

## Project Based Learning for Developing Learner Autonomy: University Level English Language Courses

Syeda Shabnam Mahmud<sup>1</sup>, Naushin Nazifa Islam<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1-2</sup>East West University

Bangladesh

E-mail: <sup>1</sup>[mahmud.shabnam@ewubd.edu](mailto:mahmud.shabnam@ewubd.edu) & <sup>2</sup>[naushin@ewubd.edu](mailto:naushin@ewubd.edu)

### Abstract

Along with the unprecedented advancements made in the sphere of English Language Teaching (henceforth ELT), the practitioners and educators have felt an undeniable demand of redesigning the teaching, learning, and evaluation strategies which have been dominating the teaching and learning process of EFL/ESL classes for the time unknown. Therefore, this field of education now puts its emphasis on enhancing learners' capacity of taking responsibilities of their own learning, which in turn promotes learner autonomy. All these changes contribute, to a large extent, to the promotion of pragmatic knowledge based learning to bring both the teacher and learners out from the erudite stereotypical practice of traditional assessments in the form of tests and examinations; hence, they are now in favor of alternative assessment that supports the notion of formative assessment. One of the most recognized tools of such assessment is Project Based Learning (PBL for now onwards), and it is not only a reflective praxis of alternative assessment but also is considered as a major learning tool for practical knowledge. It creates a scope for learners to learn from their peripheral surroundings by which they get influenced by in their everyday life, such as their social, political, communal, and familial settings. Therefore, this paper explores the possibilities as well as challenges of implementing PBL as a learning and an assessment instrument in English language classrooms at the tertiary level education in Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** project based learning (PBL), assessment, alternative assessment, learner autonomy, English as Foreign/Second Language, tertiary level, Bangladesh

### 1. INTRODUCTION

As there has been a paradigm shift lately in the sphere of teaching English as a second/foreign language in terms of evaluating students' performance, emphasis is now being put on the notion of assessing students' performance instead of testing them. It is because teachers' inclination for summative evaluation is changing, and they are showing more interest for their students' gradual development which can be measured through formative assessment. Alternative assessment is one such strategy

where learners get an exposure to the authentic contexts of language use along with the scope to invest their critical thinking abilities (Monib, Karimi & Nijat, 2020). Moreover, because of the unique nature of EFL/ESL's assessment, alternative assessment has been widely accepted in this field of education.

There are different tools for achieving the objectives of alternative assessment, and project-based learning is one of them which in turn ensures learner autonomy. Writing in ESL/EFL classes should not be based on rote learning at the tertiary level; it should have some real-life implications that will take the students beyond the four-walled classrooms, and project-based learning can serve these purposes aptly (Affandi & Sukyadi, 2016). Astawa, Artini, and Nitiasih (2017) have also opined in their article that language learning should always take place in an environment which can maximize learners' active participation and higher order cognitive skills. According to them, "Learning process should be organized in an interactive, inspiring, fun, and challenging environment. The learning activities are expected to be able to provide sufficient space for innovation, creativity, and independence" (p.1148). This gives rise to the idea of learner autonomy. Instead of considering them as the passive recipients of the knowledge, they should be considered as the active participants for both receiving and creating the knowledge.

It can enhance students' potentials for learning and also have an impact on their personal achievement and development. In order to understand the extent of learner autonomy and how teacher can facilitate it, it is important to take the socio-cultural context into consideration. It is because the concept of freedom and the right to ask questions are not practiced in the same manner in every community where the teaching and learning process is taking place (Dang, 2010). As it has been pointed out by Yuliani and Lengkanawati (2017) in their article that project-based learning promotes learner autonomy in EFL/ESL settings. It is because from the very onset of students' projects, they need to decide the objectives, plan the study procedure, analyze the data and findings, and above all maintain an interpersonal relationship to keep the project going. However, it needs to follow a process which should be facilitated by the course instructor, and only then it can be expected that students themselves will be able to achieve the success in completing the processes of planning, implementation, and monitoring.

In this research papers, the researchers have tried to find out the scopes of implementing the practice of project-based learning as a tool of alternative assessment to see to what extent it assists the learners in achieving learner autonomy by considering a number of limitations experienced by both the teachers and students.

