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## "I am more engaged in writing": Promoting EFL Students' Writing Skills through Project-Based Learning

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### Abstract

Writing remains one of the most demanding productive skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. To address this challenge, Project-Based Learning (PBL), a student-centered instructional approach, has gained attention for its potential to enhance student engagement and writing performance. This qualitative case study explored: (1) the instructional steps used in implementing PBL in writing lessons, (2) the assessment methods employed, (3) the perceived benefits of PBL on students' writing skills, and (4) the challenges faced during implementation. Data were collected from classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document review and were then analyzed qualitatively. The findings revealed that the implementation of PBL followed five key stages: preparation, planning, research, presentation, and evaluation. Writing performance was assessed formatively using an analytical rubric. PBL was found to foster students' writing development, increase their motivation and engagement, and build confidence. However, implementation challenges such as group management, unequal participation, and time constraints were also reported. These findings suggest that PBL can be a valuable pedagogical tool in EFL writing classrooms, promoting active learning and collaboration. Nonetheless, its success depends on careful instructional planning and strategies for overcoming implementation barriers.

**Keywords:** Case study, project-based learning, qualitative study, teaching writing, writing skills



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## 1. Introduction

Writing is an important skill for EFL students in educational settings, especially when demonstrating their ability to generate ideas on a specific topic (Bacha, 2002; Hyland, 2007). Piolat, (1996) defines writing as the process of transforming ideas into words, phrases, and paragraphs in order to convey messages in writing. Writing allows students to communicate and express themselves more freely than speaking (Nurhayati, 2016; Murad et al., 2021). Speaking and writing are valuable skills for conveying ideas and improving communication (Shuhratovna, 2024). To become successful writers, students must master five key aspects of writing: content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics (Hyland, 2007). Effective writing necessitates regular practice and an understanding of the writing process itself.

However, teaching writing skills in an EFL setting is difficult, especially when students' English proficiency remains limited. Prior studies (Alharbi, 2019; Hidayati, 2018; Nugroho et al., 2020) mention that EFL teachers in Indonesia face challenges such as low student motivation, a less conducive learning environment, and large class sizes. Furthermore, in some countries, such as Yemen, writing instruction is teacher-centered and focuses on grammar rules, leaving little room for student creativity (Nasser, 2018).

Overall, writing methods of instruction in Indonesia continue to be teacher-centered, with teachers providing explanations, information, and evaluating student work while students remain passive recipients (Dewi, 2017; Emaliana, 2017). This approach usually includes teachers using grammar-oriented textbooks and comparing language structures between their native language and the target language. As a result, students become more competitive and independent while having fewer opportunities for critical thinking or open discussion (Acat & Donmez, 2009). As a result, teachers become less motivated and innovative in implementing writing learning methods, while students become less creative in developing their writing abilities.

The 21st-century learning paradigm emphasizes a student-centered approach where learners collaborate and explore to learn, with teachers acting as facilitators and mediators (Rojabi, 2021b, 2021a). Project-Based Learning (PBL), a student-centered learning method (Kubiatko & Vaculova, 2011), is one approach that fits into this paradigm. PBL is a training methodology which meets quality standards by emphasizing meaningful, project-based learning activities. According to Hadim & Esche (2002), PBL makes students more active because they participate directly in the majority of learning activities rather than simply

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receiving material. Furthermore, Riswandi (2018) emphasized that PBL allows students to freely express themselves, innovate, and create within their abilities. In the context of teaching writing, PBL emphasizes the value of tangible outcomes such as written products, presentations, or publications as a means of expressing students' abilities. However, PBL emphasizes a systematic process as well as the end result. Each project has a number of steps that require active student participation, ranging from topic selection and planning to information retrieval, writing, and evaluation (Pattiasina et al., 2024; Salsabila, 2018). Classroom dynamics must also shift from teacher-centered to student-centered in order to make the learning experience more meaningful.

Several previous studies have found that PBL can help students optimize their writing skills, group collaboration, and active participation in class. Furthermore, PBL promotes natural integration of the four English language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Pattiasina et al., 2024; Salsabila, 2018). Students are also more enthusiastic and motivated because they can write based on their abilities and creativity, rather than being limited by standard writing rules. Despite its numerous advantages, implementing PBL in writing instruction presents several challenges. Teachers struggle to fully transition from the role of instructor to facilitator, which requires flexibility in the guidance of students (Mergendoller et al., 2006). Kumalatiwi (2024) observed that the classroom environment frequently becomes noisy and difficult to manage during the writing project process. Furthermore, students who are new to group work frequently struggle with negotiation, compromise, and even emotional conflict. This suggests that instructors frequently face the most difficult challenges when integrating PBL when it comes to classroom management and group dynamics.

