

Students' Learning Experiences in Project-Based Learning: A Case Study in an Understanding Structure Course

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ABSTRACT

This study examined students' learning experiences in a Project-Based Learning (PBL) activity in an Understanding Structure course at Universitas Indraprasta PGRI. The study focused on how PBL affected students' motivation, collaboration, confidence, challenges, and understanding of English grammar. A qualitative approach with a case study design was used. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with ten students who participated in the course. The interview data were analyzed to identify the main experiences of the students during the learning process. The findings showed five main themes: increased motivation, peer collaboration, improved confidence, challenges in completing projects, and understanding of grammar. Students reported that PBL increased their motivation because the learning activities were more interesting and meaningful than traditional grammar activities. Collaboration also helped students understand difficult grammar topics by discussing ideas, sharing knowledge, and supporting each other. In addition, group discussions, pair work, grammar exercises, speaking activities, and presentations helped students become more confident in using English. However, students also faced some challenges, such as applying grammar rules, managing time, coordinating group work, and dealing with different opinions. Finally, students understood grammar better because they could apply grammar rules in meaningful activities instead of only memorizing them. Overall, PBL provided meaningful learning experiences and supported students' motivation, collaboration, confidence, and grammar understanding..

Keywords: Project-Based Learning, learning experiences, English grammar

INTRODUCTION

English is one of the most important international languages used in education, business, technology, and global communication. In higher education, particularly in programs focused on teaching English, students are expected to develop not only communicative competence but also a strong understanding of English grammar. Grammar is a key part of language because it helps people learn to speak and write in ways that make sense and are correct sentences. According to Larsen-Freeman (2003), grammar should not be viewed simply as a set of rules to memorize but as a resource that enables learners to express meaning appropriately in different contexts. Therefore, grammar instruction should help students understand how grammatical forms are used in real communication.

At Universitas Indraprasta PGRI, the Understanding Structure course is a required subject for students enrolled in the English Education Study Program. The course is designed to build students' understanding of English grammar, including sentence patterns, clauses, phrases, tenses, and other grammatical structures. A strong grasp of grammar is important because it underpins students' academic writing, speaking, reading, and future teaching practice. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (2016) say that good grammar teaching should include form, meaning, and how grammar is used. This helps students use their grammar knowledge in real communication, instead of just memorizing rules.

Many students find it hard to study grammar at the university level. Grammar includes many difficult ideas and rules that require learners to think carefully and use their reasoning skills. In many classrooms, grammar is still taught using traditional methods like lectures and explanations provided by the teachers, and written practice. These methods can help students understand grammar rules, but they often make students less active learners. Students might know the rules but still find it hard to use grammar correctly when speaking or writing in university. As a result, grammar lessons might feel boring or not very important.

To help students learn better, many teachers have started using Project-Based Learning (PBL) as a different way to teach. Thomas (2000) explains that Project-Based Learning is a way of teaching where students learn information and skills by working on projects. Skills are developed by working on real projects that need research, teamwork, and finding solutions. Unlike traditional instruction, PBL encourages students to become active learners who construct their own understanding through authentic learning activities. Similarly, Bell (2010) explains that Project-Based Learning promotes learner autonomy, collaboration, creativity, communication, and critical thinking, which are considered essential skills in twenty-first-century education.

Many previous studies have found that Project-Based Learning helps students become more motivated, work better together, think more critically, communicate better, and do better in their English language studies. However, most of these studies look at learning results, like how well students do in writing and speaking performance, or grammar scores. Very few studies have looked into how students learn, particularly in English Structure courses at the university level. Learning experiences

matter because they show how students feel about learning, how they work with others, how they deal with difficulties, how they grow more sure of themselves, and how they develop their knowledge through projects activities. Understanding these experiences can provide a deeper picture of how Project-Based Learning influences students beyond academic performance.

