IV Sección
Educación: competencias, formación y aprendizajes

Project-Based Learning: boosting 21st century skills

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Abstract: Project-Based Learning (PBL) is a method that allows students to learn through the development of different authentic tasks that result in projects by working collaboratively. Therefore, this paper first describes what PBL is, its main characteristics, and the benefits of implementing it as a way to improve 21st century skills such as collaborative work, student agency, problem solving, critical thinking, and different life skills in oral communication courses. Second, it provides a variety of ideas on how to implement it in the classroom. When this methodology is implemented, students show a greater understanding of the topics that are part of their courses and become more engaged, autonomous, and empowered. That is why PBL is highly recommended to help students learn by doing and hence build knowledge in an authentic way.
Keywords: PBL; critical thinking; communicative competence; authenticity; autonomy.

Aprendizaje basado en proyectos: potenciando las habilidades del Siglo XXI
Resumen: El Aprendizaje Basado en Proyectos (ABP) es un método que permite a los estudiantes aprender a través del desarrollo de diferentes tareas auténticas que dan como resultado proyectos que se trabajan de manera colaborativa. Por lo tanto, este artículo describe primero qué es el ABP, sus características principales y los beneficios de implementarlo como una forma de mejorar las habilidades del siglo XXI tales como el trabajo colaborativo, la agencia estudiantil, la resolución de

2 ➤

problemas, el pensamiento crítico y las diferentes habilidades para la vida en cursos de comunicación oral. En segundo lugar, proporciona una variedad de ideas sobre cómo implementarlo en el aula. Cuando se implementa esta metodología, los estudiantes muestran una mayor comprensión de los temas que forman parte de sus cursos y se vuelven más comprometidos, autónomos y empoderados. Es por eso que ABP es recomendable para ayudar a los estudiantes a aprender haciendo y, por lo tanto, a desarrollar conocimientos de una manera auténtica.

Keywords: ABP; pensamiento crítico; competencia comunicativa; autenticidad; autonomía.

Introduction

Project-Based Learning (PBL) plays a significant role when it comes to developing different learning skills. According to Bell (2010), "students drive their own learning through inquiry, as well as collaborative work to research and create projects that reflect their knowledge" (p. 39). In addition, Thomas (2000) explains that students develop "complex tasks based on challenging questions or problems that involve students in design, problem-solving, decision making, or investigative activities" while working autonomously to obtain authentic products (p. 1). Nowadays, learners need to develop high-reasoning skills in order to respond to a wide range of social and economic demands, for example. For that reason, PBL has been implemented in different learning contexts as a way to expose students to real-life experiences where they can find solutions and make informed decisions.

Developing students' 21st century skills when learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) should be central in every language program. In order to meet this, students have to be provided with purposeful and meaningful tasks that allow them to develop not only the four linguistic skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing but also learning, literacy, and life skills. Embark (2019) explains that there is a "strong evidence for the successful integration of these skills in EFL classroom instructions and for realizing language learners' criticality and language competence" (p. 3). That is why PBL is key when the main objective

3

is to give students tools that allow them to enhance their learning process in meaningful ways.

Nevertheless, the process of developing learners' social, literacy, and life skills might be challenging for a large number of teachers and students when it comes to oral communication courses; in some cases, learners are not able to give sound answers or participate actively in the classroom because they might not be involved in activities that enhance the development of these abilities. This happens not because instructors are not willing to do it, but it might occur because course programs do not offer a wide range of strategies and techniques focused on student centeredness. Some language teachers might follow "teacher-centred approaches of teaching where the classes tend to be strictly controlled and do not offer any opportunities for independent learning or inquiry-based learning" (Embark, 2019, p.4). On the contrary, if the classroom methodology is focused on PBL, "students spend the majority of their time working on their own or in small groups, finding their own sources, conducting their own research, and securing their feedback" (Mergendoller & Thomas, 2001, p. 3). In addition, Kokotsaki and Wiggins (2016) say that PBL "is characterized by students' autonomy, constructive investigations, goal-setting, collaboration, communication and reflection within real-world practices" (p. 1). Here, the language instructor plays the role of a guider that helps students in each stage to attain the course objectives. Regularly, classroom activities of some oral communication courses are more focused on mastering such components as accuracy and fluency, and, in order to achieve that, students listen to audios, present some speeches, or complete fill-in-the-blanks tests where they are not given the opportunity to discover by themselves; in that way, the process of thinking critically is disregarded.

Therefore, providing students with a learning process that emphasizes different areas such as experiencing, reasoning, and communicating for them to become competent language users gives them the opportunity to grow in an integral way. Prince and Felder (2006) say that "in higher education classes,

compared to lecture-based classes, students perform comparably or better in assessments of content knowledge, and significantly better on assessments of conceptual understanding, problem-solving, and metacognitive skills" (as cited in Lewis et al., 2019, p. 955). Consequently, this paper, through a literature review, discusses the main characteristics of PBL, the process teachers have to follow, the benefits of implementing PBL in oral communication courses, skills developed, and possible tasks students can carry out as a way to enhance not only linguistic skills but also collaborative work, student agency, problem solving, critical thinking, and different life skills.

