

Undergraduate Foreign Language Learners Perspective on Project Based Learning

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Abstract: Project Based Learning has a long history which received contributions from many famous names. Projects are of great importance in the process of education due to the helpful features it provides for the teachers and students. The type of projects used can vary, but that does not change the fact that it can be used by teachers to have students apply the knowledge they have learned. The purpose of this research was to explore the perspectives of students on Project Based Learning to determine whether this method was viewed positively. This study transpired in the Education Departments of Tishk International University in Erbil, Kurdistan. A survey of seven questions was administered in this research, and the total number of 100 surveys was gathered from students of the Tishk International University Education Faculty. The students were members of the English Language Teaching, Biology, Physics, and Math departments and varied within stages, which ranged from 2nd, 3rd, and 4th. Their participation in the survey did not affect their grades and was strictly voluntary. The statistics analyzed in this study presented that students perceive Project Based Learning as effective, and the majority recommend this method of teaching and learning.

Keywords: Project Based Learning, Perspective, Students, Project, Education

1. Introduction

According to the Cambridge Dictionary online, a project is “a piece of planned work or an activity that is finished over a period of time and intended to achieve a particular purpose” (Project, n.d.). A particular purpose of teachers using the Project Based Learning (PBL) method is to have learners apply and improve their knowledge. The purpose of this study is to grasp the perspective of the students on Project Based Learning. Specifically, this research is being conducted to gather the views of students on learning through the Project Based method from the Tishk International University Faculty of Education (Biology Education Department, Math Education Department, Physics Education Department, and English Language Teaching Department) in Erbil, Kurdistan. The conduction of this research is important in order to understand the perspectives students have of the PBL method based on their past experiences as well as whether it is viewed as an interesting and beneficial educational technique.

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The hypothesis of this research is: Project Based Learning is viewed as an efficacious method of teaching and learning in the perspectives of students from the TIU Education Departments.

This research strives to form responses to these inquiries:

- What types of projects are presented to the learners?
- Does Project Based Learning help students in developing their academic skills?
- What are the learners' reactions towards PBL?
- Is Project Based Learning an efficacious method of educating?

2. Literature Review

2.1 What is Project Based Learning?

Project Based Learning is a method of learning that is learner-centered and facilitated by educators. Through the PBL method, students' pursuit of information is conducted by making inquiries that provoke their natural inquisitiveness. The educator oversees the queries and research that were constructed by the learners (Bell, 2010). Project Based Learning is an educating technique where learners receive knowledge and skills through productivity for a prolonged amount of time. This time is used to explore and answer intriguing inquiries, issues, and challenges (Buck Institute for Education, n.d.-a).

Moreover, Erdem and Akkoyunlu (2002) cited in Çelik, Ertaş & İlhan (2018) stated, Project Based Learning is a method that centers upon projects progression, creativity, preparation, and formation. PBL places prominence on students planning their process of learning either independently and/or cooperatively for the purpose of achieving goals, evolving collaborative skills, accountability, gathering informative content, and arranging the gathered informative content. Project Based Learning concentrates on finding authentic answers to issues. After recognizing the issue, learner groups build and exhibit their comprehension of an issue through presenting answers and providing a model they have created (Stanford University, n.d.). The projects conducted during Project Based Learning are termed as project work. It is defined as the development and the introduction of a project that may be conducted independently or cooperatively with colleagues (Thornbury, 2006).

According to Gawron (2016), Project Based Learning is the continuous action of learning about diverse topics concurrently, which is accomplished through directing learners to recognize authentic issues of the world using research. Learners develop answers to the issues by the use of proof to back a claim and introduce the answers using a multimedia method from the "21st century tools" (ibid. p.2). Krauss and Boss (2013) formed a descriptive statement about PBL which states that through Project Based Learning, learners receive essential "knowledge, skills, and dispositions" through exploring open-ended inquiries for the formation of an understanding which will be conveyed in "purposeful ways" (p.5). According to Moursund (1999), Project Based Learning has an important feature of not directing the attention of projects towards learning the information of something, but that it places emphasis on being productive and is center on taking action.

