

DIFFICULTIES IN IMPLEMENTING THE MAGAZINE PROJECT OF THE THIRD YEAR STUDENTS MAJORING IN ENGLISH AT THAI NGUYEN SCHOOL OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Pham Hung Thuyen

TNU - School of Foreign Languages

ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
Received:	18/3/2022	At many universities, learning English through project-based learning is no longer strange to students, especially at universities of foreign languages. This study examined the difficulties in implementing English magazine project by third-year English majors at School of Foreign Languages - Thai Nguyen University. The participants were 30 third-year English students. Data for the study were collected by using a questionnaire. The study was conducted on four main groups of difficulties: Difficulties in learners' ability, difficulties with time, difficulties in group work, and difficulties in support of teacher. The study results showed that learners' ability in using photoshop and finding information technology tools, learners' language competence (expressing ideas in journalistic style) accounted for the highest percentage of trouble, followed by difficulty in time (setting a specific timetable), group work (forgetting materials). Teachers' ambiguous comments and corrections also cause problems for students. In contrast, the difficulties in support of teachers accounted for the lowest percentage because most students did not have problems with contacting teachers for support. Besides the mentioned difficulties, there is also the problem of low learning motivation raised by students as some students were not really excited about the magazine project.
Revised:	31/3/2022	
Published:	31/3/2022	
KEYWORDS		
Project-based learning		
Magazine projects		
Difficulties		
Solutions		
University students		

NHỮNG KHÓ KHĂN TRONG THỰC HIỆN ĐỀ ÁN TẠP CHÍ CỦA SINH VIÊN NĂM THỨ 3 CHUYÊN NGÀNH TIẾNG ANH TẠI TRƯỜNG NGOẠI NGỮ - ĐẠI HỌC THÁI NGUYÊN

Phạm Hùng Thuyên

Trường Ngoại ngữ - ĐH Thái Nguyên

THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO		TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài:	18/3/2022	Tại nhiều trường Đại học, việc học tiếng Anh qua đề án không còn là điều xa lạ với sinh viên, đặc biệt là sinh viên tại các trường đại học ngoại ngữ. Nghiên cứu này xác định các khó khăn trong việc thực hiện đề án tạp chí tiếng Anh của sinh viên năm thứ 3 chuyên ngành tiếng Anh tại trường Ngoại ngữ - Đại học Thái Nguyên. Đối tượng tham gia là 30 sinh viên năm thứ ba. Dữ liệu dành cho nghiên cứu được thu thập bằng phương pháp sử dụng bảng câu hỏi. Nghiên cứu được tiến hành trên 4 nhóm khó khăn chính là khó khăn về năng lực, khó khăn về thời gian thực hiện, khó khăn về hoạt động nhóm và khó khăn liên quan đến hỗ trợ từ giáo viên. Kết quả của nghiên cứu cho thấy năng lực của người học trong việc sử dụng photoshop và các công cụ tìm kiếm thông tin, khả năng ngôn ngữ của người học (cụ thể là trình bày ý tưởng theo văn phong báo chí) chiếm tỉ trọng cao nhất trong nhóm các khó khăn được điều tra. Các khó khăn về việc sắp xếp thời gian, thu thập tài liệu cũng chiếm một phần đáng kể. Bên cạnh đó, phản nhận xét và sửa bài chưa rõ ràng của giáo viên cũng gây ra khó khăn cho sinh viên. Ngược lại, sinh viên cho rằng giáo viên có sự hỗ trợ tốt và họ không gặp khó khăn gì trong việc tiếp cận sự hỗ trợ từ giáo viên. Bên cạnh đó, khảo sát từ câu trả lời độc lập của sinh viên cho thấy động lực học tập thấp khi sinh viên không hào hứng với môn học là một yếu tố nữa gây khó khăn cho họ.
Ngày hoàn thiện:	31/3/2022	
Ngày đăng:	31/3/2022	
TỪ KHÓA		
Học qua đề án		
Đề án tạp chí		
Khó khăn		
Giải pháp		
Sinh viên đại học		

