

# Problem-Based Language Learning and Teaching

## *Teachers' Readiness and Students' Perceptions*

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**Abstract:** The status of English as an international language has created special pressure for teaching English either as a second language or as a foreign language to join the globalized world. Besides, the advent of the internet accelerated the globalization process and produced many changes in the teaching and learning of English. At this level, a pedagogical question raises: what is the innovative pedagogy that considers contemporary advances in information communication technology and educational resources to promote students' meaningful learning of English as a Foreign Language? Thus, this research aims to scrutinize problem-based language learning (PBLL) as being an innovative approach to learn a new language. The current research is an exploratory case study that aims to investigate teachers' readiness to apply PBLL for the teaching of linguistic and non-linguistic skills. It also sought to explore EFL learners' perceptions of PBLL by taking the English section of the foreign languages department at Naama University Center as a case in point. Therefore, the main questions that set the current study are what are EFL learners' perceptions of PBLL? Are Algerian EFL learners motivated to learn through PBLL? Are EFL teachers furnished to apply PBLL in their classrooms? To explore these questions, the researcher collected data on 60 Master one students and seven teachers of English language at Naama University Center, Algeria. To collect data, the researcher designed a semi-structured interview for teachers and a questionnaire for students. The findings revealed that the most used teaching method was lecturing due to the hesitancy, unfamiliarity, and inexperience to use PBLL. The analysis also demonstrated that the students have not experienced PBLL at the university level before, thus they did not report a positive perception of the approach. The results indicated that students prefer direct instruction and handouts more than PBLL.

**Keywords:** English language, Teaching, Problem-based learning, PBLL, Perception, Readiness

## Introduction

English language education is highly valued in the agenda of Algerian higher education policymakers. It is considered critical for the evolution of scientific research and the integration of Algerian students into the globalized world in which English is deliberated as an international language. Indeed, Ansarian and Lin (2018) contended that the status of the English language and the emergence of information communication technologies have presented challenges to the ways English can be taught. They further claimed that the accessibility of English language resources and communication via the internet requires special attention from EFL teachers while deciding on the teaching methodology to deal with the current supplies. As an instructional approach, PBLL represents a paradigm shift from teaching traditionally, in which the teacher is the sole source of knowledge, to student-centered instruction, which offers learners opportunities to benefit from the vast amount of information available to them. According to Gomez (2016), the development of information communication technologies presented a new situation that is challenging to former and current generations. Thus, he advocated PBLL, as one of the most pioneering approaches in 21<sup>st</sup>-century education, which can prepare EFL learners to become operative problem solvers.

An impartial look at the empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of PBL as a teaching method in foreign language classrooms revealed positive outcomes (Chiou, 2019; Gomez, 2016; Lin, 2017; Othman & Shah, 2013; Sy, Adnan & Ardi, 2013; Tang et al. 2020). For instance, Wong, Wong, and Tang (2011) acknowledged the effectiveness of adopting PBL for EFL teaching. They maintained that PBL allowed EFL learners to think critically and developed their problem-solving skills. In the same line of thought, Mathews-Aydinli (2007) claimed that PBL has both linguistic benefits in terms of natural, meaning-focused classroom interaction, and affective benefits through boosting students' motivation, supporting their autonomy, and promoting the transfer of knowledge beyond the classroom.

Teaching strategies for PBL center on the notion that the teacher supports curiosity and interest in a study subject. The strategy entails lessons that construct the students' background knowledge and then offering them an impetus such as an attention-grabbing question or an authentic problem that encourages inquiry, discovery, and study (Salkind, 2009). Correspondingly, Eggen and Kauchak (2010) viewed problem-based learning (PBL) as a teaching strategy that employs problems as the emphasis for developing content knowledge, envisioned skills, and self-regulation. Accordingly, the roles and responsibilities of both teachers and learners are different from those in traditional strategies. Generally, PBL classrooms are student-centered based primarily on a problem scenario. In this scenario, the students typically work in teams to inquire about the problem, attain information, and make deductions. In the meantime, the teacher acts as a facilitator by providing guidance, directing the data attainment process, seeking further questions, and providing the necessary feedback (Hearn & Hopper, 2008).