Literature Review

Project-Based Learning

PBL refers to a teaching method where students "learn by actively engaging in real-world and personally meaningful projects" (PBLWorks, n.d., para. 3). Lenz and Larmer (2020) also define PBL "as a teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging, and complex question, problem, or challenge" (p. 67). This means that students start discovering by themselves to answer or give solutions to problems that resemble real life. These problems become interdisciplinary because learners not only use the target language to communicate but also engage in processes that allow them to negotiate meaning (Salomon, 2003, p. 1). The learner approaches the problem with the tools provided by the language instructor. When students are engaged in activities that are interdisciplinary, they develop different skills that will directly contribute to the understanding of the contents.

PBL is quite different from traditional teaching. For example, with PBL, learners:

- "tackle open-ended challenges,
- are challenged to learn new topics and develop new skills,

5

- are given multiple opportunities to get helpful feedback and revise their work, typically work in teams and must communicate with different audiences (instructor, peers, others) in different forms (oral, written, visual). (Center for Project-Based Learning, n.d., para. 4)

Condliffe (2017) states that "what clearly distinguishes PBL from other instructional approaches is that projects are not the culmination of learning (as they often are in standard classrooms), but instead are the process through which learning takes place" (p. 6).

One main purpose of PBL is to raise students' awareness since it focuses on real-life events, and "[w]hen, students understand that their work is ultimately valuable as a real problem that needs solving, or a project that will impact others, they are motivated to work hard" (Solomon, 2003, p. 2). It is clear that implementing PBL in foreign language contexts definitely benefits students in significant ways. Rees et al. (2019) explain that this method is highly effective for teachers to help learners acquire "disciplinary skills, modes of thinking, and collaborative practices by creating solutions" (p. 953).

Instructors have to dedicate sufficient time when PBL is implemented. It is still controversial to tell exactly how much time has to be considered; nevertheless, Parker (2013) and Thomas (2000) suggest that PBL has to "guide the curriculum and instruction of an entire course and not just appear in a single, time-limited unit" (as cited in Condliffe, 2017, p. 7). Besides, "PBL design principles emphasize the importance of the project as the central vehicle of instruction and of students as active participants in the construction of knowledge" (Condliffe, 2017, p. iii). Poonpon (2018) also said that PBL:

- "focuses on content learning rather than on specific language patterns,
- is student-centered so the teacher becomes a facilitator or coach, encouraging collaboration among students,
- leads to the authentic integration of language skills and processing information from multiple sources,
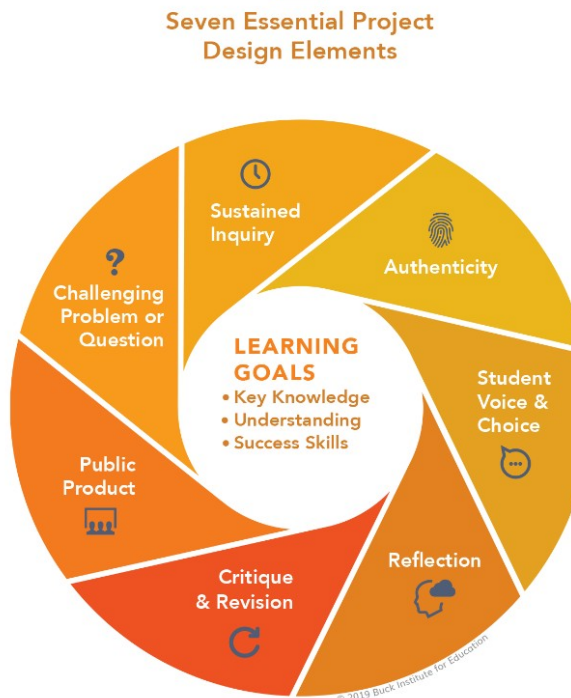
6

- allows learners to demonstrate their understanding of content knowledge through an end product (e.g., an oral presentation, a poster session, a bulletin board display, or a stage performance), and
- bridges using English in class and using English in real life contexts." (p.2)