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34238/tnu-jst.5713>

Email: phamhungthuyen.sfl@tnu.edu.vn

<http://jst.tnu.edu.vn>

203

Email: jst@tnu.edu.vn

1. Introduction

Today, English is an international language. It is absolutely necessary for learners and workers around the world. It has helped connect people around the world. Therefore, English is considered as the prioritized foreign language in Vietnam as it helps a child communicate effectively with people from other countries. Learning through project-based learning (PBL) is a learning model that organizes learning around purposeful activities and was developed at the beginning of the 20th century [1]. As stated by [2], PBL creates environment for students to work in a team collaboratively so that they will learn more from other sources like peers, Internet and books than their teachers. This action is one first step to lay the foundation for student's professional development in the future [3]. Projects are defined as "complex tasks based on challenging questions or problems that involve students in design, problem-solving, decision-making, or investigative activities; allow students to work relatively autonomously over an extended period of time; and culminate in realistic products or presentations" [4] and develop 21st century skills including critical thinking, collaboration and communication [5]. Realizing the importance of English, Thai Nguyen University (TNU) in general and School of Foreign Languages (SFL) in particular have applied project-based learning to help students learn and practice English effectively. However, researchers pointed out some main difficulties that students might encounter during their project such as group work [6], time [7], student's ability and preparation [8]. At School of Foreign Languages, there are students who complained that they had some difficulties in doing the project while there has been a lack of research on this field in my university. The results of this study will help both teachers and students in their practice of projects.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research questions

In order to find out difficulties students had, the study focused on the following questions

What difficulties do students at SFL-TNU usually face when implementing English magazine project?

What solutions are mostly suggested by students at School of Foreign Languages - Thai Nguyen University?

2.2. Research subjects

In this study, the convenience sampling method was used. The study's target population consists of 30 (25 females and 5 males) out of 60 third-year English students - Course K40 who have taken the course "English Magazine Project" at School of Foreign Languages - Thai Nguyen University. They are junior students with the age range from 21-22, some up to 24 years old.

2.3. Research techniques

From the review of previous studies [9]-[11], the main difficulties in learning English through the project were the difficulty of group work, the difficulty of time, the difficulty of the learner's ability, and the difficulty of teacher. Based on this input, theoretical framework was set up and a questionnaire was constructed to ask students about these difficulties and solutions they could suggest. A survey questionnaire is a popular tool in the social sciences because it is useful for gathering opinions and would be extremely useful in specifying goals and analyzing the teaching and learning situation [12].

The researcher used both quantitative and qualitative research method to analyze the survey data. The quantitative data were drawn from the questions with answer options in Likert scale of 5, while the qualitative data were taken from the two open-ended questions.

All the questions were written in Vietnamese to ensure participants' understanding to the fullest as well as to avoid possible misunderstanding due to language barrier.

There were 27 questions divided into 2 parts that were given for participants to complete within 15-20 minutes through the Google Form online survey system.

The first part collected information about survey respondents such as gender, age and email.

The second part included 24 questions, in which the first 3 questions were about participants' experiences in learning English, the average score on the 4.0 scale, and the cumulative score of the English magazine project subject. The next 19 questions required participants to choose the most appropriate answer to the difficulties in implementing the English magazine project based on a 5-point Likert scale specifically as follow: 1 point for Strongly Disagree; 2 points for Disagree; 3 points for Neutral; 4 points for Agree; 5 points for Strongly Agree.

In the last two questions, the researcher used open-ended questions. The first question asked the participants what other difficulties students had besides those mentioned by the researcher. In the other question, the researcher asked the participants to name some of their suggested solutions for the problems encountered.

2.4. Data collection procedures and analysis

The researcher used the data collected from the Google Form to calculate the average score. The researcher calculated and analyzed statistics objectively by displaying the average score for each item based on the information collected in the questionnaire. As previously stated, the researcher assigned from 1 to 2 points for No Difficulties, 3 points for Neutral, from 4 to 5 points for Difficulties. The data collected from Google Form was exported to spreadsheet (Microsoft Excel) to calculate the percentages. Furthermore, open-ended questions were used to elicit student feedback on other difficulties in implementing the English magazine project and solutions suggested by the students themselves.

