Seven Wonders: Bringing Student-Centered Learning into a Teacher-Centered Classroom

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Teachers in Uzbekistan tend to use a teacher-focused approach in their classes, where students concentrate on the teacher. However, student-centered learning has repeatedly been proven to motivate students and increase learning outcomes when they are given the autonomy to direct their own education (Kokotsaki, Menzies, and Wiggins 2016). The trend toward putting students at the center of learning is increasing globally. Nevertheless, many educational settings still retain the more traditional teacher-centered approach. As teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) to secondary students, we designed an adapted project-based learning (PBL) teaching method to introduce teachers and students alike to student-centered learning. For many of our students, this was their first time in a non-teacher-centered classroom setting. We chose an adapted form of PBL to foster creativity, independent thinking, and research skills, while also facilitating a gradual shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning. In addition, we had to consider the minimal technology resources available in the classroom, leading us to modify our methods by using paper and poster materials instead of digital presentations.

One of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World: The Pyramids of Giza (Egypt)

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INTRODUCING THE TASK

The adapted PBL activity focused on the Seven Wonders of the World. We acknowledged early on that limited classroom technology required adapting the research component of the project. Accordingly, we conducted advanced research and tailored the material to suit the students' needs. We then prepared handouts for distribution. These handouts included detailed descriptions and pictures of each Wonder. To uphold the principle of student-driven interest in the PBL activity, we incorporated 21 Wonders from the ancient, modern, and natural worlds (see Figure 1). To facilitate students' research, we provided

The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World
Colossus of Rhodes (Greece)
Hanging Gardens of Babylon (Iraq)
Mausoleum at Halicarnassus (Türkiye)
Lighthouse of Alexandria (Egypt)
The Pyramids of Giza (Egypt)
Statue of Zeus (Greece)
Temple of Artemis (Türkiye)

The Seven Wonders of the Modern World
Chichén Itzá (Mexico)
Christ the Redeemer (Brazil)
The City of Petra (Jordan)
The Great Wall (China)
Machu Picchu (Peru)
Roman Colosseum (Italy)
The Taj Mahal (India)

The Seven Wonders of the Natural World
Aurora Borealis [Northern Lights] (Many countries)
Grand Canyon (United States)
Great Barrier Reef (Australia)
Harbor of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)
Mount Everest (Himalayas)
Paricutin Volcano (Mexico)
Victoria Falls (Zambia and Zimbabwe)

Figure 1. The Wonders of the Ancient, Modern, and Natural Worlds

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a research guide, as most students were researching for the first time. The guidelines were categorized into two groups: required information and optional information

(see Figure 2). The optional information allowed the students to pursue their personal interests while conducting their research.

ADAPTED PBL IN ACTION

Because our students were unaccustomed to student-centered learning, we designed the PBL project with a gradual release of teacher responsibility to assist the students in gaining their own independence. The project consisted of four parts and took place over two 90-minute lessons. Part One was the most teacher-centered section of the project. We taught relevant vocabulary: *ancient world*, *modern world*, *natural world*, *man-made*, etc. We also reviewed description vocabulary, vocabulary related to dates and time, and sentence structures using *because*. In preparing the project, we decided that these terms were necessary for students to know and that reviewing would benefit their success in the project. The final step was to present the students with Figure 1 and ask them to think about which Wonder interests them the most.

Part Two shifted the focus from the teachers to the students by encouraging them to discuss ideas, gather data, and organize information. Rather than assigning a Wonder to the students, we gave them the opportunity to take charge of their own learning. The students were divided into groups of five, where they discussed their thoughts about the Wonders and came to a consensus on which one to research in detail. To streamline the negotiation process and guarantee that everyone participated, we assisted the students in their discussions. After the groups made their selection, we provided them with the prearranged handouts: an explanation of the Wonder and research guidelines. We also clarified that even though each student had

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One of the Seven Wonders of the Modern World: The Taj Mahal (India)

a specific role (handout researcher, online researcher, organizer, designer, and time coordinator), they all needed to take part in presenting the project (see Figure 2). Our choice to implement student roles for the PBL project permitted them to guide themselves more effectively. During the research time, we monitored their work and answered questions about unfamiliar words they encountered. Students who had cell phones were invited to use them for further research on their chosen Wonder.

