



Project-Based Learning for Developing English Narrative Writing Skills in an Indonesian EFL Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Project-Based Learning has been widely recognized as a student-centered instructional approach that supports active learning, collaboration, creativity, and meaningful language use in EFL classrooms. This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning in developing students' English narrative writing skills. The study employed a pre-experimental quantitative design using a one-group pre-test and post-test model. The participants were 22 second-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Muhammadiyah University of Enrekang, Indonesia. The intervention was implemented over seven weeks through project-based narrative writing activities, supported by writing portfolios, lesson plans, and rubric-based assessment. The data were collected through pre-test and post-test writing tasks and analyzed using mean scores, standard deviation, and paired-sample t-test. The findings showed that students' mean score increased from 12.68 in the pre-test to 19.68 in the post-test, indicating an improvement of 7.00 points. The paired-sample t-test result also showed a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores, with a significance value of 0.0005. Further analysis revealed that students improved in all assessed writing aspects, including introduction, body, conclusion, grammar, and word choice. Grammar obtained the highest post-test mean score, followed by conclusion, word choice, introduction, and body. These findings suggest that Project-Based Learning can support students' narrative writing development by providing structured, collaborative, and process-oriented writing experiences. The study implies that PBL can be integrated into EFL writing instruction to improve students' content organization, language use, and engagement in the writing process.

KEYWORDS

Project-Based Learning; narrative writing; EFL writing instruction; writing portfolio; rubric-based assessment.

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INTRODUCTION

English has become a major medium of international communication and academic interaction in the contemporary global context. As an international language, English is no longer used exclusively by native

speakers, but also by multilingual communities across educational, professional, technological, and intercultural domains (Kirkpatrick, 2012; McKay, 2002). In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language

and occupies an important position in higher education because it supports students' access to academic references, international communication, professional development, and scholarly publication. Therefore, English language teaching in university contexts should not only focus on grammatical knowledge, but also on the development of communicative competence, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and academic literacy.

Among the four language skills, writing is often considered one of the most complex skills for EFL learners. Writing requires students to generate ideas, organize information logically, select appropriate vocabulary, apply grammatical rules, and construct coherent paragraphs or essays (Hyland, 2003; Nation, 2009). Unlike speaking, writing demands a higher level of linguistic accuracy, textual organization, and rhetorical awareness because written texts must communicate meaning clearly without immediate interaction between writer and reader. In EFL contexts, students frequently encounter difficulties in developing ideas, organizing paragraphs, using appropriate grammar, selecting precise vocabulary, and maintaining coherence and cohesion throughout the text (Sadeghi et al., 2016; Praba et al., 2018). These challenges are also found among university students who are still developing their academic writing competence.

Narrative writing is an important genre in English writing instruction because it allows students to express experiences, construct events, develop characters, and organize ideas within a meaningful sequence. Through narrative writing, students learn how to build an introduction, develop a body, provide supporting details, and formulate a

conclusion. Narrative writing also trains students to use past tense forms, descriptive vocabulary, chronological connectors, and coherent story structure. However, for many EFL students, narrative writing is not simple. Students often struggle to transform ideas into well-organized texts, elaborate events, maintain unity, and use accurate grammar and word choice. These difficulties indicate the need for instructional approaches that provide students with opportunities to plan, draft, discuss, revise, and reflect on their writing process.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) has been widely discussed as a student-centered instructional approach that can support language learning through meaningful, collaborative, and contextual tasks. PBL emphasizes the production of a final product or performance through a sequence of learning activities involving inquiry, planning, collaboration, problem-solving, presentation, and reflection (Bell, 2010; Thomas, 2000). In language learning, PBL encourages students to use English for real purposes rather than merely completing isolated exercises. It also allows learners to integrate linguistic competence with 21st-century skills, such as communication, collaboration, creativity, autonomy, and critical thinking (Stoller, 2006; Larmer et al., 2015).

