

**The EFL Students' Attitudes toward Project-Based Learning (PBL) in Learning  
English in Secondary School**

Aruzhan Zhantas

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Education and Humanities  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS**

in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

SDU University

Department of Language Teacher Education

June, 2025

Thesis Advisor:

PhD, SDU Professor Gulnara

Kassymova

©Copyright by Aruzhan Zhantas, 2025

SDU University

Faculty of Education and Humanities  
Department of Language Teacher Education

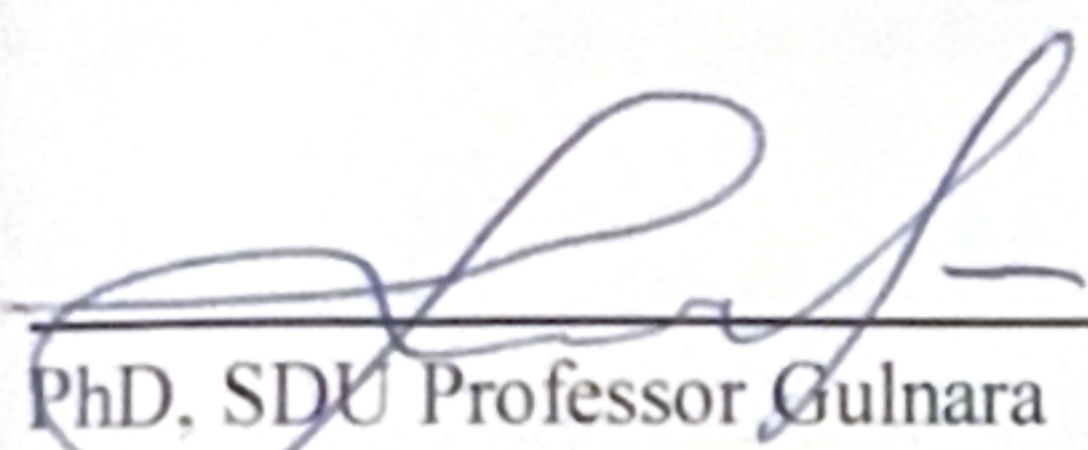
This is to certify that the Master's Thesis of


Aruzhan Zhantas

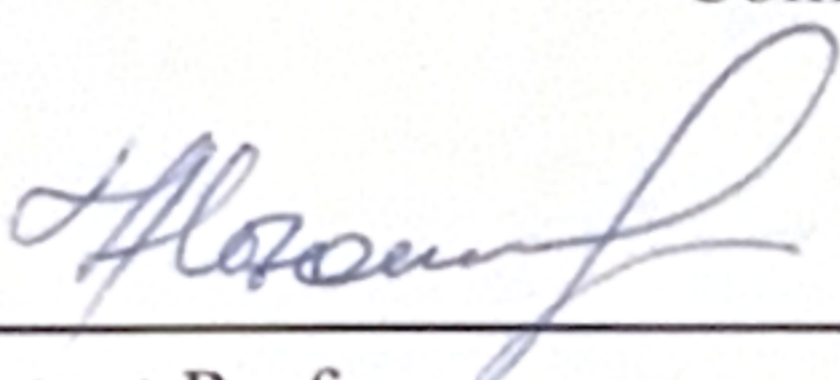
has met the thesis requirements of  
SDU University


Kaskelen, 2025

Approved by:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
PhD, SDU Professor Gulnara  
KASSYMOVA  
Professor, Thesis supervisor

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
PhD., Doctor Gulzhaina  
KASSYMOVA  
Committee Chair

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
PhD., assistant Professor  
Akmarzhan NOGAIBAYEVA  
Department Chair

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
PhD., associate professor Zhainagul DUISEBEKOVA  
Dean, Faculty of Education and Humanities



## AUTHOR AGREEMENT

The Author, I, Aruzhan Zhantas, hereby grants SDU University full and exclusive rights to reproduce the manuscript, make revisions, and reproduction. SDU rights include but are not limited to the following: (1) to reproduce, publish, sell, and distribute copies of the thesis, selections of the thesis, and translations and other derivative works based upon the thesis, in print, audio-visual, electronic, or by any and all media now or hereafter known or devised; (2) to license reprints of the thesis to third persons for educational photocopying; (3) to license others to create abstracts of the thesis and to index the thesis; (4) to license secondary publishers to reproduce the thesis in print or digital form, including electronic on-line databases; and (5) to license the thesis for document delivery. These exclusive rights run the full term of the copyright, and all renewals and extensions thereof.

I hereby accept the terms of the above Author Agreement<sup>1</sup> and I sign.



\_\_\_\_\_  
Author signature

19.06.2025

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

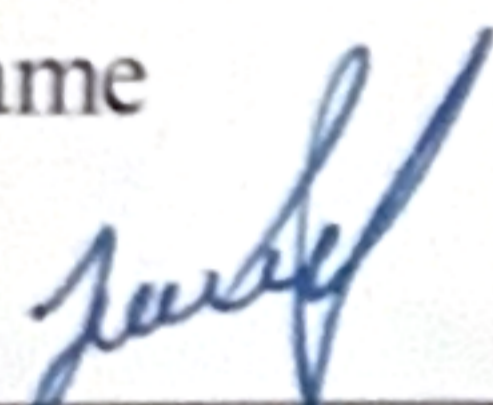
\_\_\_\_\_  
<sup>1</sup> This page is to be separately printed, then signed and dated by the author, after that scanned and finally copy-pasted in this page.

## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this submission is entirely my own work, in my own words, and that all sources used in researching it are fully acknowledged and all quotations properly identified to my best extent. It has not been submitted, in whole or in part, by me or another person, for the purpose of obtaining any other credit, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis. I understand the ethical implications of my research, and this work meets the requirements of the Faculty of Education and Humanities Research Ethics Policy.

Aruzhan Zhantay

Name



Signature

19.06.2025

Date

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to sincerely thank everyone who helped and supported me while I was working on this dissertation.

First of all, I am very thankful to my supervisor, Professor Gulnara Kassymova, for her help, support, and useful advice. Her knowledge and guidance were very important for my research and for my growth as a student. I really appreciate her patience and trust, which helped me stay strong even when things were difficult. It was a great experience to learn from her.

I also want to thank the students and their parents who took part in this study. Their time, help, and openness made this research possible and valuable.

Finally, I want to thank my family for their love and support. I am especially grateful to my husband for always believing in me, being patient, and supporting me during the hardest moments. Their help gave me strength throughout this journey.

## Table of Contents

List of Figures .....	ix
List of Tables .....	x
Abstract .....	1
Аңдатпа.....	2
Аннотация .....	3
CHAPTER 1 Introduction .....	4
1.1 Statement of the Research Problem.....	4
1.2 Significance of the Study .....	5
CHAPTER 2 Literature Review .....	7
2.1 The Positive Influence of Project-Based Learning on EFL Learners' Attitudes, Motivation, and Cognitive Developments.....	7
2.2 The Role of PBL in Advancing EFL Learners' Language Skills .....	9
2.3 Implementing PBL in Kazakhstani EFL Education .....	13
2.4 Conclusion and research gap .....	15
CHAPTER 3 Methodology .....	17
3.1 Overview.....	17
3.2 Research Design.....	17
3.3 Data Collection Tools.....	18
3.4 Participants and Sampling .....	18
3.5 Research Site.....	20
3.6 Data Collection Procedures .....	20
3.7 Confidentiality.....	21
CHAPTER 4 Results.....	22
4.1 Interview Results.....	22

4.1.1 RQ1: What are EFL students' overall attitudes toward the use of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in English language classes? .....	22
4.1.1.1 Differences Between PBL and Regular Learning .....	22
4.1.1.2 Favorite Activities and Aspects of PBL.....	23
4.1.1.3 Improvements in Speaking Skills .....	23
4.1.1.4 Confidence After Presentations .....	23
4.1.1.5 Challenges Faced and Strategies for Overcoming these Obstacles during PBL Projects. ....	24
4.1.1.6 Preference for Group or Individual work.....	24
4.1.1.7 Perceived Benefits of PBL in real-life English usage.....	25
4.1.2 RQ2: To what extent do students believe that the employment of Project-Based Learning (PBL) affects their speaking skills?.....	26
4.1.2.1 PBL Activities that Foster Speaking Skills .....	26
4.1.2.2 Speaking Skill improvements .....	27
4.1.2.3 Confidence and Challenges in Speaking.....	27
4.1.2.4 Preference for Group or Individual English Speaking Practice .....	28
4.1.2.5 Changes or Improvements to PBL.....	28
4.1.2.6 PBL and Real-Life English .....	29
4.2 Results of the Self-Reflection Checklist .....	30
CHAPTER 5 Discussion .....	33
CHAPTER 6 Conclusion.....	38
6.1 Summary of Findings .....	38
6.2 Implications for Practice .....	38
6.3 Limitations .....	39
6.4 Further Research Recommendations .....	40
References .....	42

Appendix A.....46  
Appendix B.....47  
Appendix C.....49  
Appendix D.....52

## List of Figures

Figure 1. Student's attitudes toward Project-Based Learning (PBL) activities in English speaking class from the self-reflection checklist.. .....	30
---	----

**List of Tables**

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of The Respondents .....	19
--	----

## **The EFL Students' Attitudes toward Project-Based Learning (PBL) in Learning English in Secondary School**

### **Abstract**

In the age of 21st-century skills, Project-Based Learning has been among the innovative pedagogies in EFL learning and teaching. The present research is an investigation of the attitude toward PBL perception and its effect on improving speaking skills based on secondary school EFL students' point of view. Data were collected through self-reflection checklists and semi-structured interviews. The sample was a group of 7th-grade students at a Kazakhstani secondary school by utilizing a mixed-methods design. The findings showed that students have a positive attitude towards PBL, they like interactive, creative and collaborative learning. Students believe that PBL is useful for developing conversational skills, critical thinking, self-confidence, and everyday language use. However, some problems were also identified, such as group dynamics, time management, and unequal participation, which created room for further improvement. This study contributes to an image of how PBL can become a part of language learning and has implications for policymakers and teachers in the optimization of PBL utilization in EFL contexts. Long-term effects and steps unique to different learners need to be researched further.

