

## **Project-Based EFL Speaking Activity: The English Funfair**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper explicates and justifies activities of the *Student English Funfair* (SEF) project, a campus event that is used to assess students English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking performances in an authentic setting outside the classroom. The paper details pedagogical practices and learning resources deployed in speaking classes. The interactions indicate that the SEF project coupled with Project Based Learning (PBL) provides opportunities for students to apply what they have learned in the classrooms and speak English in an authentic setting. Moreover, the project is a way to make the students practice communication, critical thinking, and creative and collaborative skills. The paper hopes to provide EFL teachers with materials that they can modify and implement in their EFL speaking classes. Further, the paper benefits teachers who need authentic speaking activities that provide opportunities for their students to practice speaking English beyond their classroom walls.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In early 2017, I got an opportunity to teach a speaking class situated in EFL contexts, in Central Java, Indonesia. Richards and Schmidt (2010) define EFL as a setting where people learn English in a formal classroom with limited opportunities to use the language outside their class. Interestingly, as one assessment in the course, all students had to complete a project-based English-speaking activity called SEF in the campus area. This project was unique as it enabled all students to interact with people who were not in their class. Specifically, it was in a setting where the people acted as customers and the students acted as sellers of meals and beverages created by the students with their group members. To frame a clear picture of how the SEF project was designed and implemented, this paper provides pivotal issues, such as a brief description of the speaking course; details on the implementation of the SEF project; and the rationale for designing the SEF with a PBL approach. This paper will be of interest of EFL lecturers who are looking for speaking materials that they may modify and use in their EFL classrooms and for those searching for authentic speaking activities that provide numerous opportunities for students to practice speaking English.

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The speaking course described in this paper is four-credits and compulsory for first-year university students held between January to April. The course requires students to come to class twice a week, which each session lasting a hundred minutes. More importantly, the students had to speak English during class. In addition, the course had students study

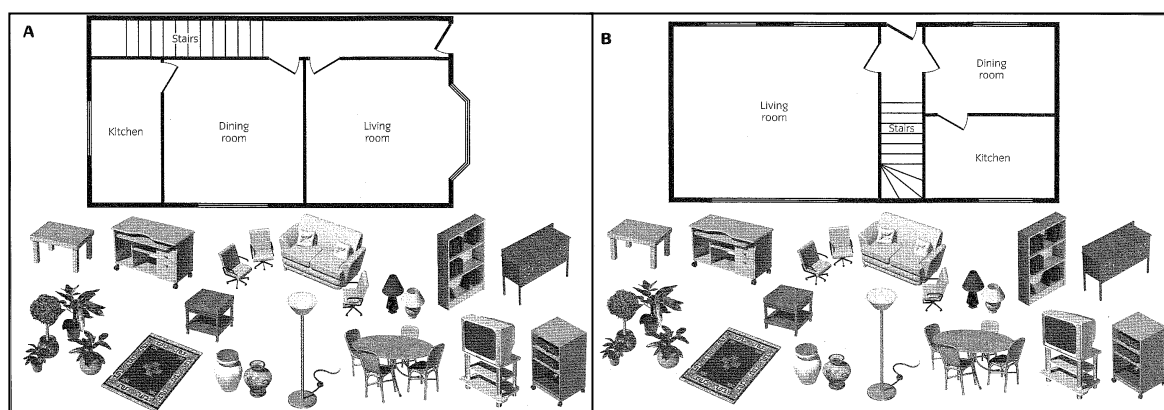
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vocabulary and language expressions to communicate in different social contexts, such as visiting a doctor, meeting people at a party, giving suggestions, and making complaints. These activities were followed by students practicing the certain expressions with their classmates through speaking games adapted by the lecturers from speaking materials from books; among others these included *Speaking naturally: Communication skills in American English* (Tillitt & Bruder, 1985); *Role plays for today* (Anderson, 2006); *Speaking extra: A resource book of multilevel skills activities* (Gammidge, 2004). For instance, the students played a game called *House Doctor* based on the following teachers' instructions (edited from Gammidge, p.32):

- Tell students they are going to be house doctors
- Put them in pairs (e.g. student A and B)
- Give out the picture (see figure 1)
- Ask them to look at the furniture and help each other with unknown words (if they still find any unknown words, they can ask other students)
- Write on the board: *What furniture is for a dining room? What are good colours for walls and furniture? What other things can be used? (e.g. paintings or mirrors)*
- Tell them that student A is the house doctor and student B wants help. Explain that they should look at student B's plan and talk about the board. Student B makes suggestions while student A decides what to do and then draws the items onto B's plan.
- After all suggestions are made, tell them student B is now the house doctor, and they should do the same with A's plan.

