

# Project Based Learning of German Vocabulary and Speaking Skills

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## ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on teaching vocabulary and German-speaking skills through "*Projektarbeit*" 'project assignment.' "*Projektarbeit*" is project-based learning that involves setting the goal, planning, cooperating in groups, implementing, evaluating, and documentation. This study aims to describe: (1) the process of vocabulary teaching and speaking skills based on a project, (2) active vocabulary and expressions on specific themes used by students in the form of *Projektarbeit*, (3) the students' opinions on the giving of *Projektarbeit* as individual assignments, and (4) the students' learning results in the speaking course. The Data were collected in the form of video records, interview scripts, and test scores. The results indicate that "*Projektarbeit*" can help students comprehend and increase vocabulary and German-speaking skills. The students' learning results of the Speaking can achieve the standard of Level B1 of CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). Student opinions about "*Projektarbeit*" were highly positive.

**Keywords:** *Classroom action research, project assignment, project based learning, vocabulary, speaking skills.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In order to be able to convey ideas properly, it takes a mastery of sufficient vocabulary. In reality, however, students still lack practice, fear to convey opinions, and do not sufficiently use available resources. They had not sufficiently mastered vocabulary and expressions. '*Projektarbeit*' is considered as a learning model that could help students in this matter. '*Projektarbeit*' is a learning process in the form of assignments to prepare an independent work where they are required to present and defend it in front of the class. '*Projektarbeit*' is a learning model that combines the brain, hands, and heart planned by lecturers and students (Wicke, 2004). More specifically, Wahrig-Burfeind (2006) stated that this learning model is part of the work within the project scope.

Project-based learning is a type of learning strategy which considers learners as active participants who construct their own (Santoso, 2012). Project-orientated learning involves the following elements: (1) the availability of a definite purpose that enables the learner to use language communicatively, to discover and experience something new, (2) planning which is conducted together by the teacher and the learners, (3) connecting the learning to situations outside the class or

bringing the learning process to authentic situations outside, (4) independent work done by individual learners where they collect data needed by using various tools or media at their disposal, and (5) the outcomes of the project are presented inside or outside the classroom (Krumm, 1991). There are steps to be used in *Projektarbeit*, namely planning, cooperating, executing, evaluating, and documenting (Wicke, 2004). *Projektarbeit* usually ends with a final product (a report) and a presentation of the report about the project. The final product may take various forms, such as organizing a debate, organizing an exhibition (Wicke in Hafdarani, 2012).

The implementation of *Projektarbeit* is believed to enrich the students' vocabulary and develop their German speaking skills. Vocabulary is the total of words that learners have mastered (Heyd, 1991; Wahrig-Burfeind, 2006) and distinguished into receptive vocabulary and active vocabulary (Bohn, 2001). Receptive vocabulary refers to all the words a person understands and active vocabulary refers to all the words a person can use to express himself. Heyd (1991) classifies vocabulary into three categories. Active vocabulary refers to all the words that a learner uses productively, also known as expressive vocabulary (Neuman & Dwyer, 2009). Passive vocabulary refers to all the words that a learner has

learned, but they do not use them productively in speaking and writing. Potential vocabulary refers to a derivation or combination of words that appear to be new to the learner but are recognizable in terms of their structure of formation. Actually, words can be classified into open class and closed class (Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams, 2013).

A good mastery of vocabulary is a requirement for students in order to be able to speak German. The ability to speak is the most essential skills, since it is the basic for communication (Oradee, 2012; Aliakbari & Jamalvandi, 2010). The Speaking skills may be differentiated into a tool and a goal. The Speaking skills as a tool place language knowledge as a foreground in learning vocabulary, forming correct sentences, memorizing dialogues, and doing exercises. As for speaking skills as a goal refer to language ability that constitutes the primary purpose (Schatz, 2006).

