



ELT Undergraduate Program Alumnus' Perception towards Project-Based Learning Experience

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Abstract

Project-based learning as one of the recent innovations in teaching and learning methodology has been introduced rapidly in many higher institutions in Indonesia. In general, project-based learning consists of several steps: (1) driving questions, (2) situated inquiry, (3) collaboration, (4) integration of technology, (5) creating learning product. This methodology is a part of contextual teaching and learning, a learning approach that emphasizes the students' interest and experiences and provides the means for reaching learning goals that requires higher order thinking skills. One example of the implementation of project-based learning happens in English Language Teaching study program in Department of English, Universitas Negeri Malang. This study program has equipped its students to experience this methodology in various courses both skill courses and content courses. Employing descriptive qualitative research method, this study investigated the perception of ELT UM alumnus about their experiences in their undergraduate degree program using project-based learning. This study involved 30 participants whom are the undergraduate alumni from ELT study program from year 2015-2019. The instrument used in this study were questionnaire for all participants and in-depth interview on some of the participants. The result and discussion section are classified into six sub-topics: strategies employed in teaching and learning process, critical thinking in PBL, collaboration in PBL, supporting tools in PBL, final product in PBL, and affective impact of PBL. It is expected that from this study, other researchers may get some insights to develop more understanding on project-based learning, while for teachers as facilitators may get some practical idea to implement this methodology in their teaching and learning process.

Keywords: contextual teaching and learning; project-based learning; 21st learning strategy

1. Introduction

Learning language in 21st century education has considerably changed in more practical and meaningful way. Learners are considered successful in learning language when they can use the language communicatively, therefore they must be equipped with exemplary productive language skills, such as speaking and writing (Mulyani, 2020). Without having adequate skill in producing the language, it is hard for them to elaborate and develop their knowledge into more advance way. The facilitator must equip learners graduate with 21st century skills such as collaboration, creativity, teamwork, problem-solving and decision-making so that our learners to learn, practice, adapt, thrive and succeed in a future we don't know (Cervantes, Hemmer & Kouzekanani, 2015). A teaching methodology is introduced to facilitate the learners to be more creative in producing the language namely project-based learning. In project-based learning, making a certain learning product is the main part of the learning outcome. It will enable the learners to integrate the prompts from the facilitator with their own thoughts and allow them to investigate a certain topic deeper to gain more comprehensive understanding (Bas & Beyhan, 2010).

In project-based learning, student-centered situation is promoted since learners are educated to be a responsible person in their own learning (Bas & Beyhan, 2010). They have full responsibility towards the activities within the learning process as this learning methodology is designed to engage learners in investigation of complex, authentic problems and carefully designed products and tasks. In general, there are five steps to conduct project-based learning: : (1) driving questions, (2) situated inquiry, (3) collaboration, (4) integration of technology, (5)

creating learning product (Thomas, 2000). Learners pursue solutions to problems by asking and refining questions, debating ideas, making predictions, designing plans, collecting and analyzing data, drawing conclusions, communicating ideas, asking new questions, and creating artifacts (Mergendoller, Maxwell, & Bellisimo, 2006). Learners are placed in realistic, problem-solving environments that serve to make connections between phenomena in the classroom and real-life experiences (Blumenfeld et al., 1991). Furthermore, PBL approach is more than student mastery of content knowledge; rather it enables learners to transfer their learning to new kinds of situations and problems and to use knowledge more proficiently in performance situations (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008). As a result, PBL provides learners with the opportunity to work autonomously over periods of time and produce realistic products that may include presentations to strategic audiences who have interest in the solutions (Thomas, 2000).

