



## EFL Students' Perception on Strengths and Weaknesses of Group Working in Project-Based Learning

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the EFL students' perception on Strengths and weaknesses of group working in project-based learning. This implements qualitative research of study. Data were collected using reflections, which were distributed to 15 students of the fifth semester at the English Education Study Program in higher education at Kendari as participant. The finding showed that there were strengthen and weaknesses in implementing group work on PBL. Some strengthen on group work do PBL are brainstorming ideas, providing easier learning, and understanding material, practicing cooperation skills, sharing the task inside team and developing responsibilities. Meanwhile, for the weaknesses of group work on PBL namely the students' feel their group member was incohesive team these included of lack unity and think of themselves, difficulties to set time, uneven assignment, and misunderstanding in the discussion group. This study implies the lecturer or prospective teacher should have some considerations when they want to use group work activities in the class.

**Keywords:** *EFL Students' perception; project-based learning; strength; weakness; group work.*

### INTRODUCTION

In the past decades, researches about project-based learning (PBL) have increasingly been trailed and has been applied to various school subjects and leaning situation especially on teaching English foreign language (Tsiplakides & Fragoulis, 2009; Musa et al, 2011; Castañeda, 2014; Kavlu, 2017; Essien, 2018). Project-based learning is process of learning where students are responsible in their own learning (Salomon, 2003). The basic concept of PBL was occurred in the early 1990s by John Dewey with popularized learning by doing (Habók & Nagy, 2016). Dewey philosophy was students centered-learning introduced real-life situation and context into school environment (Petersen & Nassaji, 2016). His ideas were further developed by William Kilpatrick in the early 1990s in the "project method" (Kalyoncu & Tepecik, 2010). His notion was that such instruction should include four components: purposing, planning executing and judging (Foshay, 1999). Since then, a great number of studies on PBL have been carried out on the global scale and has been widely adopted to teach different subject in school and educational (Thuan, 2019).

There are many experts have defined about project-based learning. Based on statement Ministry of Educational and culture in Darmaji (2018), defines that PBL is a teaching method



which uses projects or activities as the core media in the teaching and learning in which the students have full authority to gain knowledge in their own way; meanwhile the teacher as a facilitator toward the students learning process. In addition Riswandi, (2018) suggested that PBL refers to a teaching method in the teaching and learning process that requires the students to design, plan carry out an extended project and produce a publicly-exhibited output such as a product, publication, or presentation. Permadani, (2018) mentions that the most important project-based learning is students learn in the process of constructing their new ideas, creating their own project, and developing their creativity In PBL students could work together or individual to accomplish the project. Stoller in Larasati, (2015) adds that project work is part of cooperative learning. It allows students to work in their own, small, group, or in a whole class. PBL also provides valuable opportunities for the students to be engaged individually and in groups in formulating enquiry questions, setting goals and planning for the process of conducting and designing the project (Aldabus, 2018). When applying the project-based learning method in the classroom it is very possible for a teacher to form this teamwork because PBL includes a set of activities related to management and planning process that only seems possible in group member (Cinar & Biligin, 2011). Students need to organize themselves in a team, manage a project, make decision, and find solution (Alves, Mesquita, Moreira & Fernandes, 2012). The activities related to that require an intense and extended interaction among team members throughout the project.

In Greece, the use of project-based learning in EFL classes was investigated by Tsiplakides and Fragoulis (2009). The study found that at the beginning of the project, the students felt unnerved to decide their group and to develop the given material. Not only that, in this study also found the potentials of project-based learning as teaching approach because the researchers discovered that there were improvements in students' competency to communicate with their peers in English and students were found aware of their responsibilities in succeeding the PBL as they were formed as a group which consistend of team members and team leader. Furthermore, in Indonesian context study related PBL has done by Gai Mali, (2016) he has observed the pedagogical practices and learning supplies utilized by several students in a creative writing class to finish the projects given. This study emphasized the importance of team work in a group and utilized an online platform to accomplish the project assigned. His study found that group working on PBL has several benefits for students like as to share learning resources, discuss what group member have to do, to clarify ideas and negotiation different perspective. Contrary with research before, in the study by Aldabbus (2018) found that team working is the one of challenge when implemented PBL. In his study, it found that in a member group have unequal contribution of some students to the project work of the group. So, these problems compromise the quality of activities that students are working on and at same time their own learning.

