



THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PROJECT-BASED LEARNING IN TEACHING NARRATIVE TEXT: A CASE STUDY IN ONE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL IN GARUT

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ABSTRAK

Rendahnya kompetensi menulis teks naratif dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris sering kali disebabkan oleh pengajaran konvensional yang berfokus pada hafalan struktur gramatikal semata. Kesenjangan ini memicu keterbatasan keterlibatan aktif peserta didik dalam mengonstruksi gagasan secara imajinatif dan kolaboratif. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menginvestigasi implementasi *Project-Based Learning* (PjBL) dalam pengajaran teks naratif serta mengeksplorasi persepsi peserta didik mengenai dampak instruksionalnya. Menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif, penelitian ini dilaksanakan di salah satu SMA negeri di Garut dengan melibatkan satu guru bahasa Inggris dan delapan siswa kelas XI yang dipilih secara purposif. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi kelas langsung, lembar observasi, catatan lapangan, dan wawancara semi-terstruktur yang telah divalidasi ahli. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik model Braun dan Clarke. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa PjBL diimplementasikan secara sistematis melalui enam tahapan: orientasi, perencanaan, perancangan draf, pemantauan dan bimbingan, presentasi publik, serta evaluasi reflektif. Penggunaan peta cerita (*story map*) secara efektif menurunkan beban kognitif siswa dalam mengorganisasikan alur komplikasi dan resolusi cerita. Di samping itu, wawancara mengungkap tiga tema utama: persepsi positif terhadap suasana kelas interaktif, penguatan keterampilan abad ke-21 (kolaborasi dan tanggung jawab), serta pengelolaan hambatan kebahasaan melalui pemecahan masalah bersama. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini memberikan landasan empiris yang kuat bahwa model PjBL sangat relevan diterapkan untuk meningkatkan kompetensi menulis narasi dalam bingkai Kurikulum Merdeka.

Kata Kunci: *Kurikulum Merdeka, Pembelajaran Berbasis Proyek, Persepsi Siswa, Teks Naratif*

ABSTRACT

Low competence in narrative text writing within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction often stems from conventional practices that focus exclusively on rote memorization of grammatical rules. This pedagogical gap severely restricts students' active engagement in constructing imaginative ideas collaboratively. This study investigated the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in teaching narrative text and explored students' perceptions regarding its instructional effectiveness. Utilizing a qualitative case study design, this research was conducted at a public senior high school in Garut, involving one English teacher and eight purposively selected Grade XI students. Data were collected through direct classroom observations, observation checklists, field notes, and semi-structured interviews that underwent rigorous expert validation. The qualitative data were examined using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework. The findings revealed that PjBL was implemented systematically across six sequential stages: introduction, project planning, project development, monitoring



and guidance, presentation, and evaluation. The deliberate use of graphic story maps effectively mitigated cognitive load, enabling students to construct structurally coherent plots. Furthermore, the interview data yielded three major themes: positive attitudes toward the active learning atmosphere, substantial development of twenty-first-century competencies, and successful management of linguistic hurdles through collaborative problem-solving. Ultimately, these findings offer robust empirical support for PjBL as a motivating and contextually responsive instructional approach aligned with Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum.

Keywords: *EFL Context, Merdeka Curriculum, Narrative Text, Project-Based Learning (PjBL), Students' Perceptions*

INTRODUCTION

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (*EFL*) education in Indonesia, developing written literacy remains a primary pedagogical objective. Among the various genres mandated by the national curriculum, narrative text holds an essential place due to its role in fostering imaginative expression and structural mastery of language features. However, traditional, teacher-centered writing instruction frequently reduces narrative learning to passive memorization of generic structures and discrete past tense formulas. This conventional approach often fails to cultivate genuine communicative competence, leaving learners disengaged and passive in the classroom (Pandya et al., 2024). To address these pedagogical limitations, the current educational landscape under Indonesia's *Merdeka Curriculum* explicitly endorses student-centered methodologies, placing a particular emphasis on *Project-Based Learning (PjBL)* as a core strategy for nurturing functional competencies (Kemendikbudristek, 2021).

