



## Project-Based Learning to Improve Students' Writing Skills in Narrative Story

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### ARTICLE INFO

*Keywords:* Writing Skills,  
Project-Based Learning,  
Classroom Action Research  
(CAR)

*Received :* 3 October

*Revised :* 4 November

*Accepted:* 23 December

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to enhance the writing skills of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Sikur, West Nusa Tenggara, through project-based learning (PjBL). Observations revealed difficulties in content, organization, language use, vocabulary, and mechanics. Using a classroom action research method across two cycles, data were collected through qualitative (observations and interviews) and quantitative (pre- and post-test writing assessments) approaches. The findings indicate significant improvements in students' writing skills, including content (47%), organization (68%), vocabulary (68%), language use (53%), and mechanics (53%). These results demonstrate that PjBL effectively boosts writing performance by fostering active student involvement and peer feedback, highlighting its potential for improving writing skills in educational settings

## INTRODUCTION

Writing is a crucial communication skill, particularly for junior high school students studying English, as it involves various aspects such as vocabulary, grammar, organization, and coherence. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes the development of writing skills in different text types, including narrative and recount, to help students express meanings effectively in written form (Sukmawati, 2022). However, research conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Sikur in April 2024 revealed that many eighth-grade students, including class VIII D, demonstrated low writing abilities, especially in content, organization, and language use. A daily assessment showed that 65.625% of students failed to meet the expected competencies in narrative writing, highlighting the need for targeted interventions.

Classroom observations also revealed challenges, such as a lack of attentive listening during explanations of narrative structure and limited time for writing development due to the Problem-Based Learning approach used by the teacher. To address these issues, incorporating project-based learning can encourage collaboration, creativity, and peer feedback, allowing students to enhance their writing skills through group projects. As writing is a key tool for expressing ideas and fostering critical thinking, improving students' writing abilities is essential, and project-based learning offers a promising solution to support this goal.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **The Nature of Writing**

Writing is a complex skill that involves transforming thoughts and ideas into written form. It requires the ability to organize words into coherent sentences and paragraphs, using proper grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation. As Ekarista (2018) points out, writing is a form of human communication that plays a crucial role in effective expression and academic success. The process of writing is more challenging than other language skills because it demands critical thinking, the generation of ideas, and the careful organization of content.

### ***The Definition of Writing***

Writing is essential for both **academic** achievement and communication. According to Toba et al. (2019), writing is especially important for students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), as it is used in a wide range of tasks from letters to academic papers. Writing not only helps with academic success but also with personal expression, allowing people to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly (Liunokas, 2020).

Brown (2015) explains that writing involves cognitive processes such as idea generation, organization, and revision, as well as editing for grammatical accuracy. Nation (2009) adds that writing helps develop other language skills, such as speaking and listening, by turning receptive knowledge (e.g., reading and listening) into productive language use.

Writing is also a social practice, reflecting cultural norms and values. Street (2014) emphasizes that writing is not just about individual expression but also about engaging with others in specific social contexts. Hyland (2016)

suggests that writing is key to academic literacy, helping students understand the conventions of different academic fields. In the digital age, McGowan and O'Donnell (2022) note that writing has become a more collaborative activity, allowing for interaction across diverse platforms and communities.

### ***The Process of Writing***

According to Aprilia (2015), the writing instruction process involves four fundamental stages: planning, drafting, revising, and editing. Each stage includes various activities designed to enhance specific writing skills. For example, during the planning phase, teachers can assist students in idea generation through activities such as brainstorming and clustering. The writing process consists of four key stages: planning, drafting, revising, and editing. In the planning stage, students brainstorm ideas, considering the purpose, audience, and structure of their writing. Drafting follows, where students focus on freely expressing their ideas without worrying too much about accuracy, prioritizing content and flow. During the revising stage, students reflect on their drafts, improving content and organization to clarify their ideas. Finally, in the editing stage, students refine their work by correcting grammar, spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure in preparation for the final draft. These stages are recursive, meaning students may cycle through them multiple times to produce a polished piece of writing (Harmer, 2004).

