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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the significance of learner-centered approaches has been widely recognized in foreign language education, emphasizing teacher roles in promoting meaningful learning and 21st-century skills. Project-based learning (PjBL) has long been a constructivist approach involving learners' participation in authentic, real-world issues and meaningful content. This study investigates whether Gold-Standard PjBL is relevant and applicable in Kazakhstani English-medium schools and explores the attitudes of school administration toward EFL teachers implementing PjBL and their support for it. Qualitative and quantitative data involving 103 EFL teachers reveal that teachers are aware of the PjBL essentials and acknowledge the support of their school administration. However, their teaching practices fail to comply with the essential principles of a Gold-Standard, requiring further encouragement and promotion.

Keywords: *project-based learning (PjBL); essential principles; Gold-Standard teaching practices; school administration*

Changes in the contemporary world affect all sectors of society, including education. Kazakhstan is no exception in that it is influenced by globalization. Due to the reforms in Kazakhstani education, particularly regarding multilingualism and the cultural project "Trinity of Languages" (Republic of Kazakhstan, 2011), the English language and the teacher role have received significant importance in implementing the state language policy in Kazakhstan. This cultural project was initially introduced by the country's first president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, in 2007 and aimed to develop trilingual language competence, encouraging future generations to acquire fluency in three languages: Kazakh, Russian, and English (Nazarbayev, 2007). This effort required a new paradigm

shift in foreign language education in Kazakhstan, which entailed contemporary teaching approaches and acknowledged the importance of a student-centered and communication-oriented approach as the groundwork for the teaching process and meaningful student learning.

This reform led to a shift from teacher-centered classrooms, where the teacher was believed to be an authority and a source of knowledge (Dollard & Christensen, 1996; Garrett, 2008), to a learner-centric atmosphere and a facilitated methodology originating in constructivist developmental theory (Mascolo, 2009; Piaget, 1973). Moreover, the law "on the status of a teacher" (Republic of Kazakhstan, 2019, Art. 3-1(3); Art. 18)—apart from establishing the rights, social guarantees, obligations, and responsibilities of the teacher—implies improving the quality of professional development training and professional competencies. A key factor in determining the teacher's status is the extent of their professional competence. Thus, teacher roles, the objectives of the English language, and the role of schooling must be reconsidered in ways such that learners should be able to think beyond the limits of traditional classroom discourse and acquire the skills required for global citizenship (Garrett, 2008; Partnership for 21st Century Learning [P21], 2019; Thomas, 2000).

Project-based learning (PjBL) in foreign language education is known as a teaching approach that engages students in an active learning process and integrates language skills into real-world issues, hence enhancing the academic, social, and intercultural competencies for today's labor market and global citizenship (Habók & Nagy, 2016; Larmer et al., 2015; Lenz et al., 2015; Yazdanpanah, 2019). However, implementing PjBL in secondary education is a major teacher concern. The new focus on schooling aims to equip learners with 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, entrepreneurship, synthesizing, and creativity—all of which will enable them to collaborate with their peers and work productively to achieve team goals (Hojeij et al., 2021; P21, 2019). Apart from the emphasis on language acquisition, the significance of the development of life-enhanced skills and key competencies in language teaching is widely recognized and reflects new teaching objectives in foreign language education (Care et al., 2018). As Tohsaku (2013) stated, "the focus of foreign language teaching shifted from what to teach (i.e., audio-lingual approach) to how to teach (communicative approach), and then to how to connect in response to demands for students to have more of an edge in the global market" (cited in Nazikian & Park, 2016, p. 368).

The sparse literature on PjBL in the context of Kazakhstani secondary education means that little is known about English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' views and experiences in implementing PjBL in EFL classes in compliance with the Gold-Standard PjBL. This study aims to fill this void by investigating the current situation in Kazakhstani high schools, exploring EFL teachers' awareness and experience with PjBL, focusing on school administration support for its implementation, and examining the extent of PjBL teaching practices.

PjBL in Foreign Language Education

The historical roots of PjBL date back to the late 1890s in experiential education, which was initially conceived by an American psychologist and educational reformer, John Dewey, who is believed to be the father of the project approach. His method was further developed by his student Kilpatrick (Simpson & Stack, 2010). In his own work, Dewey (1916), who was particularly critical of school education based on transmitting knowledge to students, emphasized the connection between school and real life, plus theory and practice, mainly focusing on the idea of *learning by doing*. The essential principles for Dewey were learning from experience, creating schools that reflect society, and developing the child-centered and society-centered factions of progressive education. Since then, PjBL has attracted significant attention from educators who are focused on fundamental principles such as inquiry-based, explorative, and constructivist learning (Larmer et al., 2015; Lenz et al., 2015; Ravitz, 2010; Thomas, 2000). Hence, PjBL provides various opportunities for language learners to express their novel ideas and share them with others as well as develop productive research skills and critical thinking skills.

PjBL was initially deployed into the context of foreign language education in the late 1990s to early 2000s as an approach featuring learner-centered education and the development of language proficiency, as well as content and knowledge acquisition, including the skills of planning, designing, and problem-solving (Hedge, 1993). In this respect, PjBL is defined as “a systematic teaching method that engages students in learning knowledge and skills through an extended inquiry process structured around complex, authentic questions and carefully designed products and tasks” (Markham et al., 2003, p. 4). Fried-Booth (2002) believes that project work establishes a framework that creates opportunities for foreign language learners to use beyond the classroom, which is essential to developing communicative competence in the target language. The essence of PjBL in foreign language education is that the language projects are authentic with real-world content matter and points of interest for students, rather than simulated language situations. For language educators, authenticity is a purposeful factor in teaching and learning languages (Wrigley, 1998; Stoller, 2002).

