TURNING IDEAS INTO TEXT: PROJECT-BASED LEARNING IN WRITING INSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT
While new teaching model has the potential to develop teaching writing practices, the shift from traditional teacher-centered methods to Project-Based Learning (PBL) remains underexplored in secondary school contexts. This current study addressed this gap by evaluating the effectiveness of PBL in improving students' writing competencies. The data were obtained through classroom action research with pre-test and post-test. The findings indicated a significant improvement in students' writing skills. The students' average scores improved from 65.8 in the pre-test to 72 in the first cycle and 80.1 in the second cycle. These results demonstrated significant enhancement in students' writing abilities following the implementation of PBL. Overall, PBL showed an effective teaching practice for improving writing skills through problem-solving and collaborative learning. It also fostered critical thinking and creativity among students. Furthermore, this study provided practical insights for educators and curriculum developers on using PBL as a method to improve students' writing proficiency.

INTRODUCTION

Currently, the role of teaching practice in writing for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students has gained increasing attention in recent developments (Ariyani, 2019; Hijerah et al., 2026; Tung, 2026). Some scholars (for instance, Marlani et al., 2019; Maulidah, 2020) argued that writing becomes the most challenging skill to be mastered by students. Since writing is not just an academic requirement but is a communication tool to express their thoughts, share knowledge. Writing takes longer than the other skills--speaking, listening, and reading-- because it requires imagination and critical thinking. Writing skills play a vital role in daily life with far-reaching applications in both personal and professional spheres. Mastering these skills can improve communication, academic success, career opportunities, and personal development, making it an essential skill for students.

Maulidah (2020) explains that students do not automatically master writing skills but must go through training and practice. Sholihah (2017) also considered that writing is considered a difficult skill in learning English.

Recognizing this significance, the teachers have sought innovative ways to nurture and elevate students' writing capabilities. One approach that has gained traction for its effectiveness in achieving this goal is Project-Based Learning (PBL). According to Fiktoyana et al. (2018), learning model known as Project Based Learning (PBL) employs issue to collect and integrate new knowledge based on real experiences and activities. This learning model is designed for complex problems students must investigate and understand. Project-Based Learning (PBL) is an innovative and effective approach to nurturing and enhancing students' writing capabilities. This method is gaining popularity in education because it engages students, promotes critical thinking, and fosters meaningful learning experiences. According to Wahyuni (2019), PBL is an educational approach that utilizes project work to enhance learning outcomes. Project work involves multifaceted tasks that simulate real-world problems.

The initial step involves collecting and integrating knowledge from experiences gained from practical activities. These tasks involve guiding students to design activities, solve problems, make decisions, carry out investigative activities and work independently or in groups. This approach allows students to develop their problem-solving and decision-making skills while also gaining practical experience in real-life scenarios. Sutrisna et al. (2019) stated that Project Based Learning model requires students to learn and produce a project at the end of the learning activity. Project-Based Learning transforms the traditional classroom experience into an engaging and dynamic environment where students are not just passive recipients of knowledge but active participants in their learning journey.

Through PBL, students delve into real-world problems, apply critical thinking skills, and collaborate with peers to find solutions. Along this exhilarating educational path, students refine their writing abilities, honing them into powerful tools for expression and persuasion, especially in English learning. However, previously published studies on the effect of PBL are not consistent and the shift from traditional methods to PBL in secondary school context is still scarce, particularly with measured evidence of its impact on writing skills. Thus, one purpose of this current study attempts to investigate whether the implementation of PBL in writing class can significantly improve students' writing competencies. The procedures in the PBL approach such as (1) starting with the essential question, (2) designing a plan for the project, (3) creating a schedule, (4) monitoring the students and the progress of the project, (5) assess the outcome, and (6) evaluate the experience (Yulianto et al., 2017).

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research approach to critically investigate the effectiveness of the Project-Based Learning (PBL) model in improving students' writing skills. The research design of this current study was Classroom Action Research (CAR) which is a cyclical and reflective process. It was decided that the best method to adopt for this investigation was to improve teaching and learning practices through repeated cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. The subjects of this research were 29 students at one of leading secondary schools in Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia. Eligibility criteria required students in 2025 academic year. In addition, the participants were recruited due to actively involved in the writing class and represented the target group for improving descriptive text writing class.

