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Enhancing Speaking Skills through Project-Based Learning Incorporating Monologues

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ABSTRACT

Speaking skills are pivotal for authentic communication and the ultimate goal of language learning. However, studies on speaking skills in a local Chinese ethnic minority college are relatively scant. Learners in these institutions of higher learning face linguistic challenges in pronunciation, grammar and writing, but their motivations to acquire English are strong and multifaceted. Project-based learning (PBL) has increasingly emerged as an efficient method to reinforce the speaking capacities of learners. This study therefore employs a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative research and semi-structured interviews, to evaluate students' language complexity, accuracy, and fluency over four weeks. The employed instruments include speaking tests and semi-structured interviews. The participants (n = 60), all of whom were college freshmen majoring in communication media, were divided into an experimental group and a control group, with each group consisting of 30 participants. Paired-sample t-tests revealed that PBL combined with monologue tasks significantly improved students' speaking abilities. Moreover, independent t-tests confirmed that PBL outperformed the Grammar Translation Method. The qualitative findings from the semi-structured interviews highlight improvements in the students' willingness to communicate, critical thinking abilities, and capacity for teamwork. These findings suggest that the combination of PBL and monologue tasks is an effective teaching approach for improving learners' speaking proficiency. Teaching practitioners can incorporate monologue tasks into their teaching practice.

Keywords: Project-Based Learning; Speaking Skill; Monologue Tasks; Second Language Acquisition

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: 23 March 2025 | Revised: 20 June 2025 | Accepted: 2 July 2025 | Published Online: 22 July 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i7.10161>

CITATION

Lyu, L., Bidin, S.J.B., 2025. Enhancing Speaking Skills through Project-Based Learning Incorporating Monologues. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*. 7(7): 1048–1059. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i7.10161>

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1. Introduction

Speaking ability is crucial for English language learners since it enables them to convey messages and communicate for various purposes with ease^[1]. The ultimate goal of language acquisition is to achieve fluency in the target language and foster a greater willingness to communicate^[2]. However, Chinese students often struggle with speaking skills. Project-based Learning (PBL) has become an efficient method to reinforce the speaking capacities of learners. It attaches importance to developing skills via meaningful activities based on key project results^[3-8]. At the same time, this method shapes a significant relation between the usage of English in the classroom and its real-world application, so that students' second language (L2) proficiency and speaking skills are remarkably enhanced^[9-11]. To develop the English oral capacities of students, it is essential to conduct lots of practices and use education approaches^[12, 13]. In prior studies, different education methods have been evaluated to enhance students' English oral capacities. To enhance students' oral abilities, Sirisrimangkorn^[1] integrated PBL with the delivery of presentations. Apart from that, Nurjannah and Sudarwinoto^[14] incorporated PBL with debates to reinforce the oral skills of tenth-grade students. In addition, a few researchers have enhanced student's oral abilities through dubbing^[15-17]. Nonetheless, the integration of PBL with monologue activities is rarely researched at a local ethnic minority college in China.

The ethnic minority college context in China presents unique linguistic and cultural challenges for English acquisition. Students commonly use their native languages for daily communication, with Mandarin as a second language, which adds complexity due to diverse linguistic structures. These learners often face difficulties in pronunciation, grammar, and writing when learning English. However, their motivation is multifaceted. According to He^[18], many are driven by the desire to promote their ethnic culture globally and support regional development. Yang's^[19] findings highlight strong motivations rooted in globalization and family/social responsibility. These factors reflect a deep awareness of English as a tool for empowerment and social advancement. Studying ethnic minority students' English learning not only broadens the scope of second language acquisition research but also brings valuable insight into the needs and experiences of underrepresented learner populations, helping to

inform more inclusive and effective teaching approaches.

This study seeks to explore the efficacy of PBL combined with monologue tasks in enhancing students' speaking skills, as evaluated through the criteria of complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF). A quasi-experimental study is employed. For the quantitative study, both experimental and control groups will be pre-and-post tested to get spoken data. The experimental group will be instructed with PBL for four weeks, while the control group will be taught with the traditional method, the Grammar Translation Method. To gain an in-depth look at PBL, semi-structured interviews will be carried out among three participants. The research questions are as follows:

RQ1: How does PBL combined with monologue tasks impact learners' speaking skills in terms of complexity, accuracy, and fluency?

