Katarzyna Bednarska
University of Lodz, Łódź
ORCID: 0000-0002-3318-8754

Aleksandra Makowska
University of Lodz, Łódź
ORCID: 0000-0003-2703-9389

BA Projects at Linguistics for Business – at the Crossroads of PBL & PjBL

Abstract

Higher education must respond to dynamically changing job market needs and this has become the third mission of higher education institutions. Traditional methods of sharing knowledge and developing students' skills are not satisfactory. For this reason, it is necessary to seek teaching alternatives, such as PBL (Problem-Based Learning) and PjBL (Project-Based Learning). This paper presents the idea of applying the above-mentioned methods to the BA in Linguistics for Business at the University of Lodz, an innovative and interdisciplinary BA programme combining linguistics with management. The participants combine skills and knowledge gained throughout their studies, i.e. linguistics, intercultural communication, accounting and finance, or selected aspects of running a business. Moreover, creating group BA projects reflects real-life situations students may encounter in the workplace.

Keywords: PBL, PjBL, BA project, BA thesis, project charter, groupwork

1. Introduction

Linguistics for Business, a new interdisciplinary BA programme, is a response of University of Lodz to job market needs. Until its inception there was a lack of specialists possessing competences in the area of management combined with the command of two foreign languages at the B2+ level. As a result, in the course of the L4B studies students acquire basic managerial skills during classes devoted to finance and accounting or selected aspects of running a business at the Management Faculty. In addition, these skills are supplemented with linguistic and cultural competences, such as intercultural communication, pragmatics or applied linguistics.

The integration of combined competences of linguistics and management gives students a competitive edge on the job market, especially in the business services sector (BSS). Moreover, the practical profile of the studies allows for acquiring practical skills indispensable for working both in the small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) and big multinational corporations. Finally, the consequence and quintessence of the practical character of the BA programme is the BA thesis prepared and written in the form of a project in project groups constitutes the consequence and quintessence of the practical character of the BA programme, because it integrates skills acquired at various classes during the studies.

2. Problem-Based Learning (PBL)

Problem-Based Learning was introduced in 1968 and since then the method has been evolving, i.e. it undergoes the process of adaptation and hybridisation (Taylor & Miflin 2008; Newman, 2005). It places learners in the centre of attention and allows for holistic learning: it combines theory with practice, because learners have to apply acquired knowledge in practice in order to find a solution to a self-defined real-life problem. (Hartman, Moberg & Lambert, 2013). The learners are responsible for the process of their education and decide what to learn, because they are faced with a problem that they have to solve individually or in a team, using knowledge they possess, integrating information from various disciplines and skills as well as different skills they have already acquired, or evaluate the deficiencies and find appropriate and relevant resources (Hartman *et. al.* 2013; Yew & Goh 2016). In addition, such an approach engages the learners more deeply than traditional methods as learning takes place both at an individual and group level in an empirical way and/or through discussions (Hartman et.al. 2013; Yew & Goh 2016). Problems that are to be solved are authentic, which allows for training competent and comprehensively educated professionals who can combine theoretical assumptions with practical applications. The final stage in the learning process is the consolidation of acquired knowledge in writing in the form of a report (Newman 2005; Hartman et.al. 2013; Yew & Goh 2016).

In PBL the teacher is viewed as an instructor, tutor, or guide that is supposed to act as a protective umbrella in the learners' process of training and development, particularly during the stage of analysing the problem and searching alternatives to solve it (Newman 2005; Hartman et.al. 2013; Yew & Goh 2016). According to Newman (2005), the teacher takes as many as 10 different roles in the process of training, i.e. a learner, creator, director, evaluator, challenger, negotiator, modeller, designer, facilitator and supporter.

In its classical (Barrow's) approach, the method consists of 4 components:

1. The unsolved problem that triggers thoughts about its causes and possible solutions
2. The approach aimed at the learner who decides what to learn
3. The teacher who takes the role of an instructor or a guide in the process of learning
4. Real problems that mirror real-life situations (Hartman, et.al., 2013)

The PBL method allows learners to obtain very good results in acquiring long-term knowledge (Hartman et.al. 2013; Yew & Goh 2016). In addition, they develop skills of strategic planning, logical and critical thinking, self-directed learning, problem solving, in-depth subject-field knowledge as well as interpersonal skills (Newman 2005; Hartman et.al. 2013; Yew & Goh 2016). A comprehensive list of skills which are acquired via PBL was developed by Newman (2005) and is depicted in Figure 1 below.

