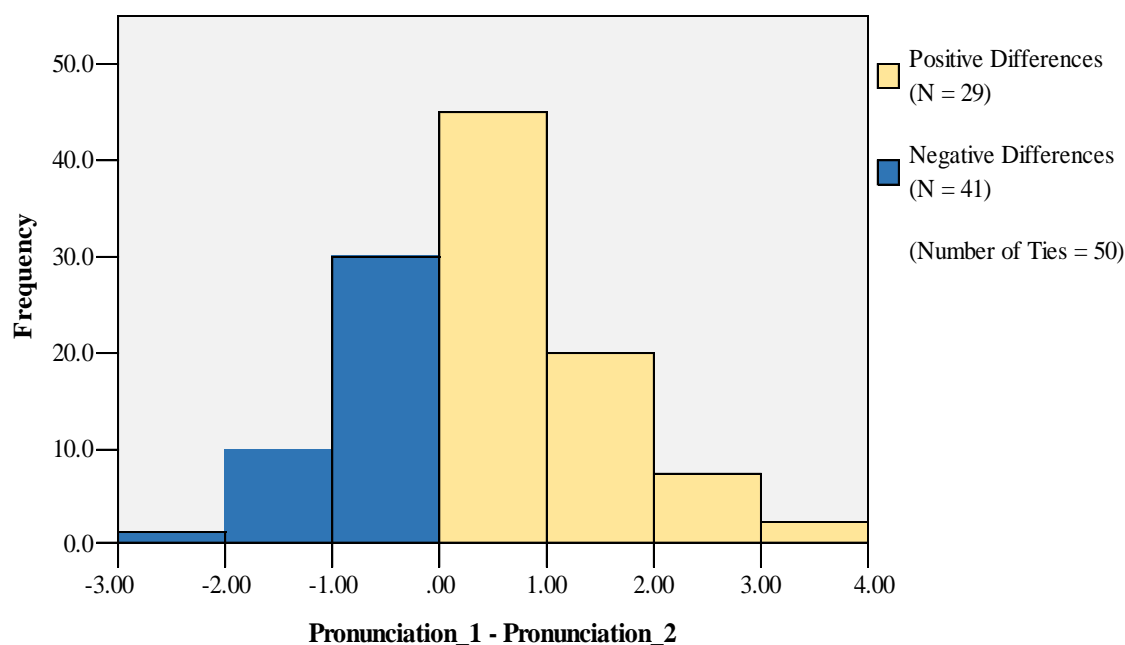
Comparing before and after participating in PBL learning activities, there is a significant difference in fluency scores ( $Z = -6.190$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The median fluency score was 4, up from 3 before trying the PBL method. The student's fluency was higher after participating in PBL learning activities than before, as seen in the histogram (67 compared to 13 positive ones). There is a positive difference in fluency before and after participation in PBL at FTU - HCMC.

In conclusion about students' speaking skills, our research group found that there was a positive difference between before and after taking part in PBL learning activities. These results are the same as the previous research of Wahyudin (2017), Chrisce (2017) and Bakar et al. (2019). Students have the opportunity to practice and develop their speaking skills by working in groups on a variety of projects. Working in a group lessens one's anxiety of making mistakes because rigorous planning and necessary adjustments are done in advance to carry out the final results. The group's applause also helps to alleviate the fear of speaking in front of a crowd. At the same time, dividing work among team members relieves pressure imposed by time constraints, allowing students to practice and prepare to speak more effectively, gradually building confidence via several projects. Furthermore, the development of the students may be easily tracked throughout each exercise, allowing teachers to make appropriate adjustments.

Regarding writing skills, PBL learning activities have no impact on students' skills. Here are specific explanations:

Firstly, there is a significant difference in comprehension scores ( $Z = 2.060$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) before and after participation in PBL learning activities. The student's comprehension was higher after participating in PBL learning activities than before, as seen in the histogram (39 compared to 22 positive ones).

Total N	120
Test Statistic	1.047.500
Standard Error	163.178
Standardized Test Statistic	-1.195
Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)	.232



**Figure 2.** Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test for Cohesion of writing skills

Secondly, the content score ( $p = 0.093$ ), the cohesion score ( $p = 0.232$ ), and the accuracy score ( $p = 0.483$ ) didn't have a significant difference between before and after joining PBL learning activities.

Thirdly, there is a significant difference in range scores ( $Z = -4.774$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The student's range was higher after participating in PBL learning activities than before, as seen in the histogram (59 compared to 17 positive ones).

Finally, as shown in the histogram, the student's target reader was rated higher after participating in PBL learning activities than before (58 compared to 18 positive ones). We may infer that there is substantial evidence of a beneficial difference in target readers before and after participating in PBL.

