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Unlocking Creativity and Engagement in Students through Project-Based Learning

Nurfajriah Basri*, Kisman Salija, Sultan Baa, Anugrah Puspita Ayu Muhammad

Postgraduate Program, Department of English Education, Universitas Negeri Makassar, Makassar, Indonesia

* Corresponding author: sultan7304@unm.ac.id

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Abstract: This pioneering study investigates the unique application of project-based learning (PjBL) to enhance creative writing skills under the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) initiative. It addresses a critical gap in understanding PjBL's impact on creative writing, student learning outcomes, and teaching methodologies. The novelty of this research lies in its exclusive focus on PjBL within the creative writing realm under MBKM, offering unparalleled insights into the synergy between technology, individualized teaching methodologies, and creative processes. Consequently, it contributes significantly to expanding the knowledge domain of experiential learning. The primary objective is to identify key factors that contribute to the success of PjBL and comprehend its transformative role in academia. To achieve this, a qualitative approach involving technical instruments such as interviews and case studies with university lecturers is employed. The results, gleaned from an in-depth analysis of data from three lecturers, reveal that PjBL considerably bolsters students' creative expression and problem-solving capabilities, while facilitating educators in devising more flexible, innovative teaching strategies. Finally, this study underscores PjBL's seminal role in nurturing an interactive learning environment that stimulates independent and creative thinking. It strongly advocates a wider exploration of PjBL applications across diverse disciplines and endorses policy reforms for its effective integration into curricula. The research also highlights the need for evolving PjBL methodologies to stay abreast of technological advancements and shifting educational needs, thereby offering readers a comprehensive understanding of the research work undertaken.

Keywords: project-based learning, creative writing education, educators' experiences, students' learning enhancement.

通过基于项目的学习释放学生的创造力和参与度

摘要：这项开创性的研究调查了基于项目的学习(PjBL)在独立贝拉贾坎普斯独立(MBKM)倡议下提高创意写作技能的独特应用。它解决了理解 PjBL 对创意写作、学生学习成果和教学方法的影响方面的一个关键差距。这项研究的新颖之处在于它专门关注 MBKM 下创意写作领域的 PjBL，为技术、个性化教学方法和创意过程之间的协同作用提供了无与伦比的见解。因此，它对于扩大体验式学习的知识领域做出了重大贡献。主要目标是确定 PjBL 成功的关键因素并理解其在学术界的变革作用。为了实现这一目标，采用了涉及技术手段的定性方法，例如对大学讲师的访谈和案例研究。通过对三位讲师的数据进行深入分析得出的结果表明，PjBL 极大地增强了学生的创造性表达和解决问题的能力，同时促进教育工作者制定更灵活、创新的教学策略。最后，这项研究强调了 PjBL 在培育激发独立和创造性思维的互动学习

环境方面的重要作用。它强烈主张对 PjBL 在不同学科中的应用进行更广泛的探索，并支持将其有效融入课程的政策改革。该研究还强调需要不断发展 PjBL 方法，以跟上技术进步和不断变化的教育需求，从而让读者全面了解所开展的研究工作。

关键词：基于项目的学习、创意写作教育、教育工作者的经验、学生的学习增强。

1. Introduction

Project-based learning (PjBL) and creative writing are two significant elements in education. PjBL is a teaching approach in which students acquire knowledge and skills by participating in a project over an extended period to investigate and respond to a complex question, problem, or challenge. This method engages students in solving a real-world problem or answering a complex question, thereby gaining knowledge and skills. Creative writing is a type of writing that breaks the boundaries of professional, journalistic, academic, or technical forms of literature. It typically includes elements of originality and imagination, such as poetry, short stories, novels, and scripts. Creative writing can be defined as writing that includes originality and self-expression. When PjBL is applied to creative writing, students engage in writing projects over an extended period, exploring, investigating, and responding to an authentic or imaginative premise. Throughout this process, students learn and hone their writing skills, including narrative techniques, character development, and plot design. The final output could be a collection of poems, a short story, a play, or any other form of creative writing, which is then shared or presented to a real audience. This approach not only helps students learn the technical aspects of writing but also fosters creativity, collaborative skills, and critical thinking.