Project Based Learning is a manner of educating, which uses the tool of projects to lead students through an educational learning process. This technique leads students into a process that uses their organization

skills and active search for knowledge to gather information and achieve the purpose of the project. PBL has students acquire information and skills through curiosity, determination, activeness, creativity, and constant productiveness. This method has learners focus on discovering answers to problems/issues, then creating a product to display their process and result of the discovery.

2.2 History of Project Based Learning

Project Based Learning has become very popular in recent years, but this method was shaped long ago. The method of receiving knowledge through doing was advocated by Confucius and Aristotle. Nowadays, classes that apply Project Based Learning include features from Socrates demonstration of learning by asking questions, inquiring, and thinking critically. A philosopher of education named John Dewey questioned the traditional form of teaching and learning. The traditional form placed learners as passive receivers of information and educators as dispatchers. Dewey supported learning through “active experiences” that equip learners for the “ongoing learning about a dynamic world” (Boss, 2011, para. 3).

Moreover, Boss (2011) mentioned, a medical practitioner named Maria Montessori established a method towards Early-Childhood Learning that caused a global movement to occur in the 20th century. Montessori presented by example that education occurs not through listening but through experiences. Furthermore, a psychologist named Jean Piaget provided information on the way people of various ages create significance from experience. Piaget’s insights were used as the basis of the constructivist method, where learners develop their knowledge through questions, investigations, interactions, and reflection of those experiences (ibid.).

The technique of learning through doing or experiences was supported by several individuals, such as Confucius, Aristotle, Socrates, Dewey, Montessori, and Piaget. These individuals have provided substantial evidence and reasoning that supports the application of Project Based Learning. Presently, the PBL method of teaching and learning is receiving more attention, and the integration of this method in educational facilities displays characteristics from the famous supporters/contributors.

2.3 Types of Project work

Teachers may assign students different types of project work depending on the educational outcome attempting to be reached. The format of the project may vary depending on several factors, such as the educator and the learners’ control on the assembling of information and the method of presenting the content. The table below (Table 1) provides detailed information about the different types of project formats and their characteristics:

Table 1: Different types of projects

Level of educator and learners' control:	Assembling of information:	Method of presenting the content:
<p>According to Henry (1994) cited in Stoller (2002), project types can vary and be placed in three forms. The projects are placed in these forms based on the level of decision-making the educators and learners have on the form and organization of activities pertaining to the project. The three project forms are structured, unstructured, and semi structured projects.</p>	<p>According to Stoller (2002), projects are differentiated into five forms in relation to the accumulation and origin of the information. The five forms are research projects, text projects, correspondence projects, survey projects, and encounter projects.</p>	<p>According to Hainse (1989) cited in Stoller (2002), projects vary in the manner that the content or product is presented. The three forms of projects under the method of project presentation are production, performance, and organizational projects.</p>
<p>Structured projects are centered on the educator's decisions about the features of the project, such as topic, materials, etc.</p>	<p>Research projects place importance on library research for the collection of data.</p>	<p>Production projects include the construction "of bulletin board displays, videos, radio programs, poster sessions, written reports... and so forth" (p.111).</p>
<p>Unstructured projects are focused on the learners determining the features of their project such as topic, materials, etc.</p>	<p>Texts projects comprise of working on texts instead of interacting with individuals.</p>	<p>Performance projects may take the form of "staged debates, oral presentations, theatrical performances, food fairs, and fashion shows" (p.111).</p>
<p>Semi structured projects are based on the cooperation of the educator and the learners in arranging the sections of the project or through dividing the organization into parts to be completed by the educator and the learners separately.</p>	<p>Correspondence projects entail a communicative exchange with a person(s) as well as the collection of information through methods of contact such as letters and phone calls.</p>	<p>Organizational projects involve the arranging and forming "of a club, conversation table, or conversation-partner program" (p.111).</p>

	Survey projects necessitate the formation of a survey that is used for the collection and examination of information from the participants.	
	Encounter projects occur by communicating and interacting with a person or speaker, not a part of the class.	

