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## THE APPLICATION OF PROJECT-BASED LEARNING (PBL) IN TEACHING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES (ESP) IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDONESIA

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### Abstract

This study aims to identify the impacts of applying project-based learning in English as Specific Purposes (ESP) classes in Islamic higher education. This research was held in the department of Family Law, Shariah and Law, State Islamic University Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta. The study conducted a qualitative approach to explore students learning process. A semi-structured interview, class observation, and a test were used to collect the data of 40 student participants. The interpretation process and coding were conducted to analyse the data. The finding revealed ESP through PBL succeed to improve 87.5% of students in their English achievement. The PBL process also encouraged students in learning discipline and motivated them to solve the learning problems.

**Keywords:** ESP; PBL; teaching English; legal English; higher education

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi dampak penerapan pembelajaran berbasis proyek di kelas English as Specific Purposes (ESP) di perguruan tinggi Islam. Penelitian ini dilaksanakan di Jurusan Hukum Keluarga, Syariah dan Hukum, Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan pendekatan kualitatif untuk mengeksplorasi proses belajar siswa. Wawancara semi terstruktur, observasi kelas, dan tes digunakan untuk mengumpulkan data dari 40 siswa peserta. Proses interpretasi dan pengkodean dilakukan untuk menganalisis data. Temuan tersebut mengungkapkan ESP melalui PBL berhasil meningkatkan 87,5% siswa dalam prestasi bahasa Inggris mereka. Proses PBL juga mendorong siswa dalam kedisiplinan belajar dan memotivasi mereka untuk memecahkan masalah pembelajaran.

**Kata kunci:** ESP; PBL; mengajar bahasa Inggris; legal English; Pendidikan Tinggi

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## Introduction

The complexity of teaching English at a non-English major at the university level has not been put to an end. There is some diffuse understanding and implementation of English, ranging from university-level to program. One possible reason to this situation is that there has not been any clear guideline of how English in non-English major should be taught; in fact, the purpose of including English subject in non-English major has not been explicitly stated.

It is stipulated in the Ministry of Education and Culture decree number 232/U/2000 that English is a 'compulsory' subject taught at the university level in Indonesia, and each has the autonomy to include and design the subject in their learning contexts. This has caused multiple interpretations that the subject implemented differently in various contexts. Masduqi (2011) argued that the aim of teaching English to students in non-English majors is to help students understand learning resources commonly in English and enable students to communicate intelligibly, especially in their field of study.

To the extent of application, although most English teachers agree that the subjects should be convened based on the notion of English for Specific Purposes (hereafter, ESP), how the subject is implemented in the classroom setting are varied. For example, Marwan (2015) reported that some English teachers teach general English skills that integrate four language skills and focused on TOEFL tests. These students need to pass the minimum TOEFL score as they graduate. In comparison, Alwasilah (2010) stated that most English courses at university focused on grammar and neglected the need for productive skills such as communicating in written and oral form.

One of the aims of learning a language is to solve learners' problems through the language. Since learners of English have various needs, language programs then should be able to overcome this. English for Specific Purposes then becomes the solution, as implied by its name ESP program concerned with learning English in a particular field.

ESP program began to rise in the 1960s; according to Richards (2001), there are several conspicuous reasons behind the emergence of the ESP program, such as the need to prepare non-English native speakers who are learning in American and British universities; the need to prepare materials for language learners who have completed general English program but they would like to further their learning; and the need to provide materials for business English.

Commonly, the notion of teaching ESP in non-English majors is interpreted by providing reading text in the learners' field of study. Seemingly, this is promising because the texts can be rich resources for students to learn. Students will at least learn vocabularies that they may find as they further their study. Nonetheless, the notion of ESP is not limited to having a repertoire of vocabulary that they need in their study. In addition, the aim of teaching English for non-English majors is to enable students to purposes of teaching English to students in non-English major to help students understand learning resources commonly in English and enable students to communicate intelligibly, especially in their own field of study. ESP program is considered to be able to meet learners' needs because the program emphasizes the context in which the language will be used by learners (Day & Krashinsky, 2011). For instance, students majoring in law will learn English using materials related to their field, such as legal and Islamic legal English. Since

learning is contextually bounded, the ESP program is expected to be able to motivate learners as they learn materials relevant to their needs.