The adoption of innovative educational strategies is crucial for enhancing the learning experience and outcomes of students [1], [2]. One such strategy is PjBL, an instructional method where students actively explore real-world problems and challenges to acquire a deeper understanding of the subject matter [3]. This study focuses on the application of PjBL in creative writing classrooms based on the experiences and perspectives of three educators, Mrs. A, Mrs. M, and Mr. R. This study aims to elucidate the impact of PjBL on student engagement, creativity, skills development, and learning outcomes [4], [5]. It also explores the flexibility and innovation opportunities that PjBL affords educators in their teaching strategies [6], [7]. The findings from this study are intended to contribute to the body of knowledge on the effectiveness of PjBL in creative writing classrooms and its potential for wider adoption [8], [9]. The study further underscores the official recognition and endorsement of PjBL by the Ministry of Education and universities, further

validating its effectiveness as a teaching and learning approach [10]. Innovative teaching strategies such as PjBL in creative writing classrooms can significantly enhance the learning experience of students [11], [12]. It can stimulate student engagement and creativity, improve skills development and learning outcomes, and provide educators with increased flexibility and innovation in their teaching strategies [13], [14]. This study presents compelling evidence to support the wider adoption of the PjBL approach in creative writing classrooms.

2. Method

The method used for this study was a survey, which allowed for the collection of data on the experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of three educators regarding the implementation of PjBL in creative writing classrooms. To conduct this survey, a structured questionnaire was developed and administered. However, the criteria for selecting the research subjects in this study were as follows: lecturers who are actively implementing PjBL in creative writing classrooms, lecturers who possess a deep understanding and experience with PjBL, and lecturers who are willing to share their experiences with, attitudes toward, and perceptions of PjBL. These criteria were established to ensure the credibility of the research and to enhance a substantive understanding of PjBL from the lecturers' perspectives. The findings from this study can be applied in multiple ways. Educators can learn effective methods for implementing PjBL in their classrooms. Educational institutions and policymakers can use the results of this study to develop educational programs and strategies to enhance the effectiveness of PjBL. The outcomes of this research contribute to a better understanding of how PjBL can be applied in creative writing education and its impact.

The questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses on the educators' experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of PjBL [15], [16]. The questions covered various aspects such as the reasons for using PjBL, the impacts of PjBL on the teaching and learning process, and the strategies employed to keep students interested in the PjBL approach [17]. The survey was conducted online using a survey software tool for ease of data collection and analysis [18]. The online platform provided a convenient and efficient means for educators to

complete the questionnaire at their convenience, thus ensuring a high response rate.

Upon receiving the completed questionnaires, the responses were carefully reviewed and analyzed [19]. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify common themes and patterns in the responses [20]. This involved coding the responses and grouping them into themes based on similarities and differences. The process was meticulously conducted to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings [21]. Measures were taken to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents, thereby encouraging honest and open responses [22, 23]. The findings were then interpreted and discussed in the context of the research objectives [24], [25]. This method was chosen for its ability to provide rich, in-depth insights into educators' experiences with, attitudes toward, and perceptions of PjBL. The use of a survey allowed collecting data from multiple respondents, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic [26]. The online survey tool provided a convenient and efficient means of data collection, while the thematic analysis enabled a systematic and detailed analysis of the responses [27], [28].

Through this method, valuable insights were gleaned into the effectiveness of PjBL in creative writing classrooms, the benefits and challenges associated with its implementation, and the strategies that can be employed to enhance its effectiveness. These insights contribute to the body of knowledge on PjBL and provide practical implications for educators, educational institutions, and policymakers [29], [30].

3. Results

3.1. Overview of PjBL

PjBL is a dynamic educational approach that combines experiences, attitudes, personalities, and expectations. It fosters creativity, engagement, and autonomy, emphasizes pragmatic language use, and encourages skills-based learning. With balance between the process and outcome, it motivates students, recognizes effort, and expands ideas in an interactive environment.