As it is clearly perceived from the previous information, PBL is centered on different characteristics and principles that allow teachers to successfully guide students in the process to reach the target objectives. These principles allow pupils to engage in active learning. They also make students learn in dynamic manners and get involved in different cognitive processes where classes become learned-centered. Besides, they help the learner acquire knowledge in significant ways because prior knowledge is activated and linked to the new one. PBL is a holistic approach to learning. For the method to be successful, instructors can follow the model of Gold Standard of PBL. This model, according to PBLWorks, includes two useful guides for educators, namely, project design elements and PBL teaching practices (n.d., para. 5). Both guide the process and provide a clear path to follow. Each of these has certain characteristics to ensure students engage in meaningful learning. The first one focuses on elements that are necessary when the process is being planned, and the second one addresses the specific practices teachers have to follow. The following images represent both.
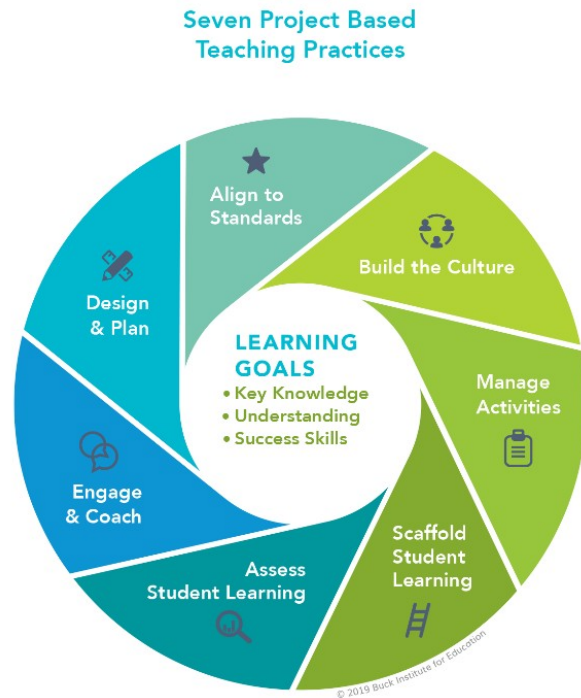
Figure 1
Gold Standard PBL: Design Elements

Note: Taken from *PBLWorks,* by Larmer, 2015 (https://www.pblworks.org/blog/gold-standard-pbl-project-based-teaching-practices)

Figure 2
Gold Standard PBL: Teaching Practices

Note: Note: Taken from PBLWorks, by Larmer, 2015 (https://www.pblworks.org/blog/gold-standard-pbl-project-based-teaching-practices)

In order to put the elements shown in Figure 1 and 2 into practice, the instructor has to focus first on such learning goals as key knowledge (the target content), understanding (level), and success skills (skills developed). Each Standard emphasizes the benchmarks that will successfully contribute to the process of doing, learning, and experiencing a relevant project. The first standard includes the elements that must be considered when the PBL methodology is being designed. Student voice and choice, authenticity, sustained inquiry, challenging problems or questions, public product, critique and revision, and reflection give the teacher the opportunity to plan the tasks effectively. These

elements will build successful projects. The key element is to start with a question or purpose that will allow pupils to engage in the process. This has to be "authentic and related to important issues in the real world" (Parker et al., 2013 as cited in Condliffe, 2017, p. 6).

The second standard includes practices teachers have to implement during the process, for example, align to standards, design and plan, engage and coach, assess student learning, scaffold student learning, manage activities, and build culture. This means teachers have to accompany students in every stage of their projects. Zabit (2010) explains that "[t]he teacher will act as a facilitator and will help students to make the right decisions, which encourages open-minded, reflective, critical, and active learning" (p. 21). The process is integral, and learners become active agents in the classroom. They not only put into practice the use of the target language but also analyze, make conclusions, and generate knowledge that is shared with the teacher and the rest of the participants in the learning process.

Other experts provide different steps to follow when PBL is implemented. For example, Krajcik and Blumenfeld (2006) explain that students "start with a driving question, explore the driving question by participating in authentic processes, engage in collaborative activities to find solutions to the question, and finally create a set of tangible products like artifacts" (p. 2). On the other hand, Jalinus et al. (2017) explain that students start by "formulating the expected learning outcome, understanding the concept of the teaching materials, skills training, designing the project theme, making the project proposal, executing the tasks of projects, and presenting the project report" (p. 251). Finally, Fleming (2000) says that teachers have to "choose a focus, identify essential knowledge and skills, introduce the project and involve students in shaping it, select a balance of teacher-led and student-centered activities, establish timelines, monitor student progress, evaluate project impact, and reflect on gathered data" (pp. 48-56). It is clear that even though the order or the steps vary, students have to focus on a

9

question, a problem, or the purpose of the project to end up with an authentic product. Krajcik explains that this question has to be "feasible, worthwhile, contextualized, meaningful and ethical" (as cited in Condliffe, 2017, p. 5). At the end, reflection is needed to evaluate the positive and negative effects as a way to improve.

Another salient characteristic of PBL is authenticity. For an activity or task to be authentic, it has to expose students to real-life experiences or events. Yoshikawa and Bartholomew (2017) make clear that real-world scenarios are the ones that give students the opportunity to learn significantly (p. 49). Its purpose is to allow students to learn and participate in the construction of their knowledge by doing. Thomas (2000) clarifies that "PBL incorporates real-life challenges where the focus is on authentic (not simulated) problems or questions and where solutions have the potential to be implemented" (p. 4). Consequently, when there is opportunity for pupils to do research on topics and problems that are real, meaningful learning takes place.

