BEYOND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PROJECT-BASED ASSESSMENT IN ELT: BENEFITS, CHALLENGES, AND TEACHERS' STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

There have been many assessment methods used in ELT classrooms, including project-based assessment. However, little is known about why this assessment method is suggested, what should be anticipated in the classroom, and how teachers overcome issues in the classroom. Regarding those research gaps, this paper aims to investigate the benefits, emerging challenges, and strategies from the teachers' point of view. This study uses a qualitative case study as the research method to investigate the topic raised in depth. The findings show four benefits offered by the project-based assessment such as the improvement of students' collaboration and teamwork skills, students' creativity, critical thinking skills and bonding between students. The challenges were students' time management and free-riders. The teacher participants in this study overcame these challenges by grouping students, structuring the tasks and motivating students, collaborating with other subjects, and conducting self and peer-assessment.

Keywords: *ELT; Project-Based Assessment; Teachers Strategies*

ABSTRAK

Sudah banyak metode penilaian yang digunakan di kelas bahasa Inggris termasuk penilaian berbasis proyek. Penelitian-penelitian sebelumnya sebagian besar berfokus pada penerapan metode penilaian, persepsi guru dan siswa, dan bagaimana metode penilaian ini dapat dikembangkan. Masih sedikit yang diketahui tentang mengapa metode penilaian ini disarankan, apa yang harus diantisipasi di kelas, dan bagaimana guru mengatasi masalah di kelas. Berdasarkan kesenjangan penelitian tersebut, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki manfaat, tantangan yang muncul, dan strategi dari sudut pandang guru. Penelitian ini menggunakan studi kasus kualitatif sebagai metode penelitian untuk menyelidiki topik yang diangkat secara mendalam. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan empat manfaat yang ditawarkan oleh penilaian berbasis proyek seperti peningkatan keterampilan kolaborasi dan kerja tim siswa, kreativitas siswa, keterampilan berpikir kritis, dan ikatan antar siswa. Tantangannya adalah manajemen waktu dan free-rider. Partisipan dalam penelitian ini mengatasi tantangan tersebut dengan mengelompokkan siswa, menyusun tugas dengan sistematis dan memotivasi siswa, berkolaborasi dengan mata pelajaran lain, dan melakukan penilaian diri dan penilaian sejawat.

Kata Kunci: *Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris; Penilaian Berbasis Proyek; Strategi Guru*

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the 2013 curriculum has changed many education aspects: the teaching learning process, assessment, and teachers' perceptions toward their practice. This research study focuses on teachers' perceptions on an assessment

model used in the 2013 curriculum (2016 revised version) called project-based assessment, especially in the benefits, challenges, and teachers' strategies in implementing the project-based assessment.

The term project-based assessment is often complicated by the use of various terms, definitions, and understandings in the previous literature. It is, therefore, necessary to clarify how project-based assessment is defined in this study. This study defines project-based assessment as an assessment method that involves projects or several activities done in a certain period of time (Dwyer, 2008). It aims to measure students' competence toward the learning material and the achievement of the learning outcome.

In a study by Hanardi (2015), project-based assessment is defined as a combination of projects and assessments. He further explains that Project-based assessment is a tool to measure whether the teaching learning process achieves a subject's learning objectives. This study also mentioned that project-based assessment might include portfolio, observation, self and peer assessment, and teachers' feedback. According to Barge (2010), a project-based assessment provides students with a clear description of the teachers' pedagogy, the integration between theory and practice, and the learning objectives.

Some previous studies have indicated the benefits of conducting a project-based assessment. In a study by Ofrim-Stăncună (2014), project-based assessment appeared to benefit young learners in acquiring a foreign language. In addition, a study by Holmes and Hwang (2014) found that the use of this assessment method appears to motivate students, improve their critical thinking skills, and make them appreciate their peers. This argument was further confirmed by the findings of Cirit's (2015) study, which revealed that ELT pre-service teachers prefer to use alternative assessment due to the benefits in which it enhances students' learning, provides continuous assessment on their progress, increases interaction between peers, gives them more detailed and practical feedback, and improves their critical thinking skills.

