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PROJECT-BASED LEARNING IN ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES INSTRUCTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract. Project-based learning (PBL) is increasingly recognized as a pedagogically effective approach in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction at the tertiary level of education. As a student-centered model, it offers numerous educational benefits, including enhanced learner motivation, the development of practical skills, and improved collaboration. However, it also entails a range of challenges and limitations, as evidenced in a growing body of theoretical and empirical literature (Becket & Miller, 2006; Fragoulis & Tsiplakides, 2009; Bell, 2010; Đorđević & Blagojević, 2017; Boss & Larmer, 2018; Kniazian et al., 2021; Tuyen & Tien, 2021; Anđelković et al., 2022).

This paper employs a qualitative content analysis of selected studies to explore the core dimensions of PBL implementation in ESP instruction. The analysis focuses on: (1) the necessity of integrating PBL activities into ESP curricula in the context of contemporary global society; (2) the key characteristics of the PBL approach; (3) theoretical foundations and guiding principles for its implementation in ESP courses; (4) the opportunities and challenges of PBL in ESP contexts based on students' perspectives; and (5) pedagogical implications, including limitations and recommendations for further research. The dual aim of this review is to emphasize the pedagogical potential of PBL as a modern, student-centered approach to ESP teaching and to encourage further inquiry into course design and curriculum development aimed at fostering student competences required for meaningful participation in the global knowledge-based society (Popovska & Piršl, 2013, p. 43).

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Introduction

Educational reforms stem from diverse and accelerating changes in the global labor market. Contemporary employers increasingly seek qualified professionals equipped with discipline-specific knowledge and specialized skills, making the quality and effectiveness of the higher education system crucial for a country's socio-economic development. Since higher education is regarded as a public good (European Higher Education Area, 2012), the advancement and competitiveness of European countries are reflected in their commitment to developing citizens' competences and professional capacities (European Higher Education Area, 2009). According to the European Students' Union, this can only be achieved by aligning university education with societal transformations, innovative learning modalities, and the evolving profiles of learners (Proteasa et al., 2009). Proficiency in English is among the key drivers of these global transformations and is considered a prerequisite for cultivating competent professionals. Consequently, general English courses no longer provide the necessary linguistic foundation for successful performance in professional contexts (Shaalan, 2020). They typically lack the specialized linguistic content necessary for effective communication and access to discipline-specific information (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001). As a result, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction has become an essential component of higher education, as it is tailored to students' actual needs, disciplinary focus, and professional goals. ESP aims to equip students not only with discipline-specific knowledge but also with the essential linguistic competences and skills needed for diverse forms of communication within their professional domain (Jelovčić, 2010, pp. 44–45).

In recent decades, global demand for ESP courses has grown significantly, with increased focus on the development of teaching techniques, methods, and approaches adapted to various scientific and professional disciplines (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Traditionally, ESP instruction has focused on transmitting linguistic knowledge through text comprehension, writing, vocabulary enhancement, and grammar exercises, while comparatively less emphasis has been placed on the development of communicative and professional skills (Mamakou

& Grigoriadou, 2011). However, as a result of gradual transformations in English language teaching (ELT) more broadly, ESP pedagogy has undergone significant stages of development (Stoller, 2002; Kırkgöz & Dikilitaş, 2018). These developments include the introduction of functional and meaningful language use, with increased emphasis on students' active engagement in constructing knowledge, rather than passive reception of information.

One of the stated goals of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2018) is to enhance the design of foreign language curricula so as to better reflect the needs of modern society. When examined through the lens of linguistic competences defined for each proficiency level, it becomes apparent that project-based learning (PBL), owing to its methodological richness and multidimensional character, offers extensive opportunities for the development of both receptive and productive language skills. However, these are not the only aspects of this instructional model. PBL also fosters the acquisition of sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and cultural competences, which are equally important in foreign language learning (Продановић & Гавриловић, 2020, p. 141). In addition, this approach ensures the meaningful use of language in authentic contexts, thereby contributing to the development of 21st-century learning skills and other key educational outcomes.