Students play a significant role when they are provided with PBL activities since it is a student-centered approach where they find answers, draw conclusions, and negotiate meaning, for example. Fragoulis and Tsiplakides (2009) said THAT "a project takes [students] beyond what they already know about a topic and therefore requires research…. Doing a collaborative project will require students to put into practice a range of important skills" (p. 91). Moreover, English and Kitsantas (2013) also made clear that "students must take responsibility for the learning process by setting goals, monitoring, and reflecting.... Therefore, the learning environment and teaching practices in PBL must be designed with intention to support students' self-regulated learning" (p.128). Here once again it can be noticed that students are the main actors in the classroom when PBL is implemented.

The teacher plays a significant role in a PBL methodology. Fragoulis and Tsiplakides (2009) explain that "the teacher's role is not dominant, but he/she acts

10

as a guide, advisor, coordinator and facilitator. In implementing the project method, the focal point of the learning process moves from the teacher to the learners, from working alone to working in groups" (p.114). In addition, Donnelly and Fitzmaurice (2005) share that the teacher is central, and that:

1. "Strong guidance is needed on how to tackle project work at the outset in order to reduce the likelihood of students attempting to undertake overly ambitious projects,
2. project specifications should be more detailed than they would be in "face-to-face" teaching,
3. careful piloting and testing of proposed projects should be undertaken in advance of the first presentation of the relevant course in order to establish reasonable estimates of time required for successful student completion,
4. sample projects should be provided to indicate to students the scope of project expected in order to help students form a realistic picture of what they are expected to achieve,
5. course teams should be aware of the importance of a Project Guide (a document containing guidelines for undertaking the relevant project) and strive to make it as clear and as helpful as possible,
6. it should be recognized that extra demands are made upon tutors both in terms of personal involvement and of time commitment in evaluating or assessing projects" (p.90).

As it is perceived, instructors not only guide the students during the development of the projects in the classroom, but they also have to pay attention to other processes to make the process effective.

The implementation of PBL greatly influences not only students' linguistic performance but also the way in which they carry out all the stages of their investigations. Once they clearly understand what they have to do, they immediately start to work on that. Studies show that there is a great improvement of students' critical thinking skills since they go beyond what is requested. During the implementation of PBL, it is noticeable that students can explain different problems that are part of real life because of their projects or investigations. They

get out of the comfort zone since they have to go to get first-hand information to support the reports of their work. It is clear that PBL contributes to the development of a wide range of skills such as experiential learning, authenticity, collaborative learning, constructivism, student agency, and critical thinking.

Skills enhanced through PBL

Experiential Learning

One of the most salient contributions of PBL is experiential learning, which, according to Kolb (1984), is "a process of experiences, actions, reflections and responses, which leads to knowledge generation" (as cited in Fitzsimons & Turner, 2013, p. 131). Kuk and Holst (2018) also state that it "is often based on the idea that reflection involves a departure from the direct context in which experience takes place" (p. 150). These same authors explain that the three main components are "experience, reflection based on prior knowledge, and learned experience as a result (pp. 150-151). Therefore, when students are involved in activities that allow them to experience and become active participants in the learning process, they not only learn the new information but also connect it to background knowledge, which makes this process more enriching and meaningful. PBL helps to boost students' engagement in their learning process.

Collaborative Learning

When students are part of classroom activities where they have to share knowledge and negotiate meaning, they develop skills that are essential for them to become active participants in different contexts. This approach to learning makes students work in collaborative groups; each member has responsibilities and tasks to accomplish. All of them play an essential role in order to achieve their objectives. Thanks to their hard work and commitment, they get high-quality results. Projects help them open their minds and study real-world problems. They not only look for experts' opinions but also obtain first-hand information to answer

12

their questions. Besides, PBL helps students to build knowledge through the process they carry out. Dunne and Rawlins (2000) define collaborative learning as "an important competency in society… [because] the abilities required by society in the current century have shifted from simple skills to more complicated and diversified competencies: creative and critical thinking abilities, interpersonal skills, leadership, communication skills and collaborative ability" (as cited in Lee et al., 2017, p. 419). In the same line, Markham et al. (2003) say that teamwork "nurtures sociability, creative discovery of problems and problem-solving ability (as cited in Lee et al., 2017, p. 419). Therefore, it is of high relevance to integrate classroom activities that allow students to learn collaboratively.