Although numerous studies have examined the use of PBL in writing instruction, few have specifically investigated how PBL is implemented in Indonesian Islamic high schools. Thus, the aim of the present study is to explore the use of PBL on enhancing the writing skills of EFL students at a Madrasah Aliyah (Islamic Senior High School) in Indonesian context. The research questions are:

1. What are the steps for teaching writing skills using project-based learning?
2. What is the process for evaluating writing instruction using Project-Based Learning?
3. What are the advantages of project-based learning for students' writing skills?
4. What are the challenges of using Project-Based Learning to teach writing?

### ***1.1. Literature review***

#### ***1.1.1. Theoretical framework of project-based learning***

Project Based Learning (PBL) is a learning approach designed to develop 21st century skills by placing students at the center of learning (Kubiatko & Vaculova, 2011). PBL encourages students to be actively involved in long-term projects that produce tangible products such as

publications, presentations, or other works that can be accessed by the public (Riswandi, 2018). In its application, PBL provides flexibility for students to work individually, in pairs, or in small groups. This model also includes cooperative learning, where project work is a key element that allows students to collaborate to achieve common goals (Stoller, 2002). Furthermore, (Kubiatko & Vaculova, 2011) emphasized that active student participation in the educational process is at the heart of PBL, helping them develop responsibility, teamwork skills, and critical thinking skills during the teaching and learning process.

Kubiatko and Vaculova (2011) highlight the characteristic of Project Based Learning as follows: (1) A student-centered approach with the teacher serving as a facilitator or coach, (2) Prioritizing content learning over linguistic patterns, (3) Promoted teamwork among students, (4) Promoted authentic integration of linguistic skills and knowledge from diverse sources, (5) Enabling learners to demonstrate their material knowledge through a final product, such as an oral presentation, poster session, bulletin board display, or stage performance, (6) Connecting classroom English to real-life situations.

### ***1.1.2. The implementation of project-based learning in teaching writing***

The steps in implementing PBL include choosing a topic, organizing, conducting research, and creating products (Aldabbus, 2018; Trimble, 2017). Furthermore, the application of the project-based approach in EFL introduces a model that divides the project work process into six steps: (1) Preparation: During this phase, the teacher provides an overview of the topic and encourages class discussion and questions. (2) Planning: At this stage, the teacher and students decide how to collect and analyze data, and various assignments are distributed. (3) Research: Students gather information from various sources, either independently or in groups. (4) Conclusion: After analyzing the collected data, students draw conclusions based on their findings. (5) Presentation: Students present their final project to the entire class. And (6) Evaluation: The teacher provides feedback and assesses the students' efforts and performance throughout the project.

### ***1.1.3. The evaluation in implementing project-based learning***

Mertens (2005) defines evaluation as determining the value or appropriateness of measured behavior, as well as testing, measuring, and qualitatively describing student behavior. The Independent Curriculum employs assessment to evaluate students' writing skills. Although the terms assessment and evaluation are frequently used interchangeably, they have distinct but complementary roles in determining student competency during the learning process. Brown (2004) divides assessments into two types: formative and summative. Formative assessment takes place during the learning process to assess students' comprehension, learning needs, and development. Summative assessment, on the other hand, is done at the end of the educational process to evaluate how well students have met their learning objectives, and the results are used to determine graduation or grade advancement. When

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teaching writing using the PBL approach, evaluation is critical in determining its usefulness for enhancing student writing skills.

To objectively and systematically evaluate students' writing projects, an appropriate assessment rubric is required. Brown (2004) distinguishes three types of rubrics that can be used to evaluate writing abilities: holistic, primary trait, and analytical. Holistic assessments assign an overall score based on the general quality of the writing. In contrast, primary trait assessments are concerned with achieving a specific goal for the text under consideration. Analytic assessments, which are thought to be the most effective, divide writing skills into multiple categories such as grammar, organization, and vocabulary, and assign separate scores to each. This analytic approach provides more detailed information about students' writing strengths and weaknesses.