With that stated, Thornbury (2006) provides examples of projects, “A typical project might be producing a magazine or website out of individually written articles. Or it might be the scripting, or rehearsals and performance – and even filming- of a short play or puppet show. Another project could involve the writing-up and presenting of the results of a survey that has been conducted with, for example, the users of a local airport” (p.183). These examples are used to provide insight on the different kinds of project ideas which may be used to facilitate students learning.

2.4 Advantages of Project Based Learning

Project Based Learning is an educating technique, which has several advantages. Thomas (2000) cited in Sirisrimangkorn (2018) states, Project Based Learning is mentioned to be a model of educating that arranges the education of learners on projects. The advantages of PBL involve motivation, cooperation skills, subject matter knowledge, language aptitude, learner morale, autonomy, and capabilities of determining decisions. Moreover, in the research of Kavlu (2017), an interview was conducted with the individual that established Project Based Learning in Fezalar Educational Institutions. During the interview, the topics of advantages and disadvantages of PBL were discussed. The interviewee stated that the application of Project Based Learning caused no serious issues, but did provide various advantages. The advantages were that projects cause learners to become familiar with working methodically, the application of Project Based Learning lead learners, educators, parents, and school administration to contribute to the process of PBL, and displaying projects makes the atmosphere of the school more appealing and assists learners to learn from their classmates.

The Buck Institute of Education (n.d.-b) stated Project Based Learning can bring change to the learners, particularly those that lack educational opportunities. PBL can change learners’ educational encounters in several ways. Firstly, learners can answer issues that they deem valuable by being active in projects that relate to their reality. Secondly, learners of PBL receive a deeper comprehension of the information and a clearer ability to use the information in newly encountered circumstances. Thirdly, learners’ occupational

interests can grow through interaction with grownups, industries, and organizations. Fourthly, Project Based Learning could bring change to a learner and provide a feeling of purpose. Fifth, projects cause learners to receive skills that are important for life and occupations. Sixth, PBL provides learners and educators with the chance to work together in projects that cause them to experience the enjoyment of learning. Seventh, learners adore using a range of technological instruments to assist in creating their final product to be presented.

Project Based Learning contains several advantages/benefits that may affect the students, teachers, administrators, and parents. A few advantages of PBL include the ability to stimulate the involvement of parents and administrators, create a pleasant environment, helps students learn from their peers, change their learning experiences, and provide opportunities in education. Project Based Learning can be an extremely effective method of educating when applied properly and considered carefully.

2.5 Disadvantages, Interference, Pitfalls of Project Based Learning

Project Based Learning does have some strong advantages, but with it comes some disadvantages, interferences, and pitfalls. According to Hertzog (1994), the efficiency of Project Based Learning faces interference from the physical arrangement of the educational facility, the limited learning time provided, and the apparent requirement that the educators should schedule time to complete each academic topic. Kavlu (2017) stated that it is possible that learners will not feel enthused to finish the project due to the absence of motivation or interest to keep them focused. Also, Project Based Learning entails group work, which might lead to differences and conflicts to occur. Group work in a project makes evaluating the contribution of each student difficult. The difficulty of evaluation could result in a few learners attempting to learn and be productive, which may cause other group members to leave the project to those individuals.

McKay (2017) stated five frequent issues (pitfalls) that a teacher might come across while applying Project Based Learning in the classroom. The first issue presented relates to the deficiency of linking projects to the student's reality (real world). The second is placing attention on the product more than the process. The third is not arranging learning based on intended standards and abilities. The fourth pitfall is attempting to assess the learners separately in group work. The fifth and final issue a teacher may face is failing to create a cooperative schoolroom culture. Project Based Learning contains a few disadvantages/obstacles that affect the educator and the learners. During the application of PBL, the educator and learners may face obstacles of time, motivation, connecting projects to reality, cooperation between learner's/group member, and evaluation of each group member. These obstacles/disadvantages can be overcome through proper planning and careful management of PBL.