Taking into account the theoretical grounding of PBL as a model of interactive and innovative instruction, along with the principles outlined in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2018), this paper aims to explore both the opportunities and challenges associated with implementing PBL in ESP instruction within the context of higher education. A qualitative content analysis was conducted based on a broad range of theoretical and empirical studies and involved the following steps: (1) a detailed examination of numerous scholarly articles; (2) the identification and analysis of themes relevant to the study's aims; (3) the definition of key concepts and exploration of their interrelations; and finally, (4) the formulation of conclusions and interpretative insights. Consequently, the main objectives of the study are: (1) to examine the need for integrating PBL activities into ESP instruction within today's globalized society; (2) to present the fundamental features of PBL; (3) to discuss the theoretical framework and general principles for its integration into ESP instruction; (4) to assess the opportunities and challenges of PBL implementation in ESP based on students' experiences; and (5) to offer pedagogical implications, acknowledge certain limitations, and provide recommendations for future research.

The paper is structured into several key sections. Following the introductory remarks, the core features of PBL are outlined. This is succeeded by a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings and guiding principles relevant to its implementation in ESP instruction. The subsequent section addresses the perceived benefits and challenges of PBL in ESP, based on students' perspectives. The final section provides a synthesis of the main findings, accompanied by a consideration of the study's limitations and suggestions for future inquiry.

Project-Based Learning: General Characteristics

PBL is a well-established pedagogical concept that has been extensively studied throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, which has led to a range of diverse theoretical perspectives regarding its nature and implementation (Beckett, 2002; Stoller, 2002; Beckett & Miller, 2006; Miller, 2006; Fragoulis & Tsiplakides, 2009; Bell, 2010; Mergendoller & Thomas, 2010). While the conceptual interpretations of PBL may vary, most researchers present the stages of PBL implementation in a relatively uniform manner. For the purposes of this paper, the model proposed by Kriwas (1999, as cited in Bell, 2010) will serve as a basic framework.

In its simplest form, PBL instruction can be defined as a form of learning structured around tasks derived from real-world questions or problems (Thomas, 2000; Mergendoller & Thomas, 2010). Within the framework of this well-established model, four principal stages of PBL implementation are identified (Kriwas, 1999, as cited in Bell, 2010): (1) speculation; (2) designing the project activities; (3) conducting the project activities; and (4) evaluation.

The first stage involves selecting a topic that is both relevant to students and connected to their professional domain. This step may arise from classroom discussions or course materials addressing current issues relevant to students (e.g., a news article, vlog, blog post, or scientific paper), or it may be derived from the curriculum itself. The general goal is to create an atmosphere that fosters critical thinking about a specific topic and research-related activities while—most importantly—encouraging students to use the target language in authentic, real-world contexts.

The second stage entails the formation of student groups and the distribution of roles among members, followed by the determination of the project's core parameters. This includes selecting appropriate sources of information, determining the methodology, and outlining the project timeline and activities.

The third stage encompasses the execution of the assigned tasks. Students collect, process, and analyze information, which they then organize into a final product (e.g., a video recording, poster, PowerPoint presentation, written report, performance, or tourism program), intended for public presentation. The final product must be meaningfully connected to students' immediate, local, or global context in order to align with the contextual and authentic principles central to PBL.

The fourth stage focuses on the evaluation of tasks performed, objectives achieved, and the project's process and outcome. Both the instructor and the students participate in reflective discussions on the projects and the challenges encountered. This stage incorporates teacher-led assessment as well as student self-evaluation (Kriwas, 1999, as cited in Bell, 2010).

Based on these implementation stages, PBL can be described as a learner-centered instructional model characterized by collaboration, communication, autonomy, constructive inquiry, and reflection within authentic real-life scenarios

(Miller, 2006; Stoller, 2006; Anđelković et al., 2022). Since all PBL activities are adapted to students' interests and needs, and are carried out through group-based exploration of specific topics, the teacher's role is significantly transformed—no longer acting as the central authority in the learning process. Instead, the teacher assumes an advisory and supportive role, acting as a guide, mentor, coordinator (Papandreou, 1994), and facilitator (Fragoulis & Tsiplakides, 2009). As a result, the pedagogical focus shifts from the teacher to the learner.

