



Original article

## The Effect of Project-based Learning on EFL Learners' Motivation to Speak; A Quantitative Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is a student-centered teaching method in which learners collaborate on real-world tasks that promote active learning and meaningful language use. This study investigates students' perceptions of PBL's impact on their motivation to speak English, a relatively underexplored area in Iraqi EFL contexts. It also examines whether PBL helps reduce speaking anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, and how it fosters a learner-centered classroom environment marked by collaboration, independence, and authentic communication. The study involved 57 second-year students at the University of Duhok who engaged in PBL instruction over two academic semesters. Data were collected through a quantitative questionnaire with closed-ended items. Findings indicate that students perceived PBL as enhancing their motivation to speak English and lowering anxiety. They also reported increased confidence, enjoyment, participation, and comfort when working with peers. Overall, the results suggest that PBL supports speaking motivation and contributes to a more positive learner-centered learning environment.

**Keywords:** Project-Based Learning, Speaking Motivation, EFL Learners

## أثر التعلم القائم على المشاريع في دافعية التحدث لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية: تحليل كمي

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### المُستخلص

يُعدّ "التعلم القائم على المشاريع" (PBL) منهجاً تعليمياً يتركز حول الطالب، حيث ينخرط المتعلمون في مهام تعاونية وحقيقية تهدف إلى تعزيز التعلم النشط والاستخدام الهادف للغة. تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى فحص أثر هذا المنهج على دافعية التحدث لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL). كما يهدف البحث إلى استقصاء كيفية تأثير التعلم القائم على المشاريع في تحفيز الطلبة على التحدث، والحد من القلق المرتبط بالتحدث والخوف من التقييم السلبي، بالإضافة إلى تعزيز بيئة تعليمية تدعم التعاون والاستقلالية والاستخدام الواقعي للغة. اعتمد الباحثون في دراستهم على تدريس سبعة وخمسين طالباً من طلاب السنة الثانية في جامعة دهوك لمدة فصلين دراسيين باستخدام منهج التعلم القائم على المشاريع. واتبعت الدراسة المنهج الكمي الذي تضمن استبيانات لآراء الطلاب تحتوي على أسئلة مغلقة لجمع البيانات. وأظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن هذا المنهج قد طوّر بشكل ملحوظ دافعية الطلاب للتحدث باللغة الإنجليزية، وقلل من حدة القلق لديهم، وساهم في خلق بيئة إيجابية تتمحور حول الطالب. كما أشار الطلاب إلى زيادة في مستوى الثقة والاستمتاع والرغبة في المشاركة، فضلاً عن الشعور بالارتياح أثناء التعاون مع أقرانهم.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية، الدافعية الداخلية، الدافعية الخارجية، التعلم القائم على المشاريع، مهارة التحدث

## INTRODUCTION

Good communication is very important, and speaking is a key skill for sharing ideas. Amoah and Yeboah (2021) say that English is important in international situations, so learners need to master it. However, speaking well is more than knowing grammar and vocabulary. Learners also need real communication skills (Brown & Yule, 1983; Saunders & O'Brien, 2006). Amoah and Yeboah (2021) explain that many EFL learners find speaking difficult. This is often because they lack confidence and do not know enough words.

PBL connects classroom learning with real language use outside the class (Fried-Booth, 1997). It helps students become more active and improve their speaking skills in different subjects (Cahyana et al., 2022; Torres, 2016). Motivation is also very important for language learning. It helps students stay active and continue learning for a long time (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021; Filgona et al., 2020). Nunan (1999) says that motivation helps students overcome their fear of speaking. For this reason, this study explores the use of PBL as a teaching and learning approach to support students' motivation and speaking development among EFL learners at Duhok University.

### 1.1 Project-based Learning in EFL Contexts

Project-based Learning goes beyond Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). It asks students to work on real tasks that need research, teamwork, and real language use. This helps students develop communicative competence (Blumenfeld et al., 1991; Bransford & Stein, 1993). PBL also matches

the ideas of John Dewey (1916). He believed that students learn better through experience, critical thinking, and active participation. His ideas focus on relevance, cooperation, and problem solving. These ideas are key parts of PBL. They help students connect what they learn in class with real-life situations.

PBL is a student-centered approach. It helps students become more independent and think critically. It also connects different subjects and prepares students for global challenges (Bell, 2010; Lam, 2011). PBL increases motivation and improves research and speaking skills. It helps students feel more confident and use language in a meaningful way (Fragoulis, 2009; Rustan, 2016). PBL also uses technology. Students use digital tools to search for information and give presentations (Bell, 2010).

To use PBL well, teachers need good planning. Cintang et al. (2017) and Lam (2011) say that projects should match the course goals. Teachers should set clear aims, encourage group work, and assess students during the project. Students should also reflect on their learning. Aldabbus (2018), Anderson (2021), and Bell (2010) explain that PBL should follow clear steps. Teachers should first interest students in the topic. Then they should guide students, give them freedom to work, and provide feedback. Careful planning and good group work help students reach language learning goals successfully.