Based on the above assumption, project-based learning (PBL) is designed in line with ESP notions. Materials are chosen based on the rationale that learners will encounter their specific needs and situation. A research confirms that English lecturers teaching in a variety of majors claimed that they select materials relevant to students' needs; however, its application is still quite the maximum (Kourieos & Evripidou, 2013). Furthermore, project-based learning facilitates students to improve their language skills.

Selecting relevant materials is the basic need for teaching English in ESP programs. Nevertheless, this should not be the only primary concern. Another aspect that needs to be taken into consideration in the ESP program in teaching strategies is precise assessment (Dudley-Evans 1998). Bearing the above concern, this research aims to explore the implementation of ESP Legal and Economics Sharia faculty and how PBL can facilitate students to improve their language skills.

### **Definition of English for Specific Purposes (ESP)**

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) uses a special topic appropriate with the occupied areas of learners' study. ESP program combines scientific fields with English. ESP is widely believed as an English program that can cater materials, methodology and strategy in learning English for specific students (Dudley, 1998; Hutchinson and Waters, 1990; Mackay and Mountford. 1992; Morrison. 2001; Pradhan, 2013; Robinson. 1988; Shabani & Khoshkholgh, 2012). The term "Specific" in ESP refers to the specific purpose in learning English (Hutchinson and Waters. 1990). Students approach the English language through a field of science that is relevant to their field. This means they can use what they learn in the ESP classroom directly in their studies. ESP approach will provide information on the relevance of what they learn through English, so learning English will be very fun and easy for them.

This can motivate students because they can learn English simultaneously and apply their knowledge based on their scientific field. Their skills in a particular field will ultimately improve their English achievement. Subject/materials used to provide the context of understanding that they need to learn English (Hutchinson and Waters. 1990; Morrison. 2001).

There are two goals for teaching ESP programs; first is acquiring content knowledge of a specific field, and second is developing English skills required to perform in the discipline (Pascoe, 2009). ESP is designed to meet the needs of the language, social and cultural background of users. It means that ESP cannot be separated from the Content-Based Instruction that emphasizes the teaching of English in context and relevant to the field's content.

### **Materials**

In learning English, ESP emphasises the context of the language rather than teaching grammar. ESP learners are generally cognizant of the purposes for which they will need to use English. Having oriented their education toward a specific field, they see English training as complementing this orientation. Knowledge of the subject area enables the students to identify a real context for the vocabulary and structure of the ESP classroom. As a result, they take

advantage of what they already know about the subject matter to learn English. The more meaningful and real context, the more interest and, accordingly, more successful learning (Far, 2008).

In other words, English teaching focused on the needs of each field, such as English for tourism, accounting, science, computers, economics, law and many others. ESP focus on teaching English that does not separate between subject matter and the fields of learners (Jeremy Day and Mark Krazanowski, 2011).

### Teaching Strategy

The convenient materials are a must in learning ESP. However, the accuracy of learning strategies becomes prominent in delivering ESP programs. Indonesia has already had appropriate materials of ESP which are built based on the needs of occupational learners. However, most learners have difficulties in achieving the lesson. This problem was found because the teacher could not deliver the material in the appropriate strategy. Teacher centre becomes the favourite way in teaching it. Another reason, learners try to understand the text and translate it into their native language (Umami, 2012; Dewi, 2012; Fahriany, 2009). This weakness makes the ESP teaching in the field failed. Whereas, Dudley-Evans (1998) emphasize ESP purpose should related orientation. This regards the learning strategy, such as business, marketing, creating a logo, and so on (Carver, 1983). Afterwards, a self-direction about 'what, when and how' is also essential in learning ESP (Dudley-Evans, 1998). Therefore, the emphasis in the ESP program is not only on teaching materials but also on teaching strategies. Some strategies can be implicated in teaching English (Hill, 2011). First, Presentation, Practice and Production, or PPP as it is called, is one of the most common teaching methodologies for ESL. Presentation is presenting the current language lesson to the student. Depending on the curriculum chosen, this could sound, parts of speech, vocabulary, sentence structure and grammar. Generally, between 65 and 90 per cent of class time is spent on the presentation component. Next, the students will practice what they are learning through activities that require them to speak English. Practice exercises should progress toward mastery of the concepts presented. The final component is Production, an advanced form of Practice that requires students to think independently rather than completing the more closely targeted Practice exercises. The steps are generally sequential, progressing from little student involvement to maximum student involvement. Beginning teachers often have success using the PPP methodology. Second, ESA, or Engage, Study and Activate, is different from PPP in that students move more freely among the three stages in this methodology. Noted teacher and teacher-trainer Jeremy Harmer (2001), certified by The International House and author of the classic ESL treatise "The Practice of English Language Teaching," stresses the Engagement phase, particularly during early lessons. He notes that students do not always come to the classroom motivated to learn; some students need their teachers to engage them and create a desire for language mastery. Finally, The goal of any language program is to develop fluency. The student must invest both time and energy to build fluency. The PPP methodology can help produce fluency because it creates from least student involvement to most student involvement, giving students a chance to learn and demonstrate their increasing abilities. The risks they take are progressively more prominent, which adds to their self-confidence.

