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**Digital Project-Based Learning for Teaching English for
Islamic Studies: Learning from Practice**

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Abstract

This paper investigated the steps of enacting Digital Project-Based Learning, henceforth DPjBL, and described the students' perspectives toward digital video production as the project works to be completed by the students taking the English for Islamic Studies course. The

participants of this study were one English teacher and twenty undergraduate students of the English Education Department of State University of Islamic Studies in Banjarmasin. The steps being investigated were started from the planning, during the project work completion, up to the presentation stage. The method used was a classroom-based study with a participatory observation technique supported by field notes and focus group interviews. The researchers collected the primary data using online class discussion notes and students' work artifacts. Findings revealed that the PjBL could be conducted online by combining conventional PjBL steps with digital technology. This study suggested teachers implement this Digital PjBL in any other courses since it empirically might create an enjoyable virtual learning environment and promote the students' competencies.

Keywords: *Digital project-based learning, digital video production, English for Islamic studies*

Introduction

Nowadays, the rapid development of technology demands educators from all education levels to integrate technology into their teaching and learning process. They establish such integration in synchronous and asynchronous modes, and one of the feasible instructional methods to answer this demand is Digital Project-Based Learning (DPjBL). By definition, Project-Based Learning, referred to as PjBL, focused on utilizing project-work in the learning process (Mergendoller & Thomas, 2000). The project work assigned to the students has involved complex tasks in which the students created the design, used critical thinking and decision-making skills. In the PjBL instruction, students worked together autonomously over a while, independently or in groups, and the project result was a practical product and or presentation. Following the rapid growth of information and technology so as in the process of education, many fields of study continue to adapt this PjBL approach across the different educational levels (Bottino & Robotti, 2007; Setiawan, Hamra, Jabu, & Susilo, 2018) started from primary to higher institutions level.

In EFL teaching and learning, Jalinus, Nabawi, and Mardin (2017) specified projects as extended tasks incorporating the teaching of language skills with various activities. The activities included the agreement of project work final objectives, which started from planning and preparation, information gathering through reading, listening, interviewing, observing, group discussion of information, problem-solving, oral and written reporting, and displaying. In line with this definition, Ravitz (2010) also set the operational definition of PjBL that it has

the features of (a) intensive inquiry process, (b) set for some period, (c) focus the direction to the student to some extent, and (d) that needs a final presentation session at the end of the project. Furthermore, teachers needed to be as creative as possible in designing various tasks that meet the students' needs and selecting appropriate methods to build their students' competency (Bin-Tahir & Hanapi, 2020). One of the best instructional methods to serve various technology-enhanced learning activities was Project-Based Learning.

In teaching English for Islamic Studies, which was further abbreviated as EIS in this present study, the Digital Project-Based Learning design, henceforth DPjBL, could also be integrated into classroom activities. Since the central core was not teaching Islamic terms separately, it focused more on English teaching in the Islamic studies context. Alan and Stoller (2005) mentioned that teachers needed to relax their control to monitor the students' project work. In the same vein with this idea, Iskandar (2018) pinpointed that teachers' attitudes played an essential role in implementing an innovative design, fostering the impact on that innovation enactment itself. It would be more effective when teachers were regarded as a guide, not as strict tutors (Smith et al., 2005), and also when students got the feedback of the project experience to let them know that their projects were respected well. Although many research works reported the teaching implementation using PjBL, only a few have discussed online or Digital PjBL in teaching EIS and elaborating the steps to implement it. It further became the gap of the previous PjBL research to this present one. Thus, this current research investigated the enactment of DPjBL in teaching EIS by exploring the implementation procedures and the students' perspectives after being exposed to the DPjBL approach. It would also be the task for the researcher to examine the proper balance between teacher control and student self-autonomy to increase the benefits of project work using DPjBL later on. Based on that rationale, there were two research questions that guided this study, as follows:

What are the steps of implementing the Digital Project-Based Learning instruction in teaching English for Islamic Studies?