## 1.2 The Importance of Speaking Skill

Speaking is an important skill for communication. People use it to share ideas, ask questions, and talk with others (Rustan, 2016). However, many learners find it hard to speak fluently. This is often because they lack confidence, are afraid to speak in public, or have limited vocabulary (Paneerselvam & Mohamad, 2019; Rustan, 2016). Rao (2019) and Rustan (2016) say that English is an important global language. For this reason, speaking English well is important for future jobs. However, many schools focus more on writing than speaking. As a result, students are not well prepared for real communication in English (Manigandan et al., 2017; Royani et al., 2023).

Batang (2016) and Royani et al. (2023) say that teachers should not teach speaking only through grammar drills and memorized dialogues. Pakula (2019) explains that when exams do not test speaking, teachers focus more on grammar, writing, and reading. Because of this, lessons often focus on written language and correct grammar. Batang (2016) says that speaking should come first because it is the main way people communicate. Harmer (2007) gives three reasons to use speaking activities in class. First, they help students practice real conversations. Second, they give feedback to help students improve. Third, they help students use language more fluently. Batang (2016) also suggests ways to help students speak more. Teachers should create a supportive classroom, use interactive activities, and start with easy activities before moving to harder ones.

To help students improve speaking, teachers should use interesting activities. These activities include group discussions, debates, role play, and storytelling (Goh & Burns, 2012; Rao, 2019; Razi

et al., 2021). Noori and Saalh (2025) also suggest using the shadowing technique. In this technique, students repeat what a native speaker says. They try to copy pronunciation, rhythm, intonation, and speed. This helps students speak more naturally. A positive classroom environment is also important. When students feel comfortable and supported, they gain more confidence and speak better (Rao, 2019). By giving more importance to speaking, teachers can help students communicate better in school, work, and daily life.

### 1.3 Motivation

Many foreign language learners believe that speaking shows how good their English is (Richards, 2008; Ur, 1996). Motivation is very important for learning a language. It affects how hard students try and how much effort they give (Dörnyei, 2001). Motivation also makes learning easier and more enjoyable (Ur, 1996). Dörnyei (2001) explains that motivation gives learners the energy to act. It influences how much effort they put into learning and how long they continue working toward their goals.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is important in language learning. It focuses on different types of motivation, not only how much motivation learners have (Dincer & Yesilyurt, 2017). Motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation comes from personal interest and enjoyment. Extrinsic motivation comes from outside rewards, such as grades or praise (Lai, 2011). Ryan and Deci (2000) explain that motivation moves on a scale. It starts from amotivation (non-self-determined) and goes to intrinsic motivation (self-determined). Amotivation means learners do not see value in the activity or do not believe they can succeed. Extrinsic motivation has four types. These include working for rewards or avoiding punishment (external), avoiding guilt (introjected), seeing personal value in the task (identified), and doing the task because it fits with one's identity (integrated) (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Intrinsic motivation is the strongest type. It comes from enjoyment and inner satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation is usually better for learning. However, it often becomes lower as students move to higher levels in school (Lai, 2011). Teaching methods can affect students' motivation. Rewards can help or harm motivation, depending on how teachers use them (Lai, 2011). Teachers should help students feel independent. They can do this by giving students choices, encouraging group work, and creating a supportive classroom environment (Lai, 2011).

Student motivation is important for successful learning. It helps students take part in lessons and achieve better results (Filgona et al., 2020). Because education is required, teachers should help build students' motivation. They should not assume that students are already motivated (Filgona et al., 2020). When students are motivated, teaching becomes easier and more enjoyable. When students are not motivated, learning becomes difficult and progress is slow (Filgona et al., 2020).

#### 1.3.1 Factors Affecting EFL Students' Motivation to Speak

Many studies have looked at what affects students' motivation to speak in EFL classes. Riasati (2012) found that many factors influence students' motivation to speak. These include the type of

task and whether students speak alone, in pairs, or in groups. Other factors are who they speak with, such as the age, gender, and familiarity of their partner. Grades, fear of making mistakes, and worry about correct speech can also affect motivation. Topic interest and familiarity are important too. Personal factors such as shyness, confidence, and how students see their own speaking ability also play a role. In addition, the teacher's role, classroom management, and the overall classroom atmosphere affect students' motivation to speak.

Soureshjani and Riahipour (2012) also found other factors that affect students' motivation to speak. These include the learning materials used in class, such as CDs, DVDs, and textbooks. The learning environment outside the classroom is also important. Students' motivation is influenced by how their classmates react. Supportive classmates can increase motivation, while negative reactions can reduce it. Language difficulty and students' beliefs about learning a language also play a role. Their study shows that the teacher's role and how students interact with each other have a strong effect on students' motivation to speak.

From a psychological point of view, Dörnyei (2001) identified three main problems that affect students' motivation to speak. These are low self-esteem and lack of confidence, language anxiety that comes from face-to-face speaking, and fear of making mistakes in front of classmates. These emotional problems often stop students from speaking, even when the classroom conditions are good.

Together, these studies show that many factors affect students' motivation to speak. These factors include teaching methods, the learning environment, social relationships, and psychological feelings. The studies show that teachers should create a supportive classroom with low anxiety. Students need to feel safe to try using the language and make mistakes. Teachers play an important role by choosing good activities, giving helpful feedback, and encouraging positive interaction between students (Dörnyei, 2001; Riasati, 2012; Soureshjani & Riahipour, 2012).

