Enhancing Recount Text Writing Skills of EFL Students through Project-Based Learning

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of Project-Based Learning (PBL) on enhancing students' writing skills, focusing particularly on the revision process. Conducted over two cycles, the research employed pre-test and post-test assessments, classroom observations, and self-evaluation checklists to gather data. The findings reveal a significant improvement in students' writing abilities, with the average writing score increasing from 25.43 in the first cycle to 31.89 in the second cycle, reaching the "good" proficiency category. The revision stage under the PBL framework predominantly involved surface-level corrections such as spelling, punctuation, and grammar, which nevertheless contributed substantially to improved writing quality. The use of structured self-evaluation checklists fostered student autonomy, responsibility, and active engagement in the writing process, with an average self-evaluation effectiveness score of 4.61 in the second cycle. Observations also highlighted positive affective outcomes including increased confidence, risk-taking, and collaborative peer feedback, which are essential for sustained learning. The study confirmed that all criteria for success—writing standards, effectiveness of self-evaluation, and portfolio completeness—were met by the end of the second cycle. These results underscore the value of PBL as a strategic instructional approach that encourages continuous improvement through revising and self-assessment. Recommendations include promoting deeper global revisions and exploring the long-term impact of PBL on writing proficiency and learner autonomy

1. Introduction

In learning English, writing skills are important to master because when writing, students can directly learn what is written and discover new things, such as vocabulary. Writing also develops and improves the ability to convey ideas effectively in written form, Indirectly, the results of writing are retained continuously in memory, which reinforces language acquisition. Additionally, writing encourages critical thinking and creativity as students organize their thoughts coherently and express their viewpoints clearly (Barnawi, 2011). Through consistent writing practice, learners gain confidence and fluency, which are essential components for overall language proficiency (Karataş & Tuncer, 2020). Therefore, mastering

writing not only supports communication skills but also deepens understanding and retention of the language. However, despite its significance, many EFL students often encounter several challenges during the writing process that can hinder their ability to produce coherent and fluent texts. These difficulties include limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, and a lack of familiarity with English writing conventions, such as organization and cohesion (Al-Hammadi & Sidek, 2015; Karataş & Tuncer, 2020). Additionally, many EFL learners experience anxiety and lack confidence in their writing skills, which can affect their motivation to practice and improve (Ratama et al., 2021; Santosa et al., 2024; Wiarishintia et al., 2024). Cultural differences in rhetorical styles and educational backgrounds also contribute to the struggle, making it challenging for students to adapt to the expectations of English writing (Tanaka & Gilliland, 2017). Consequently, these obstacles can slow down the progress of developing effective writing skills, necessitating targeted instructional strategies to support EFL students in overcoming these barriers.

Specifically, for junior high school students, these challenges are often magnified by developmental and cognitive factors. At this stage, students are transitioning from basic language acquisition to more complex language use, which requires higher-order thinking skills and a stronger grasp of language mechanics. Junior high learners might struggle with organizing their thoughts, applying grammar rules consistently, and selecting appropriate vocabulary to express nuanced ideas. Their limited exposure to extensive English writing outside the classroom can also inhibit their ability to practice effectively. Moreover, the social and emotional development typical of this age group may cause students to feel self-conscious about making mistakes, leading to reluctance in participating fully in writing activities. As a result, junior high school EFL students need carefully designed writing instruction that incorporates scaffolding, practice opportunities, and positive feedback to build both their competence and confidence gradually.

When the writer conducted a preliminary study in the Grade 8 class of SMPN 1 Bangli, it was observed that the students' achievement in writing was unsatisfactory. This was evident from the results of the writing assessment of Grade 8 students, which showed low scores in every aspect of writing. This finding underscores the urgency of addressing the specific writing challenges faced by these students and highlights the need for effective pedagogical interventions tailored to their needs.

One promising approach to enhancing students' writing skills is Project-Based Learning (PBL), which actively engages learners in meaningful, real-world tasks that require extended writing activities. Through PBL, students are motivated to participate in collaborative investigations, leading to authentic and purposeful written products (Devi et al., 2024; Mahayoni et al., 2024; Maheswari, 2024; Praba et al., 2018). This process encourages students to plan, draft, revise, and present their work in a structured yet engaging context. By integrating multiple language skills and content areas within projects, students gain a deeper understanding of writing conventions and genre features, while simultaneously developing critical thinking and problem-solving abilities (Stojanović et al., 2023). Moreover, PBL fosters learner autonomy and self-confidence by emphasizing the writing process rather than perfection, supporting peer feedback, and offering teacher scaffolding (Padmadewi et al., 2023). This learner-centered and interactive approach is well-suited to the developmental needs of junior

high EFL students, addressing their unique writing challenges through contextualized and supportive learning experiences.

