Project-Based Learning in Online Speaking Class: Interesting or Boring?

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Abstract. Project-based learning (PjBL) has been widely recognized as one of effective teaching methods used in many speaking classes in Indonesia. It has also been theoretically and practically well-documented in a myriad of publications. However, little discussed the students' feeling in fulfilling the speaking projects, mainly in the online learning classes. Therefore, the present study attempts to examine the students' emotions during accomplishing those projects in one semester. Grounded on Pekrun's emotion foundation[1], this exploratory case study employed an open-ended questionnaire administered to 29 university students in one speaking class to explore their anger, anxiety, enjoyment, hope, hopelessness, pride, relief, and shame during the online speaking class. To analyse the data, Miles and Huberman qualitative analysis framework was employed. The findings of this study informed that most students found they were both excited and challenged depending on particular conditions they encountered when doing the projects. The excitement occurred when they experienced satisfaction during the project accomplishments. Meanwhile, they felt it stimulating when they found their projects unsatisfactory. Moreover, they also expected perfection since they valued the result over the process. Pedagogical implications and further studies are also presented.

Keywords: Project-Based Learning, Online Speaking Class, Students' Emotion

1   Introduction

Speaking is one of the complicated skills encouraging students to have a lot of exercise and practice. Speaking can be tricky and frustrating because it is concerned with several components such as accents, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and fluency. Students might be confused to express their ideas because of limited vocabulary and imperfect knowledge of pronunciation. Moreover, practicing English speaking frequently becomes a challenge for the students because they have limited opportunity to practice it in their social life. Since English is placed as a foreign language in Indonesia, students may have problems practicing speaking and experiencing English expressions in their daily conversation. It is recurrently found that many students feel reluctant and worried of making mistakes when performing their speaking. Brown mentions that anxiety is among the obstacles encountered in speaking because they are frequently frightened to be arbitrated as stupid and unintelligible persons [1]. However, since mastering English speaking is an important aspect in learning a foreign language, students need to construct their speaking confidence and decrease their anxiety.

Many strategies have been found to help students improve their speaking skill. Especially in the online learning context, teachers may provide fun situations in which the students can collaboratively do some projects and tasks. Students can be forced to actively contribute to the

project within the group or individual work known as Project-Based Learning (PjBL). This strategy is valuable to help students increase their speaking confidence and build their responsibility and autonomy. As one of the student-centered approaches, PjBL aims at improving the students' language skill especially speaking by giving a pleasurable atmosphere where they can learn through experiencing problem solving. Brown argues that PjBL has a purpose to develop students' autonomy, self-directed learning and collaborative skills [2]. Especially in the process of learning speaking, PjBL forces the students to sit together, and discuss freely about the problem given. Consequently, they can make it freely without having a shy and nervous feeling.

Numerous studies have reported that PjBL can give positive impact on the students' content development and understanding [3], students' engagement and motivation, critical thinking, collaboration and problem solving [4]. PjBL is different from conventional methods because it focuses on student-centered activities in real world situations [5]. The use of Project-based learning (PjBL) also has been widely recognized as one of effective teaching methods used in many speaking classes. The study conducted by Maulany found that the use of PjBL could improve young learners' speaking ability covering their comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and fluency [6]. Similarly, Kusumawati's study mentions that PjBL is interesting for the students [7]. PjBL can provide engagement activity covering their cognitive, emotional and psychomotor aspects. This strategy can create meaningful and contextual learning that promotes social learning and optimal circumstances. PjBL can be applied in many fields of study and any class situation. It covers seven components namely learned-centered environment, collaboration, curriculum content, authentic task, multiple presentation modes, time management and innovative assessment [8]. Students can drive their own learning process by examining the problem and generate projects that reflect their feeling and understanding [9][10].

In an online learning situation, PjBL is really meaningful because it can be supported by a digital environment which provides numerous resources and promotes collaborative learning activity. Since the success of PjBL in speaking classes has been documented by many previous studies, there is inadequate attention on the investigation of students' feelings on the use of PjBL in speaking courses. Therefore, this study aims at scrutinizing the students' emotion amid the implementation of PjBL technique in speaking tasks. This research is expected to give practical contribution for teachers in order to realize the students' feeling as one of the important factors in the online classroom environment, especially in learning speaking.

