

PROJECT-BASED LEARNING: ROLES IN DEVELOPING WRITING SKILL OF EFL'S LEARNERS

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Abstract: Writing in English often becomes problem for EFL learners. Project Based Learning (PjBL) is a teaching method in which allows students to learn actively by engaging the real-world condition from the personally designed projects. Using PjBL in EFL teaching-learning is not uncommon phenomenon, but several problems need to be addressed such as learning techniques and objectives. This research is part of the media development research for developing EFL's writing skills. Thus, it aims to find out the role of PjBL in developing writing skills on EFL learners. This research employs quantitative descriptive using percentages to analyze the data obtained. The participants were thirty students from the English Department Universitas Negeri Surabaya who programmed the Essential Writing Skills course. The results show that PjBL probably has a role in developing participants' writing skills proved by the analysis which shows the score percentage above 70%. This indicates that PjBL is possibly implemented in teaching writing for EFL learners as it can develop their writing skills.

Introduction

Indonesia is one of developing countries in the world with high population. This population makes Indonesia as a source for human resources in the world workforce. To fulfill its role, Indonesia needs to ensure that the human resource will meet the demands for the workforce. One of these demands is the foreign language skill. English as a language that is recognized worldwide is one of media to communicate orally and written (Adam, Abid, & Bantulu, 2021). Thus, they are important to be acquired by foreign language learners (Hosseini et al., 2013; Klimova, 2012). Although in many cases, oral communication seems to be more important skill than other skills, it can overshadow the important of writing skill in foreign language learning because both have their own roles in communication that irreplaceable (Nasser, 2016; Hidayati, 2018).

Widiati and Cahyono (2011) argue that among all language skills, writing has a special status in communication activities which plays an important role in the language learning process. In line with this, Harmer (1998) suggests that writing skills are important skills in language learning. However, many foreign language learners believe that writing skill is more difficult to master because it not only requires them to master grammar and vocabulary comprehension, but also requires them to be able to form a coherent storyline to make their story understood by the readers (Celce-Murcia, 2011; Nguyen, Warren, & Fehring, 2014). In the development of the digital world, writing skills play a very important role (Teeler & Gray, 2000). This is because writing is a way to convey stories/news directly in digital media so that information can be communicated directly and widely (Lopez, 2017). In the world of education, writing is a way to teach learners to express their opinions in a coherent and orderly manner which can be used as a means to record, assimilate, reformulate knowledge, develop, and work on their own ideas (Trimmer, 2004). In other words, writing can be a means of personal discovery, creativity, and self-expression (Mattarima & Hamdan, 2011). Writing is also said to be an important learning tool because it helps learners to understand ideas and concepts better (Klimova, 2012). Given the importance of writing for language learners, it needs to be encouraged and

fostered during the language learning process. So, it is necessary to have the right learning methods and approaches so that EFL learners can improve their writing skills well.

Previous studies found that teaching writing is full of challenges and difficulties (Wirawati, et al., 2013; Fadilah, 2019) which are mainly due to learners' inability of to express the ideas, learners' lack of understanding in the elements of English language, such as vocabulary and grammar mastery as well as sentence construction; and learners' incoherence and incohesion in expressing their ideas/opinions (Amalia, Abdullah, & Fatimah, 2021). In EFL teaching-and learning, writing commonly has less exposure than other skills, such as speaking, reading, and structure or grammar. It is mostly caused by the assumption that writing skills has been taught along the other skills (integrated) as normally writing skills is assumed as a skill in creating sentences (Trimmer, 2004; Celce-Murcia, 2001). Thus, it causes writing skill tending to be reduced. Teachers' lack of attention to the development of writing skill serves as one of the main reasons why teaching writing is less touched or ignored in the EFL learning curriculum (Fadilah, 2019; Klimova, 2012). Therefore, it becomes the reason why EFL learners have low skills in writing or find the difficulties to write or produce good writing although they have been studying English for years.

Writing as a productive skill is a complex mechanism that needs to be deconstructed into its most essential elements to be understood, taught, and learned. Regardless of the theories that substantiate writing as a productive skill, there is no answer to the question of how to teach writing. Nevertheless, there are several approaches generally used in teaching writing, yet each of them has own strength and weakness (Dragomir & Niculescu, 2020). Of many methods used in teaching writing skills for EFL learners, one of them is project-based learning.

