

# Project-Based Language Learning with Online Community of Practice from a CALL Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

The current disruption in formal school education due to the COVID-19 pandemic calls for innovative strategies in Technology-Enhanced Language Teaching (TELT). This article presents several technological and pedagogical considerations in conducting Project-Based Language Learning (PBLL) through Online Community of Practice (OCoP) for teaching ESP in a Vocational Higher Education (henceforth VHE) context. The PBLL-OCoP integrated learning strategy offers a comprehensive approach to technology-mediated ESP teaching. It aims to support the language teachers to deliver ESP courses virtually and provide the students with a meaningful learning experience in a socially distant way. The projects include digital photovoice, interactive digital poster, vodcasting, and the integration between Digital Mind Mapping Software (DMMS) and Screen Recording Tools (SRTs) in supporting the students' online learning practice. The reasons underlying these practical approaches are to promote the students' active, autonomous, explorative, and collaborative learning. Thus, the implication of this practice calls for inclusion in the critical online language learning pedagogy and digital language teacher professional development.

**Keywords:** *PBLL, OCoP, online learning, ESP teaching, TELT, and autonomous learning*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the trending approaches to teaching vocational courses initiated by the directorate general of vocational education is the implementation of project-based learning [1]. This article brings an idea of integrating technology into online language teaching. It presents the integration of Project-Based Language Learning (PBLL) and Online Community of Practice (OCoP) for teaching ESP online within a Vocational Higher Education (VHE) context. It aims to support vocational language teachers in delivering ESP subjects virtually and providing students with a meaningful learning experience in a socially distant way. The current issue in ESP teaching today is the online course content delivery that makes meaning in the students' learning. Teaching functional English online calls for innovative technology-mediated strategies that empower learners to be more active, explorative, autonomous, and collaborative [2]. However, the role of technology in online language education is essential in increasing the learners' participation in online learning. Apart from many other factors influencing online learning participation, the importance of the students' roles and instructional tasks should be well-acknowledged [3]. The students must have a supportive online space for

exploring their learning, and thereby, they can work collaboratively and shape their learning experiences simultaneously. Therefore, the learners might need the OCoP-mediated communication platform to help them work online and seek assistantship for their projects. They should be encouraged to take control of their learning, activities, and projects. They can thereby get assistantship and build their online learning interactions even in a virtual learning setting [4].

Vocational education adopts a practical-based curriculum requiring students to do more practical activities and hands-on jobs for skills-oriented learning. We may find this issue in many vocational institutions worldwide that seek innovative and well-work strategies for motivating online learning with PBL. Learners' participation is one of the emerging issues in online synchronous learning in which the teachers had limited control over the students' virtual attitudes and activeness in education. Therefore, this article explores the potential of technology-mediated PBL in delivering online ESP courses. Consecutively, the following sections present the literature review on online PBLL with technology, Online Community of Practice (OCoP), some best practices, and the technological innovations in online PBLL. Finally, we also provide

some limitations and recommendations for future development.

## 2. METHODS

### 2.1. *Creating an OCoP environment*

Grounded in the social presence theory, OCoP can be on WhatsApp or Facebook. The role of WhatsApp and Facebook-mediated communication is pivotal and urgent due to its capacity to connect learners distantly. For instance, the utilization of Facebook in online education has been popular among scholars in which it functions as a Learning Management System (LMS) [5], a tool to improve communication competency [6], and an online environment for learning [7]. A particular interest group in Facebook can be created as an OCoP environment to mediate its members to learn, discuss, share, and collaborate online. We can use the following phases and strategies to develop a PBL-OCoP integrated learning environment to support online PBL activities.

Phases and Strategies for Creating a PBL-OCoP Integrated Learning Environment are as follows: 1) Creating an OCoP group, 2) inviting relevant members, 3) Assigning a project, 4) preparing the project, 5) monitoring and progress evaluation, 6) project exhibition, 7) assessing the outcome, 8) giving feedback and suggestions for future project development.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides several practical strategies for online PBL activities utilizing OCoP. Along with this, we need to state a disclaimer that the results might be different when applied in other different contexts. Some factors can influence the implementation of the strategies, such as the students' digital literacy (e.g., Cartelli & Di Nuzzo, 2013), the availability of adequate tools [9], and the pedagogy of learners' autonomy [10]. The following subsections discuss practical strategies and how they contribute to the development and quality of online PBL activities in the VHE context.

