PROJECT APPROACH: FACILITATING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN READING

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Abstract: This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of project approach, as one of the alternative instructions, in encouraging students' English skill, especially in reading comprehension. This is a quasi-experimental study which involved two classes with 34 students in each class as the participants. The data were obtained from tests, participant observation, interviews, and questionnaires. The finding of the independent t-test computation is 0.048 indicating that Ho was rejected. Therefore, it can be concluded that project approach is effective in promoting students' English skills, especially in reading comprehension. In addition, the students not only enjoyed the learning process, shown by their enthusiasm in the observation and their answers to the questionnaires and interviews, but also could finish the project well. Finally, all these indicate that implementing project approach is worth doing by teachers in their classrooms.

Keywords: project approach, elementary school students, reading comprehension

Abstrak: Studi ini bertujuan untuk mencaritahu keefektifitasan dari*Project Approach*/PA (pendekatan berbasis proyek), sebagai salah satu alternative metode pengajaran, dalam membantu siswa meningkatkan kemampuan bahasainggrisnya, terutama dalam kemampuan membaca pemahaman. Studi ini merupakan studi kuas ieksperimen yang melibatkan dua kelas dengan 34 orang siswa untuk setiap kelasnya. Data untuk studi ini didapat dari tes, observasi partisipan, wawancara, dan kuesioner. Hasil yang didapat dari t-tes indepeden adalah 0.048. Hal ini mengindikasikan bahwa Ho ditolak dan berarti bahwa PA efektif dalam meningkatkan kemampuan bahasa Inggris para siswa terutama dalam kemampuan membaca pemahaman.Selain itu, dalam merespon pembelajaran menggunakan PA, dilihat dari hasil wawancara, observasi, dan kuesioner, para siswa tidak hanya senang mengikuti pembelajaran, tetapi juga dapat menyelesaikan tugas yang diberikan dengan baik.Pada kesimpulannya, hasil penelitian di atas mengindikasikan bahwa PA dapat diimplementasikan oleh para guru di kelas mereka sebagai salah satu metode pembelajaran bahasa Inggris yang baik.

Kata Kunci: pembelajaran berbasis proyek, siswa sekolah dasar, membaca pemahaman

English as one of the foreign languages has got much attention from the Indonesian government. This can be observed from the government's commitment to teach English at all levels of education; it is even started from the elementary school level.

Nevertheless, the instruction, especially in elementary school level, is not yet satisfactory.

In elementary school, although English is one of the elective subjects, it is strongly recommended by the government to be taught (see the statement from *Depdikbud* RI No. 0487/4/1992 and The Decree of the ministry of Education and culture No. 060/U/1993 in Suyanto, n.d.). It is in line with Hamerly (in Suyanto: n.d.) and DeKeyser (2006) who stated that learning a foreign language will be better if it is started earlier. Moreover, it is similar with the purpose of teaching foreign languages to young learners in America, which is "preparing even very young children for life in a broad international community" DeKeyser (2006: 1).

However, the development of teaching and learning English is not good enough; thus, the result of teaching and learning in elementary schools in Indonesia is not yet satisfactory (Andini, 2007; Prapti, 2008; Listia and Kamal, 2009). Regarding to the research site, although sometimes the teachers used some various methods (for instance: using songs, total physical response, etc.), the instruction was still dominated by asking them to memorize the English words and the structures as well, as it is experienced by the teachers there. It is because the goal of the learning was to be able to do the final test which is emphasizing in vocabulary and grammar made by the local government.

As a matter of fact, there are many ways that a teacher can apply to teach the language, so that the learning goals can be achieved. Hernowo (2005) states that fun learning environment can help students learn effectively; that is highly recommended for teachers. However, it does not mean they have to make fun all the time. The word "fun" means the teachers use the friendly ways where the students enjoy studying English and the goals of the

instruction are still achieved. Moreover, children need to learn by hands-on experiences (Musthafa, 2008), which allow them to be physically contacted in direct way with the material that is being learned.