Another key feature of PBL instruction is its interdisciplinary nature, as it facilitates the integration of content across various subject areas (Habók & Nagy, 2016). This, in turn, fosters the development of functional knowledge and enhances the competences of individuals, making them better equipped to address contemporary professional challenges.

Drawing on the aforementioned definitions and explanations, PBL may be briefly defined as a process of designing, planning, implementing, and evaluating student-driven projects that culminate in a final product, publication, or public presentation (Patton, 2012). Active student participation is evident in each phase of this process, particularly through teamwork and role-based collaboration. By engaging with authentic tasks grounded in everyday life and investigating topics aligned with their interests, students are given the opportunity to refine their meaningful use of language and expand their discipline-specific knowledge.

Project-Based Learning in ESP Instruction: Theoretical Framework and Core Principles

In order to substantiate the integration of PBL into ESP instruction and to demonstrate the interconnection between these two pedagogical concepts, this section will examine them through the lens of the following theoretical perspectives: (1) authentic learning; (2) experiential learning; (3) the interactionist approach; (4) the communicative approach; (5) the learner-centered approach; (6) task-based learning; (7) the constructivist approach; (8) content-based and content and language integrated learning (CLIL); (9) the holistic approach; and (10) 21st-century learning skills. It is important to emphasize that these are not the only theoretical foundations shared by PBL and ESP, but rather some of their key overlapping concepts.

Authentic learning encompasses a variety of educational models rooted in natural, practical, meaningful, and effective engagement with knowledge in real-life contexts or with real-world purposes. It refers to a range of processes that aim to bridge formal education with the kinds of content, competences, practices, methods, and activities relevant to real-world discourse communities (GSP, 2013, as cited in Ignjatović, 2020). Within the framework of project-based ESP instruction, students engage with topics drawn from everyday life that are

closely tied to their academic and professional disciplines. Collaborative work fosters authentic interaction to achieve meaningful communication. Through PBL tasks, students acquire authentic experiences and prepare for future work environments. This form of *experiential learning*, grounded in active participation in PBL activities, naturally leads to enhanced collaboration and the development of reciprocal interaction typically centered on the negotiation of meaning. This process aligns with the principles of the *interactionist approach*, which is based on the concepts of comprehensible input and output (Chun, 2016).

Both PBL and ESP instruction share several characteristics with the *communicative approach*. By using language in authentic communicative situations, students engage in discussions concerning meaning and form with genuine interlocutors (Block, 2003). Addressing current global issues (e.g., climate change in Antarctica), students are encouraged to participate in conversations, analyze relevant material, exchange ideas and information, and ultimately present their final product. In this way, they improve their linguistic skills and systems while simultaneously developing both fluency and accuracy, which are the key tenets of the communicative approach. Thus, the integration of these two instructional models is pedagogically justified, as both PBL activities and ESP instruction aim to develop and maintain effective professional communication (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

The central purpose of ESP instruction is to meet the professional needs of learners by focusing on the language, skills, discourses, and genres essential for achieving their occupational goals (Anthony, 2018, p. 10). In other words, students pursuing different fields of study possess different language needs, and therefore, the objectives of their language learning vary accordingly. Likewise, PBL is inherently needs-oriented, as each project is centered on a topic relevant to students' future careers and workplace contexts. Given the emphasis on students' needs as a foundational element of ESP, the *learner-centered approach* is a core principle of both PBL and ESP instruction (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). This approach is considered motivational, supportive, and empowering, as it relies on authentic tasks that build learners' self-confidence and autonomy (Díaz Ramírez, 2014).

One of the shared characteristics of PBL and ESP instruction is their reliance on *task-based learning*. Learners engaged in ESP courses are systematically exposed to authentic linguistic tasks, materials, and situations that closely mirror real-world professional contexts pertinent to their fields of specialization. Such an instructional setting significantly contributes to the enhancement of their employability and broadens their prospects for career advancement (Jendrych, 2013). Similarly, PBL emphasizes the execution of authentic and meaningful tasks, which inherently require the application of genuine language use within specific, context-bound situations. This approach ensures that students do not merely acquire language for potential future use, but rather internalize it through its immediate, purposeful application in authentic communicative settings.