Project-based assessment is an authentic assessment that is considered as one of the appropriate assessment methods for project-based learning. However, in some articles, the term project-based learning can also be referred to as project-based assessment since the project is done at the end of semester. The benefits of the project-based learning or project-based assessment are revealed by Simpson (2011) which showed that the use of project-based learning gives benefits to the students in terms of improving students' teamwork skills, higher-order thinking skills, presentation skills, and confidence in using English. Furthermore, the result of a study by Mafruudloh and Fitriati (2020) also showed that the implementation of project-based learning promotes students' collaborative work in performing dialog. The students showed their effective and meaningful work in fulfilling their comprehensive tasks.

However, despite the benefits of project-based assessment, some challenges are found in this assessment practice. The most common challenge is time management (Shome & Natarajan, 2013). For the students, this is related to how to manage the workload and finish their projects within the time frame. Meanwhile, teachers often feel that assessing students' projects is time-consuming. The second challenge is grading individual students in a group project (Shome & Natarajan,

2013; Williams, 2017). As already known, providing individuals with group grades is somehow unfair. There are always some people who do not contribute (free-riders) and some who contribute more. However, providing an individual grade is not an easy job for teachers.

Recognition of the difficulties in grading individual students in a project was discussed by Williams (2017). His findings suggested that teachers should use several assessment tools such as self-assessment and peer-assessment. He further explained that teachers were recommended to involve students and use self-assessment and peer assessment rubrics in assessing collaboration and participation. Then, teachers acted out their role in assessing the final product to provide a group score. In the end, the teachers combine these two scores to produce the individual scores.

This study is part of a larger project entitled "Exploring TESOL Teachers' Perceptions of Project-Based Assessment in ELT Classroom." While the previous study conveyed the teachers' project practices, views, and feelings, the present study focuses on the benefits, challenges, and teachers' strategies in the implementation of the project-based assessment. The exploration of these three aspects aims to give further descriptions of the implementation of the project-based assessment done by teachers. Furthermore, the findings revealed in this study can be used as teachers' consideration and anticipation before implementing the project-based assessment. The following research questions used in this study:

1. How do teachers perceive the benefits of project-based assessment in their classrooms?
2. What are the emerging challenges in the implementation of project-based assessment?
3. What are teachers' strategies to better configure this type of assessment?

METHOD

A qualitative case study is chosen as the research method used in this study. This study aims to investigate the benefits, challenges, and teachers' strategies in depth. Furthermore, the qualitative case study is the appropriate method to explore about the state of being or state of mind such as thought and feeling (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Additionally, this method allows the exploration of complexities of a phenomenon (Leedy & Omrod, 2010) which in this study was the teachers' project-based assessment practice. A qualitative case study also maintains the holistic and meaningful character of the real-life events (Yin, 2003).

The research instrument of this study was interview. Interview is the most prominent research instrument for the qualitative case study (Bryman, 2016). It is also used in many research studies related to teachers' perceptions and teaching practice. This study used a semi-structured interview to guide the researcher during the interview without limiting the participants' responses (Bryman, 2016). It also gives opportunities for the researcher to develop the questions to address more issues related to the research questions.

Following the method, this study used purposive sampling. The purposive sampling was considered as the most appropriate method of this study since generalization was not the focus of this study (Merriam, 1998). Furthermore, this study used a snowball sampling approach in which the researcher approached the

potential participants who have experiences relevant to the research (Bryman, 2016). The researcher approached some of her friends who work as an English teacher and asked some preliminary questions about their teaching practice. From this circle, the researcher further asked these teachers if they have any other friends who also implement the project-based assessment as one of the assessment methods in their ELT classroom. This aims to get a wider range of potential participants while maintaining the required criteria for the participants in this research.

Four teachers called 'Deborah', 'Irene', 'Vivian' and 'Lily' *(pseudonyms)* fulfilled the criteria and were invited to participate in this research. They all have taught English for more than a year and implemented the project-based assessment in their teaching practice. Furthermore, they all graduated from the English Education study program which supports their career as English teachers. They also use the latest curriculum (2013 curriculum), where the use of project-based assessment is highly suggested.