### **Project-Based Learning**

#### ***Definition of Project-Based Learning***

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is a teaching approach where students actively work on real-world problems and create meaningful products. It can be used at all education levels, from elementary school to university (Jacques, 2017; Burlbaw, 2013). PjBL encourages collaboration, helps students apply what they already know, and develops important skills. It also allows students to explore multiple subjects within one project (Capraro & Slough, 2013).

PjBL has many benefits: it motivates students, boosts their achievement (Ali et al., 2011), helps them solve real-life problems, and strengthens teamwork (Roberts, 2011). It also caters to different learning styles and abilities (Coyne et al., 2016). Fauzi et al. (2019) describe PjBL as an approach where students engage in solving complex challenges and apply their knowledge to create real products. This process builds students' confidence, problem-solving skills, and critical thinking abilities (HOTS).

Moreover, PjBL makes learning more exciting by avoiding the typical, boring classroom atmosphere. It encourages creativity, teamwork, and long-term learning. According to Thomas Markham (2011), PjBL combines knowledge and practical tasks, helping students apply what they've learned to solve real problems. This approach, through active participation, can also improve students' writing skills.

#### ***The Characteristic of Project-Based Learning***

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) stands out from traditional teaching methods due to its distinctive characteristics, as outlined by Simpson in Zahro (2015). This model of learning involves elaborate investigations conducted over an extended period, where students take center stage by planning, completing, and presenting tasks. The focal point of PjBL projects revolves around thought-

provoking inquiries that capture students' interest, leading to the de-emphasis of teacher-directed activities. It fosters a collaborative environment, allowing for the exchange of resources, ideas, and feedback among peers and facilitators. PjBL also emphasizes practical exercises using genuine materials and advanced technologies, promoting the utilization of a diverse range of abilities, including managerial and interpersonal skills. Additionally, students engage in exertion to acquire novel proficiencies and establish connections between concepts throughout various phases of tasks. The culmination of PjBL projects often results in the creation of significant objects that can be publicly demonstrated to colleagues, educators, and specialists, with evaluation encompassing the entire progression from initial phases to the final project completion.

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is an educational approach that emphasizes students' active engagement in solving complex and open-ended challenges, enabling them to apply their knowledge and skills to create authentic products (Fauzi et al., 2019). PjBL offers significant advantages in fostering student self-confidence, enhancing problem-solving skills, and cultivating proficiency in higher-order thinking abilities (Novianto et al., 2018). Teachers play a crucial role in PjBL by implementing the project, ensuring students have access to information, and providing scaffolding instruction, modeling, and guidance to make exercises and tasks more manageable (Blumenfeld et al., 1991). Successful PjBL requires the teacher to assume a distinct position, serving as a guide, advisor, coordinator, and facilitator (Fragoulis, 2009). During implementation, the instructor should have the ability to modify the role activities, such as shifting the learning process from the teacher to the students, allowing them to work independently, in pairs, or in groups (Fragoulis, 2009). Recent studies have shown that PjBL can improve geography learning (Arisanty, 2020), establish a diverse educational environment (Mammadova, 2020), and enhance the learning environment to be engaging, enjoyable, thrilling, and instilling a sense of pride in students (Oliveira et al., 2021).

#### *The Implementation of Project-Based Learning in Writing*

The implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in writing instruction involves four key stages that encourage active student participation and the development of writing skills. The project begins by introducing an engaging story topic and explaining the objectives, helping students understand what is expected, such as narrative elements like plot and characters (Thomas, 2000). In the development phase, students conduct research, collaborate with peers, and start drafting their narratives, with teachers providing feedback to refine their stories (Blumenfeld et al., 1991; Roberts, 2011). After completing their stories, students present their work to the class, receiving feedback and reflecting on their writing (Harada & Yoshina, 2004; Hmelo-Silver, 2004). Finally, the project is assessed based on the quality of the narrative, character development, and overall creativity, with feedback guiding revisions and future improvements (McTighe & Ferrara, 1998). This process promotes collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity, leading to significant improvement in students' writing skills.