In conclusion, PBL has a positive effect on improving writing skills. This result is the same as the research by Praba et al. (2017) and Budianto, Langgeng (2017). However, the impact is not as great as speaking skills. The reason is partly explained by the research of Diem (2018) conducted in Vietnam. While PBL is helpful at stimulating students' self- and active learning, the amount of time they spend on it is a barrier to their improving their writing abilities. Furthermore, from our perspective, FTU-HCMC students spend more time on speaking than writing. Because project work at our university frequently results in a presentation, it is an excellent instrument for strengthening speaking skills. Students' writing skills did not increase significantly because they used spoken language rather than academic language. They require additional practice as well as a thorough comprehension of grammar, vocabulary, and social awareness.

#### ***4.2. Expectations from students and entrepreneurs***

Regarding students' expectations, our study asked students what prevents them from fully taking part in PBL learning activities and what skills do they find difficult to practice. According to the survey's result, time-consuming preparation and lack of motivation are two of the most chosen reasons, which hinder them from fully engaging in PBL classes. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to lead their students to focus on time-management skills, teamwork improvement and the use of different tools to assist them in PBL activities. Additionally, speaking skills are the skills that most students desire to improve, along with writing skills and soft skills (public speaking skills, collaboration skills...).

Regarding entrepreneurs' expectations, for more useful insights, our research team decided to involve corporates' expectations in graduate students' productive skills when working in the companies. The form of companies that we invited in our research is in the business sector, specifically, an MNCs growing firm working in the Talent and Acquisition field. According to a firm in the business sector interviewed, they showed their positive viewpoints toward the PBL activities at university.

For the first question about what their companies' expectations in English productive skills of employees are, they stated that in the present, the English requirement in our hiring positions is the important standard of the company. Therefore, they expect the candidate to be fluent in English communication in both writing and speaking skills. Particularly, for writing, their expectation is fluency in grammar and vocabulary for business email and daily conversation through chat. For speaking, they often assess the candidate in Fluency, Pronunciation, and Vocabulary in the business context.

For the question about the positive impact of PBL activities on students' English productive skills, which later will be used in the corporate environment, they showed their total agreement with the statement for two main reasons. First, the current issue is that students don't have a chance to practice their English in real case studies. PBL activities can support students to practice more to know how to apply their English knowledge at work. Moreover, PBL activities can give the student a clear benchmark to assess their English skill and let them know if their current English skill is good enough or not.

Finally, for the last question, the research team asked a direct question whether the firm thinks that PBL activities should be encouraged at university or not, they expressed their agreement actively: "For now, even the fresh graduates have good English skills however they cannot apply that at work and the company must train the business English for them. If we can apply Project-based learning activities at university, we can save time for both employer and employee and improve company productivity as well."

In conclusion, we have received positive responses about PBL activities from business firms that have recruited Foreign Trade University graduates. They showed their agreement and encouragement for PBL activities in teaching English to undergraduate students, indicating similar results from our research.

## 5. Conclusion

The primary objective of this research study was to identify the impact of implementing Project-Based Learning on students' productive skills at Foreign Trade University - Ho Chi Minh City Campus. The study also focuses on the expectations from students and entrepreneurs. Therefore, the suggestions are proposed to shed light on enhancing students' productivity in PBL classes at the university.

Adopted both qualitative and quantitative data, along with the application of hypothesis testing and the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, this study found a significant difference in speaking skills of FTU - HCM students before and after participating in PBL activities. According to the grade scales, the test revealed an improvement in students' pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary after joining PBL classes.

The data showed that PBL classes have no impact little effect on students' writing skills students' abilities to write in terms of writing skills. Firstly, the test revealed an enhancement in comprehension and range in writing of FTU - HCMC's students after participating in PBL activities. Additionally, the students' target readers can understand them better after engaging in PBL classes. However, the study did not notice any difference - or improvement - in their content, cohesion and accuracy in writing before and after taking part in PBL activities. The main reason for this must be students' lack of practice among students in these aspects. It takes time for foreigners to write fully accurate sentences to what they want to deliver in their native language areas. Unlike speaking skills, writing requires a lot of practice and wide knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and social understanding. Moreover, one should be well-guided well enough to know better techniques in writing. In other words, students could not fully improve in these aspects if they do not spend enough time sharpening their skills and have someone help assist them correct their correcting their mistakes.

In terms of recommendation, Aiedah et al. (2012) suggest that students can be evaluated in two ways: individually and in groups. The evaluation of each student could be based on their level of dedication, cooperation, attitude, and notes taking. The group evaluation, on the other hand, is based on the final project that they performed. Meanwhile, regardless of the learners' English language proficiency, a step-by-step instructional method may offer productive outcomes and be as successful as a guided instructional approach once it is carefully designed and correctly implemented (Abu et al., 2019).

Based on the findings, we believe PBL has the potential to improve FTU - HCM's students' skills in both speaking and writing, especially in speaking.

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