

Teaching Writing Through Project-Based Learning: A Case Study at MAN Kota Blitar

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Abstract: Writing is an essential skill in language learning that involves not only grammar and vocabulary but also the ability to generate and organize ideas coherently. Many Indonesian students, however, continue to struggle with writing in English due to limited proficiency and low motivation. To address these challenges, this study investigates the use of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in teaching narrative writing and explores how students respond to its application. Employing a qualitative case study design, the research was conducted at MAN Kota Blitar in the 2024/2025 academic year. Data were gathered through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis involving one English teacher and a group of tenth-grade students. The findings indicate that the teacher applied PjBL through three key stages: project development, presentation, reflection, and evaluation. Students demonstrated positive responses, particularly in terms of creativity, communication, and comprehension of narrative text. The results suggest that PjBL can foster active learning and improve students' writing competence, making it a valuable approach for writing instruction in EFL classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

English has been essential in fostering global cross-cultural connections, acting as a common language that supports communication and understanding across diverse backgrounds, which aids in trade, diplomacy, education, and cultural exchange (Atasheva, 2024). Moreover, English also plays a crucial role in academic fields globally, serving as a common language in education, research, and professional domains (Tiwari, 2020). In the Indonesian context, the role of English has been reinforced by the National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003 and the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 22 of 2016, which encourage students to master foreign languages as part of their competencies. The Indonesian government requires English learning from elementary school to university (Kurniati et al., 2021). Mastering English requires proficiency in its four core skills: reading, writing, speaking, and

listening (Ali, 2022). Among the four skills above, writing is a fundamental language skill that students must develop when learning a new language (Allen, 2018). Writing skill is a complex ability that involves knowledge, creativity, and intellectual integrity (Gautam, 2019). It requires attention to word choice, coherence, and grammar (Sa'adah, 2019). Writing skills are crucial in English education, playing a vital role in academic and professional communication (Bora, 2023). In addition to these technical aspects, writing also helps students organize their thoughts, structure their arguments, and convey their ideas effectively.

Scholars such as Bain (1866) explained that writing is a structured and rule- governed activity that can be systematically taught. In his influential work *English Composition and Rhetoric*, Bain introduced a clear classification of writing into four main types: narration, description, exposition, and argumentation. He believed that effective writing requires attention to organization, coherence, and rhetorical purpose. Bain's approach emphasized the mechanical and formal aspects of writing, highlighting that students could improve their writing skills by mastering distinct genres and learning how to organize ideas logically. His theory contributed significantly to early composition instruction by providing a framework that remains relevant in genre-based writing pedagogy.

Moreover, Harmer (2001) Writing encourages students to concentrate on using language accurately. As students engage in writing, the process stimulates language development by prompting them to address challenges that arise, which in turn helps refine their language skills. This highlights that writing is not simply about producing text, but rather a process that promotes critical thinking, and reflection. As students write, they confront challenges related to grammar, vocabulary, and structure, which helps them refine their language skills over time. Moreover, the act of revising and editing their work further solidifies their understanding of language rules, improving both accuracy and fluency.

Dewey (1916), on the other hand, viewed writing as an active, reflective

process closely tied to thinking and learning. In his book *Democracy and Education*, he stated that writing should not be treated as a static product but as a dynamic means of inquiry and self-expression. Dewey believed that learners construct meaning through experiences and that writing serves as a tool for organizing, refining, and communicating those experiences. He emphasized the importance of context, purpose, and personal relevance in writing tasks, advocating for a more student-centered and experiential approach to writing instruction. Dewey's perspective laid the philosophical foundation for later developments in process-based writing and writing across the curriculum.

Despite its importance, Indonesian students face significant challenges in learning English writing skills (Ariyanti, 2016). These challenges stem from both external and internal factors. Internal factors that challenge ESL students' English writing skills include insufficient linguistic proficiency, writing anxiety, lack of ideas (Fareed et al., 2016). External factors that challenge students in writing stem from cultural differences between students' native languages and English, large class sizes, limited time for effective instruction, and the need for new teaching techniques to improve students' writing outcomes (Ariyanti, 2016). Cultural differences between Indonesian and English-speaking contexts further complicate the learning process, often resulting in writing that doesn't "sound" appropriate in English. Teachers also encounter difficulties in implementing effective teaching techniques, managing large classes, and allocating sufficient time for the complex writing process (Ariyanti, 2016).