Within the framework of ESP instruction that is inherently oriented toward practical, task-driven activities, students employ pre-existing knowledge and utilize materials derived from discipline-specific contexts aligned with their academic and professional interests. Through the process of adapting, reshaping, and extending this knowledge, they effectively construct new understandings or generate original products, which is a distinguishing characteristic of PBL. To facilitate such learning, it is imperative to provide students with opportunities to access comprehensible and contextually appropriate language input, thereby enabling them to produce meaningful and functional language output (Becket & Miller, 2006). This form of learning, which not only enables but also actively encourages students to engage in the construction of knowledge through project work, represents a defining feature of the *constructivist paradigm*, which is a common theoretical underpinning of both PBL and ESP instruction.

Considering the previously outlined definitions, it may be concluded that ESP instruction is inherently content-oriented, as it presupposes the use of language within specific, professionally relevant contexts. Consequently, *content-based instruction* (CBI) appears well-suited to the demands of ESP courses (Nguyen, 2015), as it is organized around the subject matter that students are expected to master (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Moreover, *content and language integrated learning* (CLIL) also shares certain features with both PBL and ESP instruction. The primary objective of this innovative educational model is to facilitate language acquisition through the integration of language use into the instruction of specific subject-matter disciplines (Eurydice Report, 2006). PBL activities inherently possess a content-driven dimension, given that learning English through project work is meaning-oriented, focusing on the content of students' thematic projects.

According to Miller (2006), project work also reflects characteristics of a *holistic educational approach*, whose imperative lies in the integration of learning processes, rather than their division into isolated subjects or discrete skills. Within this framework, ESP instruction integrated with PBL exhibits similar features, as it adequately prepares students for professional engagement within a given field while equipping them with the communicative means necessary for the expression and transmission of specialized knowledge. Wang and Stojković (2024) define holistic education as one that transcends a narrow focus on a single domain of human knowledge or professional activity, emphasizing instead the development of students' cognitive potential. Although applied to content derived from specific professional domains, the essence of this approach lies in fostering students' awareness of intellectual growth and facilitating the development of transversal skills, such as self-promotion, negotiation, leadership, presentation, communication, teamwork, among others, as well as social responsiveness, interaction, and expanded consciousness. These competences are essential not only for success within a particular profession but also for meaningful participation in various aspects of personal and professional life.

The aforementioned skills form an integral part of the so-called *21st-century skills*, which have become indispensable components of contemporary instruction across all educational levels. According to Popovska and Piršl (2013, p. 37), ESP instruction in higher education can significantly contribute to the development and further reinforcement of the value system inherent to knowledge-based societies by implementing strategies and methods that foster both personal and professional growth among students. Thematic PBL activities, integrated within ESP curricula at the tertiary level, may be deliberately designed to encourage, develop, and enhance a wide array of skills, including communication, critical thinking, collaboration, problem-solving, creativity, self-assessment, entrepreneurship, responsibility, flexibility, negotiation, decision-making, digital literacy, and many others. Such skills are of paramount importance for future professional environments and for meeting the demands of the global labor market, particularly in highly developed economies.

Given the multifaceted ways in which PBL and ESP instruction intersect, it can be inferred that the integration of PBL activities into ESP courses enables students to apply their knowledge, skills, and English language proficiency not only to further their language development but also to foster discipline-specific knowledge in a collaborative, research-driven, and authentic manner (Kavlu, 2020). When PBL and ESP are viewed through a shared pedagogical lens, it becomes evident that their common goal extends beyond the attainment of a high level of linguistic competence. They also aim to cultivate various other skills, mental capacities, and forms of social responsiveness. This study integrates PBL and ESP instruction to explore how their synergy enhances language acquisition within a supportive learning environment.

To offer a more comprehensive understanding of the advantages and limitations associated with the practical implementation of PBL, the following section will present a concise overview of the opportunities and challenges linked to the application of this educational model in ESP instruction at the higher education level.

Opportunities for the Implementation of Project-Based Learning in ESP Instruction in Higher Education

The application of PBL in ESP instruction offers numerous advantages. For the purposes of this study, only those related to linguistic development, affective factors, and the enhancement of certain 21st-century skills will be addressed.