*Keywords:* Project-Based Learning (PBL), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Secondary Education, Speaking Skills Development, Collaborative Learning, Student Engagement, Critical Thinking, 21st-Century Skills

**Ағылшын тілін шет тілі ретінде (EFL) оқитын орта мектеп  
оқушыларының  
ағылшын тілін жобалық оқыту (PBL) арқылы меңгеру жайлы көзқарасы  
Аңдатпа**

21-ғасыр дағдыларына назар аударатын дәуірде, шет тілі ретінде ағылшын тілін (EFL) оқытуда өзгерістер әкелген әдіс - жобалық оқыту (PBL) болып табылады. Бұл зерттеу жұмысы орта мектеп EFL оқушыларының PBL-ға деген көзқарастарын және оның сөйлеу дағдыларын дамытудағы тиімділігін зерттейді. Құрама әдіс бойынша жиналған деректер өзіне-өзі рефлексия жасау чектерінен және Қазақстандағы орта мектептің 7-сынып оқушыларымен жартылай құрылымдалған сұхбаттардан алынды. Нәтижелер студенттердің PBL-ға жалпы оң көзқарас танытып, оның интерактивті, шығармашылық және ынтымақтастыққа негізделген табиғатын жоғары бағалағанын көрсетті. PBL сөйлеу дағдыларын, критикалық ойлау дағдысын, сенімділікті және шынайы өмірде тіл қолдануды дамытуға ықпал етеді деп қабылданды. Алайда, топтық динамика, уақытты басқару және тең емес қатысу сияқты қиындықтар анықталды, бұл жақсартуды қажет ететін салаларды көрсетеді. Бұл зерттеу PBL-дың тіл үйренудегі рөлін түсінуге үлес қосып, оқытушылар мен саясаткерлерге оның EFL контекстіндегі жүзеге асырылуын оңтайландыруға бағытталған кеңестер береді. Ұзақ мерзімді әсерлер мен әртүрлі оқушыларға арналған арнайы стратегияларды зерттеу үшін қосымша зерттеулер ұсынылады.

*Кілт сөздер:* Жобалық оқыту (PBL), шет тілі ретінде ағылшын тілі (EFL), орта білім, сөйлеу дағдыларын дамыту, ынтымақтастықта оқу, студенттердің қатысуы, сын тұрғысынан ойлау, 21-ғасыр дағдылары

## Отношение учащихся EFL к проектному обучению (PBL) при изучении английского языка в средней школе

### Аннотация

В эпоху, когда подчеркивается важность навыков 21-го века, обучение на основе проектов (Project-Based Learning, PBL) стало трансформационным педагогическим подходом, особенно в обучении английскому как иностранному (EFL). Это исследование изучает отношение учащихся средней школы к обучению на основе проектов и его эффективность в улучшении их разговорных навыков. Используя смешанный метод исследования, данные были собраны с помощью чек-листов для самооценки и полуструктурированных интервью с учащимися 7 класса казахстанской средней школы. Результаты показали, что учащиеся положительно относятся к PBL, и им нравится интерактивное, творческое и совместное обучение. Студенты считают, что PBL полезен для развития разговорных навыков, критического мышления, уверенности в себе и повседневного использования языка. Однако были выявлены проблемы, такие как динамика группы, управление временем и неравномерное участие, что подчеркивает области для улучшения. Исследование способствует пониманию роли PBL в освоении языка, предоставляя полезные рекомендации для педагогов и законодателей, чтобы оптимизировать его внедрение в контексте обучения английскому языку как иностранному. Рекомендуется дальнейшее исследование долгосрочных последствий и разработка индивидуальных стратегий для различных учеников.

*Ключевые слова:* обучение на основе проектов (PBL), английский как иностранный язык (EFL), среднее образование, развитие разговорных навыков, совместное обучение, вовлеченность студентов, критическое мышление, навыки 21-го века.

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

These days, there is a growing demand for 21st century skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and self-regulation. These competencies play an important role in EFL learners, who will have to face difficult linguistic and intercultural contexts. Project-Based Learning has developed into one of the strongest pedagogical methods for EFL students, which offers them an opportunity to study in a dynamic, student-oriented learning environment that fosters such important skills. PBL engages students in meaningful real-life projects, which entail active learning, critical thinking, and interpersonal collaboration-necessitating improvement not only in language but also in a number of life skills (Baş & Beyhan, 2017; Beckett & Slater, 2018).

The main goal of the current study will be to identify the perceptions of EFL students toward PBL application in secondary school English classes and their specific feelings regarding PBL's usefulness for developing speaking skills.

This research will try to address the following research questions:

1. What are EFL students' attitudes toward using Project-Based Learning (PBL) when teaching and learning the subjects in the English language?
2. To what extent does the thought of using PBL provide an effect in improving the ability to speak?

These questions, therefore, seek to explore students' perceptions of how PBL has enhanced their speaking ability and further explore how PBL influences the language acquisition of students in terms of spoken English. The study, through the exploration of these aspects, will add to the general discussion on the potential of PBL in EFL studies.

#### 1.1 Statement of the Research Problem

The demand for proficiency in the English language has been felt in today's globalized society, especially among high school students who are learners of EFL. Traditional practices of language teaching, highly focused on grammar and vocabulary drills, may not work appropriately for 21st-century learners, who seek linguistic skills along with skills of critical thinking, communication, and collaboration. Within the past years, PBL has established itself as a promising pedagogical approach that places great emphasis on active, student-centered learning through real-world projects. Several studies have shown that PBL is effective for improving academic performance and thinking skills. However, there are not many studies about how secondary school EFL students feel about PBL. Few studies focus on speaking skills. In Kazakhstan, this topic has not been studied enough. The connection between PBL and speaking skills is not well explored. This research aims to fill that gap. It looks at how secondary school EFL students in Kazakhstan feel about PBL. It also studies how PBL helps them improve their speaking skills.

## **1.2 Significance of the Study**

This study provides valuable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and educational policymakers, especially in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. The research examines EFL students' attitudes toward the use of Project-Based Learning (PBL) and reveals how learners view this student-centered method. The study highlights the relationship between PBL and students' levels of motivation and engagement in English language subjects.

The study also investigates the effect of PBL on the development of students' speaking abilities. It addresses a critical component of EFL education, which involves oral communication. Many students face challenges when they attempt to master spoken English, so this research shows whether PBL serves as an effective tool to improve that skill. The results may help teachers use more interactive and collaborative methods that create a

supportive environment. These methods can help students gain confidence and take initiative in English communication.

This research supports current educational reforms in Kazakhstan, which aim to strengthen communicative skills and learner independence. The findings can influence both educational policy and classroom practice. Educators can apply the results to adjust teaching strategies and improve language instruction. This study offers clear direction for increasing the effectiveness of English education in real-world contexts.

## CHAPTER 2

### Literature Review

#### **2.1 The Positive Influence of Project-Based Learning on EFL Learners' Attitudes, Motivation, and Cognitive Development**

One of the most important steps in researching any topic is to analyze attitudes because determining whether perceptions are positive or negative helps to understand the underlying sentiment more profoundly. Thus, prior research on topic EFL learners' attitudes toward Project-Based Learning (PBL) is significant in the sense that attitudes directly influence motivation, engagement, and overall language development. A more positive attitude toward PBL will definitely lead to increased autonomy, improved language skills, and more immersive learning; thus, this is an effective method of fostering both cognitive and communicative competencies in the language learner.

One more main idea in the research is that students' attitudes toward learning English became more positive after using PBL. For instance, Canh (2017) discussed how the creative and collaborative nature of project-based activities favored the receptive attitude of the Vietnamese EFL learners. This is especially true with speaking classes where the practical and collaborative activities allowed the learners to involve themselves more productively with the language.

Furthermore, Petersen (2008) also reported that the teachers and students show strong support for PBL. They describe it as a new and engaging method that moves them away from the traditional lecture-based style. Further supporting these studies, Duman and Yavuz (2018) noted in their study that the students in the experimental group developed greater motivation and a higher enthusiasm for their English classes rather than for traditional teaching. This was attributed to activities being more interactive and hands-on, with PBL allowing students to share and solve problems as part of a team.

Secondly, Yaman (2014) also presented data showing that in speaking skill development, the achievements were higher for the group involved in the PBL lesson rather than those instructed traditionally via course books. PBL's focused immersion into a case encourages communication in contexts; therefore, opportunities for the speaker to actually practice their productive speaking skills are already implied.

Similarly, Belmekki and Baghzou (2022) found that using a cooperative learning model (Group Investigation) for English school projects led to increased language use and improved project performance, particularly in oral presentations.