Despite the widespread advocacy for innovative pedagogies, a noticeable empirical gap remains regarding how the comprehensive *PjBL* framework is operationalized in secondary classrooms. While previous investigations have examined writing interventions, past empirical works largely focused strictly on measuring quantitative score gains through pre-experimental designs without unpacking real-time classroom interactions (Chadafi & Fatwa Syarifudin, 2021; Dhea P et al., 2022). Consequently, there is a pronounced lack of qualitative depth detailing how high school learners navigate internal tensions between motivational engagement and linguistic anxieties. Theoretical literature establishes that *PjBL* is organized around authentic, student-driven activities culminating in a tangible artifact (Thomas, 2000). According to Blumenfeld et al. (1991), *PjBL* simultaneously addresses cognitive, social, and affective dimensions, transforming classrooms into active construction sites of knowledge. Therefore, examining the lived experiences of students managing creative project demands is essential to bridging this pedagogical divide.

In terms of instructional materials, narrative writing requires learners to master complex generic structures—comprising orientation, complication, and resolution—alongside specific linguistic markers. In secondary *EFL* contexts where prior genre awareness cannot be assumed, explicit genre-based modeling is vital before assigning independent text production (Rose & Martin, 2012). Language classrooms benefit substantially when pedagogical scaffolding guides learners from joint deconstruction to collaborative text construction (Nur Istiqamah, 2024; Triastuti et al., 2022). Nevertheless, open-ended narrative tasks inherently impose a heavy intrinsic cognitive load because students must generate original storylines while simultaneously monitoring grammatical accuracy (van Nooijen et al., 2024). To prevent cognitive overload during drafting, *Cognitive Load Theory* recommends utilizing visual thinking tools, such as

story maps, to structure narrative plots prior to sentence-level composing (Islam et al., 2025; Sweller et al., 2019; Tabari, 2023).

Collaborative writing within a *PjBL* framework also relies heavily on social interdependence and cooperative learning principles. Effective collaborative tasks are characterized by positive interdependence, individual accountability, and genuine peer interaction, where each member's input directly enriches the final artifact (Gillies, 2016; Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Furthermore, the pedagogical value of *PjBL* is supported by *Self-Determination Theory*, which posits that intrinsic motivation flourishes when instructional environments fulfill learners' basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Fernández-Espínola et al., 2020; Guay, 2021). Recent empirical studies in Indonesian secondary schools indicate that structured project phases allow learners to engage productively with complex text genres (Azzahra & Afnita, 2025; Ramadana et al., 2025). Therefore, this study aims to address the aforementioned qualitative gap by examining the systematic implementation of *PjBL* in teaching narrative text in Garut and exploring participating students' perceptions of its instructional effectiveness and internal challenges.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate the operational dynamics of *PjBL* in an authentic classroom setting (Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2018). The research was carried out at a public senior high school in Garut, West Java, Indonesia, during the ongoing academic semester. The research participants consisted of one certified English teacher and a class of thirty-two Grade XI students who completed a six-week narrative writing project. From this cohort, eight focal students (coded as P1 to P8) were purposively selected for in-depth semi-structured interviews to capture diverse perspectives across high, medium, and low English proficiency levels. Before beginning data collection, formal institutional ethical clearance was secured from the school administration, and written *informed consent* was obtained from all participating students and their legal guardians to safeguard confidentiality.

Data collection was carried out systematically utilizing multiple qualitative techniques to ensure robust data triangulation. Direct classroom observation served as the primary method to record the sequential implementation of the project stages in real time. The researcher utilized an observation checklist adapted from cooperative learning frameworks (Gillies, 2016), supplemented by descriptive field notes to document interactional patterns and instructional scaffolding. Following the conclusion of the classroom project, semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with the teacher and the eight focal students. The interview protocol, which comprised eighteen open-ended questions examining student perceptions and collaborative hurdles, was developed by the researcher and rigorously validated by two expert university lecturers in *EFL* methodology (*expert judgment*). Each interview lasted approximately 15 to 20 minutes and was audio-recorded for verbatim transcription.