Likewise, PBL was implemented in several courses in English Department includes of in Syntax course. The reason the researcher chooses Syntax class because in this class, all of assignments that given by the lecture is used this method starting by form the first until the final task, and the one of their projects was use group working. It can be confirmed that the students



have many experiences with this method. Another important issue is that although group working may help EFL students to improve their language skills, sometimes working with other learners could be detrimental to some group member (Alfares, 2017). Therefore, this study is considered important to seek out the EFL students' perception on Strengths and weaknesses of group working in project-based learning to enrich the research in ELT.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study engaged with qualitative method. The participants of this study consisted of 15 students at fifth semester of English department at one of higher education in Kendari that involved in a Syntax challenge project, included A and B classes. In determining the participants, the researcher was recommended by the lecturer who teaches them with Purposive sampling technique. The purposive sampling was used to know utilized in this present study because it was not all of participants in fifth semester have criteria that fit the phenomenon with this study. Therefore, the researcher chooses the purposive sampling technique that sets certain that must be met by the participants used this study. In this study, the participants were the students who meet the criteria. The criteria that used this study were firstly students' active in learning Syntax and they have to be involved in Syntax challenge project. Secondly, students' who were late to submit the task Syntax challenge project and thirdly, students who got low score. This study deployed just one instrument namely journal reflection. The data was collected through an online platform namely Google form. In analyze the data the researcher re-read the students' reflection. The the reasearcher highlight the points releated the study (Maxwell, 2015) to ease the catagorizing. The data were categorized into several big themes (Boyatzis, 1998). In this case, the researcher perceived ideas as standpoints that can help the reasearcher to clasify the data (Lieblich, Tuval-Mahiach, & Zilber, 1998). Fristly, the reseracher categorized the data into general themes. i.e., positive attitudes , negative attitudes and neutral attitides towards the use on group work do PBL. Then, the researcher narrowed down the big themes into the more specific ones as final themes (Maxwell, 2005). After that, the obtained data were coded based on the specific theme. The process then continued to the interpretation of the data identified.

## FINDING

This section shows findings and discussion from data collected in students' reflection about the EFL student's perception of group work in PBL. All names are pseudonyms entries and will called as student 1 (henceforth S1) S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S9, S10, S11, S12,S13, S14,S15. This presentation of findings in this section will devide into two sections namely strengthen of group working on PBL and Weaknesses of group working on PBL

## 1. Strengthen of group working on PBL

Students' Responses	F	%
Brainstorming ideas	13	8,7
Providing easier learning	9	60
Practice cooperation skills	2	13
Completing the task quickly	2	13
Practice responsibilities	1	7

**Table 1. Strength of the Group Work in PBL (n=15)**

The data analysis results reveal some primary strength of the implementation group working in PBL. Table 1 summarize the students' response regarding the strength of group working activities in PBL. It is shown in Table 1 that all of students' were of the argued that learning with group working was the main advantage of the PBL activities. Most all students mentioned that the group working in PBL activities enable them to Brainstorm ideas each other as the students said that

"with group working we can share or brainstorm ideas in completing this task." (S1)

".... benefits og group working for me is can to share knowledge and experiences..." (S8)

"... working with group we can share our perspective ideas" (S9)

"group working is good because we can ask each other and give opinions" (S10)

"With group work we can asking opinions and giving opinions"(S12)

Then the other students' add

"lots of people lots of ideas..."(S13)

Another well-noted strength group work in PBL was providing easier learning through helping each other. The students claimed that group working help them in understanding material better The students claimed that group work facilitates to easier learning because the students are able to help each other.

"work with member group is good, because i can more deeply understanding the material" (S6).

"Yes, very good because if there are difficulties, we can ask group member to help" (S2)

"Work collaborati is very well in completing project tasks. Because we can help each other when there are friends who don't understand the how the process in task"(S5)

"because when I am confused, I find it easier to ask my group mates then my group friends can give me solution, so I don't have any more difficulties" (S14)

Besides, group working also made students' easier, because they said that they can deviding the task each member.

"Yes, good because it can divide tasks"(S3).

Another students expressed his similar thought

"group working is good because the heavy tasks if done together will be easy" (S15)

Some students also wrote that group working in completing project provided them with the opportunities to practice their cooperation skills.



*"I think group working is good for training cooperation between group members..."* (S7)  
*"working in groups is a great way to practice cooperation between group members"* (S8)  
 Other strength of group working in PBL activities was make they quickly to finishing their task.

*"Yes, working collaboratively is very good, it can complete project tasks quickly and clearly because working in groups, we can share the ideas that each one has to complete good project assignments"* (S9)

*"Lots of people, lots of ideas. So we quickly complete the task."* (S13)

Lastly, strength of group work in PBL was the students' considered important were sharing responsibilities in

*"I think working in groups is a good thing to train cooperation between group members, it can also increase the sense of responsibility given by the lecturer in each member"* (S7).