In the context of ESP instruction, the linguistic benefits of PBL activities are primarily reflected in their positive impact on the improvement of language skills and linguistic systems (Baş & Beyhan, 2010; Baş, 2011; Chu et al., 2011; Redchenko, 2016). Through collaborative work in groups researching specific topics in English, students actively employ speaking, listening, reading, and

writing skills while also expanding and practicing vocabulary, grammar, and other language-related components. The improvement of these skills simultaneously contributes to a deeper understanding of the professional disciplines they study. Furthermore, access to information sources in English often leads to enhanced academic achievement in general.

The findings of numerous studies consistently point to the general improvement of students' language competence, particularly regarding the development of all four language skills within ESP instruction (Baş, 2011; Wahyudin, 2017; Huzairin et al., 2018; Kniazian et al., 2021; Tuyen & Tien, 2021). Kavlu (2016), for instance, reports significant progress in reading skills as a result of PBL instruction in ESP contexts. Similarly, Simpson's (2011) research with tourism students demonstrated a notable improvement in speaking skills, while Đorđević and Blagojević (2017) and Sadeghi et al. (2016) established that PBL activities accelerate writing skill development among Iranian students. Beyond language skills, the positive impact of project-based ESP instruction on the acquisition of grammar and vocabulary has been confirmed in studies by Keles (2007), Chu et al. (2011), and Tuyen and Tien (2021).

In addition to linguistic outcomes, PBL in ESP instruction exerts a significant influence on students' affective learning dimensions. Participation in a process culminating in a tangible outcome offers students opportunities to develop, above all, self-confidence and autonomy (Tuyen & Tien, 2021). Through collaboration and joint activities, students engage in meaningful communication, become more self-assured, demonstrate initiative, and develop a sense of responsibility for their own learning (Stoller & Myers, 2019; Tuyen & Tien, 2021).

Moreover, PBL activities and meaningful learning based on thematic content stimulate students' emotions, enhance their self-esteem (Stoller, 2006), and intensify their classroom engagement, thereby fostering increased motivation. Some researchers have even demonstrated that ESP students participating in PBL tend to develop a positive attitude toward English classes and display greater interest in language learning overall (Shin, 2018; Tuyen & Tien, 2021).

PBL instruction likewise contributes to the improvement of essential 21st-century skills, since it involves continuous and purposeful engagement in meaningful, goal-oriented activities. Such engagement fosters students' active participation in collaborative project conceptualization, research endeavors, the undertaking of targeted actions, and the presentation of outcomes (Tuyen & Tien, 2021). Contemporary generations are maturing within a profoundly transformed environment, one that necessitates the acquisition of these transferable skills, as they equip learners to respond effectively to the complex demands posed by a competitive, knowledge-driven, information-saturated, and technologically advanced society and economy (The Glossary of Education Reform, n.d., as cited in Tuzlukova & Singh, 2018, p. 413). In this context, PBL activities emerge as a particularly suitable instructional model for cultivating such competences.

The process of investigating a specific topic, critically selecting and analyzing information, and engaging in reflective discussion fosters the development of critical thinking, active listening, and communication abilities. The subsequent stage of devising and producing a final project outcome provides fertile ground for students to demonstrate creativity and innovative potential. Moreover, as these activities are intrinsically linked to the use of digital tools, the advancement of digital literacy becomes an unavoidable and natural outcome of participating in PBL tasks.

Integrating PBL within ESP instruction and designing project assignments are inherently aligned with the identified needs and interests of students. This student-centered orientation represents the core of such instruction and marks a clear departure from traditional general English language courses (Belcher, 2004; Lorenzo, 2005, as cited in Shaalan, 2020). Numerous scholars have emphasized the value of ESP instruction designed in this manner, emphasizing its role in preparing students for the contextualized, purposeful use of language within specific professional and communicative settings, as opposed to conventional approaches focused predominantly on grammar instruction and language form (Flowerdew, 1990). Accordingly, language for specific purposes is perceived not as an isolated domain but as an integral component of students' academic and professional needs and interests (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001).

In light of the advantages outlined above, it can be affirmed that PBL instruction plays a pivotal role in enhancing a wide range of key learning dimensions. Its core principles evidently correspond to the aims of ESP instruction, offering it an effective and versatile pedagogical approach within professional education, whether in the preparation of future teachers across disciplines (Kniazian et al., 2021), engineers (Kotkovets, 2014), economists (Mushynska & Kniazian, 2019), designers (Lee, 2009), geographers (Ke, 2010), or specialists from a variety of other fields.