### 1.1 Research Questions

1. How is the concept of PBL implemented at the tertiary level of English Language Course?
2. How does it facilitate the learner autonomy and pragmatic use of language?
3. What are the challenges experienced both by the teachers and the learners of PBL?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Assessment

Assessment is a crucial component of the teaching and learning process. According to Nasab (2015), assessment is done to find out whether or not the learning objectives have been met. It is because the teachers cannot always take it for granted that their students have learnt everything that they have taught in the class. As a result, assessment can be considered as a bridge to fill in the gap between what the teachers have delivered in their lessons and how much the learners have successfully retained.

She has also added that for language courses, students usually are not interested in non-assessed works. They determine the importance of any certain lessons based on the fact that if it is going to be assessed or not. Hence, if the teachers want to improve their students' learning capacity and experience, then there is no option other than introducing changes in the form of assessment. It is because "If the learners are to be made ready to deal with ambiguous real-life problems, then they have to be able to demonstrate higher order thinking abilities" (Nasab, 2015, p.168).

### 2.2 Alternative Assessment

However, the age old practice of traditional assessment has been criticized for the absence of its authentic approach. Therefore, the language educators are now putting more emphasis on the use of alternative methods of assessments, and these performance and authentic assessments require students do an "authentic demonstration" of what they have learnt in the classroom (Sanders, 2016, p.63). As the name suggests, this type of assessment helps the learners implement their acquired knowledge in diverse real-life situations by ensuring their active participation in order to complete the procedure (Dikli, 2003).

### 2.3 Project-based Learning

Project-based learning is one such alternative assessment where students can either work individually or in a pair. Therefore, there is always the opportunity to hone their interpersonal skills while assisting other group members (Dikli, 2003). Furthermore, it enables students to use their critical thinking ability because they need to have an in-depth understanding of the topic; only having the superficial knowledge is not enough for project-based learning. They get the scope to start working on their topic from the scratch and then gradually moving on to the stages of developing their plans, designing their research proposal, opting for surveys, analyzing the collected data, and finally, presenting their project in front of others (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright & Zvacek, 2000).

Language teaching now focuses more on the active participation of students and their needs instead of considering them as passive learners who are only there sitting in the classroom and listening to the lectures. Besides, students also now demand for their own freedom and autonomy in the learning process. Hence, the University of Calgary has decided eight guiding principles for their project-based

learning and pedagogy designed for the new generation of teacher practitioners (Roessingh and Chambers, 2011). They are:

1. The instructor requires content area expertise and pedagogical competence.
2. Instructional design is learner centered and flexible.
3. A central question(s) or problem focuses and provides the catalyst for learning.
4. Teaching and learning objectives are explicit.
5. Learning tasks are authentic and engaging.
6. Instruction is mediated and integrated.
7. Promotes critical reflection and higher-order thinking skills.
8. Continuous assessment and monitoring of learning.

#### **2.4 Kumaravadivelu's Postmethod Pedagogy**

Kumaravadivelu (1994) in his seminal work has shed light on the necessity of coming out from the age-old tradition of methods and considering these as the only erudite strategies of language teaching. He has discussed ten macrostrategies as part of his strategic framework, and some of these macrostrategies compliment the notion of project-based learning in terms of maximizing learning opportunities, integrating language skills, ensuring learner autonomy, and raising cultural and social awareness.

In the era of postmethod pedagogy, teachers and students should work together to create a learning environment that can maximize the learning opportunities. Teachers should not only be treated as the creators of opportunities but also as the utilizers of the opportunities created by their students. The efforts should come from both the parties with the help of equal participation. Teachers as the “mediators of learning acts” ought to be able to get involved in the ongoing process of assessment to see how the learners are getting accustomed with the gradual development of the classroom events (Kumaravadivelu, 1994, p. 33). Besides, raising cultural awareness in relation with maintaining social relevance is a precursor of L2 teaching and learning. It is because the second language teaching and learning takes places within a certain cultural and social context. Interest, curiosity, and empathy towards L2 learners' own culture is one of the crucial components of this pedagogy. Along with the cultural awareness, knowing about the practices and norms of the speech community where the teaching and learning process is taking place inevitably plays a significant role. As Kumaravadivelu has pointed out, “It is impossible to insulate classroom life from the dynamics of social institutions. Teaching, therefore, makes little sense if it is not informed by social relevance” (Kumaravadivelu, 1994, p. 42).

