

THE IMPACT OF PROJECT-BASED LEARNING ON EFL STUDENTS' WRITING SKILL: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This research is a systematic literature review on the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in improving students' writing skills. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in exploring innovative and student-centered approaches like PBL, especially in response to the increasing emphasis on 21st-century skills and communicative competence in EFL instruction. This review analyzed 20 peer-reviewed studies published between 2017 and 2025, selected based on predefined inclusion criteria such as empirical focus on PBL in EFL writing, accessibility in full text, and relevance to student outcomes. Data from various sources such as Scopus, DOAJ, and Google Scholar were reviewed in depth to identify empirical findings relevant to the implementation of PBL in the context of teaching writing. The evaluation results show that PBL consistently has a positive impact on improving the quality of student writing, both in terms of structure, cohesion, and coherence. In addition, this study identified a number of challenges in the implementation of PBL, such as time constraints, teacher readiness, and ability gaps among students. The findings confirm the importance of institutional support and adaptive learning strategies in implementing PBL to optimize the development of EFL students' writing skills effectively and sustainably.

Keywords: English Foreign Language, Project-Based Learning, Systematic Literature Review, Writing skill

A. INTRODUCTION

Writing skills play an important role in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) (Parupalli, 2017). Aside from being one of the four main skills that must be mastered, writing serves as a medium to organize, convey and evaluate ideas in a structured manner (Ilham, 2022, 2023). Good mastery of writing skills contributes to students' academic success, as it is often used as an indicator of their understanding of the subject matter, such as in the writing of essays and academic reports (Anaktototy et al., 2024). In a professional context, excellent writing skills are a valuable plus, especially in the era of globalization, where many professions require written communication skills in English. Therefore, developing writing skills among EFL students not only supports academic achievement, but also prepares them for competition in the increasingly complex world of work. Writing skills reflect students'

understanding of language structures and their ability to express ideas coherently (Fitria, 2024), so improving these skills should be a major focus in the EFL curriculum.

However, many EFL students face challenges in developing this skill, mainly related to linguistic constraints, motivation, and learning methods. Limited vocabulary, weak grammatical understanding, and difficulty in constructing coherent sentences are the main obstacles in writing (Rashtchi et al., 2025; Toba et al., 2019). In addition, writing demands higher cognitive skills than receptive skills, so it is often a challenge for students. Other factors such as low motivation, lack of constructive feedback, and less interactive traditional learning methods further worsen their writing outcomes (Yan, 2024). Therefore, innovative and experiential learning strategies are needed to effectively improve EFL students' writing skills.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is an innovative learning approach that emphasizes students' active involvement in the learning process through the completion of authentic and meaningful projects (Barzegar & Fazilatfar, 2019). In the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL), PBL provides opportunities for students to develop their writing skills through real-world experiences that demand exploration, collaboration, and problem solving (Juniardi et al., 2020). This approach encourages students to organize ideas, structure text logically, and apply appropriate language rules in a more applicable context. In addition, PBL also fosters learning motivation as students feel they have more control over their learning process. Thus, PBL not only improves technical writing skills, but also builds confidence and critical thinking skills that are essential in the academic and professional use of English (Susanti et al., 2020). In addition, Project-Based Learning (PBL) also provides various benefits in learning English as a foreign language (EFL), especially in the development of writing skills (Syakur et al., 2020). Through this approach, students are encouraged to think creatively in organizing and developing their ideas in the form of coherent and structured writing (Jaya & Mortini, 2023). In addition, PBL emphasizes collaborative work, where students interact and discuss with their peers, thus improving their ability to organize ideas and give and receive constructive feedback (Seftika et al., 2021). The project completion process also trains problem-solving skills, as students must identify challenges in writing, find appropriate solutions, and adjust their writing to be effective in conveying messages (Septyarini & Budiarta, 2019). Therefore, PBL not only improves students' writing skills, but also builds critical thinking, communication, and cooperation skills that are essential in language learning.