Fig. 1 highlights the experiences, attitudes, personalities, expectations, motives, and interests related to the implementation of PjBL. In terms of experience, the process of PjBL is outlined from project creation to outcome evaluation. The use of technology, particularly weblogs and applications, enhances efficiency and convenience for students. Teaching methods are flexible, adaptable to individual learning styles, and focused on meeting students' needs, especially in creative writing. The experience also points to the need for continuous improvement and evolution in the program, hinting at a shift toward more pragmatic language use and skills-based approaches. Attitudes toward PjBL emphasize the critical role of

the lecturer in monitoring student progress, ensuring originality, preventing plagiarism, and providing constructive feedback. Personality traits fostered through PjBL include creativity and engagement, with a keen focus on preventing boredom through interactive learning experiences. Expectations from the PjBL approach are largely oriented toward results, with a focus on the final output of the learning process. However, the importance of balancing the learning process and the end product is acknowledged. The approach is expected to motivate students and foster autonomy, allowing them to explore and express creativity while developing decision-making and problem-solving skills. The motives behind the implementation of PjBL stem from the MBKM initiative, which plays a significant role in the adoption of PjBL. This initiative contributes to the design of courses and training of lecturers to facilitate PjBL. The impact of PjBL on students is expected to be positive, increasing engagement, enhancing creativity, and improving learning outcomes. Although PjBL is considered suitable for different subjects, potential limitations are also recognized. Institutional recognition and support for PjBL, including governmental and university endorsement, are deemed crucial for effective policy design and execution. Lastly, there is significant interest in recognizing and valuing student effort as it directly impacts student motivation. Broad themes in PjBL are seen as valuable for stimulating and expanding ideas, thus facilitating the learning process.

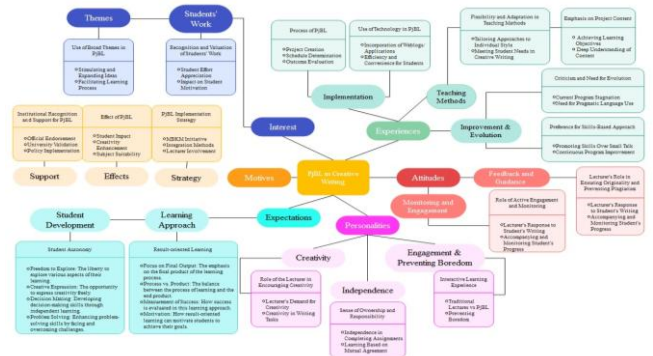


Fig. 1 PjBL in creative writing (Compiled by the authors)

3.2. Diverse Perspectives on PjBL

In academia, various teaching methodologies are employed to optimize student learning outcomes. One such approach is PjBL, a dynamic classroom approach that encourages active exploration of real-world challenges. It offers students the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills by investigating and responding to complex questions, problems, or challenges. Regarding the experiences of three university lecturers, Mrs. A, Mrs. M, and Mr. R, with PjBL in their respective classrooms, their insights reveal different perspectives and practices, shedding light on the flexibility of PjBL as a teaching methodology and its potential to be tailored to individual teaching styles and

student needs.

From these excerpts, we can glean deeper insights into the respondents' experiences with PjBL and their perceptions of its impact on students. Mrs. M acknowledges some initial difficulties students face with PjBL, such as insecurity about creating something new and running out of ideas. However, she also points to positive aspects of this process. By working one-on-one with students, she can better guide them through these challenges and foster personal growth. Her approach underscores the importance of individual attention in PjBL and the potential for personal growth through overcoming initial obstacles:

"The negative is that at the beginning they are sometimes insecure about trying to create something new, sometimes they are stuck running out of ideas and I think about opening their minds, but after the process, because it is one by one and the interaction is directly with me, I don't make them work groups so I can approach them better. The personal is also the positive, and they are still in the process" (Interview with Mrs. M).