Over time, various studies on education have put forward various ideas on teaching and learning forms (methods), one of which is project-based learning (PjBL). Project-based learning is a learner-centered pedagogy that involves a dynamic classroom approach which believes that learners will acquire deeper knowledge through active exploration of real-world challenges and problems (Kokotsaki, Menzies, & Wiggins, 2016). In Project-Based Learning (PjBL), learners need to learn on a subject within a certain timeframe and ask them to investigate and respond to complex questions, challenges, or problems (Buck Institute for Education). This learning method emphasizes an active and inquiry-based learning style. The PjBL method presents established facts or describes a smooth path to knowledge by asking questions, problems, or scenarios (Vogler, et al., 2018). This PjBL method started with John Dewey who conveyed the idea of "learning by doing" (Bender, 2012). According to Dewey (1997), the function of the teacher (at school) is not as a medium for imposing (inserting) certain ideas, but as an auxiliary media to show a good direction or influence so that it can help children (learners) to obtain information (science) with Correct.

From these findings, to improve and develop writing skills on EFL (English Foreign Language) learners, not only teaching language elements mastery is required but also appropriate learning method. So, the learners will finally overcome the burden (obstacles) created by the thoughts of "writing is difficult". This study is an early stage to develop the appropriate learning method in teaching writing for EFL learners. This study aims to examine whether the PjBL can serve as appropriate teaching-learning method to improve writing skill on EFL learners.

Literature Review

Writing Skill

According to Badger & White (2000), the Process Writing Approach (PWA), although has been widely used in ESL/EFL writing contexts, is still viewed as wanting in some aspects. For example, it is argued that learners have to spend quite a long time in order to complete just one piece of writing in the classroom. They do not have a clear understanding of the specific traits of writing and are not provided with sufficient linguistic input to write

in L2 successfully in a certain text type. They mention that process approaches see writing primarily as the exercise of linguistic skills, and writing development as an unconscious process that happens when teachers facilitate the exercise of writing skills Badger & White (2000). Thus, it makes learners ignore the product (writing) as they mainly focus on the process as well as the elements attached. Moreover, instead of spending too much time on one piece of writing (due to their focus on learning the steps), learners need more encouragement in learning writing; these encouragements can be obtained from the products (writings) produced from learning writing Tangpermpoon (2008). He suggests that teachers should let their learners practice producing writing in order to develop a concept of the audience (readers) in which encouraging them to be more active in learning writing. His idea is certainly in contrast to PWA which focuses more on the process of learning than the product produced from the learning. Moreover, Carrel (1982) pointed out that in PWA, learners have to carefully follow the writing instructions; however, this condition will lead to their discouragement in continuing the creative process (writing) because they have to be particularly aware of the textual features of writing, such as grammatical and linguistic accuracy.

EFL in Indonesia

English as a Foreign Language is a language learned by learners coming from non-English speaking countries (Peng, 2019) such as Indonesia, China, Japan, and many others. EFL learners referred in this case are people who learn English as an additional language and do not use it (English) as a language for daily communication, such as Malaysia and India (Nguyen & Terry, 2017). Indonesia as a country located in Southeast Asia has many ethnic groups where each tribe has its own mother tongue, therefore the language agreed to be used as the main language is Indonesian (first language). This is also what makes Indonesians (at least) master two languages, namely the local language (mother tongue) and Indonesian (Prystiananta, 2018). Rendering this condition, English has become a foreign language and is not common to use in daily life in which becomes less known (mastered).

According to historical records, the introduction and teaching of English in Indonesia was previously opposed by the Indonesian government (in the 1950s) due to national political factors. This is what causing English learning significantly declined in the education system (Candraningrum, 2008). However, after the political changes, English learning was admitted in the national curriculum (Cheshire, 1999). Despite its admission, the time laps made English learning in Indonesia lagging compared to other similar countries (Alfarisy, 2021), such as Thailand and Vietnam (Nakhornsri, 2016; Tieocharoen&Rimkeeratikul, 2019). This supports Dewi (2014) who mentions that English learning in Indonesia is an EFL and not ESL because it does not really function as a second language either in education or people livelihood.