Numerous studies highlighted the significant cognitive improvements associated with PBL, particularly in language learning. For instance, Quoc and Phan (2020) discovered that EFL students in Vietnam have positive cognitive, emotional, and behavioral attitudes toward PBL. They stated that PBL helped improve their language skills, motivation, and ability to manage their own learning. It is underlined that students became more involved in the learning process, especially when performing speaking tasks, whereby they became more confident and communicative. The findings of Susanti, Retnaningdyah, and Trisusana (2020) stated that most vocational high school students enjoyed learning with PBL. Students considered it motivating and helpful in decreasing anxiety, especially when speaking English, which is again proving that PBL enhances the students' engagement and emotional comfort (Quoc & Phan, 2020; Susanti et al., 2020).

Another positive effect of PBL is students' cognitive engagement. Wimolmas (2018) noted that students and teachers in a Thai secondary school environment are of the opinion that PBL nurtures critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills, all of which are important 21st-century competencies. Similarly, Apsari et al. (2019) identified that students showed better knowledge acquisition, creativity, and critical thinking ability through PBL, as

also identified in earlier research on linking PBL with higher-order thinking skills development (Beckett & Miller, 2006; Savery, 2006).

The behavioral benefits of PBL were clear in many studies, and students reported more teamwork and greater participation in group tasks. Quoc and Phan (2020) found that students in Vietnam became more responsible and improved their project skills. They further observed that PBL encouraged self-assessment, which helped students refine their critical thinking and feedback-giving abilities. Also, Canh (2017) established that PBL significantly enhanced the students' critical thinking by prompting them to conduct independent research, solve problems cooperatively, and critically appraise the findings. In addition, these are crucial skills in navigating through the intricacies of using the language in a real-life context when learners are faced with assessing, interpreting, and synthesizing information.

Canh (2017) and Belmekki and Baghzou (2022) also mentioned that students appreciated an opportunity to collaborate on the projects, which helped not only to improve their language but also their social interaction and teamwork. In particular, the Group Investigation model turned out to be very productive in promoting peer-to-peer learning and increasing students' ability to work together toward common goals. However, according to Petersen (2008), group work may have some drawbacks, such as uneven participation and interpersonal conflicts, which may negatively affect the process of PBL. Nevertheless, when well-organized, group collaboration contributes to better learning outcomes in the form of peer support and deeper understanding of the material.

## **2.2 The Role of PBL in Advancing EFL Learners' Language Skills**

In EFL education, more studies now show that PBL helps improve key language skills. For example, Chu et al. (2011) explored the effects of inquiry-based PBL in teams on students' reading achievement and interest in reading. Based on their research, students experiencing PBL activities not only showed an enhancement in reading comprehension, but

also displayed a greater interest in reading. This increased engagement is attributed to the collaborative and inquiry-driven nature of PBL, which fosters a sense of ownership and curiosity, thus motivating students to delve deeper into reading activities and enhancing their overall literacy.

Similarly, Kavlu (2015) examined PBL's effect on reading comprehension among undergraduate EFL students and found that it significantly enhances comprehension abilities. Similar to Kavlu(2015), Soleimani et al. (2015) conducted research on the impact of PBL on reading ability and vocabulary acquisition among Iranian intermediate EFL learners. From their findings, it has been underlined that PBL enhances not only the students' comprehension of a text, but also the retrieval and retention of vocabulary. PBL focuses on real-life contexts, and this helps students encounter new vocabulary in meaningful ways that support deeper understanding.

Aghayani and Hajmohammadi (2019) examined the effect of PBL on EFL learners' writing competence. Their findings indicated that PBL significantly develops EFL learners in writing. This approach gives learners real opportunities to perform more realistic writing tasks that have superior organization and coherence with better language use in writing. Therefore, the PBL approach provides learners with more practice in writing skills, and it places these tasks in real-life contexts to improve their writing outcomes.

PBL has been shown to greatly improve various language skills, and Alotaibi (2020) found that it helped Saudi secondary EFL students develop persuasive writing abilities. "The results showed that those students who were exposed to PBL instruction attained a significantly higher achievement score in persuasive writing than those that received traditional instructions." Thus, indicating that the PBL environment is suitable for developing advanced writing skills.

Shafaei and Rahim (2015) focused specifically on vocabulary retention, and they examined how effective PBL was for helping Iranian EFL learners remember and recall words. Their results showed that PBL supported both short-term and long-term vocabulary retention, and the learners improved because they used and reviewed vocabulary during the project tasks. This study confirms that PBL helps develop vocabulary, which is a key part of language proficiency.

PBL has been shown to improve students' academic performance, and it does so by increasing their engagement with the subject and promoting active and practical learning. Students who take part in project work apply their knowledge in real situations, and this helps them remember and understand the material better. This method improves comprehension, and it also develops problem-solving and critical thinking skills, which lead to higher achievement in different subjects. In Essien's 2018 study with Thai students, there was clear progress in English skills, and this was seen in higher post-test scores in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The students also showed a positive attitude toward PBL, and they preferred it because it focused more on communication and thinking skills than traditional methods. This preference suggests that students value a learning style that is active and based on collaboration, and they benefit from practicing language in real situations.

Similarly, the West Virginia Department of Education report 2018 explored the effectiveness of PBL on the performance of students. The report indicated that students exposed to PBL performed better than their peers in both the social studies and college and career readiness assessments. Therefore, it follows that PBL enhances not just language skills but contributes even more to the general performance of the students academically.

PBL supports more than just basic language skills, and it also encourages a broader and more complete way of learning a language. Beckett and Slater's (2018) framework for Project-Based Learning represented a holistic approach by integrating language learning with

practical content, promoting critical thinking, collaboration, and real-world application. This approach focused on developing in students not only the ability to use languages but also wide-ranging competencies important for personal and professional life. Thus, PBL is that comprehensive tool in language education that cognitively, socially, and emotionally provokes learners to develop activities that they need for successfully living in the 21st century.

Baş and Beyhan (2017) investigated that the use of multiple intelligences supported by PBL significantly improves both EFL learners' achievement levels and attitudes. This study highlighted that if PBL is prepared and put into practice with considerations of multiple intelligences, it leads to a tremendous improvement in the performance of students in English and thus in their attitude towards learning the language. The use of interactive and personalized PBL might, therefore create a more positive learning experience, bringing higher achievements in and long-lasting motivation of language learning.

Moreover, Kaushik (2020) found that clear and well-organized PBL instruction in the classroom leads to strong student engagement and better learning outcomes. The study also showed that PBL encourages student independence through projects led by students and group work. This approach helps learners take more responsibility for their own learning.

In addition to its benefits, some studies have confirmed that PBL is effective in building critical self-regulation and increasing self-efficacy among secondary school students. For instance, Tran and Phan (2021) explored how Vietnamese high school students managed their own language learning in a problem-based learning environment. They found that students often used self-regulation strategies. This was likely because PBL encourages learner autonomy, which requires independent effort to succeed in foreign language learning.

PBL also led to strong results in other areas. It helped students feel more confident and less anxious, especially during speaking and reading tasks. An (2023) noted that

Vietnamese students showed improved emotional responses in class due to greater confidence and lower anxiety, particularly in reading English. Susanti et al. (2020) also found that students felt more motivated and confident in learning English. This was connected to the interactive and problem-solving features of PBL activities.

Educational reforms that focus on international goals have also included PBL in foreign language teaching. These changes aim to help students develop better communication and intercultural skills, as reported by Baygudanova (2024).

### **2.3 Implementing PBL in Kazakhstani EFL Education**

In the past decade, PBL has become more important in English education in Kazakhstan, especially after it was officially introduced in the early 2010s as part of national goals for multilingualism and modernization. It followed global teaching trends focused on communication, and it was introduced to address issues in traditional, grammar-heavy teaching methods. This approach helps students experience the language in meaningful, real-world situations. PBL also promotes interaction between peers, and this peer collaboration helps learners build intercultural communication skills. When students from different cultural backgrounds work together, they practice conflict resolution, negotiation, and clear communication, all of which are key elements of intercultural competence.

Smakova (2021) reported that PBL improves students' cultural awareness and helps them develop communication skills through teamwork. Baygudanova (2024) also supported this claim and showed that PBL would improve students' communication, thinking, and participation in English classes. In Kazakhstan, recent forms of PBL now include digital tools and cross-subject tasks, and these prepare students for academic and professional demands by connecting language to real-world skills.

Baygudanova's study measured the effects of PBL on university students over 15 weeks and used tests before and after the program. The curriculum included role plays, peer

presentations, and technology-based activities. These group tasks encouraged students to use English in real situations, and they developed better speaking skills beyond grammar accuracy. Post-test scores showed clear progress, and a strong connection between pre-test and post-test results indicated that students with higher starting levels benefited more from the program. The study suggested that PBL can be adjusted to fit different student needs.

Sengerbekova, Smakova, and Avasi (2024) explored PBL in biology classes taught in English. Their study, across three schools, showed that PBL improves classroom interaction and helps build supportive learning environments. Interviews and observations revealed that students participated more and took more responsibility for learning. However, both students and teachers mentioned challenges like time limits and difficulties in grading group work. The authors recommended better training for teachers and clear methods for assessment.

Other research, such as Raikhanova and Kassymova (2019), showed that PBL is useful in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), especially in science education. Their study followed students in a three-year biology and chemistry program. Students worked on real projects, such as designing a magazine, which helped them use scientific terms and develop professional communication skills. The results showed that PBL supports 21st-century skills like problem-solving and critical thinking, and it connects English learning with future career goals.

Although there are benefits, some studies also report ongoing problems. For example, Intykbekov (2017) studied teacher views on PBL in a Kazakh-Turkish school and found that teachers appreciated the increase in student involvement and real-life skill development. However, they also noted difficulties such as lack of time, limited knowledge about PBL, and problems with group work. The study emphasized the need for teacher training to make PBL more successful and sustainable.