The data collection was done after fulfilling the criteria from the Ethics Manager at Monash University. The researcher firstly contacted the participants through WhatsApp messages, made some conversations, asked how the participants were doing, and told the participants about the research. This follows Yin's suggestions (2014) about the importance of building rapport and gaining trust in the data collection process. The researcher asked for participants' consent and explained the aims of the research.

The participants were interviewed based on the schedule they preferred. Furthermore, the researcher ensured the participants' confidentiality by conducting the interview separately, on different days and places. The interviews were done face-to-face and lasted for 30-45 minutes for each participant. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent. The audio recordings enhance the transcription process (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Merriam, 1998) in the data analysis. The researcher also took some notes of important points that the participants revealed during the interview process.

The research instrument in this study was a semi-structured interview. The researcher adapted questions developed by Merriam (2002) to investigate teachers' experiences in implementing the project-based assessment. Since the interview was semi-structured, the interviews were not limited to these questions. Instead, these questions were only used as initial questions as well as guidance for the researcher to interview the participants. More questions related to the issue might appear in the middle of the interview to either clarify the participants' statement or to ask for further information (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

Since the research instrument used in this research was an interview, the raw data of this research were the interview transcripts. First, the researcher used thematic analysis to analyse the transcripts. Then, the researcher identified some relevant themes through coding the transcripts. Additionally, the researcher gave labels to make the data well-managed and easy to analyse. Through this process, the researcher had built her initial interpretation.

After sorting the data, the researcher read the data interpretively and reflexively. Additionally, to focus on the research questions, the researcher highlighted some important points to make discussions, including interpretations

and reflections. In the end, the findings were analysed using the previous research studies.

FINDINGS
The Benefits of Project-Based Assessment

The interview transcripts were analysed to identify the benefits of the project-based assessment from the teachers' perspectives. Additionally, it is essential to mention that the teachers' names used in this paper are pseudonyms or not the teachers' real names. Four themes were identified (see Table 1): students' improved collaboration and teamwork skills, bonding between students, students' improved creativity, and improved critical thinking skills.

Benefits relating to students' social skills were very prominent and obvious in the project-based assessment, particularly an improvement in their collaboration and teamwork skills (see Table 1). Teachers noted that project-based assessment often involved multiple tasks that needed massive discussions and continuous communication between peers, and this allowed students to collaborate and work with everyone in the classroom. The teachers also highlighted that the students kept motivating each other throughout the project, which is considered another positive aspect of students' social skills.

Concerning the students' social skills, some teachers admitted the improvement of bonding between students after using project-based assessment (see Table 1). Teachers highly acknowledged the existence of a gap between students. In other words, some students often insisted on mingling and working with the same person so that there were some indications of inequality whenever the students had to work in a group. The use of the project-based assessment therefore enhanced teachers' abilities to build the bonding between students since they would collaborate and work with their friends during a long process. These teachers were, in the end, satisfied with how the students were able to bond with their classmates.

The use of project-based assessment also contributed significantly to improving students' creativity (see Table 1). Teachers acknowledged that the project often required students to plan and consider things carefully due to some project limitations. For example, the students were asked to make a beverage or food without any stove or juicer in Vivian's case. Vivian further contended that this situation demanded that students think creatively about what they would do in their project. In addition, due to the time constraints, students were often required to keep the project simple but still impressive.

Improved critical thinking skills was considered to be another benefit of project-based assessment (see Table 1). Teachers noted that in the project-based assessment, students were required to independently work with their group throughout the process. Students learnt how to search for information, filter the information, give comments, and solve every problem they encountered.