2   Research method

2.1 Research Design

As an attempt to find out the answers of the research question (RQ), what the students feel when accomplishing projects in the online speaking class, the current study adopted an exploratory case study design that focused on the topic in a detailed portrayal. The design was advantageous in understanding and explaining the complexity of real-life events [11]. This present study focused on describing the students' emotions during accomplishing the project-based learning in online speaking class. Thus, this approach was believed as an appropriate method to conduct an in-depth investigation of this phenomenon which was expected to produce comprehensive analyses.

2.2 Setting and Participants

This study was conducted in an online speaking class in a state university in Tasikmalaya, West Java, Indonesia. This class implemented project-based learning as the learning modes where the students were asked to make online speaking projects. The students had to work individually or in groups to play various roles such as a bank officer and customers, a flight attendant, a radio announcer, and a news reporter. After the students had recorded their role plays, they had to upload the recordings to YouTube.com and share the links with the lecturers. 29 English education students who enrolled this class were recruited to participate in this study. For their availability and engagement during accomplishing their projects. These participants were determined to complete all video projects and have plenty of information about their projects in line with their feelings.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

An open-ended questionnaire was administered as the data collection technique adopting Pekrun's emotion framework comprising four major components, namely affective, cognitive, motivational, and expressive psychological systems [12]. The obtained data was analyzed using Miles and Huberman's qualitative analysis framework which consists of three processes, namely reduction, display, and conclusion drawing [11].
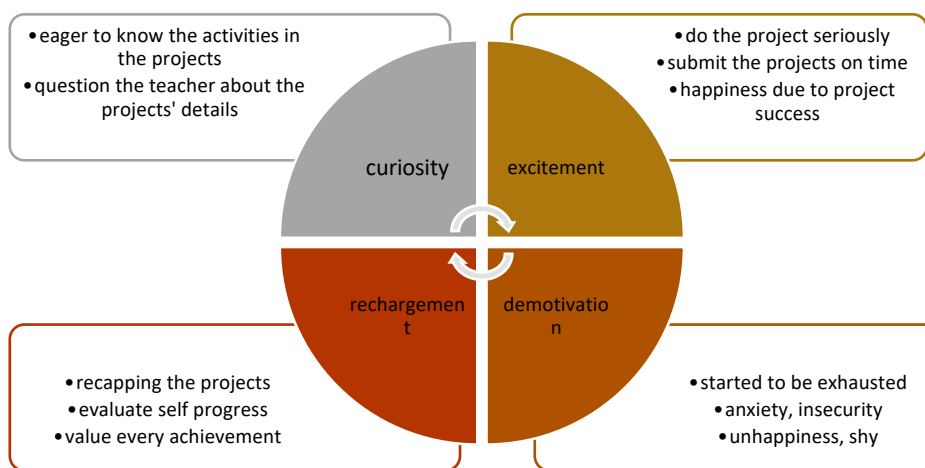
3 Finding and Discussion

Fig. 1. Students' emotional condition pattern when doing projects time by time

After learning the data, it was found a pattern of the students' emotional condition when joining the online speaking class facilitated with project-based learning activities. The depiction of the pattern can be viewed from the chart. From Chart 1, it can be inferred that the students experienced emotional shifts throughout the online speaking projects. Those emotions began with the sense of curiosity in which the students enthusiastically questioned the teacher about

the detailed activities at the outset. Following this feeling, they were super excited to conduct the projects and were very happy to gain praises from their teacher because they did well in the projects. However, during the process, they also felt so tired. As a result, they were anxious and insecure since they were afraid that the projects would be failed. Thus, they felt unhappy and shy. Luckily, the teacher encouraged them to have a look at what they have done and appreciate every single progress they made from week to week. Eventually, the students regained the energies to move on to the next projects. To facilitate a more qualitative explanation of these findings, two primary themes emerged as the general picture of 29-students' emotions amid the PjBL process in the online speaking class which obviously gives direct impacts on their learning motivation, namely feeling excited and enjoyed when the project was successful and feeling anxious, unhappy, and shy as a failure intolerance. With this regard, Zull who believes in the connection of emotion and students' motivation as important implications suggests that teachers are encouraged to explore ways to make learning intrinsically rewarding [13]. Therefore, the students would feel good about the learning and be aware of their own feelings.