#### **1.4 Learning Theories Supporting Project-based Learning**

PBL is a student-centered teaching method. In this method, students do research, analyze information, make decisions, work in groups, and solve real-life problems. They produce real results at the end of their work (Handrianto & Rahman, 2018; Kozlowski et al., 2009). PBL helps students build knowledge actively. At the same time, it helps teachers teach the lesson and reach learning goals. PBL is based on constructivist learning theories, especially social constructivism. This means students learn better when they work together in a learning community (Kozlowski et al., 2009). PBL is also connected to Dewey's ideas about education. Dewey supported learning through projects that help students feel independent and satisfied with their learning (Knoll, 1997). By using real-life experiences, PBL follows experiential learning principles. This improves teaching quality and helps students understand lessons better (Handrianto & Rahman, 2018).

The theory behind PBL is connected to well-known learning theories. These theories explain how PBL helps students think critically and develop important skills for today's world. This connection

shows why PBL is useful and effective in modern education. PBL gives teachers a clear way to use student-centered and experiential learning. It helps prepare students for real-life challenges. By combining constructivist ideas and experiential learning, PBL encourages active participation, collaborative knowledge construction, and practical use of knowledge.

#### **1.4.1 Constructivism**

Constructivism says that learning is an active process. Students build knowledge by taking part in activities, doing research, and thinking about their past experiences (Akpan et al., 2020; Bereiter, 1994). In constructivism, students do not learn passively. New knowledge connects to what they already know. Students add new information (assimilate) or change their understanding (accommodate) when needed (Driscoll, 2005; Phillips, 1995). Learning is also affected by the learning context and students' beliefs and attitudes (Bada, 2015). This approach helps students think critically, solve problems, and develop social skills. Students work together in learner-centered classrooms, and teachers guide and support them (Honebein, 1996; Tam, 2000).

Handrianto and Rahman (2018) explain that constructivism has two main branches. One branch is Cognitive Constructivism, which comes from Piaget (1964). This type focuses on how mental images organize knowledge. Learning happens when students are active. They learn by working with materials and changing their understanding through real experiences (Kumar & Gupta, 2009). Piaget's theory is based on two main ideas. The first is active learning, which means students learn by doing, experimenting, and solving problems. The second is authentic learning. This means that students build knowledge in real and meaningful situations.

The second branch of constructivism is Social Constructivism, developed by Vygotsky (1978). This theory focuses on learning through social interaction. Students learn by working with others and through cultural influence. Vygotsky introduced the idea of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This means students can learn more when they get help from teachers or classmates (Khalaf, 2025; Saleem et al., 2021). Social constructivism supports fair and inclusive classrooms where students build knowledge together (Fernando & Marikar, 2017). PBL follows these ideas by asking students to work on real projects. These projects require research, teamwork, and reflection (Kokotsaki et al., 2016). In PBL, teachers guide students instead of controlling the class. Students learn actively by doing tasks (Asiksoy & Ozdamli, 2017). By cognitive and social aspects, PBL creates a strong constructivist learning environment (Handrianto & Rahman, 2018).

#### **1.4.2 Experiential Learning**

PBL gives students meaningful and hands-on learning experiences. These experiences follow the main ideas of experiential learning, discussed by foundational theorists including Dewey (1938), Lewin (1946), and Piaget (1964). Later, Kolb organized these ideas into the Experiential Learning Model (Kolb & Fry, 1975). This model explains that learning happens when students have real experiences and then think about them. Yardley et al. (2012) explain that experiential learning means

building knowledge through real-life activities. This idea supports Dewey's belief that students must interact with their environment to learn well. Handrianto and Rahman (2018) also say that experiential learning focuses on active student participation. By connecting new experiences with past knowledge, students can better understand their studies and prepare for future work.

Kolb and Fry (1975) explain learning through the Experiential Learning Cycle. This model has four main stages and helps explain how PBL works in education. The first stage is **concrete experience**. In this stage, students take part in real-life activities. The second stage is **reflective observation**. Here, students think about what they did and what happened as a result. The third stage is **abstract conceptualization**. In this stage, students use their ideas to form general understanding or rules. The last stage is **active experimentation**. Students try their new ideas in different situations and gain new experiences. This cycle matches PBL very well. Both PBL and experiential learning focus on learning by doing, reflecting, theorizing, and applying knowledge over and over. Even though PBL was used before Kolb created his model, both follow the same learning ideas. PBL gives students real problems to solve. It helps them reflect, think deeply, and use their knowledge in practice (Kolb & Fry, 1975). These learning theories show why hands-on and reflective learning are important. They help prepare students for real-life, social, and work challenges.