To help teachers use PjBL effectively, the Buck Institute of Education (BIE) indicated three levels of manifestation and practice: *beginning*, *developing*, and *Gold-Standard* or *High-Quality* (Buck Institute of Education [BIE], n.d.). The terms *Gold-Standard PjBL* and *High-Quality PjBL* are used interchangeably among scholars; however, the term *Gold-Standard* is employed throughout this paper. *Gold-Standard PjBL* is viewed as an aspirational and desired level of practice that presents concrete indicators of how PjBL functions and what it means when appropriately applied.

As the basis for successful implementation and meaningful results for project-based work, *Gold-Standard PjBL* embodies the following essential features for project design:

- *Challenging problem or question* relates to a good *driving* question that is based on a real-life challenge (Larmer et al., 2015).
- *Sustained inquiry* is a consequence of challenging problems or questions that are used to launch an ongoing process of asking questions, solving problems, and applying new knowledge through interviewing experts, performing fieldwork, or conducting an experiment (Larmer et al., 2015).
- *Authenticity* refers to formulating learning experiences through *real-world* issues.
- *Student voice and choice* are key features that make the project more meaningful. As a learner-centered approach, PjBL significantly emphasizes the student's voice in choosing the content area and project topic, thus raising student responsibility and initiative (Lenz et al., 2015).
- *Reflection* is emphasized for both teachers and students so they may improve in their effective planning, teaching, and learning. Since “we do not learn from experience, we learn from reflecting on the experience” (Dewey, 1938), the significance of the cognitive and reflective process is key.
- *Critique and revision* facilitate the developmental process of the product or solution and pursue learners' in-depth inquiry (Larmer et al., 2015).
- *Public product* is a final component in which students present their solutions or answers to the driving questions to numerous audiences beyond the classroom or even the school. Learners appear to care more about the quality of their presentation when demonstrating before a real audience (Stoller, 2002).
- *Gold-Standard PjBL* establishes an educational platform and a relationship between inquiry-based learning and successful skills derived from the learning process necessary in the modern labor market and globalization (Larmer et al., 2015).

Teacher's Role in PjBL

Roles refer to the parts played by learners and teachers in the learning process as well as in the social and interpersonal relationships between the participants (Nunan, 2004, p. 64). The literature has a growing consensus that the teacher's role in PjBL shifts from "sage-on-the-stage to guide-on-the-side" (King, 1993, p.30). Rather than perceiving a learner as "an empty vessel to be filled" (Markham et al., 2003, p.8), the teacher's role in PjBL is to create an active environment where students obtain knowledge naturally and are empowered with responsibility for their own education (Markham et al., 2003). In an approach in which students build their understanding, teachers may first appear to be unnecessary. However, in a constructivist classroom, the teacher is required to take on diverse responsibilities and roles, such as facilitator, manager, coach, conductor, mediator, and teacher-researcher (España & Soosaar, 2022; Lam et al., 2010; Morrison et al., 2021). Teachers in a PjBL program may not be providers of knowledge (Lam et al., 2009), but they still shoulder the responsibility for the content, accuracy, appropriateness, assessment, and process as a whole. Although PjBL emphasizes student-centeredness, the teacher is still orchestrating the process to ensure that learning occurs. Teachers who are new to PjBL may face challenges, such as being unaware of the roles and the level of guidance they are expected to provide. To minimize or even avoid encountering such difficulties, the BIE (2019) developed a framework for Gold-Standard project-based teaching practices, guiding teachers to shift from a traditional teaching style to a project-based approach.

Project design and planning is the first step in the project process, in which the teacher brainstorms the ideas, designs the framework, and adapts them according to the students' interests. Additionally, *aligning the project with standards* is suggested so teachers can develop ideas that comply with their curricular requirements. This step will significantly help teachers achieve the target knowledge and skills underpinned by the curriculum.

Culture-building focuses on independence and inquiry, promoted in a healthy PjBL classroom where the student voice and choice are witnessed. In addition, students are encouraged to propose new ideas, explore different pathways, and design products. The PjBL classroom culture generates a "growth mindset" that refers to the students' unlimited abilities that can be developed through dedication (Dweck, 2006, pp. 6-7).

Managing project activities is the process in which teachers are facilitators and managers: students perform much of their projects independently with the teacher's support as needed. This process is often one of the challenging aspects for PjBL newcomers because it is notably different from traditional instruction. Managing the process refers to tracking a multi-week project, guiding student teams in the designing of products, "coordinating the involvement of other adults in the process, and dealing with the logistics of public exhibition, which is unfamiliar territory for most classroom teachers" (Larmer et al., 2015, p. 49).

Scaffolding student learning is another new aspect that may be unfamiliar to traditional teaching. Since PjBL develops student independence, scaffolding is a particularly suitable strategy in a healthy PjBL culture setting. Scaffolding instruction as a teaching strategy is derived from Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and his concept of the zone of proximal development. Vygotsky defines scaffolding instruction as the "role of teachers and others in supporting the learner's development and providing support structures to get to that next stage or level" (Raymond, 2000, p. 176). The key feature of scaffolding instruction is that it is temporary. The assistance is provided to help students grasp the core of the tasks or project during the initial stages only. Once learners master the concept, the teacher begins the process of *fading*, or the gradual removal of the scaffolding, which allows the students to work independently (Lipscomb et al., 2010).