The implication of project-based learning is resulted in the changing of model of teaching from methods of recitation and direct instruction into more innovative way (Cervantes, Hemmer & Kouzekanani, 2015; Hannam University & Shin, 2018; "Literature Review of Project-Based Learning," 2022; Sharma, Dutt, Venkat Sai, & Naik, 2020). Another research by Mahasneh and Alwan (2018) (Chen, Lai, Lai, & Su, 2022) argued that learners learning by this method become both creative and constructive, given the almost unlimited range of diverse projects they may be given, from creating a learning portfolio, constructing a model from a schematic or blueprint, producing a video, or designing a website, the possibilities are endless. Singer, Tal and Wu, (2003), noted that learners who were involved in a scientific project or experiment and who spent time interacting with their classmates developed their understanding of scientific concepts which made not only positive effects on learners' academic achievement levels and attitudes towards the lesson. It has also more positive effects on learners' academic risk taking, problem solving and creative thinking skills (Bas and Beyhan, 2010).

These previous studies are mainly discussed about the impact of project-based learning for learners who are currently studying in a particular level of education, yet there is still no study discussing about the impact of PBL after they are graduated from the school. Especially in ELT study program, it is assumed that the graduates should have adequate productive skill in English. Therefore, the researcher wants to investigate further about the impact of project-based learning towards the productive skills of ELT graduates. To limit the study, the researcher proposed several research questions: (1) How does project-based learning affect learners' English skill in general? (2) What are topics usually employed project-based learning? (3) What products do the learners usually make after the project-based learning?

2. Method

This research employed 30 participants who are undergraduate student alumni from English Language Teaching Program, Department of English, Universitas Negeri Malang. The participants chosen were graduated on 2017-2019 because project-based learning method are highly promoted from the last ten years and they have learned English for more than 10 years in the classroom. Since the design of this research is survey research, those participants were asked to fulfill a questionnaire consisting ten questions in the form of Likert scale from 1 to 4 meaning strongly disagree, slightly disagree, slightly agree, and strongly agree respectively. The Likert scale showed their perceptions towards project-based learning, three questions in the form of choosing options about their specific experience doing project-based learning including the topics they learned and the products they created. Furthermore, to get more in-depth insight, this research employed interview towards five participants. After the collecting the data, they were analyzed them using statistical tool and elaborated the result in the form of descriptive quantitative.

3. Result and Discussion

In this section the result of the research will be elaborated in six subheadings: Strategies employed in teaching and learning process, critical thinking in PBL, collaboration in PBL, supporting tools in PBL, final product in PBL, and affective impact of PBL. These subheadings are driven from the questions employed both in the questionnaire and the interview.

3.1. Strategies employed in teaching and learning process

The result indicated that for these past five years, language productive skills (speaking and writing), active discussion, and groupworks are highly promoted in the teaching and learning process. There are 63.6% (21 out of 33) participants strongly agree that their undergraduate facilitators had asked them to have written products (Figure 1). One participant (RC) explained that she had at least ten written products, for instance topical essays, academic papers, and posters. Another participant (UF) said that she often made several posters during her undergraduate program. This is in line with Thitivesa (2014) who stated that project could be interpreted as a natural language learning framework in which language learning, especially writing, is contextualized and presented in such a way as to combine learning with the task of communicating on certain subjects. Project-based learning strengthens the writing skills of the participants as it stresses, focuses the participants' attention on conveying their message and at the same time applying organization awareness to their writing. The concepts are used in the project at various points and they are applied in authentic context. This finding is consistent to those reported by (Aghayani & Hajmohammadi, 2019; Fadhillah, Sudjarwo, & Habsari, 2023)

My lecturers guided me to have written products (essay, scientific papers, creative writing, etc.).
33 responses