### 3.1. *Digital Photovoice.*

Photovoice is a pedagogical activity of creating and discussing documentary photography. It empowers students to use their socio-semiotic sense to share their opinions, ideas, and experiences [11, p. 68]. Digital photovoice is another photography method to capture social phenomena and activities. In the VHE context, digital photovoice is seen as a methodological approach to teach ESP courses such as English for business, office professionals, banking, accounting, and business communication. For instance, teaching English to office professionals aims to improve the students' knowledge and skills about daily work in the company. We hope that they can demonstrate their ability to describe,

explain, and talk about the activities in the company. We can initiate a participatory case study with digital photovoice within a micro-reality context of online project-based language learning to mediate the students' learning during the pandemic. We asked the students to take photos of daily work in an office or institution using digital cameras or smartphones.

As a result, they came up with some images of people's activities, the office equipment, and office facilities. The people activities included meetings, handling incoming and outgoing letters, archiving, telephoning. After that, the students utilized a digital image processing tool to create a digital photo gallery to mediate their social semiotic sense to understand their surroundings. One of the advantages of this project is supporting the students' vocabulary learning and improving the students' critical thinking skills to interpret the social image representations from many different perspectives.

We propose eight stages of conducting digital photovoice: 1) recruitment of participants, mentors, and facilitators, 2) plan the project, 3) train the participants, 4) photo-taking session, 5) discuss, reflect, and select the photos, 6) exhibit, 7) action & follow up 8) evaluate the process. However, digital photovoice is considered one of the qualitative methods in ELT research that provides a scientific process of participatory and collaborative actions to empower the students' social well-being and socio-semiotic knowledge and understanding.

### 3.2. *Digital Interactive Poster*

One of the tasks in second language pedagogy is a digital interactive poster creation that allows the students to illustrate their thoughts and feelings about a social phenomenon. As an online project, they can use a web-based image processing application called *Canva* (<https://www.canva.com/>). It provides many free poster templates that users can use to design their posters straightforwardly. In the VHE context, we apply this strategy to support students' autonomy and activeness in online language learning. For instance, the students worked in groups to complete a poster project on product or goods distribution and supply chain management. They created a poster in Canva and shared it online either on Facebook or WhatsApp. They can also utilize online poster presentation via Zoom or Google Meet (synchronous way) and a pre-recorded digital poster presentation (asynchronous method) in case the context of your learning does not support live production.

During poster creation on *Canva*, the students found it more flexible in adjusting the type of poster they wanted to create than any other computer-based applications such as *Corel Draw* or *Photoshop*. They can also upload their images and photos to their posters without adjusting them. Thus, the teachers will organize a digital poster creation project based on the learning

outcomes and online learning pedagogy. This strategy appeals to students because it challenges their creativity and multimedia skills to create an interactive poster. They can also be instant graphic designers without advanced computer literacy skills. It saves more time and is easy to do to work on the poster project quickly and professionally. However, the content and visual quality of the student-created posters depends on how the students explore the principles of visual communication design [12]. Thus, the activity will also improve the students' visual literacy skills and visual identity design.

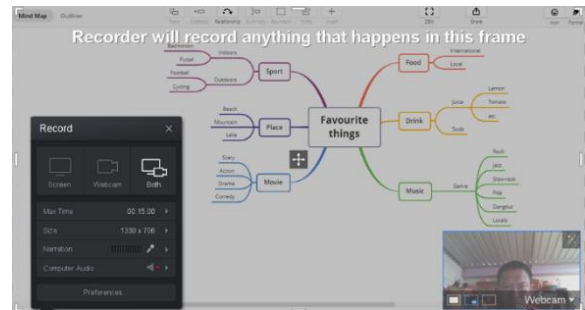
**3.3. Vodcasting Project (Student-created digital videos)**