#### **2.5 Learner Autonomy**

From the perspective of Kumaravadivelu (1994), as students can directly get involved in the learning process, it guarantees learner autonomy; they learn to take responsibilities of their own learning. It facilitates the process of equipping themselves with diverse learning strategies to decide and direct their own learning

progression.

Not only Kumaravadivelu but also Guven and Valais (2014) have opined in his article that project-based learning is connected with the constructivism view and Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory's Zone of Proximal Development. In the language of Guven and Valais (2014), "Project Based Learning (PBL) can be used to help direct English language learners towards autonomy through well planned stages of learning that emphasize interaction, critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration" (p. 184). Moreover, project-based learning helps students use authentic language what they can implement for different learner-centered activities such as information gaps, learner-to-learner interviews, role plays, simulations and collaborative writing with peers in order to complete their projects successfully.

The notion of learner autonomy is achieved in the project-based learning because students can enjoy the right to "voice their choice". The practice of formative assessment makes it easier for both the teachers and learners to enter an inclusive relationship that requires them forming a partnership, and here, the teachers do not act as the instructors, but as facilitators to create enough space for their learners to make own decisions (Guyen and Valais, 2014).

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

Qualitative method has been adopted for this study as this method is used to understand people's perspectives, experiences and opinions regarding a given issue. semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions have been arranged in order to collect relevant information.

#### **3.2 Research Participants**

5 experienced teachers and 9 students have been involved in the research process.

#### **3.3 The Teachers**

The semi structured interviews were conducted among five experienced teachers of a leading private university of Bangladesh. All these teachers have been engaged in teaching English language courses (e.g., ENG 101, ENG 102, ENG100 and other departmental English courses in the undergraduate level) for more than two years.

#### **3.4 The Students**

In the focus group discussion, there were nine students from one university. The students were selected through random sampling.

#### **3.5 Research Instruments**

As the research instruments, semi structured interview and focus group discussion have been used.

### 3.6 Teachers' Interview

Individual sessions have been arranged at the teachers' convenient hour to ask few semi structured questions. The interviewer ensured a congenial atmosphere and a flexible approach in order to gather information from the teachers. All the teachers unhesitatingly shared their views, opinions and relevant incidents on the given issues.

### 3.7 Teachers' Interview Questions

1. What kind of difficulties does a teacher experience while teaching the process of writing a term paper?
2. How do you guide your students to find a solution to their problem?
3. What kind of opportunities does the term paper provide to the students to attain learners' autonomy?
4. Are you satisfied with the learning outcome of the ENG102?
5. Do you take technological support while teaching/ guiding/monitoring students for term papers?
6. How do you ask your students to use technology while writing and presenting their term paper?
7. What are the criteria that you follow while assessing the students' term paper?

### 3.8 Focus Group Discussion

Focus group discussion is considered as one of the important tools for collecting data in qualitative analysis. In the beginning of the FGD, the moderator introduced some sample prompts to the participants in order to make them acquainted with the whole process. When the participants seemed comfortable in their state, the moderator initiated the conversation. The prompts of the FGD are mentioned here.

1. Whether the research has changed their perspective on certain issues:
2. Learned the process of research or not
3. Does it have an applicability in the real world or not
4. Is the whole system feasible to execute their plan or not?
5. Did they get sufficient scope to use technology or not?
6. Did they face any struggle or not?
7. Overall impression on the project and suggestion for the future

## 4. FINDINGS

The findings of semi structured interview and focus group discussion have been given here.

Semi-structured Interview:

*1. What kind of difficulties does a teacher experience while teaching the process of writing a term paper?*

While teaching the process of writing a term paper, an individual instructor faces different kinds of problems in his/her classroom. After analyzing the encountered problems of our participants, we have divided the issues into three



different categories which are:

- a. Teaching the structure of a term paper
- b. Dealing with the students' psychological barrier
- c. Imbibing the norms and ethics of research into the students

a. Teaching the structure and required components of a term paper: All the participants face problems while teaching the structure and necessary components of the term paper to their students since the term paper demands the format of an academic write up. "Since this term paper structure is new to them, they often find it difficult in the beginning," one respondent said. That is why, all instructors unanimously agreed on the point that they have to invest a lot of time in "explaining the process of writing a term paper to the students". One of the respondents justified the struggles of students by saying that "they are not accustomed to use secondary resources or any kind of interview in their write ups, so they face a certain level of difficulty in the beginning." Moreover, the respondents said that the students struggled in "selecting an authentic and realistic topic," "framing research questions," "differentiating between research questions and survey questions," "using formal and academic dictions" and in comprehending "the process of receiving feedback and editing".

b. Dealing with the students' psychological barrier: Another common problem that the instructors face is the low motivation of the students. One of the participants said, "Initially they think they can't do it." Another participant said, "they seem reluctant to follow the format of an academic paper in the beginning". All the participants mentioned about the psychological barrier of the students in their interview sessions.

c. Imbibing the Norms and Ethics of the Research into the students: Apart from these two factors, teaching the students writing an "authentic" paper without breaking the norms of plagiarism is another challenging task for the instructors. One of the instructors had a very bad experience regarding this aspect of the term paper. She said, "I have had term papers from several students who fully copied from their seniors." She also added, "They don't do the survey and try to take it from the internet". Even after receiving guidelines from their teacher, another participant added, "They add things, do editing without following feedback".

## *2. How do you guide your students to find a solution to their problem?*

When the teachers were being asked about the techniques of handling the encountered problems in the classroom, all of them said that they use several samples of term papers from previous semesters in order to illustrate a unified concept of term paper. By drawing references from various samples, the teachers discuss the important aspects/segments of term paper thoroughly. One of the instructors shared

that she encourages students “to select topics from their surrounding lives in order to engage the students with the process of learning.” She does it deliberately to minimize students’ fear towards writing an academic paper. Another teacher disclosed that she “made them practice writing research questions and survey questions in the class” so that she could check and give them feedback instantly as she identified that as a problem area for the students. She added that the methodology and result analysis parts are quite easy for the students as there are “tons of YouTube tutorials available on the internet”. To resolve other issues related to the structure, all instructors provide detailed feedback to guide their students.

In order to motivate the students, teachers need to present the task of writing the term paper as something “purposeful” to their students, one of the respondents suggested. Another respondent said, “Look, all students irrespective of their background have to write term papers for their departmental courses. So, I tell them if they learn it in ENG102, they will do well in the upcoming courses also.” Moreover, all participants confirmed that they divide the students in small groups so that they can provide assistance to one another.

Since the students have no idea about the norms of plagiarism before this course, the instructors thoroughly discussed this issue in the class. If still they find any plagiarized ideas in their term paper, the instructors give them feedback, arrange for individual conferences and even make them aware about the penalties of adopting plagiarism. One of the respondents said, “I do not give soft copies of the sample term paper to my students as they become more susceptible towards cheating”.

### *3. What kind of opportunities does the term paper provide to the students to attain learners’ autonomy?*

The respondents’ opinions varied to a noticeable degree while they answered this question. One of them said the learners attained autonomy “to a certain extent” through this term paper as “ they get the opportunity to choose the topic by themselves, write questionnaires on their own, take interviews and analyze results by themselves, they surely become more responsible and autonomous”. Another participant added that sometimes the students manipulated the notion of autonomy as in this case of group work, few students were seen to work actively when others remained inactive. Regarding this issue, another instructor said, “This is the early stage to expect autonomy from ENG102 students.” Last but not the least, the last respondent said, “The students don’t attain autonomy, rather they become more dependent on others, seniors, even on the internet to complete the project.”

### *4. Are you satisfied with the learning outcome of the ENG102?*

When the teachers were asked whether they were satisfied with the learning outcome of the term paper project, four out of five respondents answered in an affirmative manner. One of them said, “Obviously, I am satisfied as a good number of students do learn.” “...They learn the basics of a research paper, learn to frame research questions, learn to complete a group task, that is why I am happy” another of



them added. Another respondent sounded quite optimistic with the learning outcome as “they not only write a good term paper, they also present it in a proper way.” However, the last respondent expressed her dissatisfaction over the learning outcome of the term paper. In her words, “they are not willing to learn the process of writing a term paper; all they care only about grades without doing much work.”

