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## Project-based Learning: EFL Students' Involvement in Collaborative Writing

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### Abstract

Project Based Learning (PBL) is a student-centred learning approach in which a teacher acts as a facilitator to help a student solve a problem. In the present study, involvement is a substantial element in PBL because the student is required to learn collaboratively in a group project. Therefore, the study aims to discover how the student is involved in accomplishing scholarly writing in a group project, and what the opportunity of writing a scholarly article collaboratively is. The present research is a case study in a private university in Indonesia. The data are gained from a questionnaire and an interview. The data then are analyzed qualitatively. The study discovers that PBL is believed to activate EFL students' involvement in terms of contributing to the team project, handling responsibility, and respecting teammates. The opportunities of PBL implementation in writing experienced by the students are getting ideas, designing the project, tuning the project, writing the project, exhibiting the project, and evaluating the project. Finally, the study is expected to provide teachers with practical ideas for implementing PBL effectively in a writing context.



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## INTRODUCTION

Methods for teaching writing play essential roles in allowing students to achieve their learning objectives. Therefore, teachers need to adopt a particular method to assist their students in achieving a particular level of writing skill. The method is important because writing is commonly perceived as difficult by EFL students. Previous research indicates that EFL students experience interlingual and intralingual errors in constructing English sentences in writing, Rofik (2018, 2019); Aisyah & Yulianto (2022). Again, Yanur & Supriani (2019) declare that students find it difficult to develop the ideas in writing process. Moreover, in the writing classroom activity, while the teachers often explain the material, the students listen to the explanation and take notes. In consequence, the time that the students have to practice writing in writing class is less.

Meanwhile, writing activity needs many aspects to be involved. Nunan (1991) states that writing is viewed as involving a lot of thinking processes drawn upon in complex and varied ways. Furthermore, Nunan illustrates that writing involves the process of an individual composing, transcribing, evaluating, and revision. Again, Nunan (1991) classifies writing to be three, namely (1) writing as a physical and a mental act, (2) writing needs its purpose to express and impress, and (3) writing as a process and a product. Similar to Nunan, Barnet & Stubbs (1983) declare that writing involves action physically. In short, it can be concluded that writing involves the aspects of mental and physical to express and impress to result in writing as a product.

Writing practices for EFL students is challenging. Writing activity involves lexical knowledge and grammatical competency, Hyland (2003). In another research, Widiyanti, Rofik & Ariyani (2023) uncover that EFL students perceive grammar and vocabulary are essential parts of developing written works. Specifically, their finding uncovers that EFL students face difficulty in writing because their vocabulary mastery is limited. Therefore, reading is perceived as important to raise their capability to write fruitfully. Shih (1999) states that reading enables EFL learners to practice new vocabulary.

Therefore, potential teaching writing methods that teachers use need to guarantee the students develop their writing skills. However, the pieces of evidence often prove such an approach is difficult to implement. Walvoord & Smith (1982) state that teachers who teach writing mostly concentrate on evaluating and describing students' written products. The teachers principally examine language structures. Therefore, the students primarily revise their written products in terms of grammar rules and punctuation. Similar to Walvoord & Smith, Antika (2014) finds that the domination of teachers in teaching writing is often done in Indonesian classrooms. Therefore, the students have little time for writing

practice. Based on this evidence, the Project-Based Learning approach as student-centred learning is proposed as a part of my class efforts to activate students' involvement in writing therefore the students can improve their writing skills.

As noted by Fried-Booth (2002), PBL is a strategy that encourages learner-centered education via exploratory, interactive, and creative activities that extend beyond the classroom. In line with Fried-Booth, Dharmayanti & Joni (2021) state that PBL is a model of learning that involves students in completing individual or group project to develop their skills and knowledge. Furthermore, PBL enables students to participate in meaningful and authentic learning activities. In addition, Harigan (2014) believes that PBL can help students achieve particular standards in learning activities. In line with Harigan, Mali's study (2016) indicates that the implementation of PBL shows teachers' innovative practices in teaching and learners' participation.

PBL is student-centred learning. For some teachers, PBL is more efficient than traditional teaching methods because of the synergistic effect of learning strategies, i. e. combinations of academic styles or multimodalities, (Filippatou & Kaldi, 2010). In addition, Loyens et al. (2007) state that PBL increases learners' interest and motivation. When PBL is implemented, it is also believed to develop participants' skills. A qualitative instrumental case study conducted by Harigan (2014) illustrates that the study with face-to-face interviews and classroom observation indicates that teachers perceive some benefits with PBL in their classroom, such as increasing students' engagement, behaviour, and retention, students' academic success, and students' 21st-century skills.

