



PART 1

Read the text below and answer questions 1–13.

THE EVOLUTION OF PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

Project-based learning (PBL) describes an approach in which students develop knowledge and skills by working over an extended period to investigate and respond to a meaningful question, design brief, or real-world challenge. Although PBL is sometimes marketed as a contemporary innovation, its central intuition—learning through purposeful activity—has appeared repeatedly in education history. What has shifted over time is the justification given for project work, the institutional pressures it has faced, and the tools used to document learning. As education systems expanded and expectations changed, PBL was alternately promoted as a route to civic growth, practical competence, deeper conceptual understanding, or “twenty-first-century skills,” with each era emphasising different strengths and exposing different weaknesses.

The early twentieth-century “Progressive Education” movement is often treated as a key point of reference. Reformers such as John Dewey argued that schooling should connect to lived experience rather than revolve around the passive reception of facts. In Dewey’s view, knowledge is not merely accumulated; it is tested and refined through inquiry, social interaction, and reflective action. Classroom projects were therefore not meant to be decorative extras but vehicles for integrating subjects and cultivating habits of mind—observation, cooperation, responsibility, and the capacity to frame problems. The underlying claim was moral as well as cognitive: students should practice participation and judgement in miniature communities, so that education prepares them for democratic life rather than only for examinations.

As schooling systems developed, project work also found a practical home in vocational and technical education. Here, the alignment between tasks and outcomes was visible: students built, tested, and revised products, learning through repeated iteration. A carpentry project, for instance, makes error concrete; measurements must be corrected, joints must fit, and materials respond to handling. This “learning by making” naturally supports skills valued in many workplaces: planning, collaboration, quality control, and the disciplined habit of improving a draft rather than accepting a first attempt. Yet as mass education expanded and standardised examinations became increasingly influential, project work was often reduced, marginalised, or relabelled as enrichment. One reason was logistical: projects are more difficult to score consistently than timed tests, particularly when outcomes vary and teachers must judge reasoning, collaboration, and



revision as well as a final product. In systems that prioritise comparability across classes or districts, reliability pressures can therefore push project work to the periphery.

Later, cognitive science offered a renewed justification for PBL, but in a more structured form than some popular accounts suggest. Research on expertise and conceptual change implies that durable understanding depends on organising knowledge and applying it flexibly, not merely recalling facts. From this perspective, projects can be powerful when they force students to explain concepts, transfer learning across contexts, confront misconceptions, and revise their thinking in response to evidence. However, this is not a call for unassisted “discovery.” The tradition associated with Lev Vygotsky highlights how learning is supported through social interaction and guided participation within a learner’s “zone of proximal development.” In practice, this means scaffolding: teachers sequence tasks, provide models, offer feedback, and gradually remove support as competence grows. Well-designed projects therefore combine autonomy with structure, so that students are challenged without being abandoned.

Digital technology has expanded what counts as a project and who can be involved. Students can now use sensors to collect environmental data, run simulations, analyse large datasets, and present findings through multimedia formats for authentic audiences. In geography, a class might use GIS tools to map local heat islands and propose planting strategies; in mathematics, students might write simple code to model population growth or optimise a budget; in science, they might design an experiment with microcontrollers and compare results across schools. Collaboration can also extend beyond one classroom via shared documents and video conferencing, allowing students to coordinate roles and critique one another’s work. Yet technology introduces its own risks. Because digital products can look polished, teachers and students may overvalue presentation at the expense of reasoning, and impressive visuals can mask shallow understanding. In other words, the “project” can become a performance unless assessment and feedback keep attention on the learning process.

Assessment has therefore remained the most persistent challenge. Traditional grading systems are usually summative: they aim to produce a final judgement (often a score) under standard conditions. Projects, by contrast, often require formative assessment—feedback during learning—because improvement depends on revision, reflection, and coaching. Many schools have adopted rubrics, portfolios, conferences, and presentations to document growth over time rather than a single performance. A portfolio can capture drafts, decision points, and evidence of reasoning, while a rubric can define expectations for research quality, argument structure, teamwork, and communication. However, even with these tools, reliability can be difficult: two teachers may judge the same work



differently unless criteria are explicit and teachers practise moderation by calibrating standards together.

