PROMOTING STUDENTS' AGENTIC ENGAGEMENT THROUGH PROJECT-BASED LEARNING: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS IN EFL CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

Recent studies show that agentic engagement in Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is still not widely understood, particularly in collectivist settings like Indonesia. Much of the existing research has focused on measuring agency or linking it to other factors, but less attention has been given to how agency actually develops and unfolds in everyday classroom interactions. This study seeks to address that gap by examining how students engage in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Soppeng, South Sulawesi. Through interviews with 15 students and one teacher, several challenges emerged: language barriers, fear of making mistakes, and limited classroom time often hinder students' ability to take initiative. The findings also highlight the importance of teacher responses, which can either encourage or discourage students from actively participating. To strengthen agentic engagement, the study suggests adopting creative teaching strategies, building supportive teacher-student relationships, and connecting lessons to students' real-life goals. These insights not only deepen our understanding of agency in collectivist cultures but also emphasize the need for more research in secondary schools. Ultimately, the study calls for continued exploration to better support student autonomy and empower learners in their educational journey.

INTRODUCTION

Student engagement has long been recognized as a key determinant of learning outcomes. Engagement in the classroom is not just a desirable quality; it is a decisive predictor of students' academic success (Gerber et al., 2013). The concept of engagement has historically been understood through various dimensions, such as behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004). The various dimensions of this type have been widely studied and informed the understanding of student learning environment interactions. More recently, though,

agentic engagement has become important in understanding how students build their own learning opportunities.

In recent years, changes in the learning environment have shifted the role of students from passive recipients of knowledge to active creators of learning. One of the constructs that reflect this shift is agentic engagement, which is defined by Reeve and Tseng (2011) as students' positive and constructive participation in the process of their own learning.

This type of engagement is more than simply engagement, but is also about learners' deliberate attempts to customise, enhance, and even possess their own learning experiences by expressing preferences, posing constructive questions, and sharing materials. In EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learning, agentic engagement is not only helpful, but is a necessity as mastery of a language involves more than just rigorous activities. The students are also required to take risks, articulate their ideas creatively, and engage in active communication. However, one major and seemingly unmanageable issue exists, and that is, in most EFL, especially the so-called EFL settings with a dominant teacher-centred approach, learners show a striking absence of agency. This is evidenced by unyielding reliance on the teacher to take the initiative, reluctance to offer personal contributions, and general inactivity that goes against the very essence of student-centred approach in education.

The lens of PjBL illuminates this issue well since it is the primary educational framework used in the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. Project-Based Learning (PjBL), as defined by Thomas (2000), provides an experience in which students build complex, long-term projects to solve authentic problems. In essence, this framework is in line with the educational goal of fostering student independence and agency. PjBL situates students as the primary problem solvers, fostering the 21st century skills of critical thinking, collaboration, and self-direction; however, PjBL does not practically lead to the development of genuine student agency. The primary issue is the gap that exists between the completion of the innovative and student-centered framework, such as PjBL, and the realisation of the necessary agentic engagement.It is this absence of student empowerment in the learning trajectory that could cause PjBL to collapse to a set of teachers prescribed activities. This means that the success of PjBL in shaping students into confident, competent, and competitive global citizens depends heavily on how this approach is implemented in a real learning context. The pedagogical gaps between intentions and reality in the classroom are significant obstacles in the implementation of national curriculum reform and EFL education in Indonesia.

The problem, in its essence, is multi-faceted, and it starts with the curriculum that requires student autonomy and initiative, juxtaposed with the prevailing learning culture, educational frameworks, and, most critically, the pedagogical arsenal of the teaching force, which may still be underprepared for such a shift. This created what can be labeled as a pedagogical zone of discomfort, where new practices are implemented, yet the success factors, most importantly the attitudinal preparedness of students, are missing. Hence, initiatives aimed at promoting self-directed inquiry are, in effect, performed in a procedural, mechanical fashion, with students following pre-determined instructions and losing

what Reeve and Tseng (2013) emphasize as the constructively and cooperatively engaged. Therefore, the enduring paradox is not the lack of pedagogical advancement, but the persistent failure to mobilize the custodian of such advancement, namely, students' agentic behavior.