Many studies show that PBL helps students communicate better in English, but few studies explore its long-term effects on language development. Most research focuses on short-term gains in speaking and ignores how PBL might support deeper language learning or intercultural awareness. There is also little research on how PBL works in different school settings in Kazakhstan, especially in rural areas with fewer resources and less teacher training. More studies are needed to understand how PBL can be adapted to various learning environments and how it can meet the needs of all students.

## **2.4 Conclusion and Research Gap**

In conclusion, previous researchers clearly demonstrate that Project-Based Learning (PBL) improves students' motivation, attitudes, and cognitive development in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Scholars provide strong evidence that PBL positively affects various language skills such as reading, writing, and vocabulary. Many studies emphasize that PBL strengthens critical thinking, self-regulation, collaboration, and learner autonomy. Researchers in both international and Kazakhstani contexts confirm that PBL increases classroom engagement and communication. However, these studies still leave several research gaps. Most of them concentrate on general academic performance or specific areas like reading and writing. Only a few studies address the impact of PBL on speaking skills. Researchers have not yet explored how secondary school students view PBL or how it influences their speaking ability. Although some Kazakhstani studies examine PBL at the university level or in content-based subjects, they do not focus on younger learners in secondary schools. Furthermore, few studies investigate long-term language retention or emotional factors such as confidence and anxiety during speaking tasks.

This study fills the existing research gap. It explores how Kazakhstani secondary school EFL students view Project-Based Learning (PBL) and evaluates its effect on their speaking skills. The researcher collects data from 7th-grade students in a public school,

which allows the study to focus on a learner group that most previous studies have overlooked. Unlike earlier research that depends only on test scores, this study uses both qualitative data and student reflections. It captures students' personal opinions, confidence levels, and readiness for real-life communication. The results provide a clearer picture of how project-based methods affect speaking development during early adolescence. They also offer useful insights for curriculum developers and English teachers in Kazakhstan and other EFL environments.

## CHAPTER 3

### Methodology

#### 3.1 Overview

This research investigates the attitudes of secondary school English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students toward Project-Based Learning (PBL) and its effectiveness in enhancing their speaking skills. The focus of this study is on understanding how students engage with PBL activities and how such activities influence their language development, particularly in speaking. The research aims to answer the following key questions:

1. What are EFL students' overall attitudes toward the use of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in English language classes?
2. To what extent do students believe that the employment of Project-Based Learning (PBL) affects their speaking skills?

#### 3.2 Research Design

This study will be designed as a non-experimental, mixed-methods approach. These will include some quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques in order to assess EFL students' attitudes towards the PBL model and its impact on speaking skills. The study will use a self-reflection checklist and semi-structured interviews, and this design helps explore both classroom behavior and personal views of the learners in greater detail.

The researcher used thematic analysis to examine the interview responses. This method identified repeated ideas and common patterns in the participants' answers. The researcher transcribed the interviews, read the responses in detail, and assigned codes to specific segments. Then, the researcher grouped the codes into clear themes that represented the students' attitudes, beliefs, and experiences with Project-Based Learning. An inductive thematic analysis approach was selected to identify themes directly from the students'

responses without relying on a fixed framework. This inductive approach revealed new insights from the data and avoided the use of pre-established categories.

### **3.3 Data Collection Tools**

Ten students, whose parents provided consent for their participation, took part in semi-structured interviews. Their responses allowed the researcher to gain insight into their perspectives and experiences with project-based learning. The interview protocol, developed by the researcher and consisting of ten questions, was intended to gather in-depth qualitative data on students' attitudes and experiences with PBL in a secondary EFL setting. The data obtained from the interview questions were later coded and categorized into key themes using thematic analysis.

The researcher developed the semi-structured interview questions to align with the research objectives and to explore EFL students' attitudes toward Project-Based Learning (PBL) and its impact on their speaking skills. While the questions were original, their content and structure were informed by previous studies and theoretical frameworks related to PBL and language learning (e.g., Canh, 2017; Quoc & Phan, 2020; Susanti et al., 2020).

The Self-Reflection Checklist was adapted from a tool by Raveewan and Karnchanoke (2015), and it focused on speaking skills within project-based learning. It included four response options: "always," "usually," "often," and "sometimes," and students completed the checklist individually before giving it to the researcher for analysis. The results were examined using descriptive statistics, and percentages were used to present the findings. The checklist helped students understand their speaking progress and group participation, and it also gave them clearer awareness of their learning process.

### **3.4 Participants and Sampling**

This research took place at the 157th General Education School, where the target population consisted of secondary-level students, specifically 7th-grade learners studying

English as a foreign language. The researcher applied voluntary sampling to select participants for both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study. This method was appropriate due to the ethical requirement for informed consent, especially when working with minors. Participation was open to students whose parents granted permission and who personally agreed to take part in the research.

The final sample included 57 students who voluntarily completed the self-reflection checklist. These students represented the broader student population and provided information about their level of engagement and speaking performance during project-based learning activities. In addition, 10 students were selected from among the volunteers to participate in semi-structured interviews. These participants were chosen based on their availability and willingness to provide detailed feedback on their experiences with Project-Based Learning (PBL). Their responses offered valuable qualitative insights into the effectiveness and perceived impact of PBL in the EFL classroom.

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of The Respondents

Variables and Categories	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	30	53%
Male	27	47%
<i>Age</i>		
12	14	24.5%
Table 1 <i>Cont.</i>		
13	41	72%
14	2	3.5%
Total	57	100%

*Note. The researcher adapted an observation protocol from Raveewan and Karnchanoke (2015) focused on students' speaking skills in Project-Based Learning (PBL)*

### **3.5 Research Site**

This research will be conducted at the 157th General Education School. A secondary institution where English is a foreign language taught to the students. This school was selected because of its association with the scope of research, focusing on secondary school students who learn EFL, along with their integrated use of Project-Based Learning in the English curriculum. The school has become an appropriate place to look into the attitudes of 7th-grade students toward PBL and how it does make a difference in their speaking skills.

### **3.6 Data Collection Procedures**

This study followed a two-stage data collection process to ensure both breadth and depth in understanding students' attitudes toward Project-Based Learning (PBL) and its effect on speaking skills.

First, the researcher distributed self-reflection checklists to 57 seventh-grade students. The students completed the checklists independently during their regular English classes. This step allowed the researcher to gather quantitative data about students' classroom participation, confidence, and engagement with PBL tasks. The use of checklists served as a diagnostic tool to identify general trends and levels of perceived improvement in speaking. Second, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 students. These students were selected based on their willingness to participate further. The interviews took place after the researcher analyzed the checklist results. This second stage aimed to explore students' personal views, examples, and challenges related to PBL in more detail. The interviews offered deeper insights that complemented the numerical findings from the checklists.

The researcher chose this order deliberately. Starting with checklists allowed the collection of a broad overview from a larger group, which helped identify key areas of focus.

Conducting interviews afterward allowed the researcher to explore those areas with more precision and context. This sequence ensured a logical and effective integration of quantitative and qualitative methods within the mixed-methods design.

### **3.7 Confidentiality**

The research team will not collect any personally identifying information from participants, and full anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained. Each participant will receive a number that will be used during the analysis, and no names or identifying details will be recorded. All data will be stored securely on devices that are password-protected, and only authorized members of the research team will have restricted access. The principal investigator will be the only person with full access to the raw data. Parental consent will be obtained through an information sheet that explains the study's aims, procedures, and potential risks. This document will also confirm that student identities will remain protected and that all data will be used solely for academic purposes.

## CHAPTER 4

### Results

This chapter presents the results of semi-structured interviews conducted among students. It also includes data from the self-reflection checklists.

#### 4.1 Interview Results

The findings are presented here based on a semi-structured interview conducted with the students. The students were asked questions regarding their attitudes toward Project-Based Learning (PBL) in their English classes as well as what value they put on PBL to boost their speaking abilities.

##### **4.1.1 RQ1: What are EFL students' overall attitudes toward the use of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in English language classes?**

The insight into the attitudes of EFL students towards PBL is significant in assessing the respective merits and problems associated with its implementation. Therefore, the responses of the 10 students interviewed were coded and analyzed, providing insights into several key themes: (1) differences between PBL and conventional learning, (2) favorite activities and aspects of PBL, (3) improvements in speaking skills, (4) confidence after presentations, (5) challenges faced and strategies for overcoming these obstacles during PBL projects, (6) preference for group or individual work, and (7) perceived benefits of PBL in real-life English usage.

**4.1.1.1 Differences Between PBL and Regular Learning.** Students have, in general, recognized that PBL differs from traditional learning in that it has more fun, involves more interaction, and is substantially more creative. Student A1 noted, "PBL is fun because we do hands-on things like making posters and acting, not just listening to the teacher or reading

books.” Similarly, Student F6 stated, “PBL is more creative, but sometimes I find the traditional way, like using the book, easier to follow.” These perspectives suggest that while PBL is generally perceived as engaging, some students feel that traditional learning offers more structure and clarity.

**4.1.1.2 Favorite Activities and Aspects of PBL.** Students mostly liked the activities that allowed for creativity and teamwork; posters, role-plays, and films were the most popular. Student E5 shared, “I liked making posters and explaining them, it was fun and made me talk more.” Student B2 mentioned, “I enjoyed role-playing. Pretending to be a shopkeeper was really fun.” Additionally, students like Student C3 and Student J10 said they felt excited when presenting their projects to the class. These comments highlight how performance-based and visual activities were especially motivating.

