

# EFL HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES OF PROJECT-BASED LEARNING IN TEACHING SPEAKING SKILL

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**Abstract:** This research aimed to investigate teachers' perceptions and practices of project-based learning (PBL) in teaching speaking skill at some high schools in a Central Vietnam province. The mixed methods research was adopted with the population of twenty-five teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL). The questionnaire, interviews, and class observations were employed to collect data for the current study. The findings revealed that the majority of the teachers were fully aware of the necessity of PBL in teaching speaking and the benefits of PBL in improving students' speaking skill, creating meaningful contexts to practice speaking English, developing students' affective factors, encouraging students to speak English through integrative skill practice and promoting learner autonomy and skills of the 21st century, such as problem-solving skill, negotiation skill, and technological skill. Despite the perceived benefits, EFL teachers reported that they did not apply this method frequently in their actual practices. Another finding showed teachers' most encountered difficulties, including teachers' lack of knowledge and experience of using PBL in teaching speaking, time pressure, and students' low level of English proficiency.

**Keywords:** Project-based learning, teaching speaking skill

## 1. Introduction

Speaking skill plays an important role in English language teaching in Vietnam as the country is in the process of deepening into international integration. However, numerous students still have difficulties in speaking in English (Sundkvist & Nguyen, 2020). Some sources of difficulties that hinder students' speaking performance are students' lack of background knowledge, lack of confidence and the anxiety which are usually raised because of several factors, namely nothing to say, inhibition, low or uneven participation and mother-tongue use (Ur, 2000). Considering students' problems, a great deal of interest in the use of PBL has been increased. Regarded as a bridge between using English in class and using English in authentic situations outside the class, PBL contributes to the increase of students' L2 oral performance (Wahyudin, 2016). Specifically, when working on projects, students are engaged in purposeful communication in a natural context and participating in meaningful activities encourages students to use the English language authentically. In other words, during PBL implementation, students can gain enjoyable learning experiences that allow them to use English to interact with other students in order to create their final product. In addition, the process that leads to the end-product of project work gives students a chance to develop their confidence in speaking. Besides, PBL also promotes students' lifelong learning by cultivating a passion for learning and equipping students with the skills and mindset needed for lifelong curiosity beyond the classroom. Consequently, students' motivation and enthusiasm for learning English as well as their language awareness are becoming increasingly evident (Nguyen, 2011).

In general, a wide range of research has been carried out in the field of PBL in the world and in Vietnam (Habok & Nagy, 2016; Hidayat et al., 2020; Ho, 2019; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019). However, there remains a significant gap in understanding how PBL is perceived and applied in the process of teaching speaking in high school contexts in the central part of Vietnam. Therefore, this study was set out to bridge this gap by addressing the three research questions:

1. What perceptions do EFL high school teachers in a Central Vietnam province hold about PBL?
2. What are the teachers' practices of using PBL in teaching speaking skill?
3. What challenges do the teachers face when using PBL in teaching speaking skill?

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Definitions of PBL**

Researchers have suggested different ways of defining PBL. According to Markham et al. (2003), PBL is a teaching method that involves students in learning knowledge and skills through an extended inquiry process structured around sophisticated, authentic questions and carefully designed products and tasks. Similarly, Bell (2010) claims that PBL is an innovative method of learning that allows students to drive their own learning through inquiry, as well as work collaboratively to research and create projects that reflect their knowledge. In other words, with PBL, students are encouraged to work collaboratively, gather information from various sources as well as use their knowledge of the topics and skills to solve real-life problems.

### **2.2 Benefits and challenges of using PBL in teaching speaking skill**

Each teaching approach has its own benefits and challenges when implemented and PBL is not an exception. The application of PBL has brought several benefits in teaching speaking English to learners. Firstly, PBL can create a positive environment to practice speaking English (Hidayat et al., 2020). With PBL, students have a chance to use the target language in a natural context and be involved in meaningful activities which lead to authentic language use. Secondly, PBL promotes students' motivation, engagement, enthusiasm, and confidence when speaking English because project work is designed and carried out based on students' interests and the specific context (Nguyen, 2011). Student choice is one reason for the increase in student motivation because students can select what resources they will use to gain better understanding of a given topic. Besides, PBL offers a chance for students to improve their collaborative skills (Nguyen, 2011), such as carrying out activities in groups, exploring knowledge and experience collaboratively, monitoring and obtaining feedback from other members of the group. To be specific, by working collaboratively, students learn how to communicate and how to have their own discussions and actively listen to what their group members are contributing. Last but not least, PBL helps students develop the skills of the 21st century, such as problem-solving skill, communication skill, and critical thinking skill (Bell, 2010). In other words, students who are involved in PBL research and gather in-depth information on a specific topic, and they also look at a topic from different perspectives. As a result, students gain more understanding of the content and feel more engaged with what they are learning.