#### 1.4.3 Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Deci and Ryan (2002) and Shirado (2016) explain that Self-Determination Theory (SDT) suggests that motivation depends on three basic needs. The first need is **autonomy**, which means learners feel free to make their own choices. The second need is **competence**. This means learners feel confident in their ability. The third need is **relatedness**, which means learners feel connected to others. When the learning environment supports these needs, students become more motivated and achieve better learning results. In language learning, SDT helps explain how motivation works. Learners feel motivated when they choose to engage with the language and culture. They build competence when they succeed in tasks. They develop relatedness when they work with others in groups (Alamer & Lee, 2019; Wei, 2024). SDT is used in many fields such as education, health, and work (Deci & Ryan, 1985). This is because SDT explains motivation as a range or continuum. This range starts with amotivation and moves toward intrinsic motivation. SDT explains that extrinsic motivation can slowly become more self-directed. When learners' basic needs are met, intrinsic motivation can increase (Deci et al., 2017). Self-determination also helps learners set goals and solve problems. This supports their academic growth and learning development (Fadhillah et al., 2022).

PBL follows the main ideas of Self-Determination Theory. It supports autonomy by letting students explore topics on their own. It builds competence by asking students to solve real problems. It also supports relatedness by encouraging students to work together in groups. Shirado (2016) says that the order of tasks in PBL naturally supports these psychological needs. Because of this, PBL works well for language learning and other difficult subjects where motivation is important for success. PBL is based on constructivist and experiential learning theories. It focuses on active

learning and learning through experience. When PBL works together with SDT, it creates a learning environment that keeps students motivated and involved. It helps students learn in a meaningful way. By combining these theories, PBL becomes a strong teaching method that supports thinking skills, social interaction, and motivation at the same time.

Despite the increasing use of Project-Based Learning in language education (Bell, 2010; Lam, 2011), limited research has examined how EFL learners perceive its influence on their motivation to speak English in specific contexts such as Iraqi universities. In many EFL classrooms, instruction still tends to be teacher-centered and often emphasizes grammar and written skills rather than speaking practice (Manigandan et al., 2017; Pakula, 2019; Royani et al., 2023). Therefore, examining students' perceptions of PBL-based instruction may provide valuable insight into how learner-centered approaches support speaking motivation and classroom engagement.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How do students perceive the influence of Project-Based Learning on their motivation to speak English inside and outside the classroom?
2. To what extent do students report that Project-Based Learning reduces speaking anxiety and fear of negative evaluation?
3. How do students perceive PBL tasks as contributing to a learner-centered environment that encourages collaboration, independence, and real language use?

### **1.6 Research Hypothesis**

The study hypothesizes that the use of Project-based Learning will be associated with higher levels of students' reported motivation to speak English. PBL is expected to support a learner-centered classroom environment, increase student engagement through meaningful tasks, and encourage collaborative learning. As a result, students participating in PBL activities are expected to report greater willingness to communicate in English and lower levels of speaking anxiety.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

Motivation is a complex psychological construct that can be examined through multiple methodological approaches. In the present study, a quantitative questionnaire was used, which is a widely adopted method in second language acquisition research for examining learners' perceptions and motivational orientations. The quantitative design was used to examine students' perceptions of the influence of PBL on their motivation to speak English. Data were collected from students after they participated in PBL-based instruction in order to understand their views regarding the role of PBL in supporting their speaking motivation. The study lasted for two academic semesters

(approximately 30 weeks), which provided students with continuous exposure to PBL activities. Because the study relied on a post-intervention questionnaire, the findings reflect students' perceptions of the influence of PBL on their speaking motivation rather than direct causal measurement of instructional effects.

## 2.1 Participants

The participants were 57 second-year students from the English Department at the College of Languages, University of Duhok. The students were approximately 19–21 years old. The sample consisted of 20 male and 37 female students who were enrolled in the same speaking course and had similar academic backgrounds. Second-year students were selected because they represent an important stage in their academic development, where motivation toward language learning can be influenced by instructional approaches such as PBL. The participants were selected from the available second-year student cohort enrolled in the speaking course during the study period. Participation in the questionnaire was voluntary.

## 2.2 Tools

The tool used in this study was a student feedback questionnaire. The researchers gave the questionnaire to students after using PBL. The questionnaire included closed-ended questions with a Likert scale. It is also important to note that questionnaire-based instruments are commonly used in research on second language motivation, particularly when the aim is to investigate learners' perceptions of classroom experiences and instructional approaches. In the present study, the questionnaire items measured several indicators related to students' perceived speaking motivation, including confidence, enjoyment, participation, willingness to speak English, and perceptions of reduced speaking anxiety. Experts reviewed the questionnaire to check its validity. Their feedback helped refine the wording and clarity of the items to ensure that the instrument accurately measured students' perceptions of motivation toward speaking through PBL activities. The researchers also did a pilot study with a small group of students to make sure the questions were clear and reliable. The reliability of the questionnaire was examined using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which yielded a value of 0.988.

**Table 1: Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.988	13

The Cronbach's alpha value of 0.988 indicates a very high level of internal consistency among the questionnaire items, suggesting that the instrument reliably captured students' perceptions of motivation toward speaking through PBL activities. In addition to reliability analysis, descriptive and

inferential statistical techniques were used to examine the data. These included frequencies, percentages, mean scores, standard deviations, and one-sample t-tests. Using multiple statistical procedures helped provide a more comprehensive analysis of students' responses and strengthened the verification of the findings.