**FIGURE 1**  
**The Student A and Student B Housing Plan**



The classroom activities, which were done by all lecturers, usually started with a ten to fifteen-minute lecture that discussed language expressions which focused on ways to pronounce specific words in the expressions, use intonations when saying particular words, and review the speaking games which were to be performed on the particular day. Following the lecture, students played the speaking games prepared by the lecturers and practiced the pronunciation and intonation of the words and expressions. During the speaking games, the lecturers walked around the class to observe students, noted speaking problems (e.g., pronunciation, vocabulary, and body language), and ensured that they were using the targeted English language expressions. The lecturers sometimes joined the speaking activities to encourage students to talk more actively. At the end of the course, the lecturers reinforced the language discussed in the lecture and allowed time for students to make inquiries if they needed clarification.

The course applied different types of assessment to assess the students' speaking skills. These assessments included a speaking test and a graded role-play. The last type of assessments was the SEF project. At the end of the course, students should be able to [1] communicate orally using appropriate language functions and vocabulary in various social contexts, and [2] reflect on their speaking ability and their learning. Furthermore, students are expected to [3] increase their self-confidence in speaking English and [4] master the knowledge of constructing elements of English communication (Sinanu, 2017). To gain more insight into how this project was implemented, the specific roles of the students, the lecturers, and the visitors will be explained to allow clear explanations on how the project was carried out.

## THE ENGLISH FUNFAIR

### Students' Roles

The students worked in groups of five students to create light meals, name them with unique terms, and sell them in a small stall at a fair that was opened to the public. They were also allowed to sell other beverages they created at the stall. The food and drink should be the students' original creation; therefore, they could not buy any products sold in a supermarket and sell them at their stall (see Figure 2).

**FIGURE 2**  
**Examples of Students' Stalls at the Venue**



For this reason, members of the group had to spend a certain amount of their money, for instance, to buy necessary ingredients for creating their food and drink as well as supporting equipment for selling their products, such as plastic boxes and spoons. They could decide how much money they would spend, which was mostly based on the meals or drinks they wanted to create and necessary equipment to decorate their stall.

The students also had to think of ideas to attract people's attention to visit their stall and, finally, buy their products. Some groups decided to wear colorful and unique clothes that represented the products they sold, while some other teams offered fun games for visitors and gave them gifts if they won the game. Two groups were creative by providing photo booth corners where visitors could take photographs with rich backgrounds. Furthermore, groups discussed and decided times to meet to prepare for the event. Students needed to negotiate any conflicting views because the group members were from a various cultural, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

During the event, the students received tickets (see Figure 3) from the visitors who bought the meal and drink in their stall. The visitors got the tickets at the committee desk and each ticket was valued at 1000 rupiahs. At the end of the event, the students could contact the committee to redeem all tickets they got with rupiah. In other words, the students did not receive any cash money from the visitors during the event.

**FIGURE 3**  
**The Tickets Used to Buy Food and Drink**



In essence, the students had freedom to think creatively about what kinds of meals and beverages to sell in their stall as well as on how they could attract the attention of the visitors to collect the most tickets. Sinanu (2017) noted that the students might donate the rupiah they earned to some charity activities inside or outside their campus. The subsequent section provides more details on the roles of the visitors who needed to purchase the tickets to buy items sold in the stalls.

### **The Visitors' Roles**

Since the fair site was on campus, the visitors were mostly second and third-year students. Nevertheless, some students from study programs at the university also visited the stalls. Some of the visitors were also academic and non-academic staff members of the university. None of the visitors needed to purchase an entrance ticket to visit the fair site. Nevertheless, they had to buy a book of (ten) tickets if they wished to buy any food and drink sold at the students' stall. A book of ten tickets costs 10.000 rupiahs. As an illustration, the visitors had to give three tickets to the students when they wanted to get a drink that costs 3000 rupiahs. Then, the visitors should speak English to communicate with the students in the stall. For instance, the visitors might ask the students about the price of a particular meal, the concepts of the booth, and reasons for choosing the name(s) of their product(s).

