

# Research on the Effect of Project-based Learning in College English Teaching

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## Abstract

“Value guidance, knowledge impartment and ability training” are the three teaching objectives of Chinese education. How to realize the three objectives? The research group adopts project-based learning model. Through this model, the three teaching objectives can be combined with the teaching content of *New Standard College English Integrated Course 3*. Through teaching practice and questionnaire, PBL has shown its function in improving students’ comprehensive ability and shaping their values, which indicates that this model serves as an effective way in carrying out college English education reform.

**Keywords:** Effect; Project-based Learning (PBL); Value; College English Teaching.

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## 1. The current teaching situation of College English in China

In May 2020, the guiding outline for ideological and political courses in universities issued by the Ministry of Education in China puts forward the talent training goals: “value guidance, knowledge impartment and ability training”, and highlights the importance of value shaping. Colleges need to cultivate patriotism and international vision based on the above three training goals.

For College English teaching, the situation is challenging to meet the demands of three training goals. Firstly, College English teaching guide should place more emphasis on meeting the demands of four aspects of “state, society, school and individual”. At the same time, “English can be used properly and effectively in learning, life and future work”, and “improve comprehensive cultural literacy” and include various abilities such as application ability, cross-cultural communication awareness, autonomous learning ability. Facing the situation, the requirements of College English teaching are constantly improving while the credits of English courses are constantly being reduced. College English teachers face pressure and crisis. But crisis is the coexistence of opportunity, which requires teachers to explore a teaching model suitable for the new stage and new goals. The new teaching model should be “learning centered”, and guide students to find problems, discuss learning tasks in groups, and evaluate learning effects. At the same

time, this teaching model should also achieve the three educational goals of “value guidance, knowledge impartment and ability training”.

## 2. Theoretical basis of PBL model

Based on constructivist learning theory, project-based learning (PBL) is a teaching method that focuses on teaching activities around projects. This method can effectively promote students’ language and content learning, and comprehensively develop a variety of skills (Beckett & Slater, 2005).

Thomas defined the six standards of PBL as follows: the curriculum is carried out around the project; the project is carried out around the difficult problems that drive students to master the basic concepts and theories of the discipline based on students’ constructive investigation and research; the completion of the project drives students to carry out meaningful knowledge construction; focusing on solving practical problems and cooperation (Thomas, J.W., 2000) Teachers guide students to carry out independent inquiry learning by designing projects to match students’ level. Classroom time mainly focuses on students and carries out activities around projects. Stoller (2006) proposed the following design principles of PBL: ① content-oriented; ② Produce a final product; ③ Emphasize learners’ independence in the project; ④ The difficulty of the project is moderate and can stimulate students’ interest; ⑤ The project shall last

for a certain time span; ⑥ Train students' learning skills in the project; ⑦ Require students to think independently and study in groups; ⑧ Teachers are promoters and guides in the project; ⑨ Formative and summative assessment of students.

There are six aspects concerning the application of PBL: generating projects, formulating evaluation standards, designing schemes, implementing schemes, displaying achievements and evaluating achievements.

1. In the process of generating the project, the theme must solve the problems in real life and reflect the teaching theme. The relevance between current hot spots and students' life should be closely connected.
2. Formulating evaluation standards cover the combination of formative evaluation, summative evaluation, process evaluation, peer mutual evaluation and teacher evaluation, as well as the combination of skill improvement and value shaping.
3. In the design of project scheme, students formulate implementation scheme through group cooperation, including task assignment, data search and so on.
4. In the process of implementing, students carry out experiential learning and in-depth learning, and develop abilities of self-study, information processing, critical thinking and innovation, etc.
5. As for project achievement display, the forms can be diverse, including micro video production, exhibition, report, small academic conference, poster display, drama performance, etc.
6. The final evaluation includes project content and

effect, as well as the value orientation and the relationship between individual and collective.

It should be noted that in the process of implementing each aspect, teachers play the role of valuing leaders, task guides and helpers to give students support and help.

### 3. Teaching practice of PBL in College English Teaching

The main teaching objectives of PBL in College English are "value guidance, knowledge impartment and ability training". The goal of education should be specific to improve students' abilities concerning application, cross-cultural communication awareness, autonomous learning, critical thinking, innovation, cooperation, etc., and acquire the knowledge of language, encyclopedia, traditional culture, revolution history etc., and shape the values, such as national consciousness, cultural self-confidence, awareness of the rule of law, humanistic spirit, scientific spirit, professional quality and information quality.