*5. Do you take technological support while teaching/ guiding/monitoring students for term papers?*

After going through the interviews of all teachers, it has been found that all the instructors use technology in different stages of term paper projects. From topic selection to final draft submission, they prefer to receive students’ works via email. During the class hours, they use multimedia, they go to different websites to demonstrate the techniques of incorporating secondary sources with their write up. The instructors prefer to use either Google Classroom or Facebook platforms to communicate students beyond classrooms. The participants also said that they provide feedback on the students’ work and respond to their queries by using either email or Google classroom. In order to check the authenticity of the students’ works, all teachers use free plagiarism software which is available on Google.

*6. How do you ask your students to use technology while writing and presenting their term paper?*

As per the teachers’ response, the students used technology with full confidence. They hardly needed any assistance from their teacher to understand the technicalities of different platforms referred by their teachers. They spontaneously used the internet to search for relevant information, watched YouTube tutorials to understand the process of data analysis and discussion, presented the term paper using multimedia, communicated with teachers via Google classroom or Facebook, etc. They submitted their drafts to their respective teachers by using mail.

*7. What are the criteria that you follow while assessing the students’ term paper?*

All participants knew that a uniformed guideline had been followed by their course instructors to assess their term paper. The teachers allocated some marks for assessing writing and some marks for assessing their presentations in two phases. The instructors looked for authenticity of the content, accuracy of the format, organization of their ideas, coherence and use of proper grammar and diction while assessing their written work. To evaluate students’ presentations, all teachers followed a uniformed rubric. The instructors evaluated students’ presentation on the basis of organization of the content, synchronization of the different segments in the slides, voice projection, confidence, gestures and postures, eye contact, etc of the speakers.

#### **4.1 Focus Group Discussion**

In the beginning of the FGD, the moderator introduced some sample prompts to the participants in order to make them acquainted with the whole process. When

the participants seemed comfortable in their state, the moderator initiated the conversation.

### *1. Whether the research has changed their perspective on certain issues*

Upon asking on this issue, one of the participants readily dismissed the possibility of a changed perspective after finishing the research procedure. In his words, “it did not change my perspective on my term paper topic-corruption in the education sector of our country. Corruption is still there; no paper can change my point of view on that”. Another group which was doing a paper on Street Children said that previously they thought the charitable organizations of street children did not put enough effort to change the circumstances of the street children. But when they got to witness their efforts in person, their perspective towards the organizations’ effort changed totally. In the same way, another group that did the term paper on ‘ambivert people”, also confirmed that their perspective was initially “negative” towards the ambivert people, but when they got to explore those people more, they found them “supportive” and “social”.

### *2. Learned the Process of Research*

When the moderator asked the participants whether they had learned anything about the process of research, one of the participants unhesitatingly said that he had learned the craft of taking interviews at any level. Most of the participants supported him by nodding. He said, “I have interviewed a professor of Dhaka University (University of Dhaka); it is a big matter for me.” “We also learned the difference between the formal language and informal language,” one of the participants added. This issue generated a lot of discussion among the participants and almost all of them said that they had learned to prepare questionnaires, to use proper citation and also to maintain the format of an academic paper. They also became aware of the confidentiality issue regarding the identity of the survey participants which is important to maintain while collecting or decoding data for research purposes. Apart from that, one of the participants said that “series of feedback from the course instructor and the teaching assistant helped me to internalize the format of an academic paper. Once I submitted my write up with plagiarized content from the internet. My instructor then gave us a detailed lecture on the importance of maintaining academic honesty while writing an academic/research paper”.

### *3. Applicability in the Real World*

All the participants unanimously agreed that the term paper is hugely applicable for the real world. *One* of them said that this whole process would help them to write their dissertation which is a prerequisite to complete their graduation. Since this term paper was done in a group, it taught them to be resilient, cooperative with one another. One of the participants said that, “it developed my interpersonal skills, prepared me for real world tasks.”

#### 4. Feasibility to Execute the Plan

The moderator asked the discussants to comment on the aspects given of feasibility of the research paper.