What are the students' perspectives on Digital Project-Based Learning enactment in their English for Islamic Studies course?

Literature Review

Project-Based Learning (PjBL)

The project-based learning instruction aligned more with a constructivist theory of learning. It was so since constructivism advocated learning by collaboratively investigating and solving real-world problems. Jean Piaget (1953) in Meyer and Wurdinger (2016) promoted that each

individual's process constructs ideas. The main focus of constructivism theory proposed by Piaget related to the knowledge construction through assimilation and accommodation of personal process and its progress through four stages of development, which was different. Piaget's theory was balanced with another constructivism theory developed by Lev Vygotsky. Still, in Meyer and Wurdinger (2016), the social constructivism by Vygotsky pinpointed that an essential part of learning was social interaction itself. It was so since social interaction was mainly based on each individual's thinking process combined with classroom social interaction.

Nevertheless, it was essential to note that the enactment of Project-Based Learning effectively might differ depending on the context and the local need. This issue has further become the main focus of this present study; integrating Digital PjBL in EIS classroom activities. The selected theory of learning was a collaborative learning theory. It was about assigning tasks to students that were challenging and substantive (Bruffee, 1984), where two or more learners could elaborate on learning materials together (Cohen, 1994). Collaborative learners might gain knowledge acquisition after exposure to various perspectives and new insights (Ishihara, 2010). Moreover, interaction and discussion could lead to deeper cognitive processing of information (Webb, 1991).

What is DPjBL?

Integrating PjBL into educational technology has drawn many researchers' interest to report research under this issue. One of them was conducted by Amissah (2019). He completed a magister thesis dealing with the advantages and challenges of online PjBL. He used a comprehensive review of the literature and interviewed some experts that have implemented online PjBL. This literary research showed that online PjBL might promote academic achievement and motivation and develop students' collaborative skills. The challenges found were lack of teacher and student preparation, and the e-assessment process seemed difficult. Talking about DPjBL, Taufiqy, Sulthoni, & Kuswandi had researched Digital PjBL in 2016. Their study was to develop a model of digital PjBL material using the subject shooting image technique. The final product of this research and development showed that the expert validation and field-testing stage indicated a satisfying result. The students were satisfied to apply this digital PjBL material to their teaching and learning process. Meanwhile, concerning assessment systems in Digital PjBL, Romeu Fontanillas, Romero Carbonell, and Guitert Catasús (2016) have applied e-assessment to evaluate the students' project work. In doing the project work in the DPjBL instruction, the students were assessed starting from developing

the activities based on outcomes for each process and the final product of their project work. The e-assessment focused on the process assessment in which the student worked in teams and created a dynamic peer assessment. Applying this e-assessment mentioned that the students showed a high level of satisfaction during the e-assessment process, and their learning engagement was also significantly improved. Thus, this research has proved that PjBL could be digitally assessed and further opened the chance to design an interactive e-assessment to evaluate the project work.

Steps in Implementing PjBL

Many authors on PjBL have proposed steps in implementing PjBL in which they mostly shared specific core steps. In the Indonesian context, the Ministry of Culture and Education (2013) highlighted the six steps for the Project-Based Learning method in the teaching and learning process, they are (a) starting with the critical question, (b) designing the project plan, (c) designing a fixed schedule, (d) monitoring students project progress, (e) assessing students' outcome, and (f) evaluating students' experience. Another step of implementing PjBL was also highlighted by O'Sullivan, Krewer, and Frankl (2017). They adopted the 'Win-For-All' approach to collaborate PjBL for student groups. The steps were (a) design projects that were appropriate for collaboration rather than collective individualism, (b) make collaboration and social media part of the grading, (c) generate mutual benefits through shared learning aims, and (d) let students define their own, shared rules for collaborative learning.