3. Findings and discussion

3.1. Students' personal information

After collecting data, the females made up the majority 83.3% of the survey participants. Meanwhile, males made up 16.7%. The purpose of this investigation is to support the description of research subjects. This is also the general situation of language schools.

The age of the third-year students is mainly from 21 to 22 years old.

According to the collected data, most of the participants admitted having studied English for at least ten years by the time of the survey. About the average score on a 4.0 scale, the majority of students scored above 2.5 (73.3%). However, there are still some students with scores below 2.5 (26.7%).

All students have accumulated A and B grades in the English magazine project; of which 53.3% got A, and 46.7% got B. None of the students scored C and D. From this, it can be seen that the percentage of students getting a B score was close to the percentage of students getting an A score. It proves that these students still have some difficulties with this subject which prevents them from getting a perfect score in this subject.

3.2. Students' difficulties in implementing English magazine project

Regarding IT competence in table 1, the majority of students (73.4%) had no difficulty with using word processing software. In contrast, nearly half of the students still had problems finding IT tools (46.6%). Moreover, there were many students who had difficulty in processing images with photoshop (63.4%). Most students (86.7%) had no trouble creating folders to store important information. Those results indicated that most students were familiar with word processing and information storage while they were still struggling with advanced softwares such as photoshops and other tools for magazine design.

Table 1. Results of survey on students' difficulties in learners' ability:
Language competence, IT competence

Difficulties in learners' ability: Language competence, IT competence	SD 1 (%)	D 2 (%)	NT 3 (%)	A 4 (%)	SA 5 (%)
I had difficulty using word processing software.	16.7	56.7	13.3	10	3.3
I had difficulty finding IT tools to design my magazine.	13.3	26.7	13.3	43.3	3.3
I had difficulty in using photoshop software to edit photos.	13.3	13.3	10	56.7	6.7
I had difficulty creating folders for storing important information.	20	66.7	3.3	10	0
I had language difficulty because I often write wrong grammar and have to correct it many times.	26.7	20	13.3	26.7	13.3
I had difficulty expressing ideas due to insufficient vocabulary.	20	23.3	16.7	26.7	13.3
I had difficulty expressing my ideas in journalistic style.	10	6.7	6.7	60	16.7

In terms of language competence, nearly half of the students (40%) had difficulty with grammar while the other half (46.7%) did not; the rest 13.3% claimed neutral. Following the difficulty in expressing ideas due to insufficient vocabulary, the result was quite similar. Apart from the minor 16.7% who selected "neutral", 40% claimed having difficulties and 43.3% said they did not. Those results were compatible with the results of students' learning ability in that half had A scores and half got B scores.

Finally, the most noticeable result was that a significant high percentage of students (76.7%) admitted having difficulties in expressing ideas in journalistic style regardless of their scores.

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that learners' ability does affect their implementation of the projects. While several problems were raised, students seemed to have troubles the most in selecting IT tools to design magazines (photoshop was one example) and using appropriate journalist style of writing.

Table 2. Difficulties with time management

Difficulties with time management	SD 1 (%)	D 2 (%)	NT 3 (%)	A 4 (%)	SA 5 (%)
I had trouble with adequate time to complete all the homework assignments given.	10	23.3	16.7	36.7	13.3
I did not have enough time in designing the magazine because the deadline of the teacher gave was too short.	13.3	43.3	23.3	13.3	6.7
I had a time problem when I was implementing English magazine project because I did not set a specific timetable.	13.3	13.3	20	36.7	16.7
I had trouble in studying the English magazine project because the course duration was too short.	23.3	40	13.3	23.3	0

As shown in table 2, 50% of the students claimed having difficulty because of inadequate time to complete all the homework assignments given. In addition, 53.4% of the students had difficulty implementing the English magazine project because they did not set a specific timetable. In contrast, the majority of students had no difficulty with teacher deadlines (56.6%). At the same time, the majority of students did not have difficulty in the time of the subject of English magazine project (63.3%).