Accordingly, teachers' and students' roles in PBL fit well with the contemporary possibilities that information and communication technology is providing. Nonetheless, most EFL teachers in Naama university Center present concepts and rules in a lecture format. This is the common strategy of teaching in most Algerian universities as teachers stick toughly to the importance of forming learners for examinations. Thus, the main goal of the present research work is to explore teachers' readiness to apply PBL and investigate learners' perceptions toward PBL, by taking the EFL context as a case study. In other words, it intends to scrutinize teachers' and learners' familiarity with PBL, the teachers' experience with PBL in EFL classrooms, and the learners' perspectives towards EFL learning through PBL. In this vein, the current study sets around the following research questions:

- What is the teaching strategy that is most used for EFL teaching in Naama University Center?
- Do EFL teachers use PBL to benefit from the vast possibilities that information and communication technology is providing for learners, or are they ready to apply PBL to develop learners' linguistic and non-linguistic skills?
- What are EFL learners' perceptions toward the use of PBL?

Though various studies have discussed the use of problem-based learning in language education (for instance, Mathews-Aydinli, 2007; Lin, 2017), using PBL for classroom-based instruction in Algerian higher education is still not being researched. Indeed, PBL derives from the experiential approach to learning that is supposed to be new in applied linguistics. According to Ansarian and Lin (2018), "This approach is a novel one in language learning and applied linguistics; thus, many aspects of PBL in language classes have yet to be explored" (p. 61). Thus, the use of this teaching strategy still requires more investigations, especially in terms of the

teachers' readiness to take charge of incorporating innovative pedagogies that aim at addressing the requirements of the globalized world.

Correspondingly, investigations into teachers' readiness and learners' perceptions in PBL are immensely infrequent. Teachers may not consider the novel approach because they do not give importance to discovery, creativity, and self-direction. Moreover, it can also result in learners' resistance as they used to rely on teachers as sources of knowledge. Nonetheless, the LMD reform whispered to advocate student-centered learning and transform learning through integrating information and communication technologies (Yaiche, 2019). Thus, the current study has significant benefits in terms of exploring PBL as a strategy of teaching that may transform higher education in Algeria. It aims to evaluate EFL teachers' inclination for adjusting innovative pedagogies based on the requests of the LMD reform. Furthermore, the study theorizes that careful planning of PBL initiates positive perceptions in learners. It struggles, then, to introduce the strategy of PBL in Algerian higher education, encourage the use of PBL instead of direct instruction, to present a treasured contribution to the development of the English language teaching profession.

## I. Literature Review

In a traditional classroom, teachers are responsible for diffusing information to students, monitoring the learning process, and assessing their progress. Such teacher-centered instruction makes the teacher an authoritative leader who sets learning goals, designs courses, and assigns activities. Consequently, students become passive reporters of information and knowledge (Thomas, 2013; Zhang, 2013, as cited in Chiou, 2019, p. 446). On the other hand, student-centered approaches such as PBL adjust the teacher's role to become a tutor who provides students with possibilities to take charge of their learning. Teachers also allow students to cooperate with their classmates while working on activities that involve problem-solving. Compared to the teacher-centered approaches, PBL seems to have a better chance to deal with the requests that globalization is imposing. In this sense, this section presents the theoretical background of PBL and its use in language education. Then, this section focuses on the challenges of implementing PBL on EFL teachers and learners.

### A. PBL Approach

As a pedagogical approach, PBL was perceived and applied before five decades at the medical school of McMaster University, Canada. Ever since the principles of PBL have reached inclusive recognition in various domains. Accordingly, PBL is adopted in terms of various models and strategies for learning in higher education institutions that are adjusting to accommodate modern education requirements (Jensen, Stentoft & Ravn, 2019). Learning, in this approach, is based on a raised problem. The problem could be a challenge, query, or a puzzling situation that entails a solution or an elucidation. PBL principles maintain that students do not learn simply by receiving information. Instead, they need to construct their insights and perceptions personally through experiments.

Educational researchers have deliberated PBL as an innovative pedagogy that can develop students' competencies and readiness for factual challenges. Additionally, researchers were continuously searching aspects of PBL to enhance students' learning. Hence, educators were

applying, practicing, and adjusting this pedagogy to improve students' learning (Moallem, Hung & Dabbagh, 2019). According to Duch, Groh, and Allen (2001), the PBL approach uses intricate, perplexing, and authentic problems for stimulating the students to identify and find the concepts and principles required to solve those problems. In this learning process, the students work in small groups, cooperate for attaining, communicating, and constructing knowledge. In this vein, Levin stated:

PBL is an instructional method that encourages learners to apply critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and content knowledge to real-world problems and issues. Instruction is more student-centered and less teacher-directed than in traditional classrooms. Students assume considerable responsibility for their own learning by locating much of the information they need to solve the problems at hand. (2001, p. 1).

