

Project based learning in teaching translation: Effect on students' performance

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ABSTRACT

The debate among researchers regarding the best method for teaching translation remains ongoing. With various approaches available, it is crucial to empirically assess their effectiveness in different educational settings. Therefore, this study aims to address the lack of empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of Project Based Learning (PjBL) in teaching translation. The research involved thirty-five Indonesian EFL students enrolled in the Translation Entrepreneurship course at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta, Indonesia. Classroom action research was conducted over eight meetings and two cycles. Pre-test and post-test data from cycle 1 and cycle 2 were analyzed using paired sample t-test in SPSS. The results indicated a significant improvement in students' translation performance ($p\text{-value } 0.000 < 0.05$) after using the PjBL method. In conclusion, this study demonstrated that PjBL effectively enhances students' translation skills, offering valuable insights for teachers and educational institutions to consider it as an alternative method for teaching translation.

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Introduction

The twenty-first century has seen rapid growth in the language services field, which has become a burgeoning industry worldwide, including Indonesia. With this expansion, there is a significant increase in attention towards professional translation training. Many universities and colleges offer Translation and Interpretation Programs, particularly targeting students in the English department to meet the demand for qualified translators and interpreters. These training programs focus on developing knowledge and skills in shifting languages between the origin language and English (or vice versa), encompassing terminology, acronyms, derivatives, accuracy, and formality. Students are directed to acquire fundamental translation strategies, skills, and expertise (Zhang, 2016).

Previous research on translation teaching has emphasized two fundamental issues: what to teach and how to teach it (Li, 2018). Over the decades, researchers and practitioners have examined the skills and competencies of qualified translators to determine appropriate teaching materials and strategies. For instance, the Process of Acquisition of Translation Competence and Evaluation (PACTE) proposed a model of translation competence consisting of six interrelated sub-competencies, including bilingual, knowledge about translation, strategic, instrumental, extra-linguistic, and psychological components (Beeby, 2017; Beeby et al., 2011). However, recent studies in translation have shown that qualified translators require more than just language skills;

they also need to master analytical, technological, cultural, research, interpersonal, and time-management skills (Gao, 2019; Hurtado Albir, 2019).

Efforts to determine translation competencies have led researchers and educators to propose, practice, and debate the most appropriate methods for teaching translation and developing these competencies. Lee (2012), Novitasari & Ardi (2016), Wang (2013), and Yuliasri (2012) have utilized Cooperative Learning (CL) to develop students' translation skills. Under the CL approach, students were grouped into pairs or trios and assigned to translate specific types of texts (e.g., short stories, descriptive passages, announcements). Furthermore, the students engaged in peer feedback, where their work was reviewed and corrected by other groups. However, these previous studies found that only a few students actively engaged in the learning process using CL.

In today's era of digital technology, the use of internet-based platforms to develop students' translation skills has become more popular. Hartono (2015) addressed translation problems faced by a group of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students through an interactive web platform. He employed online teaching tools both in and out of the classroom, including class sites, tutor and learner blogs, and translation web quests. The teacher provided learning instructions through class sites, tutor blogs, and web quests, while students practiced translation on learner blogs. The result showed that the interactive web significantly improved students' translation performance. Similarly, Lee (2020), Mekheimer (2012), and Tsai (2019) investigated the effect of using Blackboard technology and online dictionaries on students' translation skills, reporting positive outcomes. Thus, incorporating digital technology is highly recommended for enhancing students' translation performance.

In response to the ongoing discussion on teaching methods, the authors recently incorporated Project Based Learning (PjBL) into their translation teaching at the University of Raden Mas Said Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia. Despite the abundance of various teaching methods in translation, there have been relatively few attempts (Kiraly, 2005; Zheng, 2017) to provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of PjBL in teaching translation. However, the claimed benefits of PjBL (Kiraly, 2005; Zheng, 2017) motivated the authors to adopt this approach in their teaching.

PjBL is based on the concept that students must learn and practice materials highly relevant to future real-world working experiences. Zheng (2017) describes PjBL as a student-centered approach where students explore, analyze, and solve learning problems while expressing their conceptual ideas. Similarly, Kokotsaki et al. (2016) define PjBL as a student-centered pedagogy that involves a dynamic classroom approach, allowing students to acquire deeper knowledge through active exploration of real-world challenges and problems. In essence, PjBL is designed as a cooperative teaching method aiming to engage and activate students' critical thinking to solve challenges and problems based on real-world experiences.

