

## PROJECT POWER IN THE STUDY OF THE ENGLISH WRITTEN LANGUAGE USED BY THE SECOND-YEAR ENGLISH MAJORS AT THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION

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### SUMMARY

This paper aims at (1) studying the nature of the project-based learning method and the way to achieve it, (2) applying the method to the study of other subjects, (3) finding out some common difficulties in studying and applying the method; and (4) offering some practical suggestions to help learners of English at University of Education, Thai Nguyen University (TUE) overcome these difficulties. The researchers worked with 62 second-year English majors at TUE. Theoretical method and Empirical method are the main methods used in this study. We have stressed some issues concentrating on the project-based learning and its power in the study of written language. Based on that discussion, we can draw some conclusion as follows: Firstly, there are some interesting projects related to written language which can help students improve their writing skill. Secondly, the students' evaluation of the program and PBL in learning written language and difficulties they faced when doing project is presented. In fact, PBL is a brand-new method in learning language in general and written language in particular, and PBL helps students promote their interest in learning and understand the importance of written language in our modern society nowadays.

**Key words:** *Project-based learning, writing skill, learning language, English majors, approach.*

### INTRODUCTION

Written language has been considered the most difficult field in language learning. Therefore, there are many different approaches to the learning of written language. Each teacher or each learner has his/her own teaching style or learning style and stresses different aspects of written language [1]. In that way, they have developed a variety of approaches to learning written language. As a result, it is important to take a serious view of some main approaches in learning written language before discussing the new and effective method.

In the process approach, the content and the organization are more important than the correction of grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and punctuation because paying too much attention on correcting these mistakes often leads to the learners' discouragement in learning [2]. One kind of process approaches is project-based learning which the writer is going to focus on in this study. Compared with product approach, process approach has many good points in helping learners improve their written language skills.

Written language is often considered the most difficult and boring field of language. It is very fortunate for those learners that a new method, project-based learning, has been invented to solve these problems. "Project-based learning is an instructional approach that contextualizes learning by presenting learners with problems to solve or products to develop" [3]. A well-planned and well-organized classroom project is a good way to motivate students to learn written language because it gives the learners a chance to work with interesting topics and games, which not only make learners feel excited but also create motivation in learning [4].

### METHODOLOGY

The subjects of this study were 62 second-year students at Thai Nguyen University of Education. These students have learnt 5 terms of English written language with different types of writing. The table below will present the detail sub-projects of the Vietnam-Netherlands Higher Education Project in each year and the activities in each project that are related to written language:

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Year	Projects	Writing activities
1 <sup>st</sup>	Culture Quiz	- Writing scenario and questions for the show - Reading and understanding the information that they search from different sources.
	Magazine	- Writing different types of writing such as narrative, description, - Reading and understanding information that they search from different sources.
	Drama	- Reading the novel they choose for their drama. - Writing scripts and drafts.
	Overseas Study consultancy	- Searching and reading information about some oversea universities. - Writing brochure to introduce a university to learners who want to study abroad.
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Virtual Tour	- Reading materials about a sightseeing that learners want to introduce to the tourist.
	Cultural Perspectives	- Searching and reading information an aspect of world culture for their performance in the museum.
	TV show	- Searching and reading materials for their show on the Internet. - Writing scripts with several drafts for their TV show.
	College Log	- Searching and reading information and news for their broadcasting.
	Vietnamese culture	- Searching and reading information about Vietnamese culture.

In the second and third year, students have many other kinds of projects that relate to their subjects, such as: Translation project, Literature project... Although all projects in 5<sup>th</sup> term supplement the subjects, many students still need written language in the process of writing their products.

## FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

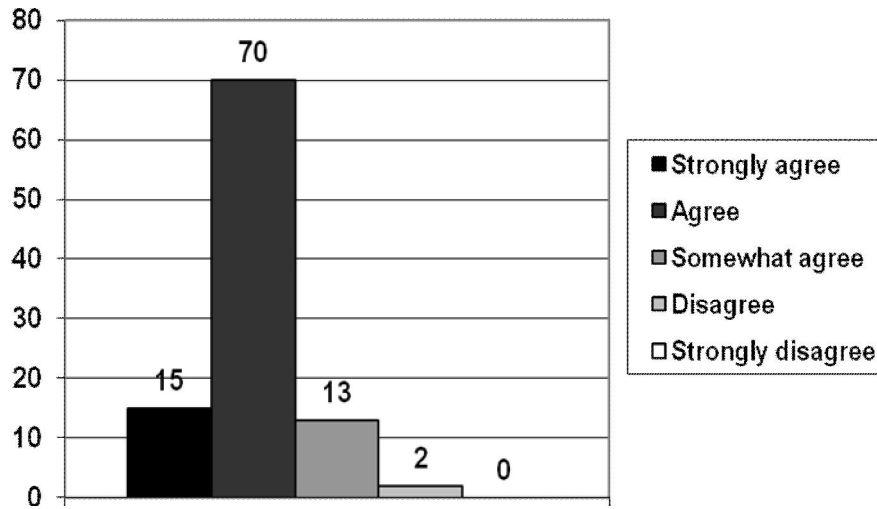
### Students' improvement in writing skill

