PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

AN ALTERNATIVE METHOD OF TESOL

Adriansyah A. Katili
Dosen Universitas Negeri Gorontalo
katiliadriansyah@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper is aimed at proposing the project-based learning as an alternative method of learning. This paper discussed why this method can be considered as an alternative method. Some discussions from some experts are presented.

Artikel ini bertujuan mengajukan metode pembelajaran project based learning sebagai sebuah alternative metode pembelajaran. Artikel ini membahas mengapa metode ini dapat dianggap sebagai sebuah metode alternative. Pembahasan dari beberapa ahli diuraikan dalam artikel ini.

Key words: Project-based learning, students' role. Teacher's role.

A. Introduction

What is project-based learning? What is the project that should be done by learners? What is the aim of the project? There are the questions that may arise in our minds. Project-based learning, as Nelson (1988) says is a Problem-Based Learning is an instructional methodology which is based on presenting the students an "ill-defined" problem for which they are to collaboratively research and propose potential solutions. Ill-defined problem means a problem with multiple possible solutions.

The key words in the above definition is problem solving. This implies that learners have a problem and they need to find the solution. However, there is no one single solution, they are some possible solution. This means that learners must find the most possible solution.

The word research implies that this method is also an inquiry- based learning. Learners are learning collaboratively to solve the problem. By doing this they will find new information or new knowledge. In other words, this is alsolearning by doing activity in which learners learn new thing by doing it. This is also known as constructivis

How do they find the solution to solve the problem? It is found in the next key word, i.e. collaborative research. Therefore, project-based learning is conducted to solve the learners' problem by doing collaborative learning. Therefore, this method is a collaborative learning. In this method of learning they can share their new knowledge and experience.

What is the teacher's role in this method of teaching? S/he plays role as suggested by Nelson (as follows) follows:

1. Facilitator. Teacher plays this role by creating real realistic and authentic problem and materials such as memos, letters, charts, articles, etc.This will facilitate students to think critically the problem (Stepien& Gallagher in Nelson, 1993.

2. Model. After providing the problem and materials, teacher acts as the model to think, such as: What do we need to know more about? Where did you find that information? What searching strategies did you use on the internet to locate that fact? How did your team effectively communicate? Teacher must answer this question by creating more questions which will push the students to answer the questions. While the students are thinking to find the answer and the solution for the problems, the teacher fades into the background.

3. Assistant, i.e. assisting students to information of the answer, but not answering the questions per see. This is to activate students to find the answer by themselves and so they can learn collaboratively and encourage them to think critically.

What are the students' role in Project-based Learning? There are some students' roles:

1. Doing the learning activity collaboratively.

2. Thinking critically during the learning process. This leads them to produce critical questions and finding the answer by doing research.

3. Communicating ideas and findings to the others.

4. Debating ideas freely.

5. Creating artifact.

(http://college.cengage.com/education/pbl/background.html#Instructional)

B. Method

How to apply Project-Based Learning? The first step isdoing need analysis. In this step teacher raises a question: "What have my students already known about the topic? What do my students need to know and to master? What is their problem related to their need?" Perhaps they need to express their ideas in English, however, they lack of vocabulary.How to do this? Gaer (1998) suggested listening to students to find their problem and to pay attention to what they read, write, and say about their life, family, job, etc.

The second step is determining the objectives. This step is based on the need analysis done in the first step. So, if the students need to improve the writing skill, then the objective will be to enable the students to write well in English. The objectives may be set by referring to Blooms' Taxonomies.

The third step is creating real and authentic problem and material. The material can be article, memos, short stories, novel, and any other things that can be used as the learning resources. The realistic and authentic problem must force the students to do a mini research. This will lead students to construct their findings and experience as their new knowledge

Fourth, implementing the project-based learning in learning activity. In this step students and teacher will do their role. Students will learn along with the plan, while teacher facilitates students by managing the activity.

The fifth step is doing assessment. In Project-Based Learning assessment is conducted in ongoing process. It is aimed at measuring the success of students' learning and at the same time is aimed at improving the process of learning.