Understanding these experiences can give a clearer view of how Project-Based Learning affects students in ways that go beyond just their grades. In the Understanding Structure course at Universitas Indraprasta PGRI, Project-Based Learning has been introduced to give students more meaningful ways to learn. Instead of completing only grammar exercises, students participate in collaborative projects that require them to apply grammatical concepts in authentic contexts, such as creating learning media, producing instructional videos, analyzing authentic texts, or developing grammar-based teaching materials. These activities encourage students to use grammar as a tool for communication while developing teamwork, creativity, and problem-solving skills.

Based on the explanation above, this study aims to explore students' learning experiences in Project-Based Learning in an Understanding Structure course at Universitas Indraprasta PGRI. Using a qualitative case study design, this research seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of how students experience Project-Based Learning, what benefits they gain, what challenges they encounter, and how these experiences contribute to their understanding of English grammar. The results of this study are likely to help create better, more focused, and more interesting ways to teach grammar in college settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Understanding Structure Course

Understanding Structure is a basic subject in English language education program. This course provides students with the opportunity to master grammar, sentence patterns, clauses and phrases, as well as tenses, and complex sentences structure. Grammar is very important in language because it helps learners speak and write English clearly and well. Larsen-Freeman (2003) says that grammar isn't just a list of rules to remember. Grammar is a tool that helps learners communicate correctly in various situations where they need to express themselves. She proposes

that grammar instruction should integrate three dimensions: form, meaning, and use. Students need to understand not only how grammatical structures are formed but also why and when they should be used in communication. Similarly, Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (2016) argue that grammar teaching should move beyond mechanical drills and isolated exercises. They emphasize that effective grammar instruction should provide learners with opportunities to practice grammar in meaningful and authentic contexts.. Through contextual learning, students can better understand how grammatical knowledge supports real communication.

Brown (2015) also explains that grammar instruction should encourage students to actively apply grammatical knowledge rather than only memorize grammatical rules. When grammar is connected to meaningful learning activities, students become more engaged and are better able to transfer their knowledge to speaking and writing tasks.

Based on these theories, it can be concluded that the English Structure course is not only designed to teach grammatical rules but also to develop students' ability to use grammar accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately in real communication. Therefore, grammar instruction should provide meaningful learning experiences that encourage students to actively practice, apply, and reflect on grammatical concepts. This way of thinking backs up using Project-Based Learning because it lets students learn grammar by doing real tasks, working together, and using language in real-life situations, instead of just memorizing rules.

2. Project-Based Learning (PBL)

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is a student-centered teaching approach that encourages students to learn by working on meaningful and real-world projects. In this approach, students actively participate in the learning process by investigating problems, collaborating with classmates, and creating a final product. Unlike regular learning, where students mostly get information from the teacher, Project-Based Learning lets students build knowledge by getting involved and gaining hands-on experience. Thomas (2000) describes Project-Based Learning as a teaching approach that centers learning around projects. Thomas (2000) defines Project-Based Learning as a teaching method that organizes learning around projects. According to him, projects are the central part of the learning process rather than additional classroom

activities. Students should look into important questions, figure out solutions, and create real products that demonstrate their understanding. Thomas also points out that Project-Based Learning helps students become more independent learners because they are responsible for planning, finishing, and assessing their own work. Bell (2010) explains that Project-Based Learning prepares students for the skills needed in the twenty-first century. Through project activities, students improve communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Bell also says that students get more motivated when they work on tasks that are meaningful and related to real-life situations. So, learning feels more fun and interesting.

Similarly, Blumenfeld and others in 1991 suggest that Project-Based Learning helps students understand things better because they learn by working on real problems instead of just remembering facts. During project activities, students ask questions, gather information, talk about ideas, and use what they know to finish important tasks. This process helps students learn both academic knowledge and useful skills.

Based on the ideas discussed above, it can be said that Project-Based Learning is a good way of teaching that focuses on students and puts projects at the heart of learning. Instead of just listening to lectures and memorizing facts, students learn by exploring real-life situations. This approach helps students deal with problems, work together, and create useful products. It lets students take an active role in planning, doing the work, and producing something meaningful, evaluating their own learning activities.