Project Based Learning is a concept that is defined in a multitude of ways. The main reoccurring themes these multiple definitions contain are that it is a method that uses projects as a medium for learning through activeness/experiences by searching for answers to inquiries or problems. Project Based Learning was a concept developed many years ago and has been fortunate enough to receive support from famous names that provided evidence in support of the application of learning by doing or experience. Moreover, the project element of PBL provides a chance at diversifying the assignment due to the various types of project forms that are provided. The Project Based Learning method contains a few disadvantages that can be

overcome through proper planning and organization. Regardless of the disadvantages, the PBL contains several strong advantages that encourage its application in the classroom.

3. Methodology

3.1 Setting and Respondents

The students of the Education Departments of Tishk International University located in Erbil, Kurdistan contributed to this research by taking time to provide their responses to the survey. The Education Department of Tishk International University consists of four departments, which are English Language Teaching (ELT), Biology, Physics, and Math. The TIU Educational departments students volunteered to complete an online Google forms survey that was composed of seven questions about Project Based Learning. This survey was used to gather data about the TIU Education department's students' perspective on Project Based Learning. The total number of surveys the researcher received was exactly one-hundred. The responses per department consisted of twenty-seven students from ELT, twenty-four from Biology, twenty-four from Physics, and twenty-five from Math. The respondents that completed the survey varied from different stages within these departments. These stages are the academic level the students are currently studying in, such as 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year from the four departments of Tishk International University Faculty of Education.

3.2 Survey Description

Google Forms was used to construct and share the survey with the respondents. The survey questions were constructed using inspiration gathered while reading about Project Based Learning as well as writing the literature review for this research. The researcher constructed a survey of seven questions. These questions were presented in different forms such as multiple choice, checkboxes, and a Likert scale that provided options that ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

4. Results

4.1 Survey Results

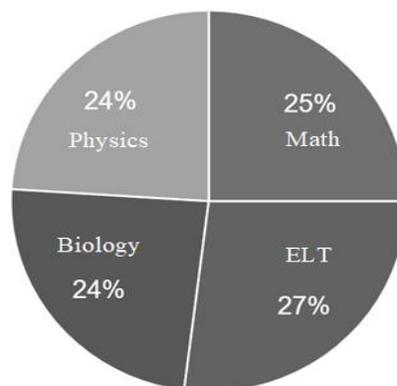


Figure 1: Question 1: What department are you from?

The survey included a question that inquired about the participants' membership to one of the Education Departments of TIU. The researcher collected a total of one-hundred surveys completed by the students of the TIU Faculty of Education. The results from the surveys provided the information that 27% of the respondents were students from the English Language Teaching Department. The participants of the survey from the Math Department consisted of 25%. The respondents from the Biology Department and Physics Department were an equal 24% each. The percentages per department are close in number and will help to provide diverse perspectives on Project Based Learning from students of different areas of study.

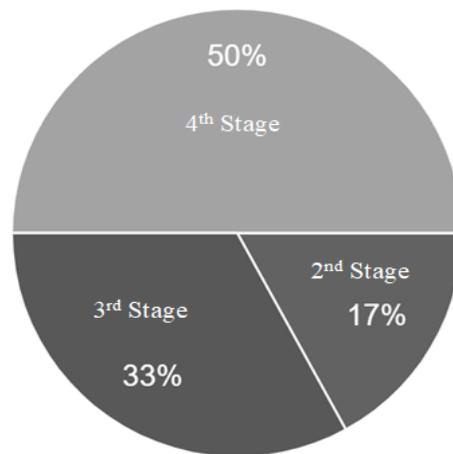


Figure 2: Question 2: What stage are you in?