- Awareness (active listening)
- Problem solving
- Strategy (planning)
- Stress management
- Managing change
- Reasoning critically and creatively
- Collaborating productively in groups or teams
- Self-assessment

- Personal learning preference
- Learning skills (laws, theories, concepts, etc.)
- Creativity
- Time management
- Interpersonal skills
- Adopting a more universal or holistic approach
- Self-directed learning
- Obtaining criteria

- Defining real problems (goals, mission, vision)
- Look back and extending experience (recognizing fundamentals in a given situation)
- Decision making
- Group and chairperson skills
- Coping creatively with conflict
- Practicing empathy, appreciating the other person's point of view
- Self-directed lifetime learning

Figure 1. List of capabilities that are developed via PBL, according to Newman (2005: 13)

Finally, PBL is an alternative method which engages the learner, and it is fit for teachers seeking improvements on their courses. However, there is a lack of clear guidance for them how to implement it in the classroom (Taylor & Miflin 2008).

3. Project-Based Learning (PjBL)

Project based learning (PjBL) is an approach based on achieving planned educational goals by engaging learners in long-term projects. The aim of teaching through projects is to master a given topic using elements of a research method combined with a project task or product development. Through the active approach to learning, learners are encouraged to develop a thorough understanding of the content, not just superficial acquisition of theory. As part of PjBL, the teachers take the role of mentors or advisors - they encourage and guide learners, help them implement the strategies they adopted when planning the project.

In comparison to traditional methods, PjBL is more motivating for learners as they are engaged in tasks involving doing research or developing a product. Table 1 below shows the key differences between traditional and project-based learning (and teaching) with the roles of both - the teacher and the learner.

Table 1: The comparison between the PjBL and traditional approach (developed by the authors).

TEACHER	LEARNER
TRADITIONAL APPROACH - chooses the teaching content and provides materials, - puts knowledge to the heads, - assesses the knowledge of students	TRADITIONAL APPROACH - listens, observes, writes down, - often does not have to prepare for lectures or exercises, - assimilates content which is often not related to other classes

TEACHER	LEARNER
PROJECT-BASED APPROACH - selects materials based on specific, everyday problems, - advises and encourages students by asking key questions, - evaluates the individual steps and teaches with the results of the project	PROJECT-BASED APPROACH - selects the content of the project, materials and information (with the help of the teacher), - must prepare for exercises and lectures, - presents the project to other students

Although the project-based method is an established, modern approach to teaching, its implementation requires a safe environment in which participants are seen as learners rather than experts in a given field. Research findings show that contemporary learning practices, such as project-based and problem-based learning, have lowered or even levelled out negative effects on the acquisition of general or basic knowledge. The positive effects of such learning practices become apparent once learners have acquired basic knowledge on the basis of which in-depth learning takes place (Hattie 2009: 235).

The PjBL method can be treated as the main teaching method used in a given unit or one of several complementary methods (both modern and traditional). While performing individual project tasks (e.g. when preparing a conceptual sketch of the project or planning the implementation of project stages), different types of work are used (individual work, pair- or groupwork), but it is desirable for learners to jointly express their ideas, propose solutions and present the results to the project participants, the teacher or the wider community at each stage of the project.

The key elements of the project-based method include:

- research question (main question), i.e. the basis for planning project activities.
- final product, i.e. presentation of results or answers to a research question, e.g. on a leaflet, poster, recording, simulation, etc.

4. The stages of the project-based method

The project-based learning may be divided into six stages. It should be emphasised that the components of the individual steps may differ depending on the subject and nature of the project. The stages are as follows:

1. Initial phase: the idea
   - Familiarising learners with the project work.
   - Presentation of the objectives and criteria for evaluation and the intended end products.
   - Project teams creation (from 2 to 4 students).
   - Proposition of a topic implemented using the project-based method (brainstorming).
2. Preliminary draft of the project
   - Discussion about specific activities that need to be carried out while working on the project.
   - Finding the sources from which the team will derive knowledge and information related to the project.
   - Distribution of tasks.
3. Planning of individual stages of the project

- Planning the implementation of individual stages, achieving goals and the final result (product).
- Objectives are operational, so it is important to define clearly how they will be achieved ("how?").