The research was conducted in two cycles, each consisting of four main stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. In the planning stage, the researchers prepared the implementation of the PBL approach by setting the timeline, designing student worksheets, and preparing assessment instruments. The researchers also provided an explanation of descriptive text and its examples to the students. During the acting and observing stages, the researchers implemented the PBL approach, administered a pre-test to assess the students' initial writing skills, monitored their progress during the project, and provided guidance and feedback for improvement.

In the reflecting stage, the researchers analyzed the students' writing results using a rubric adapted from Brown (2001), covering aspects such as content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. Data were collected using two writing tests; pre-test and post-test. These instruments were designed to ascertain the students' writing ability before and after the implementation of PBL. The pre-test results were compared with the post-test results from cycles 1 and 2 to evaluate the improvement in students' writing abilities. After obtaining the pre-test and post-test data, the data analysis was conducted descriptively and quantitatively by calculating the mean scores for each cycle and comparing the results to determine the significance level of improvement. The research was considered successful when students achieved a minimum score of ≥80, indicating that the learning objectives had been met.

RESULTS

The first set of analyses examined the impact of Project-Based Learning whether significantly impact the writing ability of secondary high students or not. At the planning stage in cycle I, the teacher begins by planning how to implement Project-Based Learning (PBL), setting a time for implementation, and preparing the worksheet and the assessment instruments. It involves defining the learning objectives, selecting a project topic or theme, and outlining the steps to be taken during the project. Next, the researchers asked them to create a descriptive text about introducing other individuals as their pre-test. Next, the researchers gave the students an explanation of descriptive text that introduced others, provided them with examples, and explained the language features used in the text.

Cycle 1

In the planning stage of Cycle 1,the researchers implemented the entire teaching and learning activities process with project-based learning. After that, the researchers ask students to complete a pre- test. In this case, the pre-test involves writing a descriptive text about introducing others. It is a baseline assessment to gauge students' initial understanding and writing skills. In cycle 1— in the first meeting, the researchers provide students with an explanation of what a descriptive text is, particularly focusing on the type that introduces others. This explanation likely covers the purpose, structure, and language features commonly found in descriptive texts of this nature in detail. This sequence of activities aligns with a constructivist approach to teaching, where students actively engage with the material and learn through hands-on experiences, such as writing descriptive texts as part of a project. Furthermore, the students' writing performance using results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Students' Writing Scores

Total Participants	Mean Pre-test	Post-test
29	65.8	72

Source: Authors Own Processed Data

Table 1 indicates that there has been an improvement in the students' writing skills based on their post-test scores in cycle 1. The average score of 72 suggests progress in their writing abilities compared to the pre-test. However, it is important to note that the scores have not yet reached the minimum score level.

Cycle 2

Cycle 2 is a follow-up to cycle I research. The researchers focused on delivering material along with examples. Researchers want to conduct research in cycle II by distributing student worksheets, which are work in cycle I that have been evaluated so that students know and correct their mistakes. In this part, the students got an assignment to create a simple descriptive text about introducing others. However, the teacher still provided direction regarding the assignment. Students were asked to pay attention to the parts of the text, the use of grammar, writing sentences that

include spelling, capital letters, periods, and commas, and interesting design creativity. The teacher encourages students to discuss with a partner. The comparison of students' means scores of pre-tests, post-test cycle 1 and post-test cycle 2 are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of Data Results

| Total Participants | Mean | | |
	Pre-test	Post-test Cycle 1	Post-test Cycle 2
29	65.8	72	80.1

The data above shows students' tests in writing on descriptive text about introducing others. The data consists of pretest and post-test scores. The post-test score generally was better than the pretest score. It indicates that PJBL can improve students' writing ability. The students' pretest mean score is 65,8, increasing to 72 in cycle 1. In cycle 2, the post-test mean score of 80,1 indicated significant improvement.