This means that the study of how agentic engagement can be purposively nurtured within the PjBL ecosystem transcends being a mere academic inquiry; it becomes a necessity, particularly to help large-scale efforts in curriculum innovation, such as the Merdeka Curriculum, achieve their desired outcomes. The ultimate goal is to graduate students whose skills extend beyond English proficiency to include critical thinking, effective action, collaboration, and independent work.

The existing academic literature provides a solid foundation for understanding both agentic engagement and PjBL, while further revealing the complexity of the intersection between the two. Reeve's (2013) important study positions agentic engagement as a distinct and developable dimension of student engagement that plays a crucial role in maintaining motivation and promoting deep learning. Research in this line of inquiry confirms that agency behaviour is not innate but greatly influenced by the context and pedagogical practices in the classroom. Critically, studies across various settings consistently identify deficiencies in this type of engagement. For example, earlier research conducted by Dong and Liu (2020) on online English language learning revealed low levels of agentic engagement among non-English-speaking students and, importantly, found no significant correlation with academic achievement. This crucial finding suggests that the mere adoption of technologically or pedagogically advanced learning environments does not automatically engender student agency; explicit and supportive scaffolding is a prerequisite.

Simultaneously, a solid amount of literature extols the virtues of PjBL for developing mastery of the content, as well as the collaboration and cognitive skills (Thomas, 2000). In the EFL context, most research tends to confirm the belief that PjBL helps to develop students' language skills and increase motivation. However, several recent studies have changed the focus by questioning the supporting factors and conditions that need to be created for the successful implementation of PjBL. In the Indonesian context, for example, Anggrarini (2018) offers the perspective that preservice teachers tend to implement PjBL rather superficially. She suggests that they concentrate on the technical aspects, paying less attention to the more pedagogical ones, who, if they understood the cognitive load, would be able to construct meaning with the students. This suggests a major reason for the gap in engagement as being the teachers' level of preparedness and understanding of the concept of agency as a learning outcome.

Additionally, recent empirical studies have begun outlining particular hindrances to agentic engagement within collective and project-based frameworks. Yang and Liu (2024) study reinforces the point that agentic engagement continues to be the most elusive and the most vulnerable to contextual variations. For Zhong et al. (2024), missing from the literature, is the critical level of culture, where fear of error, prevalent in many Asian educational cultures, is a significant barrier to students' agentic engagement. Research conducted in Indonesian secondary

schools corroborates these findings, if students' reluctance to take on leadership, propose their own ideas, and step outside the teacher's directive during a project, is questioned, the answer is clear. The prior studies, collectively, state a number of important findings: The need for agentic engagement is critical yet neglected; the success of PjBL is contingent on far more than its structural design; and psycho-cultural attributes, such as risk avoidance, are combined with pedagogical strategies to stifle student agency.

Nevertheless, prior studies do show gaps regarding what we know and do not know. A review of the literature shows that the majority of previous studies have attempted to measure agentic engagement as an outcome variable, or simply examined its correlation with other variables such as motivation and academic achievement. Conversely, PjBL research evaluates the effectiveness of PjBL in developing language skills, or in improving student satisfaction. Little to no research exists that is sufficiently detailed, ethnographically, or qualitatively, that seeks to examine the construction, negotiation, or suppression of agency in everyday interactions in the PjBL classroom. The response of teachers to student attempts at agency, be it affirmative, dismissive, or corrective, has not been documented, especially in a collectivist and hierarchical society like Indonesia. Furthermore, the research gaps include the predominant focus on the student or teacher perspectives, but not both.

There is still little research that integrates these two viewpoints to investigate the perception gap with regard to opportunities and expectations of agency in PjBL. In other words, we have a broad overview of the problem, but we still lack in-depth analyses of the micro-interactional levels, implicit norms, and critical aspects of PjBL processes that determine whether the seeds of agency are likely to grow or be stunted.

Given the existing research map, multiple research gaps are notable and warrant academic scrutiny. Foremost is the research bias in both geography and institutions whereby most studies are situated in Western educational contexts or universities. The agentic engagement of secondary school systems, and in particular the rapidly evolving educational systems like Indonesia's, continues to be understudied. The significance of this gap is reinforced by the recent countrywide adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum, which, among other things, supports PjBL and student-centred learning. From a purely scientific and practical standpoint, it is imperative to understand how macro-level policies shift to micro-level agency in a classroom. Additionally, the problems of PjBL have been documented, but the interplay between PjBL design/facilitation and the catalysation of agentic behaviour among students is still under-researched. Most studies focus on either engagement or PjBL and ignore the potential of a synergistic approach. Furthermore, research proposing and assessing specific, adaptable, context-sensitive pedagogical interventions that teachers can employ within the PjBL paradigm to cultivate and sustain agentic engagement in a strong teacher-dominant culture is sparse.