**Table 1.** *The improvement in writing skills*

Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I could learn from my friends by asking for feedbacks from other members in my groups about my writing	23 %	68 %	7 %	2 %	0 %
2. Through searching for information for my project, I have learnt how to write formal or informal essays and other types of essay, such as description, comparison and contrast, narration...	16 %	69 %	13 %	2 %	0 %
3. I now understand the importance of writing	18 %	76 %	6 %	0 %	0 %
4. By reading materials and working in groups, I have learnt how to organize my ideas for writing better.	11 %	75 %	12 %	2 %	0 %
5. I have learnt how to make my writing more attractive and persuasive.	14 %	72 %	11 %	3 %	0 %

*Adapted from Foss, P., Carney, N., McDonald, K., & Rooks, M. (2007) [5]*

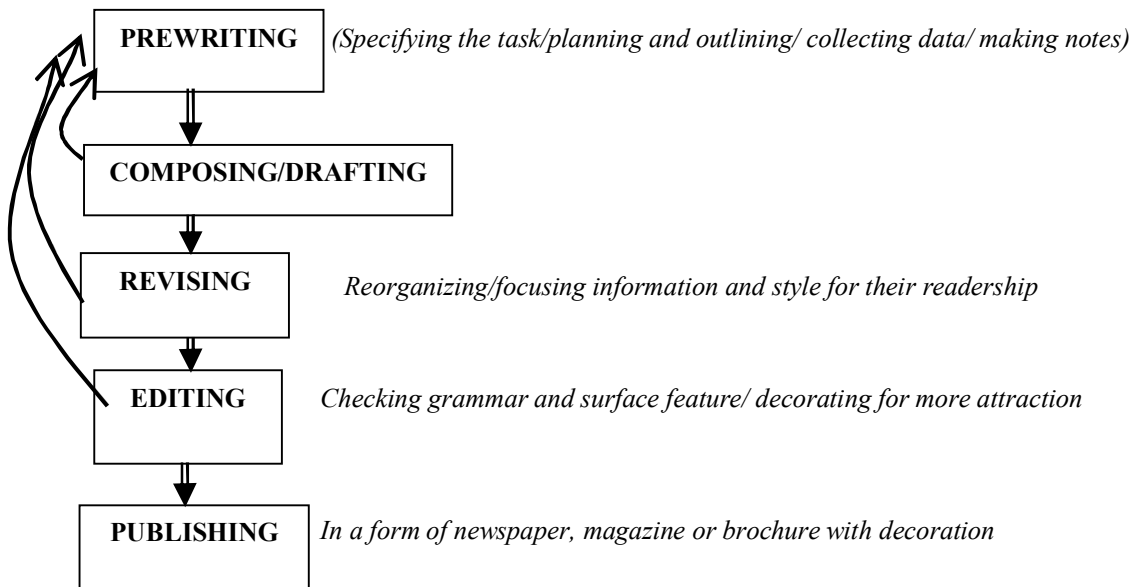
As can be seen from table 1, there is no surprise that 91 % of students agreed on their improvement in writing by asking their friends' feedbacks; 23 % definitely appreciated their friends' commends on their writing, and 7 % had some positive change in writing thanks to doing projects whereas only one out of 62 students did not see the important role of projects.



**Figure 1.** *By reading materials, I know how to use words, phrases, structures... that I have learnt and apply them into real-life contexts.*

According to Figure 1.15% strongly believed in their ability to use words, phrases, structures... in suitable situations by reading materials and writing with different themes; 70% realized the progress in using words and phrases; 13 % saw their improvement to some extent while only 2 % said that they still made mistakes in using them. Additionally, the number of students who could write an essay in a right organization was a little lower. 86% were extremely professional in organizing an essay, 12 % were quite good and only 2% were not good at this work (table 1).