Savin-Badden (2003) claimed that the focus in PBL is on developing the content of learning around problem structures rather than subjects or disciplines. Students work cooperatively to resolve or accomplish these structures but they are not predicted to obtain determined sets of correct answers. Alternatively, they are supposed to engage with the problem structure to decide on the information they need to learn or the skill they need to acquire for resolving the problem effectively. As a result, educationalists consider PBL as an approach that educates students to learn with complexity. That is to say, PBL assists students to recognize that learning and life occur in contexts. The contexts influence the solutions that are accessible and conceivable. In this manner, Tan contended that "PBL is recognized as a progressive active-learning and learner-centered approach where unstructured problems (real-world or simulated complex problems) are used as the starting point and anchor for the learning process" (2004, p. 7).

Definitions of PBL stressed different aspects but agreed on six defining characteristics. Moallem et al. summarized PBL characteristics as,

(a) the use of problems as the starting point for learning, (b) students collaborating in small groups for part of the time, and (c) flexible guidance of a tutor. Since problems steer the learning in such curriculum, (d) numbers of lectures are limited. The latter agrees with the idea that (e) learning is to be student-initiated and that (f) ample time for self-study should be available. (2019, p. 26)

The pioneers of PBL did not deliberate any learning theory while formulating this pedagogical approach. However, cognitive constructivism and social constructivism are noticeably the basics that support the theoretical foundations of PBL in terms of the cognitive and social aspects of students' learning.

### ***1. Cognitive Constructivist Fundamentals of PBL***

Different authors tried to identify the principles of PBL in different ways. However, some views seem to emphasize the cognitive constructivist nature of PBL. Based on these definitions, instructors design problems that would allow for experiential learning. Required to be self-directed, the task of students in such learning environments is to analyze the problem in small groups based on prior knowledge. The discussion of the problem aims at constructing concepts to explain the underlying principles or mechanisms of the problem at hand. In this view, Ansarian

and Lin argued, “PBL seeks answers as they are constructed and formed in the minds of the learners” (2018, p. 10). Besides, the problem is supposed to create an internal desire for the students to discover more about the topic, initiating increased concentration, focused attention, and willingness to learn (Hidi & Renninger, 2006, as cited in Moallem et al., 2019). Tan (2004) disputed that engagement with the problem inquiry process creates the cognitive conflict that prompts learning. In this process, students construct knowledge through collaborative processes of social interaction and evaluation of the practicability of one’s perspective. Therefore, metacognitive strategies and self-regulation are fundamental parts of PBL.

The role of teachers in PBL, according to Ansarian and Lin (2018), is to create learning opportunities for self-directed learning, encourage higher-order thinking, and arrange the teaching strategy of this approach aside from that of traditional learning. This type of learning is consistent with cognitive constructivist learning and the concept of globalization in the domain of education.

## ***2. Social Constructivist foundations of PBL***

Dissimilar to the cognitive constructivists who perceive knowledge construction as an individual cognitive activity, the social constructivists contend that human cognitive development stems from interaction with the social environment. Indeed, the significance of the sociocultural context to individuals’ learning is widely recognized today by educational researchers and educators. The social interactional nature of learning has informed the conception of PBL. In this manner, O’Grady et al. stated, “PBL is often associated with the philosophy of social constructivism, whereby students are able to develop a strong knowledge base through social interactions” (2012, p. 170)

Learning, in PBL, is centered on problem-solving instruction based on the teachers’ guidance or tutoring. The authenticity of the set problems integrates the students into the community of practice of their profession by providing the sociocultural and professional contexts for students to construct knowledge. Solving problems in an educational arranged environment is the first step for students to take part in social activities. This enculturation process cannot be achieved through solving authentic problems solely but through scaffolding. Thus, the teachers’ guidance is vital. In this sense, integrating students into the sociocultural professional context represents a hallmark of PBL that meets the essence of sociocultural constructivism.

According to Moallem et al. (2019), group work is another concept of PBL that embodies sociocultural constructivist principles. PBL generally entails the teacher’s presentation of an authentic problem to be resolved in small working groups with students of different levels of knowledge. In these groups, students collaboratively self-direct their learning by interacting with peers and the tutor to co-construct their knowledge of the subject. Moreover, PBL small working groups place students in a situation to discover and interpret the studied topic based on prior knowledge and experience. The social exchange and practice processes through sharing, questioning, and negotiating help students construct meaning through reciprocal social interaction.