The collected qualitative data were examined following the six-phase thematic analysis framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analytical process began with prolonged data familiarization through repetitive reading of interview transcripts and observational field notes. Initial codes were then generated inductively to capture meaningful patterns related to pedagogical stages, affective responses, and linguistic obstacles. Subsequently, these preliminary codes were organized into broader conceptual categories and reviewed against the full data set to guarantee internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. The themes were then clearly defined, refined, and contextualized within existing theoretical frameworks to produce the narrative findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Direct classroom observations revealed that the teacher implemented the *Project-Based Learning* model through six sequential and systematically organized instructional stages. The procedural trajectory moved purposefully from teacher-directed conceptual orientation to student-led collaborative production. To provide a clear overview of the instructional execution observed in the classroom, the operational phases and their core pedagogical activities are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Sequential Stages of *PjBL* Implementation in Teaching Narrative Text

Stage	Core Pedagogical Activities	Instructional Focus
1. Introduction	Explaining generic structures, language features, and presenting model texts.	Building foundational genre knowledge.
2. Project Planning	Forming heterogeneous groups of four and distributing graphic story maps.	Organizing collaborative project roles and storylines.
3. Project Development	Drafting narrative texts collaboratively from outlines and checking grammar.	Engaging in joint writing and translanguaging.
4. Monitoring and Guidance	Conducting teacher-led roving conferences and offering formative feedback.	Scaffolding complication depth and character traits.
5. Presentation	Exhibiting narrative posters publicly and conducting structured peer review.	Demonstrating authentic communicative competence.
6. Evaluation	Carrying out final text revisions, criterion-based grading, and self-reflection.	Consolidating learning and metacognitive awareness.

Based on Table 1, the implementation of *PjBL* commenced with the *Introduction Stage*, during which the teacher built students' genre awareness by explicitly modeling narrative conventions. The teacher introduced orientation, complication, and resolution using authentic folktales while granting students autonomy in choosing their original story topics. Moving to the *Project Planning Stage*, the thirty-two students were arranged into eight heterogeneous teams of four and provided with a graphic story map template. During the *Project Development Stage*, students translated their visual outlines into full written drafts, actively negotiating narrative vocabulary and grammatical accuracy. The teacher conducted continuous formative check-ins throughout the *Monitoring and Guidance Stage* to provide tailored feedback on plot progression. Finally, as outlined in Table 1, the process concluded with public poster exhibitions during the *Presentation Stage* and reflective self-assessments in the *Evaluation Stage*.

To capture the student experience across these stages, thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews yielded three interconnected themes. These themes encapsulate students' positive affective evaluations, multidimensional learning benefits, and the constructive challenges encountered during drafting. The distribution of these qualitative themes alongside their descriptive sub-themes is displayed in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Thematic Categorization of Students' Perceptions toward *PjBL*

Major Theme	Emergent Sub-themes	Focal Participant References
1. Positive Perceptions of <i>PjBL</i>	Increased intrinsic motivation; reduction of classroom boredom; heightened learning confidence.	P1, P3, P5, P7
2. Perceived Learning Benefits	Creative plot expansion; enhanced peer collaboration; stronger accountability; durable genre retention.	P2, P4, P6, P8
3. Linguistic and Creative Challenges	Generating logical story conflicts; managing past-tense grammar; bridging vocabulary limitations.	P1, P4, P6, P8

Referring to Table 2, the interview findings demonstrate that students universally perceived the *PjBL* intervention as a positive instructional shift that revitalized their learning interest. Under the first theme, focal participants like P1 and P3 emphasized that working collaboratively toward a tangible end product made the writing classroom significantly more dynamic and enjoyable. The second theme illustrates that students derived substantial communicative benefits, reporting noticeable gains in creative thinking, peer scaffolding, and long-term memory retention. Nevertheless, the third theme documented in Table 2 shows that learners experienced authentic cognitive struggles, particularly when attempting to formulate dramatic narrative conflicts and translate complex ideas into grammatically accurate English. To illustrate the relationship between the major thematic dimensions identified in the qualitative inquiry, a conceptual diagram was constructed from the interview data. The visual diagram illustrating the interaction between learning drivers and student development is presented in Figure 1 below.