The results of the one-hundred surveys collected showed that the respondents of the survey differed in their academic stages. The Tishk International University Educational Faculty students that participated in the survey were from different stages of the English Language Teaching, Biology, Physics, and Math Departments. Figure 2 shows that the majority of the participants (50%) were members of the 4th stage academic level. The survey results showed that 33% of the participants were from the 3rd stage level. The final 17% were students from the 2nd stage. The differences in academic stages provide diverse perspectives on PBL based on their experiences.

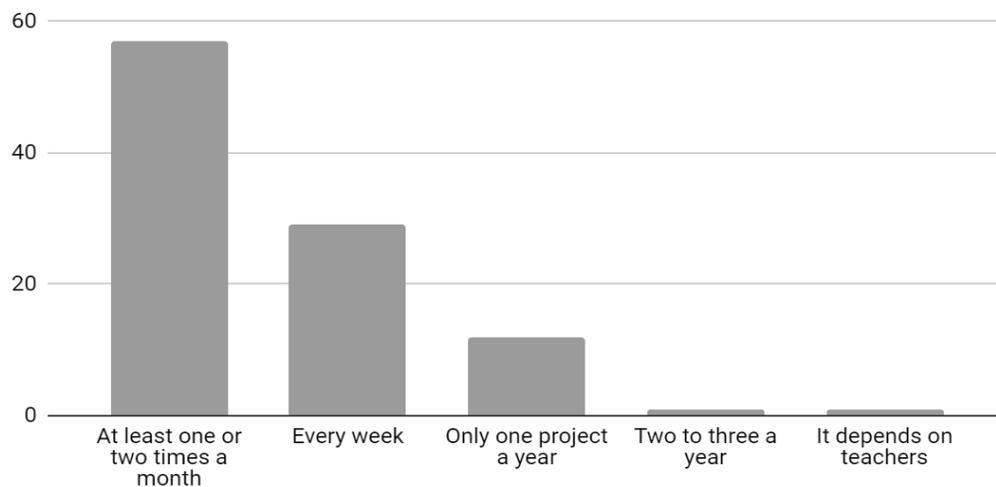


Figure 3: Question 3: How often do teachers ask you to do projects?

The chart shows that 57% of the students answered that their teachers ask them to do projects at least one or two times a month. The option of the teachers assigning projects every week was selected by 29% of the participants. 12% replied that they are asked to do one project a year. An open response choice was provided for the respondents to provide their answers. 1% wrote the response that teachers ask for two or three projects a year. Another 1% wrote that it depends on the teachers how often projects are given.

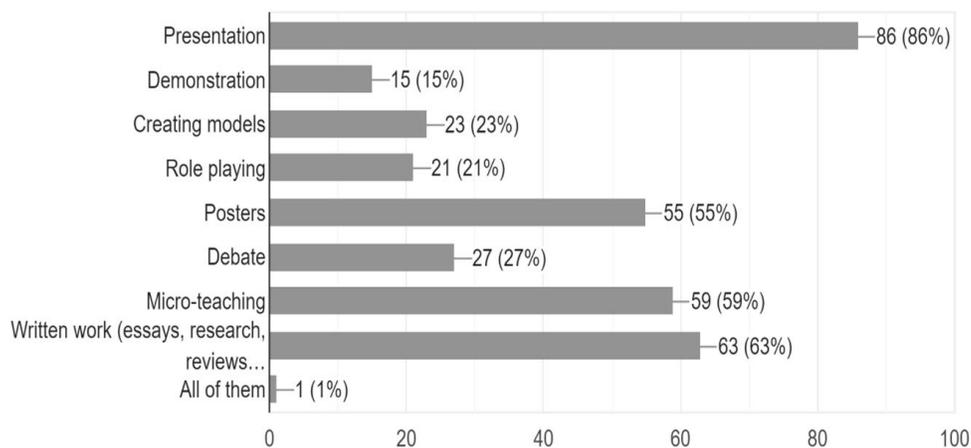


Figure 4: Question 4: What kind of projects are you asked to do?