Table 1. The Benefits of the Project-Based Assessment According to The Interviews

Benefits	Representative significant statement
Improved students' collaboration and teamwork skills	1. 'Because only through the project, my students can work in a team, learn how to solve every problem they encounter, collaborate with others, and manage the project so they can finish the project within the time constraints.' – Irene 2. 'The project-based assessment teaches us how to see students from different lenses. It is not only about their academic progress, but also how they can collaborate with others.' – Lily 3. 'In the project, there is always a collaboration work with peers. And, for me, teamwork skills are the most obvious. Management skills are there as well; students learn how to manage their team – "You search the article, you make the scrapbook, I create the model, etc.".' – Lily 4. 'The first benefit is, of course, to improve students' teamwork skills. In the project-based assessment, they need to collaborate and work with others.' – Vivian 5. 'Even some students with low proficiency tried their best. They tried to contribute to the group by preparing the ingredients and tools, or even when their group needed ice cubes. I could see very great teamwork here, from their effort and other things. And surprisingly, this also happened to the boys!' – Vivian 6. 'The project-based assessment is an effective method to assess students because all students can involve and collaborate with their peers in the project. There are also some encouragements from their friends to try their best.' – Deborah
Improved students' creativity	7. 'The second benefit is to improve creativity. In the project, the students have to decide what they are going to do and present. In my case, there were some prohibited things to bring, such as a stove or a juicer. It hence demanded them to have careful consideration about the menu; how to make a simple menu but still awesome.' – Vivian 8. 'I prefer using the project for written or speaking tests. While test often focuses on one thing (grammar), a project can integrate students' knowledge and skills at once. We can also improve students' creativity as well as their reasoning skills since these two skills are very obvious in the project.' – Deborah 9. 'Students' creativity is indeed obvious. Making scrapbook obviously needed students' creativity even if they did it in a group.' – Lily 10. 'There must be some improvements in students' twenty-first-century skills such as critical thinking and creativity since they independently search for information by themselves, not from the teacher. In making an e-magazine, they used technology, made the layout for the magazine, etc.' – Irene
Bonding between students	11. 'For the students, I encouraged them to make friends with everyone in the classroom. I wanted them to have better relationships and to bond with their classmates. Thus, I deliberately made the group for every project. Consequently, they would [be] unlikely to work with the same person or work with their 'gang'. I could see in my case that it worked very well. They have a sense of belonging, they know their friends better, and they bond with each other.' –Deborah 12. 'The benefit for the students is they could bond with their friends. One of the most common problems in teaching teenagers is they only mingle with their 'gang.' In my context, especially year 10, this is very obvious.' – Lily
Improved critical thinking skills	13. 'There must be some improvements in students' twenty-first-century skills such as critical thinking and creativity since they independently search for information by themselves, not from the teacher. In making an e-magazine, they used technology, made the layout for the magazine, etc.' – Irene 14. 'Yes. Critical thinking skills were used in the project. In my case, students are asked to give comments related to the special performance in a specific continent.' – Lily

Challenges in Project-Based Assessment

Most teachers agreed that the foremost challenge they faced in conducting a project-based assessment is time management (see Table 2). As mentioned before, the project-based assessment involves a long process, and, consequently, teachers often had insufficient time to teach the other materials or the next required chapters in a semester. These teachers further explained that their students still needed guidance in English, so that it often required more time in the project-making phase, especially in a project that involved text-editing and revisions. For example, in Irene's class, some students sometimes made an excuse by mentioning that they were doing two projects at that moment so it was hard for them to finish on time. While Lily sometimes encountered a similar reason, she also noted that her students sometimes made unnecessary excuses, such as forgetting to bring the project.

The second challenge that most teachers encounter in conducting a project-based assessment is free-riders (see Table 2). Teachers noted that free-riders often interfered in the project-making by not bringing the materials or relying only on their friends. This consequently obstructed the process and, hence, required more time to complete the process.

Table 2. The Challenges of The Project-Based Assessment According to The Interviews

Benefits	Representative significant statement
Time-management	1. 'I cannot believe it is already the end of the year, and I have to rush over the last two chapters. I am asking myself how I could be very overwhelmed with everything, and the suspect is the assessment process I did for the procedure text. I had spent some meetings for the discussion and explanation about the procedure text, and when it came to assessment, I chose this project, which apparently involved more time than usual.' – Vivian 2. 'For me, it is time-consuming. I should check the text first, and there are a lot of things to be done. It wastes the time allocation for English, especially for my students who have lower proficiency than students from other schools.' – Vivian 3. 'Yes, it is pretty hard to manage the time. I do not know whether it is because of other subjects that apparently also do a project, but my students say, "I have not finished the other yet, Miss. I should do both, so I decide to do 50/50."' – Irene
Free-riders	1. 'The challenge comes from unmotivated students. Even when they are doing the project, they are still unmotivated and rely on their friends.' – Deborah 2. 'Some students kept making excuses, and I contended that these students did not want to contribute to their groups. Because it did not only happen to my classroom, but also to the other classrooms.' – Lily 3. 'They always make an excuse by saying "I cannot finish the project, Miss, she does not bring the material, and he does not bring the tools".' – Irene