Recent studies have explored the impact of Project Based Learning (PBL) on language skills, particularly writing, among EFL students. PBL has been shown to improve academic writing ability, with one study reporting an increase from 61.67% to 82% in student performance (Yulandari et al., 2024). Ajleaa et al. (2025) highlighted the effectiveness of the project-based learning method using a mixed methods approach to provide empirical evidence and insight into the factors that contribute to the successful implementation of PBL for writing improvement, the results proved that PBL offers a practical model for educators who want to improve English writing skills among university students. Another study found that PBL positively influenced students' critical thinking and engagement in French writing, with an average score of 82.04 (Widyastuti & Andika, 2021). The implementation of collaborative PBL in English text writing showed an increase in learning outcomes of 9.99 (2.77%) over three cycles (Hapsari et al., 2024). Project Based-Learning is also proven to increase enthusiasm, confidence, creativity, independent learning ability, and collaborative learning

ability (Luh et al., 2017). Research on the impact of Project-Based Learning (PBL) on EFL students' writing skills makes a significant contribution to the field of language education, particularly in EFL teaching. PBL not only improves writing skills, but also encourages active engagement and collaboration among students, which is important in language learning (Sadad & Saehu, 2024).

Based on the review of various studies on the impact of Project-Based Learning (PBL) on EFL students' writing skills, there are some gaps that need to be addressed. These gaps indicate the need for more comprehensive and systematic research to explore the impact of PBL on EFL students' writing skills. Therefore, this study aims to conduct a Systematic Literature Review that will integrate findings from previous studies, identify trends and patterns, and uncover relationships that may not be apparent in individual studies. With this approach, it is expected to provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of PBL in improving writing proficiency, as well as provide evidence-based recommendations for educators and policy makers in designing more effective teaching strategies.

B. METHOD

This study utilized a qualitative approach through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), following the PRISMA guidelines established by Page et al. (2021) to ensure a rigorous and transparent process. The use of PRISMA is widely recognized in literature synthesis to improve replicability and reduce bias in review studies (Moher et al., 2009). The review aims to synthesize empirical evidence on the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in enhancing writing skills among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, identify effective instructional strategies, and highlight research gaps, consistent with recommendations by (Keele, 2007) for systematic review methodology in educational research.

Literature was sourced from major academic databases such as Scopus, DOAJ, and Google Scholar, covering publications from 2017 to 2024 to focus on recent developments in language pedagogy and technology integration. This database selection aligns with best practices to ensure comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed research (Papaioannou et al., 2016). The keywords "Project-Based Learning," "Writing Skill," and "English Foreign Language" were systematically combined using Boolean operators to capture relevant studies across intersecting domains, as advised by (Higgins & Green, 2011). The inclusion criteria consisted of articles published in academic journals that specifically address the application of PBL to improve writing skills among EFL students. Exclusion criteria included studies that did not focus directly on PBL or writing skills, as well as non-research publications such as editorials, opinion pieces, and letters to the editor, ensuring the reliability of evidence synthesized (Pope et al., 2007). The article selection process involved multiple stages starting with duplicate removal to avoid redundancy (Page et al., 2021). Screening based on titles and abstracts assessed initial relevance, followed by full-text review to confirm compliance with inclusion criteria. Data extraction captured key study details, including authorship, publication year, research design, principal findings, and implications for PBL-based writing instruction, following frameworks recommended by (Tranfield et al., 2003).

The collected data were analyzed thematically to identify PBL's impact on students' writing skills in EFL contexts, focusing on grammar accuracy, vocabulary growth, coherence, and paragraph structure. Thematic analysis facilitates the identification of patterns and themes across qualitative data, providing a rich understanding of instructional outcomes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach aims to offer a comprehensive overview of PBL effectiveness while also highlighting challenges and future opportunities. Additionally, the study evaluated PBL success indicators such as student engagement, collaborative learning, and improvement in academic writing quality, which align with assessment criteria in prior research on project-based methodologies (Thomas, 2000).