The stages the participants using PBL in written language often followed are represented in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** *Stages the participants using PBL in written*

*Adapted from Stoller, F.L. (2003) [8]*

As mentioned above, the participants felt interested in the PBL method in learning written language. In other words, after nearly 2 years of learning written language in this way, the students' writing and reading competence have been improved a lot. Many students realized its effectiveness in helping them to improve their writing skills. Additionally, PBL also brings learners motivation and interest in study through many exciting activities which learners are the centre of study [7]. However, it cannot be denied that there are still some weak points of the program which need improving to make PBL really become an ideal method of learning. These weak points often make student embarrassed and also cause a lot of difficulties to the students.

### **Suggestions for learners**

#### *Designing a systematical and logical plan*

This work sounds easy to most students, but actually not all students do it in the right way. A logical and systematical plan does not always mean the tasks they have to do from the beginning until the end of the term [3].

#### *Assigning work to group members reasonably and properly*

Many students often complained that some members in their groups had nothing to do while the others were too busy. This was because of the unequal division of their work. To avoid this problem, it is necessary to assign work equally in the group.

#### *Designing a personal timetable*

The timetable is very important when you want to arrange your work logically. The time for each subject and project must be balanced to avoid spending too much time doing the project and too little time studying other subjects.

### **Suggestions for teachers**

#### *Allow learners to be involved in identifying objectives and evaluation criteria*

This helps learners be more engaged and motivated in the whole process of project work. It is better for students to contribute their voice in assessing which criteria and objectives are really suitable for them [6].

#### *Allow learners to evaluate the final performances/products of others in the class*

This helps learners feel that they are the centre of learning and stimulate competition among students. Besides, evaluating others also gives students a chance to look back at themselves and learn from their friends, especially in writing.

#### *Help learners know the importance of authorship and the consequence of plagiarism*

Teachers should teach students to paraphrase and synthesize the information they have searched. Moreover, warning them about the consequence of plagiarism is necessary.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, PBL is a brand-new method in learning language in general and written language in particular. Therefore, it is obvious that this program has a number of weak points which need to be improved. However, we cannot deny its contribution to help students promote their interest in learning and understand the importance of written language in our modern society nowadays.

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## TÓM TẮT

### PHÁT HUY THỂ MẠNH ĐỀ ÁN TRONG NGÔN NGỮ VIẾT ĐƯỢC SỬ DỤNG BỞI SINH VIÊN CHUYÊN NGỮ NĂM 2, TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC SƯ PHẠM – ĐẠI HỌC THÁI NGUYÊN

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Bài báo này (1) nghiên cứu bản chất của phương pháp dạy học theo đề án và cách thức để đạt được nó, (2) áp dụng phương pháp vào các môn học khác, (3) tìm ra những khó khăn trong việc học tập và áp dụng đề án, (4) đưa ra những giải pháp thực tiễn để giúp sinh viên tại Trường Đại học Sư phạm – Đại học Thái Nguyên (ĐHSPTN) vượt qua được những thách thức. Các tác giả đã làm việc với 62 sinh viên năm 2, ĐHSPTN. Phương pháp lý luận và thực nghiệm là phương pháp nghiên cứu chính trong bài viết này. Các tác giả nhấn mạnh vào những yếu tố về dạy học đề án và những điểm mạnh của nó được ứng dụng trong ngôn ngữ viết. Dựa vào những kết quả nghiên cứu, các tác giả đã có một số kết luận ban đầu. Thứ nhất, có một vài đề án thú vị liên quan mật thiết đến ngôn ngữ viết mà có thể phát huy kỹ năng viết của sinh viên. Thứ hai, việc đánh giá của sinh viên về chương trình và dạy học theo đề án trong ngôn ngữ viết và những khó khăn mà họ gặp phải khi làm đề án. Thực tế, dạy học theo đề án là một phương pháp mới trong dạy học ngôn ngữ nói chung và ngôn ngữ viết nói chung, và dạy học theo đề án giúp sinh viên tăng cường niềm đam mê trong học tập và hiểu biết sâu sắc hơn về tầm quan trọng của ngôn ngữ viết trong xã hội hiện tại.

**Từ khóa:** *Dạy học theo đề án, kỹ năng viết, dạy học ngôn ngữ, sinh viên chuyên ngữ, cách tiếp cận.*

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