Teachers' Strategies

The challenges teachers encountered in using the project-based assessment apparently did not make them avoid using this assessment method. Instead, it encouraged them to find better ways to conduct this assessment method. According to the interviews, every teacher tended to have a different personal strategy to overcome their problems. Overall, four themes were identified: create the project teams, structure the tasks and motivate students, integrate the project with other subjects, and have students assess themselves and peers.

Creating project teams is a prominent strategy used by teachers to overcome the challenges in the project-based assessment. Teachers acknowledged that secondary students are likely to choose those with whom they want to work. Therefore, teachers contended that it is necessary to create project teams to maintain the heterogeneity of the group members and improve their social skills.

> *Deborah: 'When students create their own group, there are always people who are left behind. Some students do not want to be in the same group with the low achievers or special needs students.'*
> *Lily: 'I made them in a team so that they were able to work with everyone in the classroom. It was so hard at first. They refused it. They even personally asked me not to be in the same team with X or with Y. It made me even more curious of what was happening, and I ended up putting them in the same group on purpose.'*

Furthermore, most teachers contended that structuring the tasks and motivating the students throughout the process are crucial to achieving the allocated time.

> *Vivian: 'I keep reminding my students about the time allocation for every step in the project. For example, ten minutes presentation for each group so that all groups can perform in one meeting. I also keep emphasizing the deadline to my students with a bit of threat. Ha-ha! Thank God, they motivate each other and all finished.'*
> *Deborah: 'I tried to suggest what they have to do. I tried to understand what they liked. For example, when they like drawing, I will ask them to help the group and make the drawing, or perhaps design the project. I also keep motivating them throughout the process.'*

Meanwhile, Irene has personal strategies that will also be used in the next project. As her problem is often about other subjects' projects, she contended that integrating other subjects' projects with the English subject is a great idea. She further adds that having students assess themselves and peers can potentially minimize the free-riders problem in the group.

> *Irene: 'The free-riders will be aware that their friends will also assess them. When they do not work, they will think they do not get a score.'*

In conclusion, all teachers contended that every challenge they encountered in the classroom needed to be solved. Therefore, they have personal strategies to better configure the project-based assessment and achieve the main aim of assessment, which is promoting students' learning. As every class is unique, the teachers participating in this study also have various strategies to suit their own problems.

DISCUSSION
Benefits of the Project-Based Assessment

This study identified four benefits of the project-based assessment: students' improved collaboration and teamwork skills, bonding between students, students' improved creativity, and improved critical thinking skills. Most findings in this study not only confirm the existing knowledge about the benefits of the project-based assessment towards the students' improvement of teamwork skills, bonding between students, and critical thinking skills (Cirit, 2015; Holmes & Hwang, 2014),

but also inform us that the project-based assessment can improve students' creativity.

Benefits relating to the students' improvement in teamwork skills in this study were illustrated by the teachers in the way in which students were able to collaborate and work with everyone in the classroom. Teachers further confirmed that there were massive discussions during the process, which apparently increased students' interaction (Cirit, 2015). Furthermore, the phenomenon of students continually motivating their team members throughout the process is also similar to the knowledge existing in Holmes and Hwang (2014).

Closely related to the first benefit, teachers also indicated that project-based assessment contributed to the improvement of bonding between students. This finding is similar to that of Holmes and Hwang (2014), who revealed that students appeared to appreciate their peers more. In the case of this study, students who were initially reluctant to work with low-achievers or with students with special needs were, by the end, able to appreciate their peers with their limitations.