Despite the positive impacts of PBL, its implementation poses several challenges which affect the success of PBL in teaching speaking skill. The first challenge is teacher preparation. Teachers who have insufficient understanding of PBL as well as teachers who do not have much

experience in implementing PBL may feel overwhelmed at first because they have to formulate guiding questions, facilitate students to work productively and use appropriate assessment tools to assess students' work (Railsback, 2002). Another challenge that teachers encounter is classroom management (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019). PBL is a great framework for students to practice collaboration within groups. However, students who are not well-prepared for working in groups may have obstacles in negotiation. Thus, in groups in which students are having difficulties working together, more time is spent on organizing team members and less on the task of actual learning. The next challenge is time pressure. Habok and Nagy (2016) argue that PBL is a "highly time-consuming activity and requires great attention to detail" (p. 3). In other words, PBL takes a lot of time for the teachers to solve different issues, which means not having time available for the material or content. The issue of assessment is another challenge raised by PBL. Some teachers may be resistant to PBL because they feel that it is difficult to assess student learning. To be specific, teachers are grading authentic projects instead of grading paper tests. In addition to teachers' difficulties, Thomas (2000)'s review of relevant research points out challenges related to students, including students' lack of research skills, motivation, access to appropriate technology, and their insufficient background knowledge.

### **2.3 Related studies**

The use of PBL in teaching speaking skill in different contexts has been explored. Concerning teachers' awareness of PBL, Hidayat et al. (2021) conducted a case study which aimed to examine the English teachers' perception towards teaching speaking using PBL. The researcher employed the questionnaire, the interviews and focus group discussion as the research instruments in collecting the data from three high school teachers. The results indicated that the participants believed that PBL enabled them to accomplish their teaching speaking more effectively as this method motivated students and improved students' interest and enthusiasm in learning. The findings also showed that teachers perceived PBL as a useful method in teaching speaking to EFL students.

In addition, previous studies have looked at teachers' implementation of PBL in teaching speaking skill and teachers' challenges when using this method in their teaching. For instance, Kusumawati (2019) explored the teaching of speaking using PBL in Indonesia. The classroom action research design was employed to know the process of teaching and learning of speaking using PBL. The findings revealed the teacher's four stages in implementing PBL in speaking lessons, namely speculation, designing the project activities, conducting the project activities, and evaluation of the project work. It was also indicated that limited time and students' low engagement in the lesson were the problems that teachers had during the teaching process with PBL. Another finding showed that the implementations of PBL had some positive effect on the students' achievement.

In an investigation on how PBL activities as a teaching strategy influence students' oral communicative competence, Bakar et al. (2019) conducted an intervention which consisted of 12-week lessons using PBL teaching strategy. The participants of this study were 44 diploma students enrolled in a Communicative English course. The data from pre-tests and post-tests, as well as the questionnaire revealed a significant improvement in the learners' oral communicative competence and a high perception of PBL by the learners. More specifically, the findings showed

that PBL was not only perceived to be suitable and enjoyable by the learners, but was also found to be effective for these learners who were low proficient in English.

Regarding the use of PBL in the Vietnamese context, Nguyen and Nguyen (2019) focused their research on exploring the difficulties the EFL teachers encountered when implementing PBL in reality. The study employed a descriptive approach, specifically combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection tools, including a questionnaire and interviews. The findings of this study indicated that the teachers faced major challenges in time management, adaptation of project activities, student support, and project assessment.

Overall, the previous studies reviewed above have examined how PBL is used in teaching speaking, how it affects students' speaking skill, the challenges teachers face when using PBL and perceptions towards this approach. Kusumawati (2019) has discussed the stages of applying PBL while Bakar et al. (2019) have scrutinized students' achievement after the treatment with PBL. Hidayat et al. (2021) has drawn on teachers' positive perceptions and opinions towards this method. However, few studies have provided an insight into the teachers' perceptions and practices of PBL in teaching speaking, especially among EFL high school teachers. Particularly, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no study has been done to investigate what high school teachers perceive about PBL in teaching speaking skill, and how it is applied in the high school classroom in the current context of English teaching and learning in Central Vietnam. This lack of exploratory research becomes central to my work and serves as its motivation and rationale. This research, therefore, aims to fill the gap of research by exploring the perceptions and practices of high school teachers in a Central Vietnam province on PBL in teaching speaking skill.