- **Time Allocation:** Regarding the time allocation, the participants said that they have got “more than enough” time to complete their whole research project. One of the participants said that “since we got introduced with the whole process in the beginning of the semester and we submitted our work towards the end of semester, we had received almost three months to complete our term paper project which was “sufficient” for us.
- **Accessibility of Mentors’ Guidance:** The discussants said that they had received immense support and thorough guidance from their course instructor and teaching assistant whenever they needed. One of the participants said, “The instructor and the teaching assistants gave us detailed feedback on important aspects of the term paper which helped us to rectify our errors”. However, another participant said, “Although the TAs had always been very helpful, sometimes they behaved rudely with us... especially when we missed any deadlines”. But they also admitted that it was their mistake that they did not meet the deadline in spite of a recurrent reminder.
- **Teammates' Support and Help:** Different groups went through different kinds of experience in case of receiving necessary support and help from their teammates. Some of the groups were actively involved in the whole process; they made plans together, executed their ideas together and helped their teammates whenever they needed. While others struggled with some academically uninterested teammates, who frequently missed their group discussion and did not do any assigned task on time. They even had to complain to their respective course instructors to take some actions against those students. One of the participants added in this regard, “We really struggled with a few students in our team who remained invisible during group discussions and suddenly withdrew the course without prior notice; at that time, we had to reshuffle and redistribute some extra tasks among other group members”.
- **Scopes of Field Work:** Almost all the groups had to do field work as it was one of the integral parts of their term paper. They said that there were immense scopes of doing the field work but while doing that they “realized” they would need to follow some prior formalities in order to get the access to information of different organizations. ‘When we first approached the NGO that worked for street children for some relevant information, they refused to share any as we did not have any authorization letter. Later we took help from our university to get the letter in order to have the accessibility of the information.’ Another group said they looked for personal contact in the law enforcement agency in order to get an interview from a police inspector. “We knew that without personal contacts, we

would not get to obtain any insider information”, they added. A participant said that he faced a lot of problems in order to get authentic information from the respondents. “The teachers or administrative representatives neither admitted the existence of the admission business in the schools nor they disclosed any other important information; the interviewee gave diplomatic answers; this is very frustrating.” The survey respondents are also not “in a mood” sometimes to give answers. In this regard, a group added that “the respondents sometimes do not read the questionnaire properly and hurriedly pick random answers.”

- Availability of Online Resources: The participants seemed quite content on the availability of the online resources of their respective topics. They took help from different websites to write the literature review part. They said that they also read relevant journal articles by using Google scholar to get acquainted with the structure, style and language of an academic term paper.

#### 5. *Scopes of Using Technology*

According to the participants, in different stages of the term paper, they had immense scopes of using technology. They used Google scholar to know the guidelines, samples of the term paper; they watched “tons of YouTube tutorial” to understand the techniques of presenting data in bar charts and pie charts and they also presented their works in front of the class using PowerPoint slides. They said that whenever they came across new terms or unfamiliar ideas, they “Googled.” One of the participants said, “I relied a lot on technology while choosing an appropriate topic for my paper and also while gathering information about the traits of ambivert people...”. Another participant said that Google map was a great help for him while doing field work as it guided him to find out the addresses of different organizations where he had to go for interview purposes. Besides, in order to share ideas and updates of their work with their teammates, they used a “messenger” or “WhatsApp” platform and maintained correspondence with teachers and TAs via email.

#### 6. *Hurdles of Group Work & the Strategies to Overcome*

According to the participants the biggest hurdle of the group work was the “careless” and “irresponsible” attitude of some of the teammates in each group. “Not all the teammates were equally dedicated or committed to meet the deadlines set by our instructors,” one of the participants said. All the participants agreed with him and said that they often got into trouble for some of their teammates’ “irresponsible” and “unresponsive” behaviour. “My teammates broke his promises several times...at last I did his part as I needed to meet the deadline to avoid a penalty,” one of the participants vented out his frustration. Another team member added she even had to “threat” one of her teammates to write an application to the course instructor complaining against him. “I know I should not have threatened him in that way, but at that time, I could not think of any other options to deal with him,” she confessed.

### *7. Overall Impression or Suggestions*

Although the whole project seemed “rigorous” at different stages of implementation, their overall impression became “positive” towards the end of the project. The entire experience introduced them with the research design, academic ethics and ways of executing field work. However, they were “dissatisfied” over the fact that the university would not publish their term papers where they had put “unbelievable” effort.