#### *The Syntax of Project-Based Learning*

The syntax of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in writing instruction consists of six key steps that ensure a structured and effective learning process. It begins with posing an essential question that sparks curiosity and engages students (Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006). This is followed by designing a clear project plan, outlining objectives, steps, and resources to guide students (Thomas, 2000). A realistic schedule is then created to help students manage their time and stay on track (Barron et al., 1998). Throughout the project, continuous monitoring and support are provided to ensure steady progress (Blumenfeld et al., 1991). The project's success is assessed based on predefined criteria, evaluating both the process and the final product (Strobel & van Barneveld, 2009). Finally, a comprehensive evaluation of the experience is conducted to identify strengths and areas for improvement, fostering ongoing growth in future projects (Schön, 1983).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research utilized Classroom Action Research (CAR) as the research design, focusing on enhancing students' narrative writing skills through Project-Based Learning (PjBL). CAR is a method conducted by teachers within their classrooms to enhance their teaching performance by reflecting on their practices. The study aligns with Creswell (2012), who highlighted that action research empowers teachers to address classroom challenges, ultimately aiming to improve student learning outcomes and foster teachers' professional development.

Classroom action research is preliminary used when teachers are assigned to teach students and solve problems in an educational institution such as a classroom. It is also used as a tool for teacher professional development and to improve students' learning (Dogan and Kirkgoz, 2022; Madya, 2018). In recent times, university students have conducted action research. Placing the in-service teachers as collaborators, the university students as the researchers and the teachers in the class.

This research was implemented in cycles adapted from Kemmis et al.'s (2014) model of classroom action research. The steps included planning, action, observation, and reflection. Kemmis et al. (2014) stated that classroom action research is carried out through a dynamic and complementary process involving four stages in the research cycle: planning, action, observation, and reflection. These stages were applied over several cycles. The researchers observed and identified the issues that the students had, planned and implemented the proposed action research, observed the entire learning process, and then reflected on and evaluated the implementation of the action to design the next cycle with a revised plan. The research stopped when significant improvement in the classroom was achieved, and the issues that were identified had been resolved. To clearly present the flow of the cycles, the cyclical action research model of Kemmis and McTaggart is depicted below:

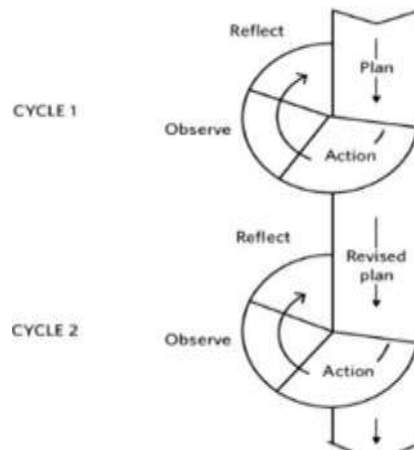


Figure 1. The Cycle of Action Research by Kemmis et al

## RESULT

In Cycle 1, PowerPoint presentations significantly enhanced students' understanding and focus. Students reported that visual aids helped them follow the material more easily and reduce confusion, aligning with educational theories that support multimodal learning. Observations showed increased engagement, as students could see key points on slides, which reduced cognitive overload and allowed them to focus on comprehension. Furthermore, Project-Based Learning

(PjBL) boosted student participation, with a 30% increase in class involvement, especially during group discussions and peer reviews. Students also expressed greater enthusiasm for writing, as collaboration through PjBL made the process more engaging and less daunting.

In Cycle 2, the "Story Chain" activity demonstrated notable improvements in students' narrative writing skills. By collaborating on a story, students were able to develop ideas, enhance their writing, and practice narrative techniques. The activity fostered teamwork and critical thinking, while teachers guided students to focus on plot development, character motivations, and narrative structure. Through PjBL, students' ability to structure stories with clear details and cohesive organization improved significantly. Feedback from peers played a crucial role in helping students identify areas for improvement, and the overall writing process became more of a collaborative, iterative experience. The results were evident in the improved post-test scores and students' newfound appreciation for writing as a process of revision and growth.

