

A Study of Project-based Learning in Foreign Language Teaching

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Abstract: Project-based Learning is a student-centered teaching model that is widely applied in foreign language teaching due to its characteristics of openness, research, and practicality. PBL fosters students' critical thinking, collaborative communication, knowledge application, and innovation abilities through projects in real-life contexts. Its theoretical foundations include constructivist theory, multiple intelligence theory, and lifelong learning theory, emphasizing active knowledge construction and autonomous learning. The steps of PBL include determining the project theme, information collection and processing, project implementation, project presentation, and reflection and evaluation. Compared to traditional foreign language teaching methods, PBL pays more attention to the "output" in teaching, enhancing students' language skills and problem-solving abilities, thereby preparing them for future work and life. It holds significant educational value and promotion potential.

Keywords: Project-based learning; Foreign language teaching; Constructivist theory

1. Introduction

Project-based learning (PBL) is a student-centered teaching model characterized by its openness, research, and practicality. Studies have shown that through project research, students can effectively acquire and use language. PBL employs methods such as reading, survey, information retrieval, communication reports, and evaluations to help students develop critical thinking, collaborative communication, knowledge application, and innovation abilities. Rooted in Dewey's "learning by doing" philosophy, PBL is based on constructivist theory, emphasizing social interaction and contextual learning, aiming to cultivate students' ability to solve real-world problems. Kirkpatrick firstly proposed the concept of project-based learning, emphasizing learner-centered purposeful activities, highlighting participation and constructiveness. In addition, PBL has been widely applied in fields such as science and technology, computer science, and marketing, and was introduced into foreign language teaching in the late 1970s, integrating language and content teaching to enhance students' language skills and overall competence.

2. Definition of Project-based Learning

Project-based Learning is a student-centered systematic teaching model where learners acquire knowledge and skills through practice, internalization, and innovation centered around specific projects. The Buck Institute for Education defines it as a method for acquiring knowledge and skills through the exploration of complex, real-world problems and the design of tasks. PBL emphasizes student autonomy and initiative, shifting the role of the teacher from a knowledge provider to a facilitator of knowledge acquisition through project completion. The development of information technology has provided project-based learning with abundant resources, enhancing students' ability and motivation for autonomous learning.

3. Theoretical Foundations of Project-based Learning

Project-based learning integrates constructivist theory, multiple intelligence theory, and lifelong learning theory. Constructivist theory posits that knowledge is actively constructed by learners through their interactions with the environment. PBL creates authentic learning contexts, allowing students to engage in experiential and innovative learning, gradually internalizing knowledge and forming their own understanding. Multiple intelligence theory argues that each student has different intellectual strengths. PBL enables students to use their unique intellectual strengths to creatively solve problems, fostering their comprehensive abilities. Lifelong learning theory

emphasizes the social nature of learning and the cultivation of learning abilities. Project-based learning, by engaging students in real-world projects, develops their autonomous learning skills, preparing them to meet the needs of evolving society.

4. Characteristics of Project-based Learning

Project-based Learning has the following characteristics: authentic and specific learning contexts, comprehensive and open learning content, digital and networked learning methods, diverse and highly collaborative learning approaches, and multifaceted and personalized learning outcomes. The PBL method emphasizes a problem-oriented approach, where teachers provide contextualized problem scenarios, and students work collaboratively in groups to solve these problems, fostering team spirit and comprehensive abilities. More importantly, PBL employs a combination of formative and summative assessments to evaluate students' individual contributions, project outcomes, and team collaboration effectiveness.

5. Steps of Project-based Learning

The steps of project-based learning include determining the project theme, information collection and processing, project implementation, project presentation, and reflection and evaluation. First, the teacher and students collaboratively decide on the project theme and the final outcomes. Then, under the guidance of the teacher, students collect and process information. The next step is project implementation, where students carry out practical operations and research activities according to the project plan. The fourth stage is project presentation, where students prepare and present their project outcomes. Finally, in the reflection and evaluation stage, both teacher and students conduct a comprehensive review and assessment of the project. Through these steps, PBL integrates language learning, content learning, and skills development, enhancing students' overall competence and practical application abilities.

6. Benefits of Project-based Learning

Compared to the traditional foreign language teaching methods, project-based learning places a greater emphasis on cognitive engagement and active inquiry, focusing on teaching "output" rather than "input" and prioritizing the learning process of students over the teaching process of teachers, yielding significant results. Psychological research indicates that purely visual input can lead to a retention rate of 20%, auditory input 40%, and when combined with hands-on activities, retention can reach 75% or more. Through reading, inquiry, presentation, and evaluation, PBL allows students to use English in practical activities such as exploring, communicating, and reflecting, thereby naturally enhancing language output and improving learning outcomes.

During the inquiry phase of PBL, students independently search for information around a theme, organize their language for expression, explore project implementation methods, and seek problem-solving strategies. In this process, students need to access information, design layouts, integrate information, and produce project outcomes, thereby acquiring subject knowledge and developing inquiry skills through hands-on and cognitive activities. At the same time, PBL requires students to complete a series of tasks. And psychologically, thinking begins with problems and deepens through tasks. In real task situations, students engage in active thinking to solve problems, thereby enhancing their cognitive qualities. What's more, PBL also emphasizes task-driven learning, fostering critical thinking skills. Students need to self-assess the best ways to complete project tasks, which involves critical thinking. Teachers should propose challenging driving questions based on students' "zone of proximal development" to stimulate their curiosity and cognitive vitality, helping them learn knowledge and design solutions to ensure the smooth implementation of the project.

Additionally, PBL cultivates students' cooperation and communication skills by addressing specific real-life problems. According to the gold standard of PBL, the problems students solve in projects are authentic and require group collaboration and collective task completion during implementation, developing essential future-oriented cooperation and communication abilities. The continuous inquiry, reflection, and revision in projects foster students' ability to integrate and apply knowledge comprehensively. Learners need to investigate new problems, reflect on completed parts, and optimize implementation plans in practice, sometimes restarting certain steps, thereby enhancing their ability to apply knowledge effectively.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, Project-based learning demonstrates unique advantages and broad application prospects in the field of foreign language teaching. As a student-centered systematic teaching model, PBL emphasizes learners autonomy and initiative, while also enhancing students' language skills and overall competence through authentic learning contexts, comprehensive learning content, digital learning tools, and diverse learning approaches. Its theoretical foundations integrate constructivist theory, multiple intelligence theory, and lifelong learning theory, emphasizing active knowledge construction, the utilization of intellectual strengths, and the cultivation of autonomous learning abilities. The steps of PBL, including determining the project theme, information collection and processing,

project implementation, project presentation, and reflection and evaluation, are interconnected to ensure the integrity and effectiveness of the learning process. Through these steps, students develop critical thinking, inquiry skills, collaboration, communication, and creativity through hands-on, cognitive, and cooperative activities. Compared to traditional foreign language teaching methods, PBL focuses more on the learning process and practical application, promoting natural language output and improving learning outcomes through reading, inquiry, presentation, and evaluation. PBL not only enhances students' language abilities but also strengthens their problem-solving skills, thoroughly preparing them for future work and life. Therefore, as an effective method of foreign language teaching, PBL holds significant educational value and promotion potential.

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