Assessing student learning in a PjBL environment urges teachers to go beyond the typical tests, quizzes, and assignments. The concept of *balanced assessment* (Burke, 2010) emphasizes the necessity and importance of both formative assessment—used to monitor the learning process, to identify students' strengths and weaknesses, and provide "feedback to adjust ongoing teaching and learning

to improve students' achievement of intended instructional outcomes" (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008)—and summative assessment, which is used to evaluate what has been learned. The balanced combination of two assessment types is essential to evaluate content knowledge, individual work or a final team-created product, and the students' abilities to apply 21st-century skills. Within the process of this balanced assessment, scaffolding instructions are applied to assure students of their progress in learning.

Engaging and coaching student performance builds an effective teacher–student interaction and coaching relationship. Projects or students alone cannot create engagement with the learning process; teachers also play an important role. The teacher, as a coach, develops skills systematically, “first by believing that all students can become better at what they are doing, then by breaking it down into steps, providing practice, and giving lots of feedback” (Larmer et al., 2015, p. 52). The planning and implementation of PjBL is a time-consuming process that requires meticulous consideration. The teaching practices mentioned above describe the framework of Gold-Standard PjBL for developing and acquiring content, language proficiency, and 21st-century skills.

In this field, many empirical studies and much evidence have revealed positive evaluations and support for the implementation of PjBL, teacher roles, and teacher perceptions of PjBL (Aksela & Haatainen, 2019; Baş, 2011; Haatainen & Aksela, 2021; Harrigan, 2014; Keys & Bryan, 2001; Le Hang & Thuy, 2023; Revelle, 2019). According to Le Hang and Thuy (2023), implementing PjBL enables learners to promote learner autonomy and 21st-century skills, in areas such as self-instruction and self-direction, self-assessment, problem-solving, and research. Likewise, PjBL integrates the learner's social, cognitive, and professional development. Regarding this concept, Aksela and Haatainen (2019) suggested that PjBL fosters the development of skills such as learning responsibility, goal setting, independence, and discipline. Moreover, the teachers in Revelle's study (2019) reported that PjBL is considered effective because it enhanced the teachers' level of engagement with the curriculum, along with the feasibility of implementation. On the other hand, many studies reveal that teachers who lack experience and are new to PjBL face challenges in complying with potential changes in their roles and the enactment of PjBL in their classrooms (Bradley-Levine et al., 2014; Haatainen & Aksela, 2021; Hertzog, 2007; Ravitz, 2003; Smakova, 2018). For instance, the studies by Haatainen and Aksela (2021), Hertzog (2007), and Parsons et al. (2010) found that teachers view PjBL as a time-consuming process for preparation and implementation in the lessons, which may lead to incompliance with the required curriculum if they spend too much time in the planning and practicing stages. Moreover, Parsons et al. (2010) noted several common obstacles in implementing PjBL, such as the need for materials and the support of human and physical resources. In a similar study, Bradley-Levine et al. (2014) emphasized teacher struggles to play new roles throughout the PjBL process, particularly in managing PjBL culture, scaffolding, and assessment. In this sense, another challenge teachers encounter is their lack of a role in monitoring (Hidayat et al., 2024). Moreover, teachers' lack of knowledge of PjBL implementation and inadequate time in using PjBL were the main challenges that the EFL teachers faced (Le Hang & Thuy, 2023; Sartika et al., 2022).

Additional PjBL studies (Abishova et al., 2020; Intykbekov, 2017) show the situation in Kazakhstani secondary education, revealing that teachers are not ready for project implementation as they lack knowledge about PjBL and available materials that consider the support of the school's administration. Teachers struggle with maintaining an ideal balance between scaffolding and giving students independence. Since learners develop their autonomy, PjBL classes may appear disorderly and noisy. To some teachers, this setting insinuates a lack of authority over students and an inappropriate learning environment. Standing aside in the learning process may make them feel uncomfortable; teachers are no longer the only experts in their classrooms—especially concerning technology (Ladewski et al., 1994; Marx et al., 1997). Similarly, Kazakhstani teachers tend to assume authoritarian roles, and students are highly dependent on their teachers, which indicates the impact of the high-power distance in Kazakh culture on schools (Yaylaci & Islam, 2013), creating a challenge for the PjBL environment.

Although many scholars and experts point to PjBL as a way for teachers to engage their students in an active and learning-by-doing process, implementing PjBL effectively and appropriately requires more than just knowing what and how this methodology should be applied. Educators cannot simply shift from traditional teaching to PjBL unless school leaders and administration offer support and provide instructors with the necessary resources. A study by Cervantes et al. (2015), highlights that not only teachers but also school leaders should be provided with PjBL training. To ensure a successful PjBL, curriculum, continuous coaching, training, and support from school administrators are fundamental practices. Teachers repeatedly discuss the importance of having sufficient materials and administrative support within and beyond the classroom (Parsons et al., 2010; Zahroh et al., 2023). For instance, Lam et al. (2010) highlighted a strong collaboration between teachers' motivation in implementing PjBL and school support for PjBL. Administrators who provide their teachers with strong professional development opportunities and PjBL training establish conditions for successful and effective PjBL implementation. In schools where teachers received such support, substantial improvement in both student performance and teacher efficacy was achieved (Terada, 2021). Moreover, to enhance pedagogical efficacy and academic performance, Ghirmai and Fessehatsion (2023) revealed that principals encouraged the school community through interaction and collaboration and "by offering continuous support, fostering a conducive and flexible environment by giving less workload, convenient scheduling of activities" (p. 583).