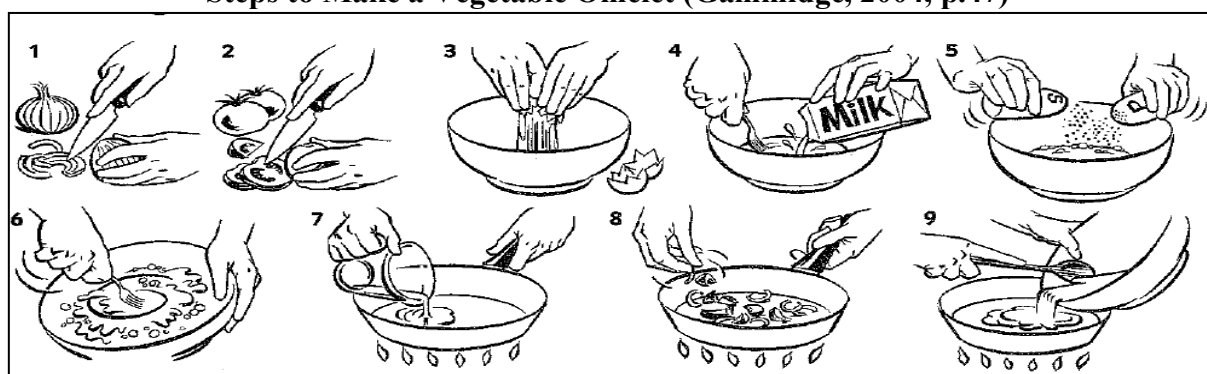
### **The Lecturers' Roles**

In the SEF project, the roles of the lecturers were as follows. Firstly, they explained to their students about the purposes of doing the project, such as providing opportunities to speak in English with people outside their classroom and to help them achieve the learning outcomes [1,3,4] of the course. Telling the students of the purpose of doing a particular English-speaking activity is important and this instructional practice has been supported by Mali's study (2015) which investigated college students in Indonesia. Secondly, the lecturers taught the students about the language expressions and vocabulary needed to communicate in that particular setting. For instance, the students studied vocabulary of food ingredients (nouns) and instructions (verbs) to cook a meal taken from Gammidge (2004, p.46). Some

nouns included cheese, cucumber, oil, omelet, lemon, milk, lettuce, salt, pepper, and tomato, while the verbs covered beat, boil, cut, fry, slice, stir, and pour. After studying the vocabulary, the students played a game that practiced giving instructions by having students explaining steps (see Figure 4) to cook a meal. The example of the instructions of the game is as follows:

*Form a group of five students. Give instructions on how to cook the meal (e.g., Figure 1) to your team member sitting on your left to act out the instructions you will say. Other team members have to guess the name of the meal. If your teammates cannot guess it, you have to repeat the instructions and actions. Repeat until everyone has done the instruction, act, and guess. (Edited from Gammidge)*

**FIGURE 4**  
**Steps to Make a Vegetable Omelet (Gammidge, 2004, p.47)**



Thirdly, they set a timeline for the students to do some preparation for the project, such as discussing roles of each group member, and deciding what meals and beverage to sell. After deciding what to sell, students worked on contacting the university personnel to reserve the site for the event and to prepare tents and tables for the stalls. They also asked some senior students on the committee of the event. The senior students help to print the tickets, sell them during the event, and photograph SEF activities on the day. Finally, the lecturers observed their students on how they communicated in English with the visitors and assessed their English-speaking performances during the event. The lecturers were allowed to also act as visitors who wanted to buy things in the stall and communicated with the students in English to assess their speaking skills.

### **WHY PROJECT-BASED LEARNING?**

The SEF project was coupled with PBL instruction. Slater, Beckett, and Aufderhaar (2006) assert that PBL is a social practice that provides opportunities for students to socialize by doing some group activities that include simultaneous learning of language, content, and skills. In the SEF project, the language learning took place when students interacted with others (visitors) in English, specifically to offer the food and drink at the stall as well as to respond to any inquires that they had about the products sold at the booth and the activities that the students were doing. In the interactions, the students could apply some of the language expressions they studied in the classroom, such as greeting people, handling conversation, and selling products. If the visitors spoke in their first language, *Bahasa Indonesia*, the students were asked to keep talking in English and had to encourage the visitors to speak using the same language.

Moreover, PBL is also collaborative learning in that it provides students with opportunities to “work together to solve a problem and learn from each other as they co-construct knowledge” (Whatley, 2012, p.77) and to seek answers to their questions and to conduct a comprehensive investigation into a problem (Lam, Cheng, & Ma, 2009). The students had to work in groups of five to discuss some pivotal inquiries, such as sharing responsibilities and creating items that would attract visitors to come to their stall. Working in the group also provided students opportunities to learn from their group mates specifically what language they needed to use in the event. For instance, they could practice using the language expressions with their group mates who at the same time helped to correct mispronunciations that they made.