#### ***1.1.4. The benefits of project-based learning***

The PBL method not only helps students develop their writing skills, but it also promotes personal development (Aghayani & Hajmohammadi, 2019; Ismuwardani et al., 2019). Both teachers and students agree that using PBL in writing lessons has significant benefits. As stated by Aksela & Haatainen (2019), one of the most significant advantages of PBL is its ability to foster student collaboration. This collaborative process teaches students to be more adaptable, open to new perspectives, and capable of working together to achieve common goals. Several key advantages of PBL have been discussed by researchers. First, PBL incorporates the four primary language skills; listening, reading, speaking, and writing into the learning process in a natural manner. Second, PBL helps students develop metacognitive skills like planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own learning. Third, PBL can boost students' self-esteem and independence, particularly when they collaborate to complete projects (Aksela & Haatainen, 2019; Kubiak & Vaculova, 2011; Kumalatiwi, 2024). Thus, PBL not only improves students' academic abilities, but it also develops character and life skills that are critical for their future success.

#### ***1.1.5. The challenges of project-based learning***

Students frequently experience group dynamics-related challenges when implementing PBL. Many students struggle to adjust to the dynamics of group work when implementing PBL. Students who are unfamiliar with group collaboration frequently find it difficult to negotiate, share tasks, and reach fair agreements. Furthermore, many students struggle to maintain emotional control when confronted with disagreements or conflicts with other group members (Aldabbus, 2018; Aksela & Haatainen, 2019;). As a result, student contributions to group projects vary, with some students remaining passive or withdrawing from active participation. This situation suggests that the most common challenges students face during PBL implementation are related to social interaction and collaboration.

Teachers, like students, face a variety of challenges when teaching writing skills using the PBL approach. These challenges include noisy and difficult-to-control classroom environments, difficulties supervising student activities, especially when learning occurs outside of class, and low student self-confidence, particularly in terms of English vocabulary mastery. Furthermore, some students show little interest in project creation, and the similarity of project outcomes across groups suggests a lack of originality or effective collaboration (Aksela & Haatainen, 2019; Habók & Nagy, 2016). These challenges highlight the complexities that teachers face when managing project-based learning processes.

#### ***1.1.6. Concept of writing***

Warnock (1983) defines writing as the process of converting ideas, thoughts, or facts into words, phrases, and paragraphs in order to convey a message. Writing is an essential skill that requires the use of symbols to represent sounds, numbers, and punctuation. Writing is a productive skill that allows students to express their ideas and opinions while also conveying information. In some cases, writing can even be an effective form of interpersonal communication. In the context of language learning, writing is primarily about the process rather than the outcome. This is because a good process leads to a high-quality written product.

According to Warnock (1983), the writing process is divided into four major stages: (1) Planning: At this stage, students have to consider three key aspects: the purpose of the writing, the audience, and the appropriate language style. The purpose of writing must be determined first so that the message conveyed is accurate. (2) Drafting: This is the first step in the writing process. Students are allowed to express themselves freely without worrying about grammatical, punctuation, or spelling errors. The primary focus is on developing and organizing ideas. (3) Editing: During this stage, students review and revise the initial draft. The editing process entails correcting errors and improving the content in order to make the writing clearer and more effective. Editing is critical to achieving a high-quality final product. (4) Final Version: This stage represents the end result of the entire writing process. Due to the numerous revisions and edits, the final product frequently differs significantly from the initial draft. The final draft may also include cuts of irrelevant or unnecessary information. Students who follow these stages in a systematic manner can not only produce good writing, but also develop critical thinking skills and reflective abilities while writing.

#### ***1.1.7. The elements of writing***

According to Heaton (1988), writing is a complex and difficult skills to teach because it requires mastery of not only rhetorical and grammatical techniques, but also philosophical and evaluative components. Students must fully integrate various language components while learning to write. Hughes (2003) identifies five critical aspects to consider in writing assessment: content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. (1) Content refers to the substance or content of the writing, i.e. the writer's main ideas and experiences

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condensed into one paragraph. (2) Organization refers to the logical and systematic arrangement of ideas, such as paragraphs, transitions between ideas, and the overall structure of the writing. (3) Vocabulary is an important component of language competence because it serves as the foundation for skills such as listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Good vocabulary mastery enables students to choose appropriate and varied words for writing. (4) Grammar is a set of language rules that enable writers to construct sentences with correct and understandable structure. Grammar mastery helps to ensure that the message is conveyed clearly. (5) Mechanics include correct spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. Although it may appear technical, this aspect is critical to ensuring the readability and professionalism of writing. By paying attention to these five aspects in a balanced manner, students' writing skills can improve significantly, both in terms of content and form.