3. Students' learning experiences

Students' learning experiences refer to everything students experience during the learning process. These experiences include what students think, feel, and do while participating in learning activities. Learning experiences are not only related to academic achievement but also to students' motivation, participation, collaboration, confidence, and personal development. Knowing about how students learn helps teachers see if their teaching methods are helping students learn well and get good results.

Kolb (1984) says that learning is a process where knowledge is made by changing and using experiences. According to his Experiential Learning Theory, students learn

best when they take part in learning activities, think about their experiences, form new ideas, and use what they have learned in different situations. Kolb describes four steps in the learning process: having a real experience, thinking about that experience, creating new ideas from it, and then testing those ideas through action. These stages show that real learning happens when you are actively involved instead of just listening without doing anything. Similarly, Dewey (1938) points out that learning should come from real-life experiences. He says that education is more valuable when students are physically and mentally involved in their learning setting, and connect classroom knowledge with real-life situations. Dewey said that learning isn't just about getting information from teachers; it's also about experiencing things, thinking about them, and figure out how to solve problems.

Entwistle and McCune (2004) say that students' learning experiences involve how they see teaching methods, how they take part in class activities, how they talk to teachers and other students, and how they build their knowledge as they learn. Positive learning experiences help students feel more motivated, confident, and interested in learning. On the other hand, bad experiences can make students less interested and less likely to take part.

Based on the ideas discussed above, we can say that students' learning experiences play a key role in their overall development. The learning process is shaped by these factors because they affect how students grasp, use, and build upon knowledge. Kolb (1984) says that real learning happens when students take part in learning activities, think about what they experience, create new ideas, and use what they've learned in different situations. Dewey (1938) thinks that learning becomes meaningful when students connect what they learn in class to real-life situations. Learning through real-life experiences happens when people actively take part, ask questions, and work to solve problems. Entwistle and McCune (2004) also say that students' learning experiences depend on how they. Engage with different teaching methods, instructors, peers, and various learning activities during the whole learning journey. These theories all agree that learning works better when students are really involved in the process than being passive listeners.

These theories share the same idea that learning is more effective when students are actively involved rather than being passive listeners. Students gain deeper

understanding when they participate in meaningful activities, collaborate with others, reflect on their learning, and apply their knowledge in authentic situations. Positive learning experiences also increase students' motivation, confidence, engagement, and willingness to learn.

In the context of an Understanding Structure course, these theories suggest that students should be given opportunities to learn grammar through active and meaningful learning activities instead of only listening to lectures or memorizing grammatical rules. Therefore, Project-Based Learning is considered an appropriate teaching approach because it allows students to experience learning directly, collaborate with their classmates, solve problems, and apply grammatical knowledge in authentic projects. Through these experiences, students are expected to develop a deeper understanding of English grammar while also improving their confidence, participation, and overall learning experience.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a case study design. Qualitative research was chosen because the purpose of this study was to explore and understand students' learning experiences during the implementation of Project-Based Learning in an English Structure course. Rather than measuring students' achievement through numbers, this study focused on understanding students' perceptions, feelings, interactions, and experiences throughout the learning process.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research is a method used to explore and understand the. The ideas or beliefs that people or groups have about a social or human issue. It lets researchers gather in-depth and detailed information from participants' viewpoints in real-life situations. Therefore, a qualitative case study was chosen because it allowed the researcher to better understand students' learning experiences during project-based learning.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The interview talked about how students felt about their experiences, why they were motivated, how they worked together, how confident they felt, the difficulties they faced, and how well they understood grammar while doing project-based learning. After looking at the interview data, five main topics came up: (1) Increased Learning

Motivation, (2) peer collaboration, (3) the improved students' confidence, (4) Challenges during project completion, and (5) Understanding of English grammar.