Constructivism

When students learn through a constructivist approach, they not only gain knowledge but also develop a wide range of skills. As Candra and Retnawati (2020) explain, constructivism "is the knowledge gained through the results of human construction, both individually and social interactions based on experience" (p. 836). Once teachers give learners the necessary tools for them to build knowledge, they start negotiating meaning and looking for the information from different sources. Constructivist theory states that learners build   from their prior knowledge. Thus, learning can be facilitated when lessons contain familiar elements. Sidman and Milner (2001) state that:

> students can then make meaningful connections by linking the new information to their background knowledge. Furthermore, the knowledge students gain is more likely to transfer to new areas if they are able to see a relationship between the instructional context and that of its   authentic   applications. When concepts are taught in settings that are similar   to   real-world contexts learners are better able to apply those particular concepts in future settings and situations. (p.70)

From a constructivist point of view, learners are not passive students who only receive input; they rather interact and add new information. Tasked (1992)

13

explains that "the active role of students in constructing meaningful knowledge, making connections of ideas by constructing meaningfully, and linking ideas with new information received" is essential (as cited in Candra & Retnawati 2020, p. 836). With this approach, students play a key role when it comes to generating knowledge since they construct it from previous and new experiences. Sidman and Milner (2001) say that "learners play an active role in the construction of their own knowledge since they are encouraged to make their own meaningful connections" (p. 65). It is essential that PBL lessons be contextualized within real world situations. As it is perceived, PBL highly contributes to developing constructivism by exposing students to contexts where they can build knowledge by linking background knowledge to the new one.

Student Agency

Making students able to become active participants in the classroom is essential for them to become autonomous. This could be reached by means of student agency, which "is the capacity of students to act purposely towards individual goals, change the established pattern of classroom interactions, and actively evaluate learning practice for the specific context" (Arnold & Clarke, 2014 as cited in Luo, 2019, p. 821). Student agency promotes academic performance and other competencies for students to become fully developed critical thinkers. This not only contributes to developing students' learning skills, but it also helps them to develop "confidence, interest, engagement and willingness to learn (Blair, 2009; Reeve & Tseng, 2011 as cited in Luo, 2018, p. 822). If all these elements are considered in the language classrooms, teachers will be opening doors for learners to be curious and become interested in the learning process. The process clearly empowers learners. It means that learners become independent because they are able to figure out how to solve problems. According to Vogt (2019), student agency is "collaborative, creative, authentic, and reflective. Students use their agency when they control the variables for learning, in personalized, or student-designed,

project-based learning. It empowers students through voice and choice and builds community and encourages collaboration, enabling students to challenge themselves" (para. 1-3).

Critical Thinking

When students are engaged in discovering and learning by their own, they develop skills to find solutions to real problems. As Scriven and Paul (2007) explain, critical thinking refers to "the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action" (as cited in Snyder & Snyder, 2008, p. 90). Embark (2019) also makes reference to this; she explains that critical thinking "implies the true engagement of learners in the process of knowledge construction through reflecting and thinking deeply" (p. 2). When students think critically, they "not only assess the result of thought processes… but also get involved in assessing the process of thinking." (Nieto and Saiz, 2011, p. 202). Halpern (2014) also explains that:

> Critical thinking refers to the use of cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome. Critical thinking is purposeful, reasoned, and goal oriented. It is the kind of thinking involved in solving problems, formulating, inferences, calculating likelihoods, and making decisions. Critical thinkers use these skills appropriately, without prompting, and usually with conscious intent, in a variety of settings. When we think critically, we are evaluating the outcomes of our thought processes, how good a decision is or how well a problem is solved. (p. 576)

When pupils engage in the process of carrying out projects, they start developing or enhancing critical thinking skills because they undergo different stages that allow them to interact with the teacher, classmates, and other participants, depending on the nature of the project. With this, learners not only improve linguistic skills but also abilities that will make them competent language users.

15

Zabit (2010) makes clear that teachers who incorporate activities that enhance critical thinking are preparing students with tools to face challenges and generate knowledge because it "leads to the most reliable, logical, and trustworthy conclusions". (pp. 24-25). Duran (2016) also agrees with him since he explains that when PBL is part of the learning process, the discussions that arise from the development of the projects "enhance the critical thinking levels of participants, helping students to improve their ability to make connections between claims and evidence" (p. 2898). In addition, Raju et al. (2020) suggests incorporating activities that develop critical thinking in oral communication courses because they "flawlessly enhance speaking skills since learners are to be given "free mind" to think logically, constructively, systematically, apparently, self-centric, self-guided, self-monitored to speak freely and fluently" (p. 691).