After completing the research, the groups started working on their presentations, which marked the beginning of Part Three. They had to come up with a plan on how to present their findings to the class since digital presentations were not an option in our classroom. To assist them, we provided large paper and markers, which they used to write down the researched data and create visual aids (many groups made posters of their selected Wonder) that would help the audience comprehend the information effectively. The students also structured their presentations, deciding speaking order and involvement. During this part of the project, we monitored the students' progress by moving throughout the classroom, aiding with writing when asked for help, and reminding students of their remaining time.

Part Four, the final part of the adapted PBL task for students, was presenting their Wonder to the class. To ease anxiety, we permitted teams to select their presentation order. Each group showcased their poster and summarized their research by sharing the required information and their chosen optional information. After the presentations, we invited the students in the audience to ask follow-up questions to learn more about the Wonders.

REFLECTION

This was the students' first time learning in a non-teacher-centered class, and the students were able to achieve the learning objectives.

Required Information	Optional Information
1. What is its location? 2. Is it natural or man-made? 3. When was it built/created? 4. What is it famous for?	1. Why is it important? 2. Describe its design/appearance. 3. What are interesting facts about it? 4. What is its cultural/historical importance? 5. Why or how was it created?
Student Roles (Jobs)	**Required Responsibilities**
Handout Researcher Online Researcher Organizer Designer Time Coordinator	1. Everyone presents (speaking) 2. Everyone researches (reading) 3. Everyone writes (writing)

Figure 2. Required and optional information, roles, and responsibilities for groups

The students who asked to do more research using their cell phones initiated more autonomy and authority over their learning. By completing a poster project instead of a digital presentation, all students participated in the construction of the poster. Using images and graphics helped students demonstrate multimodal literacy. After completing the project, we asked the students for their opinion on the new learning technique. All students shared that they enjoyed the task because they were able to choose the research topic, take responsibility for their research, and be creative while making their presentation. Students also said that after presenting, they felt more confident in their English speaking skills; they liked the material and got to choose what to present.

ADAPTATIONS

While we used the topic of the Wonders of the World as a standalone project, teachers may adjust this adapted PBL format to match their own curriculum. The steps can be condensed to the following:

1. The teacher introduces the topic, teaches relevant vocabulary and phrases, and reviews language tied to the curriculum.

2. In small groups, students select their topic and gather information via research.

3. Student groups organize the information and create a presentation.

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One of the Seven Wonders of the Natural World: Aurora Borealis [Northern Lights] (Many countries)

4. Student groups present their research and answer questions from the class.

For example, if a teacher's unit focuses on sports, this adapted PBL format can be used as a final unit project. The teacher can present worldwide sports tournaments such as the ancient Olympics, as well as the Summer Olympics, Winter Olympics, and Paralympics, the World Cup, the Tour de France, and the Grand Prix. The teacher should then lead their students in learning related vocabulary that connects with the project's questions (such as in Figure 2) to guide the students' research:

1. How often does the event happen?

2. Which countries participate in the event?

3. What is the prize for the winner?

A final step to help teachers apply the adapted PBL project is for them to ask themselves:

1. Do my students have access to technology to conduct research? If so, consider whether you need to teach them how to do online research to find websites containing reliable information. If not, consider how you will present information to them (in our case, we printed out articles).

2. How much time can I devote to this project? PBL projects take time. For our class of 30 students, the project took place over two lessons (each lesson was 90 minutes), and everything was done in the classroom. If you are short on time, consider assigning certain parts as homework or have groups present in a gallery walk or a jigsaw format.

The transition from teacher-centered to student-centered learning was successful through the use of an adapted PBL activity. Now that the students have gained experience in research, idea generation, and autonomy, they are ready to take on a greater role in leading their own learning.

REFERENCE

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