4. Implementation of the product
- The stage of analysis, learning and preparation of products which are the essence of the project.
- Individual tasks can be carried out individually, in pairs or within the entire project team.
- Evaluation of work, feedback and additional ideas for the product improvement.

5. Presentation of results
- Presentation of the final product, problem solved or organization of an event (exhibition, show).

6. Assessment of various stages of the project and presentation of the results
- The final grade consists of the evaluation of work during the product development, the evaluation of the product as such and the evaluation of the presentation.

5. The profile of the L4B studies

In order to meet job market requirements, University of Lodz has created a new BA programme of studies: Linguistics for business in which young people learn the basics of accounting and finance, project management, selected aspects of running a business, intercultural communication, linguistic pragmatics and applied linguistics. These studies also allow to acquire the command of two foreign languages: a selected European language (French, German, Italian, Slovenian, Spanish, Croatian) and English. These languages should be mastered at a level exceeding B2 in accordance with the standards of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Apart from these classes, students can participate in additional foreign language courses of Spanish or Dutch. In addition to language classes, students also participate in courses such as the culture of a given language area or translation. The students are also taught 3 languages for special purposes at different courses of 28 teaching hours each of which include the language of finance and HR, the logistics and IT. Such a combination of skills is a university's reply to job market needs that lacked professionals with the interdisciplinary education profile.

6. PBL or PjBL for L4B BA projects

As mentioned above, students define a problem, and then write their BA theses in project groups in the form of a project. On the basis of their findings they also develop a product, a physical proof of the solution to the problem they worked on. As a result, the authors decide on a comparison to determine whether the L4B BA projects are developed according to the PBL or PjBL method, or perhaps a hybrid of the two methods. For this reason, Venn's diagram might be a useful tool to extract the differences and illustrate the overlapping areas in both methods which is depicted in Figure 2.
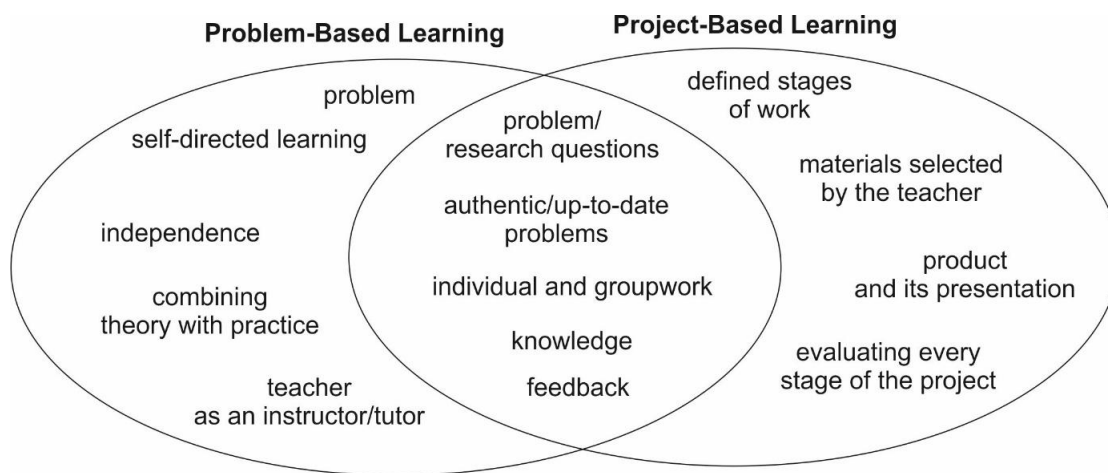
Problem-Based Learning   **Project-Based Learning**

problem

self-directed learning

problem/
research questions

defined stages
of work

authentic/up-to-date
problems

materials selected
by the teacher

independence

individual and groupwork

product
and its presentation

combining
theory with practice

knowledge

teacher
as an instructor/tutor

feedback

evaluating every
stage of the project

Figure 2 Venn's diagram illustrating similarities and differences between PBL and PjBL (developed by the authors)

As shown in Figure 2 above there are similarities and differences between the PBL and PjBL method. The PBL possesses the following characteristics:

1. The problem is in the centre of attention which triggers the process of learning: the participants need to solve it themselves.
2. Self-directed learning: it is the learners who decide what to learn – they choose the topic and define the problem.
3. The emphasis is put on learners: they select the resources when being faced with the problem which has to be solved either individually or in a group.
4. Learning takes place by combining theoretical assumptions with practical applications. Participants consolidate skills acquired during the course of studies on various classes, e.g. linguistics with project management, selected aspects of running a business, HR, marketing, etc.
5. The teacher is seen as a tutor, instructor, a protective umbrella. The promotor guides students via consultations, directs and supports them in their work on the project.

