

Project-Based Learning Implementation in EFL Classrooms at SMA Negeri 9 Wajo: Teachers' Voices

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Abstrak

This study aims to explore the English teacher's perceptions of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) implementation in the context of EFL instruction at SMA Negeri 9 Wajo. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through classroom observations and a semi-structured interview with one English teacher who applied PjBL in an eleventh-grade class. The findings reveal that the teacher had a positive perception of PjBL, viewing it as an effective strategy to enhance student engagement, critical thinking, collaboration, and motivation in learning English. The teacher believed that PjBL aligns with the Merdeka Curriculum and provides meaningful learning experiences through real-world projects. However, several challenges were also identified, such as limited instructional time, the complexity of planning, and insufficient training in PjBL methodology. Despite these constraints, the teacher remained committed to using PjBL due to its transformative impact on students' language learning and 21st-century skills development. This study highlights the importance of teacher readiness, curriculum support, and professional development to maximize the effectiveness of PjBL in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: *Project-Based Learning, Teacher Perception, EFL, English Instruction, Senior High School*

Introduction

In recent years, the integration of innovative and student-centered learning models has become a prominent concern in language education, especially in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). One of the most promising approaches is Project-Based Learning (PjBL), which encourages active engagement, collaboration, and the development of real-world problem-solving skills. The implementation of PjBL is aligned with the demands of 21st-century learning and the spirit of Indonesia's *Merdeka Curriculum*, which emphasizes student autonomy and meaningful learning. However, in practice, the adoption of PjBL in EFL classrooms is often shaped by teachers' perceptions, which influence how effectively this approach is integrated into teaching activities. Understanding teachers' perceptions is essential because they are the primary agents of educational change and play a key role in translating curriculum into classroom instruction.

Previous studies have explored the implementation of PjBL in language education from various perspectives. Pertiwi and Nurhayati (2024) investigated how junior high school teachers perceived PjBL in teaching report texts and reported that it enhanced student motivation and engagement. Putri, Artini, and Nitiasih (2017) examined the influence of PjBL on students' English productive skills and found significant improvements in speaking and writing. Other researchers, such as Harun, Hassan, and Omar (2019), highlighted the impact of PjBL on students' communication skills, while Syukri (2020)

reported increased motivation and learner autonomy in English classrooms that adopted project-based tasks. These studies collectively show that PjBL has the potential to improve student outcomes. However, they primarily focus on students' perspectives or learning outcomes rather than the teacher's own experiences, beliefs, and perceptions regarding its practical implementation.

Despite the promising results, gaps remain in the literature regarding how English teachers perceive and experience the process of implementing PjBL, particularly in senior high school settings within the Indonesian context. While the curriculum increasingly encourages project-based approaches, teachers often face systemic challenges such as limited training, rigid schedules, lack of resources, and pressure to meet examination goals. The complexities of classroom management, lesson planning, and assessment under a PjBL framework are rarely examined from the teacher's viewpoint. Moreover, few studies provide qualitative insights into how teachers navigate these challenges and how their perceptions shape the actual implementation of PjBL in their classrooms.

In response to these gaps, the present study aims to explore the perceptions of an English teacher regarding the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in an EFL classroom at SMA Negeri 9 Wajo. This study seeks to answer the research question: *What is the teacher's perception of implementing Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in teaching English at Senior High School?* The objective is to understand the teacher's beliefs, experiences, perceived benefits, and encountered challenges in applying PjBL. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the teacher's voice, providing an in-depth qualitative account that highlights both the pedagogical potential and practical constraints of PjBL in real-world EFL classrooms. By capturing this perspective, the study contributes to a more holistic understanding of PjBL implementation and offers implications for teacher training, curriculum design, and policy development in Indonesian secondary education.

Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to explore the perception of an English teacher regarding the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in a senior high school EFL classroom. The qualitative approach was selected because it allows for a deep understanding of the subject's experiences, beliefs, and perceptions, particularly in a real-life classroom context. This design is suitable for answering the research question, which seeks to uncover how the teacher interprets and experiences PjBL in their instructional practice.

The research was conducted at SMA Negeri 9 Wajo, a public high school located in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The subject of the study was one English teacher who had implemented PjBL in her eleventh-grade classroom. The participant was selected using purposive sampling, as the researcher intentionally chose a teacher who had experience using PjBL as part of the Merdeka Curriculum. This approach ensured that the subject had relevant insights into the implementation process. The chosen participant represented a typical classroom context in Indonesian public schools, allowing the study to capture an authentic and transferable set of findings.

Data collection was carried out using two techniques: classroom observation and a semi-structured interview. The classroom observation aimed to document the teacher's instructional practices during the PjBL implementation, including how the learning activities were structured, how students engaged with the tasks, and how the teacher facilitated the process. An observation checklist, adapted from Delisle's (1997) PjBL

framework, was used to record specific behaviors and instructional elements such as problem initiation, collaboration, student autonomy, and project presentation.

Following the observations, a one-on-one semi-structured interview was conducted with the teacher to explore her perceptions of PjBL more deeply. The interview questions focused on the teacher's understanding of PjBL, perceived benefits and challenges, examples of classroom applications, and suggestions for improvement. The interview was audio-recorded with the teacher's consent and later transcribed for analysis. The interview instrument was developed based on relevant theoretical frameworks of PjBL (Larmer et al., 2015; Thomas, 2000), and was validated through expert judgment prior to use.

The data analysis process followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model, which consists of three main stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the data condensation phase, the raw observational and interview data were coded and categorized to highlight meaningful patterns and themes. These themes were then organized into descriptive matrices that allowed the researcher to visualize connections between categories. Finally, conclusions were drawn by interpreting the recurring themes and verifying them through triangulation across both data sources—classroom observation and teacher interview. This approach ensured the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings.

Overall, the methodology was carefully structured to ensure the integrity and replicability of the study. The procedures were implemented systematically and ethically, and the instruments were clearly defined and aligned with the research objectives. This method enabled a rich exploration of the teacher's perception of PjBL and how it manifested in actual teaching practices within the EFL context.

Results

The findings of this study reveal the English teacher's perception of implementing Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in an EFL classroom at SMA Negeri 9 Wajo. The data were obtained through classroom observation and a semi-structured interview with the teacher. The results are presented thematically, covering the teacher's understanding of PjBL, the perceived benefits and challenges, and the real example of its classroom application.

1. Teacher's Understanding of Project-Based Learning (PjBL)

The teacher demonstrated a strong conceptual understanding of PjBL, recognizing it as one of the core approaches promoted under the Merdeka Curriculum, alongside Discovery Learning and Problem-Based Learning. She emphasized that PjBL prioritizes both the learning process and the production of a tangible outcome, which distinguishes it from other instructional models.

"...dalam Kurikulum Merdeka ini pembelajaran di kelas itu ditekankan kepada tiga model ya... Discovery learning, kemudian ada problem-based learning, kemudian ada Project based learning."

(MNA, May 6th 2025)

The teacher perceived PjBL not only as a structured instructional strategy but also as a holistic method that enables students to experience authentic learning. She highlighted that the final product created through PjBL could be reused as teaching material, thus reinforcing its practicality and sustainability in the classroom.

"...kelebihan dari PjBL itu siswa diajak... untuk mengikuti beberapa tahapan sampai nanti di akhir... menghasilkan sebuah produk... yang nantinya itu bisa digunakan kembali sebagai bahan ajar..."

(MNA, May 6th 2025)

Her explanation reflects a strong belief in the power of active, hands-on learning. Instead of simply delivering material, she aims to let students explore, collaborate, and discover through real tasks that connect with their lives. She sees PjBL as an opportunity to shift the focus from teacher-centered to student-centered learning, where students take more responsibility and become more involved in the learning process.