### **3. Research methodology**

#### **3.1 Research design**

In order to answer the research questions, this study took mixed methods research design involving qualitative and quantitative approaches as the main research approach. The use of the mixed methods research in the present study is due to the fact that the mixed methods approach enables the researcher to combine qualitative and quantitative research strengths and reduce the weaknesses of both approaches (Dörnyei, 2007). In the present study, teachers' perceptions could be quantified by obtaining the data through the questionnaire. In addition, classroom observations and semi-structured interviews were employed to collect in-depth data and find more insights about teachers' perceptions and practices of PBL in teaching speaking skill.

#### **3.2 Research setting**

This research was carried out at seven high schools in a Central Vietnam province during the school year of 2022 – 2023. In this academic year, the series of textbooks Global Success were used for grade 10 students and for grade 11 and 12 students, the new English textbooks were used in all high schools in this Central Vietnam province. To achieve the targets of the general education English language curriculum which is developing students' communicative competences through active and creative learning activities (MOET, 2018), PBL is regarded as an efficient approach to be applied in teaching speaking.

### **3.3 Participants**

This study involved 25 teachers of English from seven high schools in a Central Vietnam province. The participants' teaching experience ranged from 3 to 29 years and their ages were from 26 to over 50. These participants were chosen because their teaching areas and teaching conditions were different and their students' level of English proficiency were various. These would help the researcher have a more diverse and accurate view on teachers' perceptions and practices of PBL in teaching speaking skill.

### **3.4 Data collection instruments**

#### **3.4.1 Questionnaire**

There are several reasons why the questionnaire was used for the participants in the present research. Firstly, the questionnaire provides researchers with the chance to collect a large amount of information in a short amount of time (Dörnyei, 2007). Besides, questionnaires are believed to provide respondents with the sense of anonymity and the general freedom from bias on the part of an interviewer (Dörnyei, 2007). Additionally, the researcher can use some statistical analysis softwares to analyze data collected through questionnaires and get the results quickly.

In the present study, the questionnaire was designed and delivered to the participants to collect information about teachers' perceptions and practices of PBL in teaching speaking skill. The first section of the questionnaire intended to collect the participants' demographics. This section composed of questions asking for the participants' background information related to their name, gender, age, and experience of teaching English. The second section aimed to gain an insight into the participants' perceptions and practices of PBL in teaching speaking. All the items were categorized into three main clusters. The first cluster aimed to obtain data about the teachers' perceptions towards the use of PBL in teaching speaking skill. The second one explored teachers' practices of using PBL in teaching speaking skill. The last cluster elicited the challenges faced by the teachers when using PBL in teaching speaking skill. The questionnaire was in English and Vietnamese to maximize understanding and enhance the accuracy of teachers' responses.

#### **3.4.2 Class observation**

Class observation was employed in this study to shed light on the actual teaching of the participants because it enables the researcher to obtain direct evidence of the participants' behaviour and allows the collection of a large amount of descriptive data (Bryman, 2012). In the present study, the researcher took the role of a non-participant in observation and collected classroom happenings that demonstrated teachers' in-class practices of PBL in teaching speaking skill. In other words, the researcher only observed the classes and recorded the class activities without any involvement. Specifically, class observations were conducted with three participants who taught English at three high schools in a Central Vietnam province. Alongside the recording of the class activities during the observations, classroom observation checklists were used.

#### **3.4.3 Interview**

For the present study, a semi-structured interview format was employed to complement the questionnaire results as it allows the researcher to develop understanding with the participants and thus to obtain richer data (Anderson & Burns, 1989). The interview questions in this study were designed according to different themes following key research issues. The interview

questions were mainly based on the questionnaire but to expand the data and gain further information. Thus, the interview questions composed of three main clusters with six questions in total. The first cluster included questions 1 and 2, which aimed to explore how the teachers perceived PBL in terms of the teachers' attitude towards the necessity of using PBL in teaching speaking as well as the teachers' perceived benefits of PBL in teaching speaking skill. The second cluster consisted of questions 3, 4, and 5, which aimed to investigate the teachers' in-class practices of PBL in teaching speaking, including teachers' steps and frequency of implementing PBL, project activities in teaching speaking skill. The last cluster collected the data about the main challenges faced by the teachers when using PBL in teaching speaking skill.

### **3.5 Data collection procedure**

The questionnaire and interview questions of this study underwent a piloting process to identify areas for improvement in the design. After receiving feedback from the pilot respondents, modifications were made to the initial questionnaire and interview questions to enhance the quality of the questionnaire and interview questions and to make sure that the meanings were clear and straightforward to the participants.

