

Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Project-Based Learning in English Language Teaching within the National Curriculum

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi persepsi guru dan siswa terhadap pembelajaran berbasis proyek (Project-Based Learning/PjBL) dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris di SMA Negeri 5 Semarang, sebuah sekolah negeri yang telah menerapkan Kurikulum Merdeka. Dengan pendekatan campuran (mixed methods), data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, angket terbuka untuk guru, dan angket skala Likert untuk siswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa baik guru maupun siswa memiliki pandangan yang umumnya positif terhadap PjBL. Guru menyoroti manfaat PjBL dalam mendorong kreativitas, kolaborasi, dan keterlibatan siswa, meskipun mereka juga menghadapi tantangan seperti keterbatasan waktu, variasi kemampuan siswa, dan perlunya model penilaian yang lebih jelas. Siswa menyatakan minat dan kesenangan dalam belajar bahasa Inggris melalui proyek, terutama karena tugas-tugas yang relevan dengan kehidupan nyata dan kesempatan untuk bekerja sama. Namun, beberapa siswa mengungkapkan kendala seperti keterbatasan waktu dan kebingungan awal. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa meskipun PjBL sejalan dengan tujuan Kurikulum Merdeka, implementasi yang efektif memerlukan dukungan institusional yang lebih kuat, pelatihan profesional, dan penjadwalan yang lebih fleksibel. Temuan ini memberikan implikasi praktis untuk peningkatan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris melalui PjBL di sekolah menengah serta menjadi dasar bagi penelitian lebih lanjut terkait dampaknya dalam jangka panjang.

Kata kunci: Project-Based Learning, Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris, Persepsi Guru, Persepsi Siswa, Kurikulum Merdeka.

Abstract

This study explores teachers' and students' perceptions of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in English language teaching at SMA Negeri 5 Semarang, a public high school implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through interviews, open-ended questionnaires for teachers, and Likert-scale questionnaires for students. Findings reveal that both teachers and students hold generally positive views of PjBL. Teachers highlighted its benefits in promoting creativity, collaboration, and student engagement, though they also reported challenges such as time constraints, diverse student abilities, and the need for clearer assessment models. Students expressed interest and enjoyment in learning English through projects, particularly appreciating the relevance of real-life tasks and opportunities for teamwork. However, some students noted issues with time sufficiency and initial confusion. The study concludes that while PjBL aligns well with the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum, effective implementation requires stronger institutional support, professional development, and more flexible scheduling. These insights offer practical implications for improving English language instruction through PjBL in Indonesian high schools and suggest avenues for future research on its long-term impact.

Keywords: Project-Based Learning, English Language Teaching, Teachers' Perceptions, Students' Perceptions, Merdeka Curriculum

1. INTRODUCTION

The current educational reform in Indonesia, particularly through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, reflects a significant shift from traditional, teacher-centered approaches to more student-centered and contextual learning models. One of the key

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instructional strategies promoted by this curriculum is Project-Based Learning (PjBL), which aligns well with the global emphasis on 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and communication (Bell, 2019; Musa et al., 2012; Jaya et al., 2025). In English Language Teaching (ELT), PjBL offers an authentic learning experience by allowing students to engage in real-world problems using the target language. Instead of passively receiving knowledge, learners are actively involved in the learning process, which encourages higher engagement and deeper understanding of the subject matter (Thomas, 2019; Guo et al., 2020; Safitri et al., 2024). However, the successful implementation of PjBL largely depends on the readiness and perception of both teachers and students in applying this model. Many English teachers still face challenges in designing meaningful projects that align with learning outcomes while being feasible within the limitations of class time and resources. At the same time, students may lack the necessary autonomy or prior experience to fully engage in project-based tasks, especially when it comes to using English as a foreign language (Jaya et al., 2025b; Meylani et al., 2025; Musa et al., 2012). These issues raise important questions about the practical applicability of PjBL in Indonesian classrooms, and thus warrant an in-depth investigation.

Understanding teachers' perceptions is essential because they are the ones who interpret curriculum goals and make instructional decisions in the classroom. Teachers' beliefs and attitudes about the effectiveness, feasibility, and impact of PjBL will significantly influence how the method is implemented (Tristiana et al., 2024) Ardena & Fatimah, 2021; Fadhillah et al., 2023). For instance, if a teacher believes that PjBL enhances language skills and student motivation, they are more likely to integrate it into their lesson plans. On the contrary, if teachers view PjBL as time-consuming or impractical due to large class sizes or limited support, they may only adopt it superficially. Furthermore, there may be discrepancies between how teachers understand the theoretical framework of PjBL and how it is actually practiced in classrooms. Investigating these perceptions provides valuable insights into how well the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum are being realized at the ground level (Azli et al., 2018; Fattah et al., 2023; Sudana et al., 2023).