Communicative Competence

One of the purposes of PBL in oral communication courses is to develop communicative competence, which Swain (1980) defines as "the underlying system of knowledge and skill required for communication (e.g. knowledge of vocabulary and skill in using sociolinguistic conventions for a given language)" (as cited in Richards & Schmidt, 2016, p.5). It means that pupils not only learn the structures and vocabulary of the language, but they are also able to use them in context. Light (1989) explains that communicative competence "is a relative and dynamic, interpersonal construct based on functionality of communication, adequacy of communication, and sufficiency of knowledge, judgment, and skill in the interrelated areas" (p. 137). McKeeman and Oviedo (2013) explain that when learners "negotiate meaning in order to achieve and complete a task, they learn from one another by analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating, encouraging higher order thinking skills" (p. 48). Besides, Redchenko (2016) makes clear that "a project activity allows students to act as authors and initiators, strengthens their

16

creative endeavors, broadens their outlook and develops their language skills" (p. 6203).

Communicative competence is composed of four competence areas which are grammatical (students know how to use the grammar of the target language), sociolinguistic (students know how to use the correct structures in different social settings), discourse (students produce cohesive and coherent ideas), and strategic (students know how to solve communication problems at the moment) competence. All of them contribute to the development of competent language users, helping them reach their linguistic competencies. One of the competences that is highly addresses in PBL is sociolinguistic competence. Richards and Schmidt (2016) say that it "addresses the extent to which utterances are produced and understood appropriately in different sociolinguistic contexts depending on contextual factors such as status of participants, purpose of the interaction, and norms" (p.7). In the same way, Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) explains that such aspects as "appropriate application of vocabulary, register, politeness and style in a given situation" are part of sociolinguistic competence (p.7). This is a key element when students are being exposed to activities that resemble real contexts.

Advantages and Disadvantages of PBL

PBL is a meaningful tool instructors can implement to boost the learning process and obtain positive and fruitful results. There are several advantages when referring to how PBL contributes to the teaching and learning process. Even though it represents a more time-consuming methodology, it is worth the implementation because it engages students immediately, even if they are not active students in the classrooms. For example, Mihic and Zavrski (2017) explain that it "enhances critical thinking, promotes and encourages collaboration and teamwork, increases communication skills, develops higher order thinking, teaches decision making, fosters creativity, provides knowledge application and contextualization of learning, provides knowledge transfer, enables integrated

17

understanding, [and] builds conceptual understanding" (p. 4). As it is perceived, there are several advantages when this methodology is implemented. Teachers can make use of it to better develop the process of teaching and learning in oral communication courses since it is an innovative tool professors cannot ignore. Teachers also benefit from PBL because they "find the project based work more enjoyable, interesting and motivating... and continually receive new ideas through supervising different projects every year with new groups of students and thus also becoming a lifelong learner. Classroom management is simplified when students are interested and involved in the subject" (Mihic and Zavrski, 2017, p. 5).

Nevertheless, this methodology also has some disadvantages that must be considered to improve the process. These can be found not only in students' development of the projects but also in the teacher' and the institutions' processes. Mihic and Zavrski (2017) highlight some of the most common disadvantages, for instance, "time constraints for developing, implementing, and administering PBL, difficulties in planning and execution, student's lack of experience in more active learning roles, teacher's content knowledge and possible inability to supervise a project in their field, and group grading and assessments" (p.5). In some cases, education systems discourage this kind of methodology because it requires changing the complete curriculum, the system. It not only demands time but also budget to train teachers and students and have the necessary resources. There has to be strong previous learning basis directing students toward problem solving and project development since early school. In addition, another aspect that has to be addressed is originality. It might be possible that learners just replicate the projects given by the instructor and do not provide new information out of their research and collaborative work. Another enormous limitation that practically all instructors are aware of but discuss little is that of equal responsibility. It is well known that when working in groups, some students rely on the most responsible ones and let them do all the heavy work. Such practice might reward incompetence

and laziness over hard work and responsibility. This means instructors need to look for the most appropriate strategies to control and prevent it.

PBL in Foreign Language Environments

Once language instructors decide to incorporate PBL as part of their curriculum, learners will be given tools to cope with scenarios they will probably encounter in the real world. For this reason, PBL is highly recommended if the main purpose of a language instructor is to accompany the process of learning in an integral way. Fragoulis and Tsiplakides (2009) made a review of the main benefits of implementing PBL in a foreign environment. They point out that "the process leading to the end-product of project-work:

1. provides opportunities for students to develop their confidence and independence,
2. increases self-esteem and positive attitudes toward learning,
3. enhances students' autonomy,
4. increases students' social, cooperative skills ,and group cohesiveness because students engage in purposeful communication to complete authentic activities,
5. allows pupils to use language in a relatively natural context and participate in meaningful activities which require authentic language use (activities designed to develop students' thinking and problem solving skills which are important in out-of-school contexts, and to foster learning to learn,
6. engages students in authentic activities,
7. enhances collaboration and reflection and allows competing solutions and diversity of outcome,
8. provides opportunities for the natural integration of language skills where students enhance motivation, engagement and enjoyment,
9. increases interest, motivation to participate and can promote learning,
10. develops problem-solving and higher order critical thinking skills, and
11. encourages motivation, fosters group cohesiveness, increases expectancy of success in target language" (pp. 113-114).