Therefore, to address these challenges, teachers need to implement innovative teaching methods. One of the innovative teaching methods is Project-based Learning. In practice, traditional writing instruction in Indonesia often emphasizes accuracy and product-oriented tasks, which tend to reduce student motivation. Project-based learning focuses on task-oriented learning, teamwork, student independence, and learner-centered teaching, all while conveying curriculum content (Wiji Lestari & Kurniady Supian Erik Rusmana, 2023). Through this strategy, learners participate in practical exercises that

demand the application of their writing skills in meaningful contexts.

PjBL offers an alternative by involving students in real-life projects that encourage creativity, autonomy, and deeper engagement with language. Previous studies (e.g., Ardiana et al., 2023; Pohan, 2020; Fadhillah et al., 2023) have confirmed the effectiveness of PjBL in improving writing ability and student participation. However, limited research has explored its implementation in senior high schools in Blitar, particularly in teaching narrative writing. This gap provides the rationale for conducting the present study, which investigates how PjBL is applied in teaching writing at MAN Kota Blitar and how students respond to this approach.

Previous research has provided strong evidence of the role of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in language education. Stoller (2006) emphasize that PjBL engages learners in authentic tasks that promote deeper understanding and long- term retention. In the Indonesian context, Ardiana et al. (2023), Pohan (2020), and Fadhillah et al. (2023) found that PjBL not only improved students' writing competence but also enhanced their motivation and participation in class. These studies serve as primary references to support the relevance of PjBL as an alternative instructional strategy in teaching writing.

To address the challenges faced by students in writing, this study proposes the use of PjBL as a pedagogical solution. By engaging learners in project activities, such as developing narrative texts through multimedia prompts, collaborative reflection, and presentation, students are expected to improve both their writing skills and their confidence in using English. The teacher's role in guiding, facilitating, and assessing the project becomes central to ensure that students remain on track and achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Research on Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms has shown consistent positive outcomes. International studies demonstrate that PjBL enhances learner autonomy, creativity, and collaboration in language learning contexts (Stoller, 2006). In Indonesia, recent studies have reported that PjBL can improve students'

writing performance and motivation (Ardiana et al., 2023; Pohan, 2020). Most of these studies, however, focused on general writing tasks or descriptive text. At the same time, few have explored narrative writing at the senior high school level, especially in the context of Islamic senior high schools (*madrasah aliyah*).

The novelty of this study lies in its exploration of how PjBL is practically implemented in teaching narrative writing at MAN Kota Blitar, a context that has not been widely investigated in earlier works. This study does not only examine the teacher's instructional strategies but also highlights students' responses from cognitive, affective, and behavioral perspectives. According to Nunan (2004) student responses include how learners process and understand information (cognitive), how they feel about the learning tasks (affective), and how they behave or participate during classroom activities (behavioral). These responses serve as indicators of how effective the teaching approach is in engaging students intellectually, emotionally, and socially. In the context of Project-Based Learning (PjBL), student responses often manifest through their engagement in tasks, their willingness to collaborate, and their ability to reflect on their own learning progress. In this study, student response focuses on three specific areas: creativity, communication skill, and understanding of the material. Creativity refers to students' ability to generate original ideas and express themselves uniquely during the writing project (Harmer, 2004). Communication skill is defined as the ability of students to express their thoughts clearly, both orally and in writing, especially during collaborative activities (Stoller, 2006). Understanding of the material refers to how well students comprehend the narrative text structure and apply writing concepts taught during the project (Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006). These components reflect students' cognitive reactions to the implementation of PjBL and are used in this research to explore their responses to the writing instruction facilitated by the teacher.