For the data collection procedure, the data for the present study were collected following a Sequential Explanatory Design. First, the questionnaire was distributed to 25 teachers of English from seven high schools in a Central Vietnam province. The responses from the questionnaires were stored and analyzed to provide statistical data for the findings and discussion. There were also three classroom observations in three separate classes at three high schools in a Central Vietnam province. After the data from the questionnaire and class observations were collected, three observed teachers, along with three other teachers from the surveyed group were invited for face-to-face interviews. Each interview lasted from 15 to 20 minutes and was recorded for later analysis.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

For the quantitative data, the questionnaire results were analysed with the use of the SPSS program. The results of the Descriptive Statistics Test and the Multiple Response Frequencies were illustrated using tables to facilitate visible demonstrations and were discussed with those from the interview and class observation data. Qualitative data collected from the interviews and class observations were analyzed using thematic analysis. To be specific, the researcher read through each data set and highlighted the phrases and sentences that related to the main research issues. Next, relevant segments were initially coded. Besides, to identify common themes, the data were compared across different data sets. These themes were then reviewed, refined, and renamed. Finally, the data were presented in terms of how the participants perceived and used PBL in teaching speaking skill as well as challenges facing the teachers when using this method.

## **4. Findings**

The Scale Test is run to check the reliability of the items in the questionnaire. The results show that the Cronbach's Alpha of the questionnaire is .861, which is higher than that of the acceptable value (at 0.70). This means that all the items in the questionnaire have relatively high internal consistency.

## 4.1 Teachers' perceptions of using PBL in teaching speaking skill

### 4.1.1 Teachers' perceptions on the necessity of PBL in teaching speaking skills

Statement 1 of the questionnaire deals with the teachers' perceptions of the necessity of PBL in teaching speaking skill. The results of the descriptive statistics test are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Teachers' perceptions towards the necessity of PBL in teaching speaking skill

Statement		Min	Max	Mean	SD
1. PBL is necessary in teaching speaking skill	25	2	5	4.04	.889

As presented in Table 1, the mean score of statement 1 on the teachers' perceptions of PBL in teaching speaking skill is remarkable ( $M=4.04$ ). Specifically, the mean score indicates that most of the teachers at some high schools in a Central Vietnam province fully recognized that using PBL in teaching speaking skill is necessary and useful. In addition, the standard deviation ( $SD=.889$ ) which is less than 1 means that the differences in the participants' responses are not considerable.

### 4.1.2 Teachers' perceptions on common PBL activities in teaching speaking skill

This category, which consisted of six items, explored the teachers' perceptions of common types of PBL activities used in teaching speaking skill.

**Table 2.** Teachers' perceptions on common PBL activities in teaching speaking skill

PBL activities in teaching speaking skill can be	Min	Max	Mean	SD
2. Designing a poster and presenting	2	5	4.24	.779
3. Giving powerpoint presentations about a topic	1	5	3.92	.862
4. Making a video	1	5	3.88	.927
5. Role-playing	2	5	4.08	.759
6. Drama	2	5	4.32	.802
7. Telling a story	2	5	4.12	.781

It is clear from Table 2 that the mean scores of these statements range from 3.88 to 4.32. Thus, the results support the conclusion that participants' level of agreement on common types of PBL activities in this study is high. Besides, the SDs of all the statements in this category are smaller than 1, which means that the opinions of the participants are not very different. The results show that the mean values of item "Drama" and item "Designing a poster and presenting" are the highest ( $M=4.32$  and  $M=4.24$ , respectively). Therefore, it can be said that the majority of the EFL teachers believed that drama and designing a poster are the most common types of PBL activities in teaching speaking skill. It is worth noting that a considerable number of participants hold an opinion that "Telling a story" and "Role-playing" are also used as common PBL activities in teaching speaking skill ( $M=4.12$  and  $M=4.08$  respectively). However, when it comes to "Giving powerpoint presentations about a topic" and "Making a video", these two items get the lowest mean scores ( $M=3.92$  and  $M=3.88$  respectively). In short, most of the teachers have high agreement on the types of PBL activities that result in both process and product orientation.

### 4.1.3 Teachers' perceptions on the benefits of PBL in teaching speaking skill

The responses to eight items in this category of the questionnaire provided the data on the EFL teachers' perceptions of the benefits of PBL in teaching speaking skill. A Descriptive Statistics Test is run to check the mean scores of the items in this category to explore how these different issues are perceived by the EFL teachers.