What stands out from her responses is that she truly sees PjBL as a process. It's not just about doing a project, but about moving through each phase—planning, researching, working in groups, and presenting a result that they can be proud of. This mindset shows that she understands PjBL as a holistic approach that blends academic learning with creativity, teamwork, and problem-solving.

Overall, the teacher's perspective aligns with the core goals of the *Merdeka Curriculum*: to foster independence, initiative, and meaningful learning experiences. Her understanding lays a strong foundation for effective implementation and shows her readiness to embrace modern teaching strategies that prepare students for real-world challenges.

2. Perceived Benefits of PjBL

The teacher believed that PjBL has significant advantages for student development. She stated that PjBL encourages critical thinking, collaboration, and engagement. According to her, involving students in real-world projects helps them understand English not just as a subject, but as a tool for communication and problem-solving.

"...siswa diajak secara langsung untuk terjun ke dalam project... sehingga saya rasa sangat bisa membantu siswa untuk critical thinking..."

(MNA, May 6th 2025)

She noticed that students tend to be more active and engaged when they are given the responsibility to create something meaningful. Working on projects allows them to collaborate, divide tasks, and explore topics in depth. In this way, PjBL becomes a platform where students can learn how to work as a team, make decisions together, and support one another—skills that are not only useful in school, but also in future professional environments.

"...kehadiran PjBL itu bisa membuat mereka... bekerjasama dengan temannya... bisa saling berbagi referensi..."

(MNA, May 6th 2025)

Another benefit she pointed out was the increase in student confidence. When students complete a project and present it to their peers, they begin to see the value in their own ideas. They also improve their ability to express those ideas clearly in English, especially in oral presentations or written reports. These kinds of activities, she explained, provide a real sense of accomplishment for the students, and this makes them more confident in using English in and beyond the classroom.

In her view, PjBL also helps students connect the English language with real-life situations. Rather than learning grammar or vocabulary in isolation, students learn by doing. This helps them understand how English functions as a tool for communication, especially when they have to solve problems, create content, or deliver a product.

Overall, the teacher sees PjBL as a meaningful and enjoyable way to teach English. It doesn't just focus on memorizing rules or passing exams—it focuses on developing the whole learner: their thinking, their teamwork, their creativity, and their confidence. These benefits, according to her, make PjBL not just effective, but also relevant to the needs of today's learners.

3. Challenges in Implementing PjBL

Despite the acknowledged benefits, the teacher also identified several challenges in implementing PjBL. The most prominent issue was the time constraint. The teacher explained that carrying out a full PjBL cycle takes several sessions, which often conflicts with the tight curriculum schedule.

"...tantangannya sih mungkin agak berat... karena... memakan waktu beberapa pertemuan... tidak cukup dalam satu minggu..."

(MNA, May 6th 2025)

She explained that a single PjBL activity could take several meetings to complete properly, especially when students are required to work in groups, conduct research, and prepare final products. This becomes even more challenging when teachers have to follow a fixed syllabus or prepare students for standardized assessments. Balancing project work with regular curriculum demands, according to her, can be overwhelming without flexible planning or school-level support.

Another challenge she encountered was the lack of specific training in PjBL implementation. Although she understood the basic concepts and goals of the approach, she admitted that applying it effectively requires more than theoretical knowledge. Teachers need practical strategies for classroom management, assessment of group work, and ways to scaffold complex tasks for students with different learning levels. Without proper professional development, it can be difficult to navigate these areas confidently.

Moreover, managing group dynamics was mentioned as a recurring issue. In some cases, group members are not equally active or responsible, which can affect the quality of the outcome and the fairness of the assessment. The teacher noted that while PjBL promotes collaboration, not all students naturally know how to work well with others—some need clear guidance and consistent monitoring to stay on task and contribute meaningfully.