One of the alternative fun instructions that can be used in teaching English is project approach (PA)/ project method/ project-based instruction (PBI)/ project-based learning (PBL), in which the students are expected to be involved actively by using their English in their English teaching and learning and by doing the simple project given. PA is an instruction which allows students to learn by doing a project (Thomas, 2000). Moreover, it is an authentic instructional strategy or model, which gives the students chance to explore their various skills (Katz, 1994; Moss and Van Duzer, 1998; Mohan in Beckett, 2002; Beckett in Beckett, 2002; Desiatova, 2007), such as plan, implement, and evaluate the project that has real-world applications (Katz, 1994; Thomas, 2000; Eyring in Beckett, 2002; Blank, Dickinson, et. Al, Harwell in Railsback, 2002).

It is in line with some previous studies which show that the students find the PA as fun, motivating, and challenging approach because they can play an active role in doing the project (Katz, 1994; Challenge 2000 Multimedia Project, 1999 in Railsback: 2002). In addition, Karlin and Vianni (In Railsback: 2002) stated that in PA, children construct their new ideas or concepts based on their current and previous knowledge. It is also expected that PA can promote student's reading comprehension (Anton, 2010); since, they explore the project independently and get in touch with the vocabularies relate to the project. Consequently, they will be able to stay close with the topic that can help them comprehend the texts given, which still relate to the topic.

Thus, referring the success of PA in some previous studies, it is worth trying to

implement the PA in teaching English to the research site. Moreover, this study is focused on investigating the effectiveness of project approach in facilitating the students in improving their reading comprehension and the students' responses toward the project approach. Additionally, before going further, a brief overview about PA will be highlighted in the following.

AN OVERVIEW OF PROJECT APPROACH

PA is a method which allows students to learn by doing a project (Thomas, 2000). Moreover, it is "an authentic instructional strategy or model, which gives the students chance to plan, implement, and evaluate the project that have real-world applications beyond the classroom" (Blank, Dickinson, et. Al, Harwell in Railsback, 2002). Although the word project has many meanings, in this paper, Katz's definition (1994) is used; since, this study applies her phases in implementing the PA. Thus, the project is defined as (Katz, 1994: 1):

> an in-depth investigation of a topic worth learning more about. … The key feature of a project is that it is a research effort deliberately focused on finding answers to questions about a topic posed either by the children, the teacher, or the teacher working with the children (Katz, 1994: 1).

From the definition, it can be observed that a project is an activity that can be done by the students by investigating the topic given to get a valued learning. It can be a vehicle for children to move toward literacy and for accomplishing specific outcomes (Helm & Beneke, 2003). Children can do the project alone, with their groups or with the whole class. In doing the project given, children are expected to be actively involved in classroom learning tasks; since, "without such involvement, little learning will occur" (Fisher, Berliner, Filby,

Marliave, Cahen, Dishaw & Moore in Mergendoller and Thomas, 2000: 2).

In conducting the project approach as the instruction given to the students, there are some phases that teachers can apply. In addition, some experts have provided the phases with various names and numbers. However, they have similar idea with Katz's phases (Katz, 1994), as follows:

Phase 1: Getting Started/ Beginning Project

In this phase, the children and the teacher discuss the topic. They select and refine a topic to be investigated. They are invited to recall their memories and experiences about the topic and examine their current understanding and misunderstanding related to the topic (Hertzog, 2007).

Moreover, there are some criteria that need to be considered in selecting the topic. To begin, the topic "should be closely related to the children's everyday experience" (Katz, 1994). At least few of them should have enough familiarity with it. Secondly, the topic should allow for integrating a range of subjects such as science, social studies, and language arts. Thirdly, the topic should be rich enough so that it can be explored for at least a week. Fourthly, "the topic should be one that is more suitable for examination in school than at home; for example, an examination of local insects, rather than a study of local festivals" (Katz, 1994).

In this study, the participants of the research, the experimental group, were invited to talk about the farewell party that they were going to be met in the last of this semester two. They were also invited to see around their school from the classroom windows. In front of their classrooms there were many boards, actually for bulletin board, that were empty. Afterward, the students were requested to fill the bulletin

board. They wanted to do it; thus, making a bulletin board was the topic of the project.

Phase 2: Field Work/ Developing Project

This phase is also called as the inquiry phase because in this phase children pursue answers to their own questions, based on the topic, using firsthand resources (Hertzog, 2007). It consists of the direct investigation, which often includes field trips to investigate sites, objects, or events. This is the core of project where children are investigating, drawing from observation, constructing models, observing closely and recording findings, exploring, predicting, and discussing and dramatizing their new understandings (Chard, 2000).