## ESP and PBL

In learning English, Project-Based Learning (PBL) is an effective strategy in studying and assessing students' progress. PBL encourages students to explore ideas, solve problems, share information and work cooperatively and independently. Therefore, the effects of learning such as behaviours and cognitive strategies can be easily identified by teachers. In addition, PBL is a suitable strategy in the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) program since it is designed to meet content knowledge of a specific field and develop English skills required to perform in the discipline. This essay will explore the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is a systematic teaching method that engages students in learning essential knowledge and extends skills where learners are placed in situations in which they use authentic language to accomplish particular objectives. As a part of the process, learners plan, work on complex tasks, and assess their performance and progress; a project is designed around issues, questions or needs identified by learners (McMay et al. 2013). English for Specific Purpose is widely believed to be an English program that can provide materials, methodology and strategy in learning English that are used in a particular area.

Combining ESP and PBL in some integrated subjects is also effective in developing students' learning and language abilities. Stoller (2002) stated that learning ESP through PBL tends to invite students' learning independence and linguistic skills development; for example, PBL was applied in English for ICT class, Faculty of Science, University of Peloponnese, Greece. The teacher designed an E-class for first semester students where they should do virtual learning to find out any information to support the topic they had chosen. Pupils were encouraged to do a self-study by exploring useful sites and suitable resources from the internet; thus, it aimed at those students to learn how to comprehend, summarize, paraphrase, and do the reference of the materials. Furthermore, they were also permitted to communicate with faculty members by using an online forum (Mamakou and Grigoriadou 2009, 126-135). PBL strategy in this program revealed some benefits as follows. Firstly, students had big responsibility for their tasks and were motivated to finish their projects on time. Secondly, the program improved students' ability in learning English; therefore, the teacher met a convenience in delivering the lesson. Finally, the curriculum design led to the renewal strategy of learning that centered on technology usage. From those findings, PBL as a student-centered strategy might enhanced learners' efficacy in learning ESP because the chance of self-study develops students' progress in learning the language. If it is compared with other learning form models like quizzes, PBL would be more effective in inviting students' creativity to study ESP. The quiz assesses students' ability by closed questions; consequently, students lose their confidence and feel distressed. In the learning-based project, students actively observe their accomplishments and gain enduring feedback to reflect on their performance; as a result, they would be aware of their improvement.

Therefore, the benefit of students' awareness of their achievement in learning English related to their fields would create their confidence in facing a workplace. In other words, Learning ESP through PBL effectively prepares students' skills in their career; for instance, a program called English for Civil Engineering (ECE) which conducted research of PBL, considered that it might develop learners' quality and confidence in a workplace. To reach the

goal, students were stimulated to acquire their English communication skills; thus, they may practice negotiating with those professionals. Other academic sources such as books, journals and internet were also needed to support the data; consequently, students came up with some literature studies.

At the end of the course, they presented the data they had collected and made some argumentations from other sources to support the topic (Raof and Yusof 2006, p 6-10). Although the research did not give some clear findings of the effectiveness of doing a project in the actual workplace, doing such research before the class begins might introduce learners to understand more about what they are going to learn. The inference of materials mainly facilitates learners to understand the subject, and it would invite their critical thinking.