She also raised concerns about the availability of resources. To create engaging and high-quality projects, students often need access to technology, reference materials, and creative tools. However, not all schools are equally equipped, and not all students have access to digital tools or the internet at home. These limitations can hinder the depth and creativity of student projects.

Despite these challenges, the teacher remained supportive of PjBL and believed that the benefits outweighed the obstacles. However, she emphasized the importance of realistic planning, strong classroom management, and ongoing teacher support to ensure that PjBL can be implemented successfully and sustainably.

4. Classroom Application of PjBL

The implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in the classroom was observed through a series of English lessons in which the teacher guided students to complete a creative and collaborative project. One of the observed examples was a project on English songs, where students were asked to compose their own song lyrics and later perform or present them to the class. This activity integrated multiple language skills, including vocabulary development, grammar usage, pronunciation, and presentation.

The process began with brainstorming ideas in groups, where students discussed themes, decided on lyrics, and explored language expressions suitable for their message. The teacher provided guidance during this phase but allowed students the freedom to lead their creative process. She acted more as a facilitator than a direct instructor—monitoring progress, encouraging participation, and offering feedback when needed.

Throughout the sessions, it was evident that students were actively engaged. They were seen sharing ideas, using dictionaries and online sources, and even recording parts

of their drafts for feedback. The collaborative nature of the task encouraged each member to participate, and the teacher ensured that roles were distributed fairly among group members. Some students worked on writing, while others focused on rhythm or presentation strategies.

This activity also culminated in a product that was shared with others—a key characteristic of PjBL. In this case, the final performance served as both an assessment and a celebration of learning. The students not only showcased their English skills, but also demonstrated confidence, creativity, and teamwork.

What stood out during the observation was the way the teacher embedded PjBL principles into the flow of the lesson: connecting tasks to real-world themes (authenticity), letting students make choices (student voice and autonomy), encouraging peer feedback (critique and revision), and having a tangible outcome (public product). These align with the stages and principles of PjBL as proposed by theorists like Larmer et al. (2015) and Delisle (1997).

Although time constraints were present, the teacher managed the process effectively by setting clear timelines and focusing on process-oriented learning rather than perfection. This shows that with proper planning and classroom management, PjBL can be applied in realistic school settings and still produce meaningful results.

In conclusion, the classroom application of PjBL observed in this study illustrates how the method can be used not only to teach English in a more dynamic and engaging way, but also to cultivate broader competencies such as creativity, collaboration, and confidence. It reflects the teacher's commitment to making learning both enjoyable and relevant to students' real lives.

Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the study regarding the teacher's perception of implementing Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) at SMA Negeri 9 Wajo. The discussion is built by interpreting the data, connecting it to relevant theories and previous studies, and explaining its implications in the context of language learning.

1. Teacher's Understanding of PjBL Reflects Strong Theoretical Alignment

The results of the study show that the teacher has a comprehensive understanding of Project-Based Learning, especially in the context of the *Merdeka Curriculum*. She recognized PjBL not only as a method of instruction but also as a learning philosophy that prioritizes active participation, real-world application, and product creation.

This is consistent with the theoretical foundation of PjBL proposed by Thomas (2000), who emphasized the importance of inquiry, collaboration, and student autonomy in meaningful learning. The teacher explained:

"...kelebihan dari PjBL itu siswa diajak... untuk mengikuti beberapa tahapan sampai nanti di akhir... menghasilkan sebuah produk... yang nantinya itu bisa digunakan kembali sebagai bahan ajar..."

(MNA, May 6th 2025)

Her view also reflects Dewey's (1938) constructivist theory, which argues that learners gain knowledge best when actively engaged in experiences that are meaningful and connected to real life. The teacher's emphasis on the learning process and final product supports the idea that PjBL is not merely a strategy but a transformative approach that shifts the classroom from teacher-centered to student-centered.