The last is reflection. In this step teacher reflect the process of learning that has been recently conducted. Teacher raises some questions related to the process that has been conducted such as:

1. were the students happy?
2. were they active in doing the learning?
3. did they learn new things?
4. what lacked in the learning process?
5. what can I do to improve the learning process?

These questions are to improve the project-based learning.

C. Discussions

Two Reports on Project-Based Learning

The implementation of Project-based Learning has been reported as a successful one. Gaer (1998) reported that she applied this method in her class activity at the Visalia Adult School in central California in 1989 with immigrants from Southeast Asian Lao, Hmong, Mien, and Lahu refugees who had been in beginning-level ESOL classes since their arrival in the United States in the early 1980s as the students.

Gaer has identified that her students need to express their own culture in English. After the negotiation, she and the students agreed to write the receipt from their countries in English. They brought the ingredients to school and doing the cook, practiced the cooking and then complied the receipt they have written into a book. This helped them to build the sense of community which led them to learn collaboratively.

After the activity of writing receipt, the class had another activity, i.e. writing folktale. Gaer has noticed that the students needed to write the folktale from their countries, and tell them to their children. This idea was based on the fact that the students had minimal reading and writing skills but very strong oral traditions.

She did this project in collaboration with middle school in California, and the district librarian. She contacted the appropriate teacher who would like to join it enthusiastically.Gaer's students told the stories to the middle school students while the middle school students would write and illustrate them. Gaer's students would read it and criticize it for the accuracy.

What was the librarian's role? She provided the some information of how American tales were written in book and tells them in Gaer's class using oral and various ways such as

body languages, puppet, and role play when the students doubted that their English skills could convey the story. This is reported as the very successful learning process which improves the students' oral and written English skills.

The second Project-Based Learning is that conducted by Baş (2011) who investigated the effect of Project-based Learning on students' academic achievement and the attitudes towards English Lesson of 9th grade students in a high school in Nigde, Turkey. This research engaged 60 students distributed into two classes, i.e. control group and experimental group. This research found that project-based learning is more effective in the positive development of the students' academic achievement levels. At the end, it found that students educated by project-based learning were more successful and had a higher attitude toward the lesson than the students who were educated by instruction based on student textbook.

The Superiorities of Project-Based Learning

What are the superiorities of Project-Based Learning in English Class? The above discussion implicitly shows that there are some its superiorities. First, it is a student-centered learning. Since it is a student-centered learning, it is based on students' need. If the students need to improve their writing skill, then the class activity must be assigned to improve their writing skill.

Secondly, students are active learning and doing research. This leads them to learn to do the inquiry and so they will never forget easily the new things they have learnt. Thus, it is unlike learning in traditional way in which teacher is active to give instruction, transfer information which they can forget easily.

Thirdly, students learn collaboratively. Learning collaboratively requires communication among group members. In English class this is a good way of increasing communication. The students can increase their language competence in English if the teacher assigns them to communicate in English. Gaer's report on her activity shows how her students communicate in English when writing the folktale. She reports that her students had successfully learned English. The same also happened to Bas's experiment.

Fourthly, it can motivate students' to learn. Bas's experiment shows that the students became highly motivated when they were learning in project-based learning method. It is because they are very active which is different if they are treated in traditional way in which they are sitting passively and listening to the teacher talking all the time. In project-based learning they can express their ideas, debate freely, and show their existence. They are not treated as an empty vessel as the traditional teacher assumes.

Students treated as the empty vessels are very passive. Because they are empty, the teacher must fill them with information. This implies that it is the teacher who is very active while the students must be passive. In project-based learning students are assumed to have prior knowledge and so they can do something when triggered by the teacher. Gaer's experience discussed previously showed that her students have the prior knowledge of their folktale and they want to express it in English. Our students, even who are at elementary school, have prior knowledge which can be triggered to the new knowledge by activating it in a project which will increase their knowledge and skills in English.

In short, the superiorities of project-based learning lies on the practice of learning by doing. Students will not forget the new things they have learned if they learn it and at the same time practice it.