RQ2: How do participants in the experimental group perceive PBL?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Project-Based learning

PBL is a learner-oriented education approach. It is aimed to reinforce autonomous learning, communication exchange, as well as objective setting based on team, and help students achieve a shared result^[20]. As pointed out by Wurdinger^[21], PBL is a very efficient tool to propel the capacity development of students. By PBL, deep learning can be realized and students can get better prepared for college education and occupational development in the future^[21]. Research on PBL can be classified into three primary themes: the impact of PBL on learners' language abilities^[1, 22]; the utilization of PBL in teacher training^[23], and the theoretical exploration of PBL^[24]. The present study belongs to the first category, emphasizing the effects of PBL on learners' language abilities.

Numerous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of PBL in enhancing various language skills among students. Imbaquingo and Cárdenas^[22] focused on 20 ninth-grade students and carried out the mixed-methods research. According to the findings, PBL is favorable to reinforcing their classroom engagement and reading capacity. Regarding writing capacities, PBL effectively supports students in different phases of writing, as it provides abundant feedback

from classmates and teachers and offers chances for self-assessment^[25]. Based on the action research, Cao^[26] took the post-secondary intermediate-level EFL college students in Macao as the research object and explored the possible benefits of PBL in self-regulated learning. The research incorporated 40 EG students and 39 CG students who joined a college prep program. As revealed by the results, one-semester PBL heightens the participants' SRL to a great extent. In addition to positive outcomes of collaboration and teamwork, they could guide their study objectives and independently manage their time. Beyond that, these students conducted self-evaluation and reflection. Using surveys and interviews, Ayu Sukerti and Yuliantini^[25] assessed the impact of PBL on the learning autonomy of 25 students from a writing class. It was demonstrated that PBL could boost deep and independent learning. What's more, these learners showed better knowledge acquisition, particularly in their use of grammar and vocabulary.

As many studies demonstrated, PBL is helpful to enhance the students' oral skills^[5, 14, 27]. To investigate the impact of PBL on 25 non-English students, Mafrudloh and Fitriati^[5] leveraged observation and quantitative data analysis. The application of PBL makes the oral skills of these learners improve a lot. Based on the action research, Nugroho and Anugerahwati^[14] adopted vlogs to assess the impact of PBL on 11 students from a vocational school. It was found that the learners' pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, gross fluency, and understanding improved significantly. At the same time, the combination of PBL with digital learning is also beneficial to improve the oral skills of students^[28]. Benlaghrissi and Ouahidi^[28] conducted an experimental study with 91 students that combined smartphone-assisted language learning with PBL. The smartphone-assisted PBL group outperformed both the traditional teaching CG and the PBL-only CG regarding their speaking skills. Additionally, the post-study questionnaire revealed a positive perception of smartphone-assisted PBL among the participants. Simbolon et al.^[29], recognizing speaking as the primary objective of language learning, explored the effects of PBL on the speaking skills of 30 senior high school students. The researchers observed that the participants were reluctant to engage during lessons. They implemented PBL in these students' classroom instruction and used classroom action research (with three cycles) to explore the effects of PBL on their oral ability. The results

revealed that PBL can indeed enhance students' speaking ability. The study concluded that PBL can enable students to acquire new knowledge and language skills, as well as improve their critical thinking and creativity.

While numerous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of PBL in enhancing language skills, limited research has focused on its application in Chinese local ethnic minority colleges. These institutions present unique linguistic and cultural contexts where students may face specific challenges in language learning. Understanding how PBL impacts speaking skills in this setting is crucial, as it can provide valuable insights into adapting this approach to meet the diverse needs of ethnic minority students.

2.2. Monologue Tasks

Merrill Swain's Output Hypothesis posits that the act of producing language (output) plays a crucial role in second language acquisition^[30]. It also suggests that, although input activities (i.e., listening and reading) are vital for language acquisition, they are inadequate by themselves – learners must also engage in output activities (i.e., speaking and writing) to enhance their language proficiency and comprehension^[30]. During monologue speaking tasks, learners are required to speak at length on a topic without being interrupted^[31]. This type of oral task is a particularly effective implementation of Swain's Output Hypothesis. During a monologue, a learner is very likely to notice gaps in their language ability since they must construct and convey their ideas without relying on prompts or corrections from others. Swain also describes the concept of 'pushed output,' where learners are encouraged to stretch their use of language to express a complex idea. Monologues can push learners to use more advanced language since they have to articulate their thoughts fully and coherently.

