The Alignment of Teaching Methodology and Learning Outcomes: The Effect of Students' Presentations on the Development of English Language Proficiency of Adult Learners

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Abstract: The aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of using students' presentations on improving English language skills of adult learners and assess its potency to reach the expected learning outcomes. The research was conducted in the Continuing Education Center, Ishik University, Erbil, KRG, Iraq. The target population consisted of 23 English language learners (university graduates, and currently working in the sphere of Education). This study consisted of three major phases: first, explanation, preparation, presentation of the students' works on the topic of interest and observation of students' performance, second, teacher-student and student-student discussion of the video-recorded presentations. The last step was the application of the survey, which was designed to measure the participants' attitude toward the mini-projects they presented in the class. The data were analyzed by means of frequency and percentage, as well as a summarization of the discussions. The main findings show that students' attitude toward oral presentations, prepared on the topic of their own interest, have a positive attitude on students' motivation toward learning English and help the adult learners to improve their language in general, and the productive skills in particular.

Keywords*: Learning Outcomes, Adult Learners, Student's Presentations, Project Work*

1. Introduction

The current tendency in language teaching methodology seems to be more focused on young rather than on adult learners. However, the necessity of acquiring a foreign language has been felt more seriously as a result of globalization process as well as the need of lingua franca in all spheres of human life, such as politics, international relations, trade, medicine, media, science, and education. Many researchers have been done to find different approaches to teaching a foreign language to find the most beneficial methods and techniques to apply in language programs. The adult learners, in contrast to young learners, usually have clear stated learning outcomes (statements of what they want to know and able to do at the end of a language program) and limited time to achieve these goals. That is why the content of the language course should be developed and applied according to the needs of a particular group of students. This can be done by selecting only the material that will help learners to meet their expectations, accompanied with the tasks and activities that will promote the development of the desired skills on the appropriate level.

We noticed that most of the tasks and the activities provided in the textbook usually do not only leave students frustrated and bored but also do not support the development of the desired learning outcomes. In other words, the course content in many cases is not pertinent to what the adult learners want to know and able to do. At this point, we decided to turn to students' presentations as a technique to support students to meet their expectations of the language course.

Student's presentation is considered as a form of project-based learning and can be described as "a teaching method based on the communicative approach, a language acquisition theory that supports the use of natural communication and real-world activities in the classroom" (Yamak, 2008, p.20).

2. Configurations of Project Work

There are many ways project work might be applied in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms. The format, type, degree, etc. to be chosen for the project depends on a variety of factors, including curricular objectives, course expectations, students' level of language proficiency, students' interests, time scheduled for the project, availability of materials, etc. (Stoller, 2002).

Project work may differ according to the degree to which teacher and students decide on the nature and the set of activities related to the project. Henry (2012) proposes three types of projects according to the degree of teacher involvement into project work on different stages:

1. **Structured projects** (teacher is the leader who decides on topic, material, methodology, students' roles/responsibilities, the form of presentation, etc.)

2. **Unstructured projects** (students define the project in terms of topic, material, sources, roles, final product, etc.)

3. **Semi-structured projects** (teacher and students together define and organize the whole work, so some are decided by teacher, some by students)

Project work might be linked to real-world concerns or simulating real-world issues, or the mixture of both. Thus the product of project work further might be used in real everyday life or performed only to motivate/stimulate students' learning. For the development of one particular skill or practice of the material under study it is necessary to choose the right type of a project to reach the learning goals, so teachers should take into consideration that:

- structured projects may influence students' motivation, and they may not be interested in the project,
- Unstructured projects may not focus enough on the mastering of a particular skill or knowledge because students choose the type of sources and the way information is gathered.

That is why teachers might prefer to use semi-structured projects to guide students to the right direction. The data collection techniques and sources of information may be another variable to make projects differ one from another. Stoller (2002) distinguishes five project types according to the way information is gathered:

1. **Correspondence** projects, which may require communication with individuals, gathering information by the means of interviews, emails, phone calls, etc.

2. **Survey** projects involve students in creating surveys/questionnaires, collecting, analyzing and presenting data in class orally or submitting in written form.

3. **Encounter** projects are based on information received from a guest speaker, or individuals outside the classroom determined by the teacher or chosen by students themselves.

4. **Text** projects involve students in work on one particular text (or texts of one author), rather than on individuals.

5. **Research** projects require students to gather information and work with different written materials (library research).

The source of information the students use for their project work/s will mainly depend on the type of project work, knowledge and skills students are expected to acquire, consequently, they will simultaneously develop several skills, or focus on one particular one. For example, for the development of speaking skill students can be involved in correspondence projects, gathering information via oral communication with individuals, or/and present the obtained data orally. Thus, the focus will be on speaking and listening skills, and the other skills (writing and reading) will be involved on the secondary level.