Though limited in number, research on the use of PjBL in teaching translation has been conducted for years. Kiraly (2005) emphasized the importance of PjBL in teaching translation, as it allows students to act as the main actors in the translation process, simulating the role of a translation company owner. Building on Kiraly's work, Muam (2017) and Zheng (2017) conducted research on PjBL in teaching translation. Their PjBL design involved dividing students into groups, with each group required to establish their own translation business. Students took on roles such as translator, editor, and proofreader, working on real translation projects. The PjBL design was shown to effectively enhance students' translation skills. However, Muam (2017) and Zheng (2017) also pointed out the risk of this approach, as students were still in a training phase with varying levels of translation ability. Thus, entrusting clients' translation tasks to students at this stage may not be the best choice. They suggested that further research incorporate a PjBL design that provides students with assignments on various types of texts while maintaining a simulation of running their own translation company.

Following the recommendations of [Muam \(2017\)](#) and [Zheng \(2017\)](#), the PjBL model used in this study involved grouping students into small teams of five or six. Each group was required to establish a translation company, with members assigned specific roles such as translator, editor, proofreader, and editor in chief. Conducted over eight meetings, each group was tasked with translating a particular type of text within a week. They not only translated the text but also performed the editing process, including review, proofreading, and finalizing the translation project according to their designated roles within their groups.

Given the background discussed above, this research aims to shed light on the effectiveness of PjBL in teaching translation in an Indonesian EFL setting. Through classroom action research using PjBL, this study seeks to develop the translation skills of EFL students enrolled in the Translation Entrepreneurship subject at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta, Indonesia. The study addresses the question "How does project-based learning enhance students' translation skills?" The results are expected to contribute to the literature on methods and approaches for teaching translation both theoretically and practically, providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness and benefits of Project Based Learning for enhancing EFL students' translation skills. This study may serve as a model for teaching translation using PjBL.

Method

The aim of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of Project Based Learning (PjBL) in teaching translation. The research was conducted to address translation challenges faced by Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. To achieve this, Classroom Action Research (CAR) was chosen as the research design. CAR is a research method used in the classroom setting to improve the quality of teaching and learning, leading to better outcomes ([Latief, 2009](#); [Purohman, 2018](#)). In this study, PjBL was implemented as the action in teaching translation to English department students at the University of Raden Mas Said Surakarta.

This study took place in an Indonesian EFL setting, where English is considered a foreign language. The participants were thirty-five English department students at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta, enrolled in the elective course of Translation Entrepreneurship. Since the course was elective, it was assumed that the students joining the class were highly interested in translation.

The classroom action research conducted in this study consisted of two cycles, comprising eight meetings, using the PjBL method. Before the treatment, a pre-test was administered, where students were asked to translate a short fairytale containing idioms from Indonesian into English. The pre-test aimed to assess the students' initial level of translation skills. Following the pre-test, students practiced translating various types of texts during four meetings of cycle 1, under the teacher's supervision. A post-test was conducted after cycle 1 to assess the improvement in students' translation performance. Since there was no significant improvement yet, the treatment continued in cycle 2 with different types of texts. Another post-test was carried out after cycle 2 to further evaluate the development of students' translation performance. The study used a pre-test and two sets of post-tests as part of the classroom action research procedure using PjBL.

After collecting the data, the next step was data analysis. The students' translation works in the pre-test, post-test cycle 1, and post-test cycle 2 were scored based on the translation accuracy rubric proposed by [Nababan and Nuraeni \(2012\)](#). The rubric focused on the choice of words and the structure of phrases, clauses, and sentences in the target language (see [Table 1](#)). The mean scores, along with the standard deviation and standard error mean, were calculated using SPSS. To determine whether there was a significant difference between the mean scores of pre-test and post-tests, a paired sample t-test was conducted. A p-value lower than 0.05 indicated a significant difference between the pre-

test and post-test scores, indicating an improvement in students' translation performance after being taught using the PjBL method.

Table 1. Instrument Rubric of Translation Accuracy (Nababan et al., 2012)

Translation Categories	Score	Qualitative Parameters
Accurate	3	The meaning of the word, the technical terms, phrase, clause, sentence or source language text accurately transferred into the target language; absolutely no distortion, addition or deletion of meaning.
Less accurate	2	Most of the word meaning, the technical term, phrase, clause, sentence or source language text has been transferred accurately into the target language; but there is still a distortion of meaning or translation of double meaning (ambiguous) or there is deletion of meaning; or addition of meaning which disturb the integrity of the message.
Inaccurate	1	The meaning of the word, the technical term, phrase, clause, sentence or source language text inaccurately transferred into the target language or deleted or added.

Results

The initial stage of data collection in this study involved a pre-test to assess the students' translation performance. The pre-test mean score, standard deviation, and standard error mean were calculated using the SPSS program. Table 2 presents the pre-test results, indicating a mean score of 1.60 (standard deviation 0.651; standard error mean 0.110).

Table 2. Result of Pre-test

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test	1.60	35	.651	.110

Following the implementation of PjBL in cycle 1, a post-test was conducted to assess the progress in students' translation performance. A comparison was made between the students' scores in the pre-test and post-test cycle 1 to determine the improvement. Table 3 displays the differences between the students' scores in the pre-test and post-test cycle 1, with mean scores of 1.60 and 1.97, respectively.