Mrs. A, on the other hand, focuses on the positive impact of PjBL on student involvement and creativity. She notes that through PjBL, students become more confident in expressing their opinions and daring to think outside the box. However, she acknowledges some challenges, such as difficulties in generating new ideas or encountering strange outcomes. She attributes these challenges to a lack of exposure to or discussion about certain topics. Her response highlights the importance of fostering an environment that encourages open dialog and creative thinking:

"Positive impact may be because all this time, the scope of the class was from the first meeting to the last. Even though it may have a positive impact that students become more courageous in speaking up and dare to express their opinions, many students are still afraid to speak because they are afraid of being wrong. Second, they can think more. The young are creative to think out of the box. This is a broad idea because it is triggered by being helped, so in the end, some are helped, some may not be, but there are some that are quite strange at the end. Find new ideas" (Interview with Mrs. A).

Mr. R views PjBL as a tool for fostering independence and creativity in students, particularly in the context of the current technology-driven global era. He expresses a predominantly positive view of PjBL, highlighting its potential to equip students with the skills needed in today's world. In essence, these responses provide valuable insights into the respondents' views on the benefits and challenges of PjBL. While they recognize some difficulties, they also see the potential of PjBL to foster personal growth, encourage creative thinking, and equip students with valuable skills:

"Well, that's right. This PjBL helps students to be

more independent in completing their responsibilities. If, for example, it is connected to the current global era, which is all about technology, well, I think they will be able to be more creative; this is all more positive, I think" (Interview with Mr. R).

3.3. Crucial Role of the Lecturer in PjBL

The latest excerpts from the respondents shed light on the critical role of the lecturer in the success of PjBL, particularly in terms of feedback, monitoring, and ensuring originality and completion. Mrs. M emphasizes the significance of her response to a student's writing in determining the effectiveness of the PjBL approach. She suggests that her role extends beyond mere instruction to accompanying and monitoring the student's progress throughout the process. Furthermore, she highlights the importance of producing visible and displayable results as a measure of success. Her insights underscore the importance of active engagement and continuous monitoring by the lecturer in PjBL:

"Whether this approach is effective or does not depend on how the lecturer responds to their writing, the most important is that the lecturer accompanies and always monitors the process and that the results or work are visible and can be displayed" (Interview with Mrs. M).

Mrs. A focuses on the interactive aspect of the writing process in PjBL and discusses the importance of feedback from the lecturer. She also stresses the lecturer's role in ensuring that the student's writing is original and not plagiarized. This point is particularly crucial, given the emphasis on original thinking in PjBL. She also highlights the importance of determining a theme directly related to the student's surroundings, suggesting that relevance can enhance engagement and originality:

"In the writing process, there is interaction and feedback from the lecturer, and most importantly, the lecturer ensures that their writing is not plagiarized, I mean original, so it is important to determine the theme that really exists around them" (Interview with Mrs. A).

Mr. R emphasizes the lecturer's active involvement in the data collection process, suggesting that this is vital for the completion of the writing task. His comment highlights the role of the lecturer as a facilitator in PjBL, aiding and guiding the students through each step of the project until its completion:

"When the lecturer is active in the data collection process, writing to completion" (Interview with Mr. R).

3.4. Fostering Creativity and Engagement in PjBL

The additional excerpts from the respondents further emphasize positive impacts of PjBL, particularly in fostering creativity, reducing boredom, promoting independence, and encouraging mutual agreement. Mrs. M reflects on the role of the lecturer in fostering

creativity among students, particularly through PjBL. She suggests that when the lecturer demands creativity, it stimulates the students to rise to the occasion, especially in creative writing tasks. Her insights underscore the capacity of PjBL to foster creativity, provided that it is actively encouraged by the lecturer:

“Of course, if your lecturer demands that you be creative, you will definitely wake up to that, likewise in creative writing, especially in implementing PjBL” (Interview with Mrs. M).