To develop communication, Schatz (2006) proposes five forms of practice, namely (1) practice for preparing a dialogue, (2) practice telephoning, (3) posing questions and preparing an interview, (4) discussing and expressing arguments, (5) presenting a monologue and storytelling. In this study, the fourth practice, i.e., discussing and debating on school uniform, and the fifth practice, i.e., group presentation with the themes of people's party, planning outing activities, presenting cuisine, and introducing a film, were used to hone the students' speaking skills. Expressions that may be used in presentations are those about opening a presentation, introduction (as a moderator or as the head of a group) and as participants, conveying a discussion theme, articulating content, and closing a discussion (Perlmann-Balme, Schwalb, & Weers, 2006; Funk, 2009).

'*Projektarbeit*' provides freedom to learners to express ideas or opinions in ways they want and work in a team. Project-based learning proved brought a positive impact on students and teachers (Zucchi, 2008; Gouraca & Jourdy, 2011; Hermann & Siebold, 2012; Korosidou & Griva, 2013).

The objectives of this study are to describe: (1) the process of vocabulary teaching and speaking skills based on a project, (2) active vocabulary and expressions on specific themes used by students in the form of *Projektarbeit*, (3) the students' opinions on the giving of *Projektarbeit* as individual assignments, and (4) the students' learning results in the speaking course.

## 2. METHOD

This study embodies classroom action research undertaken on the MA1 (Spoken Expressions I) in the even semester of the 2012/2013 academic year in the Department of German Education of the Faculty of Language and Arts Education of Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia. This study uses a cycle model proposed by Kemmis and Taggart (in Wiriaatmadja, 2007; MacIsaac

1996). This model consists of planning, actuating, observing, and reflecting.

The data of this study were collected through observations, tests, and interviews. Observations were undertaken in two stages. The first observation was conducted at the beginning of the semester, while the second one at each cycle of process implementation. All activities were recorded by using a video camera. The recording transcripts were analyzed to identify active vocabulary items and expressions used by the students in their presentations. The students were interviewed to discover their opinions about the teaching of speaking skills by using *Projektarbeit*. The main instruments used were the researchers themselves as human instruments supported by additional instruments, namely field notes, observation sheets, video recordings, learning results' documents, and tests of German-speaking skills.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the observation, it was discovered that not all students actively participated in articulating opinions or responding to questions posed by the lecturer. After the lecturer asked them why they were not active, they said they had not mastered German vocabulary and sentence structure. They feared making mistakes in speaking. One way to overcome this problem was that the lecturer should give assignments that triggered active participation on the part of all the students, called *Projektarbeit*.

### 3.1. Findings

#### 3.1.1. Description of Cycle 1

##### 3.1.1.1. Planning

In the first Cycle, both the lecturer and the students prepared class activities together. The students worked in groups with 3-5 students and were assigned to deliver presentations on "*Feste*" [party] within 12-15 minutes.

The lecturer helped the students by giving them keywords for the contents of their papers and guided them in determining the organization of the papers by classifying the keywords into three groups, namely opening, main part, and closing. The lecturer asked the students to collect vocabulary items related to the theme by completing a mind map and taught them expressions usually used for presentations. In this stage, the students divided tasks among the groups made plans for the *Projektarbeit*, and chose the styles of their presentations. Everyone in each group had a task to speak in their presentations.

##### 3.1.1.2. Action

The action implementation consisted of the stages of *Projektarbeit* implementation, work finalization, and

presentation. The students learned to obtain references from various resources. Then, the students arranged the materials they had collected into short paper ready to be presented. In the final stage of the presentation, the students had to write a paper as group work. In this stage, all the interaction was done only in German. Presentations were delivered in the class led by moderators. The students agreed not to use a time reminder because they had prepared well. Each group presented a theme led by a group moderator. The other students acted as listeners or seminar participants. They were allowed to ask three questions in German.

Each group chose one ethnic celebration from Indonesia, namely Braga Festival, Kartinis Tag, Tabuik, Panjang Jimat, Kebo-keboan, Lebaran fest. Powerpoint slides equipped with photos and videos were used in their presentation. Only one group did not show a video. In the discussion session, only two groups received questions.

Observed from expressions used, only three groups (group 1, 3, and 4) used complete expressions, namely opening, content and closing. Two groups (groups 2 and 5) only used opening and content expressions. The active vocabulary items were related to several things, namely: things used in parties, tools, food and drinks, activities, characteristics, time and places, and ceremonial norms. The sum of the active vocabulary was 74 words with an average of 14,8. After the presentation of all groups, give comments on all the groups' performances and report the difficulties they faced. All groups reported that they could work together well.