Vodcasting or vlogging, a student-created video project, requires a considerable investment in equipment (video recording and editing tools) and time in its production process [13]. This strategy is a well-known approach to distance language learning to promote the students' autonomy and activeness in learning. In this Covid-19 outbreak, active innovation in online course content delivery is urgent to support the students' learning practices that make meaning. First, it is necessary to ensure that the students can access vodcasting technology to determine its feasibility. Secondly, the students must have adequate technology competency and multimedia skills to use the vodcasting tools for creating digital videos. In addition to that, the students must also have sufficient video editing skills to enhance the video production process. However, the current generation of students as digital natives [14] will be advantageous for digital language teachers to integrate technology-mediated PBL into their virtual learning environment. Therefore, we suggest technological and pedagogical considerations for organizing an online vodcasting project: 1) Pre-project activity (upskilling phase), 2) Main-project activity, and 3) Post-project activity.

**3.4. DMMS-SRTs integrated strategy.**

Digital Mind Mapping Software (DMMS) and Screen Recording Tools (SRTs) are the potential technological and pedagogical tools to support online PBL with technology. This section presents a best practice of integrating educational technologies in helping the students' online speaking practice. The DMMS-SRTs integrated strategy was an immediate response to the enactment of the educational policy requiring the academia to teach and study from home due to the pandemic outbreak. This innovation and intervention in online language teaching and learning are novel and adaptable to the teaching speaking pedagogy. This article does not claim that this integration is the most effective strategy to teach online speaking. Still, it is more likely to be an alternative strategy that English teachers can adopt and use in their teaching context. At the beginning of the Covid-19 outbreak, most lecturers must adapt to a new model of

learning where all courses had to be delivered online. Teaching speaking synchronously and asynchronously became a daunting task for lecturers since there were no modules and relevant guidelines to provide the speaking method online.



**Figure 1.** Screenshot of DMMS-SRT integrated strategy for online speaking practice

Figure 1 shows how we integrated DMMS and SRT to support the students' online speaking practice. The students' creativity and explorative thinking will develop the diagram and expand the topic coverage. The more topics and subtopics they grow, the more elaborate and talk. The mind mapping diagram aims at guiding the students to manage and organize their talk, so they know where to start and finish talking. In the pandemic, this strategy is considered adequate to mediate the students' online speaking practice so they can still learn autonomously, actively, and collaboratively. It is also considered more effective than synchronous online learning, where speaking practice cannot apply simultaneously within a single virtual learning space. Online PBL with DMMS-SRT integrated strategy is more flexible, adaptable, applicable, and manageable to be an alternative approach to online language teaching pedagogy. Interestingly, we can use this strategy in any discipline because its implementation is adjustable to the learning goals and objectives. Nevertheless, further research and investigation might be necessary to ensure feasibility and adaptability.

**4. CONCLUSION**

Conducting and organizing online PBL is simply challenging but explorative, where students explore a wide range of learning resources and meaning-making practices. The best practices can be the alternatives to teaching English virtually. Thus, the PBL processes entail the students' participation in shaping their learning and promoting autonomy, activeness, self-access, and collaborative learning. Therefore, activating the students' autonomy in distant learning will increase their participation and presence in a virtual language learning environment. However, the PBL-OCoP integrated learning remains several challenges and obstacles that hamper its actual implementation in the virtual learning space, such as the effectiveness of the

OCoP environment, members' participation, materials, and resources. Although online PBLL is considered effective in some points, there needs to be further development on designing and organizing a meaningful project for the students. For instance, conducting a digital photovoice project online is becoming more complex. It requires a technological and pedagogical model to support its implementation. Also, It requires the readiness of the teachers to tackle the pre-project issues such as the availability of workshops on digital photography, digital cameras, and image processing tools. Therefore, further research in online PBLL and OCoP to support the students' online learning is urgent. It may look at the contribution of invited experts and practitioners within the OCoP environment, their participation, and how they can give professional assistance to the students working on a project. However, it is essential to include the online PBLL-OCoP integrated learning strategy in the critical online language learning pedagogy and the language teachers' digital literacy skills development. Further studies should explore more practical methodological approaches to online PBLL with technology.

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