**4.1.1.3 Improvements in Speaking Skills.** Several students reported to the teacher their improvements in speaking skills as a result of PBL activities, particularly those related to dialogue practice and presentations. Student A1 stated, “When I practiced a dialogue, it helped me speak more clearly in class.” Student D4 noted, “Doing the debate helped me say my ideas better.” These statements show that speaking activities in PBL, such as dialogues and debates, help students improve their communication skills. However, not all experiences were uniformly positive. For instance, Student F6 said, “I still feel shy when speaking, even with group projects,” and Student I9 also expressed a similar view, noting that while PBL encourages speaking practice, it may not fully eliminate confidence issues for every student.

**4.1.1.4 Confidence After Presentations.** The levels of confidence among students after presentations varied. Some reported gains in self-assurance due to the collaborative and repetitive nature of PBL. For instance, Student A1 said, “Working in a group and presenting many times made me feel less afraid to speak in front of others.” Similarly, Student C3

shared, “After doing several presentations, I think I became more confident. It is easier now to talk in English without thinking too much.” However, not all students shared this experience. Student G7 admitted, “Even after practicing, I still feel nervous when speaking in front of the class.” Likewise, Student J10 reflected, “I get very anxious during presentations. It has not changed much, but I try to do my best.” These contrasting experiences suggest that while PBL supports speaking practice, some learners may need additional support to build confidence, such as more individual coaching or anxiety-reduction strategies.

**4.1.1.5 Challenges Faced and Strategies for Overcoming these Obstacles during PBL Projects.** Students encountered various challenges while engaging in PBL. A common issue was understanding project instructions. For example, Student F6 noted, “I did not understand what to search for the first time, but my teacher showed examples and explained, and that helped a lot.” Time management also emerged as a difficulty. Student E5 shared, “We could not finish on time because we did not plan well. The teacher asked us to stay after class, and that helped us to complete the work.” Group dynamics posed another obstacle. Student G7 described, “We had arguments about who should do what. Our teacher helped us divide the tasks fairly.” Similarly, Student A1 faced language barriers, stating, “I did not know many words, but my friends helped me translate and understand.” Student D4 added, “I did not know how to begin, but then our teacher showed us an example, and it gave us an idea to start.” These responses highlight how teacher guidance and peer collaboration were essential strategies for overcoming difficulties, reinforcing the supportive environment fostered by PBL.

**4.1.1.6 Preference for Group or Individual work.** The majority of students explicitly preferred group work, emphasizing the opportunity to collaborate on a task and learn through peer interaction. For example, Student D4 stated, “Working in a group would have made the

project easier to manage and less stressful." Similarly, Student H8 noted, "Having group members to share the work would have reduced the pressure and made the task more enjoyable." These perspectives suggest that collaborative learning is perceived as beneficial, particularly in terms of reducing anxiety and promoting shared responsibility. On the other hand, some students expressed a preference for individual work. Student F6 remarked, "When I work alone, I can fully focus without being distracted by others." Likewise, Student I9 commented, "I prefer working by myself because it allows me to control the pace and stay more concentrated." This shows that some students preferred group work for support and shared effort, while others liked working alone to stay focused and in control.

**4.1.1.7 Perceived Benefits of PBL in real-life English usage.** Many students recognized the value of Project-Based Learning (PBL) for developing practical English skills relevant to real-life situations such as travel, shopping, and social interactions. Student B2 shared, "We practiced conversations like ordering food in a restaurant, and it helped me learn useful words and phrases." Similarly, Student E5 reflected, "PBL gave me the chance to use English in situations that I might face when traveling or going out." These statements highlight the perceived practical application of PBL to everyday contexts. Conversely, some students were uncertain about the immediate usefulness of PBL for real-life speaking situations. For instance, Student F6 commented, "I still do not feel fully ready to speak English in real situations, so more focused speaking exercises might help." In a similar vein, Student I9 observed, "Although the project was useful, I think I need more practice with real conversations to feel confident." These responses suggest that while PBL contributes positively to language development, supplementary targeted speaking activities could enhance students' readiness for authentic communication.

#### **4.1.2 RQ2: To what extent do students believe that the employment of Project-Based Learning (PBL) affects their speaking skills?**

In this section, there are students' experiences and beliefs about PBL that can provide valuable insights into how it shapes their language proficiency and speaking confidence. The responses of the interview highlighted several key sub-issues: (1) PBL activities that foster speaking skills, (2) speaking skill improvements, (3) confidence and challenges in speaking, and (4) preferences for group or individual English speaking practice, (5) changes or improvements to PBL, (6) PBL and Real-Life English.

**4.1.2.1 PBL Activities that Foster Speaking Skills.** The students expressed that Project-Based Learning (PBL) differs significantly from traditional approaches because it enables learners to take part in interactive and creative activities that enhance their speaking skills. Frequently mentioned activities included role-playing, creating video clips, designing posters, and delivering group presentations. Through such tasks, students experienced opportunities to engage in authentic conversations, apply vocabulary meaningfully, and articulate their thoughts in realistic contexts. For example, Student A1 explained that presenting ideas to the class gave him or her the chance to practice speaking in front of others in a purposeful manner. Student B2 shared that participating in role-play, particularly as a shopkeeper, allowed for more natural speaking practice. In addition, several students described the creative aspect of PBL as a key motivator in participating in speaking exercises. Student E5 stated, "I think working with posters and explaining them to the class was very enjoyable and less stressful for us to practice speaking." Other activities included more functional language tasks, such as designing travel guides (Student A1) or restaurant menus (Student B2), which encouraged students to apply spoken English in real-world scenarios.

**4.1.2.2 Speaking Skill improvements.** Almost all students acknowledged the

development of their speaking skills due to PBL. Some reported that they spoke with more clarity, could form sentences more easily, and felt more comfortable expressing their ideas. For instance, Student A1 stated: "After I wrote and practiced the dialogue, I felt more confident, and I think others understood me better when I spoke." This example shows that the structured PBL tasks helped the student achieve more accurate and confident oral communication. In the same way, Student C3 explained: "It became easier to ask and answer questions after we practiced in groups." This response suggests that collaboration during group activities supported the development of fluency in spoken language. Other students also referred to specific classroom projects. According to them, activities such as storytelling, role-play, and interviews were especially useful in improving their pronunciation, fluency, and vocabulary. On the other hand, some students made the same progress. Student F6 described his continued difficulties, saying: "I get shy and forget words when I speak." This response shows that while PBL helped many participants improve, some still experienced problems related to self-confidence and word recall. Students' responses showed that PBL created a meaningful and supportive environment for speaking practice. Many believed it offered advantages that were not consistently found in traditional teaching methods.

**4.1.2.3 Confidence and Challenges in Speaking.** Speaking confidence was mentioned frequently by several participants. Many students stated that they felt more confident when speaking in group activities during the project. Student A1 said, "I was not afraid to speak when I was with my group." Student D4 also explained that "repeating the debates helped me feel ready to talk in front of others." These remarks suggest that the structure of Project-Based Learning gave learners more chances to prepare and feel secure. Conversely, Student G7 shared, "I still feel nervous when everyone looks at me," and Student J10 said, "I like working in a group, but I do not enjoy speaking in front of the whole class." These comments show that group settings helped with interaction, but fear of public speaking

remained a problem for some. Furthermore, students discussed other difficulties. Student F6 noted, "I do not understand all the words in the dialogue, and that makes me shy to speak." This reflects a problem with vocabulary understanding. Student D4 said that she felt "a little stressed about starting the project," but added that "teacher examples helped a lot to continue." This shows how clear guidance could reduce pressure and support student progress.

**4.1.2.4 Preference for Group or Individual English Speaking Practice.** Most students showed a strong preference for group work. They believed that working in a group improved their speaking abilities and reduced their anxiety. Student A1 stated, "When I speak with my friends in the group, I feel more sure about my English." Similarly, Student B2 said, "We help each other when we forget words," and Student C3 added, "Group work makes speaking easier because we are not alone." These illustrate the social support that group learning offers. Students felt less isolated and more engaged when they worked with classmates. They also appreciated the chance to share opinions and listen to different views. Nevertheless, a few students favored individual work. Student F6 said, "I can think better when I work alone," and Student I9 expressed frustration, explaining, "Sometimes the group does not use my ideas, and that makes me feel ignored." Although these students preferred to work independently, most participants found group activities more helpful in improving their speaking.