Within the field of language education, a monologue is characterized as a prolonged speech delivered by a single person to an audience in either a formal or informal setting^[31]. Monologue tasks, although undertaken individually by learners, are most effectively implemented within the context of small groups^[31]. During a monologue task, the learner is given an opportunity to speak at length about a topic uninterrupted^[31]. Monologue tasks can enhance learners' decontextualized oral language skills, i.e., the capacity to

discuss varied topics outside of the immediate context. Linguistic proficiency is needed to convey the meaning of these topics clearly to listeners who may not have the same background knowledge^[31]. Monologue speaking tasks also help develop learners' topic management skills^[31]. Monologues manifest in various forms such as storytelling, responding to a previous speaker, sharing or recounting personal anecdotes, or delivering speeches^[31]. Harmer^[32] characterizes monologues as personal oral exercises intended to hone every facet of the language system, noting that they enhance language proficiency and increase students' confidence.

Research on monologues has highlighted the positive connection with speaking skills. Karpovich^[12] successfully implemented monologue tasks focusing on describing personal experiences to develop the speaking skills of first-year college students, resulting in significant improvements. Sirisrimangkorn^[11] used quantitative data and interviews to investigate the effects of PBL combined with delivering presentations on the speaking skills of 31 sophomores majoring in Business English. The findings revealed that the participants regarded PBL with presentations positively and significantly improved their speaking skills. Pavlikova^[33] conducted action research to investigate the effects of monologue tasks on learners. The study concluded that, despite their time-consuming nature, these tasks led to enhanced thinking in English, and accuracy, fluency, complexity, confidence, and exposure to the target language. In summary, monologues can contribute to the improvement of learners' speaking skills.

Monologues provide a platform for language output, in which students express viewpoints and showcase their achievements in PBL, thus achieving Swain's goal of comprehensible output. In a PBL setting, after collaborating to finish a project, students express their learning outcomes via monologues in the form of project summary reports and product demonstrations. In problem solving, monologues can serve as a tool to explain complex matters. Furthermore, in the reflection phase, students can utilize monologue to reflect on their successes and challenges encountered in a project. By incorporating monologues, teaching practitioners can design more diverse and stimulating oral tasks, such as presentations, which can be applied to every stage of a project.

2.3. Complexity, Accuracy & Fluency Framework

Accurate segmentation of spoken language into analytical units is essential for reliable analysis of oral speech performance. Foster^[34] noted that, in analyzing oral speech, transcribed speech must be segmented into manageable units for study. Inaccurately identifying these units may give rise to imperfect analyses, as previously pointed out by Crookes^[35]. These linguistic units can be grouped into three distinct subtypes, namely, semantic, syntactic, and intonational units^[34]. Semantic units are informational 'chunks' often bolstered by grammatical and intonational cues^[34]. Crystal and Davy^[36] defined intonational units as unique inflexion patterns with an emphasized syllable or series of syllables (known as 'nuclei'). However, overreliance on intonational units can result in discrepancies for non-native speakers. This makes it necessary to supplement intonational units with syntactical units, as suggested by Foster^[34]. Analysis of speech units ('AS-units') are complete units of meaning that may stand either as independent clauses or alongside dependent clauses^[34]. In conducting analyses, aberrant utterances (e.g., false starts or repetitions) are not included in the total word count, only self-corrected final expressions are counted.

Assessing syntactic complexity, grammatical accuracy, and fluency is traditionally considered a benchmark for evaluating second language (L2) performance and proficiency^[37]. 'Linguistic complexity' refers to intricate and sophisticated grammatical structure. 'L2 complexity' is quantified by analyzing subordination—specifically, the proportion of finite and non-finite clauses relative to the total number of AS-units in a given expression^[34]. Rahimpour^[38] measured complexity through lexical variety, which is calculated by first dividing the number of content words (i.e., verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs) in an expression by the total word count, and then multiplying the result by 100. The current study adopts Rahimpour's^[38] method of evaluating lexical diversity as an indicator of linguistic complexity. Content words are crucial for conveying the central message of a sentence^[39]. In contrast, function words (e.g., 'in,' 'and,' 'but,' 'an,' 'the,' and 'he') serve a grammatical purpose and are also known as 'closed-class' words. Learners' higher usage of content words typically indicates a higher level of

linguistic sophistication^[38].