**Table 3.** Teachers' perceptions of the benefits of PBL in teaching speaking

<b>Benefits of PBL in teaching speaking skill</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
8. encouraging students to speak English through integrative skill practice.	1	5	3.72	.936
9. enhancing students' self-instruction skill, self-direction skill, and self-assessment skills	2	5	4.20	.816
10. helping students to develop problem-solving skill, research skill, and negotiation skill.	2	5	4.16	.850
11. making students more confident when performing in English.	2	5	3.92	.862
12. increasing students' motivation in speaking.	2	5	4.20	.866
13. providing meaningful contexts for students to practice speaking.	1	5	3.96	.889
14. facilitating the type of language behavior that leads to fluency.	2	5	4.48	.770
15. helping students widen their vocabulary and grammar structures	2	5	4.24	.879

As indicated in Table 3, the mean scores of this category range from 3.72 to 4.48, which is a high mean value in comparison with 5.00. This shows that there is no significant difference in the teachers' opinions about the benefits of PBL in teaching speaking skill. In addition, the SDs of these statements range from .770 to .936 ( $<1$ ), which means that the responses of the participants are almost the same. From the results in Table 3, it can be seen that the mean value of item "PBL facilitates the type of language behavior that leads to fluency" and item "PBL helps students widen their vocabulary and grammar structures" are the highest ( $M=4.48$ ,  $M=4.24$  respectively). This indicates that most of the respondents believed in the benefits of PBL in creating speaking practice context and thus helping students become fluent speakers. Additionally, most of the items in this sub-cluster have mean scores which are over 4.00. This means that the participants had good perceptions toward the benefits of PBL in teaching speaking skill. It is interesting to emphasize that the mean value of the item "PBL encourages students to speak English through integrative skill practice" is the lowest in this category ( $M=3.72$ ). The data from the interviews also support the results obtained from the questionnaire and provide more explanations. The following excerpts provide insights into what the teachers thought about the benefits of using PBL.

*While working on the project, students assigned tasks to their peers depending on their abilities and preferences to share responsibility. This promoted learner autonomy. (Teacher 5)*

The findings from the participants' interviews suggest that PBL developed learner autonomy, which was important to improve students' speaking skill. It is obvious from the results that in the process of implementing PBL, the students accepted the responsibility for all the decisions concerned with learning and when working in groups without the direct control of the teacher, the students learnt to compile and analyze the information collected by themselves. Thus, this process enabled students to fulfill the criteria of self-instruction and self-direction.

Besides, the majority of the teachers recognized the benefits of PBL in teaching speaking skill regarding the benefit in widening students' vocabulary and grammar structures, helping students to utilize and develop their topical knowledge, and boosting students' confidence when speaking English. For example, some participants stated:

*When working on a project, students had to discuss with their friends in English, read more information in the textbook or other materials, so PBL activities helped to enhance students' vocabulary, grammatical structures, and pronunciation. (Teacher 2)*



In her response, Teacher 2 perceived that PBL offered students an opportunity to use the language to communicate, listen to their partners' speaking, and exchange ideas with their group members. In addition, when students worked on a topic, they had to research and search for information from different sources. By doing these, students could be exposed to the target language and build their knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Teacher 3, a less experienced teacher, seemed to focus more on the development of students' affective factors. She explained that the meaningful communication created by PBL promoted students' confidence when speaking in English. In fact, with PBL, students had a chance to practice speaking with their friends in a cooperative learning environment. Thus, the more students practiced speaking, the more confident they became.

Teacher 5 from a high school in town added an interesting benefit that students got from working on project work. The following excerpt showed her opinion.

*I think working on PBL activities helped students improve their technological skills, such as Internet search, using various applications, and audiovisual editing and designing. (Teacher 5)*

The findings highlight that when doing projects, students practiced searching for different sources of information on the Internet and used various technological softwares, such as Microsoft powerpoint, Prezi, Canva or softwares to create visuals for their presentations. This would result in students' improvement in technological skills.

## 4.2 Teachers' practices of using PBL in teaching speaking skill

### 4.2.1 Teachers' Frequency of using PBL in teaching speaking skill

Item 16 of the questionnaire was designed to explore the teachers' frequency of implementing PBL in teaching speaking skill.

**Table 4.** Descriptive statistics of teachers' frequency of using PBL in teaching speaking skill

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Frequency of using PBL in teaching speaking skill	25	2	4	3.08	.640

The data from Table 4 shows that the mean score of this item is 3.08. It means that most of the participants agreed that they "sometimes" utilized the PBL activities in their teaching of speaking skill. In addition, the SD value is less than 1 (SD=.640). This indicates that the differences in the respondents' answers are not considerable.