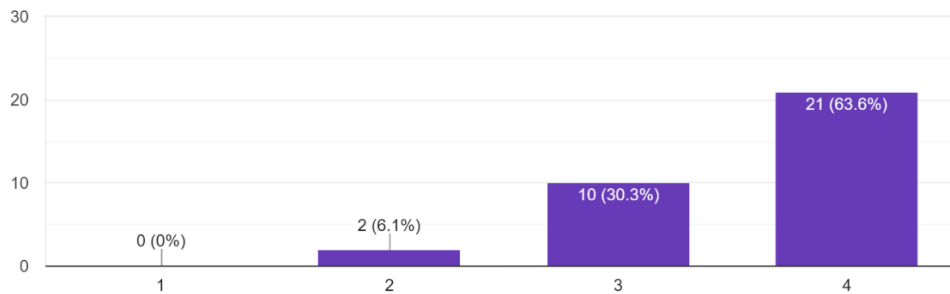


Figure 1. Written products

For speaking skill reinforcement, 69.7% (23 out of 33) of the participants were strongly agree that they were encouraged to speak in English during the class (Figure 2). A participant (VN) said that she was trained to speak English as often as possible since her first semester in college. She explained that three speaking courses (basic speaking, speaking for informal purposes, and speaking for academic purposes) enabled her to directly apply the speaking theory on to practices since the active involvement of the learners in the learning process such as using role-play, presentation, storytelling, speech, etc. were employed. This finding is also highlighted by Dewi (2016) that through the PBL, learners are engaged in purposeful communication to complete authentic tasks (project-work), so that they can use the language in a fairly natural sense and participate in practical activities involving an effective use of EFL speaking skills. Similar findings have been reported through the use of project-based learning focusing on video (Iin, 2022).

My lecturers facilitated me to speak English as often as possible.
33 responses

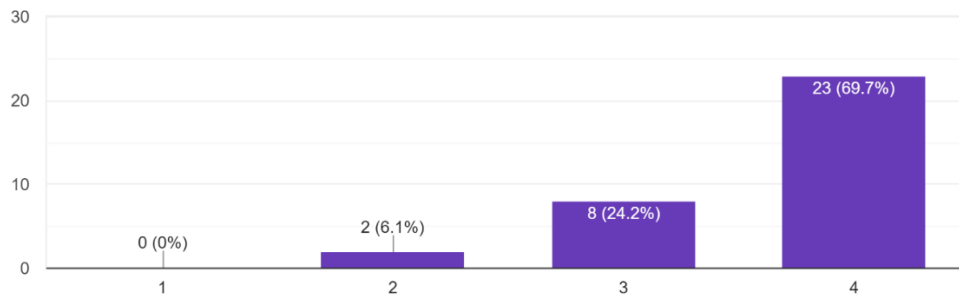


Figure 2. Speaking English in classroom

The use of team-work model was often used in class as 60.6% (20 out of 33) of the participants were agree to it (Figure 3). One participant (VN) said that the group-work usually in the form of pair-work, big group work, and classroom project work. She said that the pair-works were used for small assignments like topical presentations and small discussion during day-to-day class. Big groups were formed to do complex assignments, for instance simulations, role-play, and mini projects (Adomi & Akpojotor, 2019). The classroom works were formed when dealing on classroom final project for example drama project. Barrows (2011) stated that collaboration as one of the components of PBL is intended to give learners opportunities to learn collaborative skills, such as group decision making, interdependence, integration of peer and mentor feedback, providing thoughtful feedback to peers, and working with others as student researchers.

My lecturers often employed some group works for certain assignments.
33 responses

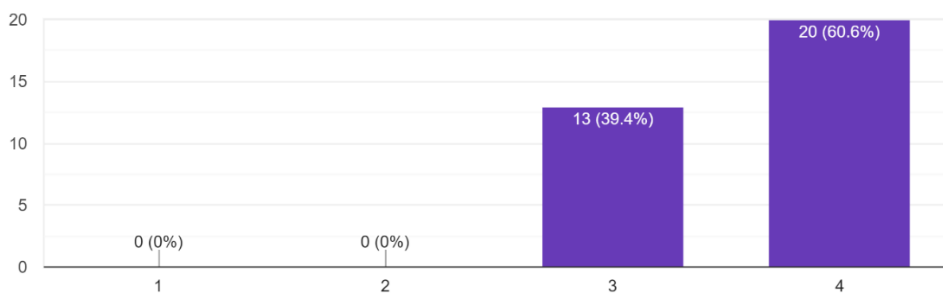


Figure 3. Group work assignment

However, 60.6% (20 out of 33) of the participants agreed the tasks assigned during the courses merely in employed “question-answer” instruction (Figure 4). Participants named DN and AM said that although the instructions were mostly in the form of “question-answer”, the most WH questions were *why* and *how*, meaning that they were still need to explore critically, for instance they were asked to make conceptual papers, mini research, and comprehensive presentations to accomplish the task.