Several studies have shown that PBL can improve EFL learners' writing skills. Aghayani and Hajmohammadi (2019) found that project-based learning promoted EFL learners' writing performance by engaging students in meaningful learning tasks. Sadeghi et al. (2016) reported that project-based language learning had a positive impact on Iranian EFL learners' paragraph writing skills, particularly in comparison

and contrast writing. Praba et al. (2018) also demonstrated that PBL significantly improved students' writing skill and supported critical thinking, communication, and creativity through collaborative work. In the Indonesian context, Hasani et al. (2017) showed that project-based learning guided students in producing educational articles, while Khulel (2022) reported that PBL combined with process writing and digital media contributed to students' writing development. These findings suggest that PBL is pedagogically relevant for EFL writing instruction because it combines language practice, collaboration, product development, and reflection.

In the context of the English Education Study Program at Muhammadiyah University of Enrekang, narrative writing is an essential component of paragraph writing instruction, particularly for second-semester students. At this level, students are expected to move beyond basic sentence construction and begin developing more organized, coherent, and meaningful paragraphs. However, preliminary classroom conditions indicate that students still face difficulties in constructing narrative texts, especially in developing introductions, organizing the body of the text, writing conclusions, applying grammar accurately, and selecting appropriate words. Traditional teacher-centered instruction may not provide sufficient opportunities for students to engage actively in the writing process, collaborate with peers, revise their work, and develop writing portfolios progressively.

Therefore, the implementation of Project-Based Learning in narrative writing instruction is considered a relevant pedagogical alternative.

Through PBL, students are encouraged to complete writing projects gradually, beginning from understanding narrative structure, identifying hooks, developing body paragraphs, adding supporting information, improving grammar and vocabulary, producing original writing, and presenting or evaluating their final work. This process is expected to help students develop not only narrative writing skills, but also learning autonomy, peer interaction, critical reflection, and responsibility for their own writing products.

Based on the above considerations, this study aims to examine the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning in improving students' English narrative writing skills. Specifically, the study focuses on students' improvement in content construction, including introduction, body, and conclusion, as well as language use, including grammar and word choice. By investigating the implementation of PBL in a real EFL classroom context, this study is expected to contribute to the development of writing pedagogy, particularly in higher education settings where students need more contextual, collaborative, and practice-oriented approaches to improve their academic and creative writing competence.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a pre-experimental quantitative design using a one-group pre-test and post-test model. This design was selected because the study aimed to examine whether students' English narrative writing skills improved after the implementation of Project-Based Learning. The pre-test was administered before the intervention to identify students' initial

writing ability, while the post-test was conducted after the intervention to measure students' writing development. The comparison between pre-test and post-test scores was used to determine the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning in improving students' narrative writing performance.

Although this design did not involve a control group, it was considered appropriate for classroom-based research because the study was conducted in an existing writing class with a limited number of participants. The design allowed the researcher to observe students' writing progress within an authentic instructional setting and to evaluate learning improvement after a structured pedagogical intervention.

Participants

The research was conducted at Muhammadiyah University of Enrekang, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The participants were second-semester students of the English Education Study Program who were enrolled in the Paragraph Writing course. A total of 22 students participated in the study. The class was selected because narrative writing was part of the instructional content in the course, and the students were at an appropriate academic level to develop basic paragraph organization, vocabulary use, grammar accuracy, and narrative structure.

The selection of participants was based on the instructional relevance of the class to the research focus. Second-semester students were expected to have basic English knowledge from the previous semester, but they still needed systematic guidance to develop more coherent and accurate written texts. Therefore, Project-Based Learning was implemented as an instructional

approach to provide students with structured, collaborative, and practice-based writing experiences.

Research Instruments

The instruments used in this study consisted of writing tests, writing portfolios, lesson plans, and scoring rubrics. The pre-test and post-test were used to measure students' narrative writing skills before and after the implementation of Project-Based Learning. Both tests required students to write a narrative paragraph or short narrative essay within a specified time. The writing tasks were designed based on the objectives of the Paragraph Writing course and focused on the students' ability to construct narrative texts.