Challenges in the Implementation of Project-Based Learning in ESP Instruction in Higher Education

Despite the numerous advantages previously discussed, the implementation of PBL in ESP instruction at the tertiary level presents several challenges for both instructors and students. What follows is a concise overview of these issues, based on findings from several studies that have specifically examined the drawbacks and potential challenges of this instructional model, particularly from students' perspectives (Becket, 2002; Simpson, 2011; Díaz Ramírez, 2014; Nguyen, 2015; Shin, 2018; Kadek Yogi & Sasthaparamitha, 2019; Kavlu, 2020; Shaalan, 2020; Tuyen & Tien, 2021; Lungu, 2022).

One of the foremost challenges concerns the time-consuming nature of PBL activities. Due to their long duration, these activities often require extended periods for successful completion, which may at times result in diminished student engagement and declining interest in the learning process (Shin, 2018; Tuyen & Tien, 2021). Time constraints can prevent students from completing all assigned tasks within the determined deadlines, potentially leading to heightened stress levels or dissatisfaction (Lungu, 2022).

Another source of difficulty lies in the shift of roles between instructors and students. The reduced reliance on teacher support and the increased autonomy required from students represent a transition to which learners often struggle to adapt (Díaz Ramírez, 2014). The transfer of instructional focus from teacher-led to student-centered learning, accompanied by the expectation that students assume responsibility for nearly all phases of the learning process, may further result in excessive workload and, consequently, a decline in the motivation and willingness to engage in academic tasks.

As the research process constitutes the core of PBL, it inevitably demands greater commitment and imposes a broader range of responsibilities on students. This increased workload, associated with the execution of various project-related tasks, can therefore hinder effective learning (Becket, 2002; Simpson, 2011).

Moreover, the study conducted by Tuyen and Tien (2021) revealed that students often view the vast amount of information uncovered through research as an obstacle rather than a valuable learning resource, despite the fact that familiarization with additional sources and subject-specific knowledge is typically regarded as one of the notable advantages of project work.

Closely related to this challenge is another limitation identified in the research of Shaalan (2020) and Lungu (2022)—the overload of unfamiliar terminology. Encountering a large number of previously unknown terms often hinders students' ability to follow and comprehend texts during reading activities, thereby complicating the further learning process.

As students are typically accustomed to traditional forms of instruction, which is characterized by passive listening, limited classroom interaction, and minimal engagement in out-of-class assignments, PBL often represents a new learning paradigm for them, making the shift to active learning particularly challenging (Nguyen, 2015; Kavlu, 2020).

Given that the instructor's role within this approach shifts to that of an observer, source of support, facilitator, and advisor, the absence of sufficient guidance, inadequate encouragement, or imprecise instructions may lead to confusion among students, causing them to carry out project tasks with uncertainty or difficulty (Díaz Ramírez, 2014; Kadek Yogi & Sasthaparamitha, 2019; Shaalan, 2020; Lungu, 2022).

A lack of self-discipline and insufficient experience in teamwork frequently hinder the successful execution of student projects. Moreover, interpersonal

disagreements within teams may obstruct consensus-building and collaboration, slowing down the project's progress and contributing to a decline in student motivation (Shin, 2018; Lungu, 2022). Divergent levels of ESP competence among team members may further complicate communication, as some students possess more advanced language skills than others. This disparity often gives rise to the fear of making mistakes, which may escalate into language anxiety and eventually result in unease regarding public speaking and presenting final project outcomes (Shaalan, 2020; Tuyen & Tien, 2021; Lungu, 2022).

Furthermore, PBL entails a fundamentally different approach to assessment, eliminating standardized testing or summative language evaluation. Consequently, students' lack of confidence in self-assessment, stemming from limited experience and the established expectation that only the instructor is responsible for evaluating their knowledge and abilities, represents another potential drawback of this method (Lungu, 2022).

