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Project-Based Learning in Fostering Narrative Writing Skills in English Language Acquisition

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to evaluate the impact of Project-Based Learning (PBL) on the English narrative writing skills of second-semester students in the English Language Education program at Muhammadiyah University Enrekang, Indonesia. The research employs an experimental design, utilizing pretest and post-test scores as quantitative measures. The PBL intervention, focused on narrative writing, spans seven weeks, incorporating various aspects of writing skills. The study's location is Muhammadiyah University Enrekang, with a sample of 22 students from the English Education study program. Ethical considerations are addressed through informed consent from participants and relevant approvals. Data collection involves pre and post-tests, as well as writing portfolios assessed using rubrics. The intervention instrument includes a structured learning plan and activities, emphasizing collaboration, grammar, vocabulary, and narrative development. Analysis of the paired sample t-test reveals a statistically significant improvement in students' narrative writing skills after PBL implementation, with a p-value of 0.0005. The mean scores show a notable increase from 12.68 to 19.68. Detailed analysis indicates improvements in content construction and language use, with significant enhancements in grammar and word choice. The findings suggest that PBL positively impacts students' narrative writing skills, aligning with previous research. The study contributes insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers seeking evidence-based practices to enhance English language education. The research emphasizes the relevance of innovative approaches, such as PBL, in shaping proficient and globally competent language learners.

Introduction

English currently acts as an international language or EFL (English as a Foreign Language), which means that its use is not limited only to interactions between native English speakers or even between native speakers and non-native English speakers (Aghayani & Hajmohammadi, 2019; McKay, 2002). In this context, English is used as a communication tool involving native speakers of the language. Taking into account its richness and significance as an international language, English Language Teaching (ELT) becomes an important aspect in the education system. Therefore, in many Southeast Asian countries, including Indonesia, many children learn English as a

second or foreign language after the national language, to be able to master English competently (Aitchison, 2015; Andy Kirkpatrick, 2012; Khulel, 2022).

In the context of English education, writing ability is a crucial element that reflects a comprehensive understanding of language skills (Aitchison, 2015; Pham, 2018; Ruengkul, 2020). Writing ability is not just the ability to arrange words sequentially (Dahal, 2016; Sadeghi et al., 2016), but involves understanding concepts, organizing ideas, and using appropriate vocabulary. Given the importance of writing skills in global communication and technological developments, attention to improving this ability is a major concern in contemporary education. Within this framework, Project Based Learning (PBL) emerges as a pedagogical approach that is attracting attention due to its potential to develop language understanding, especially in the context of writing skills.

Semester 2 in the English Language Education study program at Muhammadiyah University Enrekang is an important period in students' academic journey, especially in terms of language skills. At this stage, it is hoped that students can build on the language skills that have been instilled in the previous semester and explore more complex aspects of language acquisition. The integration of Project Based Learning this semester aims to provide a dynamic and interesting learning framework for students to improve their writing competence in English.

Students in the second semester of the English Education study program often face challenges in developing their writing skills. Despite having passed the first semester which sets the foundation for language skills, students often have difficulty adapting and developing their writing skills to a higher level. Aspects such as complex syntax, selecting appropriate vocabulary, and coherent organization of ideas are often obstacles faced by students at this stage (N.V., 2017; Praba' et al., 2018; Sadeghi et al., 2016).

This issue is critical because good writing skills are the foundation for effective communication, both in academic and professional contexts. Difficulty in writing can limit students' ability to convey thoughts and ideas clearly, which in turn can affect their academic performance and readiness to face the demands of the world of work. Therefore, research needs to be carried out to find innovative solutions that can effectively improve students' writing skills in the second semester of the English Language Education study program.

The rationale behind the investigation regarding the effectiveness of Project Based Learning in the second semester of English Language Education at Muhammadiyah University Enrekang lies in the need to overcome the challenges faced by students in improving their writing skills. While traditional methods have been basic, adaptation to contemporary educational needs requires innovative approaches. Project Based Learning offers a promising pathway by providing students with contextual and applied learning experiences (Flemming, 2000; Xuexia, 2020; Yaşar, 2022; Yulianty & Al Farhan, 2023). By involving students in real-world projects, PBL not only aims to improve language skills, but also encourages critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration (Marwan, 2015; Xuexia, 2020; Young, 2018).