Regarding to the study, in this phase, the students of the research site went around their school and noticed the things around the school. After that, they made any writings for their bulletin board. They made their project with their groups.

Phase 3: Culminating and Debriefing Events/ Closing Project

Phase 3 includes preparing and presenting reports of results in the form of displays of findings and artifacts, talks, dramatic presentations, or guided tours of their constructions. Relating to the study, in this final phase, the students presented their bulletin boards and stick it on the board outside the classroom to be read by other students.

In addition, there are some benefits from the implementation of PA. Railsback (2002: 9-10) summarized the benefits as follows:
a. preparing children for workplace;
b. increasing motivation;
c. connecting learning at school with reality;
d. providing opportunities to construct knowledge;
e. increasing social and communication skills;
f. increasing problem-solving skills;
g. enabling students to make and see connections between disciplines;
h. providing opportunities to contribute to their school or community;
i. increasing self-esteem;
j. allowing children to use their individual learning strengths and diverse approaches to learning; and
k. providing a practical, real-world way to learn to use technology.

Considering all of the advantages, it is soundly to suggest that PA can facilitate the students to learn English well. They do not need to memorize the words and the structures of English because they experience the process—hands-on experience (Hertzog, 2007; Musthafa, 2008)—which help them understand English well.

RESEARCH METHOD

Based on the research questions, quantitative method was used to investigate the implementation of project approach in facilitating students' in their reading comprehension and the students' response toward the method. Referring to the classification of research design from Nunan (1992), this research can be characterized as a quantitative design because it serves an implementation of a treatment. Furthermore, this study can be categorized as a quasi-experimental study, which includes experimental and control groups without random sampling (Nunan, 1992; Hatch & Farhady, 1982; Hatch & Lazaraton, 1991).

Instrumentations

The data was collected through some methods: tests (pre- and post-test); observation; interviews; and questionnaires. Both pre- and post-test items were in form of multiple choices. Moreover, the observation was conducted for observing the treatment in both classes. This research was held in five meetings, and it took two

hours lesson per meeting, with 35 minutes per one hour lesson. In this research, the students got a project: making a bulletin board. Regarding to the interviews, this study involved six students as the interviewees, and those who got good, medium, and low achievement in the English lesson. Moreover, after the post-test, the students filled in the questionnaires which consisted of nine statements about their responses toward the PA.

The data from pre- and post-test would be statistically analyzed and compared by using t-test. The aim was to see the difference between the initial ability of the students and their ability after getting the treatment. Moreover, the statistical data was processed by using SPSS 17.0. Meanwhile, the data from the interview and the questionnaires would be analyzed by using a thematic analysis. In this case, the students' comments were categorized into some themes that become the focus of the research.

The Participants

The samples of the research were the fifth graders of one elementary school in Parongpong. There were two classes of fifth grade in the school; one class was a randomly chosen the experimental and the other one the control group.

The classes were chosen because of some reasons. The first reason was the writer is one of the English teachers in the school; thus, she had access easily to the research site. Moreover, the researcher's "familiarity with the situation in the research site, let alone with the participants, to lead to a more natural conduct of research, in the context that normally occurs" (Emilia, 2005).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section focuses on investigating the effectiveness of project approach in facilitating the students in improving their reading comprehension and the students' responses toward the project approach. Moreover, it covers the findings from the observation, tests (pre- and post-test), interviews, and questionnaires.

The Students' Initial skills

Before giving the treatments to the students, it was important to investigate their initial skills; since, the effect of the treatment process was known from the comparison of pre- and post-test results. To find out the initial differences between the groups (Hatch and Farhady, 1982; Hatch and Lazaraton, 1991), the pre-test, consisted of 20 multiple choice items, were given to both groups. The following table is the result of the independent t-test from both groups' pre-test means.

Independent Samples Test

Table 1 Independent t-test of pre-test score in experimental and control groups

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Pre-test	Equal variances assumed	.826	.367	-.737	66	.464	-.58824	.79841	-2.18232	1.00585
	Equal variances not assumed			-.737	64.977	.464	-.58824	.79841	-2.18279	1.00632

That the independent samples test showed that there is no significant difference between the pre tesr score of the two groups. Thus, the ability of the experimental group and control group before the treatment was equal. Therefore, these two groups could be used for the research groups (Hatch and Farhady, 1982; Hatch and Lazaraton, 1991).