Mrs. A discusses the benefits of PjBL in maintaining student engagement and preventing boredom. She suggests that PjBL, unlike traditional lectures, is not centered on one person, thereby offering a more interactive and engaging learning experience. Furthermore, she asserts that PjBL encourages students to be independent in completing their assignments because it is based on a mutual agreement rather than a forced obligation. This implies that PjBL promotes a sense of ownership and responsibility among students, making the learning process more enjoyable and meaningful:

“The effect is that they do not get bored. So, it is not just centered on one person, not a lecture anymore. The positive impact is that students become accustomed to being independent in performing their assignments, and because it is based on an agreement, they are no longer forced to because this is the lecturer’s assignment but because they all want it because it is based on a mutual agreement between those who want it. So, there’s fun to have” (Interview with Mrs. A).

Mr. R, with his brief but impactful statement, validates the significant impact of PjBL. Although he does not further elaborate, his affirmation suggests his agreement with the positive effects of PjBL discussed by Mrs. M and Mrs. A:

“Very impactful, I think, right?” (Interview with Mr. R).

3.5. Personal Impact of PjBL on Educators: Innovation and Flexibility

These responses illustrate the benefits of PjBL from the educators’ perspectives. They highlight the flexibility and adaptability of PjBL, its capacity to simplify the teaching process and engage students, and its endorsement by education authorities. These insights further validate the effectiveness and potential of PjBL as a teaching and learning approach.

The additional excerpts from the respondents further emphasize the positive impacts of PjBL from their perspectives as lecturers. Mrs. M shares her personal experiences with PjBL, highlighting that it has positively impacted her teaching strategies. She explains that she has been able to adapt and modify the application of PjBL using a weblog specifically for creative writing. This suggests that PjBL not only benefits students but also provides flexibility and innovation opportunities for educators:

“Personally, I have had a lot of positive impacts, I know more about teaching strategies, and I have modified the application of PjBL with a weblog specifically for creative writing” (Interview with Mrs. M).

Mrs. A sees PjBL as a tool that simplifies the teaching process. She believes that it helps students see and interpret their everyday experiences in a new light, motivating them to transform these experiences into written work. Her suggestion that more projects might be better further underscores her belief in the effectiveness of PjBL in engaging students and enhancing their learning:

“Actually, PjBL makes it easier for us in the teaching process. In my opinion, it is quite good because it can help them see things that they actually experience every day. But it never occurred to them to make it into a written work. Maybe more projects are better” (Interview with Mrs. A).

Mr. R describes the relaxed nature of PjBL, suggesting that it allows students to work on projects they enjoy, thus reducing the need for excessive supervision. He also indicates that PjBL helps students focus more on their work, possibly because of their interest in the project. Lecturer 3’s statement also implies the support and endorsement of PjBL by educational authorities, as indicated by the reference to the program from the Minister:

“It’s relaxed, so we don’t take care of them too much, because what they do is something they enjoy and is more focused, of course, because of the program from the Minister for project-based learning” (Interview with Mr. R).

3.6. Broad Themes in PjBL: Fostering Creativity and Intuition

Mrs. A, Mrs. M, and Mr. R have been applying this approach since 2022, as part of an initiative called Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM). The university, recognizing the potential of PjBL, held meetings with lecturers, encouraging them to integrate this method into their courses. Mrs. M’s positive feedback on this approach, stating that “this is excellent for our children,” suggests that she has observed beneficial impacts on the students because of PjBL. This collective feedback from educators further validates the effectiveness of PjBL as a teaching and learning approach, highlighting its potential to enhance the learning experience, foster creativity, and gain official endorsement. Mrs. M’s statement underlines the importance of valuing and acknowledging students’ work. She emphasizes the necessity of appreciating the efforts they put into their projects and that these are not just assignments but representations of their scientific endeavors. This recognition, she suggests, could significantly increase students’ motivation, thereby fostering a more engaged learning environment:

“And that way, we must be operational too,

especially in their work. We must really appreciate their work because they have worked and represented their scientific work” (Interview with Mrs. M).