Concisely, PBL is based on a problem scenario that intends to develop knowledge and understanding. Some of its principles are listed below:

- Developing learners' autonomy and self-directed learning.
- Solving problems through collaborative learning and scaffolding.
- Students learn about critical thinking, problem-solving, and self-assessment.
- The problem authenticity energizes students, attracts their attention, and fosters their motivation.

#### **B. PBL in EFL Education**

As an experiential learning strategy, PBL has long been acknowledged as a useful method to promote the development of a variety of skills in several educational fields. Savory (2006) maintained that PBL is effective in developing several skills, including problem-solving, communication, critical thinking, argumentation, collaboration. These skills subordinate directly to the language skills students have to develop in any second/foreign language program (cited in Humalda & Zwaal, 2016, p. 208). Correspondingly, Hearn and Hopper (2008) contended that PBL affords an outlook for authentic English as second language education, and can boost English language use while endorsing skills like critical thinking, interactive communication, and self-reflection. Particularly, English language learners may profit from PBL education as it supports them in improving cultural constructs along with language skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking. This section reviews empirical studies of PBL implementation in the EFL context.

According to Mathews-Aydinli (2007), PBL, in foreign language education, aligns with the teaching approaches in which the learners learn the target language by using it, instead of being presented with and then performing scheduled language structures. Approaches centered on parallel principles include task-based learning, content-based learning, and project-based learning. Nonetheless, PBL is different from other teaching approaches because it focuses on learning through solving real problems that do not have exact solutions.

In his research on the power of PBL in EFL classrooms, Patrick stated, "PBL is a curriculum model that emphasizes the use of task-based problems to engage students in active and multidisciplinary learning" (2009, p. 41). He found that EFL students were largely stimulated and involved in the PBL assignments. They analyzed the raised problems and found solutions. They also directed their learning through planning, monitoring, problem-solving, and finding solutions to the problem. Similarly, Othman and Shah (2013) explained that PBL engaged EFL students to find possible solutions to the raised problems. This engagement would improve their content knowledge, collaborative skills, and communicative skills in the language. In the same line of thought, Gomez (2016) investigated PBL to develop oral communication in the EFL classroom. In his research, he considered PBL as an innovative and compelling approach that can enhance oral communication in the EFL classroom.

In another study, Munoz Campos (2017) implemented PBL in one of the curricular modules of the EFL pedagogy program at a regional university in Chile. The results indicated that the participants perceived PBL positively as they reported that PBL contributes to the development of their cognitive capacities, critical and knowledge integration capacity, self-directed learning, and social skills. In a more recent study, Chiou (2019) incorporated PBL in the EFL context to develop English low achievers' grammar competence concerning relative clauses and their motivation in EFL learning. The study results experimentally demonstrated that the PBL approach had a positive impact on the performance of the participants. The findings also denote that the participants emphasize, when proposing solutions to the given scenario, more on employment than on studies, which may reflect their real-life experiences.

### C. Challenges of PBL in EFL Education

The implementation of PBL in EFL education is full of challenges for both teachers and learners. A growing body of qualitative research was concerned with investigating the main challenges in the adoption of PBL in various educational contexts. Rogers (2014) summarized the encountered challenges in terms of the shift in roles, lack of training and experience, and unprepared classes. This section reviews some of these challenges, as it would not be possible to present the effectiveness of PBL without mentioning its possible related problems.

Implementing PBL in foreign language education triggered challenges faced by teachers, challenges met by learners, in addition to other challenges relating to the use of PBL teaching materials. As far as teachers are concerned, the lack of instructional resources and training are the main reasons for the challenges they face while teaching through PBL. Mathews-Aydinli (2007) contended that the PBL curriculum designers should provide teachers with accurate resources and adequate training. PBL approach is different from traditional approaches. Therefore, teachers should be trained to design a problem scenario, which prompts the use of cognitive and metacognitive skills. The absence of appropriate teaching resources and training leads to the misapplication of the PBL approach (Ansarian & Lin, 2018).

Moreover, Gidcumb (2016) found another challenge among teachers that is hesitancy stemming from unfamiliarity toward the approach. Adopting the role of facilitators as an alternative to knowledge providers produced a problem for novice teachers. Rogers (2014) found that teachers felt hesitant about the instructional selections they had to consider owing to unfamiliarity and inexperience with PBL. She further argued that this problem originated from inexperience and lack of confidence. According to Ansarian and Lin (2018), language teachers may lack confidence in the PBL approach, as they believe that letting learners look for answers themselves means that they are neglecting their roles as teachers. Indeed, PBL is wired by self-directed learning and considers teachers as tutors who are required to change their traditional roles. In this manner, Landeen et al. (2013) suggested that the possible way to deal with this ambiguity would be through expanding both tutors' and students' experience with PBL, hence developing familiarity and rising the teachers' tolerance of ambiguity.