### ***1.1.8. Teaching writing in EFL context through project-based learning***

According to Brown (2001), high school students are typically between the ages of fifteen and eighteen, a stage commonly referred to as puberty. At this developmental stage, students undergo significant cognitive, emotional, and social changes that influence how they learn. Therefore, teaching writing skills at the high school level must not only align with the applicable curriculum standards in each school but also consider the students' developmental characteristics to ensure effective learning outcomes.

In the Indonesian context, the writing curriculum at the senior high school level includes several types of texts, such as descriptive, analytical exposition, narrative, and procedural texts (Larasati, 2015). These text types require students to develop a range of writing competencies, from organizing ideas logically to using appropriate vocabulary and grammar. Thus, to address the challenges posed by curriculum demands and the specific needs of adolescent learners, innovative and student-centered teaching methods, such as PBL are increasingly being recognized as effective approaches for enhancing writing instruction in EFL classrooms.

## **2. Method**

### ***2.1. Research design***

This study employs a qualitative approach to explore non-numerical data such as ideas, opinions, and experiences related to the teaching of writing skills through PBL. A qualitative methodology was selected because it enables the in-depth collection of data through interviews, document analysis, and observations, allowing the researcher to understand and explain social processes holistically. A case study design was utilized to examine various aspects including processes, programs, activities, and individual interactions (Creswell, 2012). This case study specifically focuses on a particular phenomenon: the development of students' writing skills following the implementation of PBL. The data collected from the informants consisted of descriptive information presented in both written and spoken form.

## ***2.2. Research setting and participant***

Purposive sampling was employed to recruit participants in this study, meaning that the researchers intentionally selected individuals and settings deemed relevant to understanding the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2012). The participants consisted of five students and one English teacher from an Islamic high school in Lumajang East Java, Indonesia. The students were selected based on the English teacher's recommendation and their ability to provide detailed insights into the teaching of writing skills through PBL. The English teacher was chosen because she had implemented PBL in her writing instruction and was therefore able to offer comprehensive information about the process. All participants who agreed to be involved in the study were interviewed regarding their experiences with teaching and learning writing skills through PBL. Prior to the interviews, participants were informed about the purpose, nature, and potential benefits of the study. They were also assured that their data would be used solely for research purposes and would be anonymized to ensure confidentiality.

## ***2.3. Data collection***

The researchers used three primary methods to collect data: (1) Nonparticipant observation. Over the course of a span of three weeks, the researchers conducted six classroom observation sessions, each lasting about 90 minutes. The observations concentrated on teacher activities implementing PBL steps, student interactions within groups, student engagement during writing, and the types of support (scaffolding) provided by the teacher.

The researchers followed an observation protocol that included a guided observation sheet and field notes adapted from previous PBL studies. This protocol included indicators such as student participation in the task, group collaboration patterns, writing stages, and teacher teaching strategies. All findings were systematically documented for future analysis. (2) Semi-structured interviews. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with all participants: five students and one English teacher. Each interview lasted 30-45 minutes and was recorded with the participants' permission. The interviews sought to delve into their experiences learning writing through PBL, including perceived benefits, challenges encountered, and reflections on the learning process. The interview guide was used to ensure that the questions were consistent while also allowing for further exploration. Finally, (3) Document analysis. The researcher also looked at supporting documents like student writing, group project reports, modules, and teacher assessment rubrics. This document study complemented and validated the data from observations and interviews. The analysis was conducted to evaluate the development of students' writing skills, the application of PBL principles, and the process's relevance to learning objectives.