### 4.2.2 Reported common PBL activities used in teaching speaking skill

In order to discover common PBL activities used in teaching speaking skill, item 17 of the questionnaire was designed with multiple choices of the types of activities. The results are quite different from the findings in the previous section, which examine the teachers' perceived PBL activities in teaching speaking skill. The results show that all of the participants chose "Giving powerpoint presentations about a topic" as the most common PBL activity that they used in teaching speaking skill (100% of cases). "Designing a poster and presenting" ranks second regarding the common PBL activities used (68%). It is interesting that the number of the teachers who chose "Drama" or gave other activities are small (4%). It is obvious that there is a difference between the teachers' perceived PBL activities in teaching speaking skill and their actual practices. While the majority of the teachers perceived that "Drama" was the most common type

of PBL activity in teaching speaking skill as presented in the previous section, the number of the teachers who actually applied this type of activity in their classes is not high (4 %).

It is remarkable that all the participants of the interviews shared the similar opinion as they reported that giving powerpoint presentations about a topic was their preferable activity and they did not use drama for their own reasons. As noted in her interview, Teacher 1 expressed that PBL using powerpoint presentation was appropriate for her students' level, her teaching context, and it fulfilled her expectations of a PBL activity for teaching speaking.

*I often ask my students to give a powerpoint presentation about a topic... This type of activity meets some of my requirements, such as saving time, being conducted easily, and being suitable for students' ability.* (Teacher 1)

In addition, the interviewed teachers explained the reasons why they did not use PBL focusing on drama. The youngest EFL teacher stated that she perceived the benefits of using drama in teaching speaking skill, but one important thing in teaching was that she had to adjust her teaching practices to suit her students' ability, and interest. Teacher 3 believed that PBL focusing on drama was not applicable to her current students' ability.

*I never use drama in teaching speaking skill because it is difficult for my students to memorize the scripts and do the acting at the same time.* (Teacher 3)

In fact, reported common PBL activities show that there are differences in the teacher's perceived PBL activities and the teachers' actual practices.

#### 4.2.3 Reported steps of using PBL in teaching speaking skill

In the process of discovering the reality of using BPL in teaching speaking skill, ten steps of the project work of Alan and Stoller (2005) were used to investigate the steps which the teachers applied in their teaching.

**Table 5.** Descriptive statistics of reported steps of using PBL in teaching speaking skill

Statements	Min	Max	Mean	SD
18. My students and I agree on a theme for the project.	2	5	3.72	.678
19. My students and I decide the final outcome of the project.	2	5	4.12	.781
20. My students and I discuss the structure of the project.	2	5	3.76	.597
21. I prepare my students for the demands of information gathering.	2	5	3.76	.723
22. I let my students gather information by themselves.	3	5	4.36	.810
23. I instruct my students on how to compile and analyze data.	1	5	3.12	.881
24. I let my students compile and analyze the gathered information.	3	5	3.84	.688
25. I prepare my students for the language demands of the final activity.	1	5	3.16	.898
26. I let my students present their project.	3	5	4.28	.737
27. I ask my students to evaluate their project and make recommendations used to enhance their future projects.	2	5	3.88	.707

The results show that among the ten steps investigated in this category, item 19 "My students and I decide the final outcome of the project" (M=4.12), item 22 "I let my students gather information by themselves" (M=4.36), and item 26 "I let my students present their project" (M=4.28) get the mean scores which are higher than 4. This means that most of the participants offered strong support to these steps. The mean scores of these three items range from 4.12 to 4.36, which indicates that the majority of the teachers "usually" applied these steps when using PBL in teaching speaking skill. In addition, the standard Deviation of these five steps range .737

from to .810. Thus, the participants' responses are quite similar. Moreover, most of the other steps in this category receive the mean scores that are higher than 3.70. It means that the participants agreed that they also conducted these steps frequently. Remarkably, the steps that take the low mean scores are item 23 "I instruct my students on how to compile and analyze data" ( $M=3.12$ ) and item 25 "I prepare my students for the language demands of the final activity" ( $M=3.16$ ) and). The mean values of these two steps are lower than 3.2. It means that these steps were not used often by the participants.

The class observation showed the way Teacher 1 implemented PBL in her speaking class. In the getting started lesson, the teacher gave instructions for project work and guided students on how to find materials for their project. The teacher stated that students could contact her for more information if needed. In the speaking lesson, the teacher started the lesson by giving the aims of the activity. After that, she let each group of students present their final products. When students had finished presenting, the teachers gave feedback on students' projects and she also asked each group to reflect on their own performance. The teacher also delivered the assessment checklist for students to evaluate other groups before each group started their presentations. From the findings, it is obvious that the observed teacher didn't apply all the ten steps proposed by Alan and Stoller (2005). Teacher 6 expressed that her procedure of implementing PBL in teaching speaking skill was flexible and it depended on her students' level of proficiency. If students' level of proficiency were low, she would give them some suggestions on the structure of the project, ways to analyze gathered information or the language demands of the activity. With good students, she let them decide on their own.