### 3.1.1.3. Observation

Every student participated in the presentation, although there were still some who were tied to their notes. Some of them still felt unconfident to speak in front of the class. Not all group members used complete authentic expressions for opening, content, and closing. They said they felt nervous because their lecturer observed them and other students, and their presentations were recorded. Observed from their vocabulary, the students used quite a broad active vocabulary, but vocabulary mastery was not evenly spread among groups.

### 3.1.1.4. Reflection

The students were able to use expressions and vocabulary needed for a presentation; however, there were still errors that had to be fixed to improve their presentations. These errors were related to the use of active vocabulary according to the presentation themes, complete expressions for opening, content, and closing by using good structure, the ability to speak without being tied to a text, and maintaining interaction with the audience. Based on these problems, a second cycle had to be done.

## *3.1.2. Description of Cycle 2*

### 3.1.2.1. Planning

In cycle 2, the first session was used to practice vocabulary and expressions used in podium debates or discussions about how to argue against students' motion of the use of school uniform. The second session was used to deliver their presentation, which lasted for 40 to 50 minutes. In the third session, the students practiced using vocabulary and giving presentations on an outing activity in a German town. Two moderators were involved in leading the debate. Each group was asked to work together closely regarding the work division and practice using vocabulary items and expressions.

Before the class started, the students had been asked to seek information in the library or on the internet about a German town for their presentation. They explained what they would do if they wished to do outdoor activities and what they could do in that town.

### 3.1.2.2. Action

The students were asked to choose representatives for each group as spokespersons for each debate on the presentations. The students chose two persons as the leading spokespersons. The students arranged seats and desks in the classroom to suit the debate situation. On the right and left sides were two chairs for the leading spokespersons of the pro and contra groups.

The first moderator opened the debate by mentioning the theme and introduced the spokespersons of each group. The pro-group which supported school uniform was invited to speak first, and then the contra group. Later the second moderator asked the supporting participants to convey their opinions.

The pro group used more active vocabulary items than the contra group because they had more knowledge about the use of school uniforms than about free costumes at school. Overall, the students used 38 active vocabulary items with an average of 19 words per group. The pro group used more expressions than the contra group (15 to 5). Both moderators used complete expressions, greeting, opening the debate, introducing the members, inviting the members to speak, asking for opinions, thanking, and closing the debate.

The second presentation in cycle 2 was about a planned trip to one of the cities in Germany. Being presented instantly while searching information on the Internet, many students still had difficulty conveying the information, so that the lecturer had to help them.

### 3.1.2.3. Observation

By undertaking a debate, the students got used to speaking spontaneously without reading a note. The

students tended to make errors in sentence structure due to their spontaneous speech. These errors did not constitute the focus of the presentation. Some students said that they were still nervous. Some expressions already taught were used in the debate, but the contra group still used fewer expressions than the pro group. These indicate that the students had mastered vocabulary about the pro uniform motion than the contra one.

In the debate, moderator 1 attempted to support moderator 2 who had minor mastery of vocabulary and fluency. Moderator 2 showed significant progress, namely, the willingness to lead two presentations, despite his apparent weaknesses. This fact indicates that the learning process took place better than expected in this research.

In the presence of an outing activity in a German town, the students encountered a problem, namely explaining information while searching data through the Internet. Nevertheless, they were delighted to be able to give presentations by using information obtained from the Internet.

#### 3.1.2.4. Reflection

The learning process was much better than that in the previous cycle. The students spoke more fluently and could use active vocabulary much more. They were able to use more expressions. Nevertheless, some issues still had to be attended to; how to make the students master more vocabulary and expressions to express opinions in German without being afraid of making errors.

### 3.1.3. Description of Cycle 3

#### 3.1.3.1. Planning

The students and the lecturer planned and prepared the lessons in two sessions together. The students were assigned to present themes of food specialties and films. They were required to present a dish, including the ingredients and how to cook it. For the film theme, the students were assigned to introduce one film from one country. The time allocated for the presentation about food specialties was 12 minutes and 7 minutes for the short film.