Project-Based Learning (PjBL)

PjBL (Project Based Learning) is a teaching and learning strategy that involves students working on a project that is beneficial to the community or the environment (Sani & Sani, 2014). This learning allows students to develop their creativity in the process of designing and creating projects that can be used to solve problems (Beckett & Slater, 2019). According to them, project-based learning is very important in the language teaching and learning process, especially to improve students' academic abilities. This is because this learning model provides more opportunities for students, is more collaborative, and is more active in involving students to complete projects independently or in collaboration with teams (Sarrazine, 2018; Schwalm, 2012; Markham, 2011; Rais, 2010). The PjBL learning model familiarizes students with completing projects independently and working in teams/groups so that it will help students adjust to their work environment in the future (Schwalm, 2012). Project-based learning emphasizes learning activities that are long-term, interdisciplinary, and student-centered (Sarrazin, 2018).

Unlike traditional teacher-led classroom activities, students are often asked to organize their own work and manage their own time in project-based classes (Tamim & Grant,

2013). Project-Based learning differs from traditional inquiry by its emphasis on the construction of collaborative or individual's objects to represent what is being learned (Vogler, et al., 2018). Project-Based Learning also provides opportunity to explore problems and challenges that have real-world applications, increasing the likelihood of long-term retention of skills and concepts (Beckett & Slater, 2019). Project-Based Learning emphasizes that real-world problems can attract students' interest and provoke serious thinking as students acquire and apply new knowledge in a problem-solving context (Schwalm&Tylek, 2012). Teacher plays the role of facilitator, working with students to frame valuable questions, constructing meaningful assignments, practicing the development of knowledge and social skills, and carefully assessing what students have learned from experience (Lee, et al., 2014). PBL replaces other traditional teaching models such as lectures, textbook-driven activities, and inquiry into preferred delivery methods for key topics in the curriculum. PjBL becomes an instructional framework that allows teachers to facilitate and assess deeper understanding rather than standing by and conveying information. This is because PjBL deliberately develops students' problem solving and creative product creation to communicate a deeper understanding of key concepts and mastery of 21st century important learning skills such as critical thinking. Students become active digital researchers of their own learning, so they can learn more from the process.

Method

This research is a part of research and development study (R&D study) using 4D model development. This study the model development is adapted from Thiagarajan, et al. (1974) 4D Model Developmental Research. This model is selected because of its suitability in meeting the requirement for R & D study especially to develop certain media (method). This study was a report which explains the third stage of the 4D model development, the developmental stage (see Fig. 1). Rendering to its aims, the analysis carried out by testing the product (PjBL) in small group of participants to examine its effect. The participants were 30 students who program Essential Writing Skills subject course. Data were collected using documentation and observation. The subjects (participants) were treated using the object observed (PjBL) to improve their writing skill (see Fig. 2). The treatment (PjBL method) was given 4 times; first is project/assignment (PjBL) introduction, second and third are consultation (detail explanation), and last is assignment/project report. The analysis was conducted using the data obtained from observation and documentation of assignment (project) given (see Table 1).