The other way projects may differ is the way the product of work is presented/reported: **production project** (videos, radio programs, posters, written reports, brochures, menus, letters, etc.), **performance project** (oral presentations, drama, fairs, shows, debates, etc.), and **organizational projects** (planning an organization of clubs, conversation program, etc.) Projects in EFL may also differ one from another according to the skill, which is focused on development. According to Mukalel (2004), there are some skills and linguistic items to be focused on during the project work:

1. Pronunciation; Students may work on pronunciation of particular sounds, stress, intonation, pitch, etc. For example, students may record the speech of each other, listen and analyze it to find the most common mistake in the pronunciation of sounds. This work may help them to master their pronunciation being more aware or their own mistakes.

2. Grammar; for the development of grammar, students may work on written, oral or audio/reading (for example, to see how meaning may change according to the use of different structures) accuracy. For example, students of higher language proficiency may be involved in a project helping students of lower language proficiency.

3. Vocabulary; focusing on vocabulary enrichment students may be involved in a wide range of project work. For example, working on newspaper articles (better if the article is connected with students professional education) students prepare a booklet with crosswords or using the word list (prepared by the teacher or together with the students) student write a story trying to use every word from the list.

Vocabulary mini projects can also be used as preparation for another project, providing students with necessary vocabulary bank.

4. Listening; to develop students' listening skills, project work might be whether with recorded, or live speech of different people. For example, the teacher may organize a visit to a museum/organization/institution/etc. (where the guidance is available in English) where students will listen and take notes, then prepare reports about it.

5. Speaking; the speaking projects are usually focused on both speaking and listening and can be used to develop the two skills together (every speaking activity involves listening as well). For example, students may be involved in interview production, which can be audio or video-recorded, students/teachers may also organize fairs, days or weeks where the language of communication is English.

6. Writing; depending on what kind of writing is chosen to develop (formal or informal), students may be involved in projects like writing letters/e-mails, booklets, advertisements, articles, etc.

7. Reading; projects on reading in English are focused on a number of things: increasing reading speed, comprehension, proficiency in expression and recognition of vocabulary, or discourse development. For example, supervised library reading, class extensive reading (for instance, every day for 15 minutes, the number of pages may be recorded, then after a month to see how much their speed improved), students may be given a book to read (for example, for a week), then tested or attend a competition (the questions of which are prepared according to the book).

Very often project work helps to develop more than one skill simultaneously because real language communication is not a separate skill, but a combination of all. Students working on a listening project will also work on their writing, speaking and reading, working on writing projects students will also need to read, listen or speak, etc., thus, project work usually involves work on several skills, where one or two skills can be more stressed than others.

3. Project Organization

Each project is a unique work because each student or group of students has different background knowledge, attitude toward the topic, approach to learning, and creativity. However, projects can be changed and adapted for specific purposes/students' needs and each project should go through certain stages of development and fit the common framework.

Various researchers provide different frameworks for organizing projects. Legutke & Thomas (2014), for instance, suggest six stages of a project work:

1. Opening (stimulus - discussion about the idea of the project, definition of the objectives, language preparation/practice)
2. Topic orientation (discussion and sharing of information students have about the topic)
3. Research and data collection (design of written materials, preparation of questionnaires, maps, tables, photos, etc.; reading is practiced most on this stage)

4. Preparing data presentation (collating and organization of material)

5. Presentation

6. Evaluation

Once the stage requirements are fulfilled, students move to the next stage.

The most popular project work framework is provided by Stoller (2002). The ten-step model is an easy to follow the guideline of project work that helps students and teachers to develop "meaningful projects to facilitate content learning and provide opportunities for explicit language instruction at critical moments in the project" (Stoller, 2002, p. 111):

1. Agree on a theme

2. Determine the final outcome

3. Structure the project

4. Prepare students for the language demands of Step 5

5. Gather information

6. Prepare students for the language demands of Step 7

7. Compile and analyze information

8. Prepare students for the language demands of Step 9

9. Present final product

10. Evaluate the project

Working on a project needs a systematic approach to guide students through the process till the culmination of the end product. Following the steps of a framework chosen by the teacher, students, or both provides students with the information about what they are expected to do at every stage of the project work.

The guidelines for project work recommended by Legutke & Thomas (2014) and Stoller (2002) have very much in common and can serve many learning/teaching objectives. From our point of view, teachers/students might feel that it is necessary to modify the existing guidelines (if they choose the readymade ones) according to the learning/teaching objectives of the course/program/etc. changing the order of the stages and adding/skipping different tasks and activities.