The writing portfolio was used as part of the intervention process. It contained students' writing products developed during the Project-Based Learning activities. Through the portfolio, students were able to document their writing progress, revise their drafts, and reflect on the development of their narrative writing skills. The lesson plans were prepared to guide the implementation of PBL across seven meetings. The scoring rubric was used to assess students' writing performance consistently based on content construction and language use.

Project-Based Learning Intervention

The Project-Based Learning intervention was implemented over seven weeks. During the intervention, students were guided to complete narrative writing projects through a sequence of activities. The activities included identifying the characteristics of narrative writing, developing introductions, organizing body paragraphs, adding supporting details,

improving grammar, building vocabulary, writing complete narrative texts, and presenting or evaluating writing products. Students worked individually and collaboratively during the process, depending on the learning objectives of each meeting.

The intervention emphasized writing as a process. Students were encouraged to brainstorm ideas, discuss topics, develop outlines, draft their texts, revise their writing, and submit writing

portfolios. The role of the lecturer was to facilitate learning, provide guidance, monitor group discussion, give feedback, and evaluate students' writing products using the rubric.

Activity Timetable

The following table presents the sequence of Project-Based Learning activities implemented during the seven-week intervention.

Week	Activity	Project
One	Confirming the project. Lesson Plan 1: Understanding narrative essays and identifying hooks.	Students discuss preview questions with classmates, read a sample narrative essay, and answer comprehension questions. They write a narrative about "Frustration in a Place You Have Visited" in 150–200 words.
Two	Implementing the project. Lesson Plan 2: Developing the body of a narrative essay.	Students write a narrative about "Picking Up Dreams" in 150–200 words.
Three	Implementing the project. Lesson Plan 3: Adding supporting information.	Students write a narrative about "The Campus Environment" in 150–200 words.
Four	Implementing the project through writing portfolio activities outside the classroom.	Students write a narrative about "Vacation to the Village" in 150–200 words.
Five	Implementing the project. Lesson Plan 4: Grammar for writing. Lesson Plan 5: Building better vocabulary.	Students write a narrative about "Becoming a Champion" in 150–200 words.
Six	Implementing the project. Lesson Plan 6: Developing a narrative essay. Lesson Plan 7: Original student writing: Narrative essay.	Students write a narrative about "Campus Teaching Programs" in 150–200 words.
Seven	Presentation and evaluation.	Students write a narrative about "Unexpected Events" in 120–200 words and participate in evaluation activities.

Scoring Rubric

The students' writing was assessed using a rubric that focused on two main components: content construction and language use. Content construction included introduction, body, and conclusion, while language use included grammar and word choice. Each component was rated using a five-level scale, ranging from very low to excellent. The rubric was used for both the pre-test

and post-test to ensure consistency in evaluating students' writing performance.

The maximum score for each student's writing test was 25 points. This score was obtained from five assessed aspects, each rated from 1 to 5. The use of the rubric helped the researcher assess students' writing more systematically and reduced subjectivity in scoring.

Data Collection Procedure

The data were collected in three main stages. First, the researcher administered the pre-test to measure students' initial narrative writing skills before the Project-Based Learning intervention. Second, the researcher implemented the PBL-based writing instruction over seven weeks. During this stage, students completed narrative writing projects and submitted writing portfolios. Third, the researcher administered the post-test after the intervention to measure students' writing improvement.

The pre-test and post-test were conducted under similar conditions to ensure fairness in assessment. Students were given clear instructions and sufficient time to complete the writing tasks. The writing products from both tests were then assessed using the same rubric.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed quantitatively by comparing students' pre-test and post-test scores. Descriptive statistics, including mean score and standard deviation, were used to describe students' writing performance before and after the intervention. To determine whether the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores was statistically significant, a paired-sample t-test was applied.

The analysis focused on two levels. First, the overall pre-test and post-test scores were compared to identify general improvement in students' narrative writing skills. Second,

students' scores in each writing aspect were analyzed to determine which components improved after the implementation of Project-Based Learning. These components included introduction, body, conclusion, grammar, and word choice. The significance level was set at $p < .05$.