## 2.4. Data analysis

The data was analyzed using the model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), which included data collection, data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. (1) Data collection: The researchers collected as much information as possible through observations, interviews, and documentation. (2) Data condensation: The researchers used manual open coding to identify units of meaning from participants' responses. The initial codes were then divided into categories based on their semantic similarity, and main themes were developed from these categories. (3) Data presentation: The results of the coding analysis were organized into four major themes, as shown in Table 1. Finally, in stage (4), draw the conclusion. after all data had been coded and categorized, researchers reviewed all themes to ensure coherence and relevance to the study's questions. The verification process involved comparing results from interviews, observations, and documents to ensure that the conclusions reached were supported by strong and consistent evidence. To ensure the data's credibility and validity, researchers used method triangulation, which involved thoroughly comparing and verifying findings from all three data sources (observations, interviews, and documents).

Table 1. Qualitative analysis matrix

Code	Category	Theme	Excerpts
Students choose a project topic	Students choose a project topic	Student autonomy in project direction	<i>Students can choose their own topic. I also provide explanations of procedure book material. I divide students in one class into groups consisting of 4-5 each group... (T)</i>
Discussing with peers what to include in writing	Collaboration and decision making	Student collaboration in the writing development process	<i>... Then, I will talk with my buddies on which information should be included in a writing assignment. And then, we will begin drafting the structure of the procedural text... (S4)</i>
Use of analytical scoring rubric	Written assessment instruments	Writing evaluation through PBL	<i>"I utilize the analytical scoring rubric to efficiently assess students' skill at the senior high school level. This rubric has numerous advantages, including detailed information provided by the separation of assessments into criteria ..." (T)</i>
Feel comfortable while learning with PBL	Learning comfort	Benefits of PBL on affection and learning motivation	<i>"The Project Based Learning method of learning made me feel more at ease and motivated to study English in class... (S1)</i>

### 3. Findings and Discussion

#### 3.1. *The steps in teaching writing skill through project-based learning (PBL)*

The steps in question are a series of activities carried out by teachers and students during the writing learning process using PBL to help students improve their writing skills. These stages aim to help students understand and apply project-based writing in the classroom. Figure 1 (left) depicts the stages of implementing PBL to teach writing in the classroom. In the left figure, the English teacher began the initial stage by dividing students into small groups, explaining the material about procedural texts, and deciding on several project topics related to the material. This is part of the initial preparation for students before they begin the project. Meanwhile, Figure 1 (right) depicts students actively participating in following the teacher's instructions while working on a group project. At this point, students were seen collaborating before looking up information on how to make pizza. After gathering data, they summarized their findings and begin writing a creative and engaging procedural text.

These stages demonstrate how PBL-based writing instruction emphasizes not only the final written product, but also the critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity required during the project.

Furthermore, there are several stages to teaching writing skills with PBL. During the initial stage, the English teacher divided students into groups of 4-5, explained the procedural text material, and determined project topics for the students to work on. Next, the teacher guided students through several stages of the project to help them improve their writing skills. The first stage was preparation, during which the teacher provided an overview of the material and prompted questions to stimulate students' interest and engagement. The second stage was planning, during which the teacher assisted students in developing a work plan, including creating an outline to guide their writing. The third stage was information search, in which students were guided to find information relevant to the project topic. The fourth stage was drawing conclusions, in which students compiled previously gathered information and began writing it in an accurate, systematic, and creative manner. The fifth stage was presentation, in which students were guided by the teacher to present the results of their projects to the class. The sixth stage was evaluation, in which the teacher assessed students' work based on specific criteria such as content, text structure, vocabulary, and involvement during the learning process.



Figure 1. The Steps in Teaching Writing Skill Through PBL

The findings from the above observations are supported by the teacher's statement in the interview, which stated that he implemented systematic steps in project-based writing learning, beginning with dividing the groups and providing materials and progressing to mentoring students at each stage of the project, such as planning, searching for information, compiling texts, presentations, and assessments.

*I begin the steps by defining learning objectives and selecting a topic for student projects. Students can choose their own topic. I also provide explanations of procedure book material. I divide students in one class into groups consisting of 4-5 each group...preparation by selecting topics and asking stimulating questions about theatrical. Second, I will help students create a concept map as part of their planning process. To begin, they will create a concept map or outline. Third, I will aid students in searching for information regarding to their procedure text writing topic...I will guide students in summarizing their topic-specific knowledge for their procedure text project. These phases are designed to provide students additional direction while they work on the assignment...Next, I will guide students through the presenting process...Finally, I will evaluate their performance... (T)*

Furthermore, students agreed with the observation results, which showed that the teacher used systematic steps in project-based writing instruction.