The essence of this problem is the recognition that effective writing ability is not a stand-alone skill but an integrated process that requires a diverse approach. Project Based Learning, with its emphasis on collaborative projects and real-world applications, offers a holistic environment for students to develop not only linguistic competence but also the application of practical writing skills (Kavlu, 2016; Mantra et al., 2023; Marwan, 2015; Yaşar, 2022). This study recognizes the link between language skills and aims to reveal the extent to which PBL can be a driving force in sharpening students' writing skills in the second semester.

Additionally, an investigation into the effectiveness of Project Based Learning in the second semester is in line with the broader educational goal of preparing students for the demands of the modern

world. As English continues to become the language of global communication, the ability to convey ideas cohesively in written form is a skill that transcends academic boundaries (Ismail, 2019; Ismail & Ramadhan, 2019; Ismail,. Jabri, 2017). This research hopes to provide valuable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers seeking evidence-based practices to improve the English language educational experience.

Thus, exploring the effectiveness of Project Based Learning in developing writing competency in the second semester of the English Language Education study program is an appropriate and relevant effort. By deepening the complexity of this pedagogical approach in a specific academic context, this research aims to provide nuanced insights that contribute not only to academic discussions but also to the practical improvement of language education. As we navigate the ever-changing landscape in language pedagogy, understanding the impact of innovative approaches such as PBL becomes critical to shaping the next generation of language-skilled and globally competent individuals.

Methodology

1. Research Design

This research aims to evaluate project-based learning in improving students' narrative writing skills in the second semester of the English Language Education study program. This research is experimental research by collecting quantitative data by comparing pretest and post-test results.

At the initial stage of learning, students take a pretest to measure their initial abilities. Next, the Project Based Learning method is applied in class, and after completion, a post-test is held to measure student improvement. The results of these two tests are used to compare whether the Project Based Learning method is effective in improving students' writing skills.

2. Research Location

This research was conducted at Muhammadiyah University Enrekang, Indonesia. Muhammadiyah Enrekang University is a tertiary institution located in Enrekang district, South Sulawesi Province, Indonesia, with 2 faculties and 9 study programs. The research population was second-semester students of the teaching and education faculty with 5 study programs. The research sample is one of the 5 study programs, namely the English Education study program with the number of students in semester 2 being 22. The English Language Education study program was chosen as the sample because the focus of this research is writing narratives in English. Based on traditional learning approaches, it is difficult to absorb knowledge, especially writing skills. Currently, with rapid developments in the era of globalization, students need more abilities, such as writing skills, teamwork, and critical thinking skills that will help them get more opportunities in the future.

3. Ethical Considerations

According to Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2018), research must be conducted with integrity. To avoid manipulation and exaggerated claims regarding research objectives, obtaining informed consent from participants is important to protect their privacy and dignity before data collection. Therefore, to ensure compliance with research ethics, researchers obtained approval from participants in the form of students and heads of study programs.

4. Research Instruments

In this research, the instruments used were pretest and post-test. Students in this study took tests before the project and after learning project-based learning. Then the scores are collected by the researcher. The intervention instrument consists of RPS, portfolio writing, and rubrics. Writing portfolios are collected from students after they have finished. In this research, the Pretest aims to test the writing level before the Project Based Learning treatment. The posttest is used after being given treatment to find out whether students experience an increase in learning achievement. The pre

and post-tests are based on the paragraph writing course, the English Language Education study program curriculum at Muhammadiyah University Enrekang. Both tests are given a safe time of 50 minutes.

5.   Intervention Instrument

In this research, a writing portfolio is a collection of student writing in handwritten form, which aims to show student development during the two months of learning in the second semester. A writing portfolio can help students gain increased proficiency skills, content knowledge, and grammar abilities. It helps students improve their vocabulary, grammar as well and critical thinking skills. The students worked in groups on their portfolios. The writing portfolio includes student work and evaluation through rubrics. Students design

subtopics of their content in discussions, build their knowledge, and then generate ideas for their content. In the process, students can gain competence in vocabulary, grammar, and content structure. A writing portfolio can help students improve narrative writing skills, communicate skills in teamwork, and know how to get ideas for writing by discussing them in groups.

6.   Semester Learning Plan

Researchers carried out 7 Semester Learning Plans (RPS) referring to the Paragraph Writing Module, Unit 1 to Unit 7. Students were required to work on a writing portfolio with 6 narrative assignments. They write a topic based on a predetermined title within 50 minutes. A worksheet was prepared by the researcher which contained an outline and writing instructions.

