

STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO THE TV SHOW PROJECT AS THE END-OF-TERM ASSESSMENT IN THE PRONUNCIATION COURSE

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SUMMARY

The research reveals a number of critical findings related to the perceptions, self evaluations as well as expectations of English major students at the Banking Academy of Vietnam in doing the "TV show project" in the Pronunciation course as the alternative for the end-of-term exam. The data were collected from survey questionnaires and interviews among those students, triangulated by teacher's observations of students' behavioural attitudes and performances on the presentation day. In general, students showed positive attitudes towards this end-of-term project. In addition, their behavioural responses and performances on the stage were surprising and encouraging. The research findings together with the pedagogical recommendations will hopefully be useful to researchers and practitioners in the same fields of interest.

Keywords: *project-based learning; project-based language learning; alternative assessment; pronunciation teaching and learning; TV show project*

INTRODUCTION

In the dynamic era of abundant innovations in language teaching and learning, project-based language learning (PBL) came into existence in the mid-1970s as response to pedagogical theories of "learner-centered teaching, learner autonomy, the negotiated syllabus, collaborative learning, and learning through tasks" [1, p.276]. For those essences, PBL has been introduced to many educational institutions as an innovative approach and well-embraced by practitioners worldwide [2]. In fact, it has also been employed at the Banking Academy of Vietnam in teaching and learning English for more than five years. However, it was not until 2 years ago when the application of PBL became widely applied in almost all disciplines with all groups of students namely English-majors, non majors and fast-track students. More importantly, projects have recently been employed as an alternative assessment tool, accounting for a very large percentage (60%) in students' total mark. Given the superiorities of alternative assessment to traditional assessment, the

adoption of PBL could possibly be considered as a positive change. However, more factual evidence should be obtained to reinforce this belief. This means in-depth investigations with actual findings are required. This current research which investigates students' responses to the TV show project as the end-of-term assessment in the pronunciation course will hopefully contribute to providing a full insight into the effectiveness of applying PBL at the BAV, and serve as a reliable reference to interested practitioners and researchers in other teaching contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

PBL has been viewed as a teaching and learning method which "organizes learning around projects" [3, p.2]. It challenges students with complex tasks which require problem solving, decision making or investigative activities in students' work [4], [5]. PBL also allows learning evaluation from different perspectives, namely self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and teacher evaluation [5]. Added to that, authentic content and authentic assessment are widely considered as defining features of PBL [6]. As put by Fried-Booth, PBL "functions as a bridge between using

English in class and using English in real-life situations" [6, p. 22].

In terms of the benefits of PBL, it is strongly believed to support the use of target language for genuine communicative needs [1]. Getting involved in doing projects, students have to engage in the real-life communication tasks with authentic content, which accordingly cultivates their communicative skills and language acquisition. In addition, PBL also supports non-linguistic skills in collaborative work and research work [7]. By doing work group, students learn how to work well as part of a team, how to cooperate for mutual success. The demanding and challenging authentic tasks also require their in-depth investigation into an issue, developing their research skills. Moreover, according to Fried-Booth [8], PBL helps motivate and encourage students thanks to its challenging tasks with tangible end-products. Interestingly, within the context of teaching and learning language at universities, PBL is considered as an appropriate method. Indeed, with once-per-week language classes, students need a lot more time for their practice. Assigned projects will require their real practice and develop their independent learning.

However, with regards to the drawback of PBL, time consumption is the biggest concern of all people involved [2]. For its challenging essence, projects are often carried out within an extensive period of time, and students often have to spend a large amount of time for preparation. They often have many more things to prepare than in a traditional task, as well. As for instructors, in response to students' products of complex tasks, instructors have to spend more time on evaluating, assessing and giving feedback. Especially, it requires instructors to have good classroom management skills and flexibility to make sure that everything will go smoothly [9].

In general, given the fact that PBL has been widely acknowledged with many merits, their disadvantages still exist. Moreover, the application of PBL with particular issues entailed varies from one teaching and learning context to another because of different variables. Therefore, research done in specific contexts is still in need for practical purposes.

RESEARCH AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research was specifically designed to answer the three following questions:

1. How was the TV – show project in the Pronunciation course perceived by the ATC students at the BAV?
2. How did the ATC students at the BAV evaluate their performances in the TV – show project in the Pronunciation course?
3. What were the ATC students' expectations of the conduct of the TV – show project in the Pronunciation course?

METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology

This is a small-scale case study, conducted under the interpretive paradigm. The data was collected from survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaires were distributed to 100 ATC English-majored freshmen at the Banking Academy of Vietnam (54 students from ATCC group and 46 students from ATCD group), then 5 out of them were invited to take part in the interviews. The collected data was triangulated by teacher observation.