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in improving EFL students' writing skills as well as identify the supporting and inhibiting factors in its implementation. The findings showed that PBL significantly improved the quality of students' writing, particularly in the aspects of grammar, coherence, and paragraph organization, directly addressing the research objective of measuring writing skill improvement. In addition, PBL promoted the development of higher-order thinking skills as well as students' emotional and cognitive engagement, which is in line with the research objective of identifying effective strategies to develop learners' cognitive and affective abilities. The study also revealed the important role of collaboration among students, active facilitators, and technology integration, all of which are key elements in the successful implementation of PBL in accordance with the research objective of identifying supporting and inhibiting factors. Table 1 below summarizes the key relevant findings.

Table 1. Research Analysis of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in EFL Writing Instruction

No	Focus	Authors	Insight/Research Variables
1	Improving Writing Skills (Grammar, Structure, Coherence, Genre, etc.)	Ajleaa et al., (2025), Ilham (2022), Zannan Alghamdy (2023), Siman (2023), Yulandari et al., (2024)	PBL improves students' linguistic skills in terms of grammar, paragraph structure, and the application of genre writing.
2	Collaboration and Social Interaction in Writing	Ilham (2022), Rofik (2023), Pakpahan et al., (2023), Sedubun and Nurhayati (2024), Argawati and Suryani, (2020)	PBL fosters collaboration, idea exchange, and peer feedback. However, heterogeneous proficiency levels among students may require strategic grouping and differentiated scaffolding.
3	Student Motivation and Active Participation	Andargie et al., (2025), Ajleaa et al., (2025), Ali (2022), Syarifah (2018), Ilham (2022), Ngadiso et al., (2021), Rofik, (2023)	Engaging in meaningful, real-world tasks under PBL increases learners' motivation, autonomy, and participation. These tasks create a sense of ownership that enhances students' investment in their learning process.

4	Teacher's Role and Scaffolding	Fatmawati et al., (2023), Zheng (2012), Cahyono et al., (2024)	Teachers function as facilitators and learning designers. Insufficient training and support for teachers remain significant obstacles to optimal implementation.
5	Real World Context and 21st Century Skills Development	Ajleaa et al., (2025) , Azman et al., (2024), Sedubun and Nurhayati, (2024), Widyastuti and Andika, 2021)	PBL emphasizes the integration of authentic tasks and encourages critical thinking and 21st century skills.
6	Learning Independence and Autonomy	Sukerti and Yuliantini (2018), Syarifah, (2018), Ali (2022)	By positioning students at the center of learning, PBL cultivates independence, responsibility, and reflective learning habits.
7	Time and Resource Limitations	Song et al., (2024), , Argawati and Suryani, (2020)	Challenges include limited instructional time, inadequate technological infrastructure, and institutional constraints.

Table 1 shows that the main focus of the research is on the application of PBL in EFL writing learning. The main focus in the application of PBL is to improve writing skills, such as grammar, coherence, and paragraph organization. In addition to promoting these linguistic competencies, research shows that PBL is effective in improving the quality of students' writing, especially in the use of proper grammar and the organization of writing according to genre. In addition, PBL encourages collaboration among students which enriches the exchange of ideas and feedback. However, the differences in language ability between students require appropriate grouping and scaffolding for optimal participation and learning outcomes, with the role of the facilitator crucial for managing group dynamics.

Furthermore, other focuses such as student motivation, the use of technology, and the role of the facilitator are also evident in the research findings. PBL increases students' engagement and motivation, encouraging them to be more active in the learning process and giving them a sense of ownership over the task. Appropriate use of technology in PBL not only facilitates writing skills but also supports the development of 21st century skills, such as critical thinking, collaboration and effective communication. However, the main challenges in implementing PBL are time constraints, differences in student abilities, and limited institutional support.

1. Implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in learning writing for EFL students

The implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in writing instruction for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students has shown significant potential in improving their writing skills. PBL creates an interactive and collaborative learning environment that encourages students to take ownership of their work while engaging with real-world problems. This enhances their linguistic competence and critical thinking ability. PBL promotes the development of essential writing skills, including grammar, vocabulary, and organization, by engaging students in meaningful tasks (Ajleaa et al., 2025). In addition, students report

improving their ability to organize ideas coherently and apply genre-specific conventions through collaborative writing projects (Ilham, 2022). PBL also encourages active student engagement, where learners contribute to team projects, handle responsibilities, and respect their peers (Rofik, 2023). Collaborative writing experiences allow students to brainstorm, design projects, and evaluate results collectively, increasing their motivation and creativity (Ilham, 2022). The role of the teacher in PBL is not directive but facilitative, helping learners navigate each project phase with appropriate guidance and feedback (Fatmawati et al., 2023). While PBL offers many benefits for EFL writing instruction, some educators may argue that traditional methods still have value, especially in structured environments where explicit instruction is prioritized. Therefore, a blended instructional model that integrates PBL with traditional techniques may better accommodate diverse student needs.

Project-Based Learning has also shown promising results in enhancing EFL students' academic writing performance and classroom motivation. Studies indicate that implementing PBL in writing instruction can significantly improve academic writing skills while fostering a more engaging learning environment. This method typically follows three structured stages: planning, action, and evaluation (Syarifah, 2018). PBL has been observed to create a positive classroom dynamic and is well received by both students and teachers (Ngadiso et al., 2021). Beyond skill development, PBL nurtures autonomy and collaboration by allowing students to engage in purposeful communication and teamwork. In English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts, PBL supports learning independence and helps students develop relevant competencies for professional use (Sukerti & Yuliantini, 2018). Despite these benefits, some challenges have been reported, including limited instructional time and the need for more comprehensive teacher preparation (Ngadiso et al., 2021). Such obstacles highlight the importance of administrative support and continuous professional development to ensure that PBL can be implemented effectively across varying educational contexts.

The application of Project-Based Learning in writing instruction has proven effective in bridging the gap between theory and practice, transforming the learning process from teacher-centered to learner-centered. Through engagement in authentic and collaborative tasks, students do not simply complete assignments but instead use writing as a means of addressing real-life challenges. This shift creates a more meaningful learning context and promotes a deeper understanding of writing as a process. Quantitative evidence supports the effectiveness of PBL, with post-test scores increasing from 61.67% to 82% after PBL-based instruction (Yulandari et al., 2024). In addition to measurable outcomes, students express more positive perceptions of the classroom atmosphere, indicating that PBL contributes to a more conducive and motivating learning environment (Ngadiso et al., 2021). However, time constraints and insufficient teacher training continue to be major barriers. To address these issues, institutions must allocate sufficient time for project work and invest in training programs that equip educators with the skills necessary for facilitating PBL effectively.

2. The impact of Project-Based Learning (PBL) on improving EFL students' writing skills

The implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) has shown a significant positive impact on improving the writing skills of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. Research consistently highlights that PBL enhances learners' mastery of grammar and paragraph organization, particularly when measured through pre- and post-test comparisons (Zannan Alghamdy, 2023). In addition, active participation in writing projects allows students to share ideas and work together, resulting in a dynamic learning atmosphere that

supports improved writing outcomes (Pakpahan et al., 2023). This collaborative process also nurtures peer learning and encourages negotiation of meaning during task completion. PBL encourages students to think critically and solve problems, while simultaneously increasing self-confidence and reducing anxiety in writing tasks (Ali, 2022).

Project-Based Learning (PBL) has demonstrated effectiveness in a variety of EFL writing contexts. Studies across different education levels report improvements in both academic and functional writing skills as a result of PBL implementation (Siman, 2023; Yulandari et al., 2024). The method also fosters higher engagement and the development of critical thinking, especially in writing-focused courses (Widyastuti & Andika, 2021). In secondary settings, PBL has been found particularly effective in teaching descriptive essay writing (Siman, 2023). Moreover, the integration of technology within PBL further enriches the learning process, making it more relevant to 21st-century learners (Widyastuti & Andika, 2021). Quantitative findings across these studies report significant increases in students' writing test scores and overall pass rates. Collectively, this body of research affirms that PBL is a powerful pedagogical strategy for improving EFL students' writing skills across genres and educational levels.