The participants came up with some suggestions for the future betterment of this project:

- University should publish their work
- The instructors should provide adequate number of term paper samples from the previous semesters
- A few participants said that the project should be done individually as sometimes they have to go through “bitter” experiences for the irresponsible behaviour of some students.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

### **Discussion of the Research Question no 1**

It has been mentioned in the literature review part that there are eight guiding principles of project based learning and pedagogy designed for the new generation of teacher practitioners (Roessingh and Chambers, 2011). If we shed light on our study part, we would see that most of the principles have been incorporated in this term paper project. All the teachers are quite sound in the content knowledge of PBL and rich in pedagogical experiences. They ensure a proper learning atmosphere for their students so that they can attain their goals and objectives by themselves. The teachers motivate the students to choose a problem based topic from their surroundings, guide them to prepare a research proposal, conduct questionnaire and interview sessions and analyze those data in their term paper. Most of the students are found to be enthusiastically engaged with the whole process as they try to find the problems of real life issues. Of course, they receive guidelines, help and suggestions from their teachers whenever they ask for it. The teachers follow the criteria of alternative assessment to assess students works in different phase of this project as alternative assessment is more suitable when the students do an “authentic demonstration” of what they have learnt in the classroom (Sanders, 2016, p.63)

### **Discussion of the Research Question no 2**

As per the information of the interview and FGD, this project-based task helped learners to be autonomous in multiple ways-

- Topic Selection: In the initial phase of the project, the teachers suggest their students to choose an appropriate, relatable topic on their own from their

surrounding context so that they do the whole task with utmost interest and dedication. By choosing a relevant topic from their surroundings, they not only become autonomous participants but also become more empathetic human beings.

- **Group Work:** As the participants have to do the term paper in a group, the students divide tasks among themselves, set goals and deadlines for each activity, discuss relevant issues and solve problems on their own. They learn to make important decisions on their own which help them to develop their leadership skills.
- **Field Work:** They have to prepare questionnaires and distribute those to different organizations and groups. They need to talk to people to fill up the questionnaires, convince interviewees to give interview slots, etc. They also need to persuade people/authorities of different organizations to give them access to authentic information for their research work. All these experiences help them to develop interpersonal skills and make them a more self-reliant individual.
- **Use of Technology:** Using technology for various purposes also makes the participants self-dependent. They read journal articles using Google Scholar, watch Youtube tutorials for presenting, analyzing and putting data in excel sheets, etc.

The teachers deliberately create scopes for the students to make them self-reliant because the teachers know that, in near future, the students have to do this kind of project on their own to complete their graduation. Moreover, in their professional lives they will thrive if they properly utilize the lessons that they have learnt from this project. Our students get to experience the practice of learner autonomy to a great extent starting from the topic selection to presenting their project. The course instructor plays the role of a facilitator, and the students can work collaboratively under the guidance of the teacher. Therefore, it ensures the notion of “voice the choice” and Zone of Proximal Development. Moreover, students can also get the exposure to the use of authentic language while conducting their surveys where they can apply their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities (Güven and Valais, 2014). Besides, when they engage themselves in different field works to collect data, they have the opportunities to observe different cultural and social components, and it can assist them in raising cultural awareness and being informed about the social relevance of their studies. It is a gradual process of achieving an autonomous approach not only in the academic settings but also in the social settings (Kumaravadivelu, 1994).

### **Discussion of the Research Question no 3**

From the findings part it has become evident that both the teachers and the learners of PBL have faced multifaceted challenges. The challenges, faced by the teachers, can be categorized into three different sections. The teachers faced challenges regarding-



- Teaching the format of an academic paper
- Dealing with the psychological barrier of a student
- Instilling ethical aspects of a research paper into the students

On the other hand, according to the learners, the biggest challenge was for them to cope with the “unresponsive” and “irresponsible” team members who jeopardized their group work for their lack of dedication towards the collaborative project work. It is true that the learners initially faced difficulties in comprehending the format and content of the work and in conducting field work. But they eventually learned to overcome those challenges. However, the learners complained recurrently regarding the “problematic” team members for whom they had to “redistribute” and “reshuffle” their group work several times.