3.1 Feeling excited and enjoyed when the project was successful

Most of the students reacted positively when asked about their feelings on certain projects, such as playing roles as bank officers, radio announcers or flight attendants. This excitement had arisen since they enjoyed the activity. Scherer argues that feelings and emotions encourage people to take actions [14] . This implies that if someone is acting in certain ways, the experience of a feeling or emotion can make him or her stop that particular action or continue making the best efforts in order to achieve a certain goal. This motivational energy shift is mainly influenced by the personal emotion they are experiencing. Again, this statement supports the notion that students' intrinsic desires will be triggered by the state of their hearts. The following excerpts are the evidence.

"I am really excited and enjoyed this first peer project. I really appreciate my peers because my partner and I can work together well. Playing the bank customer service is quite difficult so I recorded it a few times. I am actually very excited about this peer project and I am very satisfied with the results." (Participant 2, October 2020)

"When doing the project, I felt happy and excited. Because I also can imagine if I were a 911 dispatcher." (Participant 11, October 2020)

"I was wondering, is it possible for me to become a radio announcer? I'd like to imagine that I'm in a studio and I become the radio announcer, it makes me happy!" (Participant 7, October 2020)

As a teaching and learning technique, Project-Based Learning (PjBL) provides activities that promote students' independent and collaborative learning skills. Thus, the students are required to express their ideas in their own ways in many chances. The learning process in this speaking class has encouraged them to be creative and explorative. They not only increased their independent learning but also developed their collaborative learning skills by working with diverse students in particular projects. In line with this, several researchers claim that PjBL is a real-life experience-based teaching strategy that correlates to the students' contextual settings and functions to build their life skills, creative thinking and collaborative works [15][16][17]. They also emphasize that this strategy brings a lot of fun and enjoyable atmosphere in the

English communication learning. Given this fact, implementing PjBL in the online speaking class, to a certain degree, could positively activate the students' dopamine hormones which create pleasure and satisfaction.

Doing projects in online speaking circumstances is a new learning opportunity not only for students but for teachers as well [18]. Teachers are effective when they are serious and curious about the project outcomes and are eager to learn new things from them. Their teaching enthusiasm plays a significant and decisive role when students encounter obstacles and dead-end. If a teacher reacts indifferently to results, the students will be unmotivated too [19]. Learning this fact, there are some considerations that the teachers should take into account such as the adaptation of PjBL implementation based on students' needs according to their grades [20]. Since the implementation of PjBL in this case was in higher education, in which students prefer more competition rather than cooperation, teachers are suggested to apply rewards and punishment as one of the strategies. The students will be triggered to perform at their best because they expect to be in top position.

3.2 Feeling anxious, unhappy, and shy as a failure intolerance

Particular conditions result in diverse emotions of the individuals. In this case, some students felt so worried to make mistakes since they expected perfection in their performance. Their intolerance towards failed performance led them to show anxiety in speaking performance [21]. The frequent and sometimes intense negative emotions reported to be felt by participants in the study conducted by Ryan and Deci [22] which somehow influenced the students' learning motivation. These negative emotions created the negative impacts on the students; causing them to experience learning demotivation. However, particularly, students could also make use of such negative emotions to re-evaluate their actions and re-boost their motivation accordingly. The students could implement the reflection process by finding out the reasons behind those emotions and realizing that they needed to make up what had gone incorrectly [23]. This realization during the reflection process is the one that led students to focus on those areas they needed to improve upon in order to enhance their language learning process. Therefore, although negative emotions had an immediate negative effect on students' motivation, causing such behavior provided a space for students to reflect on their performance which allowed students to overcome that negative impact and to recharge the energy to reborn their motivation. To express the negative emotions they experienced, in the questionnaire, some of the students jotted these down,