### **4.3 Challenges faced by teachers when using PBL in teaching speaking skill**

The responses to 8 statements in this category of the questionnaire provided the data on challenges faced by the teachers when using PBL in teaching speaking skill. The difficulties were categorized into three areas: teacher-related challenges, student-related challenges and external factors. From the results, the mean scores of the items regarding teacher-related challenges range from 3.20 to 4.08. Most of the participants believed that assessing students' project was not a real challenge for them as the mean score of this item is not significantly different from 3 ( $M = 3.20$ ), the accepted for the neutral level. On the other hand, item 28 ( $M = 4.08$ ) ranks the highest mean of all. It indicates that most of the participants highly agreed that lacking knowledge and experience of using PBL in teaching speaking skill was a challenge for them. Regarding student-related challenges, the mean scores of the two items are relatively high. Specifically, most of the participants considered students' low level of English proficiency and students' lack of motivation for doing speaking projects as their challenges ( $M = 4.00$  and  $M = 3.68$ ). In terms of external factors, the mean score of the item regarding time for PBL activities was rather high ( $M = 4.04$ ). It seemed that it was a challenge for the participants when using PBL in teaching speaking skill as it was time-consuming.

When the EFL teachers were asked the question about their obstacles when implementing PBL in teaching speaking skill, there were various opinions from the respondents and these mentioned challenges were also similar to three areas investigated in the questionnaire. Besides, additional issues concerning the schools' facilities and students' working in groups were reported from the participants' interviews. Teacher 4 from a rural high school reported that the school's insufficient facilities was one of the obstacles in her teaching practices as the classrooms at her

school were not equipped with computers and Internet connection. It is obvious that different types of projects need different materials and facilities to be conducted effectively. Therefore, if the schools do not provide teachers with sufficient facilities, it will be hard for them to apply PBL in their teaching.

## 5. Discussion

The first research question investigated teachers' perceptions of PBL in teaching speaking skill. The findings from the questionnaire and the interviews revealed that most of the participants highly appreciated the importance of PBL in teaching speaking skill. To the PBL activities in teaching speaking skill, among the PBL activities listed, the findings from the questionnaire showed that most participants perceived drama, designing a poster and presenting, and giving presentations about a topic as common PBL activities in teaching speaking skill. Besides, the findings indicate that most of the participants were fully aware of the benefits of PBL in teaching speaking skill. The participants believed that PBL would help to improve students' speaking skill by helping students widen their vocabulary and grammar structures, and facilitating the type of language behavior that leads to fluency. These results are in line with the findings of Sirisrimangkorn (2021) that working on the projects got students involved in speaking tasks in an authentic environment, which could utilize their knowledge, language, and speaking skill. Besides, similar to previous findings on the benefits of PBL in teaching speaking skill, in this study, the participants believed that PBL created meaningful contexts to practice speaking English. Specifically, the situations in PBL activities encouraged students to communicate with their friends and allowed students to think about how they had to respond to their interlocutors (Sirisrimangkorn, 2021). Additionally, compared to Bakar et al. (2019)'s results, this study provided a general view on the benefit of PBL in developing students' affective factors, including motivation and confidence. Moreover, PBL was perceived by the participants to promote learner autonomy and skills of the 21st century by enhancing students' self-instruction and self-direction skills and self-assessment skills as well as helping students to develop such skills as problem-solving skill, research skill, and negotiation skill. These perceptions are well-matched with the findings in previous studies that students fulfilled the criteria of self-instruction, self-direction, self-access learning and individualized-instruction in every stage of PBL (Yuliani & Lengkanawati, 2017).

The second research question explored teachers' practices of PBL in teaching speaking skill. The data from the questionnaire and the interviews indicated that most participants agreed that they occasionally applied PBL in teaching speaking skill. In fact, there is a contrast in the teachers' perceptions and their frequency of using PBL in teaching speaking skill. While most of the participants believed that PBL was important in teaching speaking skill because of its obvious benefits, not many teachers carried out it in their actual practices frequently. This result is relevant to the findings of Ho (2019) which showed that the majority of the teachers did not often ask their students to conduct projects in their classes. The findings from the questionnaire also showed that the participants acknowledged the investigated steps which were proposed by Alan and Stoller (2005). However, the participants revealed that their procedure of implementing PBL was not fixed as their application depended on different factors, such as class time, students' level of English proficiency, the fixed curriculum, and school facility.