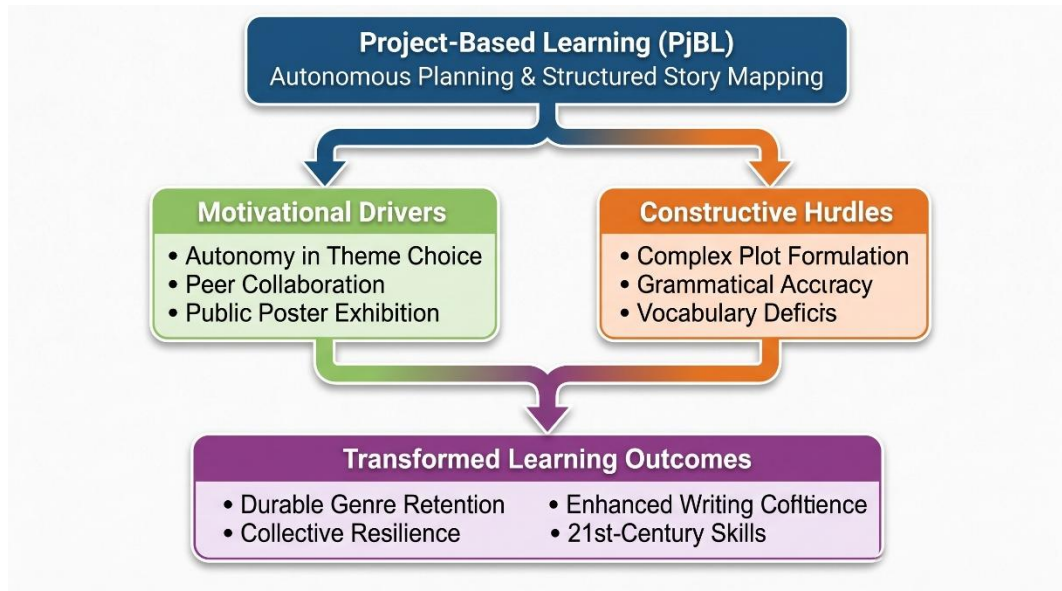


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Student Engagement and Learning Progression in *PjBL*

As illustrated in Figure 1, the implementation of *PjBL* established an interactive learning environment where motivational drivers directly complemented constructive instructional hurdles. The combination of student autonomy, collaborative grouping, and visual story mapping triggered high intrinsic motivation among learners. Simultaneously, authentic challenges regarding past-tense mechanics and narrative plotlines acted as productive cognitive

hurdles rather than demotivating barriers. The convergence of these complementary factors in Figure 1 ultimately fostered durable genre retention, collective resilience, and heightened writing confidence.

Discussion

The empirical findings from classroom observations demonstrate that the *PjBL* framework was executed systematically, establishing an effective scaffolding continuum that supports writing development. Answering the *what* dimension of this study, the teacher successfully structured instruction across six distinct pedagogical phases, shifting the pedagogical locus from teacher modeling to independent collaborative composing. This trajectory directly aligns with genre-based writing frameworks, which advocate that explicit deconstruction of target text features must precede independent production in *EFL* classrooms (Nur Istiqamah, 2024; Rose & Martin, 2012; Triastuti et al., 2022). By integrating graphic story maps during early planning, the teacher provided visual scaffolds that allowed learners to clarify plot sequencing before confronting sentence-level drafting. This finding confirms recent evidence indicating that visual mapping tools substantially improve narrative writing quality by streamlining structural planning (Islam et al., 2025).