Considering the background and theoretical perspectives, this study

focuses on the application of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in teaching narrative writing at MAN Kota Blitar. Writing is often regarded as a difficult skill for Indonesian students, and PjBL is assumed to provide meaningful learning experiences that can overcome these difficulties. However, little is known about how teachers implement this method in real classroom practice, particularly at the senior high school level in Islamic institutions. At the same time, students' responses toward this method also need to be explored to understand its effectiveness from their point of view. Therefore, this study seeks to describe the teacher's implementation of PjBL and to examine how students respond to the use of this method in narrative writing instruction.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a single-case study design addapted from (Yin, 2018), conducted at MAN Kota Blitar during the second semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. The participants consisted of one English teacher and a group of tenth-grade students selected through purposive and snowball sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data were collected through semi- structured interviews with the teacher and students, classroom observations of the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) implementation, and documentation of lesson plans, assessment rubrics, and student project. The researcher was directly present at the site to carry out these activities. The data were analyzed using (Miles et al., 2014) interactive model, which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, supported by open, axial, and selective coding. To ensure validity and trustworthiness, the study applied triangulation across data sources and addressed credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are presented in two parts: the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) by the English teacher and the students'

responses toward its application in narrative writing classes.

1. Implementation of PjBL

This study indicates that the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in teaching narrative writing at MAN Kota Blitar followed a structured and purposeful approach. Before the project started, the teacher explained the learning objectives, the structure of narrative texts, and their language features. The teacher assigned a writing project in which students created narrative texts based on silent videos, promoting creativity and interpretation of visual content. A semi-guided strategy was used, where the teacher provided an example text to serve as a reference while still allowing students to express their ideas. Students engaged in brainstorming, vocabulary exploration, and individual writing tasks. The teacher gave continuous guidance both in class and via WhatsApp, and only selected students were asked to present their work due to time limitations. At the lesson's end, students participated in reflective exercises. In terms of evaluation, the teacher used an assessment rubric. Evaluation results were used to determine the next instructional steps: students who met the minimum passing grade (KKM) continued to the next material, while those who did not meet the minimum passing grade received additional support through remedial sessions.

2. Students' Responses

The students demonstrated positive responses to the implementation of PjBL. In terms of creativity, they produced more imaginative and expressive narratives compared to previous assignments. Regarding communication, students showed greater confidence in sharing their work and discussing ideas with peers. From the perspective of understanding, students exhibited better comprehension of narrative text structure, including orientation, complication, and resolution. Overall, PjBL created a more engaging classroom atmosphere that motivated students to participate actively in the writing process.

By analyzing interviews, observations, and documentation data, this research constructs a model demonstrating the application of Project-Based Learning in writing classes and the students' reactions to it. The model consists

of two interrelated components: (1) the teacher's implementation strategies and (2) the students' reactions and learning outcomes. The teacher initiated the process with media-based stimulation (such as silent video), followed by semi-guided instruction that allowed student autonomy, and was supported by clear timelines and individual tasks. Throughout the process, consistent guidance was provided in class interactions and WhatsApp communication. As a result of this structured and student-centered implementation, students demonstrated active engagement and positive responses in three key areas: creativity, communication skills, and understanding of the material.

The study's findings allow for the formulation of several research propositions detailing Project-Based Learning's (PjBL) impact on student learning experiences. First, the use of silent video as a stimulus in PjBL provides a creative trigger that helps students generate original ideas and imagination in their narrative writing. The semi-guided instruction model employed by the teacher also proves effective in striking a balance between structure and flexibility, allowing students to explore their creativity while still receiving guidance. Moreover, consistent guidance from the teacher, both during classroom activities and through online platforms such as WhatsApp, contributes significantly to maintaining students' motivation and supporting the successful completion of writing projects. Additionally, integrating reflection activities helps both teachers and students evaluate the learning process, identify areas for improvement, and reinforce their understanding of the material. Project-Based Learning also gives students opportunities to practice public speaking when they present their writing, thereby strengthening their communication skills and building confidence. Finally, the experience of creating their written products enables students to construct a deeper understanding of the material, as the process requires them to internalize and express what they have learned in a significant way. These propositions highlight the pedagogical value of PjBL and its potential to enhance creativity, communication, and comprehension in EFL writing instruction.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in teaching writing at MAN Kota Blitar provided students with structured, engaging, and meaningful learning experiences. Students were guided through a series of activities, including observing a silent video, exploring relevant vocabulary, brainstorming ideas, drafting narratives, and presenting their written work. These stages enabled students to express their ideas creatively while developing language skills in a supportive and purposeful learning environment. The students' ability to create original stories based on visual stimuli and their enjoyment of the process reflect the emotional and personal involvement in writing that this model encouraged.