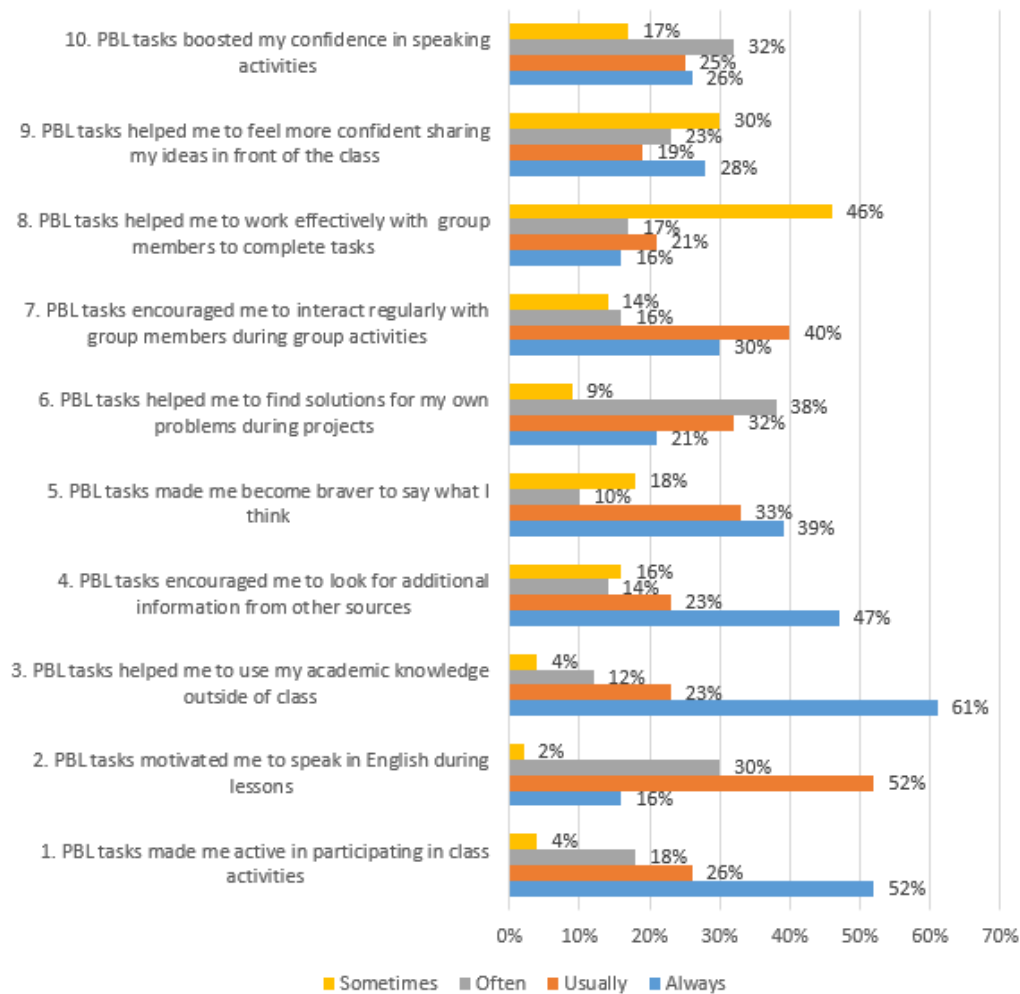
**4.1.2.5 Changes or Improvements to PBL.** Students propose several improvements that can make PBL more effective with speaking skills development. Some of the most common recommendations suggest providing more time for preparation before presentation, more interactive games, and clearer instructions for students. Student H8 suggested, "We need more time to get ready and practice before we talk in front of others." Another common

recommendation was to make instructions clearer. Student F3 explained, "Sometimes we do not understand exactly what to do, so better instructions would help." Interactive elements were also seen as important. Student K6 said, "Games help me feel less nervous and talk more in English." Some students preferred working in smaller groups. Student G7 noted, "It is easier to talk and everyone gets a chance if the group is small." There was also interest in more practical, real-world speaking opportunities. Student J1 mentioned, "It would be exciting to speak English with people outside school, like tourists." Another student, C2, added, "Doing something fun outdoors while speaking English would help us remember the language better." These suggestions show that students want PBL to match their personal learning styles. They seek more structured preparation, clear guidance, and realistic speaking situations that feel relevant and useful.

**4.1.2.6 PBL and Real-Life English.** Many students understood that PBL was important for them to really prepare for communication in real-life situations. They believed that speaking activities helped them become more confident in practical situations. Student E5 said, "When we made a menu and played as the restaurant's customers, I learned how to order food in English." Similarly, Student B2 shared, "PBL helped me because now I can speak to a tourist more easily." Students reported that using language in context helped them understand how English is used outside of school. Student D4 stated, "Doing these tasks is different from normal lessons. It feels more like how we use English in the real world." On the other hand, some students wished for more chances to practice English beyond the classroom. Student A6 expressed, "If we had more activities outside, it would help us feel more ready for real conversations." These responses suggest that students view PBL as a valuable bridge between classroom learning and authentic language use. They appreciate the practical focus and request more experiential learning opportunities.

## 4.2 Results of the Self-Reflection Checklist

The Self-Reflection Checklists were designed as a questionnaire for students to assess how Project-Based Learning (PBL) helped improve their academic learning, personal growth, self-evaluation, confidence, group work, and engagement.



*Figure 1.* Student’s attitudes toward Project-Based Learning (PBL) activities in English speaking class from the self-reflection checklist.

Figure 1 shows that learners liked the PBL tasks in improving their learning, confidence and collaboration. In general, the most common responses are “always” and “usually.” These are followed by “often” and “sometimes.” This shows that students have a mostly positive view of PBL for learning and participation.

The data from the PBL tasks shows that students are engaged, motivated, confident and collaborative. A clear positive trend is seen in areas related to active participation and application of academic knowledge. 52% of the students said PBL tasks made them active in class, 26% said they were usually active. This shows the potential of PBL to engage students in class. Moreover, 61% of the students said PBL tasks helped them apply their academic knowledge outside class, 84% combined said this. This means PBL encourages real world application of what is learned in class, one of the advantages of this learning method.

PBL also seems to motivate students to speak in English in class, 98% of the students said they are always or usually motivated to do so. This is a big indicator that PBL develops language use and communication skills which are part of language learning. 70% of the students said PBL made them look for additional information from other sources, this shows that the tasks sparked curiosity and independent research which are part of academic growth.

However, the data also showed areas where results were lower. For example, while 72% of students reported that they spoke their minds boldly during PBL activities, the response was not as collaborative and motivating. This suggests that while PBL has some effect in building trust, it may not be sufficient to meet the needs of all students. Similarly, 80% of students reported that they communicated regularly with group members during the activity and that PBL encouraged collaboration regardless of the frequency of interaction. This effect will vary according to the work and group dynamics.

Furthermore, the results highlight some difficulties, particularly in problem solving and teamwork. While 91% of students felt that they were able to find solutions during the study, the remaining 9% indicated that this was a problem. This suggests that while PBL encourages problem solving for most students, it may not always encourage the critical thinking or problem solving skills that are necessary for all students. However, the greatest concern arose in the area of teamwork. Almost half of the students (46%) said that PBL

activities did not always help members work well together to complete the project. This points to a significant problem with teamwork because PBL is based on teamwork. Clearly, issues such as team dynamics, project management, and collaborative learning need to be addressed further to increase the overall effectiveness of PBL.

In summary, while the results of the self-concept products show that PBL is effective in promoting participation, motivation, and prompting, there are differences in developing collaborative problem-solving skills and effective collaboration. In order to enhance the PBL experience, focus should be placed on developing team collaboration, working clearly, and problem-solving to deal with weak or small responses. By developing these areas, PBL can become a more powerful tool for promoting effective learning.

As a conclusion to this section, the interviews and student reflections show that students had a positive experience with PBL in their English classes. They enjoyed the creative tasks and felt more confident in speaking. Many students improved their speaking skills and took part more in class activities.

## CHAPTER 5

### Discussion

Studies have found that students have positive attitudes toward project-based learning (PBL), appreciating its interactivity, engagement, and relevance to the world (Canh, 2017; Quoc & Phan, 2020). This view was also supported by the interview results, where students often highlighted the appeal of PBL, such as role playing and making posters. These activities help students engage in learning and provide a refreshing alternative to traditional teaching methods. However, despite the perception that PBL is more effective, some students, such as student F6, indicated that they preferred the simplicity of traditional methods, arguing that the simplicity and ease of use of PBL may not be equally beneficial to all students.

PBL has been praised for its ability to stimulate interest and engagement, particularly through activities that encourage independent and critical thinking (Duman & Yavuz, 2018; Wimolmas, 2018). This can be seen from this study that 98% of the students showed interest in speaking English in PBL activities, especially poster making and drama activities. Despite these positive outcomes, some students also identified practical challenges, such as time management and lack of collaboration. These articles suggest that although PBL often promotes student engagement, its success may be hampered by several challenges.

In addition, PBL is often associated with the development of higher-order thinking skills, such as problem solving and critical thinking (Beckett & Miller, 2006; Savery, 2006). Thus, 91% of the students in this study indicated that their problem-solving skills improved as a result of PBL. However, a small number of students experienced difficulties, indicating the need for analytical support and guidance, especially students like A1 and F6 who struggled with the more complex aspects of the task.

The main benefit of PBL is its ability to improve communication skills and reduce language anxiety (Yaman, 2014; Quoc & Phan, 2020). Most students in this study showed

significant improvements in speaking clearly, concisely, and confidently, especially in discussions and presentations. However, some students, such as G7 and J10, remained concerned during the presentation that they believed changes in group and individual self-esteem could affect individual outcomes. Petersen (2008) highlighted the importance of these factors, demonstrating that emotional involvement can easily influence performance.

PBL collaboration is another popular area that helps improve interaction and team skills (Belmekki & Baghzou, 2022; Quoc & Phan, 2020). Although most students appreciated the PBL group activities, 46% reported difficulties in collaboration and needed guidance to ensure equal participation and prevent problems in gatherings. This finding is consistent with Petersen's (2008) warning that organizational change can create difficulties and require guidance to facilitate collaboration.

Another major benefit of PBL is the ability to connect classroom learning to real-world experiences (Susanti et al., 2020). In this study, students practiced English language skills such as ordering food and having daily conversations. However, some students, such as F6, expressed skepticism about the appropriateness of some tasks, suggesting that a more focused real-world practice approach could improve the effectiveness of PBL activities.