It can be concluded that PBL facilitates the integration between ESP and other subjects where students could work on the project with specific English. As a result, students may have minor difficulties learning the language because it relates to their fields' content. Based on the research findings, learning ESP through PBL may build some learning behaviours such as critical thinking, independent learning, self-efficacy, learning discipline and learning management; consequently, learners would be ready to develop their skills in a workplace. It can be suggested that promoting PBL in learning ESP may help teachers deliver English language content effectively. Furthermore, at the end of the learning, students are good at understanding English and could also create and design a product resulting from their achievement.

## Evaluation

ESP program also should be supported by the precise assessment. In Indonesia, ESP is only measured by state exams. Other matters related to measuring ESP skills are not used as a benchmark of student learning success (Far, 2008). However, an authentic assessment drives the curriculum. Those teachers first determine the task that students will perform to demonstrate their mastery. Then a curriculum is developed that will enable students to perform those tasks well, which would include the acquisition of essential knowledge and skills (Richard. 2001).

For instance, the teacher is a resource that helps students identify their language learning problems and find solutions to them, find out the skills they need to focus on and take responsibility for making choices that determine what and how to learn. The teacher will serve as a source of information to the students about how they are progressing in their language learning.

## Method

This research aims to identify how students perceive PBL. Relevantly, qualitative design was selected; as Creswell (2007) points out that human perception and attitude can be best investigated through a qualitative approach. Further, qualitative design suits this research as it takes account of the research context (Nunan, 1997) Data were collected throughout a semester in order to attain a thorough picture of how PBL was implemented.

The research participants were second-semester students at the Family Law Department in an Islamic university in Jakarta. Forty students participated in the research, consisted of 24 male and 16 female students. These participants were selected based on two criteria: first, they study at

the Family Law department, which implies that these students are studying family Islamic laws such as marriage, polygamy, divorce, legacy, etc. These learning materials are considered to be flexible in that learning resources are accessible in several languages, including English. Second, the participants have Islamic legal backgrounds, which support them to comprehend materials in legal English. This knowledge helped students to build their conceptual thinking framework as they performed the project (Haerazi & Irawan, 2019).

## Research Instrument

### Data collection

In this study, the researcher had a role as a non-participant observer (Merriam 1998 cited in Alwasilah 2000) during the data collection process. Since this study is designed as qualitative and descriptive, Gray (1990) said that descriptive data are usually collected an observation, interview, questionnaire or interview. Therefore, instruments were employed to obtain data for the study as follows:

The researcher carried out class observations as Maxwell (1996) said that through observation researcher would get some data that cannot be acquired through questionnaires or interviews, such as participants' tacit understanding and how theory- in-use.

Classroom observation aims to see the actual process of assessment carried by participants. To observe the class, the researcher used field notes. Since the online learning has proceeded on this research, most of the sessions have been recorded. The researcher informed students that they were recorded and observed during the learning process. The classes were observed carefully until the researcher was able to gain a vivid picture of the implementation of the textbook in the class. The researcher was also present during the process of the mid-semester test and final test. During the observation, some assessment tools applied by teachers were collected.

Questionnaires were administered to participants of the research. The questionnaires functioned as pre-interview activities for some of the participants. The questionnaires are divided into two parts. First is the participants' data. It is used to attain information about teachers' backgrounds, such as personal data and educational background.. The questionnaire included both open-ended questions and questions with fixed alternatives. The questionnaire was written in Bahasa Indonesia to ensure a complete understanding of the items by participants.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of interpreting and making sense of the collected materials (Boglan and Biklen 1992). The research questions guided data analysis Data gathered from questionnaires and observations were coded and classified based on research questions. Each classification was analysed and interpreted. The interpretation was limited to the data findings to produce grounded theory on the phenomenon observed in this theory. A statistical description was conducted to describe the percentage of students' responses to the questioners.

## Results and Discussion

In this section, we discuss the findings, including students' treatment and students' surveys on their treatment responses. In the planning, generally, the researchers designing a lesson

plan and teaching strategies. We compiled themes related to family law, starting from English vocabulary, phrases, and texts. The orientation in this learning is reading and writing. Therefore, we emphasize understanding vocabulary and sentence structure. The sentence structure that we have developed starts from simple sentences, compound sentences, and complex sentences. In types of writing, we provide an understanding of descriptive, narrative, and argumentative texts.