Table 1. The Table Shows the Results of Students' Pretest, Posttest 1, and Posttest 2

Pretest

sum	594	345	323	453	96
average	18,5625	10,78125	10,09375	14,15625	3
max	30	20	20	25	5
min	13	7	7	5	2

Post-test 1

sum	762	409	460	548	105
average	23,8125	12,78125	14,375	17,125	3,28125
max	30	20	20	25	5
min	13	7	7	5	2

post-test 2

sum	871	578	538	694	143
average	27,21875	18,0625	16,8125	21,6875	4,46875
max	30	20	20	25	5
min	13	7	7	5	2

## DISCUSSION

This section provides an analysis of the findings from Cycle I and Cycle II, evaluating the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in enhancing students' writing abilities. Initial observations highlighted significant challenges in various writing aspects, including content, organization, vocabulary, and mechanics, emphasizing the need for an intervention like PjBL. The implementation of PjBL led to significant improvements, particularly in students' comprehension and writing skills, aligning with Simpson's (2011) framework, which emphasizes active participation and critical thinking through structured, meaningful projects. Using PowerPoint presentations as a teaching tool played a key role in this process, enhancing students' understanding by integrating visual elements that supported cognitive processing, as supported by Mayer's (2017) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning. Students reported that PowerPoint made it easier to follow lessons, and observations showed increased focus, reducing cognitive overload and improving learning outcomes.

PjBL also boosted student engagement, with participation rising from 20% to 50%, highlighting its effectiveness in creating an interactive learning environment. Research by Krajcik and Shin (2024) and Bell and Smetana (2023) supports the idea that PjBL fosters deeper engagement by involving students in collaborative, real-world tasks, enhancing motivation and learning. The positive shift in students' attitudes toward writing, as indicated in interviews, further illustrates the motivational impact of PjBL, making the learning process more enjoyable and meaningful. This increase in engagement was

accompanied by improvements in critical thinking and writing skills, as students collaborated, reviewed peers' work, and received feedback.

The data also revealed significant improvements in writing skills, with students making strides in grammar, vocabulary, and the organization of their narratives. These gains align with Ellis (2020) and Beck and McKeown (2019), who emphasize the effectiveness of collaborative, project-based approaches in enhancing grammatical understanding and vocabulary acquisition. Despite these improvements, challenges in generating ideas and maintaining plot coherence persisted, suggesting areas for further focus in future PjBL cycles. Overall, the findings demonstrate that PjBL effectively supports students' writing development through collaborative learning and targeted instruction.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The research study conducted at SMPN 1 Sikur took place from June to August 2024. The researcher involved 32 students from grade VIII G as subjects, along with the English teacher as a collaborator. The aim of this action research was to enhance the narrative writing skills through Project-Based Learning. The data collected included both qualitative and quantitative form. As discussed in the previous chapter, the implementation of project-based learning has significantly enhanced the writing skills of grade VIII students. This approach has demonstrated its effectiveness in improving various aspects of writing, including content, text organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Additionally, the collaborative nature of group work during project-based learning has fostered greater student involvement and participation, allowing them to engage more deeply with the writing process. The group discussions not only facilitated interaction among students but also encouraged the sharing of ideas, further enriching their learning experience. Furthermore, the feedback provided by both the researcher and peers has been instrumental in enabling students to recognize their own mistakes, as well as those of others, thereby promoting a culture of reflective learning and mutual support. Ultimately, the findings from this study underscore the transformative potential of project-based learning in cultivating not only improving writing skill but also a collaborative and interactive classroom environment that motivates students to take ownership of their learning. Overall, the use of project-based learning techniques to improve the students' writing skills at grade VIII of SMPN 1 Sikur was successful.

## **FURTHER STUDY**

The findings of this research can serve as a foundation for future studies focusing on the use of Project-Based Learning to enhance writing skills in different educational settings. Future research could explore the application of PjBL in other grade levels or disciplines, compare its effectiveness with other teaching methods, or examine its impact on other language skills, such as speaking and reading. Additionally, investigating the long-term effects of Project-Based Learning on student motivation and writing proficiency could provide valuable insights for educators seeking to improve writing instruction.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the English teacher at SMP Negeri 1 Sikur, who supported and collaborated throughout this research. Special thanks to the students of grade VIII G for their active participation and enthusiasm during the project. I also appreciate the guidance and insights provided by my academic advisors and colleagues at Yogyakarta State University. This research would not have been possible without their encouragement and support.

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