The improvement of students' critical thinking skills in this study confirms the existing knowledge from Holmes and Hwang (2014) and Cirit (2015). Teachers in this study illustrated the improvement of critical thinking skills in the way students independently worked with their group throughout the process, searched for information, filtered the information, and gave critical comments regarding the information. Teachers further explained that there was also an improvement in the way they solved every problem they encountered.

This study also found that project-based assessment contributed to the improvement of students' creativity. This finding fulfilled the creativity aspect, which is one of the requirements of the project-based assessment, according to the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture (2016). In addition, teachers also conveyed that the requirement of the project and time limitation often encouraged students to think creatively. This is in contrast to the findings from Shome and Natarajan (2013), which found that complicated tasks and the time constraint often discouraged students from doing the project.

Challenges in Project-Based Assessment

The challenges relating to the use of project-based assessment are time management and free-riders. As the project-based assessment involves a long process, teachers have to give continuous feedback and do a continuous assessment (Shome & Natarajan, 2013). However, unlike the findings from Shome and Natarajan (2013), teachers in this study were not complaining about the continuous feedback and assessment they should give. Instead, they felt worried if they could not finish the materials required in a semester. The findings of this study further revealed that teachers often became overwhelmed in managing the time frame because students often needed more guidance than the teachers expected, particularly in text-editing and revisions. Therefore, the project was often finished after the initial due date.

Closely related to the first challenge, the existence of free-riders in the projects also often interfered with the process and the time constraints. Teachers conveyed that the free-riders often made an excuse whenever required to bring materials or tools for the project. However, the teachers further explained that they helped the team structure the task, gave the free-riders clear job descriptions, and kept

motivating them throughout the process. Therefore, the teachers contended that the existence of free-riders was unlikely to give them insurmountable difficulties in terms of assessing them because, ultimately, they also contributed to the project. The finding of this study therefore brings different knowledge into the field from that of Shome and Natarajan's (2013) findings about free-riders.

Teachers' Strategies

Each teacher has their strategies to overcome the challenges encountered in the project-based assessment. Overall, four strategies were identified: create the project teams, structure the tasks and motivate students, integrate the project with other subjects, and have students assess themselves and peers.

Teachers in this study found that creating the project teams for students is one of the beneficial strategies in the project-based assessment. Furthermore, Deborah and Lily agreed that creating the project teams for the students not only maintained the heterogeneity of the group but also enhanced students to gain the benefits of the project-based assessment, particularly in social skills improvement. They further explained that this strategy could also reduce the gap between students, which is another prominent problem in the classroom.

Teachers also conveyed that they must help students structure the tasks and motivate the students throughout the process. As the project-based assessment often involves multiple complicated tasks in a limited time frame, teachers agreed that they must provide students with a robust support system.

Additionally, teachers also have some further suggestions regarding the strategies that can be used in the next project-based assessment. First, ELT teachers can integrate the English project-based assessment with other subjects. Irene personally thought that this suggestion appears to be an alternative way to reduce the time-consuming aspect as well as reduce students' usual burden of doing many projects at once. Second, peer assessment can be used to minimize the free-riders problem in the group. This suggestion confirms the finding by William (2017). Lastly, peer assessment can increase students' motivation to do their projects because of the involvement of their peers in the assessment process (J & Fajar, 2019).

CONCLUSION

This study explored the benefits, challenges, and teachers' strategies in doing the project-based assessment. This study was shaped by the overarching research questions of how teachers perceive the benefits of project-based assessment in their classrooms, the emerging challenges and their personal strategies to better configure this type of assessment. These questions provided opportunities to investigate some benefits, challenges, and the teachers' personal strategies to configure the project-based assessment better.

Findings of this study revealed the benefits of project-based assessment, which are identified as students' improved collaboration and teamwork skills, bonding between students, students' improved creativity, and improved critical thinking skills. Despite the benefits gained, teachers encounter several challenges in their project-based assessment, mostly associated with time management and free-riders. However, teachers also have some strategies to better configure this assessment method by creating the project teams, structuring the tasks and

motivating students, integrating the project with other subjects, and having students assess themselves and their peers.

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