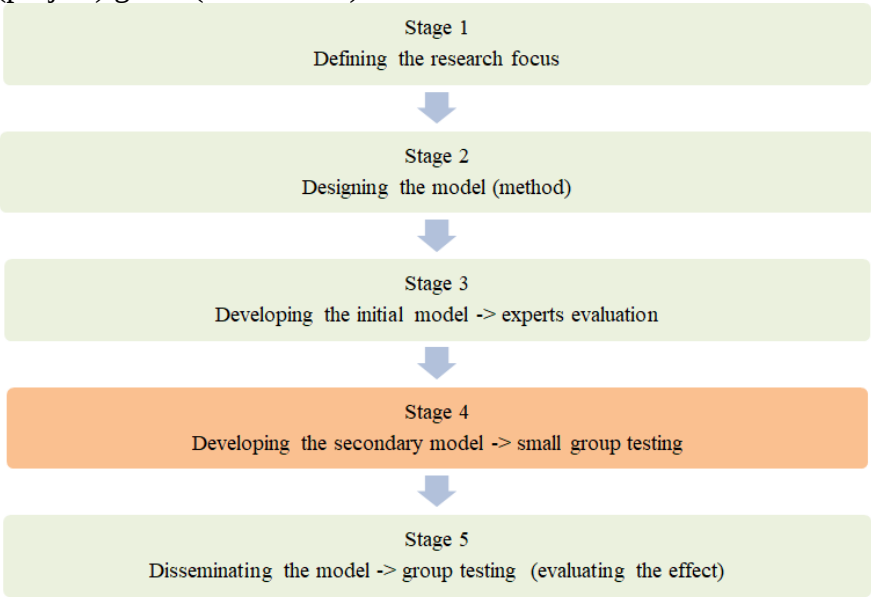


Figure 1. Research Developmental model

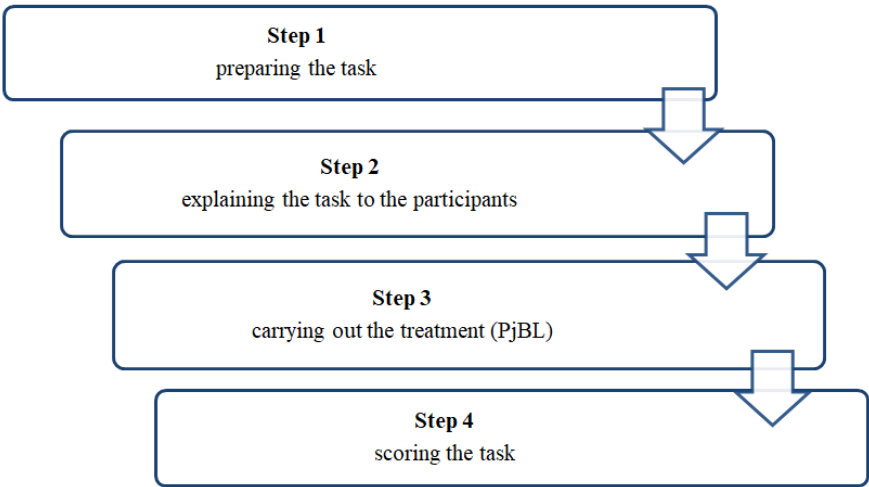


Figure 2. Research observation step

Table 1. Scoring scale

Observation aspects	Score scale
Determining Thesis statement	0-5
Paragraph/article development	0-5
Cohesion/coherence	0-20
Grammar and structure (sentences construction)	0-35
Assignment completion	0-35

Result and Discussion

Result

Table 2. Assignment evaluation score

Observation aspects	Average score	Percentage (%)
Determining Thesis statement	4.2	84
Paragraph/article development	3.8	76
Cohesion/coherence	16.47	82.35
Grammar and structure (sentences construction)	24.6	70.29
Text completion	25.93	74.09

The PjBL method used to develop students’ writing skills shows its roles. It can be seen from the average evaluation score of assignment (project) given (see Table 2). The results show that all observed aspects are more than 50% meaning that the method given to the participants can successfully develop their writing skills. Of the analysis, the highest percentage obtained by the participants is on their ability in determining the idea for the assignment given proved by 84% average score obtained meaning that most of participants can decide/determine idea for the project asked. This indicates that most participants were happy and excited to carry out the project, while the lowest percentage is in the area of structure and grammar (sentences construction), proved by the 70.29% of the average of assignment evaluation score. This indicates that participants have issues in constructing sentences according to the good language grammar and structure. Three of five aspects observed (paragraph/article development, sentence construction, and assignment completion) show the score percentages on 70s (76%, 70.29%, and 74.09% respectively) meaning that these three have slower development than the other two (determining thesis statement and cohesion and coherent) which have score percentages on 80s (84% and 82.35% respectively).

Discussion

As part of a development research, this research has not drawn for its final results. This research is on the second part of the model development stage from 4D model developmental research. In here, the developed method (PjBL) is given to small groups to be tested in order to get feedbacks which serve as material to evaluate the method before stepping into the dissemination stage (Thiagarajan, et al., 1974). In this research, the developed method was given to the participants as a treatment to see its role in developing participants' writing skills. The data were taken by observing participants' writing skills from determining ideas to completing articles/writings (see Table 1). From data analysis, the results show that the average score of assignments given was above 50% from the determined score scale of each aspects observed (see Table 1). This indicates that PjBL has successfully played its role in developing students' writing skills.