As a result, it can be said that when teachers use PBL in foreign language environments, they are giving students the opportunity to fully develop their skills.

19

PBL in Higher Education

PBL can be implemented in any educational setting; however, when higher education institutions incorporate it, the benefits are even more meaningful because this is when students are prepared for the job market. The Center for Project Based Learning suggests this methodology because it allows:

> High-Impact Practices: PBL is a way to build first-year seminars, undergraduate research, and capstones into curriculum. Authentic Tasks: Students crave relevance and can be highly motivated by opportunities to apply what they have learned to real-world problems. Transferable Skills: Valued by employers, abilities such as effective communication, critical thinking, and teamwork can help students lead more fulfilling lives. Stand out from Peer Institutions: A PBL curriculum will make institutions more distinctive and attractive by connecting core curriculum, first-year program, or integrative capstone experience to goals and values. Engage the Community: Working on challenges and opportunities in the community can deepen an institution's connection to the world and help students become engaged citizens. (n.d.)

Preparing college students for real life is key, and PBL helps reach this goal since it allows instructors to incorporate authentic activities.

Assessment in PBL

Different challenges are encountered when PBL is used instead of methodologies that are more traditional. It implies a change from the teacher's and the student's part. One of the most challenging elements is the assessment process because it sometimes becomes difficult to assess students mainly when they are working in groups. Doppelt (2003) shares a quite useful assessment strategy to comply with the principles of PBL; he said that PBL not only changes the classroom methodology, but it also "requires adopting new assessment methods, such as portfolio assessment, which is based on records of pupils' activities… [It] reflects what pupils have learned, how they question, analyze, synthesize, solve problems, and create new ideas..." (p. 10). Chang and Tseng (2011) also suggest the implementation of portfolios in PBL methodologies

20

because in the study they carried out they concluded that the portfolios "had a statistically positive effect on self-perceived learning performances" (p. 1), which allowed learners to detect which areas had to be improved. Self-assessment and peer-assessment are also other strategies teachers can implement to assess students' learning process. Hou et al. (2007) say that "peer assessment strategy in the classroom could facilitate learners' critical thinking and meta-cognitive skills" (p. 237) because learners understand their learning process and become even more active participants because it is not only the teacher telling them what to improve but the students. This gives this process a more positive view. Moreover, Frank and Barzilai (2004) provide useful information on assessing students through PBL. They mention that "working in small teams, the students carry out a project in a Project-Based Learning (PBL) environment ... where the final outcomes of the project are group and individual written reports, a portfolio, a multimedia presentation and a physical model" (p. 1). These all belong to what is called alternative assessment. Alternative assessment focuses on processes that allow learners to see their progress systematically. This makes the process more enjoyable, and pupils can see their progress.

PBL Oral Communication Activities

There are several oral communication projects language teachers can implement as a way to help students reach the course objectives and hence promote communicative competence as well as social skills. For example, the Buck Institute for Education: PBLWorks on its web page provides a wide variety of activities for different disciplines, for instance, for Fine Arts, Health, Math, Science, and World Languages. However, the ones described below are recommended for oral communication courses. They are organized according to the topic, the question, and the process that has to be carried out in the language classrooms.

Table 1. *PBL Oral Communication Activities*

Topic	Question(s)	Instructions
What in the World?	How can instructors and students cope with the array of fake news and manipulation from the media? How can one assess the veracity of such sources to claim they tell the truth?	Students use the target language to explore a significant topic in current events (migration and refugees, environmental sustainability, economic justice, public health, or human rights). They look for authentic news sources in the target language—podcasts, television shows, magazines, newspapers, and blogs. Each team focuses on a different geographic region or issue connected to the class theme and produces a podcast segment or news report that describes and analyzes the issue/situation in an engaging format for any population.
Welcome to Our School	How can we use our target language to help visitors learn about our school?	Students work together to create a virtual, bilingual tour of their school. In teams, students identify the most important places in the school. They may choose to customize their tour for a specific audience (new students, members of the larger community who speak the target language or a pen-pal class from another country). In their tours of each space, students practice their school vocabulary and the present tense in basic forms by including information about activities that happen in that space and people who work there. Teams plan scripts and develop storyboards before producing the virtual tours. The virtual tours will be featured on the school website for speakers of the language to see what the school stands for.
Face Your Face	How can fallacious generalizations, stereotypes, and potential biases in favor / against some cultural practices be prevented?	In this project, students explore the use of masks in various world cultures, learning about the origins, purpose, and use of masks in rituals, performances, fashion, and occupations. They consider how masks function as objects that enhance beauty and appearance, provide protection or concealment, display power, or indicate change and transformation. They create a mask and present it as part of a collaborative exhibition where they describe the meaning of their in an oral presentation.
Ready for Anything	How can we keep our communities safe in the face of natural hazards?	Students work in teams to learn about the causes, features, and risks of common natural hazards and then produce preparedness campaigns or guides for each major type of hazard. Students will conduct in-depth research on their natural hazards, including in-person or virtual interviews with people who have experienced these hazards firsthand, as well as with scientists, engineers, and disaster preparedness specialists. As they develop their readiness guides, students consider questions such as "What precautions can communities take in advance to reduce the impact of this hazard?" and "Which communities or members of a community are at risk in the face of this natural hazard? How can we work together to ensure safety for all?" Depending on the community and the specific aspects of the standards you are planning to address, you may wish to structure this project as a place-based project focusing on natural hazards that affect your local community or have each team focus on a different type of natural hazard that occurs in a different part of the country.