On the other hand, the PBL method is characterised by the following distinctive features:

1. The stages of work are clearly defined. Participants draw up a plan of a project on the basis on the deadlines set up by the promotor.
2. The teacher selects the materials on the basis of the problems that have been defined by the participants.
3. Learners present the results of their research and the developed product during the defence of the BA thesis.
4. Learners are graded at each stage of their work and for the finished project by the teacher.

However, one can identify common ground between PBL and PjBL:

1. Learners are supposed to choose a topic, define a problem and ask research questions.

2. The problems are authentic and up-to-date that motivate learners to work, e.g. L4B students choose topics connected with the working environment or are inspired by issues that arise during their internships.

3. Learners work either in project groups or individually (BA theses are developed in project groups).

4. Learners provide feedback during consultations with the teacher, and prepare BA theses as a written report of performed tasks.

5. Learners acquire in-depth subject-field knowledge via self-directed learning with the assistance of the teacher (delve into the topic, search for resources and literature on the subject).

At the BA seminar L4B students decide themselves how to divide into project groups, choose a topic of their interest and define the problem. In order to solve this problem, they select the most suitable research method and search for materials, i.e. relevant literature on the subject. Before starting their research, students prepare a project charter (discussed in the next section) which guides them through the whole process: it defines roles, duties, deadlines, stakeholders, opportunities and threats. While doing their research they integrate knowledge acquired in various courses during their studies, use the selected resources to solve the problem they are working on. As a result of their research they are supposed to produce a physical product which presents their findings. The teacher is not a knowledge facilitator, but aa coach, tutor that assists in the process of performing their project who also assesses progress in their research. The BA thesis constitutes a written report of conducted research and work. Therefore, it can be concluded that BA seminar at Linguistics for Business is a hybrid of both methods discussed above: PBL and PjBL.

7. Project charter as a teaching aid at the BA seminar

As mentioned above, the whole BA project is prepared and written by a project group, which is supposed to simulate a real life situation at a workplace. As part of preparatory work before writing the thesis L4B students fill in a project charter that is normally used in project management. In this approach students integrate and verify their knowledge and skills acquired at various courses, such as project management, selected aspects of running a business and linguistics.

A project charter is the most important document developed for the presentation of the project proposal and contains "the essence of the general purpose of the project, the substantial description of fragmentary tasks, the schedule of design and construction work, costs or cost estimation of the project (Wałas-Trębacz & Sołtysik 2013: 3)". It is an essential tool both during the preparatory and execution phase of the project, because it "identifies project supervisors, explains project's specificity and key criteria of its success (Wałas-Trębacz & Sołtysik 2013: 3)". It contains "a vision, purposes, scope, and organisation of the project and a preliminary plan", but also prerequisites, assessment of available resources, threats, limitations, all of which require authorisation (Wałas-Trębacz & Sołtysik 2013: 3). In addition, it allows for the identification of project group members and stakeholders by creating their map, but is also used for the determination of deadlines for a planned project.

As mentioned above, L4B students draw up a project charter at the BA seminar which allows them to organise their work on their project. The project charter depicted in Figure 3 below used at the seminar was developed on the basis of the textbook "Project management step by step" („Zarządzanie projektami krok po kroku") by Mariusz Kapusta.

Figure 3. Project charter developed on the basis of Kapusta's (2013) textbook used at the BA seminar.

The project charter is an invaluable tool for students during the BA seminar. The criteria charter help perform all the activities connected with their BA projects in teams in time. At the same time it constitutes a simulation of real life situations in a potential workplace: planning, implementing procedures, conducting project work, drawing up a written report from performed activities.

The experience gained so far has shown that implementing a project charter at the BA seminar has greatly simplified and regulated the execution of BA projects since it allows for defining tasks of each project group member and setting the deadlines for particular stages of project work as well as predicting certain obstacles. This, in turn, prevents a number of problems from arising.