RESULTS

This study aimed to examine the effect of Project-Based Learning on students' English narrative writing skills. The data were obtained from students' pre-test and post-test writing scores. The pre-test was administered before the implementation of Project-Based Learning, while the post-test was conducted after the seven-week instructional intervention. Students' writing performance was assessed using a rubric covering two major components: content construction and language use. Content construction consisted of introduction, body, and conclusion, while language use consisted of grammar and word choice.

Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

The first analysis compared students' overall pre-test and post-test scores. Descriptive statistics and paired-sample t-test were used to identify whether there was a statistically significant difference between students' writing performance before and after the implementation of Project-Based Learning.

Table 3. Paired-Sample t-Test of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

Test	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (one-tailed)
Pre-test	12.68	22	1.171	.250	-11.215	21	0.0005
Post-test	19.68	22	2.644	.564			0.0005

Table 3 shows that the mean score of students' narrative writing increased from 12.68 in the pre-test to 19.68 in the post-test. This indicates an improvement of 7.00 points after the implementation of Project-Based Learning. The result of the paired-sample t-test also shows a significance value of 0.0005, which is lower than the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores is statistically significant.

The standard deviation also increased from 1.171 in the pre-test to 2.644 in the post-test. This indicates that students' post-test scores were more varied than their pre-test scores. In other words, although students' overall writing performance improved, the degree of improvement was not identical

among all students. Some students may have benefited more strongly from the Project-Based Learning intervention than others. This finding suggests that PBL had a positive effect on students' narrative writing performance, but individual differences in writing development remained visible.

Improvement in Each Aspect of Narrative Writing

Further analysis was conducted to examine students' improvement in each assessed writing aspect. The rubric assessed five components: introduction, body, conclusion, grammar, and word choice. Each component was scored on a scale from 1 to 5.

Table 4. Mean Scores of Each Writing Aspect in the Pre-Test and Post-Test

Quality Assessed	Pre-test	Post-test	Order of Mean Score
Content Construction			
<i>Introduction</i>	2.95	3.82	4
<i>Body</i>	2.14	3.77	5
<i>Conclusion</i>	2.59	4.09	2
Language Use			
<i>Grammar</i>	2.50	4.14	1
<i>Word Choice</i>	2.50	3.86	3

Table 4 demonstrates that students improved in all assessed aspects of narrative writing after the implementation of Project-Based Learning. In the content construction component, the mean score for introduction increased from 2.95 to 3.82, the body increased from 2.14 to 3.77, and the conclusion increased from 2.59 to 4.09. These results indicate that students became more capable of organizing narrative texts by developing clearer openings, more structured story bodies, and more complete endings.

In the language use component, grammar showed the highest improvement, with the mean score increasing from 2.50 to 4.14. Word choice also improved from 2.50 to 3.86. These findings indicate that students were able to use more appropriate grammatical forms and vocabulary after participating in the PBL-based writing activities. The improvement in grammar may be associated with repeated writing practice, feedback, and revision during the portfolio-based learning process. Meanwhile, the improvement in word choice suggests that students were

exposed to more opportunities to explore vocabulary in meaningful narrative contexts.

Among all aspects, grammar obtained the highest post-test mean score, followed by conclusion, word choice, introduction, and body. Although the body component improved substantially, it remained the lowest among the post-test scores. This suggests that developing the main part of a narrative text, including elaborating events, adding details, and maintaining coherence, remained relatively challenging for students. Therefore, future writing instruction should provide more intensive guidance in paragraph development, idea elaboration, and coherence-building strategies.

Overall, the findings indicate that Project-Based Learning contributed positively to students' English narrative writing skills. The improvement was evident not only in the total writing score, but also in each specific aspect of writing. The results suggest that PBL provided students with structured opportunities to practice writing, collaborate with peers, develop portfolios, revise drafts, and improve both content organization and language use.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that Project-Based Learning had a positive effect on students' English narrative writing skills. The increase in the mean score from 12.68 in the pre-test to 19.68 in the post-test shows that students' writing performance improved after the seven-week PBL intervention. The paired-sample t-test result also confirmed that the difference between pre-test and post-test scores was

statistically significant. This finding suggests that PBL can be considered an effective instructional approach for improving students' narrative writing ability in an Indonesian EFL classroom.