This study focuses on examining and analysing the identified gaps, which are interrelated and, to a certain extent, empirically measurable. Specifically, this study aims to be a pioneering study that maps the manifestations, drivers, and barriers of agentic engagement in the implementation of PjBL in Indonesian

secondary school English (EFL) classrooms. Notably, the focus here will be to systematically and diagnostically study the gaps and how students perceive the gaps, particularly, the gaps in the opportunities for agency, and the gaps in, institutional, pedagogical, or socio-cultural, obstructive, or supportive, structures.

The second objective of this study is to undertake a critical assessment of the extent of the theoretical coverage of principles of PjBL, as espoused in the Merdeka Curriculum, against the lived experiences of the students and the teachers. The study aims to ascertain whether the pedagogy is designed to create an 'intended' structure of agency and to what extent such structure is 'unintended' or 'intended'. Lastly, and most significantly, the study aspires to create an evidence-based pedagogical strategy framework to be offered to EFL teachers, which will be culturally appropriate and will allow for deliberate PjBL practice that goes beyond simply assigning projects to students, as a practice that will, throughout the process, empower students to exercise agency in negotiating the project, designing the process, and innovating and evaluating solutions.

An Indonesian teacher will be able to articulate the specific challenges that Project-Based Learning (PjBL) as an administrative task faces in enabling the learning ecosystem that the students require. By basing her work on the PjBL administrative task, she will exercise PjBL in such a way that the students feel safe, capable, and in control of their learning processes. With an interpretative and qualitative paradigm, this research intends to achieve its purpose using a multi-site instrumental case study. The research will consist of the document analysis of projects, as well as the recording of teaching and in-depth participant observation, and the conducting of semi-structured interviews with students and teachers. This approach provides a more accurate picture of the complex dynamics of the classroom, which are often overlooked or ignored in quantitative research. By focusing on the interactions and experiences of individual teachers and students, this study will be able to answer how and in what way teachers' beliefs about agency influence their facilitation practices, and how students make determinations in relation to their own learning about being, and doing, an active participant.

RESEARCH METHOD

To truly understand the students' experiences, this study took a deep, qualitative look at a single, insightful case. The main consideration in choosing this approach was its depth of exploration in an authentic context, which allowed us to delve into the participants' perspectives while observing the various factors that influenced their engagement patterns. As Yin (2020) notes, case studies are powerful for investigating contemporary phenomena within their authentic settings. We believed this design was perfectly suited to unravel the complexities of fostering students' proactive ownership of learning within Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom.

The location of this research is Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Soppeng in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The selection of this location was based on practical reasons and suitability of principles. Initial observations revealed that the school

not only implemented PjBL procedurally, but also embraced this approach with strong commitment.

The school demonstrated clear readiness: teachers were trained, and facilities were adequate to support hands-on projects. More importantly, we observed students actively and authentically engaged in projects designed to improve their English comprehension. Therefore, this school presented itself as an ideal, living laboratory to study agentic engagement. It was a setting where the pedagogical model was already in motion, providing a genuine context to examine how students navigate challenges and seize opportunities to direct their own learning.

This location was chosen based on convenience sampling, which emphasises ease of access and feasibility in terms of time, distance, and resource availability. As Creswell (2023) suggests, this approach supports efficient data collection, particularly for research that focuses on exploring specific contextual factors rather than producing generalisable findings. While the use of convenience sampling may limit the ability to generalize the findings across other educational settings, it remains suitable for the study's focus on in-depth exploration within the unique context of this school. Thus, the combination of scientific reasoning and convenience sampling ensured that MAN 1 Soppeng was an optimal location for this research.