Collaborative learning is an educational learning strategy where students work in groups to solve problems, complete assignments, or create products. Gokhale (1995) states that collaborative learning, as a teaching approach, involves students working in small groups with a shared objective. In this method, students are not only accountable for their own learning but also play a role in each other's success, meaning that the progress of one student contributes to the success of others. In addition, Laal & Godshi (2012) state that collaborative learning is an educational strategy where cohorts of students collaborate to solve problems, accomplish assignments, or generate a product.

Furthermore, collaborative learning proposes many benefits. Laal & Ghodsi (2012) categorize the benefits of collaborative learning to be four; psychological, academic, social, and assessment. In line with Laal & Ghodsi's categorization, collaborative learning effect positively on academic and social performance, Ibrahim, et al (2015). In a more recent study, Ghavifekr (2020) revealed that collaborative work is more preferred than individual work by students.

Furthermore, Ghavifekr declares that collaborative learning effects significantly on the way students socialize with each other.

The present research is a case study of project-based learning (PBL) to examine students' involvement and opportunities in collaborative writing. According to Ravitz, Hixson, English, and Mergendoller (2012), project-based learning will have a positive impact on learners if employed by a professional teacher who is an expert in project-based learning. Additionally, Bell (2010) believes that PBL involves essential procedures for the success of student learning. In this study, the implementation of PBL is examined to answer the following research questions, (1) How are EFL learners involved in writing class using PBL?; (2) what is the opportunity of PBL in writing experienced by the EFL learners?. The present study is conducted in Islamic higher education. Therefore, it is expected to foster Islamic students' involvement during scholarly writing process.

## **METHODS**

The present study proposed a descriptive qualitative design to describe the implementation of PBL in teaching writing and explain students' participation toward the implementation of PBL in writing, especially related to their engagement and opportunities in the writing process. Furthermore, this qualitative research is a case study. According to Gillham (2000), a case study investigates real-world circumstances to answer a specific research issue by exploring a variety of diverse pieces of evidence. Furthermore, Yin (2003) declares that a case study is conducted to analyze "why" and "how" objectives.

The setting of the study was a private university. The data were taken on 21<sup>st</sup> of September in the year 2023. The study involved 27 participants. The purposive participants in the writing class were involved to explore their experiences during their writing process. The participants in the class were encouraged to compose a scholarly article using the Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion (IMRAD) style. To conduct scholarly writing, they are divided into teams. Every team consisted of 2-3 student participants. Their writing was then consulted in every class meeting. This study analyzed the students' engagement in the writing process. A questionnaire is distributed to the participants. Some questions were proposed to examine their involvement related to their contribution to the team project, their responsibility, and their respect for other members. The questionnaire is adapted from Mali (2016). This questionnaire was in a form of four-point Likert scale.

**Table 1.** Questionnaire for Students' Involvement

No	Category	Statement	Scale			
			4	3	2	1
1	Contributing to the team project	I collect relevant information for the team's purposes.				
		I offer well-developed and clear ideas to the team's needs.				
2	Handling responsibility	I perform writing tasks effectively.				
		I am involved in the team writing process.				
3	Respecting teammates	I listen to my teammates' ideas.				
		I help my teammate develop his/her ideas while showing my respect.				
		I help my team make a fair decision.				

After distributing the questionnaire, an interview was conducted to unveil the participants' experience related to opportunities they get in writing class using PBL. Participants in the interview section were made anonymous to keep their privacy. The interview lists were proposed to know how the students obtain an idea, how they design the writing project, how they tune the project, how they do the project, how they exhibit the project, how they evaluate the project, and how they revise the project (adapted from Dharmayanti & Joni, 2021). The interview involved four participants. The interviewed participants are taken randomly.

The obtained data from the questionnaire and interview were then analyzed. The responses to the questionnaire with a four-point Likert scale were categorized to be always (4), often (3), sometimes (2), and never (1). Different from the questionnaire categorized to be scale, the interview data was subsequently analyzed utilizing data reduction, data presentation, and verification or conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To answer problem statement number 1, the questionnaire is administered to the students. The number of students who responded to the questionnaire was 27. The students engage in a writing class that applies PBL as follows.

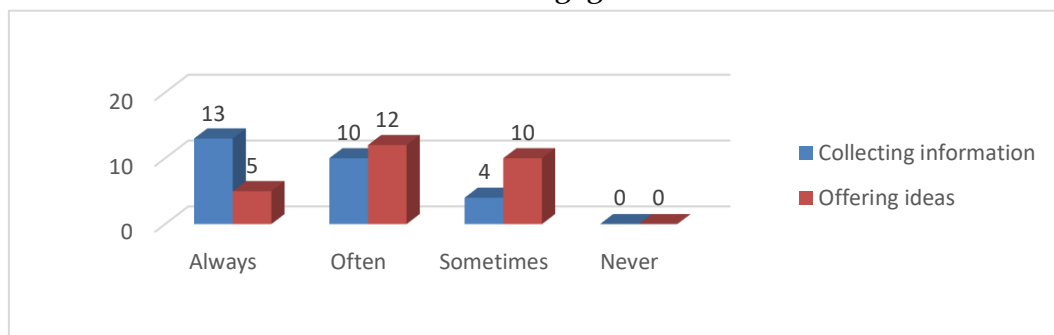
### Students' Involvement in PBL

PBL is collaborative work therefore the present study analyzes how the students are involved in conducting the project. The student's contribution, responsibility, and respect for the group as important aspects in PBL are analyzed.