Table Activity Timetable

Week	Activity	Project
One	Confirm the project: **Lesson plan 1:** What is a Narrative essay & Identifying Hooks	Discuss the Preview Questions with a classmate. Then read the essay and answer the questions that follow. Preview Questions: 1) Have you ever had trouble getting from one place to another while traveling? Where were you going? What happened that made this travel difficult? 2) Can everyday people be considered heroes? What do you consider to be a heroic act? 3) Write a narrative about "Frustration in a place you have visited" (150-200 words)
Two	Implement the project: **Lesson plan 2:** The Body of Narrative essay	Write a narrative about "Picking Up Dreams" (150-200 words)
Three	Implement the project: **Lesson Plan 3:** Adding Supporting Information	Write a narrative about the "Campus environment" (150-200 words)
Four	Implement the project: Doing writing portfolios outside the class	Write a narrative about "Vacation to the Village" (150-200 words)
Five	Implement the project: **Lesson Plan 4:** Grammar for writing **Lesson Plan 5:** Building Better Vocabulary	Write a narrative about "Become a Champion" (150-200 words)
Six	Implement the project: **Lesson Plan 6:** Developing a Narrative Essay **Lesson Plan 7:** Original Student Writing: Narrative Essay	Write a narrative about "Campus teaching programs" (150-200 words)
Seven	Presentation & Evaluation	Write a narrative about "Unexpected events" (120-200 words)

7. Rubric

Rubrics are used as a multi-purpose assessment tool in evaluating student performance and learning outcomes. With

multiple criteria that must be met, rubrics offer a more fair and accurate approach to assessing students. In this study, two rubrics were used to assess student learning outcomes: one for the writing portfolio and

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another for the pretest and post-test. The rubric instrument aims to measure the improvement of students' English writing skills through Project Based Learning. The criteria assessed involve aspects such as content (introduction, body, conclusion) and language use (grammar, word choice), with a rating scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates a very low level of performance and 5 indicates a very good level of performance. The two rubrics are adjusted to the criteria for the Paragraph Writing course.

Table 2. Rubric Level Scale

Very low	Low	Average	Good	Excellent
1	2	3	4	5

8. Data collection

Students take the Pretest at the beginning of the lecture, and the Posttest is given after implementing Project Based Learning. Each test lasts for two sessions, each 100 minutes long. All students who take the paragraph writing course are required to take both tests. Researchers collected scores from both tests as indicators of students' narrative writing abilities.

9. Data Analysis

In evaluating student tests, researchers focused on two main aspects: essay structure (introduction, content, conclusion) and language skills (grammar, word choice), which were measured using a rubric. The maximum score for each test is 25 points. Test assessment is carried out by calculating the average score. To analyze whether there was an improvement in writing skills, the paired sample T-test, Mean, and Standard Deviation were used.

Result

This research aims to assess the impact of implementing Project Based Learning on students' English narrative writing abilities. A paired sample t-test was used to evaluate the difference between the pretest and post-test. Comparative statistical analysis was carried out via paired sample t-test on a group of 22 students, with comparisons between the pretest and posttest based on mean, standard deviation, and inferential statistical analysis at a significance level of $p < 0.05$.

1. Comparison of Pretest and Posttest

Comparison between pretest and posttest scores is carried out through analysis of the mean, standard deviation, and significance level (p).

Table 3. Uji Pair Sample T-Test

Paired Samples Statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig (one-tailed)
Pretest	12.68	22	1.171	.250	-11.215	21	0.0005
Post-test	19.68	22	2.644	.564			0.0005

Based on the table, it can be seen that students have experienced an increase in narrative writing abilities. Table 3 shows the research significance of 0.001, smaller than 0.05 (p<0.05), indicating a statistically significant increase in student scores on the post-test. In a statistical context, standard deviation serves as a measure of data variation. A low standard deviation indicates values close to the mean, while a high one indicates greater variation. The pretest standard deviation was 1.171 and the post-test was 2.644, indicating an increase of 1.473. This indicates an increase in students' narrative writing abilities after the Project Based Learning intervention. In conclusion, Project Based Learning has a

positive impact on student achievement. The average pretest and post-test scores can be shown in Figure 1.
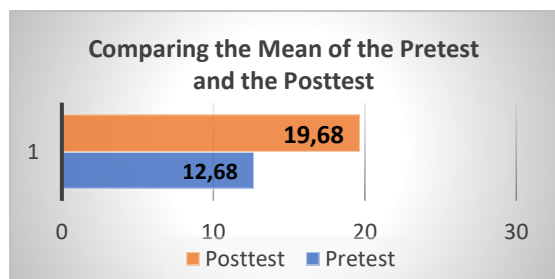

Figure 1 Comparison of Pretest and Posttest

In Figure 1, it can be seen that participating students achieved a score of 12.68 on the pretest and 19.68 on the posttest, indicating an increase of 7.00 points. By considering the average scores of both tests, students showed improved performance on the post-test compared to the pretest. These results indicate that the adoption of Project Based Learning contributes to improving students' narrative writing skills.