Maintaining the highest ethical standards was a fundamental priority in every phase of this research. Our study involved secondary school students from class XI. F1.1 at MAN 1 Soppeng, who were engaged in learning English through Project-Based Learning (PjBL). In order to gain detailed insight, a purposeful group of 15 students and their English teacher were invited to participate in interviews. Prior to the commencement of any participation, the objectives of the study were meticulously elucidated, and written consent was obtained from all participants, with emphasis placed on the voluntary nature of their involvement and the option to disengage at any time without repercussion. Confidentiality was guaranteed, with the assurance that all data would be anonymised and handled with the utmost discretion. During the interviews, the primary objective was to listen with respect, acknowledging the autonomy of the participants and striving to capture their experiences and challenges in a manner that was both authentic and ethical.

Our data collection unfolded in two connected stages. It began with a period of classroom observation, which allowed us to witness firsthand the natural flow of student interaction and engagement within the PjBL environment. This foundational step grounded our understanding in the real-life dynamics of the classroom. We then moved to in-depth interviews with the selected students and their teacher. These conversations, informed by what we had observed, explored the specific obstacles they faced in fostering active, student-driven learning and the strategies they believed could make a difference. This sequential approach—observing first, then talking—enabled us to build a richer, more contextualized understanding of their shared experiences.

In conclusion, an analysis was conducted on the qualitative data derived from the observations and interviews conducted. This analysis seeks to identify common themes, challenges that continue to arise, and opportunities that can be

developed to strengthen the proactive role of learners in learning. The findings provide practical and contextual insights into how collaboration between teachers and students can foster a more independent and engaging learning environment in EFL classrooms. It is expected that these insights will serve as a valuable reference for educators and policymakers committed to empowering students within the PjBL framework.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION
Finding
This research outlines both problems and possible solutions regarding students' agentic engagement via PjBL in the EFL classroom. Using student and teacher interview data, this research explains the significant challenges that stifle student engagement and possible means of resolving them.

Challenges to Students' Agentic Engagement
Language Barriers
A profound and recurring theme within this study centers on the formidable challenges posed by language and communication barriers, especially for students navigating English as a non-native language. Participants frequently described a sense of discomfort and a tangible struggle to articulate their thoughts in English, a difficulty that became most acute during moments that required active voice.This barrier transcended mere technical limitation.

This potent mix of linguistic challenge and eroded confidence created a significant deterrent to participation, leading many to withdraw from class discussions and collaborative work, thereby curtailing their own learning opportunities. The emotional dimension of this barrier was captured poignantly in student reflections. One participant shared, "*I also lack confidence, so sometimes I feel insecure, and I end up being shy to talk*" (Student SS, 23 January 2025). Another revealed the unfamiliarity of the situation, noting, "*Honestly, it was my first time presenting in English*" (Student MRA, 23 January 2025). These statements, echoed by peers, underscore a critical intersection: language barriers are inextricably linked to psychological hurdles like anxiety and self-consciousness. Together, they form a substantial impediment to the exercise of student agency and proactive engagement in the learning process.

High Expectations
This study identified the emergence of elevated expectations on the part of teaching staff with regard to the completion of assigned projects as a further significant challenge. Many students admit to feeling burdened by various learning demands, especially when they feel they have failed to meet the academic expectations set by their teachers. This constant pressure can erode self-confidence, leading to self-doubt and fear of failure.Conversely, rather than feeling motivated to actively engage, students may withdraw, avoiding participation in class discussions or group activities. One student shared the following observation: "*The source of my depression is the inability to meet the demands placed upon me. One potential solution to this issue may be found in the act of sharing with other group members*"

(Student ZH, 23 January 2025). Another student noted, "*It is possible that I am experiencing elevated levels of stress, as I am under pressure to perform at my optimal level. I strive to the utmost of my abilities and offer prayers for guidance*" (Student AK, 23 January 2025). The responses obtained demonstrate that, while elevated expectations have the capacity to motivate students to achieve superior results, they can concomitantly precipitate a state of stress, which in turn engenders a diminution of both autonomy and engagement in the educational process.

Limited Time
From the teacher's perspective, the limitation of classroom time was identified as a significant challenge that exerted a direct influence on the teaching and learning process. The teacher noted that due to the strict time constraints of the academic schedule, he was often forced to take greater control of the learning process to ensure that all necessary material was covered within the allotted time.The necessity for teachers to maintain the structure of the lesson resulted in reduced opportunities for open discussions, group activities, or student-led initiatives. As the teacher explained, "*In this school, it is mostly teacher-agentic engagement... The constraints imposed by time are a significant factor in this regard, with educators assuming a substantial degree of authority in the realm of learning*" (Teacher SM, 10 February 2025). This finding suggests that time limitations not only affect the delivery of content but also restrict students' autonomy and their ability to engage agentically in the learning process.