The researchers proposed many more steps dealing with implementing PjBL in the EFL context, which may vary. However, as previously noted, there were no practical steps proposed to implement PjBL in a technology-enhanced classroom situation which has become the novelty in this present study. The feasible steps might help the teachers and students in the actual implementation of Digital PjBL. Teachers might also create activities that are easier to organize and fit their own classroom situation. Finally, these practical steps might effectively promote the students' language skills, creative thinking, and content learning to achieve the project's outcome.

English for Islamic Studies (EIS)

English for Islamic Studies (EIS) was frequently connected under English for Specific Purpose (ESP). Muhsinin (2013) contended that English could be learned more explicitly as an ESP course, focusing on one or more skills that would help the students comprehend text about Islamic studies written in English. This course would further enable them to learn Islam

through English. The students could develop their English and, at the same time, understand Islamic beliefs as well as the content of the text. The use of English for Islamic Studies, which contents were taken from Islamic teaching materials, would resolve the conflict between the students' Islamic values and the English ones.

In developing the curriculum for Indonesian English Language Teaching (ELT), Hidayati (2017) argued that it was necessary to insert cultural and religious values in English teaching material. It was a must, especially for Islamic studies institutions, to internalize these values since they have become Muslim communities' life guidance. It would be an excellent job for English language teachers to develop their Islamic-based teaching materials since these materials and available resources were still limited in number. By designing the materials themselves, they might be able to meet the students' needs. Furthermore, the ELT teaching's desired goals in Indonesian Islamic higher education did not merely focus on students' language skills acquisition but also to strengthen Islamic faith reflected in everyday lives attitude (Irwansyah, 2018). In short, ELT practitioners should explore the philosophy of language education within the Indonesian context in general and in Islamic educational institutions in particular.

Methods

The method used was a classroom-based study with a participatory observation technique supported by field notes and focus group interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Kral (2014) pinpointed that the participatory qualitative method was administered to analyze data. He further highlighted that the researcher and participants become co-investigators in which both parties were involved in collecting and analyzing the data.

Participants

The researcher managed one English teacher and twenty undergraduate students of the English Education Department of State University of Islamic Studies in Banjarmasin as the research participants. The teacher was female, and the students were twelve females and eight males. The teacher's pseudonym was Mrs. Mala. The twenty students' pseudonyms were Surya (male), Udin (male), Fatimah (female), Sella (female), Hani (female), Desi (female), Umar (male), Sinta (female), Tia (female), Soraya (female), Amir (male), Mina (female), Andi (male), Ruslan (male), Nisa (female), Wahdah (female), Lusi (female), Khadijah (female), Agung (male), and Ali (male). Table 1 presents demographic information regarding the age and sex of the participants.

Table 1. Demographic information of the participants

No	Respondent	Age (years old)	Male/ Female
1	Mala (Teacher)	31	Female
2	Surya	20	Male
3	Udin	19	Male
4	Fatimah	19	Female
5	Sella	19	Female
6	Hani	20	Female
7	Desi	20	Female
8	Umar	21	Male
9	Sinta	20	Female
10	Tia	19	Female
11	Soraya	19	Female
12	Amir	20	Male
13	Mina	20	Female
14	Andi	19	Male
15	Ruslan	21	Male
16	Nisa	19	Female
17	Wahdah	20	Female
18	Lusi	20	Female
19	Khadijah	19	Female
20	Agung	20	Male
21	Ali	20	Male

The information derived from Table 1 indicated that there was no slight difference in age among the students. Before the research implementation, the achievement test result also showed that they had primarily shared similar English language competencies. They took the English for Islamic Studies course this semester and have already been familiar with the procedure of conventional Project-Based Learning.

Data Collection and Analysis

In collecting the data, the researcher joined the Google Classroom, WhatsApp group, and virtual zoom meeting provided by the EIS lecturer to collect the data dealing with the online observation of DPjBL enactment. The primary data were collected using online class discussion notes and students' work artifacts. The focus group interview was administered to obtain the participants' responses to their perceptions after exposure to the DPjBL.