Accuracy is a key measure used in L2 research^[40], and is defined as the capability to generate language free of grammatical or other errors^[41]. For the measurement of accuracy, the proportion of error-free clauses to the gross amount of clauses in a particular sentence is calculated^[42]. Error-free clauses have no errors^[43].

‘Fluency’ constitutes the effortless use of language without misinterpretations or communicative errors^[41]. Fluency is assessed across three dimensions: pause frequency, repair fluency (i.e., self-corrections or repetitions), and speed fluency or speech rate. Speech rate, a standard fluency indicator, is calculated by dividing the number of uttered syllables by the time taken to produce them^[40, 44]. This study will use the Syllable Count web tool to count syllables. Garcia-Ponce et al.^[45] investigated the use of WhatsApp for enhancing speaking skills (particularly fluency and grammatical correctness) through task repetition. In their study, seven Mexican university students were asked to complete monologue narrative tasks on WhatsApp. The results showed variable degrees of fluency and accuracy, with fluency improving over time. In the present study, CAF will be analyzed to determine how participants’ speaking skills have improved. By analyzing CAF in the context of monologue-based PBL, teaching practitioners can discern which task features best fit the linguistic development of ethnic minority students, which leads to designs that better support their progress and encourage deeper engagement with the target language. Thus, applying CAF sheds light on pedagogical intervention and task creation designed for this population.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

This research employs an integrated mixed-methods design that blends quantitative data collection (via a quasi-experimental framework) with qualitative data collection. Tashakkori and Teddlie^[46] highlight the primary benefit of mixed method research (MMR) by noting that it allows researchers to address both confirmatory and exploratory research questions simultaneously, thereby facilitating the verification and generation of theory within a single study. The study involves pre- and post-testing assessments for both groups. The pre-test included a monologue-based speaking

assessment evaluated according to the IELTS criteria focusing on CAF. The EG underwent PBL instruction for a month based on the teaching schedule with one project lasting four weeks, while the CG received instruction via the Grammar Translation Method. After the conclusion of the instructional phase, both groups were reassessed via a speaking test that included a monologue task, again evaluated according to IELTS criteria on the same three metrics. Following quantitative data collection, interviews were conducted to gather qualitative data.

3.2. Participants

Participants were recruited offline. They were informed about the research objectives and procedures, and only those who voluntarily agreed to participate were included. This study included 60 first-year college students (14 of whom were male and 46 female) majoring in communication media; They were divided into two groups of 30 participants each. Each participant had a 9-year history of studying English, and their ages ranged between 17 to 20 years old. All the participants had scored above 100 on the Chinese College English entrance exam and had no prior exposure to PBL.

3.3. Instruments

The instruments were meticulously selected to provide a thorough assessment of participants’ English language proficiency, with a specific focus on their speaking skills. The cornerstone of this evaluation was the IELTS—a globally recognized benchmark for assessing the English proficiency of non-native speakers. In the pre-test, participants were required to introduce their favorite movie, and for the post test, participants would describe an unforgettable journey with their family members.

To complement the IELTS speaking assessment, six semi-structured interview questions were crafted to investigate further the efficacy of PBL in enhancing the participants’ speaking skills. The interview questions were organized into six sections. The first question, “How would you describe your speaking skill before engaging in projects?” is formulated to provide a direct context of the experience, identifying the specific aspects of the activity and the individuals involved. The second question, “How has participating in group discussion during PBL affected your confidence in

speaking with peers and inspectors?” addresses the emotional responses during the experience. The third question, “In what ways do you believe that PBL has influenced your ability to express yourself verbally?” critically evaluates the event’s outcomes. The fourth question, “What factors might influence your speaking skills?” analyzes the factors contributing to the results. The fifth question, “What are the most significant takeaways from PBL?” summarizes the learning experience. The sixth question, “Have there been any challenges you faced while communicating during PBL activities? How do you overcome them?” suggests future actions for self-improvement.