The aforementioned challenges related to PBL have been identified in both theoretical and empirical research conducted by various scholars. While these are not the only existing limitations, they represent findings derived from prior studies on ESP instruction from the student perspective. Most of these constraints are general and may equally manifest within PBL in the context of general English instruction. However, certain obstacles, such as the overwhelming volume of information and the extensive exposure to unfamiliar terminology, appear particularly characteristic of ESP courses. The nature of specialized disciplines necessitates in-depth thematic research, which often requires students from specific departments, such as geography, to engage with a considerable number of specialized terms related, for example, to climate change, economic development, or space exploration.

Concluding Remarks and Pedagogical Implications

This paper aimed to provide a concise overview of the advantages and limitations associated with the implementation of PBL in ESP instruction within higher education. The subject of the qualitative content analysis was the key concepts, whose interrelations and theoretical foundations point to the necessity of integrating PBL activities into contemporary ESP instruction at the university level. Adapting to global changes requires the development of innovative instructional models for ESP courses—models that should not be exclusively oriented toward the development of linguistic competence. Rather, they should be structured in a way that prepares students for academic and professional success while also fostering 21st-century skills recognized by both university educators and employers as essential for functioning in modern society (Wang & Stojković, 2024). It is imperative to provide students with functional, thematically relevant curricula,

along with diverse interactive and authentic tasks aimed at improving proficiency in specific English used within particular professional or disciplinary communities (Habul-Šabanović, 2020). In this regard, the integration of project work with ESP instruction appears to be a particularly effective approach.

Our analysis of relevant findings from numerous studies, alongside a review of the key characteristics of this instructional model, allows for the formulation of the following conclusions: (1) PBL is a valuable instructional approach, as it contributes not only to the enhancement of language skills and systems within ESP instruction but also to the development of various other competences and discipline-specific knowledge aligned with students' fields of interest; (2) PBL tasks are based on authentic content and reflect real-life professional scenarios, thereby facilitating students' academic advancement and professional growth; (3) through this teaching model, students are encouraged to engage actively in processes of self-determination and professional identity formation (Копылова, 2003); (4) the student-centered environment fostered by PBL supports the development of individual capacities and skills, while the application of ESP further enriches students' professional repertoire (Fried-Booth, 2002); finally, (5) participation in PBL tasks equips students with competences required for the 21st century and enhances their preparedness for the demands of the contemporary labor market.

As previously stated, the limitations associated with PBL activities are challenges that may arise in the classroom practice of any foreign language instruction, not only within ESP courses. In order to alleviate these challenges, it is advisable to orient students toward this instructional approach from the early stages of their education, thereby gradually fostering adaptability and collaborative competence. Equally important is the necessity of exposing students—as frequently as possible—to the language of their profession, authentic materials, and context-based tasks, to prepare them both spontaneously and thoroughly for acquiring the specialized knowledge required in their future careers. Moreover, more consistent engagement in ESP project-based instruction would foster the development of their cognitive, psychological, and cultural attributes (Wang & Stojković, 2024). Students would also become increasingly aware that professional growth is a lifelong process—an imperative that should define the trajectory of any professional career. The primary drivers of this process are instructors, whose enthusiasm for their work, willingness to adapt to students' needs and to pedagogical innovations, and capacity to implement PBL are key factors for the successful adoption of this approach. Frequent professional development of instructors, through seminars, workshops, webinars, and exchanges of experience with colleagues, would significantly enhance the effectiveness of PBL, thereby boosting students' engagement and motivation to participate in ESP instruction. Such professional growth would lead to more efficient selection of vocabulary (regarding frequency, relevance, and scope), more appropriate choice of authentic materials and tasks, better time management, and more precise delivery of instructions, all of which would likely improve students' performance in ESP courses.

Another promising avenue for increasing students' interest is the integration of telecollaboration into ESP instruction. This method entails cross-border collaboration on PBL tasks with peers from the same professional domain using online platforms. Such an environment facilitates engagement in authentic intercultural communication (Zečević & Trkulja Milekić, 2022, p. 70), provides opportunities for international collaboration, and serves as a strong motivator for students to advance their ESP proficiency.

We hope that these insights will encourage university educators to enrich and refine the educational objectives of their curricula by incorporating PBL, which is a vital component of both contemporary theory and practice in the teaching of ESP.