Welcome to the Neighborhood!	How can we help new friends get to know our community?	Students work together to create a shared newcomer's guide to important places in the neighborhood around the school or in their broader community. After creating a shared class map of the community, student teams each create maps that document a different geographic feature (places to play, places to be in nature, places to shop). With support from the teacher, students write and illustrate brief descriptions of their favorite places to be included in the guide.
History in Pictures	How can we as historians design an interactive digital tool for a [local museum, historical society, or archive] that demonstrates our local community's influence on a period in history?	In this project, students partner with a local historical society or archive to explore, research, and interpret primary source images and documents from a significant event or period in local history that connects to a larger historical moment or social movement. They read narratives and first-person accounts from the period in question to build background knowledge. Then students work together in teams, using a digital tool to create an interactive museum app that provides context and background for the images and artifacts and connects them to the larger historical moment or social movement.

Note: Taken from *PBLWorks,* by Larmer, 2015 (https://www.pblworks.org/blog/gold-standard-pbl-project-based-teaching-practices)

Conclusions

After providing a thorough explanation of the process of PBL, contributions, and sample activities, it is important to highlight some of the major impacts students undergo when provided with effective and engaging PBL activities in the language classroom. The implementation of PBL greatly influences not only students' linguistic performance but also social and life skills. When the PBL methodology is used in the classroom, great improvement of students' critical thinking skills takes place. For example, students become active agents in the process of learning. They get out of their comfort zone since they have to do research by themselves. The language instructor is a guide, and learners become more responsible for their learning. PBL contributes to the development of different skills that will definitely help students cope with real life events.

The process of carrying out projects clearly empowers learners and opens doors for student agency. It means that learners become independent because they can figure out how to solve problems. One clear example of how this is represented is when students talk to different people to obtain data and socialize

23

the results of their projects at the end of the process. This approach to learning makes students work in collaborative groups; each member has responsibilities and tasks to accomplish. All of them play an essential role in order to achieve their objectives. They have to work hard and be committed to their tasks. The projects help them to open their minds and study real-world problems. Besides, PBL helps students to build knowledge through the tasks they carry out while they enjoy and learn.

Providing foreign language learners with meaningful ways of learning is necessary in any learning context. When language instructors make the classroom a place to learn by doing, students become independent. Giving learners the opportunity to learn in such an innovative and interactive way makes them able to use the language in context and with a purpose. In addition, learning focused on the development of different projects is quite relevant and empowering. At the first stages of language learning, instructors are accustomed to offering students activities to develop language abilities; however, it is of high importance to provide them with classroom activities that contribute to the enhancement of critical thinking and other skills as well. Krajcik and Blumenfeld (2006) explain that if "[teachers] could find a way to engage students in their learning, to restructure the classroom so that students would be motivated to learn, that would be a dramatic change" (p.1). The classroom is the place where students are part of the most enriching experiences.

When instructors implement PBL in the language classes, they have to follow a set of steps to achieve the course objectives successfully. However, it depends on the target goal and the specific course objectives because, according to different experts, the process may vary. Nevertheless, there are basic steps that have to be followed. For example, some express that there has to be a planning stage; after that, there should be the implementation stage, and, finally, the reflection stage to evaluate how all the process was. When all these stages or

24

steps are considered, PBL meaningfully takes place, and teachers as well as learners take the most of it.

There are several types of activities that can be implemented in oral communication course. It all depends on the course, purposes, and objectives that have to be accomplished. Some examples of activities previously mentioned related to oral communication courses have to do with making the student able to search for information, create, share, and investigate to share the final products at the end. It can be concluded that PBL helps pupils learn meaningfully since they engage in activities that allow them to be the main actors in the learning process, which makes them autonomous and responsible language learners. Nevertheless, if this methodology becomes part of the curriculum of any educational institution, a wide variety of measures has to be considered for this to be successful. For example, the curriculum has to incorporate PBL as part of the methodology, where teachers and students have to be trained at early stages for them to engage and get positive results with the projects they carry out. Originality, responsibility, and assessment are elements that require attention since the main purpose of PBL is to make all students able to become an active agent in the learning process.

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27

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28

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29

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