Solutions to Encourage Students' Agentic Engagement
Teaching Innovations
In order to address these challenges, a number of innovative teaching approaches have been proposed with a view to enhancing student engagement and creating a more interactive learning environment. It was indicated by the students that the incorporation of more engaging and dynamic teaching methods, such as the use of educational games, ice breakers, and field trips, could result in a significant increase in their participation and interest in the subject matter. One student emphasised the necessity for more interactive teaching, stated: "*The teacher must adopt a more interactive approach to prevent students from becoming bored or reluctant to speak*" (Student RG, 23 January 2025). Another student proposed the introduction of "*more games, fun activities, and quizzes*" (Student NW, 30 January 2025). These activities have been shown to make learning more enjoyable for students and to encourage students to engage more actively by giving them the chance to take charge of their own education and learn through hands-on experiences.

The integration of these innovative approaches by educators has been demonstrated to engender an inclusive and dynamic classroom environment, which in turn has been shown to motivate students to become more engaged in their own learning. This, in turn, has been shown to facilitate the development of a more profound comprehension of the material. Furthermore, the utilisation of technology and the provision of outdoor learning opportunities were identified as efficacious methods to enhance interest and engagement in the subject.

Fostering Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

The importance of a strong teacher-student relationship in encouraging agentic engagement was also identified. One student shared the following observation: "*The manner in which a teacher presents the material exerts a substantial influence... It is acceptable for a guide to be provided, however, it is not acceptable for them to belittle the group*" (Student SH, 30 January 2025). Another stated, "*When the teacher is in a good mood, their teaching approach will be positive*" (Student EI, 30 January 2025). The responses indicate that a teacher's attitude and approach to teaching exerts a significant influence on students' propensity to participate and take the initiative. Furthermore, these responses suggest that the teacher's attitude and approach to teaching also influence students' motivation, confidence in expressing ideas, and ability to engage actively in the learning process. The implications of these factors are manifested in the learning environment created by teachers: an ecosystem that can be fertile ground for the growth of curiosity, collaboration, and independent thinking, or conversely, a barrier to the development of these three things.

Enhancing Students' Motivation
It is important to note that fostering student motivation has been identified as a vital pathway to cultivating greater agentic engagement. This is because it serves as the essential catalyst that propels learners to assume ownership of their educational journey. A key driver of this intrinsic motivation is relevance in which students perceive a meaningful connection between their coursework and their personal ambitions or real-world contexts, their investment deepens considerably. As teacher poignantly illustrated, making these tangible links is fundamental: "*In various aspects of life, English is always present... Even in simple things like using farming tools, the manual book is often in English*" (Teacher SM, 10 February 2025). Beyond curricular relevance, the motivational ecosystem of the classroom itself proved powerful. The encouraging influence of peers created a positive feedback loop, where collaborative energy bred further participation. One student's observation captured this dynamic simply: "*When my friends are active, I am also encouraged to be active*" (Student NW, 23 January 2025). Thus, motivation is not a solitary construct but is significantly amplified through the synergistic relationship between a teacher who frames learning as meaningful and a peer community that models and inspires active involvement

Special Session at the Beginning of Learning: Expressing Students' Needs, Interests, and Preferences
In essence, the study proposes that dedicating intentional time at the idcommencement of lessons to enable the expression of students' needs, interests and learning preferences can be a potent strategy to foster heightened student agency. Providing opportunities such as this allows educators to guide students to take more responsibility for their learning process, while building a classroom atmosphere filled with a sense of togetherness and belonging. Such practices can strengthen student agency, encouraging them to become more independent and confident, explore learning content more deeply, and design personalised learning journeys. Unfortunately, this study reveals that teachers do not provide such space,

confirming the gap between the theoretical potential of the student-centred approach and its actual implementation in the field.