The students worked in groups which consisted of three to five persons. Every group member had to have a turn to speak during the presentation. Before the presentation, they practiced using vocabulary items and expressions needed in the presentation. They learned vocabulary that was used to explain how the food was cooked and their recipe.

#### 3.1.3.2. Action

The action implementation stage of cycle 3 was the same as that of cycle 1. The students sought materials for their *Referat* from various sources for the final part of the action implementation, namely the presentation. The students agreed to choose two students as timekeepers. They gave a sign when the presentation time was 2 minutes left.

Each group presented its work results lead by the moderator. The other students acted as participants. They could ask questions about the topic being presented. Meanwhile, the lecturer acted as a facilitator and an observer. She did not give any corrections to whatever errors they made. This was intended in order that there was no mental block on the part of the presenters. Information about the group's presentation can be seen in Table 1.

The students presented cuisines from Indonesia, Germany, Holland, and Japan in various forms, and they were very entertaining. Almost all groups received questions or comments. Group Zucker did not receive a question, because their presentation was so interesting. This group announced to the best presenters. Group Lecker and De Sisha created a recording scenario which was produced very attractively. Every group had used time efficiently, namely 12 minutes at the most. It means that the students had planned their *Projektarbeit* well.

Active vocabulary used by the students covered ingredients of the food and how to cook them: adverbs of time and situations, and activities being done. All groups entirely used presentation expressions, as planned in the learning scenario. The sum of active vocabulary was 112 words, with an average of 18.7.

**Table 1.** Information on the presentation of *Spezialitäten* in cycle 3

Group Name	Foods	Forms and media	Durations, proper/Not proper	Number of questions from the audience
<i>Puppe</i>	<i>Obstsalat</i>	Theatre, role playing	12, proper	2
<i>Duo</i>	<i>Nasi Liwet</i>	Power point, scheme, photos	12, proper	1
<i>Blut</i>	<i>Makaroni Schotel</i>	Power point, Photos	12, proper	2
<i>Lecker</i>	<i>Sayur Asem</i>	Power point, photos, video	12, proper	1
<i>De Sisha</i>	<i>Käserolle</i>	Power point, photos, video	12, proper	2
<i>Zucker</i>	<i>Maki Sushi</i>	A cooking demonstration on TV	12, proper	0

**Table 2.** Information on the Film presentation of cycle 3

Group Name	Titles and genre of the films	The country and language of the film	The forms and media	Duration in minutes, proper/not proper
<i>Puppe</i>	<i>Der gestiefelte Kater</i> , action film	Germany, German	Power point, scheme, photos, footage	6, proper
<i>Duo</i>	<i>Nenn mich einfach 'Axel'</i>	Germany, German	Power point, scheme, photos, footage	7, proper
<i>Blut</i>	<i>Kirschblüten (Hanami)</i>	Germany, German	Power point, scheme, photos, footage	7, proper
<i>Lecker</i>	<i>Hello Stranger, Romantische Komödie</i>	Thailand, Thai	Power point, scheme, photos, footage	7, proper
<i>De Sisha</i>	<i>Silly's sweet summer (Blöde Mütze)</i>	Germany, German	Power point, scheme, photos, footage	7, proper
<i>Zucker</i>	<i>Cargo</i> , Trailer (Science Fiction)	Switzerland, German	Power point, scheme, photos, footage	6, proper

In the films' presentation, the students chose films that used German from Germany and Switzerland and Thai from Thailand. They delivered their presentations by using powerpoint slides equipped with schemes, photos, and a short film. The forms of the presentations show the titles, genres, country of origin, and the language used in the film which each group introduced.

### 3.1.3.3. Observation

In the action implementation, the students started to get used to speaking in front of the class. Almost none of the students were tied to their notes or nervous when giving their presentation despite being recorded. The students used proper vocabulary and expressions.

### 3.1.3.4. Reflection

The presentations in cycle 3 indicated that the students were able to complete their assignments as expected. Their active vocabulary increased and improved. This was also the case with their expressions used in opening, content, and closing.