Previous studies have confirmed the benefits of PBL on a variety of language skills, including reading, vocabulary acquisition, and writing (Chu et al., 2011; Kavlu, 2015). This study confirmed these findings, with many students reporting improvements in their speaking skills, particularly through role-playing, video production, and presentations. The reflective journal further supported the idea that PBL encourages the use of spoken language, with 98% of students reporting a greater desire to speak English during PBL activities.

Although most students report increased speaking confidence, especially after group work and repetition, not all students make the same progress. Students such as G7 and J10 continue to struggle with anxiety, indicating that although PBL is meant to build self-

confidence, some students may need more support. This can be seen in the reflection checklist, where 72% of students reported that they expressed their opinions more effectively, although this increase was not uniform across all participants.

Students' challenges, including difficulties in understanding instructions, time management, and group discussion, were consistent with the findings of previous studies (Shafaei & Rahim, 2015). Although PBL has been shown to improve vocabulary retention, it can interfere with task management and collaboration. Nearly half of the students in this study had difficulty working in groups, highlighting the importance of providing collaborative strategies and task management.

Previous research and current findings demonstrate the potential of PBL to prepare students for real-world language use. Many students reported that they had worked on practical language skills such as restaurant vocabulary and travel-related conversations, demonstrating the relevance of PBL to the real world. However, some students, such as F6 and I9, were skeptical of the usefulness of some activities and felt that more language activities were needed.

Baş and Beyhan's (2017) study suggests that student achievement and behavior can be enhanced by integrating PBL with multidisciplinary knowledge. This is consistent with the current study, where students reported enjoying interactive activities such as music and creating a journal, which helped them communicate with the world. However, some students still struggled with presentation skills, indicating that personal support is needed to help these students benefit from PBL. According to

Kaushik (2020), a well-structured PBL environment promotes student independence and participation. This was evident in the current study, where students used the freedom provided by PBL activities and the collaborative nature of the activities to support participation. However, students like F6, who had difficulty managing time and

understanding the tasks, suggest that the benefits of PBL for independence are not fully realized without guidance and organization

PBL is also known to promote self-regulation and self-efficacy, as students develop their own learning strategies (Tran & Phan, 2021). Students in this study reported using self-management strategies, such as peer collaboration, to overcome challenges. However, examples like G7 and J10, who were still anxious, suggest that while PBL promotes self-regulation, it does not guarantee the same results, especially when it comes to confident communication.

Research supports the idea that PBL increases students' confidence and reduces anxiety, especially in communication and reading activities (An, 2023; Susanti et al., 2020). Most students reported feeling more confident after group presentations, although some remained nervous, especially during individual presentations. This suggests that emotional input varies, and suggests that personal factors, such as personality and past experiences, influence students' responses to PBL.

Baygudanova (2024) suggests that PBL fits with the international learning goals of promoting communication and intercultural competence. This can be seen in the current study, where students reported using their learning materials, such as ordering food and participating in travel-related discussions. However, some students, such as F6, expressed concerns about the practical value of PBL and suggested that more communication activities should be implemented to build confidence.

This study also supports previous research showing that PBL can improve intercultural communication skills (ICC) and speaking skills (Smakova, 2021; Baygudanova, 2024). Students report that their speech is clear and they feel very comfortable expressing their ideas. The questionnaire confirmed that 98% of students felt comfortable speaking

English during PBL activities, which strengthens the effectiveness of PBL in promoting communicative language use.

Despite the positive effects of PBL, there are still problems in its implementation. Time management issues, group dynamics, and lack of structured learning have been noted by students and previous research (Intykbekov, 2017; Sengerbekova et al., 2024). These difficulties highlight the need for clear guidance and better strategies to effectively address these issues.

Although PBL has been shown to improve students' confidence and speaking skills, its effects on long-term fluency and spontaneous communication are less clear. While many students expressed confidence, others (e.g. F6) still faced vocabulary deficits and doubts, and more research is needed on the long-term effects of PBL on language skills, particularly in terms of maintaining creativity and engaging in interpreting authentic content.

## CHAPTER 6

### Conclusion

This study explored the attitudes of Kazakhstani secondary school students toward Project-Based Learning (PBL) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes and examined its influence on speaking skill development. The research adopted a mixed-methods approach, using both self-reflection checklists and semi-structured interviews.

#### 6.1 Summary of Findings

Students expressed a generally positive attitude toward PBL, highlighting its interactive, collaborative, and engaging nature. Activities such as role-playing, presentations, and visual tasks were especially valued for their ability to support speaking fluency and confidence. Students reported improvements in vocabulary usage, sentence formation, and clarity during oral communication.

However, the study also revealed challenges, including time constraints, difficulties with task instructions, and inconsistent collaboration in group work. Some students experienced anxiety or lacked the confidence to speak publicly, indicating a need for tailored support.

Overall, students perceived PBL as beneficial for real-world communication, particularly in simulated everyday scenarios. The approach fostered both academic and emotional growth, contributing to motivation, self-reflection, and critical thinking.

#### 6.2 Implications for Practice

The findings indicate that Project-Based Learning (PBL) serves as an effective method for improving students' speaking skills and increasing engagement in EFL classrooms. Students found PBL more interactive, enjoyable, and effective than traditional methods, suggesting that incorporating it into regular curricula can enhance motivation and participation. Teachers are advised to implement creative tasks including role plays, poster

presentations, and real-world simulations, which were shown to improve speaking confidence and willingness to participate.

Structured group collaboration and repeated speaking opportunities were associated with higher fluency and lower anxiety, indicating the value of regular group-based speaking activities. Although many students favored group work, some preferred individual tasks due to distractions or unequal effort, highlighting the need for balanced task design and clear guidance to ensure fair participation and student focus.

Clear teacher instructions, consistent feedback, and modeling were critical in supporting students who experienced difficulties during PBL tasks. This underscores the importance of scaffolding and continuous support to enhance language use, task management, and learner autonomy.

While students recognized the real-life relevance of PBL, many lacked confidence in applying language outside the classroom. Including experiential learning activities such as field tasks, interviews, or virtual exchanges can strengthen the link between classroom instruction and authentic communication.

Administrators can maximize the benefits of PBL by prioritizing teacher training that focuses on effective implementation and assessment, since managing time and teamwork challenges demands structured support and practical strategies in the classroom.

### **6.3 Limitations**

This study has several limitations. First, the research focused on a single secondary school in Kazakhstan and included a relatively small number of participants. This limited scope prevents the generalization of findings to a broader population of EFL learners. Second, the study collected self-reported data through interviews and checklists. Students may have given socially desirable answers rather than accurate reflections of their true experiences and improvements.

Third, the study did not include a pre-test or post-test to measure actual changes in speaking ability. The research focused mainly on students' perceptions and attitudes rather than on objectively assessed language development. Fourth, the research did not involve classroom observations. As a result, it could not capture how students behaved or interacted with peers during PBL tasks.

In addition, the study covered only short-term effects. It did not measure long-term improvements in speaking skills or the retention of knowledge gained through PBL. These limitations suggest that the results should be interpreted with caution and used as a foundation for further research.

#### **6.4 Further Research Recommendations**

Future studies should explore the long-term effects of Project-Based Learning on students' speaking abilities, especially in terms of spontaneous communication, fluency, and real-life language use beyond the classroom. While this study focused on immediate attitudes and self-reported gains, it did not assess whether the improvements in speaking skills are sustained over time. Longitudinal research would provide deeper insights into the durability of PBL outcomes.

Researchers are also encouraged to expand the scope of participants by including students from various grade levels, multiple schools, and diverse geographic or socio-economic backgrounds. Broader sampling would allow comparisons across different contexts and increase the generalizability of the findings. Including rural schools or under-resourced settings could reveal whether PBL remains effective in environments with fewer materials and less teacher training.

Future investigations may incorporate more objective assessment methods, such as standardized speaking tests, classroom observations, or teacher evaluations. These tools could

complement student self-reports and provide a more accurate picture of actual performance improvements.

In addition, studies that examine the role of teacher involvement, task design, and instructional scaffolding in PBL outcomes would offer valuable guidance. Since students in this research highlighted the importance of clear instructions and support, future studies should investigate how teacher strategies influence students' participation, confidence, and success in project-based tasks.

It is also important to examine differentiated approaches to PBL that match students' learning styles, language proficiency levels, or personality traits such as introversion and extroversion. Investigating how specific groups respond to PBL can help educators customize project design to support individual needs and ensure inclusive classroom experiences.

Finally, future research should focus on how PBL can be integrated with intercultural communication training or digital tools to better prepare students for global communication. As Kazakhstan continues to modernize its education system, studies that combine PBL with 21st-century skills and technology-enhanced learning will help shape innovative language education practices.

## References

- Aghayani, B., & Hajmohammadi, R. (2019). The impact of project-based learning on EFL learners' writing skills. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 10(3), 567-578.
- Alotaibi, G. (2020). The effect of project-based learning on persuasive writing skills among Saudi secondary EFL students. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, 8(1), 12-22.
- An, T. (2023). The emotional impact of project-based learning on Vietnamese secondary students. *Asian Journal of English Language Education*, 15(2), 203-219.
- Apsari, Y., Wulandari, D., & Setiawan, I. (2019). The influence of project-based learning on EFL students' creativity and critical thinking. *Journal of English Language Studies*, 7(1), 45-57.
- Baş, G., & Beyhan, Ö. (2017). Effects of multiple intelligences-supported project-based learning on students' achievement levels and attitudes. *Journal of Educational Research*, 21(3), 345-364.
- Baygudanova, A. (2024). Communicative competence in Kazakhstani undergraduate EFL students: A project-based approach. *Kazakhstani Journal of Language Education*, 8(1), 17-29.
- Beckett, G. H., & Miller, P. C. (2006). Project-based second and foreign language education: Past, present, and future. *Research Perspectives on English for Academic Purposes*, 19(4), 231-243.