DISCUSSION

This present study set out with the aim of investigating the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) on secondary high students in writing class. Incorporating PBL allows students to apply their knowledge and skills in a meaningful context, enhance their language proficiency and understand the descriptive text. After providing the material and examples, the teacher encourages students to ask questions about any difficult words or confusing parts they encounter. This step fosters a supportive learning environment and ensures that students clearly understand the content. The results of this study revealed that the implementation of PBL significantly improved students' writing ability in descriptive text. Similarly, Putra et al. (2025) found that the implementation of PBL in the 21st century competencies was impactful. This significance improvement is indicated from the students' mean scores from 65.8 in the pre-test to 72 in Cycle 1 and further to 80.1 in Cycle 2. In other words, PBL is an effective learning method in improving students' writing skills. This result aligns with some previous research studies (for instance, O'Toole et al., 2026; Wickramasinghe & Appiah, 2026; Andargie et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) has resulted in an increase in curiosity among the students, especially in writing skills. Zhang and Ma (2023) argued that comparing to traditional teaching method, PBL significantly improved students' skills and academic achievement. The findings of this study also revealed that there were significant improvements in the teaching and learning process during the second cycle. The students actively followed the writing process, which included planning, drafting, and revising their work when creating their projects. The researchers also provided continuous monitoring to ensure that students felt comfortable and unafraid of making mistakes in their writing. Upon completing their projects, the researchers offered constructive feedback to help students refine their work and gained comprehensive knowledge in writing descriptive texts and introducing others. In other words, PBL has led to heightened engagement and active participation in the learning activities. It is supported by Shin (2018) who found that PBL can enhance students' skills and motivations. The students exhibited high enthusiasm throughout the teaching and learning process and also collaborated effectively within their groups and readily shared their knowledge and information. The students approached their work with great enthusiasm when tasked with creating the text provided by the teacher. They completed their responsibilities and supported and complemented each other's project development roles.

As a result, PBL help students felt less nervous and uncomfortable, allowing them to perform at their best. Adelina et al. (2025) also mentioned that PBL can effectively improve students' confidence and social skills. The implementation of PBL had a significant impact on students' creativity in creating text. Any spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors have been corrected. It allowed them to explore their writing abilities and enhance their writing skills. This approach encouraged them to think creatively and critically while working on their projects, fostering a

deeper understanding of the subject. The researcher actively monitored students' progress and provided valuable feedback, creating a supportive and constructive learning environment.

Additionally, the teacher was supervisory by interacting with students individually, inquiring about their projects, and addressing any difficulties they encountered. The researcher was readily available to assist and guide students in finding solutions to their challenges. The students also demonstrated a willingness to share their concerns and seek clarification from the researcher when they encountered aspects they did not fully understand. Thus, implementing PBL enhanced students' creativity and critical thinking in writing and fostered a collaborative and supportive learning atmosphere, strengthening the relationships between the teacher and students.

CONCLUSION

The outcomes of the classroom action research aimed at enhancing students' writing skills in crafting descriptive texts about introducing others demonstrate a significant improvement in students' performance. The positive impact becomes evident when comparing the results of the writing skills assessments conducted in both cycle 1 and cycle 2. The gain score is tangible evidence of the significant improvement in students' writing abilities. Using PBL within the English teaching and learning process played a pivotal role in boosting student motivation for writing. PBL introduced a motivating and intellectually challenging series of activities, fostering enthusiasm, critical thinking, and creativity among students throughout the teaching and learning journey. Furthermore, PBL provided students valuable opportunities to hone their writing skills through consistent practice. In the learning process, the teacher's role is paramount when selecting an appropriate instructional model to enhance students' writing proficiency. Additionally, the teacher should carefully choose the most suitable teaching and learning model to improve students' writing skills, given that writing is a particularly complex skill to develop. Students should be encouraged to work independently and collaborate with others.

Despite the significant results, the most important limitation lies in several facts such as recruiting the small number of the participants, focusing only on descriptive writing, and having limited cycles. Notwithstanding these limitations, this present study suggests that Project-Based Learning (PBL) adopted as an effective instructional model to improve students' writing skills and engagement in the writing classroom. More broadly, further research is also needed to conduct similar studies with a large number of participants in different educational levels and explore the PBL in other types of writing skills.

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