#### 1. Contributing to the team project

To measure the involvement of the students in PBL during the class, the following statement, I collect relevant information for the team's purposes, is proposed. Furthermore, the questionnaire also proposes the following statement, I offer well-developed and clear ideas to the team's needs. The responses are in chart 1.

**Chart 1.** Student Engagement in PBL

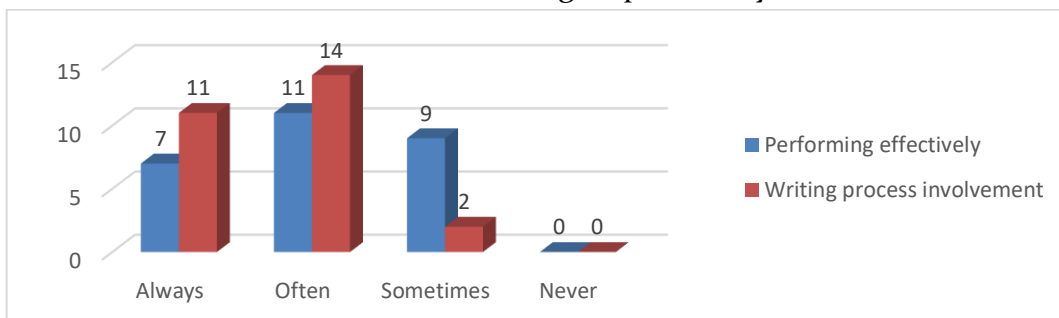


The data indicates that the majority of students responded that they always collect relevant information for the team. Different from how the students collect relevant information, the students experience that they are not always able to offer developed ideas. To elaborate on the data, the responses indicate that students' involvement is satisfied. The students who are always involved in offering ideas are only 5 (18,5%) students.

#### 2. Handling Responsibility

To confirm the student's responsibility, the data uncover that the students often perform writing tasks effectively.

**Chart 2. Handling responsibility**



The data suggest that the majority of the students often perform writing effectively. Chart 2 indicates that 11 (40,7%) students often experience performance writing tasks effectively. Furthermore, the students are also often involved in the writing process. Therefore, students in PBL classes are successful in taking responsibility collaboratively.

3. Respecting the teammate

Respect is an essential element in collaborative work. To measure this aspect, the study uncovers how the students listen to their teammates, how they show respectful behavior, and how they help each other to reach fair decisions for the team. Those three aspects are illustrated in chart 3.

**Chart 3. Respecting the teammate**

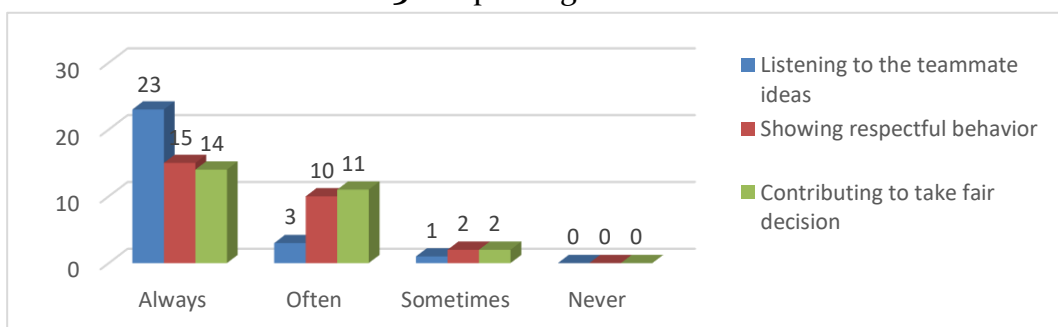


Chart 3 indicates that most of the students (23) listen to the teammate's ideas. In addition, they (15 students) also helped their teammates develop the idea while showing respectful behavior. In line with the two previous supportive attitudes, the students (14) also help the team to reach an impartial decision.

**Students' Opportunities in PBL**

To answer problem statement number 2, the interview is administered. Based on the interview data, it is revealed that students gain a positive impact of PBL implementation in writing. The obtained opportunities are how the students

get the ideas to write, how they obtain an idea, how they design the writing project, how they do the project, how they exhibit the project, and how they evaluate the project.