3.4. Data Collection

We collected data in two distinct phases. During the preliminary stage, we administered oral tests during the evening classes of EG. The subjects’ oral performances were captured in video format, with lengths varying between three to four minutes. The tests were conducted across six groups of five students and were monitored appropriately by two educators. The second data collection stage commenced after the four-week intervention period. The post-intervention oral test closely resembled the preliminary testing scenario to maintain uniformity. To facilitate an accurate comparative analysis and enable the identification of any improvements to the subjects’ oral skills after the PBL intervention, the consistency of the pre-and post-testing conditions is of utmost importance. The post-tests were also captured in video format, and the same two educators were responsible for supervising the tests to ensure uniformity. The collected data was analyzed to evaluate the efficacy of PBL in enhancing the participants’ speaking abilities. After collecting the spoken data, semi-structured interviews will be carried out during the evening class. Three participants will be invited to attend the interview which is held in a vacant classroom. To foster a comfortable environment, the interviewer will speak Mandarin.

3.5. Data Analysis

To address Research Question 1, a paired-sample t-test was conducted to determine if there were any statistically significant variations between the pre-and post-test scores of the participants speaking skills. This test aimed to mea-

sure the effectiveness of PBL combined with monologue tasks on improving students’ oral proficiency. In response to the hypotheses, an independent-sample t-test was conducted to compare the efficacy of PBL with that of the traditional Grammar Translation Method, directly comparing the two teaching approaches. Additionally, NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, was utilized to analyze interview data under the guidance of thematic analysis, enabling a deeper exploration of the participants’ perceptions and experiences with PBL.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was gained from the ethical committee of Sichuan MinZu college. To ensure the experiment goes smoothly, all the participants will be informed of the purpose, methods, and participants’ right in the experiment. They will be assigned a written consent form before experimenting. Another important ethical consideration is confidentiality. In the interview stage, students’ names will not be used. Instead, generic identifiers such as S1, S2, and S3 will be employed to refer to participants, thereby ensuring that their responses can’t be traced back to them individually. Moreover, participants’ right will be respected. Participants will be informed that their answers are entirely voluntary and that they have the right to refuse to answer any questions they are uncomfortable with.

4. Results

4.1. Quantitative Results

The participants’ performances (**Table 1**) were evaluated through pre- and post-tests, with a specific focus on a monologue task that involved describing their personal experiences. The speaking tests were assessed using the IELTS rubric, and the scores were analyzed via a paired t-test to identify any significant improvements. Additionally, three indices of CAF (**Table 2**) were measured to gain an understanding of the participants’ speaking performances. An independent sample t-test (**Table 3**) was conducted to compare the effectiveness of PBL with that of the Grammar Translation Method.

Question 1 concerns the efficacy of PBL on students’ speaking skills based on CAF assessments. A paired sample

t-test was employed to determine whether the EG's speaking scores had improved following the intervention period. **Table 1** shows that the EG's speaking scores had changed significantly since the pre-test ($t(29) = -6.134, p < 0.05$). The two groups' mean scores indicate that the students' average speaking skills during the post-test were significantly higher than during the pre-test.

Each learner's speaking proficiency was evaluated based on the CAF criteria, each of which was assessed during the pre- and post-tests. **Table 2** below illustrates the results of a comparison between the pre- and post-test scores across

the three different aspects of speaking ability. The results indicate that the post-test scores for Complexity (0.462) are significantly higher than the pre-test scores (0.428), with $t(29) = -5.782$, and $p < 0.05$. Similarly, the post-test scores for Accuracy (0.572) are significantly higher than the pre-test scores (0.543), with $t(29) = -5.684$, and $p < 0.05$. The post-test scores for Fluency (2.3) are also significantly higher than the pre-test scores (1.73), with $t(29) = -5.461$, and $p < 0.05$. The participants demonstrated noteworthy improvement in their speaking skills across all the dimensions of CAF following the intervention period.

Table 1. Comparison of pre-test-post-test scores on speaking skills (n = 30).