Basing on the analysis above, it is interesting to notice that not many students had problems with the timeline of the English magazine project as well as the given deadlines. Other issues related to time such as personal students' workload and time management skills seemed to affect but were not significant, proven by the percentages falling evenly on both groups who selected the assigned values of 4, 5 and 1,2,3.

From table 3, it can be seen that the percentage of students having difficulty with mutual support in the group is pretty even with 46.7% of students having no difficulty and 40% of students having difficulty. Furthermore, the number of students having troubles because of the responsibilities of some group members is also quite uniform with 50% and 46.7% respectively.

In particular, the number of students with the difficulty in assigning work to team members accounted for 30%, while those selected “neutral” (value3) and those claimed having no problems (values 1 and 2) made up 70%. The highest perceived difficulty in this group is that some members forget to bring materials to class which made it difficult for doing the project together in class (56.6%). Finally, the percentage of students who had difficulty communicating ideas to each other is 40%, which is a little lower than the percentage of students who do not have difficulty (50%).

Table 3. Difficulties in group work

Difficulties in group work	SD 1 (%)	D 2 (%)	NT 3 (%)	A 4 (%)	SA 5 (%)
I had trouble with mutual support in the group.	10	36.7	13.3	23.3	16.7
I had trouble with teamwork because of the responsibility of several team members.	16.7	33.3	3.3	36.7	10
I had trouble with teamwork when assigning work.	23.3	20	26.7	23.3	6.7
I had trouble with teamwork as some members of the group forget to bring materials to class.	23.3	33.3	16.7	23.3	3.3
I had trouble with teamwork about communicating ideas to each other.	23.3	26.7	10	36.7	3.3

In short, regarding teamwork, students did have troubles in terms of mutual support and communicating with group members. However, in both those categories, the percentage of students having difficulties was always lower than that of students without difficulties. In addition, while few students had problems with assigning tasks, many claimed that members' not bringing in materials to the class caused problems for completing task completion.

Table 4. Difficulties in support of teachers

Difficulties in support of teachers	SD 1 (%)	D 2 (%)	NT 3 (%)	A 4 (%)	SA 5 (%)
The teacher did not support me enough.	20	50	16.7	10	3.3
The teacher's comments are not detailed enough; I don't understand his/ her correction.	26.7	30	13.3	30	0
I had difficulty communicating with teachers.	30	43.3	10	16.7	0

In table 4, it is obvious that most students did not have problems with teachers. In terms of support from teachers, 70% of students chose not to have difficulties. Similarly, 56.7% of the students did not have problems with the teacher's comments and corrections. Finally, the number of students who had no difficulty communicating with their teachers accounted for the highest percentage of this group at 73.3%.

Most of the students answered that there were no other difficulties or that the proposed difficulties coincided with their problems. Some of the ideas mentioned were:

- (1) The difficulty of synthesizing the writings from the team members because each person has a different style.
- (2) The difficulty in printing the final product.
- (3) The problem of low learning motivation.

3.3. Results of solutions suggested by students

Besides the difficulties reported by the students themselves, the researcher also collected suggestions to solve those difficulties:

With regard to the difficulties in learners' ability group, students suggested that they need to improve their knowledge to better their magazine product. Furthermore, students need to learn grammar, more vocabulary or how to make presentation. They should learn more about the language of magazines before studying EMA. Moreover, students need to do more writing homework and practice. What is more, they should learn about Photoshops and Softwares for magazine design and use them fluently on the computer before learning EMA. Finally, students

should ask for the opinions and suggestions of surrounding people such as instructors or members of their own groups or learn from other groups.

With respect to the difficulties with time, it is advisable to give a specific group schedule for the group project and divide responsibilities or tasks for members from the very beginning stage. Such a plan from teachers can give them a useful guidance for their time management skills as well as directions for their project steps.

Regarding the difficulties in group work, the group needs to set clear rules and views from the first week of working together, and if it cannot be done, there will be penalties due to the group discussing and making decisions. In addition, the group needs to promote solidarity among the members of the groups in the class and emphasize the importance of teamwork in this subject. More importantly, the group should choose a topic that all members of the group are interested in, divide the work, and make a clear timetable for completing each section of the magazine. Besides, it is necessary to select members of the group carefully; including those who can use softwares and help to check the grammar of the writing. Finally, for each student, it is necessary to pay attention to group work to avoid the dispersion of each member's activities.