*...First, the teacher will divide students into several groups in a single class. The teacher will discuss the procedural text material that will be utilized as the project topic. Furthermore, the teacher will guide us to the start. The teacher will take us through the process of developing and creating the procedure text. In this case, English teacher often encourages us to outline...Next, I will look for material on my group's topic of making orange juice. Then, I will talk with my buddies on which information should be included in a writing assignment. And then, we will begin drafting the structure of the procedural text...We will present the procedure text that created in*

*groups in front of the class. Then, English teacher will evaluate the writing project on the procedure text we created (S4).*

The findings of this study demonstrate that teachers systematically divide students into groups and allow them to choose their project topics, which is consistent with the findings of prior studies (Argawati & Suryani, 2020; Mergendoller et al., 2006). In their study, the learning process started with group division and topic selection, with the goal of increasing student participation in writing projects. However, rather than simply confirming previous findings, the findings of this study show that giving students autonomy in topic selection fosters a sense of ownership over the project, which increases their motivation and emotional engagement with writing. This reflects a shift from a traditional teacher-centered approach to a more adaptable and responsive learning model that caters to student needs. These findings also support Kubiato and Vaculova's (2011) assertion that PBL puts students at the center of the learning process. However, this study adds that this approach not only encourages active participation, but it also promotes collaborative skills and critical thinking, especially when students collaborate to draft, develop, and present their writing. Thus, the use of PBL in this context not only strengthens writing skills, but it also fosters a more autonomous and reflective learning environment, which is critical for developing 21st-century competencies. The pedagogical implications of these findings suggest that teachers should design writing lessons that emphasize not only the final product, but also the process, participation, and ownership of students' learning.

### ***3.2. The evaluation in teaching writing skill through project-based learning (PBL)***

The findings of this study reported that the English teacher evaluated students' writing skills using formative assessment, which involved both test and non-test methods. The test was used to assess students' writing projects, while the non-test method was used to assess students' attitudes during the writing lessons in the classroom. In addition, the English teacher assessed the students' writing projects on procedure text using an analytical scoring rubric. Analytical scoring is considered the most effective rubric for evaluating students' learning in the classroom because it provides detailed assessment by dividing the evaluation criteria into several specific components, which are suitable for the context of senior high school students.

Furthermore, the criteria used by the English teacher to assess the students' writing projects on procedure texts included: the content of the text, the organizational structure (covering the introduction, goal, ingredients, and steps), and the vocabulary used in the project. On the other hand, the English teacher also sometimes provided positive feedback on students' presentation performance after they delivered their group project. This included giving applause and offering words of praise as a form of encouragement.

Moreover, this was supported by visual documentation. As shown in Figure 2, the English teacher was observed evaluating students' writing projects on procedure texts during the implementation of PBL. The teacher assessed the content, the organizational structure (goal, ingredients, steps), and the vocabulary used in the writing. Additionally, the teacher employed analytical scoring as an efficient rubric to accommodate the diverse writing skills of senior high school students (See Figure 2).



Figure 2. The Evaluation of Writing Skills Through PBL

Meanwhile, the findings show that teaching writing skills using PBL employs formative assessment in the form of tests and non-tests, as well as an analytical assessment rubric, to evaluate student projects. Semi-structured interviews with English teachers support this finding.

*When evaluating student writing, I often evaluate the content, organization, and vocabulary employed. Text structure and vocabulary are important aspects to consider when writing. In addition, I evaluate students' attitudes towards learning in the classroom... I utilize the analytical scoring rubric to efficiently assess students' skill at the senior high school level. This rubric has numerous advantages, including detailed information provided by the separation of assessments into criteria. This makes the assessment clearer. The analytic rubric is clear and appropriate for high school students. Furthermore, this rubric is highly objective. (T)*

Such findings regarding the benefits of formative assessment support prior studies (Andersson & Palm, 2017; Harmer, 2004), which emphasize that formative assessment is intended to enhance the teaching and learning process and is typically administered at the end of a learning session. However, rather than simply confirming this theory, the findings of this study highlight how formative assessment serves not only as a measuring tool, but also as a pedagogical strategy that allows teachers to provide ongoing feedback and encourage active student engagement in the learning process. The use of analytical rubrics by teachers was another significant finding in this study. These rubrics were chosen not only

for their effectiveness, but also because they provide a comprehensive assessment structure that is tailored to the needs of high school students with varying writing abilities.