An extensive literature review shows that thorough planning and completion of benchmarks are essential to implementing successful projects such as Gold Standard PjBL. Moreover, the existing plethora of studies on teacher perceptions, teacher roles in PjBL, and administrative support for PjBL implementation reveal that teacher views and teacher roles are multifaceted. Overall, teachers who have experienced PjBL and participated in empirical studies perceived it as a learner-centered approach in which teachers facilitate, mediate, and scaffold rather than only lecture. Nevertheless, teachers struggled to maintain an appropriate balance between managing a project and controlling or leading a project. Although PjBL may be perceived as time-consuming, the approach has certainly proven to be a worthwhile endeavor. Educators believe PjBL to be an effective pedagogical methodology that enables learners to acquire linguistic competencies, engage in solving real-world issues, and develop life-enhancing skills.

Using the Literature Review to Clarify the Research Gap

A review of the literature provided an overview of the theoretical and methodological foundations of PjBL, including the historical background, definitions, benefits, and challenges of implementing PjBL in the world, in addition to the Kazakhstani context. Ample evidence identified PjBL as a learner-centered, inquiry-based, and competency-based learning approach based on constructivist educational philosophy. Specifically, the literature review provided an understanding of PjBL implementation in foreign language education and teachers' roles in Gold-Standard PjBL teaching practices. Although the PjBL studies and major empirical research mainly emphasized the same challenges practitioners faced (such as teachers' lack of knowledge of PBL implementation, the time-consuming process for preparation, and the lack of the support of the school's administration), they consistently indicated an effective and positive influence on academic performance, student interests, and motivation, as well as the deep learning of content knowledge and the development of the life-enhancing skills. Many international empirical studies have emphasized the benefits of PjBL as an approach that immerses learners in authentic, cognitive, and autonomous learning, thereby broadening students' 21st-century skills. As noted above, the teacher's role has been one concern throughout the entire process of PjBL implementation. The literature review revealed that teachers struggle with maintaining an ideal balance between monitoring, scaffolding, and giving students independence. Teachers perceive a challenge to transition non-PjBL teacher roles to PjBL teacher roles, which require them to be facilitators, coaches, mediators, and managers of the projects. Studies around

the world have revealed significant benefits of applying PjBL, and both its benefits and challenges are perceived by practitioners of PjBL. None of these studies, however, have investigated the compliance of PjBL teaching practices in their implementations with the Gold-Standard teaching practices of BIE (2019), particularly in the EFL classes in secondary education in the Kazakhstani context. Therefore, to address this gap in the literature, the current research focuses on the EFL teachers' perceptions regarding the school administration's support for the PjBL enactment and the level of the implementation of Gold-Standard PjBL teaching practices.

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the EFL teachers' perceptions of administrative support for PjBL implementation in EMI schools?
2. To what extent does the level of EFL teachers' PjBL teaching practices align with the teaching practices of Gold-Standard PjBL? (beginning, developing, or High-Quality/Gold-Standard PjBL)?

Method

Research Design

This paper is part of a broader study that is aimed at the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) through PjBL in Kazakhstani schools where English is the medium of instruction (EMI). EMI can be described as "a model of content instruction in contexts where English is not a majority language but is nonetheless used as a language for teaching and learning" (Toth & Paulsrud, 2017, p. 189). Therefore, to promote ICC through PjBL, it is first essential to understand the views of the Kazakhstani EFL teachers on implementing PjBL in practice in EMI schools. Thus, the purpose of this study was to discover EFL teachers' perceptions of school administrators' support for implementing PjBL, to explore how teachers practiced PjBL in their lessons, and to determine if their teaching practices aligned with the essentials of Gold-Standard PjBL according to the rubric designed by the BIE (2019; as beginning, developing or High-Quality/Gold-Standard PjBL). This study employed an exploratory approach with a survey research method that allowed collecting data from a large group of participants to gather insights about their perceptions, beliefs, and experiences (Babbie, 2020; Creswell, 2021). Data were collected through an online questionnaire that was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

To maintain a high level of ethical standards, approval was received from the Institutional Ethics Review Committee for the study. In addition, the online questionnaire incorporated a consent form. This form thoroughly outlined the nature of the study, its objectives, participants' rights, and the assurance of anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. Only upon being informed and providing their consent were the respondents able to proceed to the subsequent sections of the questionnaire. This approach ensured that participants were well-informed about the study and participated in the data collection process voluntarily.