On the other hand, students' perceptions also play a crucial role in determining the success of any pedagogical innovation. As the primary recipients of instructional strategies, students' engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes are directly affected by their experiences with PjBL (Osakue et al., 2011; Ferdaus & Novita, 2023; Rama et al., 2023). Research by Alan and Stoller (2015) shows that students involved in project-based English learning often demonstrate improved language performance and a higher level of interest in learning. Nevertheless, these positive outcomes are not always consistent. Some students may find PjBL challenging, particularly if they lack the foundational language skills or collaborative skills necessary to complete the tasks effectively. Hence, capturing students' voices is vital to understanding how PjBL influences their learning process, as well as identifying possible improvements for more effective implementation (Guo et al., 2020; Arochman et al., 2024; Permana et al., 2023).

The Merdeka Curriculum aspires to make learning more personalized, inclusive, and meaningful, which resonates strongly with the principles of PjBL. However, the alignment between curriculum expectations and classroom realities remains a major concern. Studies in the Indonesian context Tamim and Grant (2013) have revealed inconsistencies in the interpretation and execution of PjBL across different schools and regions. These inconsistencies are often attributed to a lack of professional development, inadequate support systems, and varying levels of student readiness. Therefore, a closer examination of how teachers and students perceive the implementation of PjBL is not only timely but necessary to bridge the gap between policy and practice (Tristiana et al., 2024). This study seeks to

contribute to that conversation by focusing specifically on English language classrooms within the national curriculum framework.

By exploring both teachers' and students' perceptions, this research aims to provide a balanced and comprehensive understanding of how PjBL is experienced and interpreted in real classroom settings. This dual-perspective approach acknowledges that meaningful change in education cannot be achieved by focusing on a single stakeholder group. Instead, it requires collaboration, mutual understanding, and reflective practice from all parties involved. The insights from this study are expected to inform not only classroom practices but also curriculum design, teacher training, and education policy. In sum, this research highlights the importance of grounding pedagogical innovation in the lived experiences of its implementers and beneficiaries, thereby promoting a more responsive and effective English language education system in Indonesia.

Research Questions

- 1) What are English teachers' perceptions of implementing project-based learning in the national curriculum?
- 2) What are students' perceptions of English language learning through project-based learning?

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design to explore the perceptions of English teachers and students regarding the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in the national curriculum. Using open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, the research gathers in-depth and varied responses that reflect participants' experiences and viewpoints. The qualitative approach is suitable for capturing detailed, contextual insights, while the combination of data collection methods enhances the credibility and richness of the findings (Sugiyono, 2021; Patton, 2020).

2.2 Research Subject and Object

The subjects of this study are English teachers and students from one of the public high schools in Semarang, namely SMA Negeri 5 Semarang. These participants were selected because the school has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum, including Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in English language teaching. The object of the study focuses on the perceptions of both teachers and students toward the use of project-based learning in English classrooms, particularly how they experience, interpret, and respond to its implementation under the national curriculum framework.

2.3 Research Site and Timeline

This study was conducted at SMA Negeri 5 Semarang, a public high school located in the city of Semarang, Central Java. The research took place during the second semester of the 2024/2025 academic year, when the school was actively implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, including project-based learning in English language instruction.

2.4 Data Collection Technique

- 1) Open-ended Questionnaires: These were distributed to both English teachers and students to gather initial insights into their perceptions of Project-Based Learning (PjBL). The open-ended format allowed participants to express their thoughts freely and in their own words (Dornyei & Taguchi, 2019; Miall & Kuiken, 2019).

- 2) **Semi-structured Interviews:** Interviews were conducted with selected teachers and students to validate, clarify, and deepen the responses obtained from the questionnaires. This technique provided flexibility in probing important themes while ensuring consistency across interviews (Kvale, 2021).
- 3) **Documentation:** Supporting documents such as lesson plans (RPP), project guidelines, and student project outputs were collected to provide contextual data and strengthen the credibility of the findings through triangulation.

2.5 Data Analysis Technique

The data in this study were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of three main components: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. First, data reduction involves selecting, focusing, and simplifying the raw data obtained from questionnaires, interviews, and documentation. This step helps in organizing the information into meaningful categories relevant to the research questions. Second, data display refers to presenting the reduced data in an organized form such as matrices, charts, or narrative descriptions, making it easier to interpret patterns and themes. Lastly, conclusion drawing and verification is the process of interpreting the findings, identifying relationships, and confirming the validity of conclusions through continuous comparison and reflection throughout the research process (Mauliddiyah, 2021; Susanto et al., 2023).

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Research Context

The research was conducted at SMA Negeri 5 Semarang, a public high school that has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum, including Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in English language instruction. The school has applied PjBL for at least one semester, allowing both teachers and students to gain sufficient experience with the approach. The school was selected due to its commitment to curriculum innovation and the availability of English teachers and students who were actively involved in PjBL activities. This context provided a relevant setting for exploring the real perceptions and practices of PjBL in English classrooms under the national curriculum framework.