Cycle 3 required that each group should have its moderator for two presentations. In one class, 12 students experienced being moderators, which was beneficial for strengthening their confidence.

### *3.1.4. Learning results from the course of Mündlicher Ausdruck I*

The primary data of this research consisted of learning vocabulary and enhancing students' speaking skills by giving them *Projektarbeit* assignments. Data from the scores of learning processes and the results of the Final Exams were counted as supporting data.

In the final exam, the students had to do two assignments. Part 1: describe a personal experience, and

part 2: accomplish a task with an exam partner. These final exam themes were work and leisure time, family, students' lifestyles, school, party and customs, eating and drinking, school uniform, job, family celebration, family time. The learning results are presented in Table 3.

An average of 83.56 was obtained from the two average scores, namely 81.41 added by 85.70 divided by 2. The data showed that the students' learning results improved. This was evident in the increased score between the average score of the learning process and the average score of the final exam.

### *3.1.5. Interview Results*

Twelve students were interviewed in terms of their impressions of the *Projektarbeit*. The interview indicated that all of them responded positively about *Projektarbeit*. They became much more creative, active, and free to speak in front of the class. They felt happy because they were able to explore learning resources that they needed on their own. The various forms of presentations proved their creativity. The students also learned much from other groups.

The students also became aware that they sometimes made minor errors in using grammatical structures in speaking, although these errors do not matter. They were able to express their ideas without being afraid of making errors. According to the students, this way of learning was much more interesting than the conventional one, such as lecturing.

**Table 3.** Learning results of *Mündlicher Ausdruck I*

	Highest score	Lowest score	Average
Learning Process	90	70	81.41
Final exam	95	75	85.7

### 3.2. Discussion

From the three cycles, it can be inferred that teaching vocabulary and speaking skills can be undertaken by assigning *Projektarbeit*. This was evidenced in the planning, presentation results, interviews with the students, and the final exam's good results. The data show that all aspects support one another.

In the planning process, the students prepared their presentations well by using all available resources. They were able to organize their data into engaging presentations that showed high creativity. Gradually, their confidence developed as indicated when they used German vocabulary actively and their expressions were used in presentations comprehensively.

According to Krumm (1991), the procedure of assignments with *Projektarbeit* is undertaken through clear steps; namely, (1) the lecturer and the students determine concrete objectives that will enable the students to use the language in accordance with its communicative functions, discover and experience new language phenomena, (2) the planning is made by the teacher and the learners considering the skills levels of the learners, namely the level of B1, (3) there is an integration of outside-of-the-class situations into classroom activities, for example, cuisine presentations and cooking demonstrations, (4) learners undertake independent work by collecting data using various tools and media such as books and the Internet, (5) the products of this project are presented both in the class and outside of the class. The students undertook the *Projektarbeit* steps in accordance with Wicke (2004), namely planning, cooperating, acting, and evaluating, and documenting. The planning was undertaken to collect data and choose the form of presentation so that the students could cooperate reasonably. This planning was reflected in the undertaking of tasks in presentations, which were relatively proportional. After each presentation, the students evaluated their work result by conveying impressions, obstacles, and opinions about the *Projektarbeit* assignment.

From the above descriptions, it can be concluded that the teaching of vocabulary and speaking skills using *Projektarbeit* could be undertaken well in accordance with the set learning objectives.

### 4. CONCLUSION

Some conclusions can be drawn from this study. First, the students implemented the processes of vocabulary teaching and speaking skills based on *Projektarbeit*, starting from establishing objectives, planning, working in groups, executing, evaluating, and documentation.

Second, active vocabulary and expressions used by students were found to be comprehensive and appropriate with their contextual uses and themes of their individual

presentation assignments of *Projektarbeit*. Third, the students' impressions, opinions on the project were highly positive. They thought that such assignments were exciting, making the students active, stimulating their creativity, not dull. Therefore, the students suggested that *Projektarbeit* assignments should be retained in the curriculum and that they should also be implemented in other courses. Fourth, the learning results of the speaking course were quite good, as indicated by the average increase of their scores from the midterm to the final exam.

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