Theme 1: Increased Learning Motivation

All 10 participants said that Project-Based Learning made them more motivated to learn their motivation to learn English grammar. They said that learning through projects was more exciting than regular grammar lessons because they could take part in class activities and use grammar in real-life situations. The interview was done to understand what drives students to learn in the English Structure class. The interview involved three students. The students were asked the following question: **“What motivates you to learn in the Understanding Structure class?”** The responses showed that the three students had similar motivations. They were motivated to improve their grammar knowledge, use English correctly, and develop their speaking and writing skills.

The first student stated:

“I am motivated to learn English Structure because I want to improve my grammar and use English correctly. I believe that understanding grammar will help me improve my speaking and writing skills.”

This response shows that the first student sees grammar as an important part of learning English. The student believes that a good understanding of grammar can help them use English more accurately. The student is also motivated by the need to improve both speaking and writing skills.

The second student gave a similar response My motivation to learn in the Understanding Structure class is to improve my grammar knowledge and become more accurate when using English.

The second student stated:

“I think learning grammar is important for improving my speaking and writing abilities. The second student also emphasized the importance of grammar knowledge.”

The student wanted to be more accurate when using English. This indicates that the student understands the relationship between grammar and communication. The student believes that learning English Structure can support their ability to communicate through speaking and writing.

The third student stated:

“I am motivated to study English Structure because I want to understand grammar better and use English correctly. I believe that having good grammar knowledge can make me more confident in speaking and writing English.”

The third student had a motivation that was also related to improving grammar and using English correctly. However this student additionally mentioned confidence. The student believed that understanding grammar better could increase confidence when speaking and writing in English

Based on the three interview responses, several similarities can be identified. First, all three students mentioned improving grammar knowledge as an important motivation. They wanted to understand English grammar better so that they could use grammatical structures correctly. Second, all students connected grammar learning with their speaking and writing skills. They believed that grammar was not only about learning rules but also about using English accurately in communication.

Another finding is that students were motivated by their desire to use English correctly. The students realized that grammar knowledge could help them avoid mistakes and produce better English sentences. This shows that students considered English Structure to be useful for their overall English development.

Overall, the interview findings indicate that the students’ motivation to learn English Structure is mainly related to their desire to improve their English proficiency. They want to understand grammar, use English correctly, and improve their speaking and writing abilities. The findings also suggest that students do not see grammar as simply a collection of rules. Instead, they see grammar as a useful component that can support communication and increase their confidence in using English.

Theme II Peer Collaboration

To explore students’ experiences of collaboration in the Understanding Structure class. The questions focused on how collaboration with classmates helped students understand grammar and how working together influenced their learning experience. The students were asked the following question: **“How does working with your classmates help you understand English grammar better?”**

The first student stated:

“Working with my classmates helps me understand grammar better because we can discuss the grammar rules together. If I do not understand something, my friends can explain it to me in a simple way.”

The second student gave a similar response:

“I think collaboration is helpful because we can share our knowledge. Sometimes my classmates understand a grammar topic better than me, so they can help explain it. We can also discuss our answers together.”

The third student stated:

“Working with my classmates makes it easier for me to understand difficult grammar topics. We can ask questions, discuss the exercises, and correct our mistakes together.”

experiences with collaboration. They believed that working with classmates helped them understand English grammar more easily. Discussion and sharing knowledge were important activities in the collaborative learning process. Students could ask questions, explain grammar rules to each other, and discuss their answers.

The findings also show that students did not depend only on the lecturer when learning grammar. Their classmates also became a source of learning support. When students had difficulty understanding a particular grammar topic, they could ask their friends for explanations. This made the learning process more interactive.

Theme III The Improved Students' Confidence

The interview was conducted to explore students' confidence in learning and using English in the Understanding Structure class. Three students participated in the interview. The students were asked the following question: **“What activities in the English Structure class help you improve your confidence in using English?”** The students mentioned different activities, including group discussions, grammar exercises, speaking practice, pair work, and presentations.

The first student explained:

“Activities such as group discussions, grammar exercises, and speaking practice help me improve my confidence. When I work in a group, I feel more comfortable because I can discuss my answers with my classmates. If I make a mistake, my friends can help me fix it. These activities help me get more chances to use and practice English.”