Getting ideas is one of the most important steps in the writing process. The students read previous research and utilize technology to search for relevant information for their project, namely writing a scholarly article. Student A (Anonym) states that I explore some scholarly articles to get an idea of my writing project. Reading previous research helps me find an idea to write. Furthermore, she states that after she gets the idea, my teammate and I discuss the idea then we start writing. Student C states that to get a topic, she initially searched on the internet.

Based on students' responses, it can be concluded that students use technology to explore their ideas. Furthermore, students believe that using technology helps them to get inspiration. Exploring the internet and reading previous research plays an important role in their writing process.

After getting the idea, the students collaboratively design the writing project by constructing an outline of a scholarly article. Student B states that we design the project by writing the outlines of a scholarly article, such as the introduction of the study, proposing research questions, deciding the objective of the study, previous research, deciding the method we use, composing the findings, concluding, and writing cited references. He, furthermore, declares that the process is challenging and time-consuming.

A further step that the students conduct is tuning the project. To tune the project, the students collect the materials from printed and online scientific journals and relevant books. Furthermore, for the students who decide to conduct field study, they do field observation. Student C states that my friend and I explored all possible references to tune our project. We search for relevant research on the internet. We also read academic books and conduct field observations in particular sites. We perceive that doing these activities helps us understand our research better.

After tuning the project, the students begin doing the project by writing their scholarly articles following the IMRAD model. Student C states that to write the project, we adopt a scholarly writing style namely, introduction, literature review, method, result, discussion, conclusion, and reference. Furthermore, student B adds that we propose study objectives in our introduction section.

The written projects then are exhibited at the class meeting. Student D states that our project is exhibited every week. It is done regularly. Similar to student D, student B states that we are obligated to report our progress to the teacher weekly in our meeting class.



Reporting the progress of writing to the teachers is used by the teacher to evaluate the student's writing. Therefore, the students can develop their writing products. However, the students also have their stage to evaluate their projects. Student C states that after we wrote the project, my friend and I discussed the aspects of the project. For example, we revise our project and conduct the editing section if we find some incorrect grammatical structures. Student A adds that our teacher passionately discusses our project, beginning from our initial writing ideas. He suggests some beneficial feedback. He also revises small details, such as ungrammatical structures, punctuation, etc. We perceive that evaluation helps us develop writing skills.

Evaluating a writing project is not final. It should be followed up by another action, namely revising. Student C states that after we evaluate the project, we begin revising the evaluated points. For example, after our teacher gave us feedback, we revised our project following the teacher's feedback. In addition, student B states that before our project is consulted with the teacher, usually we revise some points of our projects. My friend and I revised the project collectively.

Concerning the implementation of PBL in a writing project, the study reveals that students experienced high engagement in accomplishing the project. The study strengthens a positive trend of using PBL in a classroom, such as the studies conducted by Karyawati & Ashadi (2018), Mali (2016), and Harigan (2014). The previous three studies indicate that PBL develops the students' creativity. In addition, the present study reinforces Ravitz et al study (2012) which states that PBL affects students' positive learning outcomes. PBL therefore can solve writing learning activity problems as the study of Walvoord & Smith (1982) indicates that writing is often dominated by teachers to correction activity. The present study indicating students' involvement means that the study is in line with Ghavifekr (2020). His study uncovers that learning collaboratively is believed to enhance socialization among members.

Secondly, the present study declares that PBL provides students with various opportunities. The first opportunity is to get an idea of the PBL project. In this term, students are encouraged to experience using technology. To correlate using technology to PBL means that PBL can encourage students to demonstrate real-life tasks in a digital era. The study, therefore, strengthens Stoller's declaration that PBL should reflect contemporary tasks reflecting a digital era need (2002). Furthermore, different from Antika (2014) who declares that teaching writing in Indonesia is mostly dominated by teachers, the various opportunities reflected in the present study indicate that learning using PBL can prevent teacher domination in the teaching-learning process.

## CONCLUSION

The present study indicates that PBL use in writing a scholarly article is discovered to provide a high learning involvement for the students in manners that the students experience to contribute to the team project, handle responsibility, and respect other teammates. To explain, the ways the students contribute to the team are collecting relevant information, and offering a clear idea. To handle responsibility, the students are performing writing tasks effectively and they are involved tidily in the writing process. Concerning ways the students respect their teammates, the students are listening to the teammate's ideas, helping teammates respectfully develop the idea, and helping the team make a fair decision.

Furthermore, the opportunities experienced by the students in writing a scholarly article using PBL are designing the writing project, tunning the project, doing the project, exhibiting the project, evaluating the project, and revising the project. The various opportunities enable the students to take the benefits of learning using PBL. The present study proves that learning writing using PBL develops skills in the students' writing.

Finally, the study highlights the substantial aspects of students' collaborative learning and their opportunities to learn using PBL to develop their involvement with socialization among members. It is believed that the following research related to character building using PBL in writing and to what extent the use of PBL supports character building will be interesting.

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