### **2.3 Data Collection**

The researchers collected the data at the end of the PBL program. All students were told about the purpose of the study. Their answers were kept private, and their participation was voluntary. The students' responses provided insight into their perceptions of how PBL influenced their motivation to use English in speaking activities.

### **2.4 Procedures and Data Analysis**

First, the researchers selected suitable students for the study. Then they prepared the PBL lessons. After that, they created the student feedback questionnaire. After receiving ethical approval and preparing all materials, the study began at the start of the first semester. During two academic semesters, students worked on PBL tasks prepared by the teachers. These tasks were designed to support speaking motivation through real, meaningful group activities. The activities included discussions, presentations, videos, and group projects. At the end of the academic year, students completed the questionnaire. This helped the researchers understand students' perceptions of how PBL influenced their motivation to speak English. The researchers then organized the data to be analyzed.

The researchers used a quantitative method to analyze the data. They entered the answers from the closed-ended questions into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The program produced descriptive results such as frequencies, percentages, mean scores, standard deviation, t-test values, and significance. These results allowed the researchers to evaluate students' reported motivation to speak English after participating in PBL activities and to examine their perceptions of how PBL influenced their speaking motivation.

## **3. RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

This section shows the results of the study. The analysis did not rely only on descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations). The study also used reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha) and inferential statistical procedures, including one-sample t-tests, to examine whether the observed responses were statistically significant. These procedures provided additional verification for the results and helped ensure that the findings were not due to chance. The findings suggest that students perceived PBL as improving their speaking engagement, with 82.5% agreeing or strongly agreeing that PBL improved their activeness and courage. Additionally, 68.4% of students said that their motivation to speak increased, while 66.7% said that their interest in speaking improved. Students also reported that PBL encouraged risk-taking, with 59.7% of students agreeing about this point.

Moreover, 59.7% of students reported that PBL helped reduce their anxiety. Although 38.6% found PBL engaging, 54.4% still remained neutral, and this suggests that there was variability in students' perceptions of the project activities. 57.9% of students stated that they enjoyed the projects and 61.4% of students stated that they felt more comfortable with peer collaboration, which the researchers believe supports the idea that social learning can be beneficial. Also, according to 68.5% of students, PBL increased teamwork and confidence, and according to 64.9% of students, PBL created a positive learning environment, and this suggests that PBL may contribute to a positive, learner-centered setting. However, students had different opinions about willingness to speak outside the classroom, with a 52.6% agreement, and responsibility of learning, with a 52.6% agreement, indicating areas for further improvement. Overall, the results suggest that students perceived PBL as supporting active learning, collaboration, and confidence in speaking, although some aspects may need further improvement to increase engagement.

The questionnaire showed excellent internal consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.988 for all 13 items. The researchers believe that this indicates that the instrument reliably measured students' opinions of PBL's effects on speaking motivation. The quantitative data from the student feedback questionnaire provide valuable insights into students' perceptions of how PBL supports their motivation to speak English. Below is a detailed analysis and discussion of the findings, compared with the theoretical framework and literature review previously stated in the study.

*(N= number of students, Fr=Frequency of responses, %=percentage of responses, M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, T=One Sample t-test value, Sig.=Significance)*

**Table 2: Questionnaire items 1-7**

Item	N	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		M	SD	T	Sig.
		Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%				
Q1. Speaking Activeness and Courage	57	22	38.6	25	43.9	8	14.0	2	3.5	0	0	1.82	.805	17.122	.000
Q2. Motivation for Speaking Activities	57	11	19.3	28	49.1	14	24.6	3	5.3	1	1.8	2.21	.881	18.941	.000
Q3. Interest and Willingness to Learn Speaking	57	12	21.1	26	45.6	15	26.3	4	7.0	0	0	2.19	.854	19.379	.000
Q4. Risk-Taking in Speaking	57	11	19.3	23	40.4	16	28.1	6	10.5	1	1.8	2.35	.973	18.247	.000
Q5. Reduced Anxiety and Fear	57	12	21.1	22	38.6	19	33.3	3	5.3	1	1.8	2.28	.921	18.694	.000
Q6. Engagement in Speaking Projects	57	3	5.3	19	33.3	31	54.4	3	5.3	1	1.8	2.65	.744	26.889	.000
Q7. Enjoyment of PBL Tasks	57	10	17.5	23	40.4	17	29.8	7	12.3	0	0	2.37	.919	19.464	.000

**Table 3: Questionnaire items 8-13**

Item	N	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		M	SD	T	Sig.
		Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%				
Q8. Improved Team Relationships	57	12	21.1	27	47.4	13	22.8	2	3.5	3	5.3	2.25	1.005	16.870	.000
Q9. Willingness to Speak Outside Class	57	6	10.5	24	42.1	23	40.4	4	7.0	0	0	2.44	.780	23.616	.000
Q10. Comfort Through Peer Collaboration	57	14	24.6	21	36.8	20	35.1	1	1.8	1	1.8	2.19	.895	18.495	.000
Q11. Responsibility and Confidence Growth	57	9	15.8	21	36.8	19	33.3	8	14.0	0	0	2.46	.927	20.000	.000
Q12. Confidence in English Performance	57	12	21.1	27	47.4	14	24.6	4	7.0	0	0	2.18	.848	19.374	.000
Q13. Positive Learning Environment	57	11	19.3	26	45.6	16	28.1	4	7.0	0	0	2.23	.846	19.895	.000