As far as students are concerned, PBL obliges them to take an active role in the learning process. This role may overwhelm the students who used to learn traditionally. Dochy et al.

(2005) stated that the PBL environment could be a noteworthy challenge to students who expect learning as the transmission of knowledge. While some studies revealed that students welcomed their active roles in PBL, other studies demonstrated that the implementation of PBL might cause tension, anxiety, demotivation, and confusion (Jin & Bridges, 2016; Papinczak, 2010). For instance, Barron et al. (2008) found that tutor's extensive control of the learning process instigated anxiety in PBL working groups. Students may avoid articulating uncertain solutions in the tutor's presence. In another study, Lekalakala-Mokgele (2010) noted that students have problems adjusting to the novel learning situation where they are predicted to cope with learning resources and self-direct their learning. Furthermore, they are required to manipulate their membership in the PBL group and define their role within the group.

Rather than the challenges to teachers and students, the appropriateness of instructional materials constitutes another challenge to the implementation of PBL (Ansarian & Lin, 2018). Henceforth, preparing classes to adopt PBL requires the design of appropriate instructional materials. The central objective of PBL is to cultivate autonomous learners who can solve real-life problems, thus instructional materials that are based on problem scenarios are essential to PBL implementation. Generally, EFL teaching in higher education is lecture-based. Such teaching and learning situations provide little opportunity for EFL learners to experience autonomous learning, collaboration, problem-solving, critical thinking, and self-assessment. Therefore, implementing PBL entails the teachers' adjustment of the instructional materials to benefit from claimed benefits of PBL.

Overall, the literature reviewed highlights PBL as an effective learning strategy in the context of EFL education in general. Nevertheless, PBL implementation is not free of challenges and tensions. Although there are studies on the use of PBL in the EFL context, teachers' readiness and learners' perceptions in particular still need investigation. Most of the investigations focused on PBL in EFL education in general. Moreover, it should be pointed out that studies on PBL in the context of EFL teaching in Algerian higher education are not accessible.

## **II. Methodology**

The current investigation is an exploratory case study, which aims at scrutinizing teachers' readiness and students' perceptions toward the use of PBLL. The researcher has adopted a multi-method approach to data collection as means to identify and explore different dimensions of the issue under investigation and to reduce bias caused by using only one method of data collection.

### **A. Participants**

The researcher selected seven teachers for the interview and 60 (two groups) students for the questionnaire from the English section of the foreign languages department at Naama University Center, Algeria. The students were two Master one groups. These students studied English for four years. The subjects were enrolled in Semester one and assessed during the academic year of 2020-2021. The participants were randomly selected from three available groups to ensure probability. Simple random selection entails that each participant has an equal



chance to be part of the study. Therefore, the researcher has selected this type to get a representative sample.

## B. Instrumentation

The researcher carried out the process of data collection using two instruments. The first was an interview designed for teachers who have attempted to change their methodology to adopt alternative teaching strategies such as project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, and electronic learning through ICTs (Information Communication Technologies). The questions of the interview focused on the teachers' experience within non-lecture-based strategies and the challenges they face while implementing these alternative strategies. The interview questions sought also to assess their motivation toward the use of PBL for developing learners' skills in problem-solving, critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and self-assessment. The questions also addressed their knowledge on the use of PBL.

The second instrument is a questionnaire of 12 Likert scale statements aimed at assessing EFL learners' perceptions of the change toward a PBL experience that is very different from the lecture-based method. The teacher-researcher implemented PBL for one month and then tried to assess students' perceptions toward learning in such a different environment. It aimed at obtaining EFL learners' perceptions on the contribution of PBL experience to the development of their motivation to learn, their aptitude to take roles in their learning, think critically, improve communication skills, collaborate with peers, search for information, and seek solutions to problems. Generally, it intended to assess the overall contribution of the experience to learners' perceptions toward change and their desires to continue learning through PBL. The questionnaire included the following assessment criteria: (a) Strongly Agree, (b) Agree, (c) Neutral, (d) Disagree, (e) Strongly Disagree.