Based on the research findings, Project-Based Learning (PBL) provides opportunities for EFL students to apply writing skills in contexts that are authentic, collaborative, and cognitively engaging. Through projects involving group discussion, personal reflection, technological tools, and interdisciplinary content, students not only enhance the structural aspects of their writing but also develop skills in critical thinking, problem-solving, and idea organization. PBL supports the creation of an active and participatory learning environment, leading to improved motivation, engagement, and academic performance. However, its success depends on thoughtful instructional design, active facilitation by teachers, and the learners' preparedness to collaborate effectively. A persistent challenge is the variation in language proficiency and collaborative skills among students, which may affect group dynamics and equity in participation.

3. Supporting and inhibiting factors for the success of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in teaching English writing skills

The success of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing skills is supported by several key factors. One of the primary benefits of PBL is its ability to increase student motivation by engaging them in authentic, real-world tasks (Andargie et al., 2025). Collaborative group work encourages the exchange of ideas and peer feedback, enriching the writing process and fostering better communication skills (Sedubun & Nurhayati, 2024). The teacher's role is also crucial, particularly in providing guidance and constructive feedback throughout the project phases (Cahyono et al., 2024). By incorporating authentic materials that reflect real-world contexts, PBL makes writing activities more meaningful, while also nurturing essential 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and time management (Azman et al., 2024). These factors collectively highlight PBL's potential as a transformative teaching approach that enhances student engagement and writing proficiency in EFL contexts.

Despite its advantages, the implementation of PBL in writing instruction faces several significant challenges. Time constraints remain one of the most significant obstacles, as the project-based process often exceeds the available class time (Song et al., 2024).

Additionally, differences in language proficiency among students can affect the dynamics of group work, limiting the quality of collaborative outcomes and hindering effective peer interactions (Argawati & Suryani, 2020). Another internal factor is the lack of adequate teacher training in project-based approaches, which can impact the successful integration of PBL in the classroom (Sedubun & Nurhayati, 2024). External factors, such as limited learning resources, inadequate access to technology, and the misalignment between traditional assessment methods and PBL objectives, further complicate the implementation process (Hidayati, 2023). These internal and external factors require systematic strategies and institutional support to overcome and ensure the effective use of PBL.

The research findings demonstrate that PBL creates an active and collaborative learning environment that enhances motivation and writing skills. Internal factors, such as student collaboration and the teacher’s role as a facilitator, are crucial in fostering meaningful learning experiences. However, the effectiveness of PBL is heavily influenced by both institutional and individual readiness. Institutional readiness includes factors such as time allocation, available facilities, and institutional support for technology, while individual readiness concerns teachers' competence in designing and guiding projects effectively. External challenges, such as disparities in student abilities, technological limitations, and mismatched assessment systems, need to be addressed to improve PBL outcomes. To optimize PBL implementation, a systemic approach involving teacher training, curriculum flexibility, and sufficient learning resources is essential.

Research on the Project-Based Learning (PBL) method in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing instruction has demonstrated significant advancements over time. This method has proven effective in enhancing students' writing skills through authentic, collaborative projects that foster critical thinking, creativity, and independent learning. Over the years, research related to PBL has expanded not only to the improvement of writing mechanics but also to interdisciplinary integration, the use of digital technologies, and the development of soft skills such as teamwork and self-evaluation. The following mind map illustrates the major developments of research variables concerning the application of PBL in EFL writing instruction from 2017 to 2024.