4. Methods

The guideline of the project work used for the experiment of this study is a kind of synthesis of Stoller's and Fried-Booth frameworks discussed above. The first stage (before the teacher-student discussion of the ideas for the project topic) starts from teachers' preparation for the introduction of the project work to the class (project work objectives, such as skill(s) to be developed, the type of the project, and the form of final product). Then brainstorming with students about topics to work on occurs. On this stage students usually need some review of the project because students' background knowledge may not be enough to make a qualified decision (Fried-Booth, 1986). Thus it can be a good idea to ask students to make some preliminary research. This research can also help in shaping the project, distribution of the roles among students, and guide students while gathering information.

Once the material and information are collected, students analyze, synthesize, and combine the information. The practice shows that students need a preliminary presentation in class or to a teacher, to see what was done well and what needs to be changed or corrected because they may not see their mistakes and need someone else to help them. Having taken comments into consideration, students edit their work to prepare the final product. The process of the project work used in this research is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Guideline for the project "Exciting Science"

Title: Exciting science	
Stage 1.	1. Teacher asks students to indicate their own field/profession/major or the sphere of their own interest. 2. Teacher discusses with the students what they would like to work on.
Stage 2.	1. Teacher negotiates the format of the final product (preparation and presentation of the poster, power point presentation, etc.) 2. Students discuss the draft titles of their presentations (based on the task of step 1)
Stage 3.	1. Students together with the teacher agree on the major components of their projects (introduction, main part, conclusion) 2. Students decide what major questions they need to answer in their projects. For example: Why did I choose this topic? Why is it helpful? Etc.
Stage 4.	Students gather information on the selected topic.
Stage 5.	The teacher provides students with the expressions they can use in their presentations.
Stage 6.	With the help of peers and the teacher compile and analyze the gathered information.
Stage 7.	Students prepare the final product of their project
Stage 8.	Students show their product to the teacher and edit it (if necessary).
Stage 9.	Project presentation. All the presentations are video recorded.
Stage 10.	The video recordings of the presentations are watched and discussed.

After completion of the last stage of the project work procedure, to reveal the students' attitude toward using presentations in EFL class a questionnaire, being a quantitative method, was chosen as the method for the purpose of the research of this study.

The research was conducted in Continuing Education Center, Ishik University, Erbil, KRG, Iraq. The participants of this study were 23 EFL learners, whose age varied from 35 to 45, with a minimum bachelor degree in education. The research was completely on a voluntary basis, anonymous, and the obtained data was used only for academic research.

5. Results and Discussion

The survey used for this research consisted of 5 Likert scale questions with five answers varied from totally agree to totally disagree (Table 2). The received data was calculated with the help of Microsoft Excel, Office 2013.

Table 2: Questionnaire results

#	Question	Totally Agree	Rather Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Totally Disagree
1	I find presentations useful in improving my English Language	81%	17.2%	-	-	-
2	I would like to repeat this type of activity (presentation) more often	86%	8.6%	4.3%	-	-
3	Knowing the presentations are video recorded motivated me to prepare better product	77.4%	17.2%	4.3%	-	-
4	Watching and discussing video recordings showed me my weaknesses and strengths	94.5%	4.3%	-	-	-
5	The individual presentations made during the course helped me to reach the expected learning outcomes	90.1%	4.3%	4.3%	-	-

The results of the survey reveal students' higher satisfaction (81%) of implementation of individual presentations into EFL course content, expressing their desire to repeat this type of activity more often in future (86%).

Video recording of the presentations increased students' feeling of responsibility and attempts to produce a better product (77.4%). Moreover, further discussions of the video recordings helped learners to reveal their strength and weaknesses (94.5%), which is crucially important for the development of their learning strategies and teaching methodology and course content, enabling students and the teacher to understand what they need to work on. Finally, 90% of the participants (21 out of 23) believe that individual presentations made during the course helped them to reach the learning outcomes they expected to master at the end of the course.

6. Conclusion

Project work, applied to the process of learning contributes to student learning and program improvement in a number of ways:

- They focus on a real-world subject matter that can sustain the interest of students.
- They require student collaboration and, at the same time, some degree of student autonomy and independence.
- Project work is a process and product-oriented, with an emphasis on one particular skill or integrated skills and end-of-project reflection.
- Project work requires information gathering (or preparation for information gathering) which involves work with different written materials, from different sources, of different genres, etc., consequently, it improves students' English language proficiency.
- Project work increases students' interest and motivation toward learning English.

Project work in this study was assumed as an activity to promote the alignment between teaching methodology and students' learning outcomes, which puts increased demands on both the learner and the teacher. That is because for a project to be successful both the teacher and his/her learners have to be prepared for a new style of working. However, the satisfaction of achieving the learning goals clearly outweighs all possible problems.

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