In her comments, Mrs. M proposes the use of broad or “big themes” to trigger and expand students’ ideas. She argues that by encouraging students to openly respond to problems or solutions in their surroundings, they can gradually find the learning process easier and more intuitive. This approach aligns closely with the principles of PjBL, which promotes real-world relevance and encourages learners to apply their knowledge to practical problem-solving.

Mr. R, on the other hand, advocates the employment of popular or universally appealing themes, such as travel, to stimulate students’ interests. This deliberate choice of theme engages students by leveraging their personal interests, making the learning process not only educational but also enjoyable. Taken together, these insights underscore the importance of recognizing students’ efforts, sparking their creativity, and ensuring that the learning process is both engaging and enjoyable. These elements are key to creating an effective PjBL environment where students are motivated to learn and apply their knowledge creatively:

“Some of our traveling themes are custom; no one likes travel deliberately chosen so that their interest is stimulated” (Interview with Mr. R).

Based on the findings of this research, PjBL has a positive impact on both educators and students in the context of creative writing. The results suggest that the application of PjBL enhances students’ independent thinking, creative expression, and focus. These findings highlight the potential of PjBL to enhance various aspects of students’ learning experiences, reaffirming the potential of PjBL as an effective methodology in the curriculum. The significance of these results lies in the benefits that PjBL offers to both educators and students. For educators, PjBL promotes flexibility and innovation in teaching strategies, while for students, it helps develop their abilities to express their thoughts and ideas. Furthermore, the practicality of PjBL plays a crucial role in enhancing students’ ability to think about and provide solutions to problems arising in daily life. These findings align with those of similar studies conducted previously. For example, they are consistent with multiple studies suggesting that PjBL is effective in enhancing students’ creative thinking and problem-solving abilities. They also align with prior research suggesting that PjBL aids in increasing student engagement and promoting independent thinking.

However, alternative interpretations of these findings are possible. The effectiveness of PjBL could vary depending on the educator’s level of involvement, continuous feedback, and emphasis on originality and completion by the students. Therefore, the success of PjBL depends not only on the methodology itself but also significantly on how it is applied and managed. It

is also important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. This study primarily focuses on the experiences and perspectives of educators and does not provide direct insights into the effects of PjBL from the students’ perspectives. In addition, as this study is based on experiences with PjBL in a specific educational context, it is unclear whether these results can be generalized to other contexts or subjects. Bearing these limitations in mind, further comprehensive research and additional studies incorporating students’ perspectives are necessary.

4. Conclusion

This study delves into the effects of the PjBL approach in the context of teaching creative writing. It examines both positive and negative experience educators have had with PjBL, its impact on students’ attitudes and personalities, and the expectations and motives educators hold.

The findings suggest that PjBL plays a vital role in fostering personal growth, encouraging creative thinking, and developing crucial skills among students, particularly in creative writing. Continuous monitoring and feedback from educators are essential in maximizing the effectiveness of the learning process. PjBL is an effective method for fostering creativity, preventing boredom, promoting independence, and encouraging mutual agreement among students. It exhibits flexibility and adaptability, simplifying the teaching process and enhancing student engagement.

These findings gain further significance compared with previous studies. For example, Smith and Johnson [3] examined the impact of PjBL on creative thinking abilities in high school economics students, employing a quasi-experimental design and focusing on student outcomes. Although the focus and methodologies differ, both studies highlight the diverse applications and impacts of PjBL across different subjects and research approaches.

This study enriches the existing body of knowledge by demonstrating the significant role of PjBL in enhancing students’ learning experiences in creative writing education. This finding aligns with the utility of PjBL suggested by Lee and Chang [4], thus substantiating the usefulness and effectiveness of PjBL. However, this study was conducted within a limited scope, and as suggested by Kim and Park [5], further research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of the effects of PjBL. Additional studies on the operation of PjBL in different academic disciplines or other educational environments are also required.

The implications of this study provide useful guidelines for educators on how to effectively implement and apply PjBL, potentially improving the learning environment and enhancing students’ learning outcomes. This study significantly contributes to deepening our understanding of PjBL and ongoing efforts to enhance this educational approach.

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