The third research question discovered the challenges faced by the teachers when using PBL in teaching speaking skill. In detail, the qualitative and quantitative data demonstrated that the most common difficulties were the teachers' lack of knowledge and experience of using PBL in teaching speaking skill, time pressure when planning and implementing PBL activities in teaching speaking skill, and students' low level of English proficiency. The findings also confirmed that the teachers also had limited time to implement all the steps in PBL. Therefore, sometimes some steps were not implemented. In fact, these challenges are comparable to the results of some previous studies conducted in EFL settings. For example, Sartika et al. (2022) disclosed that the teachers' lack of knowledge of PBL implementation and inadequate time in using PBL were the main challenges the EFL teachers faced.

In conclusion, there is a mismatch between the teachers' perceptions and practices of PBL in teaching speaking skill. The difference lies in how the teachers perceive the importance of PBL and the frequency of implementing it in teaching speaking skill in reality. There is also a discrepancy between the teachers' perceived common PBL activities and the types of PBL activities they used in their actual practices.

## 6. Conclusion and implications

This study was conducted to investigate how EFL high school teachers in Central Vietnam perceived PBL in teaching speaking skill. It also aimed to explore their practices of PBL in teaching speaking skill. From the findings of the study, it is suggested that universities of education should include PBL approach in their curricula to equip pre-service teachers with sufficient knowledge of this approach when they are at university. In addition, the educational administrators should organize workshops, seminars, conferences, and training courses or design a forum to provide in-service teachers essential information of project implementation so that the teachers have a chance to improve their professional preparation. For EFL teachers, it is necessary that the teachers offer more support and scaffolding to students in need in all stages of a project. Before students do a project, it is important to equip them with basic skills, such as information gathering, compiling, evaluating, synthesizing, making comparisons, using graphic organizers, and making a presentation. During the process of implementing PBL, teachers should manage time to support every group of students. After students finish presenting their final products, it is necessary for teachers to implement appropriate types of assessments to help students reflect on their own work and learn from their strengths and weaknesses. Besides, English teachers can cooperate with each other to create the audience for their students' presentations. Last but not least, teachers should instruct students on how to do projects carefully so that students with low levels of English proficiency know what to do and they will not think that PBL activities are difficult for them.

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# NHẬN THỨC VÀ THỰC TẾ SỬ DỤNG PHƯƠNG PHÁP HỌC THEO DỰ ÁN CỦA GIÁO VIÊN TIẾNG ANH TRUNG HỌC PHỔ THÔNG TRONG DẠY KỸ NĂNG NÓI

**Tóm tắt:** Nghiên cứu này nhằm mục đích tìm hiểu nhận thức và thực tế sử dụng phương pháp học theo dự án của giáo viên trong dạy kỹ năng nói ở một số trường trung học phổ thông trên địa bàn một tỉnh miền trung Việt Nam. Phương pháp nghiên cứu hỗn hợp được áp dụng với 25 đối tượng nghiên cứu, là giáo viên tiếng Anh trung học phổ thông. Dữ liệu được thu thập thông qua bảng câu hỏi, phỏng vấn và quan sát lớp học. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy phần lớn giáo viên nhận thức đầy đủ về sự cần thiết của việc sử dụng phương pháp học theo dự án trong dạy kỹ năng nói cũng như lợi ích của phương pháp này trong việc cải thiện kỹ năng nói cho học sinh, tạo bối cảnh có ý nghĩa để học sinh luyện nói tiếng Anh, phát triển nhân tố cảm xúc của học sinh, khuyến khích học sinh nói tiếng Anh thông qua thực hành các kỹ năng tích hợp, phát huy tính tự chủ của học sinh và các kỹ năng của thế kỷ 21 như kỹ năng giải quyết vấn đề, kỹ năng đàm phán và kỹ năng về công nghệ. Mặc dù nhận thức được các lợi ích của phương pháp học theo dự án, các giáo viên cho biết họ không áp dụng phương pháp này thường xuyên trong thực tế dạy học. Kết quả nghiên cứu cũng cho thấy giáo viên gặp một số trở ngại khi áp dụng phương pháp học theo dự án, bao gồm việc thiếu kiến thức và kinh nghiệm sử dụng phương pháp học theo dự án, áp lực về thời gian và trình độ tiếng Anh của học sinh còn thấp.

**Từ khóa:** Phương pháp học theo dự án, dạy kỹ năng nói