The Implementation of PA

Project approach was applied in the experimental group for five meetings. In implementing this, the teacher used her English, as the classroom language, to the students. Besides, it involved one project and three phases, as explored in the following paragraphs.

In this study, the teacher in the instruction process used English to communicate and give directions to the students. The decision of using English was to provide the target language input and to encourage them to use their English, especially in the teaching and learning process. It is in line with Pinter (2006) who claims that teachers, who often talk a lot in the target language, even in the beginning stages of learning a language, can provide the language input for their students. This helps them to get used to the patterns of intonation and the sounds of the language. Besides, it is based on one of the principles of PA proposed by Moss and Van Duzer (1998), which states that PA challenges learners to use English in new and different contexts outside the class. It follows that the teacher should provide and model the students with her English. Nevertheless, it could be seen from the observation that the students understood and did all teacher's instructions well. Moreover, some of them followed some of the teacher's utterances in the learning process. For example when the teacher encouraged a student, who had done her work, to come and read her work in front of the classroom, another student said "Come on, try, try!" It follows that the student assimilated what he got from the existence model around him. Thus, here, PA can promote English to the students.

In terms of the project used, in this treatment, the student made a bulletin board as the project. It was chosen by the teacher and the students because they had many empty bulletin boards in front of their classroom. Moreover, the theme for the bulletin board was "My School." The reason of choosing that topic was because it exists around the students. In addition, it is in line with Katz (1994) who states that the topic "should be closely related to the children's everyday experience". Another reason was because they wanted to hold a farewell party in the end of this school year. Thus, they wanted to introduce their school to the guests who would come to their school.

Regarding to the phases of PA, this treatment involved three phases adapted from Katz (1994): getting started/ beginning project; field work/ developing project; and culminating and debriefing events/ closing project. The first phase, beginning the project, is the phase where the children and the teacher discuss the topic. They select and refine a topic to be investigated. As it is claimed before, the topic was "My School". Moreover, in this phase, they were invited to recall their memories and experiences about the topic and examine their current understanding and misunderstanding related to the topic (Hertzog, 2007). Thus, after they chose the topic, they discussed "what bulletin board is; what are the contents of it; what are things that exist in their school"; etc. This phase was conducted in two meetings. Furthermore, in this beginning project phase, the students responded to the teacher well. They answered the teacher's questions related to the materials of the project, in the apperception session. Some of them even voluntarily raised their hands

to answer the questions, every time the teacher asked questions. It indicated that they engaged in the learning process. However, in some cases, they preferred to keep silent

The second phase of this approach was field work/ developing project where the students conducted the project, making a bulletin board. In conducting the project, they were working in groups; there were six groups in this class. The group works were preferred because it would be hard for them to finish a bulletin board in two days alone. Besides, PA encourages cooperative learning (Anderman & Midgley; Lumsden in Railsback, 2002; Moss and Van Duzer, 1998; Coleman in Beckett, 2002) and incorporates problem solving, negotiating and other interpersonal skills (Moss and Van Duzer, 1998). Thus, in finishing the project they could share and learn things from their peers (Ytreberg, 1990). In addition, based on the interview result, all of the interviewees enjoyed working in groups because they thought it could make the works easier and it could make the time more effective. Additionally, this phase was conducted in the third and the fourth meetings. In this phase, most of them enjoyed making their project. It could be observed from their activities in their classroom. In this phase also, the students could express themselves by making their own project without teacher's direction. It is important for teachers not to direct the students all the time in doing their works; in order the products were not adult-like in nature (Clark, 2007). However, in making their stuff for their bulletin board, the students could anytime ask for the teacher's help. The teacher went around the classroom, not to give some directions, but to help and supervise the students if they wanted to. From the observation, it can be observed that the students could finish the project well.

The final phase was culminating and debriefing events/ closing project, which was conducted in the fifth meeting. In this meeting, the students presented the result of the project in front of the class. Each group began the presentation by introducing their group and then mentioned all of the contents of their bulletin board. Although every group presented in a short time and they looked so nervous, they had tried their best to show their works. In the end of the session, the teacher gave feedback to the students. Afterwards, each group put their bulletin board on the empty board outside their classroom that could be read by the other students from other classes.