Research Settings

The pronunciation course is offered to the first-year English majors in the first semester with an aim to developing students' pronunciation, as a preparation for students' developing their speaking skills. The course runs in 8 weeks, and each class meets twice per week. In this course, doing the TV show project is compulsory for all students as a

replacement of the end-of-term test, accounting for 60% of the total mark.

In this project, students are supposed to work in groups of 3-5 to make shows of 10 -15 minutes. They can choose from a variety of performance forms such as role-plays, talk-shows, game shows, TV news reports, etc. Students also have a free choice of topics. However, they need to make sure about clearly conveyed content of the show, equal work division and equal share of speaking time during on-stage performances. Technology-assisted applications are highly recommended for more creative and impressive products. Each group must have the TV show plan checked and approved by teacher. Revision may be made more than once, depending on the discussion between teacher and students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' perceptions of the TV show project

Students' preferences of the TV show project

The findings showed very positive attitudes towards the project among the surveyed and interviewed students. Surprisingly, about 80% of the students said that they liked or really liked doing the TV show project, 18% remained neutral, leaving only an insignificant number feeling unhappy with doing the project.

When comparing TV show project with other traditional end-of-term assessment tools including written tests and recording tests, approximately 90% of the students advocated the former one. Two of the five interviewed students provided a very critical ideas and explanations for this.

"Paper tests can only measure very small part of students' pronunciation."
(Interviewee A)

"Recording tests are better than paper tests, but they are not communicative and passive."
(Interviewee D)

Students' perceived benefits and drawbacks of doing the TV show project

In terms of benefits, almost all the student agreed that the project provided them a refreshing way of learning, an interesting and effective mode of end-of-term assessment. One of the interviewed students put that doing the project was fun and very different from hard and boring paper tests at high school. Besides, the students affirmed the project's advantages in developing their creativity and confidence (over 90% and 75%, respectively). Providing a practical opportunity for student practice was also acknowledged as a merit of doing the project by more than two-thirds of the students. One interviewee explained that *"Doing this project requires us to practice orally a lot. I think it helps our pronunciation development better than written tasks."* (Interviewee A)

In comparison, the drawbacks of doing the TV show project were reported by far smaller number of the surveyed students. However, more than 9/10 of the students mentioned time consumption as the biggest concern when doing the project. In fact, it is one of the inevitable obstacles of PBL because of its demanding essence for comprehensive developments of different aspects at the same time. Nervousness was the second widely mentioned hindrance by above 35% whereas money investment in doing the project was mentioned by only 15% of the students. This was beyond my expectation because I had actually anticipated that spending some money on the project would have been unpleasant to most of the students.

Students' self-evaluation on their doing the TV show project

Students' self-evaluation on the process of doing the project and satisfaction of their performances

Overall, the findings revealed much more satisfaction than dissatisfaction with doing the TV show project among the students.

Most of the students attributed their self-perceived development in self-learning, activeness and creativity to their satisfaction after doing the project. On the other hand, they felt rather unpleasant with the stage of deciding topics, content and dissatisfied with their time management skills. Especially, dissatisfaction with on-stage performance was reported by many students. Most of them wished that they had done it better on the performance day or some individuals really regretted not having done as well as when practicing at home.

Again, it was interesting to find out that only 15% considered money spending as an advantage of doing the project, as discussed earlier, and only 17% felt unhappy about that. Given the fact that students in general and first-year students in particular often think much about saving money, this figure really meant a positive response to the project. It could be inferred that the students thought it was worth spending some money on the project. In fact, those students wanted to have impressive shows and spending some money allowed them to have good costumes for their performances.

In addition, whereas more than 9/10 of the students mentioned preparation time as the drawback of doing the project, only half of them felt unsatisfied with it. Possibly the students were fully aware of the fact that good TV show product couldn't be made without attempts and sufficient amount of preparation time.

Students' self-evaluation on showing pronunciation aspects during their performances

It was startling to find that the pronunciation of individual sounds which was the primary focus of the course was not the most noticed by the students. Most of them said that more attention was paid to showing intonation, sentences stress and linking sounds, instead. One interviewed student explained that "*With*

long and many lines, students found it hard to pay attention to sounds." (Interviewee E). Nevertheless, according to my observations, most students couldn't show good intonation, stress very much in their shows. This was a critical finding that will be discussed in the following part.

Students' expectations of their performance the TV show project

Again, the findings highlighted students' challenges in group work skills. A great majority of the students expected that there should have been more effective co-operation in workgroup and work should have been distributed more equally among group members.

Besides, much as critical as it was, although the students were quite satisfied with teacher support, they still wished to have even further more.