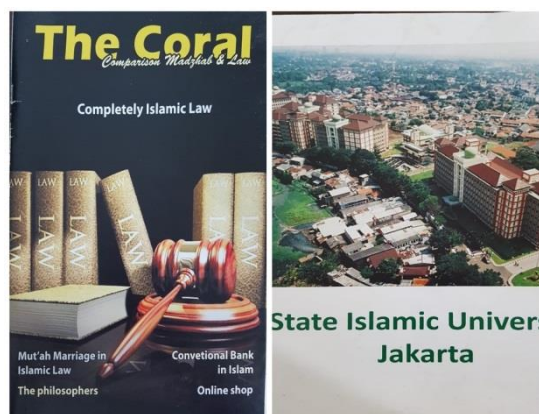


Figure 1. A Sample of Student Bulletin on Islamic Law

In the analysis of data observation and students' achievement, researchers compiled the students' score in the following table 1.

Table 1. Students' Score on Essay Writing

No	Participants	Before treatment	After treatment	No	Participants	Before treatment	After treatment
1	Student 1	62	75	23	Student 23	70	80
2	Student 2	66	73	24	Student 24	74	85
3	Student 3	72	75	25	Student 25	75	80
4	Student 4	60	80	26	Student 26	75	85
5	Student 5	70	77	27	Student 27	75	80
6	Student 6	65	80	28	Student 28	75	77
7	Student 7	72	85	29	Student 29	75	80
8	Student 8	50	75	30	Student 30	75	80
9	Student 9	70	80	31	Student 31	77	85
10	Student 10	60	76	32	Student 32	70	70
11	Student 11	74	80	33	Student 33	72	77
12	Student 12	72	80	34	Student 34	70	80
13	Student 13	70	73	35	Student 35	70	85
14	Student 14	75	80	36	Student 36	72	80
15	Student 15	70	75	37	Student 37	72	75
16	Student 16	70	73	38	Student 38	70	80
17	Student 17	71	78	39	Student 39	86	85
18	Student 18	70	80	40	Student 40	60	82
19	Student 19	70	80				
20	Student 20	66	77				
21	Student 21	60	85				
22	Student 22	70	78				



The table 1 describes students' achievements in writing the essay. Most students had upgraded their score, some remained the same, but none decreased their points. The detail can be seen on the table; students 4, 8, 21, and 40 had increased their points after the treatments. It can be seen those students could increase around 10-20 points on the final test. This is proved that the ESP on legal English has succeeded in improving students' language skills. This echoed the previous study conducted by Dja'far, Cahyono, and Bashtomi (2016) that ESP indeed improve students' English achievement. Moreover, the study suggested teachers apply ESP in teaching English, especially for students of Economics and Business (EEB).

Although the ESP through PBL could improve English student skills; nevertheless, the strategy somehow did not improve or slightly decrease students' performance. The score might not significantly change; however, it should be reported that ESP did not continually improve students' achievement. The table above mentions that student 32 gained a remaining score before and after treatment; 70 points. Moreover, student 39 had slightly decreased the score on the final test; 86 to 85 points. It might not provide a significant failure, but there was a reason why the student decreased their score. Based on an informal interview with the current students, they said that ESP was good at developing their understanding in reading the target language. However, they seem still need more practice in writing English.

I can understand the English text regarding Islamic law, but I have some difficulties drafting my opinion into a written task. (Student 32)

The text of Islamic knowledge helps me a lot in catching up on legal terms in English words. However, I need to be more careful in writing the essay, which might help me avoid significant mistakes. (Student 39)

The two statements above concluded that ESP helped them to understand English texts since the students have background knowledge on Islamic law. However, writing tasks seemed still a challenge for them to be improved. Based on an interview with the participants, some findings were recorded while students started writing a target language. First, about 17 (42.5%) students struggle in grammar, developing writing organisation, cohesion, and coherence. This mostly happened when they start writing complex sentences. Therefore, some students or about 10 (25%) participants decided to write the text in simple sentences. This related to a study conducted by Ariyanti and Fitriana (2017) that most students who practice writing an essay would struggle on developing organisation of the draft, grammar difficulties and dealing with coherence and cohesion among paragraphs.

Second, regarding students' learning motivation, the findings found that ESP through PBL motivated most of the students. There are at least 34, or 85% of students felt enjoyed and motivated in learning ESP. PBL, at this stage, encouraged them to read more sources before they started writing an essay.