Research Site and Participants

The study was undertaken with 103 EFL teachers from 57 urban Kazakhstani EMI secondary high schools, in which science subjects (physics, chemistry, biology, or computer science) were taught in English. The schools' curricula have been based on the content of the State Standard of the Republic of Kazakhstan and aligned with international educational standards (Republic of Kazakhstan, 2017). All participating schools were located in different cities within the country and served as the pilot ground for the Kazakhstani educational project, "Trinity of Languages" (Nazarbayev, 2007), and as a

launchpad for the development of trilingual education in Kazakhstan. The admission of EFL teachers to these schools is carried out on a competitive basis according to their levels of English-language proficiency and communication presentation skills. In addition, EFL teachers annually upgrade their qualifications and participate in different seminars organized by the school administrations and the Ministry of Education. The teachers who responded to this study were from different backgrounds (e.g., age, location, and teaching experience) and were selected through a combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling. The initial participants were secured by using a personal network of convenience sampling, and the transition to snowball sampling was applied by asking those participants to refer others. Table 1 provides demographic information about the participant teachers in the current study and illustrates that the majority (85.4 %, $N = 88$) of the participants were younger than 35 years old, and 77.7% ($N = 80$) of participants had less than ten years of teaching experience.

Category	Percentage
Age 20–25 years	38.8%
Age 26–35 years	46.6%
Age 36–45 years	8.7%
Age 46+ years	5.8%
Teaching experience 1–5 years	54.4%
Teaching experience 6–10 years	23.3%
Teaching experience 11–15 years	11.7%
Teaching experience 16–20 years	2.9%
Teaching experience 21–25 years	1.9%
Teaching experience 26+ years	5.8%

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants ($N = 103$)

The respondents' demographic profiles also included the their PjBL experience. Table 2 represents an overview of the responses to the PjBL types in which respondents actively participated and the frequency of instances when they were involved in that type of PjBL.

Type of PjBL	Never	1–3 times	4–5 times	5+ times	Total responses
Class PjBL (involves the participation of classmates)	3	51	29	20	103
Whole-school PjBL (involves the participation of different classes within the same school)	36	35	24	8	103
Organizational/Governmental/International PjBL (involves the participation of governmental or international organizations)	54	31	12	6	103

Table 2. Frequency of Participation in Types of PjBL

As shown in Table 2, class PjBL was identified as the type that most participants (100) most frequently experienced. This result was followed by the whole-school PjBL (67 participants) and organizational/governmental or international PjBL (49 participants), respectively. The fact that class PjBL experiences garnered the highest of all types of project-based experiences was an expected result. This finding may indicate that most respondents participated in single-class-oriented projects within their own lessons and were aware of and familiar with the PjBL.

Data Collection

Data for the present study were collected by employing an online questionnaire consisting of two main sections with closed and open-ended items: a) a section on demographics and background overview for a contextual framework including the participants' experiences in implementing PjBL, and b) a section on teachers' responses associated with their perceptions of PjBL, the support and its types the teachers receive from school administration, and the level of PjBL teaching practice. In order to ensure a common understanding of the meaning of project work, a definition of PjBL derived from selected literature (Holm, 2011; Larmer et al., 2015; BIE, 2019) was provided in the questionnaire.

The online questionnaire was used in this study to collect three main types of information: facts about participants; their behavior; and their personal beliefs, attitudes, and values (Dörnyei, 2007). This tool was considered most suitable due to the geographic locations of the schools. Furthermore, online questionnaires offer several advantages over other data collection tools as the data can be collected without the researcher's presence; therefore, participants are likely to feel free and more comfortable in providing frank and honest answers.

The closed-ended statements were developed to identify the extent to which the level of EFL teachers' PjBL teaching practices align with the teaching practices of Gold-Standard PjBL. Thus, the questionnaire statements allowed the researcher to categorize the level of the teaching practices. The respondents were asked to rate 15 Likert-scaled statements to identify the extent to which they apply the key components while practicing PjBL in their EFL lessons (Appendix A). The 6-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 2 = to a little extent, 3 = to some extent, 4 = to a moderate extent, 5 = to a large extent, 6 = don't know) was adopted to elicit the participants' practices regarding the PjBL essentials. All 15 statements that describe detailed features and indicators of Gold-Standard PjBL were adapted from Gold-Standard teaching rubrics (BIE, 2019), which reflect the seven key practices essential to project-based teaching (Larmer et al., 2015).

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using a scheme devised for meaningful interpretation of the mean values of the statements concerning the teaching practices. According to this scheme, the numerical categories were identified. As a result, the numerical criteria applied in interpreting the mean values were defined based on the mean values of each item as follows: beginning PjBL (between 1 and 2.33), developing PjBL (between 2.34 and 3.66), or Gold-Standard PjBL (between 3.67 and 5; adapted from Kemaloglu, 2010). The descriptive statistics were compiled to determine the mean values. The mean values and the percentages of the items in the Likert scale questions were statistically analyzed and calculated with the help of IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 25). The questionnaire items were tested for reliability and validity using Cronbach's alpha, $\alpha = .967$ for PjBL practice, indicating high internal consistency. The qualitative data obtained from open-ended items were analyzed employing thematic analysis of the inductive approach, which is described as a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results

School Administration Support for Implementing PjBL

The first research question of this study addresses the support EFL teachers receive from their school administrations while implementing PjBL. Table 3 presents an overview of the responses to the rates of received support. More than half of the participants (55%) acknowledged the support they received from school administrations with either "There is always support" or "There is support to some extent" However, a considerable percentage of responses (45%) selected for "No, not particularly" and "There is no support at all," indicating they did not receive any support from the school administration.