## C. Procedures

The data attainment in the current investigation followed three main stages. Before the data attainment process, the researcher conducted some classroom observations to identify the EFL teachers' methodologies at Naama University Center. Throughout observations, the researcher recognized that some teachers were using alternative strategies such as inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, and some forms of e-learning but not a real form of PBL. Through different methods of instruction, teachers tried to shift from the traditional approach. However, the researcher noticed that whenever they face a problem such as lack of resources, learners' hesitancy, demotivation, lack of interest, and resistance, they complete their sessions through lecturing. She observed that the students were motivated at the beginning of sessions but hesitated to complete the problem-solving process. Thus, as a second stage, the researcher interviewed teachers to identify the reasons that lead them back to lecturing and their readiness to adopt innovative strategies such as PBL.

In the third stage, the researcher as a teacher taught the target sample lessons of educational psychology and research methodology through PBL for one month to let them experience the approach before assessing their perceptions. That is to say, the teacher-researcher

explicitly integrated PBL to teach the designed courses. After PBL implementation, the researcher administered the designed questionnaire.

### III. Results and Discussion

#### A. Teachers' interview

The researcher interviewed seven EFL teachers from Naama University Center. The questions aimed to give an overview of the teachers' use of innovative strategies for the delivery of instructed materials, the challenges they face while implementing alternative strategies, and their readiness to adopt PBL.

**Question one:** what teaching strategy do you use to deliver instructed materials?

Five teachers out of seven revealed that they teach through lecturing in addition to project-based learning or inquiry-based learning. The five respondents explained that they instruct new materials through lecturing and then offer students topics to search for out of the class time. That is to say, the students are given topics to work on individually, in pairs, or groups and present their findings in another session. The teachers do not monitor the inquiry process but ask questions the day of the presentation to assess the students' understanding of the searched topic. The respondents further stated that they insert such projects to promote the students' inquiry skills, autonomy, and collaborative work. Also, such projects permit them to give students evaluation marks. On the other hand, two respondents out of seven maintained that they teach through lecturing only as it is the preferable and reliable way for students. The two teachers claimed that they could not direct their students' motivation and attitudes toward the use of other strategies due to the lack of resources. Moreover, they rely on testing to insert the students' evaluation marks. These results may answer the first research question, "what is the teaching strategy that is most used for EFL teaching in Naama university Center?" In a comparative study of PBL and traditional approaches in EFL classrooms, Tang et al. (2020) found that lecturing was the most frequently observed activity in both PBL and traditional classes.

**Question two:** do you think that students prefer lecturing or other teaching strategies?

The seven teachers answered that the majority of students prefer lecturing. They argued that students used to be passive receivers of knowledge and favor ready-made information. However, they added that some students preferred to handle responsibilities for their learning through questioning, exploring, and experimenting. This minority, according to them, prefers an environment that is very different from the traditional one. They added that they also asked the students to be autonomous through searching their interests and discuss them in the classroom, but only a few students were interested. These results may answer the first research question, "what is the teaching strategy that is most used for EFL teaching in Naama university Center?" Similarly, Dochy et al. found that students today appreciate learning materials as supplied by academics instead of engaging in meaningful situations for themselves.

**Question three:** what strategies do you use instead of lecturing?

The seven teachers revealed that lecturing has become an integral part of the students learning, and it would be difficult to replace it with another method or strategy. They also highlighted that EFL teachers and learners in the department need the training to convert to alternative strategies. They maintained that although they recognize the significance of incorporating innovative strategies, they would continue using lecturing to deliver instructed materials. On the other hand, five teachers out of seven maintained that they supplementary used inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, and e-learning in addition to lecturing. The five respondents claimed that they tried to base learning on the students' work such as projects but they did not manage the situation. They further stated that making learning student-centered frustrated them and made them feel like they are not doing their jobs. This hesitancy constituted a handicap for these teachers, therefore they often convert to lecturing to complete sessions. In the same line of thought, Papinczak (2010) found that teachers are sometimes hesitant to abandon their traditional teacher's role. They found it ineffective to assign the learning to the students because they observed the student-centered learning dysfunctional.

**Question four:** Why do not you teach through alternative strategies without converting to lecturing?

Two teachers out of seven revealed that they did not use alternatives to lecturing. They justified their answers claiming that they have limited time to complete the syllabus. They also added that the classrooms are not designed to permit alternatives to lecturing. From another angle, five teachers stated that they used alternative strategies to provide additional activities and assignments in addition to lecturing. They explained that they found difficulty in managing class time, taking the roles of tutors, and dealing with learners' lack of interest, unfamiliarity, and resistance to adopting roles rather than passive receivers. They further clarified that they attempted to make their classrooms student-centered, but whenever they encountered such problems, they converted to lecturing to prepare their students for examinations. This result is consistent with the findings of Jin & Bridges (2016) study. They noted that the shift in roles could cause anxiety and demotivation. Thus, Ansarian and Lin (2018) contended that the transition to alternative strategies should not be sudden. Time should be allocated for the change to avoid overwhelming the students.