As shown in *Table 2*, 38.6% of students strongly agreed and 43.9% agreed that PBL improved their speaking activeness and confidence. In contrast, only 3.5% expressed disagreement, and no students strongly disagreed. The mean score of 1.82 and a standard deviation (SD) of 0.805 suggest a high overall level of agreement among participants. Furthermore, 19.3% of students strongly agreed and 49.1% agreed that PBL increased their motivation to participate in speaking activities. The mean score of 2.21 and SD of 0.881 suggest that there is a moderate to high level of agreement about motivation

among students. Similarly, 21.1% strongly agreed and 45.6% agreed that PBL increased their interest in speaking, with a mean of 2.19 and SD of 0.854, which makes the researchers believe that most of the students had a positive engagement during projects. Regarding risk-taking in speaking, 19.3% strongly agreed and 40.4% agreed that PBL encouraged them to take risks. The mean score of 2.35 and SD of 0.973 suggest an adequate degree of improvement in this area. Moreover, 21.1% of students strongly agreed and 38.6% agreed that PBL helped reduce their speaking anxiety. Additionally, the researchers suggest that the mean score of 2.28 and SD of 0.921 support the hypothesis that PBL may reduce speaking-related anxiety and fear. Concerning engagement with speaking projects, 5.3% of the students strongly agreed and 33.3% agreed that the projects were engaging, but, the neutral agreement of 54.4% might suggest that some projects were viewed as less engaging. However, the mean 2.65 was still positive, with a SD of 0.744. When evaluating enjoyment, 17.5% of participants strongly agreed and 40.4% agreed that PBL tasks were enjoyable. The mean score was 2.37, with a SD of 0.919, which supports the moderate enjoyment levels.

Additionally, as can be seen in *Table 3*, 21.1% of the students strongly agreed and 47.4% agreed that PBL improved their teamwork skills. The mean score of 2.25 and a standard deviation of 1.005 suggest a largely positive view of social outcomes, though some slight differences in students' responses are seen. As for motivation to use English outside the classroom, 10.5% strongly agreed and 42.1% agreed that PBL motivated them to use English outside a classroom setting, while 40.4% remained neutral about it. The mean score of 2.44 and SD of 0.780 suggest a generally positive view, though the high neutral percentage shows some uncertainty, indicating only slight support for this outcome. The researchers suggest that this indicates that while students viewed PBL positively, they remained cautious about using their speaking skills in real-world contexts. Regarding peer collaboration, 24.6% of students strongly agreed and 36.8% agreed that PBL tasks made them more comfortable when speaking, with a mean of 2.19 and SD of 0.895, highlighting the value of socially constructed learning experiences. Moreover, 15.8% of students strongly agreed and 36.8% agreed that the projects gave them a sense of responsibility for learning, though 33.3% still felt neutral. The mean score of 2.46 and SD of 0.927 suggest mixed opinions. Students reported that PBL increased their confidence in speaking, with 21.1% of students strongly agreeing and 47.4% of students agreeing about this point. The mean score of 2.18 and SD of 0.848 further support the hypothesis that students perceived PBL as increasing their confidence in speaking. Finally, 19.3% of students strongly agreed and 45.6% agreed that PBL created a positive classroom setting. The mean score of 2.23 along with a SD of 0.846 supports this learner-centered approach.

All items shown in Tables 2 and 3 were statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ). This means that the results were strong. Each t-test had a p-value of less than .001, which shows a high level of significance. This suggests that students' positive views about PBL did not happen by chance. The t-values were high and ranged from 16.870 to 26.889. The highest t-value, 26.889, was for Item 6, which focused on engagement in speaking projects. Although this item had a more neutral response, the mean score ( $M = 2.65$ ) shows that students clearly leaned toward agreement, not neutrality. The significant results indicate that students perceived PBL as increasing their motivation to speak (Items 1–3 and 12). Students also reported lower levels of speaking anxiety (Items 4 and 5) and the results