3.2 Teachers' Perceptions

Based on the data collected from open-ended questionnaires and interviews with English teachers at SMA Negeri 5 Semarang, it was found that the majority of teachers held positive perceptions of Project-Based Learning (PjBL). They viewed PjBL as an effective instructional approach that encourages student creativity, active engagement, and collaborative learning. Despite these benefits, several challenges were also reported, including limited class time, difficulties in creating relevant and contextualized projects, and students' diverse proficiency levels. The following presents a summary of teachers' responses to each open-ended question and an analysis of the findings.

- 1) How do you understand the concept of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in the context of English language teaching?

Responses:

“PjBL helps students apply English in meaningful contexts and enhances their communication skills.” Another teacher emphasized that PjBL promotes student autonomy and critical thinking.

- 2) Have you implemented PjBL in your English classes? If yes, please describe one example of a project you have conducted.

Responses:

“Most teachers indicated that they had implemented PjBL. For example, one teacher shared a project where students created a short tourism video in English to promote local attractions. Another teacher asked students to design an English-language brochure for a fictional product.”

- 3) In your opinion, what are the benefits of using PjBL for students in learning English?

Responses:

“Students become more confident to speak in English when working in groups or presenting their projects.”

- 4) What challenges have you encountered in implementing PjBL in your English teaching?

Responses:

“It’s hard to finish a meaningful project within limited teaching hours.”

- 5) How do your students usually respond to PjBL activities in English class?

Responses:

Teachers observed mostly positive responses, with students enjoying group work and expressing enthusiasm. However, some students were “passive or confused” at the start.

- 6) What kinds of support (e.g., training, resources, time) do you think are needed to successfully implement PjBL?

Responses:

“We need workshops on how to design and assess projects effectively.”

- 7) How do you assess student learning outcomes when using the PjBL approach?

Responses:

Teachers use rubrics, presentations, peer assessments, and project reports. Some also include language accuracy and teamwork as part of the criteria.

- 8) Do you feel that PjBL aligns with the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum? Please explain.

Responses:

Most teachers agreed that PjBL supports the Merdeka Curriculum’s focus on student-centered and contextual learning. “It helps develop Pancasila Student Profile values,” one teacher noted.

- 9) How do you integrate English language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) within PjBL tasks?

Responses:

Teachers integrate skills by requiring students to read project guidelines, write scripts, listen to peer feedback, and speak during presentations.

10) In your view, how can the implementation of PjBL in English teaching be improved in your school context?

Responses:

Suggestions included collaborative planning among teachers, smaller class sizes, more flexible schedules, and greater access to technology.

Teachers support Project-Based Learning (PjBL) due to its perceived ability to enhance student engagement, foster language development, and promote 21st-century skills such as collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking. They believe that PjBL encourages students to actively participate in meaningful learning experiences that reflect real-life contexts. However, despite these positive views, the implementation of PjBL in English language teaching remains inconsistent. Structural constraints such as limited instructional time, insufficient resources, and varying levels of teacher preparedness—pose significant challenges. As a result, many teachers highlight the need for targeted support, including professional training, opportunities for collaborative planning, and the development of clearer assessment models. These supports are essential to ensure the quality and sustainability of PjBL implementation. Overall, teachers affirm that PjBL aligns well with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, especially its emphasis on student-centered and contextualized learning. Nevertheless, for PjBL to be effectively executed, a more systematic and structured support framework at the institutional level is required.

3.3 Students' Perception

Students' perceptions of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) were evaluated using a close-ended questionnaire consisting of 10 statements related to their experiences and opinions about PjBL in English language learning. Each statement was rated on a Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5) to measure the degree of agreement or disagreement. The questionnaire was distributed to 30 eleventh-grade students (class XI) at SMA Negeri 5 Semarang, who had participated in at least one PjBL activity as part of their English subject during the second semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. The aim of this questionnaire was to gain a general understanding of how students perceive the effectiveness, engagement, and benefits of PjBL, as well as the challenges they may face. The results from the questionnaire provide quantitative support to complement the qualitative data collected from teachers, offering a broader picture of PjBL implementation from the learners' perspective.