**Question five:** what are the main challenges do you face while implementing strategies rather than lecturing?

The seven respondents agreed on one challenge that is the lack of appropriate resources. They argued that traditional classrooms equipped with blackboards, tables, and chairs did not allow any motivation to try innovative strategies. To adopt alternative strategies, the department has to prepare more than two computer-assisted language learning laboratories, furnish classrooms with data-shows, provide rich libraries, and offer internet access to students. In addition to these conditions, five teachers stated that learners' autonomy is another challenge that requires consideration. Two respondents also highlighted that our learners in the department do not trust the information presented by their peers and consider it unreliable. Thus, they find themselves obliged to present the information themselves. Correspondingly, Lekalakala-Mokgele

(2010) observed that students generally encountered problems adapting to any new learning environment that requires self-control and group work.

**Question six:** do you use PBL as a strategy for teaching?

Facing difficulty in understanding the main principles of PBL and its effectiveness in language education, the six respondents stated that they did not apply it in their classrooms before. They maintained that although they heard about PBLL, they did not implement this approach. In contrast, one respondent stated that she recognized the efficiency of PBLL and tried it before, but only for few sessions as she faced resistance on the part of the students. This result may answer the second research question, “do EFL teachers use PBLL to benefit from the vast possibilities that information and communication technology is providing for learners, or are they ready to apply PBLL to develop learners’ linguistic and non-linguistic skills? This is in line with what Rogers’ (2014) and Gidcumb (2016) found. They revealed that unfamiliarity and inexperience in PBL instigated uncertainty and hesitancy in teachers.

**Question seven:** what is your knowledge about PBL use and effectiveness?

Five teachers informed that they are not well-informed about the nature of PBLL and its application in EFL classrooms. They also stated that they do not know the necessary principles of creating a PBLL environment. Nonetheless, two teachers were knowledgeable about the principles of PBLL. They cited the steps of creating a problem scenario and provided a clear vision about its efficiency in terms of adjusting EFL classrooms to meet the requirements of the global age.

**Question eight:** what do you think teachers and learners need to benefit from PBL premises?

All the interviewees agreed that trying alternative strategies requires both teachers' and learners' training in addition to supplying classrooms with the necessary resources. One out of seven teachers said that she used PBL, primarily in the module of grammar. She said that it was difficult for learners to handle responsibilities for their learning, mainly in the process of finding solutions. She also confirmed that she tried to facilitate the process, but learners could not continue learning as they lacked interest. They claimed that they could use the PBLL as a supplementary strategy in addition to lecturing. They added that this strategy requires extensive use to cultivate students' learning styles. Two teachers claimed that most teachers and learners have no idea about the use of PBLL and are stuck to the traditional teaching approach. Besides, teachers and learners have to understand how PBLL works and its effectiveness. In this vein, Aydinli (2007) argued that the administrators should afford teachers accurate resources and enough training to apply PBLL. Besides, Landeen et al. (2013) stressed the importance of increasing both teachers' and students' experience with PBL to arrive at the benefits it offers to meaningful learning.

## B. Students' Questionnaire

After experiencing learning through PBL for one month, EFL learners answered the perception scale, which comprised 12 statements relating to PBL experience. Table 1 displays the criteria and percentages consistent with learners' perceptions' ratings.

Table 1. *Criteria and percentages about EFL learners' perceptions of PBL*

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. The problem-solving learning environment is attractive.	12%	39%	22%	21%	6%
2. The PBL experience was motivating.	13%	38%	20%	23%	6%
3. The PBL experience was engaging.	15%	36%	22%	21%	6%
4. The PBL experience enhanced my critical thinking.	15%	38%	20%	20%	7%
5. The PBL experience developed my research skills	18%	42%	16%	18%	6%
6. The PBL experience developed my communication skill.	18%	39%	24%	14%	4%
7. The PBL experience fostered control of my learning.	14%	38%	21%	17%	10%
8. The PBL experience cultivated me to collaborate with peers.	16%	44%	26%	10%	4%
9. The PBL experience stimulated my skills to seek, analyze, and synthesize information.	18%	37%	24%	15%	6%
10. The designed problems are similar to real-life problems.	18%	40%	16%	18%	8%
11. PBL is a useful strategy that promotes EFL learning	14%	34%	27%	17%	8%
12. The PBL experience contributed to the development of my personality.	15%	36%	22%	18%	9%