If we analyze the encountered difficulties of the instructors and the learners, we will see the teachers’ perspective is very different from the learners. While the teachers talked about the issues regarding teaching the format or ethical aspects of a research paper, the learners mentioned dealing with the “irresponsible” teammates was the biggest challenge for them. The teachers found that even after repeated instructions, numerous groups submitted term papers with plagiarized contents. Those learners failed to understand the necessity of writing “original” research papers. In this regard, one of the teachers said that instilling ethics into the learners was very difficult as they were “quite immature” and “do not have any prior knowledge” regarding this. As a matter of fact, the students rely heavily on the provided materials by the teachers and their respective institutions in their SSC and HSC levels. They even manage to get a good GPA by memorizing the contents of their textbooks and notebooks. They hardly need to do any assignments or need to write any analytical paper as a prerequisite for passing SSC and HSC level. Hence, while doing the term paper, they tried to apply the same techniques. They relied heavily on the internet resources and were susceptible to copy contents from there.

Now, if we shed light on the education culture of the national curriculum of Bangladesh, we would be able to understand the reasons behind the difficulties of some learners in coping with the team members during a group project. The students of Bangla Medium and National Curriculum of Bangladesh, often get little or no opportunity of doing group work in their school and college levels. Regarding the English language education system, Al (Amin & Greenwood, 2018) has suggested that.

If Bangladesh is to achieve its goals of preparing its students to be competent in spoken as well as written English and to be effective communicators in real life situations, then its education processes need to include not only practice in oral language but also opportunities for spontaneous, creative and contextually relevant use of language, rather than the rote learning that currently widely predominates. (p 12)

As the students of national curriculum of Bangladesh do not get any exposure of real-life tasks in their SSC and HSC levels, they often do not know how to

contribute to a group work or how to actively participate in project work. When they get group projects or assignments in their university levels, some of them fail to follow the teacher's instructions and behave inappropriately with their group members by being inactive or unresponsive with their assigned tasks.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The findings part of the study unfolded multifaceted problems of incorporating project-based task at the university level English courses. Most of the problems had been addressed and resolved by the teachers who played the role of guide, facilitator, monitor, editor, instructor, etc. at different levels of the project work. Here one thing is clear that, the traditional method of assessment would not be applicable in this case as it fails to evaluate to what extends learners' meet the objectives of this kind of project work. Alternative assessment methods are considered as one of the most suitable methods of assessment for this kind of teamwork and hence project-based learning has been used as a tool of assessing students in this case. By following PBL as a tool of assessment, most of the learning outcomes of the project have been achieved as most of the students showed willingness to get involved in the assigned real-life tasks and tried to perform the tasks with utmost sincerity. Through this term paper project work, they develop leadership quality, learn to form critical thinking skill, become problem solver, and most importantly, evolve as autonomous learners. However, few students were unresponsive in their group works and were found to adopt unfair means while writing the term papers. They submitted their final drafts with plagiarized contents and tampered data. Now, the question is- do we need to blame only these students who became susceptible to plagiarize even after receiving recurrent feedbacks from their teachers?

The discussion part revealed the potential answer to this question. It suggested that students should not be blamed solely for their irresistible temptation towards copying. Since these students have little or no experience of involving in group work or project based work and writing an original assignment in their SSC and HSC levels, they failed to meet the criteria of project based learning in their tertiary level. In order to mitigate the possibilities of failure, the curriculum planners should create more scopes of group work, project works at different levels. Since the inclusion of group works "allows teachers to increase educational effectiveness and allows students to learn transferable professional skills", it should be made mandatory to integrate group works in the lesson plans of primary, secondary or tertiary levels to make the learners more creative, and more prepared to face the challenges of the real world (Zedda, Bernardelli & Maran, 2017, p 10)

However, this study has its own limitations. More teachers, students, and universities should be involved in this study in order to get a much comprehensible view of the successful implementation of PBL in developing learners' autonomy. Despite the limitations, this study exhibits that the PBL helps the learners to be autonomous if the teachers create perfect learning environment to help students

execute their plan in the right direction. Moreover, whenever the students will feel frustrated or unmotivated in different phases of their projects, the teachers need to keep their spirit up by providing practical suggestions and guidance. According to Kizkapan & Bektas (2017), “In order to increase the potential of PBL, projects should be designed that promote student motivation and metacognitive thinking skill. Teachers should also be supported in creating PBL” (p 48)

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