The survey included a question about what kind of projects students are asked to do, and it allowed them to select multiple options that related to them. The table presents the types of projects the 100 respondents may have been required to complete. The results show that 86% of the students selected presentations as one of the projects they were assigned. The option of demonstration was chosen by 15% of the participants as a part of their answer. 23% of survey takers had picked creating models, and 21% had chosen role play as a project they have been asked to do. Surprisingly, 55% of respondents stated that posters are a type of project they are asked to complete.

Figure 4 show that 27% of the participants have included debate in their response. 59% of the respondents marked the box of microteaching as an assigned project. Written work received 63%, which makes it the second common project among the survey takers after presentations. The survey included an option that enabled the students to include their answers that were not listed in the choices. The answer all of them was provided by 1% of the respondents.

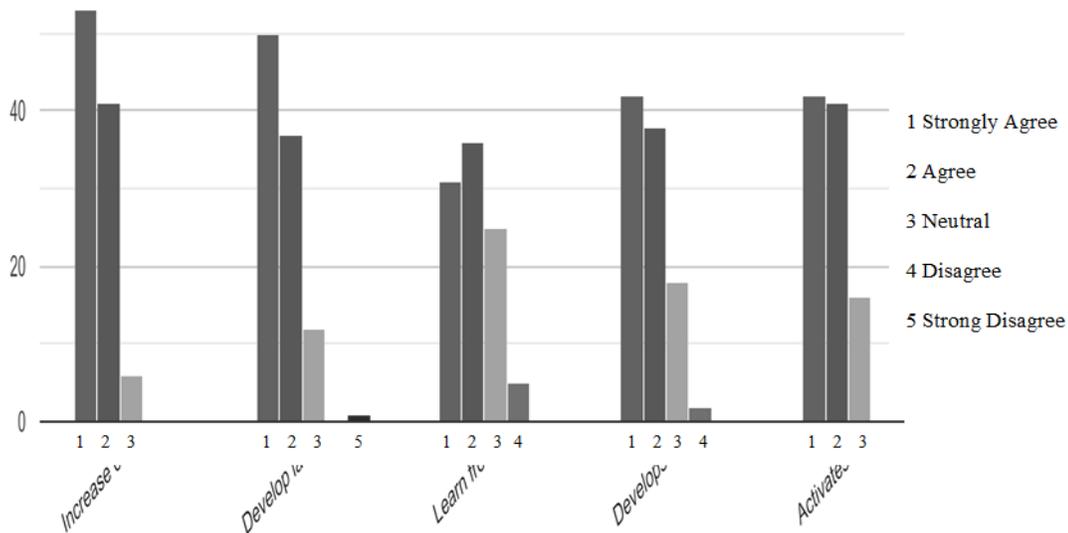


Figure 5: Question 5: Working on projects helps me: Increase creativity, develops language skills, learn from my classmates, develop my skills in technology, and activates my learning styles.

The table shows the results of multiple sub-questions that are linked by a main title question (working on projects helps me). A Likert Scale that ranged from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree was used to gather data for these questions. Figure 5 shows five sets of bars for the five sub-questions the survey contained. The first set of bars represents the result of the first question, which was working on projects helps me increase creativity. 53% of the participants strongly agreed, and 41% agreed that projects help increase their creativity, while 6% were neutral. The second set of bars displays the survey takers responses towards projects helping to develop language skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The results showed that 50% strongly agreed and 37% agreed, while 12% were neutral, but 1% strongly disagreed against projects developing language skills.

The third set of bars located on figure 4.5 displays the results for the question that projects help students learn from their classmates. The results show that 31% strongly agreed, while 36% agreed, and 25% of the participants were neutral, but 5% disagreed with projects helping them learn from their classmates. The fourth set of bars provides the survey takers responses towards projects helping to develop their technological skills. The responses acquired displayed that 42% strongly agreed, while 38% agreed, and 18% of the participants were neutral, but 2% disagreed that projects help develop their skills in technology. The fifth set of bars in the table provides the respondents' answers about projects activating their learning styles, such as visual, auditory, and physical. The table shows that 42% strongly agreed and 41% agreed, while 16% of the participants were neutral, which means that they did not deny or accept that working on projects helps activate their learning styles.