suggest that PBL encouraged collaboration (Items 8 and 10). The significant results also show that students thought PBL was enjoyable (Item 7,  $M = 2.37$ ) and created a positive learning environment (Item 13). The results also indicate that students perceived PBL as increasing their willingness to speak outside the classroom (Item 9,  $M = 2.44$ ) and growth in responsibility and confidence (Item 11,  $M = 2.46$ ). Engagement in speaking (Item 6,  $M = 2.65$ ) had a high neutral response. However, the strong significance level ( $p < .001$ ) shows that students' responses leaned toward agreement. This suggests that this area may improve more with better task design, but overall, students viewed PBL in a positive way.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The results of Item 1 in *Table 2* agree with Fragoulis (2009) and Rustan (2016). They say that PBL activities such as speeches and presentations help students build confidence, fluency, and other language skills. PBL also reduces fear of making mistakes because it is collaborative. This supports Dörnyei (2001), who explains that a supportive classroom can lower speaking anxiety. The results of item 2 support the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002), which states that autonomy and competence provided in PBL tasks encourage motivation. Dörnyei (2001) and Ur (1996) argue that motivation is important for learning a language successfully. Furthermore, the results of item 3 in *Table 2* support the constructivist principle (Piaget, 1964; Vygotsky, 1978) that active participation in meaningful tasks, as in PBL, increases interest in learning. Similarly, Rao (2019) and Bell (2010) explain that interactive and engaging tasks make speaking practice more interesting. Additionally, the results of item 4 support Dörnyei (2001) and Riasati (2012), who argue that it is important for students not to fear negative evaluation in order to be willing to communicate. PBL's focus on peer collaboration likely created a safer space for students to experiment with their speaking skills. The findings related to item 5 support Soureshjani and Riahipour (2012), who claimed that when students are in a supportive environment, their anxiety reduces. This also supports Rustan's (2016) claim which stressed that PBL can reduce speaking anxiety by offering supportive contexts. PBL's step-by-step process, as stated by (Kolb & Fry, 1975), allows gradual confidence-building, dealing with linguistic and psychological barriers (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021). The results of Item 6 show that engagement depends on task design. Some improvement is still possible. Future projects could include more varied tasks or better match students' interests. This supports Anderson (2021), who says that careful project planning is important. Ur (1996) also says that fun and game-like activities increase enjoyment. Bell (2010) adds that enjoyable learning increases motivation. Finally, the results of Item 7 show that students generally enjoyed PBL. However, adding more fun activities such as role-play may increase motivation even more.

The results of Item 8 in *Table 3* support the idea of "relatedness" in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002). They also support Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism. These theories say that learning improves when students interact and work with their peers. Similarly, Lam (2011) mentioned how important PBL is for strengthening collaborative skills. The significant result in item 9 aligns with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002). While PBL fostered autonomy and relatedness, the small percentage of strong agreement suggests that competence may require further support. Additionally, Riasati (2012) and Dörnyei (2001) highlighted psychological barriers, such as

fear of mistakes and negative evaluation as key obstacles of speaking motivation. The neutral mean here suggests that while PBL reduced classroom anxiety, as seen in items 4 and 5, students still hesitated in less controlled environments. Therefore, the researchers think that environmental factors, such as limited English-speaking opportunities in Duhok, likely contributed to the hesitation, confirming Soureshjani and Riahipour's (2012) finding that EFL contexts lack real-world language-use motivation. The results of item 10 support Vygotsky's ZPD (1978) and Shirado's (2016) findings that learning that occurs through social interaction and peer support reduces anxiety and develops competence. Additionally, Kolb and Fry's experiential learning model suggests that reflecting on experiences increases responsibility. The findings from item 11 align with this idea, showing that students feel like they took ownership of their learning. The neutral responses, on the other hand, may come from students not distributing tasks evenly within their groups, a known PBL challenge. Having more structured roles and reflection phases after the projects could improve responsibility. As for confidence, Dörnyei (2001) and Riasati (2012) highlighted that when students have anxiety, it can probably hinder their confidence and Dörnyei (2001) further agrees that confidence strengthens motivation. The PBL results support their claims by showing that students had reduced anxiety during the implementation of the projects as shown in item 5, and therefore, the results from item 12 are aligned with the claim made by Dörnyei (2001) and Riasati (2012). And finally, Deci and Ryan (2002) stressed how the relatedness component is essential for motivation. The results of item 13 directly reflect this, showing how PBL's collaborative projects fulfilled students' need for peer connections, as shown in item 10. Also, these findings confirm what Riasati (2012) and Soureshjani and Riahipour (2012) mentioned; classroom settings influence motivation. A well-managed, interactive PBL space encourages positivity and safety for language use. The results are also consistent with Deci and Ryan (2002) and Shirado's (2016), concept of SDT, which suggests that in order for people to be motivated, they must fulfil three universal and innate psychological needs. When a person's social environment supports these needs, motivation increases.

The results suggest that students perceived PBL as having a positive influence on their motivation to speak English. The results were statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ) and reliable ( $\alpha = 0.988$ ). The findings also match important learning theories such as Self-Determination Theory and Constructivism. However, some results show that engagement was not always strong. This means there is still room for improvement. By improving this area, teachers can make PBL more effective. The t-test results (all  $p < .001$ ) indicate strong statistical support for students' positive perceptions of PBL's influence on their motivation to speak English. These results support the study's hypotheses.

Overall, the statistical results support the theories discussed earlier. The high t-values and low standard deviations suggest that the effects were strong and shared by most students. The results suggest that PBL may support the three psychological needs identified in Self-Determination Theory: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. It also supports constructivist and experiential learning theories. PBL encourages active learning, student-centered activities, and group work. Students reported higher motivation when participating in PBL tasks that provided autonomy and meaningful activities. However, engagement depended on the type of task. Working in groups also appeared to

reduce students' fear of making mistakes. These findings suggest that PBL may be a useful approach for supporting speaking motivation in EFL classrooms.