The focus group interview session with the students was conducted via a virtual zoom meeting. Before the interview, the interviewees were informed and asked for their consent to record the process to make the data transcription easier. The aspects being interviewed were their perception of the DPjBL enactment covering their preference of online chat forum, the application used to complete the video project, the benefit gained from being exposed to DPjBL, and the possible challenges in meeting the online project work.

Findings and Discussion

The Steps of Organization of DPjBL Implementation

Findings revealed that the PjBL could be conducted online by combining conventional PjBL and features of digital technology. The teacher implemented the main PjBL features started from planning, carrying out, up to the presentation stage. The steps of DPjBL performed by the teacher are displayed in the following Figure 1.

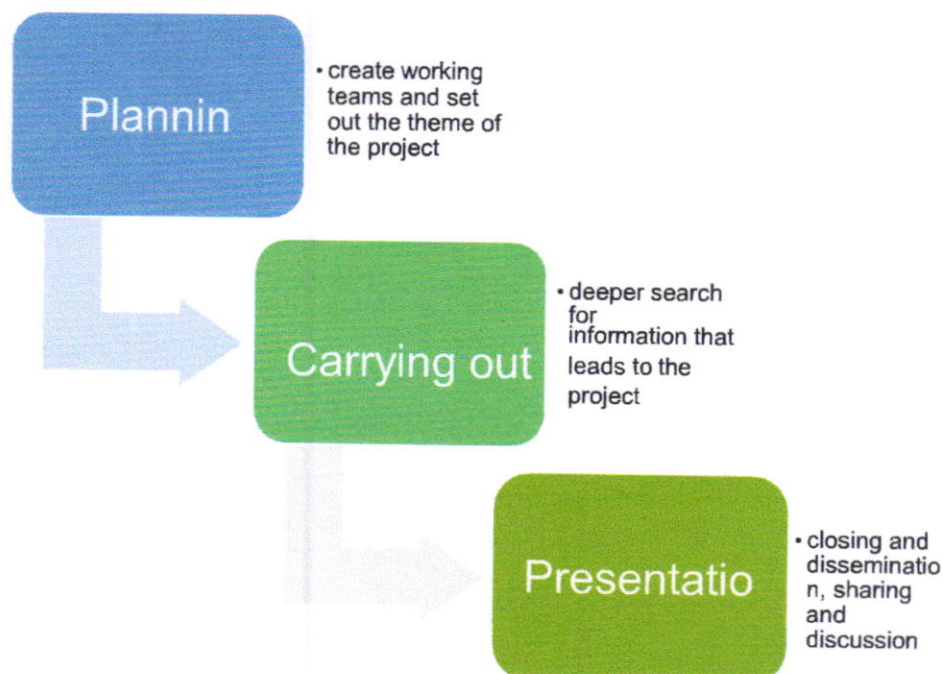


Figure 1. The steps of PjBL implementation

The interview result with the teacher revealed that she focused on three main stages of DPjBL: planning, carrying out, and presentation since it addressed the main key point of PjBL itself. In line with Hong (2019), it was mentioned that after the teacher and students agreed on planning a new project, learners in PjBL cooperated in small teams to complete the project work that might take forms an oral presentation or a staged performance. The researcher observed that the teacher provided a conducive environment to create working teams and started the initial planning stage. The students set out the topic or theme of their project work during this stage. The next step was a carrying out stage in which the students collected information as much as possible to support the project work completion. The project was started to be developed using the gathered information. During this stage, the students have designed the first version or prototype of their project. The last step was the presentation stage regarding the final version of the project's sharing and discussion. Based on the online observation of the DPjBL implementation, the teacher further divided the three main steps above into five more detailed activities. Figure 2 portrays the activities of implementing DPjBL conducted by the teacher in the online classroom.