Table 3. Result of Pre-test and Post-test Cycle 1

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-test	1.60	35	.651	.110
	Post-test cycle 1	1.97	35	.785	.133

To assess whether the two scores showed a significant difference, a paired sample t-test was performed (refer to Table 4). Table 4 indicates that the t-test statistics is -3.404, and the significance level is 0.07 ($> .05$), indicating that there is no significant difference between the students' pre-test and post-test cycle 1 results. Additionally, the table shows that the mean score of the students in the post-test cycle 1 is 0.37 points higher (on a scale of 3) than the pre-test. Consequently, it can be concluded that the null hypothesis is accepted. As there is no significant difference in the mean score between the pre-test and post-test cycle 1, the treatment of teaching translation using PjBL continues to cycle 2.

Table 4. Result of Paired Sample t-test Cycle 1

	Pre-test- Post-test	Paired Differences							
		Mean	Std. Dev	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	cycle 1	-.37	.646	.109	-.593	-.150	-3.404	34	.07

The post-test cycle 2 was further administered after the students were taught using PjBL in another four meetings. The post-test cycle 2 functions to examine the enhancement of the students' score in performing translation. Table 5 reveals the result of the pre-test and post-test cycle 2 in which the mean scores are 1.60 and 2.51.

Table 5. Result of Pre-test and Post-test Cycle 2

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-test	1.60	35	.651	.110
	Post-test 2	2.51	35	.612	.103

To determine the significant difference between the mean score of pre-test and post-test cycle 2, the second sample t-test was conducted. Table 6 shows that the t-statistics is -7.285 and the significant value is 0.000 ($< .05$), meaning that there is a significant difference between the students' mean score in pre-test and post-test cycle 2. Therefore, it can be concluded that PjBL is proven as an effective method in teaching translation. The result of paired sample t-test emphasizes that the students perform better in translation after being taught using PjBL in classroom action research consisting of two cycles in eight meetings.

Table 6. Result of Paired Sample t-test Cycle 2

	Pre-test- Post-test	Paired Differences							
		Mean	Std. Dev	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	cycle 2	-.914	.742	.126	-1.169	-.659	-7.285	34	.000

Discussion

Based on the data analysis, the findings of this study demonstrate the effectiveness of PjBL in enhancing students' translation performance. The results confirm that PjBL learning is an effective approach to improve students' translation skills, aligning with the principles of social constructivism proposed by Kiraly (2005). These principles include students' engagement in real-life translation practice, problem-solving, collaboration in

groups, and critical thinking. In a project-based learning environment, students can actively participate in the translation process, similar to real-world professional translators. They work with authentic translation materials and face real-life challenges, preparing them for future professional environments (Alkhatnai, 2017; Izzah & Diana, 2022). Consequently, they gain not only translation knowledge and skills but also translator competence (Azwati et al., 2022; Kiraly, 2005).

This study's findings align with Zhang's (2016) research, which also demonstrated the effectiveness of project-based learning in improving Chinese students' translation performance. This effectiveness indicates that the method meets students' learning needs and expectations, especially for those who voluntarily choose Translation as an elective course. PjBL's aspects of authenticity in projects, collaborative learning, process-oriented focus, and real-world learning environment make the learning experience enjoyable for such students. They join the course to acquire professional translator competence, and PjBL facilitates their journey toward this goal (Kiraly, 2015; Redjeki & Hapsari, 2022).

The implications of this study are relevant to various stakeholders. Firstly, teachers and curriculum developers can use this study as a reference to implement PjBL in translation teaching at the university level. Secondly, the faculty and college are encouraged to explore the development of a professional translation service where the translation process can be modified based on the PjBL model used in this study. Thirdly, students can benefit from the study's results as a guide to understanding and practicing translation before entering real-life professional translation experiences. Lastly, the study's findings suggest that PjBL learning holds promise as a method for teaching translation. It offers a student-centered, engaging, and effective approach to enhance students' translation skills and competencies.

Conclusion

The present study investigates the effectiveness of PjBL in teaching translation to a group of thirty-five Indonesian EFL learners enrolled in the Translation Entrepreneurship course at the University of Raden Mas Said Surakarta, Central Java. Classroom Action Research (CAR) was employed, comprising two cycles with a total of eight meetings. The results obtained from data analysis using a paired sample t-test indicate a significant difference between the students' scores in the pre-test and post-tests ($p\text{-value } 0.000 < 0.05$), demonstrating the success of PjBL in enhancing the students' translation performance. These findings offer valuable insights for educators and curriculum authorities, suggesting the incorporation of PjBL as a promising alternative method for teaching translation at the university level. While the results are compelling, the study lacks students' perceptions regarding the implementation of PjBL in translation teaching. Hence, further research is strongly recommended to conduct qualitative investigations, exploring students' perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses of PjBL and their beliefs toward its practice in teaching translation.

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