	Pre-Test		Post-Test		MD	t (29)
	M	SD	M	SD		
Speaking skill	3.97	0.571	4.37	0.507	-0.4	-6.134

$p < 0.05$.

Table 2. Comparison of CAF in monologue task via paired sample t-test.

	Pre-Test		Post-Test		MD	t (29)
	M	SD	M	SD		
Complexity	0.428	0.051	0.462	0.062	-0.34	-5.782
Accuracy	0.543	0.156	0.572	0.155	-0.03	-5.684
Fluency	1.73	0.64	2.3	0.6	-0.57	-5.461

Independent sample testing was used to assess the differences between the two teaching approaches. **Table 3** shows that the students instructed through PBL were significantly different from that of the control group who were instructed through GTM ($t = 2.389, p < 0.05$). The results indicate that the scores for the PBL group (4.37) are significantly higher than for the GTM group (4.03).

In conclusion, the results indicate a significant improvement in the speaking skills of the participants in the experimental group, as evidenced by the comparisons between their pre- and post-test scores. These findings suggest that PBL combined with monologue tasks is more effective in enhancing students' speaking skills than the traditional Grammar Translation Method (GTM).

Table 3. Comparison of EG and CG in speaking skill.

	PBL (n = 30)		GTM (n = 30)		MD	t (58)
	M	SD	M	SD		
Speaking skill	4.37	0.507	4.03	0.571	0.33	2.389

4.2. Qualitative Results

The qualitative findings from interviews with three participants indicate that PBL was generally perceived as a beneficial and engaging instructional approach. Participants

expressed a positive attitude toward PBL, citing its effectiveness in creating a more interactive and student-centered learning environment. They highlighted improvements in multiple areas, including language proficiency, especially in speaking, as well as increased willingness to communicate,

enhanced critical thinking, and strengthened teamwork. Although the extent of perceived improvement varied among individuals, all participants actively engaged in classroom activities and valued the collaborative nature of PBL tasks. These insights suggest that PBL can foster both linguistic and interpersonal growth among students in ethnolinguistically diverse settings. The specific qualitative findings are categorized as follows:

One key finding is that PBL provided participants with increased opportunities to practice speaking, which contributed to perceived improvements in their oral communication abilities. The extended speaking tasks and frequent peer interaction enabled students to enhance their turn-taking, clarification, and expression skills. Although the degree of improvement varied, all three participants acknowledged that PBL allowed them to speak more frequently and with greater purpose.

Student 1: "I frequently use 'Excuse me' and 'Can you please repeat that?' to seek clarification."

Student 2: "I didn't feel much improvement, but they still joined in the conversations and worked with the group."

Student 3: "I encourage my peers to share their perspectives."

Another major finding is that PBL helped boost students' confidence and made them more willing to speak in class. Because the tasks were meaningful and often involved personal stories or teamwork, students felt more comfortable sharing their ideas. They were more open to participating, even if their English wasn't perfect.

Student 2: "I was more willing to collaborate with my classmates."

Thirdly, students also mentioned that PBL pushed them to think more deeply. They weren't just completing tasks; they were comparing ideas, discussing options, and making group decisions. This process helped them improve how they approach problems and explain their thoughts clearly.

Student 2: "During the tasks, we discussed each other's ideas to choose the best one."

PBL gave students a real sense of teamwork. They had to split tasks, work together, and combine their ideas. All three students mentioned that they learned to cooperate better and felt more connected to their classmates through the group work process.

Student 3: "We separated the material into key topics,

delegated them, and then recombined them to discuss the issues."

Student 1: "We cooperated well together."

Student 2: "Everyone in the group was willing to help and work together."

5. Discussion

The purpose of the present study is to see whether PBL can improve participants' speaking skills evaluated with CAF, and how participants perceive this learner-centered teaching approach. The paired sample t-test results revealed that the subjects' oral abilities (measured based on CAF) were significantly enhanced, thus validating the value of PBL as a teaching strategy. Our findings also indicate that PBL outperforms traditional teacher-centred approaches (such as GTM) in terms of improving student's oral skills.