One teacher noted, "*I believe that material is based on the teacher's analysis, and whether students like it or not, it should align with my analysis*" (Teacher SM, 10 February 2025). Conversely, students often exhibited reluctance in articulating their needs, as evidenced by one student's statement, "*I am shy and reluctant to ask the teacher directly*" (Student AAZ, 30 January 2025). The provision of a dedicated space for students to articulate their learning preferences has the potential to significantly enhance their agentic engagement, as it empowers them to influence the direction of their educational experiences.

Discussion

Encouraging student agentic engagement is an obstacle that educators face, especially considering the challenges of a lack of language proficiency, the pressure of time, and the stress of academic demands. Many prior research studies, like this one, argue that students from several backgrounds cannot be self-directed learners. This research analysed the impact of students' lack of language proficiency, and its impact on student participation and classroom attrition. Language barriers and a lack of self-confidence are significant impediments to student agentic engagement, especially in the context of higher education, as Zhong et al. (2024) also noted. These findings corroborate our own: students are often disengaged and unable to participate in activities due to their language deficits. The results also show that there are a time factor and a high academic workload that creates barriers to students obtaining a full comprehension of the content.

Studies have shown that language barriers are a major reason why students are not more engaged. Choi and Lee (2018) suggest that students' lack of language proficiency leads to diminished participation. Often students with poor language skills lack the self-assurance necessary to voice their thoughts. This research expands on their findings by determining how language problems correlate to the size of the problem students have in taking ownership of their learning. Students who have a problem with articulating their ideas are averse to taking risks and leaving their comfort zone. Wang et al. (2022) affirm that students' language problems are more serious than poor communication; they create mental barriers that inhibit student participation. Students who are not proficient with a foreign language and have problems with understanding or articulating ideas will remove themselves from academic discussions and this results in a sense of inadequacy and leads to a lack of participation.

In addition, this research understands that despite the 'motivating' nature of the academic challenges, they can elicit the opposite. Given the current educational environment, which is high pressure, fast, and outcome driven, the academic stress associated with trying to meet the challenges can lead to lower levels of engagement. This is consistent with the research of Zhong et al. (2024), for example, who state that the high evaluative pressure coupled with the fear of failure, significantly reduces the level of engagement of students. In project-based learning, for instance, students who fear that they may not meet the expectations of their teachers or of themselves, are often unwilling to take initiative and to be active

leaders in the group. This is particularly alarming because, in Pjbl, students are expected to take initiative over their own learning, and work with others to take risks and be adventurous. However, as illustrated in the research, high pressure learning environments lead to a fear of failure that in turn reinforces passive behaviors and a lack of active engagement. Consequently, it is necessary for teachers to develop a positive classroom culture, in which students are not afraid of being labeled as failures and are able to take risks, to encourage active participation.

Involvement is also impeded by student confidence. Reeve (2013) proposed that confidence in one's capabilities is a prerequisite for active participation in any learning activity. The present study validates this hypothesis by providing empirical evidence of the significance of self-confidence in students' agentic engagement in foreign language learning. This is not surprising because self-doubt is associated with the lack of initiative to undertake what is perceived to be challenging. Gray and DiLoreto (2016) also attribute student activity to self-confidence. In this study, the findings indicated that students' a lack of confidence in their language skills resulted in their increased participation in non-activity, thereby further perpetuating the cycle of alienation. The phenomenon of self-doubt, language barriers and academic pressure demonstrate that students lack the ability to truly 'own' their learning.

Students' agentic engagement is influenced by many factors, and time is a big one. Teachers, who must manage large student numbers and a restricted time frame, struggle to give every student the chance to contribute to the best of their ability. Previous research (Umam and Kristiyantini, 2021) noted that time restrictions limit the level of engagement that students can achieve through peer-to-peer learning, which is a fundamental component of deep engagement and critical analysis. There is a need to further examine the issues related to time restrictions that deepen the understanding of student-led learning activities in project-based learning environments. Teachers tend to revert to traditional teacher-cantered approaches, which limit students' opportunities to self-initiate and learn autonomously when time is limited and the content is extensive. This is particularly the case in foreign language teaching, in which the development of students' language skills heavily relies on their active involvement in the process.

This research illustrates that teacher-student rapport facilitates students' active engagement. Pu & Barnard (2025) suggest that teacher empathy and perspective-taking enhance students' engagement and motivation to learn. When students' ideas and questions are valued by the teacher, students are more likely to be involved in learning and to take responsibility for their learning. This supports Adhikari (2024) who contends that teacher-student rapport is central to fostering students' self-regulated learning and autonomy. Responsive and sensitive teacher-student relationships catalyse the lowering of students' learning anxiety, the raising of students' learning confidence, and the creation of a learning climate that heightens students' agentic engagement.