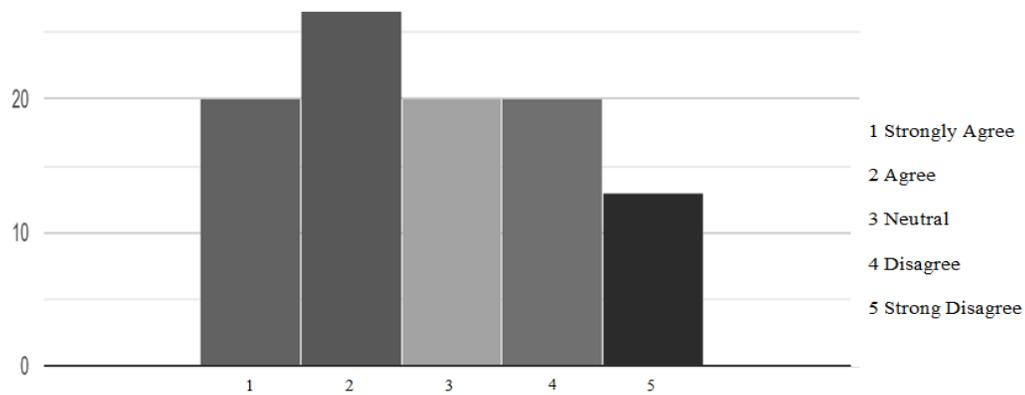


Figure 6: Question 6: I prefer regular homework to project work.

The figure above shows the results of a statement provided in the survey about preferring regular homework to project work. The responses acquired revealed that 20% of the participants strongly agreed that they favor regular homework than project work. The option of agree had the highest percentage with 27% of participants answering that they prefer regular homework. The results showed that 20% of the participants were neutral in their preferences towards homework and project work. Another 20% disagreed with the statement and preferred project work over regular homework. The final 13% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement and favored project work.

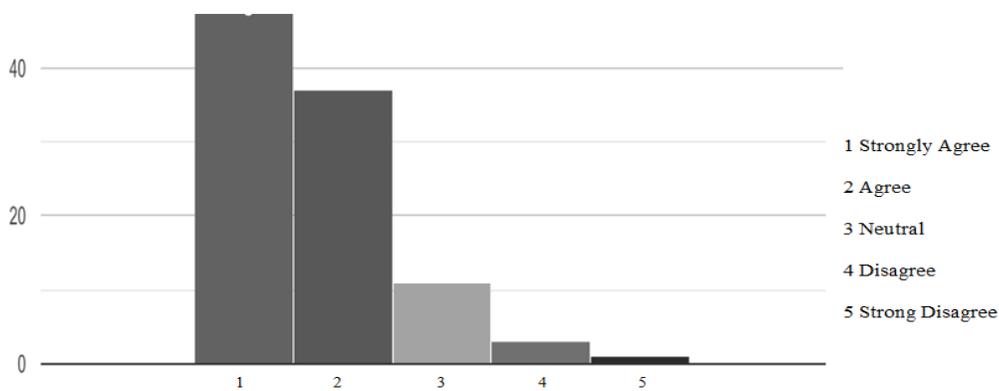


Figure 7: Question 7: I would recommend using projects for different courses.

The survey presented the respondents with a statement of if they would recommend using projects for different courses. The results revealed that the majority (48%) of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement. 37% of the participants replied that they agreed with the statement and would recommend using projects for different courses. The survey showed that 11% of respondents selected neutral as their reply towards the statement meaning that they do not encourage or discourage the use of projects for different courses. Surprisingly, 3% of the survey takers answered that they disagreed with the statement. The final 1% strongly disagreed with the statement and would not recommend using projects for different courses.