8. The specificity of BA projects at L4B

Linguistics for Business is a practical BA programme, which entails certain adjustments to the course in comparison to the general academic profile. The details have been included in the Detailed Rules for Dissertation at the Faculty of Philology at University of Łódź which were approved at the Faculty Council on 27 November 2020[1]. These rules stipulate that BA theses can be prepared in the form of a project which is supposed to prove that the student has acquired a number of skills, i.e. foreign language

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1 http://filolog.uni.lodz.pl/?page_id=17100, 30.10.2021

command at the B2+ level, problem solving and the scientific description of the problem with the use of literature on the subject and methodology that led to the solution. The project can be executed in a project group with clearly defined roles of each group member. Group members describe tasks they were responsible for and they are graded separately for their workload. In addition, the project is to solve a specific practical problem and produce a physical product. The topic that students choose needs to be original and cannot be part of any other assignment handed in and graded in the course of the studies. It has to be approved by the supervisor of the BA thesis on the basis of a plan, and finally confirmed by the scientific council at the department responsible for a given programme of the studies. The plan, or project proposal, should include the topic and purpose of the project, characteristics of practical activities, research methods, description methods of project execution, all activities, stages, deadlines and list of references and resources.

The BA project should be divided into two parts:

1. The presentation of practical steps taken or their documentation (an exhibition, translation, photographic documentation, report, etc.) also in the form of a public display

2. The critical-descriptive part which entails the characteristics of practical steps taken and adopted methodology, written in the appropriate register including basic domain-specific terminology on the basis of literatureon the subject according to a dedicated stylesheet. It should also contain keywords in Polish or English depending on the language it was written.

As mentioned above, the purpose of the BA project is to elaborate on a specific problem, topic or issue which entails its solution, description or explanation. As a result, students create a physical product which involves, e.g. an exhibition, translation with the description of the translation process, an interview, encyclopaedic entry, documentation of an issue, series of articles, glossary of given terminology, subject field dictionary, compendium of knowledge or information.

The grade for the BA project embraces both the practical and descriptive part and should be based on the following criteria: novelty, consistency of effects with purposes, validity of the adopted method, consistency between the practical and theoretical part as well as the project presentation. Each student receives 6 ECTS points, which equals the workload of 160–180 hours.

At Linguistics for Business, students work in teams of 2-4 members and prepare BA theses in the form of projects concerning linguistic, business and cultural issues and creating various products. In recent years, these were, inter alia, business guides for people interested in the Russian market, video guides promoting French, podcasts related to economic emigration to Spain, advertisements of the Faculty of Philology in Polish and Spanish (based on the analysis of Polish and Spanish advertisements), a glossary of homeopathic vocabulary in Polish, English and French. Students also created a radio programme about teaching and learning business terminology during the COVID-19 pandemic, a guide for teachers about audiovisual teaching aids to boost motivation among English learners, an e-book about tips how to advertise a business entity effectively in the Internet or a magazine for English learners about the Spanish culture and business issues.

9. Conclusion

PBL and PjBL are practical approaches to teaching which let students discover knowledge individually. In addition, BA theses prepared in the form of a project allow for using various skills acquired on

management and linguistic classes and emphasise the practical profile and the interdisciplinary character of the L4B programme of studies. These perspectives which combine theoretical assumptions with practical elements and knowledge from different disciplines perfectly fill in the niche in the job market for professionals with an interdisciplinary set of skills.

Both the methods of teaching selected for the BA seminar and the projects themselves constitute hybrids. In addition, the projects are developed on the basis of a PBL-PjBL hybrid that combines elements from both methods which is illustrated by the Venn's diagram. The implementation of elements of these two approaches allows teachers to prepare students comprehensively for project work and to guide them through the process of conducting research, developing the product and writing the thesis. They are supplemented with basic project management techniques which are used to help students organise their project work. On the other hand, the projects also constitute a mixture, because the topics pertain to linguistics and different aspects of management.

BA theses developed as a project also mimic real-life situations from the working environment. On various occasions employees work on projects in teams with the collective responsibility for its execution and obtained results. While working on their projects, students learn by experience that working in a group might be problematic, because they are fully responsible for the whole process. On the macroscale it turns out to be beneficial, but the microscale shows that it might be complicated.

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