The tasks given by my lecturers employed merely "question-answer" instructions.
33 responses

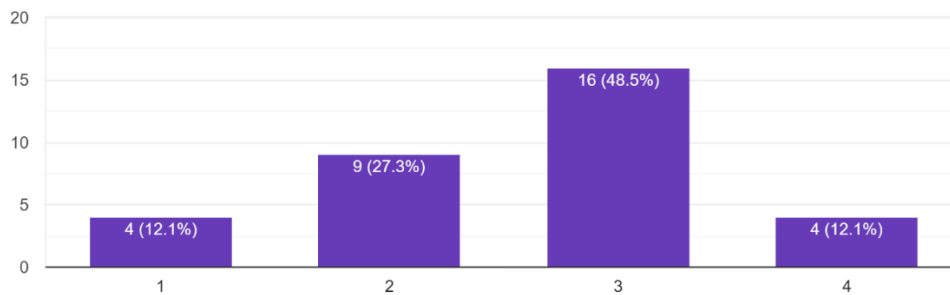


Figure 4. Question and Answer instruction

The important point of project-based learning lies on the learners' ability to be curious and guided towards certain meaningful and important questions (Kean & Kwe, 2014). These questions should be enclosed in real-life situations. The driving questions organize the overall idea of the project while the drive activities provide a context where learners can use to explore learning objectives and scientific practices as well. Moreover, it can also reinforce the learners to accomplish the project (Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006). A good driving question elicits a desire to learn in learners and it makes learners realize that there is a real problem to be solved. Throughout the project, the facilitator calls attention to the driving questions to link together the ideas explored by the learners during the project.

3.2. Critical thinking in PBL

Critical thinking learning strategies were highly encouraged during participants' undergraduate degree as 78.8% (26 out of 33) of the participants strongly agreed and 21.2% (4 out of 33) of the participants agreed that this was the main point which they had learnt throughout the courses (Figure 5). VN said that critical thinking skill in her undergraduate program allowed her to think objectively and solve problems by seeking insights from different references and perspectives. In project-based learning, learners explore the driving questions using new ideas which they have learnt. They do investigation to the driving questions over a situated period of time. This is certainly different with conventional classroom where learners are only provided with prepared materials and textbooks without situated learning in inquiry process (Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006; Dr Parbin Sultana, 2021).

Doing projects on several courses allowed me to think critically.