Table 1. Five-Point Likert Scale Frequency

No.	Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
1	I feel more interested in learning English through projects.	0%	6.7%	16.7%	50.0%	26.6%
2	PjBL helps me understand English materials better.	3.3%	10.0%	23.3%	46.7%	16.7%
3	I feel more confident using English during project activities.	6.7%	13.3%	33.3%	36.7%	10.0%
4	The projects given are challenging and relevant to real life.	0%	6.7%	30.0%	43.3%	20.0%

5	I prefer learning through projects compared to conventional methods.	3.3%	16.7%	26.7%	40.0%	13.3%
6	I often collaborate with classmates during projects.	0%	3.3%	13.3%	53.3%	30.0%
7	The time given to complete the projects is sufficient.	6.7%	20.0%	33.3%	30.0%	10.0%
8	The teacher guides me well during the project implementation.	0%	3.3%	20.0%	43.3%	33.3%
9	Learning through projects improves my critical thinking skills.	3.3%	6.7%	16.7%	53.3%	20.0%
10	I would like to have more PjBL-based English learning in the future.	0%	6.7%	20.0%	40.0%	33.3%

Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage of student responses to 10 statements regarding their perceptions of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in English classes, based on a five-point Likert scale: Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Neutral (N), Agree (A), and Strongly Agree (SA). The responses were collected from 30 eleventh-grade students. The data shows that most students responded positively to PjBL. For example, 76.6% (Agree + Strongly Agree) of students felt more interested in learning English through projects (Statement 1), and 70% agreed that PjBL improved their understanding of English materials (Statement 2). High agreement is also seen in collaborative aspects (Statement 6) and teacher guidance (Statement 8), indicating that students benefit from support and teamwork. However, some students expressed neutral or mixed views, particularly regarding confidence in using English (Statement 3) and time sufficiency (Statement 7), where higher neutral and disagree responses suggest potential areas for improvement. In conclusion, students generally perceive PjBL positively in terms of engagement, relevance, and skill development, though certain aspects like time allocation and confidence-building may require further attention.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that both teachers and students at SMA Negeri 5 Semarang generally perceive Project-Based Learning (PjBL) as a beneficial and engaging instructional method in the context of English language learning. Teachers acknowledged that PjBL supports student-centered learning and cultivates key 21st-century skills such as collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and communication, which align with the goals of the Kurikulum Merdeka (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). For instance, one teacher stated that PjBL enhances communication skills and student autonomy, indicating its potential to make English learning more meaningful and contextual. This aligns with Thomas (2019), who emphasizes that PjBL allows learners to work on real-world problems, making learning more relevant and motivating.

From the students' side, the Likert-scale data further supports these insights, with a significant proportion expressing positive attitudes toward PjBL. Notably, 76.6% of students agreed or strongly agreed that PjBL increased their interest in learning English, and 83.3% reported frequent collaboration with peers (Statement 6), suggesting that the approach fosters active engagement and cooperative learning. These results resonate with the findings of [Bell \(2019\)](#), who highlights that PjBL promotes engagement by involving students in purposeful tasks that require teamwork and problem-solving.

However, the study also uncovers several implementation challenges, including time constraints, students' varying proficiency levels, and difficulties in designing contextual projects. As one teacher remarked, "It's hard to finish a meaningful project within limited teaching hours," highlighting a structural limitation that can hinder the depth and quality of PjBL activities. This issue is echoed by [Arochman et al. \(2024\)](#), who argue that effective PjBL demands sufficient time for planning, execution, and reflection conditions that are not always present in typical school schedules. Moreover, while students responded positively overall, some expressed neutral or uncertain views, particularly about their confidence in using English during project activities (Statement 3, where 33.3% were neutral), and the adequacy of time to complete projects (Statement 7, where 26.7% disagreed or strongly disagreed). These responses suggest that although students enjoy PjBL, there may still be gaps in language proficiency and project management that need to be addressed. According to [Alan and Stoller \(2015\)](#), students need scaffolding and structured support during PjBL to develop both linguistic and academic skills effectively.

To overcome these challenges, both teachers and students emphasized the need for institutional support, such as professional development workshops, collaborative planning opportunities, and improved access to learning resources and technology. These findings are consistent with research by [Blumenfeld et al. \(2016\)](#), which underscores the importance of teacher readiness and resource availability in sustaining successful PjBL implementation. The study supports the integration of PjBL in English language teaching under the Kurikulum Merdeka framework. The approach is well-received by both teachers and students and is seen as instrumental in enhancing learner engagement, language competence, and critical thinking. However, its effective application requires systematic support, particularly in time allocation, training, and resource provision, to ensure that both educators and learners can fully benefit from its potential.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that both teachers and students at SMA Negeri 5 Semarang generally perceive Project-Based Learning (PjBL) positively in the context of English language teaching under the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers appreciate PjBL for its potential to enhance engagement, collaboration, and real-life language use, while students report increased interest, critical thinking, and active participation. However, challenges such as limited time, varying proficiency levels, and lack of assessment clarity remain. The findings imply that while PjBL aligns well with student-centered learning principles, its successful implementation requires structured institutional support, teacher training, and curriculum adjustment. Future research should explore long-term impacts of PjBL on students' language proficiency, examine digital integration within projects, and involve comparative studies across schools to validate these findings and improve scalability.

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