"We were rather confused about what topic should we work with. There were too many." (Interviewee B)

"I knew role-plays, but I haven't done other types like talk shows, game shows, or TV reports. So it was a bit confusing in the beginning about which form of performances' to pick." (Interviewee C)

During the interviews, students revealed some more expectations in teacher support in using technological devices such as projectors, and sound systems. They also wished to have more detailed comments on their group performances as well as individual performances. It should be clarified that much as I wanted to give them detailed comment on their work, due to time constraints and human shortage, this was a big challenge for me to fulfil that job. Online feedback delivered to students after the presentation could be a solution to this.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

A number of critical findings mentioned above brought me to some implications as follows.

Firstly, the students' positive attitudes towards the TV show project proved that PBL was well-embraced by the ATC students. More importantly, doing projects should be used as an alternative assessment tool in place of the traditional assessment.

Secondly, the perceived challenges in time management and group working mentioned by many students means that more effective support and advice should be provided by teachers. At some institutions like the Banking Academy of Vietnam, the Study Skills course is offered to provide students with essential skills at university such as group working, problem solving, managing times. Such kinds of courses will support students a lot in doing learning projects.

Thirdly, the students appreciated teacher's help but still expected more advice in building the show content. There seemed to be a mismatch between what the students and the teacher thought to this point. I allowed my students a free choice of themes and sub-themes to maximize students' freedom, creativity and independence. However, it turned out a big challenge for them in identifying the show content. Therefore, the recommendation is that teachers should suggest students about themes and sub-themes as well as provide them with good TV show examples. This will be very helpful for first-year students.

Lastly, as revealed from the findings, individual sound pronunciation was the main focus of the course but not the most noticed by the students during their performances, which arose another mismatch between the course objectives and students' perceptions and behaviors. Therefore, a question should be raised about how to redirect students to prioritize the perfection of individual sounds to fulfil the main objectives of the course. Possibly, there should be clearly stated requirements about that in the project guideline. Alternatively, the application of a

different project which closely addresses this course objective may be taken into consideration.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study revealed very positive attitudes among students towards doing the TV show project as the end-of-term assessment. It showed students' appreciation of applying PBL in order to not only develop language acquisition but also cultivate students' creativity, activeness, confidence, self-learning skills and group work skills. Much positive as it seemed, when doing the project, students faced some challenges in terms of building the content of the show, managing time, working well as part of a team, showing their progress in perfecting pronunciation aspects such as individual sounds, sentence stress, intonation. Inevitably, it would take more time for those first-year students to develop their language as well as other study skills. Therefore, a very significant progress was not highly expected after an eight-week course from the beginning, but the positive thing is that PBL proved a suitable and effective learning approach in language learning context at the BAV. It came as a good experience and a positive start for those first-year students. Finally, the recommendations drawn on the actual findings will hopefully improve the practice of applying the TV show projects and PBL in general.

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TÓM TẮT

PHẢN HỒI CỦA SINH VIÊN VỀ DỰ ÁN TV SHOW LẤY ĐIỂM CUỐI KỲ TRONG KHÓA NGŨ ÂM

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Nghiên cứu này cho thấy một số phát hiện đáng quan tâm liên quan đến cách nhìn nhận, tư đánh giá cũng như những mong muốn của sinh viên chuyên tiếng Anh tại Học viện Ngân hàng trong việc hoàn thành đề án cuối kỳ "TV show project" đối với môn Ngữ âm, thay thế cho bài thi cuối kỳ. Nội dung của bản báo cáo có được thông qua việc thực hiện phát phiếu điều tra, phỏng vấn đối với nhóm đối tượng sinh viên này, kết hợp với việc quan sát và đánh giá thái độ cũng như sự thể hiện của sinh viên qua đề án lấy điểm cuối kỳ. Nhìn chung, sinh viên bày tỏ quan điểm rất tích cực về việc thực hiện đề án như 1 hình thức thay thế cho bài thi cuối kỳ. Đồng thời, thái độ, sự đầu tư cho đề án cũng như sự thể hiện trên sân khấu của sinh viên mang lại những bất ngờ thú vị và đầy tính khích lệ. Kết quả nghiên cứu cũng như những đề xuất liên quan đến phương pháp giảng dạy hy vọng sẽ có ích đối với các nhà nghiên cứu và giáo viên giảng dạy tiếng Anh quan tâm đến lĩnh vực này.

Từ khóa: Học theo dự án; học ngôn ngữ theo dự án; phương pháp đánh giá thay thế; dạy và học Phát âm; dự án TV show

Ngày nhận bài: 15/10/2017; Ngày phản biện: 02/11/2017; Ngày duyệt đăng: 13/12/2017