33 responses

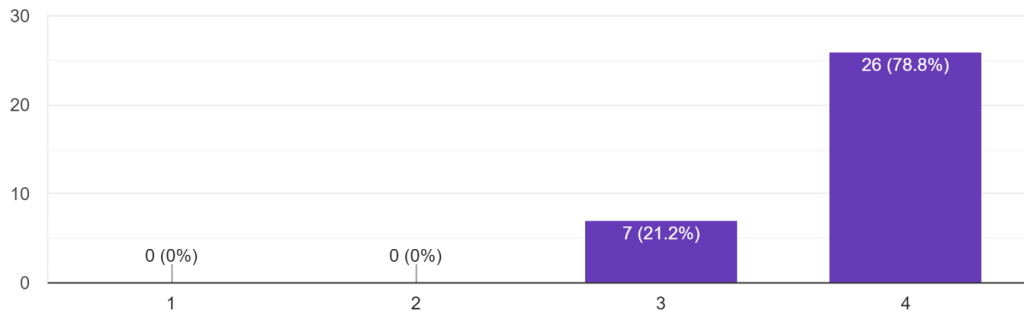


Figure 5. Critical Thinking in project making

3.3. Collaboration in PBL

Project-based learning is inseparable from collaborative works. This research has some proofs that 87.9% (29 out of 33) of the participants strongly agreed and 9.1% (3 out of 33) agreed that they had some peer and group works with their classmates during project making (Figure 6). Not only with their classmates, 57.6% (19 out of 33) of the participants had collaborated with non-Department of English learners and professionals (Figure 7). A participant named IS said that she was asked to interview and have a discussion with a professional make-up artist to prepare for drama project. Since this is a project-based learning, the learning involves learners, facilitators, and member of societies to collaborate with one another to investigate questions and ideas (Dumitrache & Gheorghe, 2018). The classroom becomes a community of learners. Learners collaborate with their classmates and facilitators to ask questions, write explanations, form conclusions, comprehend information, discuss data, and present findings. Collaboration helps learners build shared understandings of scientific ideas and the discipline as they engage in discourse with their classmates and adults outside the classroom (Krajcik, et.al., 2002).

Doing projects on several courses allowed me to collaborate with my peers or classmates.

33 responses

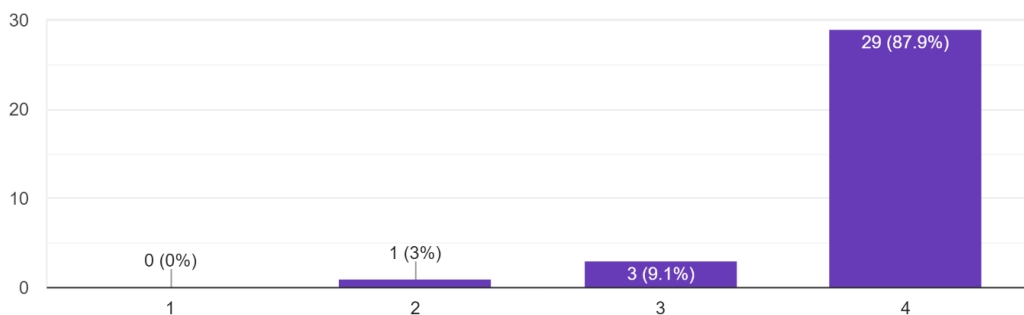


Figure 6. Peer collaboration

Doing projects on several courses allowed me to collaborate with people outside classroom (e.g. professionals, non-English department scholars, etc.)

33 responses

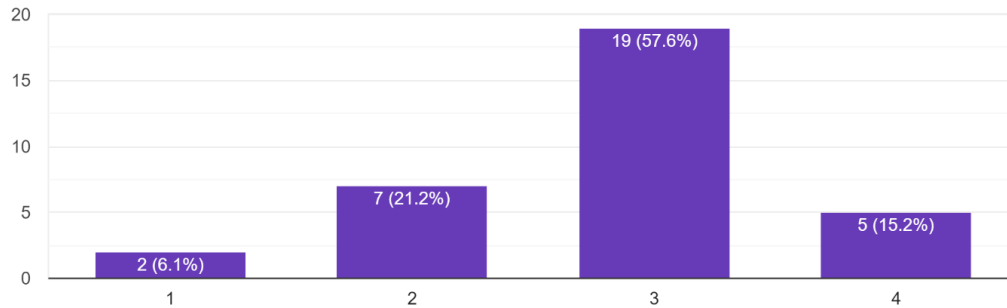


Figure 7. External collaboration

3.4. Supporting Tools in PBL

In terms of gaining sources to support the project-making, 69.7% (23 out of 33) of the participants strongly agreed and 30.3% (10 out of 33) of the participants agreed that they were required to access several references such as books, journal articles, internet websites, and blogs (Figure 8). One participant named VN said that her facilitators gave her several references to read and it helped her not only for the project-making, but also for her upcoming assignments.

Doing projects on several courses allowed me to do literature or reference review from various sources (e.g. books, articles, internet websites, blogs, etc.).