Analyzing the *why* dimension behind this instructional success reveals that the systematic phase progression substantially alleviated cognitive overload among secondary learners. According to *Cognitive Load Theory*, writing in a foreign language imposes heavy processing demands because novices must simultaneously generate creative plots, organize discourse cohesion, and apply grammatical conventions (Sweller et al., 2019; van Nooijen et al., 2024). Dividing the writing process into distinct planning, drafting, and revising stages allowed students to allocate their cognitive bandwidth efficiently (Tabari, 2023). Moreover, roving teacher conferences provided immediate formative feedback that prompted students to elaborate complications and deepen character descriptions rather than merely correcting punctuation (Andersson & Palm, 2017; Wiliam, 2010). This formative interaction encouraged learners to treat revision as a substantive meaning-making activity, resonating with recent writing research on novice *EFL* text revision (Wang et al., 2026).

Regarding student perceptions, the interview data illuminate how collaborative project dynamics generated high levels of intrinsic motivation and personal agency. From a theoretical standpoint, granting students the liberty to select original story topics satisfied their psychological need for autonomy, while successful poster presentations nurtured their sense of competence and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Guay, 2021). These affective outcomes validate prior research indicating that collaborative project work promotes joyful, mindful, and enduring learning experiences within secondary *EFL* contexts (Fernández-Espínola et al., 2020; Ramadana et al., 2025). The public exhibition of artifacts served as an authentic communicative goal that deepened task engagement, supporting earlier claims that public sharing fosters a sense of classroom community (Reid-Griffin et al., 2020). Students transformed from passive recipients into active authors who took pride in their collective achievements.

Furthermore, the study highlights how collaborative teamwork fostered essential twenty-first-century competencies, notably interpersonal communication, distributed responsibility, and metacognitive reflection. Heterogeneous grouping arrangements ensured that higher-proficiency learners provided natural peer scaffolding to their peers, illustrating the practical realization of Vygotskian social constructivism in *EFL* writing (Gillies, 2016; Vygotsky, 1978). These findings support empirical observations by Busnawir et al. (2025) and Pham (2021), who demonstrated that collaborative writing tasks cultivate positive interdependence and mutual accountability among secondary school learners. Structured peer



assessment during presentations also promoted evaluative judgment and metacognitive awareness, matching conclusions from meta-analytic syntheses on peer review (Double et al., 2020; Yu & Lee, 2016).

Finally, the linguistic and creative obstacles reported by the participants functioned as constructive learning friction rather than instructional dead-ends. When confronted with vocabulary deficits and grammatical uncertainty, students strategically deployed pedagogical translanguaging—using their native Indonesian to negotiate story arcs while drafting the final text in English (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020; Otheguy et al., 2018). These hurdles operated as "desirable difficulties" that stimulated critical reflection, collaborative problem-solving, and personal resilience (Bjork & Bjork, 2023; Krajcik & Shin, 2014). This adaptive behavior indicates that experiencing authentic linguistic struggles within a supportive peer network empowers students to develop autonomous learning strategies (Andargie et al., 2025; Hossain, 2024). Consequently, the integration of *PjBL* proves to be a robust, contextually responsive pedagogy that effectively operationalizes the student-centered goals of the *Merdeka* Curriculum.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of *Project-Based Learning* in teaching narrative text was executed systematically across six progressive stages: introduction, project planning, project development, monitoring and guidance, presentation, and evaluation. The strategic integration of graphic story maps and formative teacher feedback successfully mitigated learners' cognitive load, enabling them to produce structurally cohesive narrative texts. Students demonstrated overwhelmingly positive perceptions toward *PjBL*, noting marked enhancements in writing motivation, collaborative team skills, creative confidence, and deeper retention of narrative conventions. Furthermore, although learners encountered notable hurdles regarding creative conflict design and grammatical accuracy, these challenges functioned productively as desirable difficulties that strengthened collective problem-solving and communicative resilience.

Based on these conclusions, several pedagogical recommendations are proposed for secondary school instruction. English educators are encouraged to incorporate structured pre-writing visual aids alongside explicit vocabulary support to assist lower-proficiency learners during open-ended project work. School administrators should provide supportive professional development that equips teachers with practical project management and formative assessment strategies aligned with the *Merdeka* Curriculum. For future researchers, it is recommended to expand the scope of inquiry by employing mixed-methods or experimental designs across multiple educational contexts to assess the long-term impact of *PjBL* on broader language proficiencies.

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