Motivation represents another key factor. Auquilla et al. (2024) indicate that both types of motivation lead to active involvement in language learning. This study corresponds to the opinion of Deci and Ryan (2008), stating that students' psychological needs become met when there is a balanced proportion of the two

types of motivation. Moreover, students' control in the learning process is enhanced. The research reveals that students tend to participate in the learning process actively and take control of it when they are motivated both intrinsically and externally, and when such motivations are proportionately balanced. This situation is likely to assist students in working through difficulties like a lack of self-esteem, and the fear of failing.

Providing students with the opportunity to communicate their learning needs, preferences, and objectives is important as well. Reeve and Shin (2020) state that students are more likely to feel a sense of ownership when they can influence the development of their learning experiences. This study results support the notion that possessing the opportunity to articulate learning objectives has a positive impact on student motivation and engagement. It is suggested that teachers who give students the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings are likely to foster a positive, student-centred atmosphere in the classroom that will result in students becoming more self-directed learners.

Although this research has been very helpful in understanding the phenomenon, there are some limitations. Given the small number of participants, it is possible the results do not reflect the reality of the situation. In future research, it is important to involve students of various educational and cultural backgrounds to see if the findings are consistent. Moreover, the present study only examined the viewpoints of students and teachers, thereby ignoring other important aspects such as the role of the institution, the curriculum, or other factors that affect how engaged students are. In the future, it is imperative to analyse these aspects to comprehend their impact on the utilisation of project-based learning and the engagement of students.

Given the limited scope of this study, its findings may not fully reflect the current situation. Johnson et al. (2019) argue that a broader and more diverse student sample, which includes various educational and cultural backgrounds, would make the findings more representative and generalizable. The present study primarily concentrated on the perspectives of students and educators; however, it overlooked significant factors such as the institutional context, the curriculum, and other external influences that impact student engagement. The institutional context and curriculum have been demonstrated to play a pivotal role in shaping students' experiences in project-based learning environments (Smith & Brown, 2020).

It is recommended that future research include the following elements in order to facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of student engagement and the effectiveness of project-based learning. A further limitation is the study's cross-sectional design, which does not allow for an assessment of the long-term effects of the strategies proposed to foster active engagement. The implementation of longitudinal studies would facilitate the determination of the longevity of the impact of these strategies on students' performance and engagement. Furthermore, factors such as family support, cultural background, and socioeconomic status have not been explored in relation to students' agentic engagement in PjBL, which could provide valuable insights in future studies.

To end, this research offers valuable insights into student active engagement by detailing challenges and proposing actionable solutions. The study examines the

intricate interplay of the challenges posed by the combination of limited time, academic stress, and language proficiency, particularly within the context of project-based foreign language learning. The innovative re-mapping of pedagogical tools, the cultivation of constructive teacher-student rapport, and the balanced construction of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are all essential to the support of student success.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The objective of the present study was to examine various aspects of students' agentic engagement while utilising PjBL in the EFL classroom. The study looked at the problems students had, what they did during the learning process, and the ways they were encouraged to get involved. The most important results showed that PjBL does have a positive effect on students' engagement, but this effect can be reduced by various problems, such as not enough language, unrealistic school work and not enough time in the classroom. The students had trouble speaking in front of people, which made them feel less confident and like they weren't good enough. This meant that they did not want to join in class discussions. In the same way, not expecting too much meant that the students were less stressed and more able to focus on learning. There is now less time spent in the classroom, which means students have more freedom to learn on their own.

Despite the research highlighting the PjBl method and its promotion of agentic engagement in an EFL classroom, there are several restrictions that should be considered. The limitations of the study's particular educational context render the findings ambiguous and inapplicable to other EFL situations. The impact of PjBL on the students' sustained agentic engagement and on PjBL's and the students' learning outcomes, is an aspect of the study that remains unaddressed. In light of the significance attributed to innovative teaching methodologies and the constructive teacher-student relationship within this paradigm, the issues encountered by students that are associated with the frequent implementation of these strategies remain to be thoroughly examined.

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