33 responses

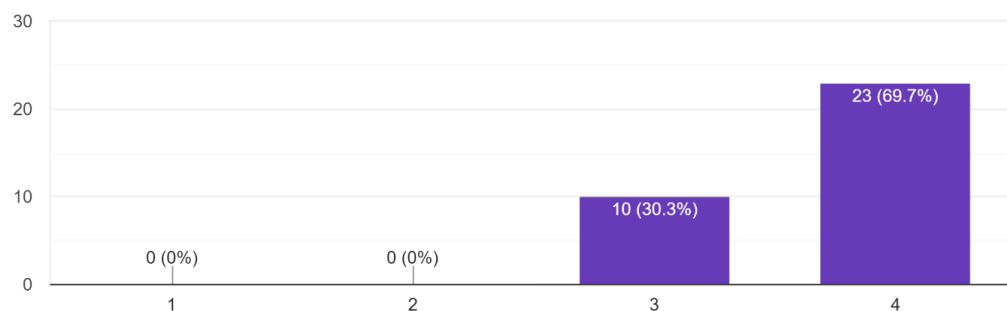


Figure 8. References review in PBL

Secondly, 69.7% (23 out of 33) of the participants strongly agreed and 30.3% (10 out of 33) of the participants agreed that they were allowed to use various tools to support their project, such as relevant computer softwares, mobile apps, and non-digital tools (Iqbal, Niazi, & Hafeez, 2021). VN said, "I often used Adobe Premier for editing video project and Photoshop for poster project. Those softwares help me since they provide some features which I need to do editing.

Technology tools can help transform the classroom into an environment where learners actively construct knowledge. There are three reasons about the significance of using technology

inside the classroom according to Edelson (2001): (1) it aligns with the practice of all branch of science, (2) it can present information in dynamic interactive formats, and (3) it provides opportunities to change the transmission-acquisition model of instruction into more communicative and contextual learning.

Learners can use learning technologies to access real data on the internet, to collaborate with others via network, to gather data, to graph and analyze data, to create models, and to produce multimedia artifacts. Learning technologies allow learners to extend what they can do in the classroom and serve as powerful cognitive tools that help facilitators foster inquiry and student learning (Novak & Krajcik, 2004; Zeng, 2020).

3.5. Final Product in PBL

The major difference between project-based learning and other model of teaching is the requirement of establishing final product. There are 45.5% (15 out of 33) of the participants agreed and 30.3% (10 out of 33) of the participants strongly agreed that they were asked to publish their final products in various platforms like social media, exhibition, Youtube, etc (Figure 9). VN shared, “One thing which I find it memorable and meaningful is when I was asked to make a Big Book for Young Learners and then I showed it and used it directly as a teaching media to second grade learners in My Little Island school, one of international elementary schools in Malang.” Another participant named DD said that she was asked to make a video (vlog) about culture and publish it on Youtube. As for the implication of the project-making, 57.6% (19 out of 33) of the participants strongly agreed and 42.4% (14 out of 33) of the participants agreed that their skill in producing the language were increased along with the progress of the project-making.

Doing projects on several courses allowed me to publish the final products in various platforms (e.g. social media, exhibition, publication, etc.).
33 responses

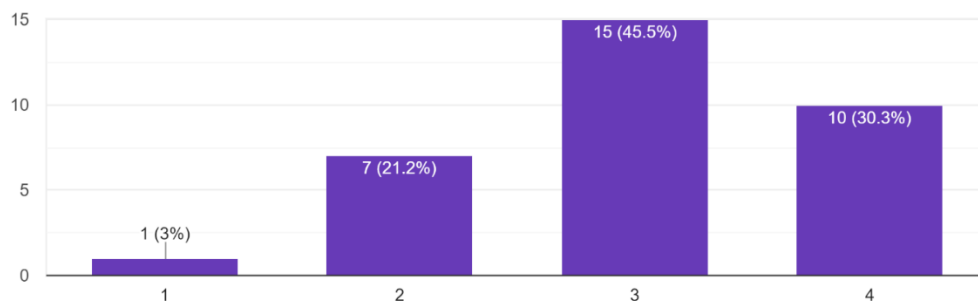


Figure 9. Final product in PBL

It is believed that learners learn more effectively when they develop product – the highest level of their constructed knowledge. In project-based learning, the products result from learners’ investigations into the driving questions (Blumenfeld et al., 1991). Learners develop physical models and computer models, reports, videotapes, drawings, games, plays, websites, blogs, etc. To make it effective, products need to address the driving question, show the understanding of learners, and support learners in developing understanding associated with the learning goals of the project (Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006)

When learners make the product throughout a project, they will connect their ideas and topics into their real-life situation (Krajcik et.al, 2002). Facilitators can use the product to know learners’ understandings along various projects. The product development allows facilitators to

assess higher level cognitive outcomes, such as asking questions, designing investigations, gathering and interpreting data, and creating scientific explanation (Atkin & Coffey, 2003; Hopman & MacDonald, 2018).