With its focus on solving real-world problems through collaboration, PBL likely creates a more interesting and meaningful environment that encourages the accurate use of language. This challenges students to share their thoughts in a more detailed and precise manner. PBL's collaborative format may also enhance fluency since it requires students to communicate effectively during group-based tasks. PBL also presents an iterative feedback loop that enables students to receive constant input from their classmates and teachers, which may be essential for improving their oral abilities. This conclusion aligns with that of previous studies^[14] that have also confirmed the value of PBL in language learning. Our findings add to this literature by providing a more nuanced analysis of speaking performance, specifically by analyzing CAF.

Our qualitative research demonstrates that PBL increases students' willingness to communicate. This echoes Blumenfeld's^[47] assertion that PBL improves classroom participation. PBL creates a cooperative learning environment, enabling students to share their ideas openly^[21]. It also serves to improve students' critical thinking. Steenhuis & Rowland^[48] showed that PBL facilitates the development of advanced reasoning and cognitive skills such as analysis, assessment, and creativity. PBL can help prepare students for tertiary learning and their future careers by facilitating deep learning^[21]. Finally, PBL facilitates group collaboration. Oakley et al.^[49] have underscored PBL's value in developing

students' effective collaborative skills, while Kokotsaki et al. [20] pointed out that PBL's main function is to give learners a shared goal which must be achieved through group-based effort.

This study seeks to explore the efficacy of PBL combined with monologue tasks in enhancing students' speaking skills, as evaluated through the criteria of CAF. The findings can potentially inspire teachers to create more meaningful and authentic monologue tasks, thereby substantially enhancing their students' speaking abilities. Furthermore, it could prompt textbook authors to incorporate more relevant speaking tasks within real-world contexts to foster students' communicative competence.

6. Conclusions

In this article, we conducted oral tests and interviews to evaluate the potential benefits of PBL in combination with monologue tasks on students' oral abilities. Our findings demonstrate PBL's superior capacity to improve students' CAF, compared to the traditional Grammar Translation Method. This shows that the combination of PBL with well-structured monologue tasks in language classes can serve to improve students' oral skills, thereby providing practical insights for language educators. Our findings also highlight the value of incorporating meaningful, real-world monologue tasks into language learning coursework, and may encourage textbook authors to consider this innovative approach. This study's implications also encompass the wider English language education field, especially in local ethnic minority colleges where students' oral abilities are typically lacking.

Despite the positive outcomes, this study has some limitations that warrant consideration. First, the study's short intervention period of four weeks may not be sufficient to observe long-term improvements in speaking skills. The effects of PBL combined with monologue tasks on sustained oral proficiency remain unclear. Second, the study was conducted within a single ethnic minority college, and has a limited generalizability with findings applicable to ethnic minority colleges and other normal universities in China where students possess an intermediate English proficiency and have no prior exposure to PBL. To address these limitations, future research should extend the duration of the intervention to examine the long-term effects of PBL on stu-

dents' speaking abilities. A longitudinal study could provide deeper insights into how continuous practice with monologue tasks influences language retention and fluency over time. Additionally, conducting similar studies across multiple ethnic minority colleges and comparing the results with those from mainstream universities would help determine whether the observed benefits of PBL are consistent across diverse educational settings. This would significantly enhance the external validity of the findings and offer a more comprehensive understanding of PBL's impact on language learning.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, L.L. and S.J.B.; methodology, L.L.; validation, L.L.; formal analysis, L.L.; investigation, S.J.B.; data curation, L.L.; writing—original draft preparation, L.L.; writing—review and editing, S.J.B.; visualization, S.J.B.; supervision, S.J.B.; project administration, L.L.; All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding

This work did not receive any funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Institutional Review Board (or Ethics Committee) of Sichuan Minzu college (protocol code AESCUN20240908 and date of approval 08 September 2024).

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Acknowledgments

The researcher gratefully acknowledges the support of her supervisor, Siti Jamilah Bt Bidin who provided invaluable help in the study. Extended thanks are also given to Sichuan MinZu college and all participants in the study, whose support and contributions were essential to the success

of the research.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest related to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

Appendix A

Table A1. List of Abbreviations.

AS-Units	Analysis of Speech Units
CAF	Complexity, Accuracy, and Fluency
CG	Control Group
EG	Experimental Group
GTM	Grammar Translation Method
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
L2	Second Language
MMR	Mixed Method Research
PBL	Project-Based Learning

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