Equity concerns have also shaped modern debates. Projects can unintentionally reward students who have access to resources outside school: quiet spaces, supportive adults, better devices, or prior familiarity with academic language. Group work can further conceal unequal participation, allowing confident students to dominate while others become peripheral. In response, many educators build checkpoints into the project timeline, require individual reflections, and design tasks with multiple roles and outputs so that success is not limited to one kind of contribution. The aim is to ensure that projects assess learning rather than privilege polish, and that collaboration becomes a structured opportunity rather than an unregulated competition.

Today, PBL is sometimes promoted as workforce preparation, especially where employers value communication, collaboration, and problem-solving in ambiguous situations. Supporters argue that projects resemble professional work: goals evolve, constraints matter, and solutions must be justified to others. Critics respond that the label can become a slogan that masks weak teaching, particularly when teachers lack training or when projects are treated as replacements for systematic instruction in foundational skills. The most credible position therefore recognises PBL as a method rather than a cure-all. Across its history, the approach has been repeatedly reinvented to serve new educational aims; the most successful implementations tend to pair authentic problems with strong scaffolding, clear criteria, and assessment systems that make learning visible over time.

Questions 1–5

Select the correct answer.

1 What does the passage identify as having changed across the history of project-based learning?

- A** The basic principle that purposeful activity can support learning.
- B** The reasons for using project work, the pressures surrounding it, and the tools used to record learning.
- C** The requirement that projects should always prepare students directly for employment.
- D** The belief that projects should be assessed separately from other forms of learning.

2 What was a central idea of Progressive Education reformers such as Dewey?

- A** School learning should be connected with experience, inquiry and active participation.
- B** Project work should primarily develop practical skills through making and revising



products.

C Deeper understanding depends on structured guidance designed around conceptual change.

D Student progress is best demonstrated through portfolios and other records accumulated over time.

3 Why did the growth of standardised examinations create difficulties for project work?

A Projects increasingly focused on civic development rather than knowledge that schools were expected to assess.

B Larger school systems made it difficult for teachers to give students sufficient independence during projects.

C Varied project outcomes and processes were harder to judge consistently than performance under standard test conditions.

D Vocational programmes increasingly replaced practical project work with forms of assessment based on written examinations.

4 How did later research on learning support a more structured form of project-based learning?

A It showed that students learn concepts most effectively when they discover them without teacher intervention.

B It suggested that projects should concentrate on cooperation rather than the transfer of subject knowledge.

C It indicated that teacher support should remain unchanged throughout a project to prevent misconceptions.

D It showed that projects can promote flexible application and revision of understanding when appropriate guidance is provided.

5 What problem can arise from the use of digital technology in project work?

A Access to sophisticated tools can make it harder for students to collaborate beyond their own classroom.

B A highly polished presentation can give an exaggerated impression of the depth of the underlying learning.

C Collecting and analysing digital data can prevent students from presenting work to authentic audiences.

D Multimedia formats can make it impossible for teachers to provide feedback while a project is developing.

Questions 6–9



Complete the notes below. Choose **ONE WORD ONLY** from the text for each answer.

Features of effective project-based learning

- In vocational and technical settings, students often improved performance through repeated **6** as they built and revised products.
- Later, research influenced by Vygotsky highlighted the need for careful **7**, ensuring learners receive guidance and feedback rather than being left to “discover” everything alone.
- Schools may use **8** to preserve drafts, decision points and evidence of students’ reasoning as a project develops.
- To make group participation more visible and address equity issues, teachers sometimes require individual **9** at key stages.

Questions 10–13

Choose **TRUE** if the statement agrees with the information given in the text, choose **FALSE** if the statement contradicts the information, or choose **NOT GIVEN** if there is no information on this.

10 The passage states that project-based learning originated only after digital technologies became common in schools.

11 The passage states that students who collaborate through video conferencing produce better work than students working entirely within one classroom.

12 The passage suggests that assessment reliability can improve when criteria are explicit and teachers practise moderation.

13 The passage claims that project-based learning should replace systematic instruction in foundational skills.

Answer Key

1. B
2. A
3. C
4. D
5. B



- 6. iteration
- 7. scaffolding
- 8. portfolios
- 9. reflections
- 10. FALSE
- 11. NOT GIVEN
- 12. TRUE
- 13. FALSE