"I'm so nervous and screwed up, that's what I want to say. I really want to apologize to Mrs. A because I was not optimal in this first project due to my activities that delayed the task of this project too much, as a result it can be seen clearly in the video that I was in a hurry to speak and had many pronunciation errors." (Participant 4, September 2020)

"…I really wonder what it feels like to be a radio announcer, even though I'm not very good at it. For me this is a challenge that I have to go through, just consider this the initial stage to become good at speaking, listening and reading. There is only one thing I worry about, I'm afraid of mispronouncing words and making the listener not understand what I'm talking about." (Participant 4, October 2020)

"I'm so sad that my video project I edited failed and it couldn't show my partner's voice. I am sure that I have done it perfectly, but it turned out to be a lot of failure. I realized it after

uploading the video to YouTube, and I felt desperate then I removed it from YouTube. Fortunately, at the end, my partner and I edited together, and she uploaded the video... it was successful but I am so shy…" (Participant 21, October 2020)

Participants of this study realized that there were many factors influencing the way they reacted to emotional experiences, such as the topics of the projects, the deadlines, and the partners. Those contributing factors led them to experience negative feelings when they did not meet the ideal conditions as they expected. For instance, when the group division of a particular project was determined by the teacher and the partnership did not run well, they automatically felt desperate and unpleasant. For that reason, the students usually expected to form the groups based on their own preference so that they could explore and discuss the projects more comprehensively. Considering the students' learning convenience, teachers as facilitators have to open as wide as opportunities for them to decide whom they want to work with. Another example, the students tended to delay the projects until the last minute. As a result, they found that the performance was unsatisfactory and therefore they felt disappointed in themselves. This negative emotion made them shy and unconfident about their competence. This fact implies that postponing tasks in PjBL will result in the project failure because it is irrelevant with the principle of PjBL itself which prioritizes a student-driven learning model; encouraging the students to encounter the central concept and principles of a discipline [24][25][26]. In short, it is concluded that being disciplined is the primary concept the learners need to implement to complete the successful projects since PjBL demands high learning autonomy.

As mentioned earlier, the emotional experience has had a great impact on student motivation. Both positive and negative emotions have a direct impact on foreign language learners' motivation, as they can activate or deactivate foreign language learners' motivational behaviors [27][28]. Experiencing both types of emotions was considered important to the student's language learning process as it helps the student coordinate learning and emotions. Motivation was considered dynamic and evolving. Various emotional influences have influenced the motivational behavior of participants in this current study. The students experienced more negative situations than positive ones, but they turned them into positive results. The prevalence of negative activating emotions (fear, anxiety, sadness) in this study may have triggered student motivational behavior to overcome these negative emotions in future projects. I was even able to take advantage of my emotions.

4   Conclusion

This present study sheds light on the students' emotions amid the online speaking class using PjBL in a higher education setting. It was found that PjBL has brought advantages and disadvantages on the students' feelings which were like a pendulum swing; inspiring and interesting to further investigate. Students basically felt satisfied and delighted with the projects they had performed. This positive energy has built their learning motivation and pushed them to achieve their learning goals. Similarly, they also experienced frustration, despair, and unpleasantness once they were disappointed with the results. They worried about the negative evaluation from their teacher and partners which might cause them to experience losing face. However, these negative feelings sometimes impact positively on their learning motivation. They were encouraged to perform better in order to avoid similar mistakes in the following projects. Thus, different perspectives should be utilized to find other possibilities of PjBL. The

findings imply the importance of recognizing emotions when conducting PjBL in the online learning environment, because both teacher and students would anticipate the actions they can take to overcome the problems they encountered. This study has several weaknesses. Firstly, it only implemented a single technique to collect the data. Therefore, further study is recommended to follow-up the questionnaire by conducting an in-depth interview to investigate the case deeper. Secondly, this research was conducted for a specific purpose that was to recognize emotions from students' viewpoints only. Thus, to capture a more comprehensive understanding on the emotions in the PjBL-based online speaking class, the next researchers are encouraged to involve the teacher's emotions.

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