5. Limitations

The limitation of this research was that it only included the Educational departments of one university in Erbil called Tishk International University. The researcher applied one survey to the learners of the Departments on the Faculty of Education of Tishk International University. The number of participants may not represent the opinion of all the students of the region and the country. That is why it is necessary to conduct further research to make generalizations for wider populations.

6. Discussion

The topic of student perspective on Project Based Learning contains a significance which can be seen from its application on students of different levels of education and in various fields of study. The findings of this study showed the students reactions towards the Project Based Learning, which was seen to be efficacious. Regardless of students preferring homework, the results show that the majority of students support applying PBL into different courses because working on projects helps them develop skills. The study's results presented that the students had a positive view towards PBL and the advantages they received from the method. This is in agreement with the results of a study conducted on Civil Engineering students where the greater number of survey takers had optimistic feelings in regards to PBL and its uses (El-Maaddawy, Al Jassmi, & El-Hassan, 2018).

Moreover, the results of the survey presented that the majority (50%) of participants strongly agreed with projects helping develop language skills. Similarly, it was found in research conducted in Guatemala that most of the high school students agreed that PBL was mostly effectual towards learning English (Adams, 2018). Likewise, the results of research conducted on EFL learners provided evidence that the application of Project Based Learning tasks centered on drama presented learners with the chance to exercise their oral language skills. The research used students' statements as supporting evidence, and one student commented that the drama project provided the opportunity to exercise speaking from start to finish. Also, the project encouraged learning and speaking in English, which helped the student learn the four skills of language (Sirisrimangkorn, 2018). These three studies acquired the results that Project Based Learning assists with language learning and becoming familiar with the skills of language.

This study's results showed that most education department's students strongly agreed that working on projects increases their creativity. This can be compared to a similar result from research about learners' views on developing life skills in PBL School. The students of the PBL school viewed creativity as one of the vital life skills. The results of the research included students' comments about PBL schools helping them become more creative. One student commented, "It helped me be more creative with what I do. Here you really create everything for yourself" (Meyer, 2015, p.80).

The comparison between these results presents evidence that supports the idea that PBL is looked upon positively, helps develop language, and increases creativity. Moreover, the similarities between the results of this research to those researches conducted in different countries and educational levels enabled the ability to make generalizations that PBL is effective and viewed optimistically regardless of the limitations. Furthermore, a small percentage of negative results were received from the survey of this current research. The reasons for these negative results can vary depending on multiple aspects such as

project form, topic, goals, individual/group project work, and so on. These aspects of projects can affect an individual's motivation level and lead to the formation of negative perspectives.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The reason for the conduction of this research was to gather the perspectives of Tishk International University's Education Faculty's learners on Project Based Learning to comprehend if it was perceived as an efficient technique in education. This study contains background information about Project Based Learning, such as the meaning, history, types of projects, advantages, and disadvantages. The survey results received displayed that a shocking number of students strongly agreed that working on projects helps increase their creativity (53%) and develops their language skills (50%). Moreover, the majority (48%) of the Education Department students from TIU recommend using projects for different courses. Although 27% of the students answered that they prefer regular homework over project work, it cannot be ignored that most of the participants responded positively to the questions about projects assisting them in developing, increasing, or activating different aspects of their learning. An understanding is drawn from the results that the method of Project Based Learning is regarded in a positive perspective from the TIU students of the ELT, Biology, Physics, and Math departments. Furthermore, the importance of identifying the effectiveness of a teaching and learning method such as Project Based Learning is crucial in ensuring that students are receiving a motivating and advantageous learning experience. Thus, this quote of John Dewey about education states it best, "Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself" (Singh, 2006, p.127).

Based on the literature review and the collected data, the following recommendations were derived:

- Project Based Learning should be used to educate students through active and physical involvement in the production process of a project.
- A variety of projects should be supplied to consistently keep learners' interest and motivation.
- In PBL, the project characteristics should be taken into consideration by the teacher and students to select the appropriate form of project to meet requirements or purposes.
- A project that is well managed and has clear objectives can increase learners' skills as well as the chance of reaching a successful outcome.

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