All the activities in the SEF project are in line with the four core skills of the twenty-first century as stated by Davila (2016) (see Table 1). Those four skills include communication, critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration. Specifically, Davila mentions that those skills require students to be able to perform an individual and/ or group task in a highly technologically advanced atmosphere and be ready in performing daily and global interactions. Further, the students are required to be adaptive, flexible, and creative and need skills to plan, build, and collaborate with their group mates.

**TABLE 1**  
**Summary of SEF Activities**

No	The core skills	Activities
1	Communication	Interacting with the visitors in English (e.g., to offer food and drink in the students’ stall, to respond to any inquiries that the visitors have about things the students sold) <sup>[a]</sup>
2		Deciding the meal and beverage to sell <sup>[b]</sup> Naming the food and drink with unique terms <sup>[c]</sup>
3	Critical thinking, Creativity	Deciding amount of money to spend for buying necessary ingredients <sup>[d]</sup> Sharing the equal responsibilities for every group member <sup>[e]</sup> Arranging the preparation time <sup>[f]</sup> Thinking of ideas to attract people’ attention to visit the stall <sup>[g]</sup>
4	Collaboration	Creating the meal and beverage <sup>[h]</sup> Practicing using the language expressions with their group mates <sup>[i]</sup> Helping to correct mispronunciations <sup>[j]</sup>

The essence of collaboration and communication noted by Davila (2016) is reinforced by the recent literature (Alber, 2014; Griffin, 2015). For instance, Griffin specifically mentioned that teachers need to prepare their students in finding new ways to work that highlight the essence of their communication and collaboration skills. Further, Griffin postulates that people could be more successful in their workforce if they can interact with people to get information, understand the meaning of the information, and persuade others to take some actions based on the implications drawn from the information. Alber, getting insights from *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards*, explicitly states that all seventeen or eighteen-year-old students have to be able to participate in various conversations and to collaborate with diverse ideas. In collaboration, a student has to build on other people’s opinions and express his/her view in a clear and persuasive way. Otherwise, they will not be prepared for university and work after their graduation from secondary school. Furthermore, the selection of PBL to implement to SEF activities was based on the positive research findings on PBL which were well documented by literature. For instance, PBL is said to promote language and content learning in EFL classrooms (Guo, 2006), increase students’ learning motivation (Bell, 2010), help students to learn knowledge and skills

through activities in various domains (Tamim & Grant, 2013), and mirror real-life tasks (Stoller, 2002).

Nevertheless, I support Walker's (2001) assertion that working on a team is somehow challenging as it can deal with the unequal distribution of the workload among group members. Therefore, in the SEF project, to ensure that all five students had equal tasks distribution and completed them seriously, I strongly encourage the use of peer evaluation rubric (see Franker, 2015; Vandervelde, 2015) which was found to be a useful tool in numerous studies (e.g., Neal, Ho, Weihs, Hussain, & Cinar, 2011; Lee & Lim, 2012; Mali, 2016, 2017). Peer evaluation for evaluating students' contributions in completing the project is an essential phase in PBL (Sharan 1998, cited in Dooly & Masats, 2008) and can be an effective way of allowing every student to monitor the process as well as the product of team learning (Lee & Lim, 2012).

## FINAL THOUGHTS

The current study suggests that the SEF project has its merits and challenges. It is rewarding because the activities provide an authentic setting where the students can practice speaking in English outside the classroom. In addition, the project seems to be a way to make the students practice communication, critical thinking, and creative and collaborative skills. Nevertheless, the SEF project is challenging because the activity is time-consuming, as it requires several weeks to prepare and complete the project. Also, the project can be costly because money is needed to prepare the food. However, the activities in the SEF project should be modified by teachers to fit their contexts. It is a challenge for teachers to plan speaking activities that enable their students to speak actively and, at the same time, make them practice the core skills necessary to enter the twenty-first century and be successful in the workplace. In the end, I urge researchers and EFL practitioners alike to be innovative in applying PBL approaches in their EFL speaking classrooms so that students can speak English actively. Further research can also inquire if the students positively believe that PBL approaches are useful in the speaking classes by equipping them with necessary skills for their future.

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