I enjoyed learning about writing. I have been encouraged to develop my critical thinking on some issues and even do a little research to support my argumentation. (Student 35)

This is linked to a study conducted by Chiang and Lee (2016). They found that PBL enhanced students' motivation; they enjoyed practising and exploring. Moreover, students could

share their experiences and help others in order to solve the problem on the project they had (Chiang & Lee, 2016).

However, the current findings also found that four or around 10% of students complained that the ESP on PBL did not change their learning attitude. A participant mentioned that ESP in Islamic law still confused them when they found some terms were mentioned in Arabic, such as *qias*, *mut'ah*, or *sunnah*.

I expected that legal English might lead me to understand most of the Islamic terms. But I find some English texts did not change the Arabic terms like *sunnah* and *qias or mut'ah*. (Student 13)

This becomes a significant input for researchers to consider adding information related to some terminology in Islamic law into English. Further, if there is no equivalent word, the terms are explained in detail in the target language.

Learning ESP through PBL encourages students to get new information outside of English and Islamic law. For example, mostly, around 22 or 55% of students gained new knowledge related to education, health, and politics.

PBL opened up new knowledge for me, especially in education issues. In the process of searching for data on Islamic law education in madrasas, I finally found out that there are still many madrasas that still need learning facilities, especially in remote areas. (Student 28)

The students realised another factor: some Islamic schools struggled to develop their learning outcomes since the learning facilities in a madrasah in remote areas were still poor. Another experience of students indicated that the PBL process led them to understand the benefit of fasting for health.

When writing a discussion about "is it okay to exercise while fasting?" I got a lot of information about the benefits of fasting for health and how exercise for people who are fasting is very beneficial for health. (Student 10)

Finally, little research done in learning ESP through PBL helped students understand a political condition in the era of Prophets Muhammad PBUH.

Reading the history of Islamic law, I understand how the Prophet and his companions have built politics in Islam. (Student 40)

This is relevant with a review from 30 eligible journal articles conducted by Chen and Yang (2019) that PBL project-based learning has a medium to a large positive effect on students' academic achievement compared with traditional instruction. The study also stressed that in PBL, students experience exploring and solving authentic problems and producing artifacts or making presentations in class (Chen & Yang, 2019). This is clear that PBL has encouraged students' motivation, creativity, and critical thinking in learning a subject. Therefore, the findings in the current study have proved that the PBL has done an excellent influence on students' learning process.

## Conclusions

Teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is essential to develop particular language skills for students in higher education. Moreover, Project-Based Learning (PBL) as an approach tended to encourage students to learn independently, develop critical thinking, and produce an appropriate learning product.

In this current study, ESP with PBL approach was implemented in teaching English for Law in Syariah and Law Faculty, State Islamic University *Syarif Hidayatullah* Jakarta. The study indicated that ESP and PBL improve students' achievement, particularly on writing an essay in the target language. The finding revealed that most students succeed to improve their critical thinking on some Islamic legal issues. Moreover, most of them prosper to express their logic into a written task and create an internal bulleting as the learning product. The findings recorded that more than half class or 87.5% improved their writing skills. It was shown their increased the writing score significantly. Two factors had influenced this achievement. First, learning the target language with ESP has made it easier for students to understand legal terms in English. This is influenced by the background knowledge they have before they start learning English. Second, learning with the PBL approach supported students to gain experience and motivation in solving problems from various issues. Producing learning products such as writing essays in bulletins encouraged students to commit to completing the project on time.

The findings also revealed that PBL encouraged students to develop their learning discipline and motivation to solve problems. Some students were confident that ESP through PBL tended to support them learning many legal terms in the target language. Moreover, while involving the project, some realized that students gained more information than legal English, such as education, health, politics, and history.

Finally, the researchers suggested further research regarding ESP on the PBL approach in higher education since they still found some elements that needed improvement. For instance, the material content, like legal issues, might be suitable for students to understand the language; however, the lecturer still needs to support language tools such as grammar, writing structure and organizing essays before they are ready to write a target language. This could be started by making a student language diagnosis. Need analysis is also necessary to be done to look deeper into what students need to learn the target language. So that lecturers can prepare proper materials to fulfil students' necessities.

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