Relevant the group difficulties in support of teachers, every teacher should let students work on a variety of topics and help students more by exposing to sample products of other groups. Apart from them, teachers need to provide more information channels, web resources and information technology tools which can offer real magazines for better imagination.

4. Conclusion

From the above discussion, the following conclusions can be made with regard to the research questions. For the first research question, the study results showed that technical issue regarding technological skills was what concerned students most followed by soft skill shortages. Besides the mentioned difficulties, there is also the problem of low learning motivation, an issue raised by the students.

In terms of the second research question, students proposed some solutions to overcome difficulties. Students need to learn grammar, more technical language of magazines and skills to use Photoshops and Softwares for magazine design. They also suggested that time management should be taught and guided by teachers and action plans should be drawn in the beginning of the course. Teachers can also help them by providing more information channels, web resources, information technology tools.

Although the study has tried to provide a comprehensive understanding of the problems of studying English magazine projects at School of Foreign Languages - Thai Nguyen University, the study was limited to the third-year English majors and did not address possible other issues encountered by students in other areas and ages. Therefore, these findings are not applicable to all other disciplines.

REFERENCES

- [1] W. H. Kilpatrick, "The project method," *Teachers College Record*, vol. 19, pp. 319-335, September 1918.
- [2] A. J. Rotherham and D. Willingham, "21st century," *Educational Leadership*, vol. 67, no. 1, pp. 16-21, 2009.
- [3] C. A. Maida, "Project-Based Learning: a critical pedagogy for the twenty-first century," *Policy Futures in Education*, vol. 9, no. 6, pp. 759-768, 2011.
- [4] J. Thomas, "A Review of the Research on Project-Based Learning. The Autodesk Foundation," 2000. [Online]. Available: http://www.ri.net/middletown/mef/linksresources/documents/researchreviewPBL_070226.pdf. [Accessed Feb. 28, 2021].
- [5] J. Schwalm and K. S. Tylek, "Systemwide Implementation of Project-Based Learning: The Philadelphia Approach," *Afterschool Matters*, vol. 15, pp. 1-8, 2012.
- [6] H. Nicola and S. Allison, "The benefits and challenges of project Based Learning," *Pedagogic Research Institute and Observatory (PedRIO), Plymouth University*, 2014. [Online]. Available: <https://www1.plymouth.ac.uk/research/pedrio/Documents/PedRIO%20Pape%206.Pdf>. [Accessed April 5, 2021].

-
- [7] J. S. Krajcik and P. C. Blumenfeld, "Project-based learning. In *The Cambridge Handbook of the Learning Sciences*," R. Keith Sawyer (ed). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 317-334.
- [8] P. C. Blumenfeld, E. Soloway, R. W. Marx, J. S. Krajcik, M. Guzdial, and A. Palincsar, "Motivating project-based learning: Sustaining the doing, supporting the learning," *Educational Psychologist*, vol. 26, no. 3-4, pp. 369-398, 1991.
- [9] O. D. Baysura, S. Altun, and B. Y. Toy, "Perceptions of teacher candidates regarding project-based learning," *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, vol. 16, no. 62, pp. 15-36, 2016.
- [10] M. J. Harris, "The challenges of implementing project-based learning in middle schools (Doctoral dissertation)," University of Pittsburgh, 2014. [Online]. Available: <http://search.proquest.com/openview/097025eafda8f9dabff383844e705862/?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>. [Accessed April 5, 2021].
- [11] V. Van den Bergh, D. Mortelmans, P. Spooren, P. Van Petegem, D. Gijbels, and G. Vanthournout, "New assessment modes within project-based education- the stakeholders," *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, vol. 32, no. 4, pp. 345-368, 2006.
- [12] D. R. Litz, "Textbook evaluation and ELT management: A South Korean case study," *Asian EFL Journal*, vol. 48, pp. 1-53, 2005.