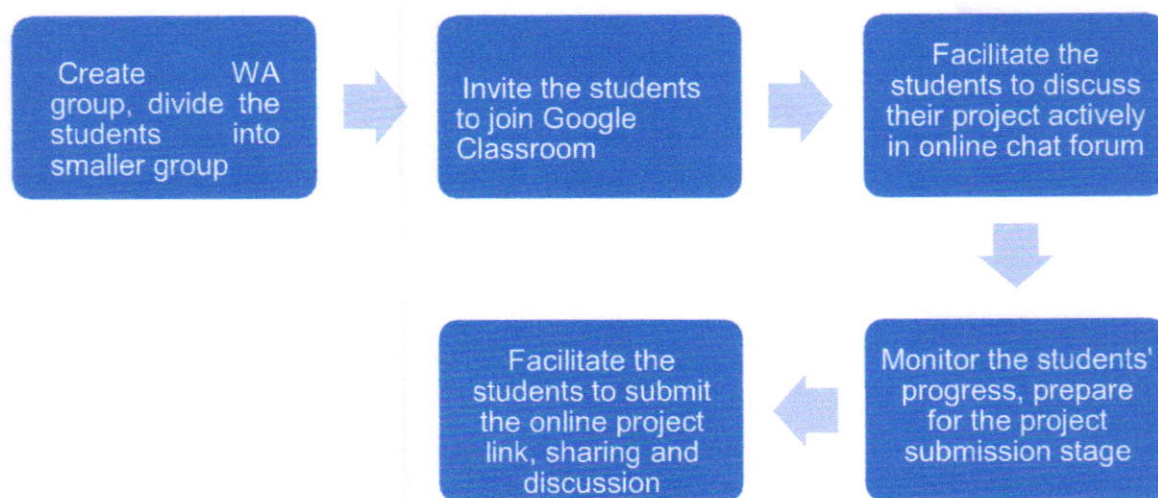


Figure 2. The activities of DPjBL implementation

The EIS teacher started to implement DPjBL by creating an online group through a WhatsApp application. She explained their upcoming DPjBL project work procedures to ensure that all participants were on the right track. She then informed the students through a group chat that the twenty students would be divided into five smaller groups. She also mentioned that further

discussion would be conducted through Google Classroom, and she invited the students to join DPjBL classes in it.

The students joined the Google Classroom using the code given and followed the instructions there. The researcher also joined the online class to monitor and get the data dealing with the DPjBL project progress. The teacher divided the forum chat into three stages and informed the students that all discussions related to their project work must be done in Google Classroom chat. This instruction made the teacher more comfortable monitoring and supervising their students' project work progress. She said:

"I demand the students do the discussion only through Google Classroom chat to make it easier to control their work. I do not allow them to open a private WhatsApp group since I cannot monitor their progress and hints in doing the project work." (Mala, interview data)

Teacher Mala further explained to the researcher that she could check the collaborative learning through online chat discussion and the development of her students' critical thinking. It was expressed clearly in the chat, and she might decide the necessary advice to facilitate the students' problem in completing the project work. The students' project works were overdue within four active weeks. Project work in PjBL would gain its highest benefit when the teacher and students work together to complete the project work itself. The teacher would be the one who guided the students as well as motivated them to learn autonomously. Alan and Stoller (2005) gave some criteria to implement project-based learning in the classroom organization successfully. The first criterion was that the teacher must focus more on real-world situation matter under the students' learning environment since it would attract their interest. For instance, the project might take form a creative video of maintaining the physical distance in public places during the pandemic virus. The second criterion was that the teacher needed to monitor the students' collaborative work while always keeping their students' autonomy and independence in doing their project work. The third was that the PjBL implementation could accommodate the learning process focusing on form and other language aspects. The last criterion was that the PjBL must be processed and product-oriented to create a learning-by-doing atmosphere. It would be handy to emphasize targeted language skills and end-of-project reflection, respectively. Next, they also proposed ten comprehensive steps on using PjBL in EFL classrooms, which started from (1) the students and instructor agreement on a theme of the project work, (2) determining the outcome, (3) structuring the project, (4) instructor preparation to gather information, (5) students information gathering as assigned by the instructor, (6) instructor preparation to compile the data, (7) students data collecting, (8)

instructor preparation for the final activity, (9) students' presentation of the project work, and (10) evaluation stage (Alan & Stoller, 2005).