This answer shows that group activities help make learning feel more comfortable. The student can talk about answers and get help from their classmates. I can talk about my ideas during discussions without feeling very nervous.

The second student explained:

“I think discussions and presentations are very helpful for improving my confidence. During discussions, I can share my ideas without feeling too nervous. Presentations also give me the opportunity to practice speaking in front of other students. Although I sometimes feel nervous at first, I become more confident after doing the activity.”

The student's response shows that discussions and presentations provide opportunities to practice communication. Although presentations can initially make students nervous, repeated participation can gradually increase their confidence.

The third student stated:

“Pair and group activities help me improve my confidence because I can practice English with other students. I also like grammar exercises because they help me understand how to make correct sentences. When I can answer the exercises correctly, I feel more confident about my English ability.”

This response shows that both collaborative activities and grammar exercises contribute to confidence. Correctly completing grammar exercises gives the student a sense of achievement, while pair and group activities provide opportunities to practice English with peers.

The three responses suggest that interactive activities are important for developing students' confidence. Students should have chances to use their grammar knowledge by talking and practicing. Working in groups, with partners, having discussions, and giving presentations let students use English in real and useful ways.

Theme IV Challenges during project completion

The interview was conducted to explore the challenges students experienced during the completion of the English Structure project. Three students participated in the interview. The questions focused on the difficulties they experienced, how they dealt with the difficulties, and how the project affected their learning. The students were asked the following question: **What challenges did you experience while completing the English Structure project?**

The first student stated:

“The main challenge I experienced was understanding the grammar rules and applying them correctly in the project. Sometimes I got the explanation, but I still felt confused when I tried to use the grammar in my own sentences. I also had difficulty managing my time because I had other assignments from different classes.”

The second student stated:

“I had some difficulties when completing the project, especially when choosing the correct grammar structures. Sometimes I was not sure whether my sentences were grammatically correct. I also found it difficult to finish the project on time because there were many parts that needed to be completed.”

The third student stated:

“My main challenge was working on the project with my group. We sometimes had different ideas about how to complete the project. It was also difficult to find a suitable time for all group members to work together. Besides that, I sometimes had difficulty understanding some grammar topics.”

The responses show that students faced various kinds of difficulties while finishing their projects. Two students mostly had trouble with understanding grammar and using grammar rules correctly. They knew the basic grammar concepts but sometimes had difficulty applying them in their own work. Another difficulty was managing time, especially since students had other school tasks to handle. The third student talked about difficulties they faced while working in a group. Different ideas and challenges in choosing a good time for everyone in the group might slow down how the project gets finished. This means that project-based learning needs more than just knowing facts; it also asks students to talk to each other and work together.

Theme V Understanding of English grammar.

The interview was conducted to explore students' understanding of English grammar after participating in the Understanding Structure class and completing the learning activities. The interview focused on how students understood grammar, how they applied grammar in their learning activities, and how their understanding of grammar changed after learning through classroom activities and projects. The question is “**How**

has your understanding of English grammar improved after learning in the English Structure class?”

The first student stated:

“My understanding of English grammar has improved because I now understand grammar rules better than before. Previously, I only memorized some grammar formulas without really understanding how to use them. In this class, I learned how grammar works in sentences and when I should use different grammar structures. I also learned that grammar is not only about memorizing rules, but also about using them correctly in communication.”

The response shows that the student experienced a change in the way they understood grammar. Before taking the class, grammar was mainly understood as a set of formulas that had to be memorized. After learning English Structure, the student began to understand the function of grammar and how grammatical structures are used in sentences.

The second student stated:

“I understand English grammar better now because I have more opportunities to practice it. Before, I often felt confused when I saw different grammar structures. Now, I can identify some of the differences between them and understand why a certain grammar structure is used. I still make mistakes sometimes, but I can recognize my mistakes and try to correct them.”

This response indicates that practice plays an important role in improving grammar understanding. The student is now more able to recognize different grammar structures and understand their functions. Although mistakes still occur, the student has developed greater awareness of grammatical errors.