Analytical rubrics make assessments fairer and more transparent, and they help teachers identify specific areas for improvement in each student, such as content, organization, and vocabulary use. These findings support Brown's (2004) theory that classroom assessment is most effectively conducted through analytical scoring because it encompasses key aspects of writing and allows students to better understand their strengths and weaknesses. In this context, analytical rubrics are used not only as an evaluation tool, but also as a learning reflection tool for both teachers and students.

### ***3.3. The benefits of project-based learning (PBL) on students' writing skill***

The findings of this study reported that there were several benefits of using PBL in developing students' writing skills. These included the development of writing ability, increased student enjoyment and interest in writing activities in the classroom. In addition, students were able to integrate the four English skills, practice group collaboration, and build self-confidence. Meanwhile, as shown in Figure 3, there are two pictures that illustrate the benefits of PBL in teaching writing. The figure on the left show students' enthusiasm during the writing lesson, as they appeared more engaged and interested, an indication that PBL supports the development of writing skills. The figure on the right show students working together in groups, which facilitated collaborative learning and helped students build their self-confidence while completing their writing projects (See Figure 3).



*Figure 3. Students' Engagement and Collaboration During PBL in Writing Activities*

Furthermore, the English teacher assumed that students gained new learning experiences during the writing lessons in the classroom. These experiences included the ability to collaborate and interact with their peers in groups, the opportunity to express their writing skills, and the integration of the four English language skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. This is in line with the results of a one-on-one interview with the English teacher, in which she stated:

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*The primary benefit is that students can freely practice their writing skill. Additionally, students benefit from the indirect application of four English language skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. They can also learn how to collaborate in groups... (T)*

In addition, students' statements also supported this finding by highlighting the benefits they experienced during the writing lessons through Project-Based Learning. They reported:

*Of course, I am more engaged in writing, project-based learning method has made me more enthusiastic to learn English and love the process. (S3)*

*The Project Based Learning method of learning made me feel more at ease and motivated to study English in class. Previously, I assumed learning English were uninteresting. But, this method has increased my enthusiasm and active participation in class. It also allows me to develop my writing skills without the burden of following standard English writing guidelines. (S1)*

These findings are consistent with prior studies (Kumalatiwi, 2024; Salsabila, 2018), which demonstrate that the implementation of PBL can increase students' interest and motivation to learn English. However, the findings of this study not only confirm the increased interest, but also show how PBL fosters a more participatory, autonomous, and meaningful learning environment for students. The emotional engagement that occurred during the group project development process indicates that students are not only motivated, but also beginning to develop a sense of ownership over their own learning experience. Furthermore, these findings are supported by the findings of prior studies, which found that implementing PBL provides new learning opportunities for students, particularly in terms of collaboration and group discussions during writing sessions (Argawati & Suryani, 2020; Zhou et al., 2012). However, this study makes an additional contribution by demonstrating that social interaction within groups influences not only project outcomes, but also the development of interpersonal skills and increased student confidence in expressing ideas in writing.

#### **3.4. The challenges in teaching writing through project-based learning (PBL)**

The findings of this study revealed that there were several challenges in teaching writing skills through PBL, encountered by both teachers and students in the classroom. However, most of the challenges were faced by the teacher during the implementation of PBL in writing lessons. Challenges encountered by students generally occurred within group work, such as difficulties in managing emotions among group members and a tendency for some students to be passive during the project-making process. On the other hand, the teacher faced challenges such as the inability to manage the classroom effectively after dividing students into groups, lack of classroom control during outdoor learning activities, students' limited vocabulary, and their low interest in using dictionaries. Additionally, some students produced

similar or identical project results, indicating a lack of originality or collaboration in some groups.

Furthermore, as shown in Figure 4, two figures illustrate these challenges. The image on the left depicts challenges faced by students during writing lessons using PBL. It shows one student acting arbitrarily within the group, resulting in conflict, while two male students in the background appeared disengaged and passive. The image on the right illustrates the challenges faced by the teacher. After dividing the students into groups and instructing them to gather and begin their projects, the classroom environment became uncontrolled and noisy, making it difficult for the teacher to manage the situation effectively.



Figure 3. Challenges Faced by Students and Teacher During the Implementation of PBL in Writing Lessons.