In EFL teaching and learning, there were four English skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, which needed to be mastered by students. The students also needed to understand the language components (vocabulary, fluency, pronunciation, and grammar) to support their mastery of the four English skills (Masita et al., 2020). The findings showcased that the students' competencies development was reflected in the presentation stage as the last stage of DPjBL. They presented the artifacts through virtual zoom meetings and shared and discussed sessions with their teacher and peers. All of the participants were actively engaged in the discussion and interested in their friends' digital videos. The teacher also inserted Islamic substance as the teaching material of the English for Islamic Studies course through the forum. In the last session, the teacher reminded them to upload their videos either on Youtube or Instagram TV to access their digital project works.

The Students' Perspectives after Being Exposed to DPjBL

The second research question dealt with the students' perspectives after being exposed to the DPjBL approach. The responses were collected using focus group discussions covering four leading indicators. The interview was administered utilizing a zoom meeting. Table 2 presents the students' responses to the focus group interview.

Table 2. The Students' Perception of DPjBL

No	Indicator	Responses
1	The preference for a digital chat forum	WhatsApp instead of LMS Google classroom
2	The application used to complete the video project	Kinemaster, Discord, Youtube, IGTV, Inshot, PixelLab, playmaker, podcast, etc
3	The benefit gained from being exposed to DPjBL	The significant improvement of the speaking skill of English Boost the students' creativity Demands the students' to be familiar with technology Improve their content knowledge of the selected video topic

4	The challenge in completing the digital project	<p>Slow responses from the group member, communication problem</p> <p>Unstable network connection to send the video</p> <p>Requires extra effort to edit the video</p>
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The first five questions covered the students' digital chat forum preferences and applications to finish their project work. The students' responses were varied, but most of them stated that they preferred the WhatsApp group instead of the Google Classroom or University's Learning Management System (LMS) to do the online discussion. Surya and Fatimah expressed their feelings dealing with this finding as to the following.

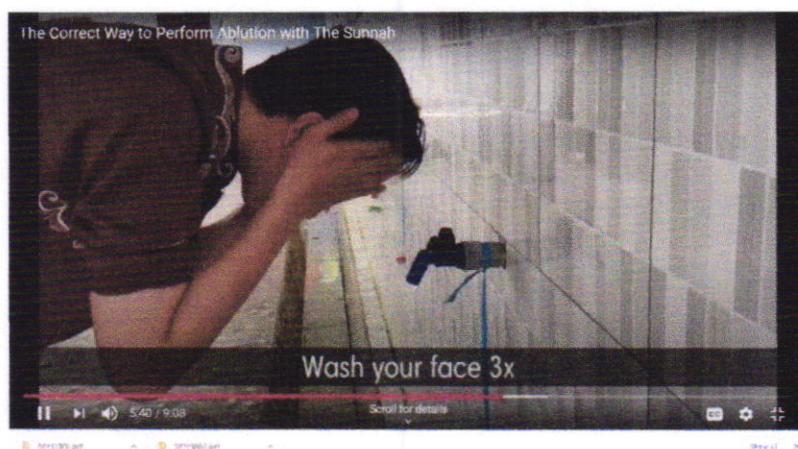
"It was hard for me to do the online discussion through LMS since I could not check whether my group members had read my comments." (Surya, interview data)

"I hope that the teacher will allow us to discuss via whats-app group since it is faster to respond one to another." (Fatimah, interview data).