In short, the findings in the implementation of project approach are in line with the previous studies (Katz, 1994; Hertzog, 2007; Clark, 2007; helm and Beneke, 2003; Railsback, 2002; Thomas, 2000). From this observation, it could be noticed that the students enjoyed (Katz, 1994; Challenge 2000 Multimedia Project in Railsback, 2002), were challenged (Katz, 1994; Challenge 2000 Multimedia Project in Railsback, 2002; Anderman & Midgley; Lumsden in Railsback, 2002; Thomas, 2000), engaged in cooperative learning (Anderman & Midgley; Lumsden in Railsback, 2002; Moss and Van Duzer, 1998; Coleman in Beckett, 2002) in doing and finishing the project.

The Effectiveness of PA

To investigate the effectiveness of project approach in encouraging students' reading comprehension, the post-test were given to the students. The tests consist of 20 items with similar difficulty; hence, they could be used and compared to know the effectiveness of the approach, the PA. The following tables are the result of the post-test analysis calculated by SPSS 17.0.

As it can be seen from the table above, the mean of the experimental group (16.26)

was higher than the mean of the control group (14.62)., it can be noticed that the significant value of the t-test was 0.48. ($p<0.05$); thus, Ho was rejected. It means there was a significant difference in students' post-test scores between the experimental and control group. Thus, it could be claimed that the ability of the experimental group after the treatment in terms of reading comprehension achievement was higher than the ability of the control group

Group Statistics

Table 2 The Groups statistics result on post-test

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Post-test	Experimental	34	16.2647	2.78860	.47824
	Control	34	14.6176	3.85349	.66087

Independent Samples Test

Table 3 Independent t-test of post-test score in experimental and control groups

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Post-test	Equal variances assumed	1.036	.312	2.019	66	.048	1.64706	.81576	.01835	3.27577
	Equal variances not assumed			2.019	60.124	.048	1.64706	.81576	.01537	3.27875

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This result has similarity with the results of some studies (Katz, 1994; Hertzog, 2007; Clark, 2007; Helm and Beneke, 2003; Railsback, 2002). Thus, project approach can promote students' English skills, especially in reading comprehension.

The Students' Responses to PA

In responding to the implementation of the PA, based on the findings from the observation, interviews, and the questionnaires, a lot of students gave their positive responses: they enjoyed their English learning using PA because it was interesting and did not make them bored. It has similar result with the study that was conducted by Hertzog (2007). She states that the children enjoyed working in the project because they had many opportunities in first-hand experiences (see also Musthafa, 2008), which allowed them to be themselves and worked independently. Moreover, more than half students claimed that the PA was different from the previous treatment they got. However, many of them had some problems in presenting the project; since, they had to use their English, but they had limited vocabulary.

Moreover, the students responded positively toward the importance of learning English using PA. It was seen from their questionnaires and interview results. More than half of the students thought that PA could make their English better. Furthermore, it was shown from the

interview result that PA was also able to make their creativity skills increase. It was shown that PA could engage learners in acquiring new information that was important to them (Moss and Van Duzer, 1998). Consequently, Grant (in Hasan, 2009: 4) stated that the learning by using this approach must be "personally meaningful, where individuals are more likely to become engaged in learning." Moreover, the students constructed their new ideas or concepts based on their current and previous knowledge (Karlin and Vianni as cited in Railsback: 2002). Regarding to the motivating method, more than half students agreed that PA could motivate them in learning English. It is similar with Railsback's (2002) statement which claims that PA can increase the students' motivation.

Additionally, students also responded to the teacher's role in implementing the project approach well. Nearly all students agreed that the teacher could teach them well and she also could help them do the project given. In addition, more than half of the class claimed that they could understand the materials given by the teacher.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

To sum up, PA is an effective instruction for encouraging students' comprehension of the reading given. It is also a fun, interesting, challenging, and motivating approach that can help the students be more creative. This result is similar to the results of some other previous studies (Katz, 1994; Hertzog, 2007; Clark, 2007; Helm and Beneke, 2009; Railsback, 2002). Hence, it can be concluded that implementing project approach is worth doing by teachers in their classrooms.

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