Another reason is that when the learners publish their product, it makes their understanding visible to others. Since products are concrete and explicit, they allow learners to share and have their products reviewed by others. Feedbacks from the reviewers support the development of learners' understanding so that they reflect and revise their works.

Affective Impact of PBL

Apart from the development of their language skills, 60.6% (20 out of 33) of the participants strongly agreed and 36.4% (12 out of 33) of the participants agreed that by doing projects, their confidence and motivation were increased simultaneously (Figure 10). A participant named DD said, "I was a not-so-active student until one of my lecturers asked her to do project works which required me to blend with my classmates and other people outside my classroom as well." She felt that her social skill was getting better as she needed to communicate with other people often, she was gaining confidence as well because she was asked to present her product in front of the class, and finally she felt motivated in learning since she found that this project-making was challenging yet worthwhile for her in many aspects. The advantages of project work are: it encourages motivation, fosters group cohesiveness, increases the expectancy of success in the target language, achieves "a rare synthesis of academic and social goals", reduces anxiety, increases the significance of effort relative to ability, and promotes effort-based contributions (Dornyei, 2001).

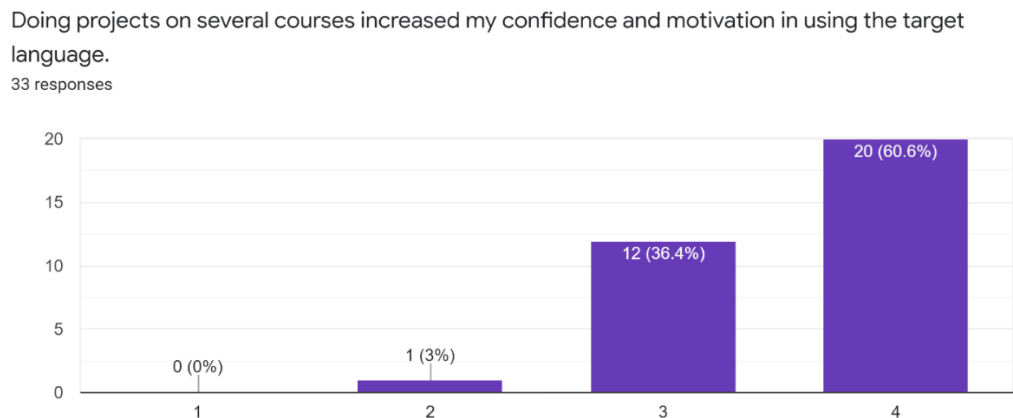


Figure 10. Confidence and motivation in PBL

4. Conclusion

Learning English in 21st century has been developed to a more effective and meaningful way. Project-based learning as one of teaching methodology is promoted significantly in these past five years. Many aspects including collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity have emerged during the implementation of project-based learning. Moreover, by emphasizing on the language production, project-based learning has proven itself that it encourages learners to indulge in meaningful learning. Some learners work with their teammates and some projects require them to deal with people outside their classrooms, connect their comprehension of a certain topic with other field, and publish their final product to get feedbacks not only from their teachers and classmates, but there is also a possibility that they get feedbacks from the society.

This research has limitation in terms of the variables therefore it is suggested that other researchers conduct more thorough study on how the implementation of PBL occurs in the classrooms and how PBL can have a role in boosting students' creativity and confidence in producing the target language. For classroom facilitators, it is suggested that he/she should evaluate the implementation of PBL in their classrooms gradually such as evaluating the topics provided, the time allocation, students' language level, and their skill in using some tools and media. All in all, this research provides optimism towards the development of PBL as a holistic language teaching and learning methodology.

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