Five aspects used to scale the writing skills of the participants referred to the general indicators used in assessing individual writing skills (Hosseini, et al., 2013). Although some people find writing is difficult, according to Tangpermpoon (2008) it is a skill that integrates various linguistic factors, such as vocabulary, grammar, sentence construction, and idea elaboration. In CEFR scale descriptor for writing ability, aspects that can be used to measure one's writing skills include sentence structure, vocabulary, coherence and cohesion, as well as writing completion. In addition, several standard assessments, such as IELTS and TOEFL iBT, use task completion, coherence and cohesion, lexical resources, as well as grammar and accuracy as indicators to measure a person's writing skill. As writing skill is a special skill which aims to put thoughts into words, it integrates various language aspects in order to communicate ideas/thoughts to others (Onazawa, 2010). Therefore, one needs to pay attention to the linguistic elements in order to develop good writing (Elbow, 1981). Three of five aspects in this research focus on the linguistics elements on the writing skill, while the remaining two relate to the objectives of writing which are stating idea and completing task (writing) into communicable information.

The data prove that using PjBL to develop writing skills is positive and successful. It can be seen from the analysis that average scores are above 70%, meaning that its role in assisting participant to develop their skill is significant. This result supports Brown (2001), who mentions that the appropriate approach used in teaching-learning writing skills should adapt to the conditions of the learner and adjust it to meet the condition of the learners in order to ease them in developing and improving their skills. However, the results (where the score percentages are around 70-84 and do not reach 90) indicate that difficulties and problems faced by the participants. These are in line with previous research on EFL writing skills (Sasmita & Setyowati, 2021; Muamaroh, Mukti, & Haryanti, 2020; Nasser, 2018; Divani, Ghufon, & Matin, 2018; Fareed, Ashraf, & Bilal, 2016). The lowest score obtained from the grammar and structure (sentence construction) shows that this linguistics aspects on writing skills is the most difficult to overcome and it supports the findings of Sasmita & Setyowati (2021), Divani, Ghufon, & Matin (2018), and Nasser (2018) who agree that this aspect is found to be a problem for EFL learner in writing. Meanwhile, Fareed, Ashraf, & Bilal (2016) mention that developing ideas into a complete writing are two problems that are hardly overcome by EFL learners and it is supported by Muamaroh, Mukti, & Haryanti (2020) who mention that gathering idea and completing the text completion are issues that hinder the EFL learners in writing. However, in this research, the determining ideas is not the most difficult problem faced by the participants, proved by the analysis that it obtained the highest score percentage among the aspects observed (84%). Although there are problems (as it cannot reach 90%), yet it does not serve as the biggest problem in writing. Similarly, for other aspects observed (grammar & structure, coherence & cohesion, paragraph development, and text completion) although do not show a high percentage achievement, they remain in the upper-middle level (moderate) ones (from 60-85) according to CERF. It means the participants find that the level of difficulties was not high, hence they can obtain better score (outcomes). These results prove that PjBL plays its role in developing and improving writing skill of the participant because it is able to

facilitate problems faced by participants in writing. These results support the previous research that state on how PjBL can be used as method and approach to develop certain skills on the learners (Rais, 2010; Schwalm&Tylek, 2012; Tamim & Grant, 2013; Sarrazin, 2018) because it assists the learners to approach the problems from their individual view points and interests.

Conclusion

From the discussion, it can be concluded that PjBL as method shows its roles in developing writing skills of the participants. It proves from the score percentage in which five observed aspects (determining thesis statement, paragraph/article development, cohesion/coherence, grammar and structure (sentences construction), and text completion) have score percentages more than 70% (84, 76, 82.35, 70.29, and 74.09 respectively). This result indicates that PjBL can be used in teaching writing skill for EFL learners. Nevertheless, as this research is on-going research, the final result may differ because the limitation and exclusion of several factors in the analysis.

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