Level of Support	Percentage
There is always support	14%
There is support to some extent	41%
No, not particularly	31%
There is no support at all	14%

Table 3. Percentage Distribution of Participants' Ratings of Support for PjBL Implementation

To investigate further, three different questions were asked on whether respondents received any support from school administration, the type of support they required, and the type of support the school provided. Participants supplemented their responses by specifying in free-text fields the types of support they requested from their schools. The respondents listed various requests, including financial support, transport, technical equipment, permissions to organize projects, and permissions for trips out of schools and seminars or training, considering PjBL. Although not all participants provided responses in the free-text boxes, 22 respondents recognized the necessity of "more time to work with students, not with documents." Likewise, 18 respondents shared a similar opinion regarding the supplementary guidance on implementing PjBL and the involvement of other teachers and school administration to establish collaborative and interdisciplinary projects within different subjects. Moreover, participants mentioned that they wanted school administration to help them with a real public audience in addition to parental support, which refers to critical and essential aspects of Gold-Standard PjBL (Larmer et al., 2015) and lies at the core of PjBL. For example, some extracts from participant responses were the following:

- Teacher 1: "Audience is very important when students are ready to present, the school can invite some guests to watch their presentations."
- Teacher 2: "We want our school administration to help us invite/make sure the participation of relevant audiences for public presentations. Help with documentary support (consent letters, certificates, etc.). Help us collaborate with experts by assigning tasks and scheduling events."

Employing thematic analysis with an inductive approach, the first phase (*familiarisation with the data*) allowed the initial data to emerge. Before creating the codes, the transcript was reviewed several times; as a result, $n = 14$ codes emerged. The codes were developed based on the frequency of the respondents' mentions and applied to the themes that represented the types of attitudes. Thus, the

responses to open-ended questions about the school administration's attitudes toward teacher requests were further coded and categorized into three main themes: *encouraging*, *teacher concerns*, and *not experienced*. All three themes reflected respondents' views and were regarded as a level of awareness of the Gold-Standard PjBL essentials. Table 4 presents a summary of how codes were applied to themes in the data set.

Revised Codes	Theme
Professional development opportunities	Encouraging
Open communication	Encouraging
Collaborative environment	Encouraging
Failure to provide resources	Teacher concerns
Ignoring teacher requests	Teacher concerns
Teachers' workload	Teacher concerns
Inconsistent communication	Teacher concerns
Lack of PjBL culture	Not experienced
Noncompliance with curriculum	Not experienced
Limited understanding of PjBL	Not experienced
Weak PjBL involvement	Not experienced

Table 4. A Summary Table of Codes

Of all responses, the most common expressions conveyed a theme of encouragement. The majority of the participants acknowledged their school administration for fulfilling their needs and encouraging them to implement project work:

- Teacher 3: "[School administrators] write a letter to parents on their behalf, certain office supplies and lab use."
- Teacher 4: "School administration participated in the interview that was conducted by students; as a jury evaluated students' projects; and advised in the sphere of organization."
- Teacher 5: "Organize contests and events; we have PjBL lessons in our long-term plan."

Besides their encouraging responses regarding the support from school administration, teachers also expressed *concerns* that consistently emerged throughout the data, that may cause serious issues regarding the PjBL implementation. For instance:

- Teacher 6: "We have some problems with it; [School administrators] do not provide any support."
- Teacher 7: "School is usually open to projects, but initiators do everything themselves."
- Teacher 8: "Mostly, they provide us with what we ask but usually a bit late."
- Teacher 9: "It is difficult to correlate PjBL with the national curriculum."
- Teacher 10: "Teachers are not enough to implement PjBL in schools. School administration should also know what it is like."

- Teacher 11: "School routine may sometimes prevent you from applying PjBL to the maximum degree. Another point to take into consideration is the school's vision and teacher motivation to realize PjBL in schools."

However, there were also responses that described that teachers had never experienced PjBL and were not aware of how it worked:

- Teacher 12: "I have no experience at all. We always hear about PjBL, but I don't know how it works."
- Teacher 13: "I can not [sic] say anything as I am not involved in such kind of learning. Haven't done any projects yet."

The open-ended responses facilitated identifying and elaborating on the types of support respondents required and had been provided. Moreover, the elaboration indicates the respondents' awareness and concern about implementing PjBL in their lessons. The open-ended responses demonstrated an awareness of what PjBL is and what it includes to be considered Gold-Standard PjBL. Even though very few respondents had no experience practicing PjBL and some participants faced challenges in receiving support from school administration about implementing PjBL, the majority of respondents were experienced and aware of PjBL essentials, having been encouraged to apply PjBL in their teaching.

The PjBL Teaching Practice

The second research question concerns the level of teaching practice that the teachers implement in EMI schools. In order to identify the level of teaching practice, the indicators of Gold-Standard PjBL from Gold-Standard teaching rubrics (BIE, 2019) were included as Likert-scale statements in the questionnaire (Appendix A). The numerical criteria applied in interpreting the mean values were defined in accordance with the mean values of each item as the following: beginning PjBL (between 1 and 2.33), developing PjBL (between 2.34 and 3.66) or Gold-Standard PjBL (between 3.67 and 5; adapted from Kemaloglu, 2010). Three participants who had no experience in PjBL consequently selected "Don't know" for all items; therefore, their responses were excluded since their opinions were not valid for this question.