2. The Pretest and Posttest Mean Scores in Each Aspect Comparison

This section shows a comparison of student scores on each dimension between the pretest and posttest. In assessing student tests, a rubric with 5 levels is used which assesses 5 different aspects. Scores range from 1 to 5 points, with "1" indicating the lowest level, and "5" indicating an excellent level.

Table 4. The Mean Scores in Each Aspect of the Pretest and the Posttest

Quality Assessed	Pretest	Post-test	Order of the mean score
Content Construction			
Introduction	2.95	3.82	4
Body	2.14	3.77	5
Conclusion	2.59	4.09	2
Language Use			
Grammar	2.50	4.14	1
Word Choice	2.50	3.86	3

Table 4 shows the increase in students' narrative writing abilities after the Project Based Learning intervention. In detail, in the aspect of content construction, there was an increase in all parts: Introduction (Pretest: 2.95, Post-test: 3.82), Content (Pretest: 2.14, Post-test: 3.77), and Conclusion (Pretest: 2.59, Post-test: 4.09). Meanwhile, in language use, there was a significant increase in Grammar (Pretest: 2.50, Post-test: 4.14) and Word Choice (Pretest: 2.50, Post-test: 3.86). In conclusion, Project Based Learning has a positive impact on student achievement, with the highest ranking in grammar mastery and introductory writing.

Discussion

In this research, the main objective is to evaluate the impact of Project Based Learning on students' English narrative writing abilities. Analysis was carried out using the paired sample t-test on the group of participating students. Results showed significant improvements in students' writing skills after participating in the Project Based Learning intervention.

Figure 1 presents a comparison of the average pretest and posttest scores, which shows an increase in scores of 7.00 points on the posttest. The paired samples t-test in Table 3 confirms the significance of the study (p=0.0005), showing a statistically significant increase in students' scores on the post-test. In addition, the standard deviation shows an increase from the pretest (1.171) to the posttest (2.644), indicating an increase in variation in students' narrative writing abilities.

Further analysis in Table 4 reveals improvements in every aspect of writing. It can be seen that students achieved the most significant improvement in the Grammar aspect, followed by Word Usage, Conclusion, and Introduction. Although the Content and Body aspects have also increased, they are at a slightly lower level.

Overall, these findings imply that Project Based Learning has a positive impact on students' learning achievement in English

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narrative writing skills. This finding is in line with research by Hasani et al., (2017); Xuexia (2020) states that PBL can not only improve students' narrative writing skills, but also other skills, namely cooperative skills, critical thinking skills, and creativity. This improvement can be seen in all aspects of writing, indicating the effectiveness of this learning method in improving students' writing skills.

In PBL, students collaborate to solve real-world problems and complete tasks that reflect a positive work environment. Active student participation is key in PBL, and producing good narratives in writing skills can be the main motivation. PBL moves the role of the lecturer to a more peripheral one, giving students responsibility for their learning in an educational approach centered on students and interactions between students. The application of PBL also encourages students to think reflectively, opening up opportunities for communication between students and lecturers in producing good narratives. The integration of reflection in assignments is considered to have three potential benefits, namely improving the assessment of learning outcomes, stimulating student learning, and involving lecturers in professional development, according to the views of Lam (2011) & Poonpon (2017).

Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion of this research, several important conclusions can be drawn, namely that the application of Project Based Learning (PBL) in this research shows a positive impact on students' English narrative writing abilities. The results of the Paired sample t-test show a significant increase between the pretest and posttest, with a p-value of 0.0005, confirming that this difference did not occur by chance. In addition, student scores increased from the pretest to the post-test. In the pretest, the student's average score was 12.68, increasing to 19.68, indicating an increase of 7.00 points. Further analysis in Table 4 reveals that this improvement occurred in all aspects of writing, especially

in Grammar, Word Use, Conclusions, Introductions, and the body of the student narrative. Thus, it can be concluded that Project Based Learning is effective in improving students' English narrative writing skills. These findings provide a positive contribution to the development of learning methods and demonstrate the important value of the PBL approach in the context of developing students' writing skills.

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