In this research, the students also pinpointed that they got many benefits in engaging with the DPjBL. Most of them address that DPjBL has boosted their creativity and made them more familiar with digital technology. Khadijah said:

"I learn a lot about how to use Kinemaster and do video editing through this project work. It is fun!" (Khadijah, interview data).

Nevertheless, the students faced some challenges in completing the project work, such as unstable internet connection in the rural area. This digital video production required much more effort to make it memorable and exciting to watch. And it was truly outstanding; here is the screenshot of the YouTube channel of the uploaded students' video production.



This video was uploaded by group three under the title *The Correct Way to Perform Ablution with the Sunnah* (based on the Sunnah). Each group member took part in the video and beautified it with texts and suitable back sound.



In this video, Soraya from group five explained ten eating and drinking habits of Prophet Muhammad. Group 5 shot their video in a natural setting to present something different from other groups. They did it separately at home and compiled the videos into one exciting complete video.

Regarding the students' previous challenges, knowing better the role of the teachers and the students while implementing the DPjBL will overcome these possible challenges. The first and foremost role of the teacher in PjBL was as a guide or facilitator through the project assignment (Abdul Khalek & Lee, 2012). It would be crucial for them to maintain interaction with the students during the projects' completion. Teachers might do the monitoring process in DPjBL through the LMS or real-time synchronous digital platform through the group chat. Teachers should think as critically as possible to design the most interactive teaching process. They ought to be able to use various open sessions as a medium for expressing their students' opinions on different topics.

Collier (2017) noted that teachers have to make sure that they already understand the steps in completing the project work. Thus, the instructions needed to be as detailed and complete as possible. Of course, this dealt with the preparation stage or careful planning before assigning the projects to the students. Teachers who wish to implement DPjBL in their class must make sure that the whole participants of the project have understood their roles and know the steps clearly. Since the students were responsible as the decision-maker in their own projects, they should be allowed to give their voice and choices in the project decisions, such as presenting their projects in the last stage of DPjBL. Still, Collier (2017) pointed out that assigning the

students to report their progress in completing their projects would make them responsible for their assigned roles.

Conclusion

This study's findings reveal that the conventional offline PjBL can be turned into online or Digital PjBL. This classroom-based study provides two empirical contributions: the practical steps of implementing PjBL in a higher education setting and the students' perspectives toward this instructional method. The teacher starts by grouping the students through WhatsApp, carrying out the DPjBL via Google Classroom, and virtually completing the dissemination process through zoom meetings. The students successfully followed the guidance and remarked positive perceptions after being engaged during this DPjBL instruction. This achievement is because this DPjBL is designed based on the students' needs. Pham (2019) asserts that project-based learning emerged as an approach that virtually meets the participants' needs in foreign language acquisition since it focuses more on developing the learners' creative skills to motivate them to engage with learning thoroughly.

Pedagogical Implication

By presenting the practical step-by-step procedure in implementing the DPjBL instruction, the pedagogical implication of this research is to promote the shifting of the conventional PjBL classroom implementation to the digital one. It is because Digital Project-Based Learning (DPjBL) is the most feasible answer to improve students' critical thinking competencies, collaboration, communication, and creativity (Jin, 2017) and improve their technological knowledge. The digital project works given to the students are also helpful to cope with real-world competition and survive in the digital workplace. At last, due to the positive perception showcased by the participants in this research, it will be beneficial for teachers to implement this Digital PjBL in other courses since it may bring an enjoyable digital learning environment to support the students' competencies development in English teaching and learning practice.

Recommendation

In short, the progressive change of the conventional PjBL classroom into an authentic virtual learning environment is inevitable. It further involves much more effort than bringing features of the real-life situation into digital project work. However, there are two limitations of this research result. The first one is since this study was conducted in a small classroom situation, the steps of implementation may be developed further to adjust its enactment into a larger

setting. Another limitation is that this research does not cover up the online assessment system using DPjBL. Thus, the researchers recommend that future researchers explore the use of online assessment in DPjBL practice.

Declaration of conflicting interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this work.

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