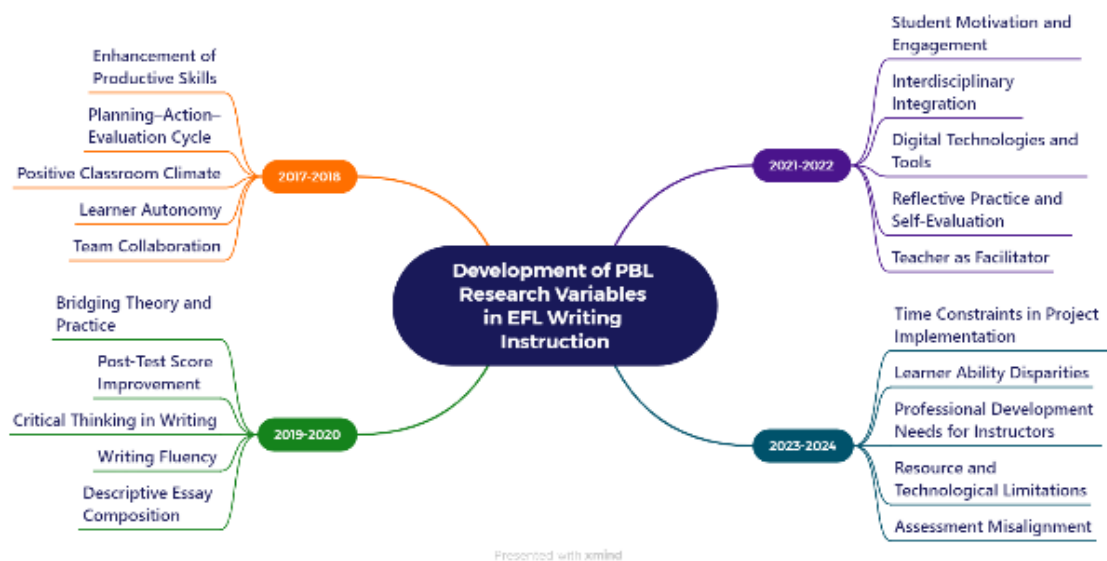


Figure 1. Application of PBL in Teaching EFL Writing

Figure 1 shows that the development of research variables on Project-Based Learning (PBL) in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing has evolved systematically over the years. In the 2017-2018 period, research focused on improving productive skills, implementing the planning-action-evaluation cycle, fostering a positive classroom climate, enhancing learning autonomy, and promoting team collaboration. By 2019-2020, the focus shifted towards bridging theory and practice, with an emphasis on improving critical thinking, writing fluency, and students' ability to compose descriptive essays, as evidenced by improved post-learning test results. In 2021-2022, the research expanded to address student motivation and engagement, the integration of interdisciplinary approaches, the use of digital technology, reflective practice, and the role of teachers as learning facilitators. More recently, in 2023-2024, research has highlighted the challenges of PBL implementation, including time constraints, gaps in students' abilities, the need for professional training for instructors, limited resources and technology, and the misalignment of traditional assessment methods with project-based learning objectives. This evolving focus indicates that PBL implementation in EFL writing instruction is increasingly addressing the balance between cognitive, affective, pedagogical, and contextual factors while identifying areas for further improvement to achieve optimal learning outcomes.

D. CONCLUSION

Based on a systematic synthesis of the current literature, this study asserts that Project-Based Learning (PBL) has a substantial positive impact on EFL learners' writing performance, especially in the structure, coherence, and substance of writing content. This approach creates an active, collaborative, and contextualized learning environment, which allows learners to engage emotionally and cognitively in the writing process. Besides strengthening technical skills such as grammar and writing organization, PBL also enhances higher-order thinking skills, including critical thinking and problem solving. However, the success of PBL is highly influenced by several factors, including institutional readiness, the active role of teachers as facilitators, as well as the availability of time, technology, and appropriate assessment methods. The findings also highlight the main challenges in implementing PBL, such as time constraints, differences in learners' abilities, and the need for professional training for educators. To maximize the effectiveness of PBL, it is recommended that educational institutions provide focused professional training for lecturers, ensure access to necessary technology, and align assessment methods with PBL objectives to optimize learning outcomes. Future research is recommended to explore the role of digital technology in supporting PBL implementation, especially in contexts with limited access to technology in some educational institutions.

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