PjBL Teaching Practice	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Design & Plan	100	2.97	1.09
Align to Standards	100	3.1	1.14
Build the Culture	100	3.25	1.17
Manage Activities	100	3.24	1.18
Assess Student Learning	100	3.31	1.18
Engage & Coach	100	3.33	1.19
Scaffold Student Learning	100	3.19	1.09

Note. *N* = number of participants; *SD* = standard deviation.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of PjBL Teaching Practice Levels

According to the findings shown in Table 5, no PjBL teaching practices would fall into the category of the Gold-Standard PjBL level, as evidenced by the mean values. The perception of all PjBL practices indicated in Table 5 was found in the category of developing PjBL with mean scores between 2.97 and 3.31. More interestingly, in the category of Developing PjBL, the highest level of practice belongs to Engage & Coach with a mean value of 3.32 and Assessing Student Learning with a mean value of 3.31, with a standard deviation of 1.18. Although the practice of Project Designing and Planning is the first step in the project planning process, it concludes the list as the least practiced item with a mean value of 2.97 ($SD = 1.08$). This result is explained by the necessity of a considerable amount of time for planning and preparing for the project. Lack of time was one of the most frequently reported concerns in the open-ended responses, and it was also the most commonly mentioned necessity for which respondents requested support from the school administration. Representative responses are demonstrated below:

- Teacher 14: "PjBL is not well developed in our country. And teachers don't usually use it since its time-consuming with the organizing process."
- Teacher 15: "Free time to work with students, not with documents."
- Teacher 16: "Resources, time, and interdepartmental cooperation."

The standard deviation presented in the last column reveals a variation in the range of responses, indicated by a relatively high standard deviation. Thus, the results indicate a rather high range of various PjBL implementations across the respondents' reports, especially in practicing Engage & Coach, Manage Activities, and Assess Student Learning.

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the attitudes of the Kazakhstani EMI school administration towards the support for teachers who want to implement PjBL and to what extent the essentials of Gold-Standard PjBL teaching practices have been implemented in EFL classrooms. Our research employed both qualitative and quantitative data analysis methodology to understand more in-depth the current status of the Kazakhstani EMI schools regarding the applicability of PjBL in EFL classrooms. A concerning issue to note is the lack of knowledge and experience of teachers in implementing PjBL. The participants in this study also referred to this point and stated they would like to receive school support regarding training and professional development programs. The study complies with the findings of Abishova et al. (2020) and Intykbekov (2017), asserting that Kazakhstani teachers are not ready for PjBL implementation and showing the unsatisfactory situation in secondary education regarding PjBL. Based on the teachers' perceptions, this study suggests that the situation remains unchanged and that urgent support from the school administration is required.

On the other hand, similar to the studies of Cervantes et al. (2015), Lam et al. (2010), Parsons et al. (2010), and Zahroh et al. (2023), teachers in this study also acknowledged the importance of the support provided by school administrations and admitted that administrative support establishes successful implementation and interdisciplinary collaboration. However, teachers also reported various challenges regarding the PjBL implementation in their schools. As stated in the previous studies (Haatainen & Aksela, 2021; Hertzog, 2007; Parsons et al., 2010), the lack of time to plan and practice PjBL emerged as an essential obstacle, as well as the weak involvement of other interdisciplinary teachers in establishing collaboration within the schools and other experts in specific areas.

Furthermore, the study reveals that teachers are aware of the essentials needed for Gold-Standard PjBL because they wanted their school administrations to help them with the real audience and public events. This finding suggests the importance of engaging students with an authentic

environment throughout the learning process. An interesting point is that the responses in this study reflected both encouraging perspectives and expressed concerns regarding the obstacles in implementing PjBL, indicating teachers' awareness of what PjBL is, how it works and its importance, and their belief in PjBL as a practical teaching approach in language classrooms.

This study is different from the other reported studies about teachers' perceptions of PjBL. Unlike previous studies on PjBL, this study investigated the level to which these Kazakhstani EFL teachers applied the Gold-Standard PjBL teaching practices (BIE, 2019) in their EFL classrooms, as indicated on the Likert scale. Considering the support of the school administration and the obstacles mentioned above, expecting a high level of enactment of those teaching practices would be unfair. PjBL practitioners need to accept that although implementing Gold-Standard PjBL teaching practices (BIE, 2019) leads to effective and successful outcomes, these teaching practices impose huge responsibility and workload on teachers' roles. Since the key elements like engaging, coaching, and scaffolding clearly imply teacher roles, the findings of this study are in line with the studies where participants experienced challenges and a lack of teacher roles in monitoring, scaffolding, and assessment (Hidayat et al., 2024; Le Hang & Thuy, 2023; Sartika et al., 2022). Even though there are no PjBL teaching practices that fall into the category of the Gold-Standard PjBL level, teachers favored two components of teaching practices, such as Engage & Coach and Ssessing Student Learning. The former, which "reflects two senses of 'engage' –one is to engage with students, the other is to engage students in their learning" (BIE, 2019, n.d.), may be attributed to the teachers' preferences to spend time with their students instead of doing paperwork, as was repeatedly mentioned in the open-ended responses. In contrast, the latter may be explained by the sensitivity of these teachers to the assessment process, which was highly emphasized by the administrative authorities as a component of educational reforms in the country (Republic of Kazakhstan, 2016). On the other hand, Larmer et al. (2015) state that "assessment in a PjBL context includes many of the practices found in traditional instruction" (p.47); however, PjBL teachers are required to go beyond the standardized tests and quizzes, which should include self-assessment, peer evaluation, and reflection, in addition to formative and summative assessment.