The focus of this study is to determine whether Project-Based Learning (PBL) can effectively improve the writing ability of the eighth-grade students at SMPN 1 Bangli. Through action research, this study aims to systematically investigate the impact of implementing PBL strategies on students' writing performance, particularly in terms of fluency, vocabulary use, coherence, and overall writing quality. By engaging students in meaningful, project-centered writing activities, this research seeks to provide empirical evidence on the efficacy of PBL as an instructional approach to enhance EFL writing skills at the junior high school level.

2. Method

In accordance with the problems faced by students in writing, classroom action research was conducted using a Project-Based Learning (PBL) model aimed at improving their writing abilities through engaging projects. This research employed an action research approach, characterized by cyclic processes of planning, action, observation, and reflection to ensure continuous improvement. According to Khasinah (2013) action research is a cyclical process that involves these stages to foster meaningful change. In this study, the researcher carried out two cycles, each consisting of three sessions, to systematically implement and evaluate the PBL interventions. By applying this cyclic process, the research aimed to observe how the PBL approach could positively impact students' writing skills, promoting an interactive learning environment that addresses their specific difficulties and fosters continuous development.
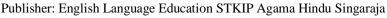
To collect data on students' writing abilities, the researcher employed pre-tests and post-tests as primary instruments. These tests served the purpose of measuring the students' existing knowledge and skills before and after the implementation of the Project-Based Learning (PBL) intervention. The tests included various writing tasks, such as answering questions and composing paragraphs, which provided a comprehensive assessment of the students' writing competence. By using these tests, the researcher could easily quantify students' writing performance and monitor their gradual development throughout the study. Writing assignments were scored based on predetermined assessment categories to ensure consistent and objective evaluation. In analyzing the collected data, the researcher applied descriptive statistics to summarize and present the students' writing performance clearly, focusing on measures such as mean scores and score improvements. This systematic observation and analysis were crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of PBL in enhancing the writing skills of eighth-grade students at SMP N 1 Bangli.

3. Findings

The results of the analysis of students' writing skills revealed a positive impact of the Project-Based Learning (PBL) intervention. The average score obtained by students was 31.89, which falls within the category of good performance. Compared to the first cycle, the students' average score increased by 3.57 points in the second cycle, indicating improvement. Specifically, 23 students (69.69%) achieved good grades, while 10 students (30.30%) attained
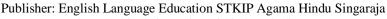
very good grades. According to the graduation criteria, students are considered to have passed if they achieve an average score of at least 27; thus, the students' performance met these criteria successfully. Upon analyzing students' drafts, the researcher observed that the revision process primarily involved surface-level corrections such as spelling, punctuation, and grammar adjustments. More comprehensive global changes—such as reorganizing paragraphs, rewriting entire sections, or adding and removing ideas—were less frequent. Despite this limitation, the surface-level revisions still contributed positively to the students' writing development and overall achievement, demonstrating that even incremental improvements in writing mechanics can enhance writing ability in the context of PBL.

The analysis of the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) activities further demonstrated the positive impact of this approach on students' writing revision processes. All students were observed to actively use their creativity during the revision phase, with some utilizing all the descriptors provided in the evaluation checklist, indicating thorough engagement. The effectiveness of PBL activities reached an average score of 4.61 in the second cycle, marking an improvement of 0.65 points from the first cycle. This score categorized the self-evaluation activities as very good, and the average score met the criteria for completeness, confirming the success of the intervention. More specifically, 15 students (45.45%) employed 61-80% of the checklist descriptors (categorized as good), while 18 students (54.54%) used 81-100% of the descriptors (categorized as excellent). This analysis reveals that the students maximized their efforts in revising their writing, and the increasing use of descriptors reflects their growing confidence and autonomy as writers within the PBL framework.