College English is a compulsory course for all majors in North China Electric Power University (Baoding). It usually has 64 class hours in the first semester. The current textbook is "*New Standard College English Integrated Course 3*". The research group adopts PBL teaching mode in the teaching class with the capacity of 30-60 students. The teaching practice of PBL runs through 16 weeks of a semester, and conducts six projects. The specific topics are as follows:

Units	Articles	Content	Value Element and Output Project
Unit1 Discover yourself	AR1: Catching crabs	How do college graduates find themselves by talking to their father and catching crabs	1) The pursuit of self-worth and understanding the meaning of death, cherishing the present 2) The group conduct the questionnaire of "College Students' future career planning" and display it
	AR2: We are all dying	Our attitude towards death	
Unit2 Childhood memories	AR1: The Glass Castle	Father's wealth education for children	1) The role of education and cultivating an international vision 2) Classroom presentation: childhood in different cultures
	AR2: Cultural childhood	Childhood in different cultures	
Unit3 Art for art's sake	AR1: How we listen	The art of listening	1) The right way and meaning to do things 2) Write an explanatory composition "how we do sth"; show your favorite photos through video
	AR2: The photo	The significance of American Victory Day Photos	
Unit4 No place like home	AR1: Golden memories	Family life and changes in urban life	1) Cultivation of patriotism towards family and country 2) Creative design and poster display of future home
	AR2: No place like home?	Home is the best place	
Unit6 High days and holidays	AR1: Christmas Day in the morning	Love story between father and son	1) Show gratitude to parents; Cultural meaning behind festivals 2) Comparative display of Chinese and western festival culture
	AR2: Chinese or Western, it's time to relax	Understand the advantages and disadvantages of Chinese and Western cultures	

#### 4. Teaching effect of PBL in College English

Teaching effect of PBL in College English can be observed through the following questionnaire which is composed of 15 questions. 526 students from six teachers' classes are involved. Questions 1-6 mainly cover the content, form, students' feelings and

satisfaction on PBL, and questions 7-15 mainly aim at the effect of each project and the overall effect of this semester.

Question 1: In this semester (2019-2020-1), how many projects did you do in individual and/or in team?

Choice	Calculation	Percentage
A. 0	22	4.18%
B. 1-2	115	21.86%
C. 3-4	209	39.73%
D. 5 and above	180	34.22%
Total	526	

Analysis: 389 people participated in more than three projects, accounting for 73.95%, indicating that

the teachers of this research group have carried out project-based activities seriously.

Question 2: Which form of project would you prefer?

Choice	Calculation	Percentage
A. Individual	100	19.01%
B. Pair	52	9.89%
C. Team	275	52.28%
D. Not sure	99	18.82%
Total	526	

Analysis: There are forms of individual, pair and team. According to the results, more than half of the students (275) choose team, indicating that the students favor this form more than others.

Question 3: Which unit-project impresses you the most?

Choice	Calculation	Percentage
A. U1—Interview about future plan	77	14.64%
B. U1---Questionnaire design, survey and analysis of the data	32	6.08%
C. U1---A play of Catching Crabs	51	9.7%
D. U2—Review on movie “Glass Castle”---Growth Through Adversity	173	32.89%
E. U2---Analysis of influential factors on children’s development	46	8.75%
F. U3---Introduction to an impressive photograph	99	18.82%
G. U6---Debate on Gift-Giving	14	2.66%
H. U6---Debate on “Should Chinese people celebrate western festivals?”	34	6.46%
Total	526	

Analysis: This varies from person to person, indicating that the students have different interests.

Question 4: What is the biggest challenge when you did the project?

Choice	Calculation	Percentage
A. Language barrier	266	50.57%
B. Teamwork	89	16.92%
C. Technology literacy	99	18.82%
D. Cognitive competence	63	11.98%
E. Other (Please specify) : _____	9	1.71%
Total	526	

Analysis: More than half of the students think they have to deal with the difficulties in language, which indicates that teachers should help the students in their language application

Question 5: How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with Project-Based Learning overall?

Choice	Calculation	Percentage
Extremely satisfied	196	37.26%
Satisfied somewhat	243	46.2%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	64	12.17%
Dissatisfied somewhat	17	3.23%
Extremely dissatisfied	6	1.14%
Total	526	

Analysis: As for the teaching evaluation of this PBL. 439 students (83.46%) think it is still very effective.

Question 6: Why did you give that rating?

Numbers	Sample Answers from students
1	Because I can not only learn much new technology about computer by completing challenging tasks one by one, but also develop the traditional relationship among classmates.
2	I tried my best and I have learned a lot, but I still didn't overcome my weakness to some degree.
3	I can learn how to cooperate to some extent, but to tell the truth it is limited to English knowledge.
4	Because the teacher is patient.
5	On one hand, I have some disadvantages which need to be improved; on the other hand, I did something that satisfied myself.
6	I have benefited a lot from it.
7	I took a lot of time doing it and learnt a lot.

Analysis: Most students think that they have learned knowledge and skills and improved a lot.

Question 7: Now I know myself much better than before, such as my strengths and weaknesses, my passion and goals.

Choice	Calculation	Percentage
Strongly agree	171	32.51%
Agree somewhat	271	51.52%
Neither agree nor disagree	68	12.93%
Disagree somewhat	10	1.9%
Strongly disagree	6	1.14%
Total	526	

Analysis: 422 people (84.03%) thought they had enhanced their ability in their cognition, such as their understanding of advantages and disadvantages.