2. Perceived Benefits: Motivation, Collaboration, and Critical Thinking

The teacher identified several key benefits of implementing PjBL, including improved student motivation, increased collaboration, and development of critical thinking. These findings are in line with previous studies. For instance, Bell (2010) found that students involved in PjBL demonstrate greater engagement and improved problem-solving abilities.

"...siswa diajak secara langsung untuk terjun ke dalam project... sehingga saya rasa sangat bisa membantu siswa untuk critical thinking..."

(MNA, May 6th 2025)

"...kehadiran PjBL itu bisa membuat mereka... bekerjasama dengan temannya... bisa saling berbagi referensi..."

(MNA, May 6th 2025)

This perspective supports the findings of Yuliani and Lengkanawati (2017), who observed that collaborative projects improve student communication and confidence in using English. The teacher's observations confirm that PjBL not only enhances language learning but also helps build soft skills that are essential in real-world communication.

3. Challenges Mirror National and Global Trends in PjBL Implementation

Despite her positive perception, the teacher also highlighted several challenges, particularly in terms of time constraints, lack of training, and uneven group participation. These challenges are not unique to this study. Zainuddin and Halim (2020) also reported similar obstacles faced by Indonesian teachers implementing PjBL, especially when curriculum demands and time allocation are rigid.

"...tantangannya sih mungkin agak berat... karena... memakan waktu beberapa pertemuan... tidak cukup dalam satu minggu..."

(MNA, May 6th 2025)

Moreover, the concern about unequal group participation echoes the findings of Syukri (2020), who noted that while PjBL promotes collaboration, it can be difficult to manage group dynamics without strong teacher intervention. The teacher in this study demonstrated awareness of this issue and addressed it by monitoring students closely and assigning roles within groups.

These findings suggest that while PjBL is theoretically sound and positively perceived, its success in practice depends heavily on contextual support—such as training, flexible scheduling, and access to resources.

4. Classroom Application Confirms PjBL Principles in Practice

The classroom observation provided evidence that the teacher's understanding of PjBL was reflected in her practice. She applied key principles such as authenticity, student voice and choice, collaboration, and public product, as outlined by Larmer et al. (2015).

For example, when teaching a unit on English songs, she allowed students to write their own lyrics, choose their topics, and present their work to the class. This confirms that the teacher did not only understand the theory behind PjBL but also successfully applied it in a real teaching context.

This practical application supports the research by Harun, Hassan, and Omar (2019), who found that creative project-based activities in language learning increase student confidence and fluency.

The use of music and performance as a project outcome also connects with the idea of multimodal learning, where students use different forms of expression—not just written text—to convey meaning. This reflects an expanded view of literacy and language competence promoted by modern EFL pedagogy.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the perception of an English teacher regarding the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in an EFL classroom at SMA Negeri 9 Wajo. The findings reveal that the teacher held a strong understanding of PjBL, viewing it not only as a curriculum requirement but also as an effective pedagogical approach. She perceived PjBL as a means to foster active learning, collaboration, critical thinking, and student creativity. These perceptions were evident in the way she applied PjBL principles in the classroom through engaging, authentic, and student-centered projects.

However, despite these positive perceptions, the teacher also faced several challenges in implementing PjBL, such as limited instructional time, lack of targeted training, and unequal group participation. These obstacles highlight the gap between theoretical expectations and classroom realities, especially in the context of public high schools with fixed schedules and limited resources.

While the study was able to provide rich insights into the teacher's perspective, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The research focused on a single teacher in one school, which means the findings cannot be generalized to all contexts. Moreover, the study did not measure student learning outcomes directly, focusing solely on the teacher's perception and observed classroom activities.

Nonetheless, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on PjBL in Indonesian EFL settings by emphasizing the importance of teacher beliefs and experiences. It reinforces the idea that effective implementation of PjBL depends not only on curriculum policy but also on teacher readiness, support systems, and the adaptability of teaching strategies to local conditions.

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