These findings align with Harmer's (2004) perspective that writing is not merely about forming grammatically correct sentences, but serves as a tool for expressing ideas, emotions, and opinions. By constructing stories from a silent video, students were encouraged to interpret meaning and transform visual experiences into written language. This form of creative expression provided them with an opportunity to connect personally with their writing, thereby making the learning process more authentic and engaging. The meaningful context provided by the video enabled students to relate their writing to real-life situations, which, according to Harmer, enhances the educational value of writing tasks.

Moreover, the writing process observed in this study, particularly in the stages of vocabulary exploration, and drafting supports Harmer's (2001) view that writing is a process that fosters language development through active problem-solving and critical thinking. As students selected appropriate vocabulary and constructed coherent narratives, they engaged in linguistic decision-making that refined their grammar, structure, and word choice. The act of revising their drafts helped reinforce language rules, improve writing fluency, and strengthen their awareness of cohesion and accuracy. These activities show that writing can be a reflective process that contributes to both skill development and deeper understanding.

In terms of instructional design, the model implemented in this study corresponds with the core principles of Project-Based Learning as described by Krajcik and Blumenfeld (2006). Students were engaged in a long-term writing project that required sustained effort, personal interpretation, and the production of a concrete product (a narrative text). Although the project did not involve a formal driving question, the task encouraged inquiry, self-direction, and the construction of knowledge based on visual interpretation. The structured support provided by the teacher during the planning and execution stages contributed to student engagement and responsibility, illustrating how PjBL fosters meaningful learning through authentic tasks.

Furthermore, the study aligns with Stoller's (2006) view that PjBL is particularly suitable for language learning, as it creates purposeful contexts for language use while integrating multiple language skills. In this case, the project enabled students to develop their writing proficiency, expand their vocabulary, and enhance their confidence in expressing ideas through written English. The individual nature of the task, along with reflection and presentation opportunities, provided a comprehensive learning experience tailored to each student's pace and ability. This confirms that PjBL can be effectively adapted in EFL writing classes, even without collaborative components, and still yield significant improvements in learner motivation and performance.

In addition, the findings of this study reveal that students demonstrated a clear understanding of the structure and language features of narrative texts throughout the project. This was evident in the way they organized their stories using appropriate sequencing and narrative elements. The teacher had previously provided explicit instruction on the components of narrative texts, including orientation, complication, and resolution, along with key language features such as the use of past tense, action verbs, and temporal conjunctions. These findings are consistent with Derewianka's (1990) explanation that narrative texts typically follow a generic structure comprising orientation, complication, and resolution

In conclusion, the discussion of findings suggests that integrating PjBL in writing instruction, particularly through visual media and structured support, can enhance students' creativity, linguistic accuracy, and personal engagement. This outcome aligns with the perspectives of Harmer (2001, 2004), Krajcik and Blumenfeld (2006), and Stoller (2006), who emphasize that writing should be expressive and reflective, and that project-based learning promotes meaningful language use through active and contextualized tasks. The observed implementation in this study also demonstrates Stoller's (2006) view of PjBL as a means to foster learner autonomy and integrate language skills through authentic, student-centered experiences in narrative writing.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that Project-Based Learning (PjBL) was effectively implemented in teaching narrative writing at MAN Kota Blitar. The teacher applied PjBL through three main stages, project development, presentation and reflection, and evaluation, which provided structured opportunities for students to engage in meaningful writing activities. Students responded positively to this approach, as reflected in their increased creativity, improved communication, and deeper understanding of narrative text structure. These findings confirm that PjBL can serve as a valuable instructional model to enhance student engagement and writing competence in EFL classrooms.

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