Research Limitations

This study is subject to certain limitations that warrant careful consideration. These limitations pertain to: (1) the number of scholarly articles analyzed; (2) the type of research articles included; (3) the interpretative approach employed in the analysis; and (4) the examination of key concepts from a single perspective.

Had a larger corpus of scholarly publications been incorporated, the findings would likely have attained greater generalizability. Since the reviewed studies pertain to ESP instruction across various disciplinary contexts, the results cannot be unequivocally extended to all specialized fields. Moreover, if the analysis had drawn more heavily on empirical rather than predominantly theoretical studies, the findings would have provided more robust insights into the improvement of ESP instruction and the adaptation of course syllabi in line with current professional demands and labor market needs.

Additionally, the conclusions presented in this study are based solely on a qualitative content analysis. A more diversified methodological approach might have led to a different structure and scope of findings. The study also addresses the benefits and challenges of PBL in ESP instruction exclusively from students' perspectives. Including instructors' viewpoints could have yielded a more comprehensive understanding of the affordances and challenges of these two educational paradigms.

Suggestions for Future Research

In light of the findings regarding the advantages and limitations of PBL in ESP instruction in higher education, a number of areas merit further investigation to deepen our understanding of their interplay and significance in contemporary education. The following suggestions outline possible directions for future research:

(1) a combined qualitative and quantitative analysis of students' perceptions concerning the benefits and challenges of PBL activities in ESP instruction, focusing on a specific student profile across multiple universities; (2) a qualitative content analysis of the theoretical and empirical research produced within the Serbian academic context; (3) a comparative analysis of the strengths and limitations of project-based versus traditional instructional approach in ESP; (4) a study of ESP instructors' experiences with PBL to explore perceived opportunities and challenges; (5) an inquiry into the feasibility and pedagogical value of implementing PBL tasks through telecollaboration in higher education.

These and other avenues of research may contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how PBL can be effectively integrated into ESP instruction to meet evolving educational and professional requirements.

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Учење засновано на изради пројеката у настави енглеског језика струке у високом образовању: могућности и изазови

Резиме

Учење засновано на изради пројеката представља значајан приступ у савременом високом образовању, јер промовише следеће концепте: (1) интегрисање знања и вештина студената; (2) учење кроз реализацију истраживачког процеса; (3) бављење проблемима из области интересовања студената; (4) извршавање аутентичних задатака; (5) јавну презентацију и евалуацију резултата; (6) усавршавање рада у групи и (7) активно учешће студената у процесу учења. Настава енглеског језика струке пружа изузетан простор за примену оваквог приступа, јер омогућава студентима, као будућим стручњацима, да унапређују комуникацијске вештине на енглеском језику у домену своје академске и професионалне области.

Примена пројектних активности све чешће је саставни део наставе енглеског језика струке у високом образовању. Иако овај приступ доноси бројне предности, одређена ограничења су такође присутна, што потврђују различите теоријске и емпиријске студије (Becket & Miller, 2006; Fragoulis & Tsiplakides, 2009; Bell, 2010; Boss & Larmer, 2018; Kniazian et al., 2021; Tuyen & Tien, 2021; Anđelković et al., 2022). У циљу сагледавања ових аспеката, спроведена је квалитативна анализа садржаја више теоријских и емпиријских студија, са фокусом на: (1) потребу за интегрисањем пројектних активности у наставу енглеског језика струке у контексту савременог глобалног друштва; (2) основне карактеристике учења заснованог на изради пројеката; (3) теоријске оквире и начела примене овог модела у настави; (4) искуства и ставове студената о предностима и изазовима овог приступа и (5) педагошке импликације израде пројеката, укључујући ограничења и препоруке за даља истраживања.

Сходно томе, циљ овог рада је двострук: 1) да промовише могућности учења заснованог на изради пројеката као савременог модела наставе енглеског језика струке у XXI веку и укаже на потенцијалне недостатке, те 2) да подстакне даље истраживање у области планирања и реализације наставних програма усмерених на развој компетенција потребних за активно и сврсисходно учешће студената у друштву заснованом на знању (Popovska & Piršl, 2013, стр. 43).

Кључне речи: учење засновано на изради пројеката; енглески језик струке; студенти; предности; изазови.