Question 8: When pursuing my dream, I know there are some people called "crabbers" always trying to pull me down from improvement.

Choice	Calculation	Percentage
Strongly agree	184	34.98%
Agree somewhat	205	38.97%
Neither agree nor disagree	77	14.64%
Disagree somewhat	44	8.37%
Strongly disagree	16	3.04%
Total	526	

Analysis: In the process of pursuing my dream, I know that some people are called crabs. They try to pull me down from the road of progress. This is

the knowledge learned in unit 1. 389 people (73.95%) know this point.

Question 9: We should know ourselves and empower the others.

Choice	Calculation	Percentage
Strongly agree	259	49.24%
Agree somewhat	197	37.45%
Neither agree nor disagree	50	9.51%
Disagree somewhat	15	2.85%
Strongly disagree	5	0.95%
Total	526	

Analysis: we need to know ourselves, then light up others, and 456 people (86.69%) recognize this consensus, which shows that the effect of value teaching is very good.

Question 10: Adversity in life exerts more positive impact than negative upon one's growth.

Choice	Calculation	Percentage
Strongly agree	206	39.16%
Agree somewhat	234	44.49%
Neither agree nor disagree	70	13.31%
Disagree somewhat	11	2.09%
Strongly disagree	5	0.95%
Total	526	

Analysis: In the process of our growth, adversity has brought us more positive effects than negative effects. This is the knowledge learned in unit 2. 440 people (83.65%) have recognized this point.

Question 11: Everyone knows the usefulness of what is useful, but few know the usefulness of what is useless.

Choice	Calculation	Percentage
Strongly agree	188	35.74%
Agree somewhat	241	45.82%
Neither agree nor disagree	76	14.45%
D. Disagree somewhat	19	3.61%
Strongly disagree	2	0.38%
Total	526	

Analysis: Some seemingly useless things are actually very useful. The speculative views on the usefulness of things reached 429 (81.56%)

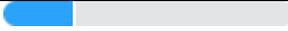
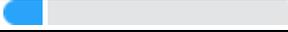
Question 12: When introducing a photo, I know how to apply the "three planes" to analyze the sensuous, expressive and photographic planes.

Choice	Calculation	Percentage
Strongly agree	176	33.46%
Agree somewhat	252	47.91%
Neither agree nor disagree	74	14.07%
Disagree somewhat	19	3.61%
Strongly disagree	5	0.95%
Total	526	

Analysis: I will use the knowledge in lesson 2 of unit 3, that is, how to appreciate photos at three levels to realize knowledge transfer. The number of

people who approved this statement reached 428, accounting for 81.37%.

Question 13: Celebrating western festivals in China should be forbidden.

Choice	Calculation	Percentage
Strongly agree	97	 18.44%
Agree somewhat	115	 21.86%
Neither agree nor disagree	111	 21.1%
Disagree somewhat	129	 24.52%
Strongly disagree	74	 14.07%
Total	526	

Analysis: China should prohibit celebrating western festivals. Everyone's cognition of this question is diversified, 214 people agree, the proportion is 30.3%; 111 people held a neutral attitude, accounting

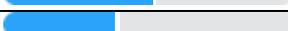
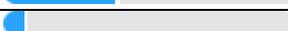
for 21.1%; 203 people opposed it, accounting for 38.59%.

Question 14: When presenting my project (in written, oral, video or audio, etc.), I am confident about my English.

Choice	Calculation	Percentage
Strongly agree	141	 26.81%
Agree somewhat	216	 41.06%
Neither agree nor disagree	101	 19.2%
Disagree somewhat	59	 11.22%
Strongly disagree	9	 1.71%
Total	526	

Analysis: 357 students (67.87%) were satisfied with English when showing the project. It can be seen that nearly 30% of the students need to improve their oral presentation ability.

Question 15: "Learning by doing" can better prepare me with life skills and help me to internalize knowledge into application and deepen my understanding of core social values.

Choice	Calculation	Percentage
Strongly agree	277	 52.66%
Agree somewhat	204	 38.78%
Neither agree nor disagree	38	 7.22%
Disagree somewhat	5	 0.95%
Strongly disagree	2	 0.38%
Total	526	

Analysis: "Learning by doing" can better prepare me with life skills and help me to internalize knowledge into application and deepen my understanding of core social values. 481 people are satisfied, accounting for 91.44%, which proves that the implementation of PBL project is effective.

## 5. Evaluation & Conclusion

From the above questionnaire and analyses, it can be seen that PBL gives students more autonomy than other teaching models. Driven by the orientation of the project display, it can improve students' comprehensive English and be more proactive in learning humanistic and scientific knowledge. Especially in the aspect of value shaping, it takes into account that individual growth and collective cooperation have established a strong national self-confidence and cultural self-confidence. However, the results of quantitative research can not reflect the real feelings of students. In the future, the research group will collect more information and data in combination with qualitative research methods in order to reflect the learning effect of PBL in a more objective way.

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