Overall, the scale results showed that the participant learners have an average level of positive perceptions after experiencing PBL for one month with one teacher only. Most of the items included in the scale have percentages from 12% to 18% in the strongly agree, from 34%

to 44% in agree category, with items 5 and 8 getting 60% between strongly agree and agree categories. Perceptions regarding motivation and engagement (items 2 and 3) in PBL rated an average level, respectively. Other items also rated a mediocre level between strongly agree and agree categories; for example their attention in PBL (item 1), at 12% in strongly agree and 39% at agree. Their critical thinking (item 4) rated 15% in strongly agree and 38% in agree. Their personality development (item 12) rated 15% in strongly agree and 36% in agree. Their self-control learning (item 7) scored 14% in strongly agree and 38% at agree.

The percentage regarding the PBL contribution to the development of their skills in seeking, analyzing, and synthesizing information (item 9) is above the average as 18% was rated in strongly agree and 37% in agree. Besides, other percentages denoted a relatively favorable perception including item 6 with 18% in strongly agree and 39% in agree; and item 10 with 18% in strongly agree and 40% in agree. On the other hand, the percentage regarding perceptions of the PBL experience contribution to the promotion of EFL learning (item 11) is relatively low, at 14% in strongly agree and 34% in agree.

The presented percentages revealed that the PBL environment was not very stimulating and constituted a challenge to students who used to learn through lecturing. It appears from the results that half of the participants resist the engagement in PBL. Although it might be expected that PBL promotes EFL learning; however, when experienced the students resisted the change. These results may answer the third research question, “what are EFL learners’ perceptions toward the use of PBL?” In this respect, Jin and Bridges (2016) found that the students who are new to PBL experience felt anxious and demotivated at times. Similarly, Rogers (2014) observed reluctance toward adopting the PBL approach on the part of the students who have expressed worries about learning through facilitation. Thus, Ansarian and Lin (2018) found it necessary to prepare students to accept the shift in roles by taking into account a few considerations. Though observed positive effects of PBL on EFL learning, Tang et al. (2020) have also noticed the students’ passive learning in PBL classroom as lecturing was the most commonly observed activity in both PBL and traditional classrooms. Moreover, Humalda and Zwaal (2016) found worrying facts indicating that PBL may not be the best vehicle available for EFL/ESL learners.

#### **IV. Implications**

Notwithstanding the existence of empirical evidence supporting the significance of PBL, EFL teachers in Algerian Higher education do not consider its application for teaching the designed curricula. The results of the current study have significant benefits in terms of directing attention towards the teachers’ hesitancy of applying PBL to develop EFL learners’ problem solving, autonomy, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication skills. The research data involved the scores of EFL learners’ perceptions scale and teachers’ interviews. The interview results denoted the teachers’ reluctance to adopt PBL as an alternative to traditional approaches. The perception scale results showed an average level of positive perception. Half of the participants estimated that PBL contributed to the development of their learning-related skills. Conversely, the other half of the participants either disagreed on PBL contribution to their study skills or expressed neutral positions. As a result, the implementation of PBL in Algerian higher education is full of challenges like teachers’ reluctance, learners’ resistance, and the absence of

appropriate materials. Thus, PBL application requires proper teacher training, preparing learners, and supplying appropriate teaching materials.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate EFL teachers' readiness and learners' perceptions toward PBL. It suggested the PBL approach to develop EFL teaching in Algerian Higher Education. The researcher took the English section of the foreign languages department at Naama University Center as case to investigate the research objective. The findings of this study unveiled that the learners who experienced PBL did not show high levels of positive perceptions toward this learning strategy. Teachers, on the other hand, expressed hesitancy and unwillingness to apply PBL. Consequently, PBL application is rife with challenges. It does not reflect teachers' interests in trying alternatives to lecturing. Also, the problem solving scenario established difficulties to students who accustomed learning through lecturing. The unfavorable results achieved from the teachers' interview fortified the researcher to assume that PBL application more than training and materials, but cultivating the whole educational system to adjust to the new requirements of the global age.

An additional assumption that the current study recommends is that PBL is an innovative strategy to promote EFL learning in higher education. However, the present study did not experiment the significance of this strategy for the teaching of linguistic skills, including listening, speaking, grammar, writing, and vocabulary. Thus, this field requires further investigation. Moreover, it is vital to scrutinize whether learners would develop skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, self-direction, collaboration, and communication in PBL.

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