- Beckett, G. H., & Slater, T. (2018). A framework for the integration of language and content through project-based learning. *Journal of Second Language Education, 34*(2), 197-216.
- Belmekki, F., & Baghzou, L. (2022). Cooperative learning through group investigation: An application in EFL classrooms. *International Journal of Linguistics and Communication, 10*(3), 1-18.
- Canh, T. V. (2017). Vietnamese students' attitudes towards project-based learning in speaking classes. *Journal of Educational Development, 9*(2), 120-135.
- Chu, S., Tse, S. K., Loh, E. K. Y., & Chow, K. (2011). Collaborative inquiry-based project-based learning: Effects on reading ability and interest. *The Journal of Educational Research, 105*(5), 378-385.
- Duman, B., & Yavuz, C. (2018). The role of project-based learning in improving EFL learners' speaking skills. *Language Teaching Research, 22*(1), 1-13.
- Essien, A. (2018). The impact of project-based learning on Thai students' English language proficiency. *Asian EFL Journal, 20*(4), 45-58.
- Intykbekov, S. (2017). Teacher perceptions of project-based learning in Kazakh-Turkish Lyceums. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research, 14*(3), 56-78.
- Kaushik, A. (2020). Structuring PBL for enhanced student engagement and achievement. *Education Research International, 9*(3), 112-124.
- Kavlu, A. (2015). Project-based learning: A panacea for reading comprehension. *European Journal of Language Studies, 2*(1), 55-63.

- Petersen, J. (2008). Teachers' and students' perceptions of project-based learning. *Journal of Educational Research, 12*(1), 13-27.
- Quoc, N. H., & Phan, T. P. (2020). Attitudes toward project-based learning among Vietnamese EFL learners. *Journal of Language and Culture, 11*(2), 150-170.
- Savery, J. R. (2006). Overview of problem-based learning: Definitions and distinctions. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Problem-Based Learning, 1*(1), 9-20.
- Shafaei, A., & Rahim, H. (2015). Enhancing vocabulary retention through project-based learning. *Iranian Journal of Language Studies, 8*(3), 91-110.
- Smakova, A. (2021). The role of project-based learning in fostering intercultural communicative competence. *Journal of Educational Innovations, 19*(4), 233-250.
- Soleimani, N., Raeesi, R., & Nasri, N. (2015). Effects of project-based learning on EFL reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. *Modern Journal of Language Teaching, 5*(2), 111-126.
- Susanti, N., Retnaningdyah, P., & Trisusana, N. (2020). Vocational students' experiences with project-based learning in speaking classes. *Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching, 16*(2), 145-160.
- Tran, T. T. T., & Phan, T. L. (2021). Self-regulated learning strategies in project-based EFL education. *Asian EFL Journal, 23*(4), 320-345.
- Wanchid, R., & Wattanasin, K. (2015). The investigation of students' attitudes toward project work in enhancing independent learning in English I at King Mongkut's University of technology North Bangkok. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, 6*(5), 581-592.

West Virginia Department of Education. (2018). The effectiveness of project-based learning on student achievement. *State Education Reports*, 10(3), 1-50.

Wimolmas, R. (2018). Project-based learning and its effects on Thai secondary school students. *ASEAN Journal of Education*, 9(2), 15-32.

Yaman, S. (2014). Effects of project-based learning on speaking skills of EFL students. *Journal of Language and Literature*, 8(1), 77-94.

## Appendix A



**Research Ethics Committee** <rethics@sdu.edu.kz>

to me ▾

Good evening!

Yes. You may start your research work as the decision was **conditional approve**.

Good luck!

Ср, 2 апр. 2025 г. в 17:20, Aruzhan Zhantas <[221302038@stu.sdu.edu.kz](mailto:221302038@stu.sdu.edu.kz)>:



## Appendix B



### SDU University Research Ethics Committee

#### Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place: Zoom meetings

Researcher: Aruzhan Zhantas

Participant's name:

The Individual Semi-Structured Interview questions:

Lead-in:

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. Your participation is highly valued and helps the researcher identify teachers' attitudes toward **Project-Based Learning (PBL) in Learning English Language**. The interview does not have any right or wrong answers, we are interested in your personal opinion and kindly ask you answer honestly. Remember that your confidentiality is guaranteed, and you are free to stop the interview if you feel unsafe.

How are you today? Do you feel comfortable participating in the interview?

General questions:

1. How is Project-Based Learning different from the regular way you learn English, like using books or listening to the teacher?
2. What PBL activities do you like to do in your English class?
3. What part of PBL do you like the most when you're learning English? Why?
4. How has working on PBL projects helped you improve your speaking skills in English? Can you share any examples?
5. After doing PBL activities, the presentation part, do you feel more confident speaking in English? Why or why not?
6. Can you tell us about a specific PBL project that helped you improve your English? What made it helpful?
7. Did you face any problems while doing PBL activities in your English class? How did you solve them?
8. Do you like working on PBL projects by yourself or with others? How does working in a group help you speak English better?
9. What would you change or improve about the PBL activities in your English classes?
10. How do you think PBL can help you use English in real life, outside the classroom?

Is there anything you would like to add or share? Thank you! We're about to end this interview.

Thank you once again for taking time to participate in this interview. We believe that your answers help policymakers and teachers in the optimization of PBL utilization in EFL contexts.

## Appendix C



### SDU University Research Ethics Committee

#### Parental Consent Letter

Research title: **The EFL Students' Attitudes toward Project-Based Learning (PBL) in Learning English in Secondary School**

Dear [Parent/Guardian Name],

We invite your daughter/son to take part in an important research study understanding how Project-Based Learning (PBL) affects core language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), fosters 21st-century skills like critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration, and enhances student engagement and motivation. Before you decide whether to participate, it is essential that you understand the purpose, procedures, potential benefits, and any risks associated with this study.

#### **Study Purpose:**

The aim of the study is to investigate 7th-grade students' attitudes toward the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in their English classes. Specifically, the research focuses on understanding how PBL affects core language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), fosters 21st-century skills like critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration, and enhances student engagement and motivation.

#### **Procedures:**

Your involvement will consist of completing a questionnaire for all student participants and semi-structured interviews with 10 randomly selected students for in-depth insights. These activities will gather information about your perception of Project-Based Learning (PBL) and its impact on core language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), fostering 21st-century skills (critical thinking, creativity, collaboration), and enhancing engagement and motivation.

**Confidentiality:**

All information collected will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Your name and personal details will be coded and kept strictly confidential, and any published results will use aggregate data to ensure anonymity.

**Voluntary Participation:**

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time without penalty or consequence. Your decision to participate or not will not affect your current or future relationship with the educational institution.

**Benefits and Risks:**

While there may not be direct benefits to you, your participation will contribute to valuable research that can potentially benefit future students and educators. The risk associated with this study is minimal, and we will make every effort to ensure your comfort and well-being throughout the process.

**Contact Information:**

If you have any questions or concerns about the study or your participation, please feel free to contact *Zhantas Aruzhan* at [221302038@stu.sdu.edu.kz](mailto:221302038@stu.sdu.edu.kz) or +77071090918.

**Consent:**

By agreeing to participate, you acknowledge that you have read and understood the information provided in this consent form. You are providing your voluntary and informed consent to participate in this research study.

Thank you for considering participation in this study. Your input is highly valued and will contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field.

**Child's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### Self-Reflection Checklist

*Self-Reflection Checklist:* The researcher adapted an observation protocol from Raveewan and Karnchanoke (2015) focused on students' speaking skills in Project-Based Learning (PBL) and made some adjustments. The observation uses a structured format with four frequency options: Always, Usually, Often, and Sometimes. The Self-Reflection Checklist is a survey-based, structured observation tool in which students self-report their behaviors and perceptions using a fixed-response scale. Students complete the checklist independently, and the researcher collects the completed checklists for analysis. The data gathered from the checklists are analyzed using descriptive statistics, with percentages used to summarize the results. The Self-Reflection Checklist enables students to assess their own speaking skills and engagement during collaborative activities, providing valuable insights into their learning experiences.

**1. PWs made me active in participating in class activities**

(Options: Always, Usually, Often, Sometimes)

**2. PWs motivated me to speak in English during lessons**

(Options: Always, Usually, Often, Sometimes)

**3. PWs helped me connect what they learned in class to real-world situations**

(Options: Always, Usually, Often, Sometimes)

**4. PWs encouraged me to look for additional information from other sources**

(Options: Always, Usually, Often, Sometimes)

**5. PWs gave me a say in the final outcome when working on projects**

(Options: Always, Usually, Often, Sometimes)

**6. PWs helped me find solutions to problems on their own during projects**

(Options: Always, Usually, Often, Sometimes)

7. **PWs encouraged me to interact regularly with their group members during group activities**

(Options: Always, Usually, Often, Sometimes)

8. **PWs supported me in working effectively with their groups to complete tasks**

(Options: Always, Usually, Often, Sometimes)

9. **PWs helped me feel more confident sharing their ideas in front of the class**

(Options: Always, Usually, Often, Sometimes)

10. **PWs boosted my confidence in speaking activities**

(Options: Always, Usually, Often, Sometimes)