## 2. Weaknesses of group working on PBL

Students' Responses	F	%
Manage time	5	33
Uneven assignment cooperation	4	27
Mmisunderstanding in the discussion group	2	13

**Table 2. Weaknesses of the Group Work in PBL (n=15)**

Most students had positive perception on the implementation of group works in their projects process. But some of them took weaknesses on working with member Almost all student' opined that member of their group was not compact these problem. Such as, some students felt that they found it difficult to set time to discuss with their group for instance the one students said that

*"Difficult in Determining the time to work together because everyone has their own busyness"* (S3)

*"difficulty in managing time to meet"* (S6)

*"sometimes, can not to manage time to meet, it is very difficult to gather all member group."* (S4)

Then, uneven assignment cooperation. Such as some students were actually working, whereas others ignored the work and were loading and some students who feel more smarts than their member group take the most part and not give another friend a chance to work as the students said

*"Not compact, group members who already have their respective duties but they ignore and don't do it"* (S13)

*"There is one friend who selfish, then those who feel themselves smart prefer to organize and want to do it themselves"* (S15)

Another weaknesses was misunderstanding in the discussion group because the differences of opinion.



*“Misunderstanding while discussing. Sometimes some people have thoughts that are not in line, so sometimes we have difficulty dividing assignments.”(S15)*

*“ the difficulty in group working is such as the differences of opinion”(S11)*

## DISCUSSION

The finding showed that the use group working on PBL has negative and positive impact in learning. Based on the data analysis, there are six strengthens of group work on PBL, the first is strengths of group working is brainstorm ideas. This becomes the biggest strength where it is reflected when students share their experience and perspective ideas to their friends. It trains the students to be open-minded about what they think and feel of something with their friends. This finding related with study by Alfares, (2017) argued that in group each people have different experiences and knowledge to share with others. The second is providing easier learning and understanding material. In here, the students are able to help each other and work together to reach their goal. Based on the students’ statements group work makes an easier learning because the students the students are able to help each other and work together to solve some problem. Related with Ghufon and Ema, (2018) stated that with group member in learning PBl it can make students more easy learning.

In addition, with group work the students can sharing task from the lecture inside team so this also become students easier. This is because group work does not let the students to do all the task individually. This view was supported by Phitaloka, (2015) that found in her study that the benefits of group work as giving an opportunity for the students to share their difficulties and ask their friends to help. The third is practice cooperation skills, in process ding the task the students work together to accomplish shared goals. The students also seek the weaknesses the member group, discuss material with each other, help one another understand it, and encourage each other to work hard. All of activities supported them to train the cooperative learning. Similar with Alfares, (2017) claimed that in group work swapping the information and knowledge between students can increase the cooperative learning opportunities. The last is practice responsibilities. In group work students also can raise students’ responsibility in learning (Ghufon & Ernawati,2018)

Dealing with weaknesses, Group work, even though the students reported that working collaboratively is good choosing in completely the project, they also mentioned that various difficulties face when working collaborative namely not compact. Similarity scholar reported that collaboration is a huge difficulty (Baysura et al., 2016; Aldabbus, 2018; Harris, 2014). Some students also reported that there is a problem of unequal contribution of some students to the project work of the group. These results are in agreement with those of earlier studies. In this regard, Van den Bergh; Mortelmans; Spooren; Van Petegem; Gijbels; Vanthournout, (2006)



states that it is hard to determine every student's contribution within each group. It is highly possible that because of some "free-riders" other students in the groups have to work more. Baysura et al. (2016) Harris, 2014) found that there was an unequal contribution to the project work from some passive students. Also, Aldabbus, (2018) found that there are some students that dominated work and did not allow their friends to take role in their project. Furthermore, in term of misunderstanding in the discussion group, it is worthwhile to mention that group work is difficulties to students since they had lack skills and experience in communication and collaboration within the groups (Yam & Rossini, 2010).

## CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the finding of this study, it is proved that group work can be used in the class activities as a valuable tool for the students to improve their skills and help them deal with the course they join because it has many advantages. In this study found that there are six strengthen in group working in PBL such as brainstorming ideas, providing easier learning, and understanding material, practice cooperation skills, shared the task inside team and practice responsibilities, meanwhile for the weaknesses of group working in PBL namely the students' feel their group member was not compact this includes of difficulties to set time, ineven assignement, and misunderstanding in the discussion group.

In relation to this study, further study can be conducted considering that this study has a limitation aspect since the researcher found that some questions in the reflection are not truly answered deeply by the participants. So, the researcher must contact again the participant to get the explanation about their answer Therefore, for further study it is important to do a deep interview to get more information and better result related to the students' opinion about group work.

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