The third student stated

“I think my grammar knowledge has improved because the lessons and activities helped me understand grammar step by step. Some grammar topics were difficult for me at first, but after doing exercises and discussing them with my classmates, I understood them better. I also became more familiar with sentence structures and how to use grammar when writing.” “I think my grammar knowledge has improved because the lessons and activities helped me understand grammar step by step. Some grammar topics were difficult for me at first, but after doing

exercises and discussing them with my classmates, I understood them better. I also became more familiar with sentence structures and how to use grammar when writing.”

The response shows that students can develop better grammar understanding through gradual learning, exercises, and discussion. Collaboration with classmates also helped the student understand difficult grammar topics.

Based on the three responses, the students showed a better understanding of English grammar after participating in the English Structure class. They moved from simply memorizing grammar rules to understanding how and when grammar structures should be used. Practice, classroom activities, and discussions helped students recognize grammar patterns and correct their mistakes.

CONCLUSION

This study evaluated the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in an Understanding Structure course among students at Universitas Indraprasta PGRI (Unindra) and examined how it shapes their overall learning experiences. Based on the interview findings, the integration of project-based tasks, peer collaboration, and interactive activities fundamentally transformed how Unindra students perceive, learn, and apply English grammar. Rather than viewing grammar as an isolated set of abstract rules to memorize, students experienced it as an essential, practical tool for real-world communication.

The findings across the five major themes highlight the comprehensive impact of Project-Based Learning on Unindra students:

First, PBL significantly increased student motivation. The students found project-based learning much more engaging than traditional teacher-centered grammar lectures. The primary driver of their motivation was a strong desire to improve their overall English proficiency. They recognized a clear connection between mastering grammatical structures and enhancing their real-world speaking and writing abilities. This functional perspective encouraged active participation in classroom activities and motivated students to avoid errors and construct accurate sentences.

Second, peer collaboration served as a vital support system within the Unindra classroom environment. Working in groups created an interactive learning space where

students did not have to rely solely on the lecturer for knowledge. When encountering complex grammar topics, students engaged in active discussions, shared knowledge, explained rules to one another in simpler terms, and collectively corrected their mistakes. This collaborative process simplified difficult concepts and made learning grammar far less intimidating.

Third, the interactive nature of PBL improved students' confidence. Engaging in pair work, group discussions, grammar exercises, and classroom presentations gave Unindra students repeated opportunities to practice English in a safe, supportive setting. While activities like public speaking and presentations initially caused nervousness, consistent practice helped students overcome their anxiety. Doing well in grammar exercises gave them a feeling of accomplishment, which helped build their confidence in their language abilities.

Fourth, even though there were some good results, Unindra students faced some big difficulties when finishing their projects. Some students had difficulty moving from understanding grammar rules in theory to using them correctly in their project work. Working in groups caused some difficulties, like handling different opinions from group members and finding times to meet outside of class. Time management was another common hurdle due to balancing project requirements with assignments from other courses.

These challenges show that when students do project-based learning, they need to build good communication, time management, and teamwork abilities along with their regular schoolwork. In the end, the study shows that using problem-based learning helped students understand English grammar better and more deeply. The students moved from just memorizing formulas by heart to really engaging with the material actively. A good understanding of how and when to use different sentence structures helps in making writing clearer and more effective. Knowing which sentence types to use in different situations can improve communication and make messages easier to understand. This knowledge allows writers to choose the best way to express ideas, ensuring messages are both clear and properly structured. Students learned more about grammar patterns by following clear instructions, practicing directly, and talking with others in groups. This helped them better understand their own language mistakes and learn how to fix them on their own. In conclusion, project-based learning helps students

develop skills in managing their time for schoolwork and working well with others in a group. It shows that it works well as a teaching method in the English Structure course at Universitas Indraprasta PGRI. It connects theory with real-world use by increasing student motivation, encouraging teamwork, building confidence in communication, and developing a strong, lasting understanding of English grammar.

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