Another important detail is that the least practiced component among the teaching practices is project designing and planning, which is very much connected with the required amount of time and pertains to the main obstacles to the implementation of PjBL, as also stated in open-ended responses. There appears to be a relationship among school administration support, PjBL enactment, and the implementation of Gold-Standard teaching practices. Although teachers report being aware of the PjBL essentials (BIE, 2019), all of the teaching practices were found in a developing level of enactment in their EFL lessons. The reasons may be due to the above-stated obstacles that teachers encounter: overloaded paperwork, which leaves no time for project planning, and a lack of collaboration between the interdisciplinary teachers and school administration.

The context of EMI schools is also significant in this study in the sense that the role of the English language and contemporary approaches, such as PjBL, in such contexts assumes essential roles since these EMI schools served as the pilot ground for the Kazakhstani educational project, "Trinity of Languages," and launched the development of trilingual education in Kazakhstan. Although PjBL is implemented in EMI schools, it does not comply with the Gold-Standard PjBL teaching practices and is still at the developmental stage. These factors imply the necessity of professional development programs on innovative approaches.

Conclusion

This paper provides insights into how 103 Kazakhstani EFL teachers in EMI schools view the implementation of PjBL in practice, as well as the current status of the reported Gold-Standard PjBL teaching practices in their schools. Although teachers acknowledged the school's support regarding

the PjBL implementation, they highlighted substantial obstacles they experienced throughout the PjBL process. PjBL is a challenging approach to implement, but with proper support, involvement, and meticulous planning for its implementation, teachers can engage their learners in exploring real-world issues in authentic contexts, which develop life-enhancement skills for the 21st century. Therefore, the findings of this study suggest that although teachers experience challenges in implementing PjBL, the method can be applied in Kazakhstani schools. Based on the results of this study, the two implications for research are considered relevant. First, the integration of PjBL practice into the existing standards and curriculum design, as well as the development of guidelines that meet academic standards, should be explored. Second, the findings advocate investigating the challenges regarding assessing the learning process and learners' outcomes within the PjBL context, exploring the assessment tools that align with Gold-Standard PjBL, and evaluating the development of 21st-century skills.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Although this study provides a new perspective on EFL teachers' implementation of the Gold-Standard PjBL in EMI secondary high schools with a natural sciences profile, some limitations should be acknowledged. The findings herein do not represent all EFL settings in Kazakhstan. Given the particular type of schools, this study suggests that further research should include EFL teachers from multiple public schools to provide a more comprehensive set of results. Another limitation is the use of the questionnaire, so another study, including other data sources such as in-depth interviews and observations, may provide alternative insights and robust conclusions on the significance of Gold-Standard PjBL teaching practice and the support of the school administration.

The results of this study may provide an invaluable contribution to both Kazakhstani and international educators and scholars in developing and improving ongoing theories, policies, and curricula. Thus, several educational recommendations are being proposed. First, to better encourage the EFL teachers to implement PjBL, it is crucial to strengthen the focus on the awareness of PjBL 's significance in foreign language education and provide teachers with the appropriate support for PjBL enactment in their classrooms. Second, considering the governmental support by the law "on the status of a teacher" (Republic of Kazakhstan, 2019, Art. 3-1(3); Art. 18), professional development training is still necessary to promote their PjBL knowledge on using Gold-Standard PjBL teaching practices. Further research, in addition to the abovementioned studies, will lead to more complex comprehension and evaluation of PjBL experiences as well as student perceptions of teacher roles in PjBL in another major. Investigating the views of pre-service and in-service teachers in higher education would also be worthwhile to obtain an overall picture of the Gold-Standard PjBL teaching practices.

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6. Using the scale below, please indicate to what extent you implement PjBL teaching practices in your lessons (adapted from Buck Institute for Education, 2015).

1-Not at all 2-To a little extent 3-To some extent 4-To a moderate extent 5-To a large extent 6-Don't know

PjBL teaching practice	1	2	3	4	5	6
Detailed and accurate plans include scaffolding and assessing student learning, and a project calendar, which remains flexible to meet student needs.						
Resources for the project have been arranged well in advance.						
Criteria for products are clearly and specifically derived from standards.						
Scaffolding of student learning, assessments, and rubrics supports student achievement of specific standards.						
Student voice and choice are expected and ongoing, including real-world issues and problems students want to address in projects.						
Students usually know what they need to do and are directed by the teacher only to the extent necessary when working individually or in teams.						
Students work collaboratively in healthy, high-functioning teams, much like an authentic work environment; the teacher rarely needs to be involved in handling problems.						
Well-balanced teams are formed according to the nature of the project and student needs.						
Classroom routines and norms are followed during project work time to maximize productivity.						
All students receive necessary instructional supports, removed when no longer needed, to access both content and resources.						
The teacher does not "front-load" too much information at the start of the project, but waits until it is needed or requested by students.						
Standards-aligned rubrics are used by students and the teacher to guide both formative and summative assessment, and to guide students to deeper levels of thinking.						
Student questions play the central role in driving the inquiry and product development process; the driving question is actively used to sustain inquiry.						
Student needs are identified and met not only by the teacher but by students themselves or other students, acting independently.						
Students give and receive effective feedback to inform instructional decisions and students' actions.						
Detailed and accurate plans include scaffolding and assessing student learning, and a project calendar, which remains flexible to meet student needs.						