#### 4.1 Pedagogical Implications

The results of this study are important for EFL teachers and curriculum designers, especially where students find speaking difficult. Students' positive perceptions of PBL in relation to their motivation, confidence, and willingness to speak highlight the value of student-centered and experiential teaching. It also shows the need to move away from conventional teacher-centered methods. The findings support Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002). They suggest that PBL may support students' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Teachers can design PBL tasks that give students more control over their learning. For example, students can choose project topics or work in teams. This freedom increases motivation, which is important for long-term language learning (Deci & Ryan, 2002). This study also shows that peer interaction helps students feel more comfortable when speaking, as Lam (2011) and Rustan (2016) explain. Reflection activities, based on Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1975), help students understand their progress and improve their learning. The researchers believe that because PBL improves engagement and learner autonomy, curriculum designers should include projects as a main part of speaking courses. These projects can include debates, presentations, storytelling, and community tasks. Such activities help students improve fluency, thinking skills, and real-life use of English. The results also suggest that PBL may support increased confidence and reduced speaking anxiety among students. This may help students overcome psychological barriers to oral communication. PBL may contribute to a supportive classroom environment and reduce fear of negative evaluation, as Riasati (2012) explains. The researchers agree with Soureshjani and Riahipour (2012) that teachers should use group work, such as group presentations and peer feedback. These activities help students build confidence step by step and feel safer when speaking. PBL also focuses on real-world tasks. This supports constructivist ideas (Vygotsky, 1978) and Communicative Language Teaching. Teachers should use projects that require real communication, such as interviews, podcasts, or community tasks, to connect classroom learning with real-life language use (Fried-Booth, 1997). Teaching speaking sub-skills in context, not separately, is also important (Jumaili, 2025). Some students were neutral about engagement. Because of this, teachers should adapt PBL tasks to students' interests, culture, and language level. Giving students choices in topics and roles can increase interest and motivation (Lai, 2011). Finally, using PBL well requires teacher training. Teachers need training in project design, scaffolding, and assessment. The researchers suggest that institutions offer workshops to help teachers move from traditional teaching to student-centered methods. By doing this, EFL programs can create supportive learning environments that may help students improve their English and develop important skills such as critical thinking and teamwork.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The present study examined EFL students' perceptions of the influence of PBL on their motivation to speak English. Speaking is an important skill, but in many EFL contexts it is not well developed.

This is often because students feel anxious, lack confidence, and do not have many chances to use English in real situations, especially outside the classroom. This problem is clear in Duhok. Motivation plays an important role in solving these problems. Theories such as Self-Determination Theory explain how motivation helps learners overcome fear and low confidence. PBL is based on constructivist and experiential learning theories. It uses real tasks, group work, and student choice. This may help meet students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The study lasted for 30 weeks and included 57 EFL students at Duhok University. The results suggest that students perceived PBL as increasing their motivation to speak English. Students also reported lower levels of speaking anxiety and a more positive, learner-centered classroom environment. They indicated they felt more confident, enjoyed learning more, and were more willing to speak. They also felt more comfortable working with their classmates. These findings support learning theories by Piaget, Vygotsky, and Kolb. All of these theories support active learning in meaningful contexts. However, the study also found that students were neutral about engagement and that this needs to be improved. This suggests that project tasks may need better design and stronger links to students' interests. From a pedagogical point of view, the results suggest that PBL may be a useful approach in EFL courses. Teachers should focus on student choice, teamwork, real language use, and strong teacher support to keep students motivated. The study connects empirical findings with learning theories and offers practical implications for EFL teaching.

## 6. LIMITATIONS

Although this study provides useful insights into students' perceptions of the influence of PBL on their motivation to speak English, it has some limitations. First, the number of participants was small. The study included only 57 second-year students from one university in Duhok. Because of this, the results may not apply to other universities or learning contexts. Future studies could include more students from different levels, universities, cultures, and fields of study. Second, this study did not include a control group. Without a comparison group taught using traditional methods, it is difficult to determine the extent to which the reported increase in motivation is attributable to PBL. A study that compares PBL with other teaching methods would give stronger results. Finally, this study used only quantitative data. This method may not fully show students' personal experiences or feelings toward PBL. Therefore, future research may include qualitative analysis to provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' motivational experiences with Project-based Learning.

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#### Appendix: Questionnaire (Students Perception of PBL)

Strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD)

No.	Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	Project-Based Learning provided the opportunity for me to be more active in speaking English and encouraged me to be more courageous in speaking English.					
2	Project-based learning increases my motivation to participate in English-speaking activities.					
3	The assignments in project-based learning made me interested and willing to learn to speak English more.					
4	I am more willing to take risks and speak English after participating in project-based learning.					
5	The project helped reduce my anxiety about speaking in public and my fear of negative evaluation.					
6	I found the PBL projects that emphasized speaking skills engaging.					
7	I did project-based learning assignments with pleasure and not because I had to.					
8	After participating in the project, I felt the relationship within my team improved as we worked on the project cooperatively.					
9	PBL has increased my willingness to initiate conversations in English outside of class.					
10	Collaborating with my peers on PBL activities made me feel more comfortable speaking English.					
11	I increased my responsibility and confidence level by working on this project.					
12	I felt more confident in my English performance.					
13	Project work promotes a positive learning environment.					