Project-Based Learning in Our Class Activity

Perhaps, we have been practicing project-based learning in our class activities. We often assign our students to do some activities in order that they can learn new thing. For example, we assign them to write a simple essay about their opinion of current issue, let say national examination. They can write whatever they think about this topic.

Or, perhaps some of us show them a picture, or a series of pictures. Every student will write a simple story based on the pictures. Every student will have different story according to the perception of each student. We do not want them to have the same because the most important thing is that they are able to express their idea in English freely. Also, at the beginning we tolerate their language error because we want to motivate them to learn. And then will have them read their story in class. Finally we will publish the stories in class book, or put them in school tabloid managed by the students. This motivates them because everybody will be proud if his or her work is published and read by many people.

I am sure that some of us have been implementing this method. However, do not realize that it is a project-based learning. If we have been implementing it, we can go on on doing some improving based on the reflection we do after the activity.;

In my class, at the English Department of Gorontalo State University, I have been practicing this method. In my class of poetry, I assign them to read poems and explain it in a short simple essay which consists of a brief analysis. Then I choose randomly some of them to present their analysis in class which leads them to a class discussion. This method makes every student be prepared and make his or her best.

After analyzing poems, I assign every body to compose his or her own poem. In 2009 I took my students from two classes to the beach of Olele with a project, i.e. everybody will write a poem about sea. All the students' poems will be compiled in a book. The students seemed to be happy with the project. Everybody wanted to compose a good poem. My point here is that every student will be creative, that they are not only able to analyze poems but also be able to compose poems and so they can express ideas in aesthetic language.

My point is that perhaps we have been applying project-based learning in our class activities without realizing that it is project-based learning. However, perhaps something lacks, i.e. we do not assign our students to produce a product at the end of course. The product might be a film, poem, a short story, or a simple essay which will be published. What is the purpose of this producing product? It is aimed at enabling students to learn from their product.

We also have practiced the traditional method of teaching, such as explaining the topic all the time—the students were passive. We have been treated them as the empty vessel who must be passive and the teacher were loading them actively. Or perhaps we applied grammatical method in which students were taught the grammatical rule of English. At the end of course we tested ttheir mastery of grammar. However, we ignore the use of language as a mean of communication. If yes, now we need to change it. And then let us compare them. In traditional method, students are not facilitated to apply their knowledge in real life. In English class they cannot practice their English. This in line with Moss who says that Project-based learning functions as a bridge between using English in class and using English in real life situations outside of class (Fried-Booth, 1997). It does this by placing learners in situations that require authentic use of language in order to communicate (e.g., being part of a team or interviewing others). When learners work in pairs or in teams, they find they need skills to plan, organize, negotiate, make their points, and arrive at a consensus about issues such as what tasks to perform, who will be responsible for each task, and how information will be researched and presented(1998).

D. Conclussion

As discussed previously, there are some superiorities of project-based learning. Students are engaged actively in collaborative learning to solve a problem. This facilitates them to communicate actively in the language being learned. It facilitated students to apply

their knowledge of language in real communication during the classroom activity. Teacher plays the role as facilitator who guides students to be active.

An implementer, Gaer and an expert Bas have proven that project-based learning has worked successfully. Gaer has implemented this method to increase her students' writing and speaking skills and it worked. Bas, in his experiment, has proven that project-based learning has increased the students' achievement in English class, and at the same time has increased their positive attitude to English.

From the discussion, I think that project-based learning is an alternative method in TESOL to improve the students' achievement in learning English.

REFERENCES

Gökhan Baş. *Investigating the Effects of Project-Based Learning on Students' Academic Achievement and Attitudes towards English Lesson in* "TOJNED : The Online Journal Of New Horizons In Education - October 2011, Volume 1, Issue 4"

(http://college.cengage.com/education/pbl/background.html#Instructional)

Gaer, Susan Less, *Teaching and More Learning* in "Focus on BasicsVolume 2, Issue D :: December 1998"

Moss, Donna and Carol van Duzer, 1998. Project-Based Learning for Adult English Language Learners. http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/ProjBase.html.

Nelson, Clark J. 1998. Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in the Foreign Language Classroom Clark_Nelson@dps.cudenver.edu