Furthermore, findings from an interview conducted with the English teacher revealed several challenges in teaching writing skills through PBL. She reported:

*Each class presents unique challenges, such as the difficulty of controlling students when learning outside of the classroom. Due to the large number of students, it may be challenging to maintain control. Additionally, dividing them into groups in the classroom may lead to overcrowding and difficulty in establishing conditions...students often lack confidence and vocabulary in English, leading them to ask questions during lessons without considering alternate dictionaries... (T)*

Additionally, not only did the English teacher face numerous challenges during the teaching of writing skills through PBL, but the students also encountered several difficulties. They confirmed:

*My challenges are typically limited to friendship and teamwork category. Emotional management and differences are common challenges in relationships. (S1)*

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*I frequently face challenges in groups with colleagues. For example, we must be able to control our emotions while still learning to respect others. Other challenges may arise from noncontributing friends in our group. (S2)*

*Challenges are typically held among groups of friends. Friendship can lead to disagreements, mood swings, conflict, and incomplete projects. Ultimately, the project was not finished. (S3)*

The findings revealed a variety of challenges that both teachers and students face when teaching writing skills using PBL. The main challenges at the student level stem from group work dynamics, such as difficulty controlling emotions, disagreements among members, and the presence of passive students who contribute little to the project development process. This situation suggests that, while PBL is intended to promote collaboration, not all students have the necessary social and emotional skills to effectively participate in group projects. This appears to contradict Kumalatiwi's (2024) findings, which stated that the primary challenges in PBL are with teachers, particularly in terms of classroom management and student engagement. However, this study provides an important perspective: students' ability to manage conflict, communicate, and share responsibility has a significant impact on the success of group work in PBL.

To fully implement PBL, teachers need to initially offer explicit training on teamwork, emotional management, and individual responsibility in group projects. On the teacher side, there are a variety of challenges, such as managing a crowded and noisy classroom, particularly after group assignments or during extracurricular activities. Furthermore, students' low engagement and limited English vocabulary hampered their ability to complete writing assignments independently and creatively. Another challenge was the similarity of results between groups, which suggested potential plagiarism or a lack of originality in student projects. While these findings are consistent with prior studies (Aksela & Haatainen, 2019; Kumalatiwi, 2024; Sadad et al., 2024), which highlighted students' lack of vocabulary mastery and limited active engagement, this study expanded on the discussion by emphasizing the importance of diverse task design and group monitoring systems. Teachers can use mitigation strategies such as implementing group work guidelines with clear individual roles, providing formative feedback throughout the process rather than just on the final product, improving emotional literacy and teamwork through simulations or role-plays, and using technological tools to track each group member's contributions. Thus, implementing PBL necessitates not only innovative teaching methods, but also adaptive classroom management and systematic support for interpersonal strategies. Without a comprehensive approach, PBL can fail to realize its full potential as a student-centered learning method.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study found that implementing PBL to teach writing skills in EFL classrooms has both positive and negative consequences. The first finding indicates that teaching writing through PBL involves six structured stages, with the teacher actively guiding students from project planning to evaluation. The second finding reveals that student writing skills are formatively evaluated via tests and non-tests, with analytical rubrics used to assess aspects of content, structure, and vocabulary in depth. The third finding confirms that PBL improves writing ability, learning motivation, active participation, and mastery of four language skills, including collaboration and student self-confidence. The fourth finding indicates that implementing PBL presents challenges for both teachers and students, including intragroup conflict, passive students, and teacher difficulties in classroom management and overcoming students' language limitations. The study has several limitations. First, because it was only conducted at one high school, the findings cannot be generalized to a larger context. Second, the small number of participants (five students and one teacher) reduces the variety of perspectives gained. Third, the qualitative approach used, while in-depth, has the potential for subjectivity in data interpretation. Pedagogically, these findings make significant contributions to the teaching of writing in EFL classes. PBL has been shown to help students strengthen their writing abilities, engagement, and self-esteem. To address issues like student conflict or inactivity, teachers should receive adequate classroom management and group work facilitation training. Creating a more comprehensive assessment rubric could also aid in project evaluation, making it fairer and more accurate. Furthermore, incorporating technology, such as online collaboration and monitoring student contributions via digital platforms, can enhance the results of PBL in today's English language learning context.

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