The findings in the second cycle demonstrated a clear improvement in students' writing abilities compared to the first cycle. The average score of 31.89, categorized as good, reflects this progress. Classroom observations during the action stage indicated that Project-Based Learning (PBL) activities, particularly at the revising stage, significantly contributed to enhancing students' writing skills. The high percentage of effective self-evaluation in the second cycle showed that students were able to utilize the checklist proficiently during the revision process. Furthermore, positive attitudes emerged, which were expected to strengthen in the subsequent third cycle. Observations revealed that students developed a sense of ownership of their learning, as evidenced by their persistent efforts to revise drafts based on self-identified strengths and weaknesses. They understood writing not merely as a grading task but as a means to overcome challenges and develop competencies. The students also demonstrated risk-taking attitudes and self-confidence through the use of various outlining techniques and their willingness to provide peer feedback during revisions. Moreover, the self-evaluation activities encouraged active engagement, responsibility, and learner autonomy. By the end of this cycle, all three criteria for accomplishment—writing skills standard, effectiveness of self-evaluation activity, and completeness of portfolio folders—were met, marking the successful completion of the study's objectives in cycle two.

4. Discussions

The findings of this study indicate that Project-Based Learning (PBL) significantly enhances students' writing abilities, particularly through the revision process. The observed increase in students' average writing scores from the first to the second cycle, reaching a good category of 31.89, underscores the effectiveness of PBL as an instructional approach. This improvement highlights the capacity of PBL to engage students actively in their writing development and encourages continuous refinement of their drafts.

One notable aspect of the study is that students primarily made surface-level revisions, focusing on spelling, punctuation, and grammar, rather than engaging heavily in global or structural changes. While this might suggest a limited scope in revision techniques, these surface corrections nevertheless contributed positively to their writing quality. This finding aligns with prior research that suggests even incremental skill improvements can cumulatively enhance writing proficiency over time (Cavaleri et al., 2019; Sulistyo et al., 2020). The data reveals that the revision stage under the PBL framework offers a crucial opportunity for students to practice and internalize writing mechanics. Moreover, the study reveals that the use of self-evaluation checklists during the revision process played a pivotal role in fostering student autonomy and involvement. The increasing use of checklist descriptors and the average effectiveness score of 4.61 in the second cycle demonstrate how structured self-assessment tools can guide students to become more confident and meticulous writers. The variety of descriptors used, ranging from good to excellent, suggests that the students were not only adequately guided but also motivated to optimize their revisions, reflecting a growing ownership of their learning journey.

The active engagement observed during PBL activities also cultivated affective outcomes such as confidence, risk-taking, and a sense of responsibility toward learning. Student behaviors like experimenting with different outlining techniques and providing peer feedback illustrate the development of higher-order skills and positive learning attitudes. These attitudes are crucial for sustaining motivation and lifelong learning habits beyond the classroom context (Tsai et al., 2023). Lastly, meeting all the study's accomplishment criteria—writing skill standards, self-evaluation effectiveness, and portfolio completeness—by the end of the second cycle indicates a well-rounded success in applying PBL. It suggests that this pedagogical approach not only benefits the quality of student work but also supports holistic learning practices encompassing self-regulation and metacognition.

5. Conclusion and Suggestion

This study has demonstrated that Project-Based Learning (PBL) effectively improves students' writing skills, particularly through the revision process. The significant increase in students' writing scores from the first to the second cycle, coupled with the positive classroom observations, confirms that PBL facilitates active student engagement, autonomy, and motivation in writing. The use of self-evaluation checklists during revision promoted student ownership and responsibility for learning, encouraging continuous improvement. Additionally,

the development of positive attitudes such as risk-taking and peer collaboration further contributed to the enhancement of writing competencies. Overall, the fulfillment of all established criteria—including writing skill standards, self-evaluation effectiveness, and portfolio completeness—by the end of the second cycle signifies the success of PBL as an instructional approach in writing education.

To maximize the benefits of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in writing instruction, educators should continue integrating PBL activities with an emphasis on self-evaluation tools to nurture learner autonomy and responsibility, encouraging students to engage in both surface-level and deeper structural revisions while fostering peer collaboration. Students are advised to view the revision process as a continuous growth opportunity, leveraging checklists and peer feedback to improve their writing and experimenting with various outlining strategies. Future research should explore ways to promote more comprehensive global revisions within the PBL framework and assess the long-term impact of PBL on writing skills and learner autonomy. Lastly, curriculum designers are encouraged to develop structured self-evaluation frameworks that support metacognitive skills and progressively embed PBL approaches across writing curricula to sustain motivation and skill development.

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