The improvement found in this study is consistent with previous research showing that Project-Based Learning can enhance EFL learners' writing performance. Aghayani and Hajmohammadi (2019) found that PBL promoted EFL learners' writing skills because students were involved in meaningful, collaborative, and process-oriented writing activities. Similarly, Sadeghi et al. (2016) reported that project-based language learning improved Iranian EFL learners' paragraph writing skills by providing students with opportunities to plan, develop, and revise their written products. The findings of the present study support these previous studies by showing that students' narrative writing improved after they participated in structured project-based writing activities.

One possible explanation for this improvement is that PBL positions students as active participants in the learning process. In traditional writing instruction, students often depend heavily on lecturer explanation and individual assignment completion. In contrast, PBL encourages students to engage in planning, discussion, drafting, feedback, revision, and presentation. These activities are important in writing instruction because writing is not a single-step activity, but a recursive process that involves idea generation, organization, language development, and text refinement. This is in line with Stoller's (2006) view that project-based language learning allows students to use language meaningfully while developing

content knowledge and communicative competence.

The results also showed improvement in all aspects of writing, including introduction, body, conclusion, grammar, and word choice. This indicates that the PBL intervention did not only affect one dimension of writing, but contributed to broader writing development. In the content construction component, students improved in writing introductions, developing body paragraphs, and constructing conclusions. This finding is relevant to Praba, Artini, and Ramendra (2018), who reported that PBL was related to better writing performance because it encouraged students to organize ideas, collaborate, and complete meaningful writing tasks. Through the project activities in the present study, students were required to write several narrative texts with different topics, which may have helped them become more familiar with narrative structure and paragraph organization.

The highest improvement was found in grammar. This result suggests that repeated writing practice, lecturer feedback, peer discussion, and portfolio development helped students become more aware of grammatical accuracy. In PBL-based writing instruction, students do not merely produce one final text; they engage in a process of developing and improving their writing over time. This process allows students to notice errors, revise sentence structures, and apply grammatical forms more appropriately. Hasani, Hendrayana, and Senjaya (2017) also found that PBL could support students in producing better academic writing products because students were guided through collaborative and process-based activities. Therefore, the improvement in

grammar in this study may be interpreted as the result of continuous practice and revision during the project.

The improvement in word choice also indicates that students benefited from contextualized writing activities. In narrative writing, students need to select words that match characters, events, settings, actions, and emotions. PBL provides students with opportunities to explore vocabulary in relation to meaningful topics rather than memorizing isolated word lists. This supports the argument that project-based language learning can promote authentic language use because students use language to complete purposeful tasks (Poonpon, 2017). In the present study, students wrote narratives on various topics, such as personal experiences, dreams, campus environment, village vacation, achievement, teaching programs, and unexpected events. These topics may have encouraged students to expand their vocabulary and use words more contextually.

However, the body component remained the lowest post-test score compared with other aspects. This finding indicates that students still experienced difficulties in elaborating the main events of a narrative text. Developing the body of a narrative requires students to organize events chronologically, provide supporting details, build coherence, and maintain the flow of the story. Although students improved in this aspect, the result suggests that body paragraph development needs more intensive instructional attention. This is consistent with Sadeghi et al. (2016), who note that EFL learners often face challenges in paragraph development and idea organization. Therefore, future PBL-based writing instruction should include

more explicit guidance on idea expansion, sequencing of events, use of transitions, and paragraph coherence.

The findings also suggest that writing portfolios played an important role in supporting students' development. Through portfolios, students could document their writing progress and revise their work across several meetings. Portfolio-based writing activities are compatible with PBL because both emphasize process, reflection, and product development. In this study, students' portfolios helped them practice narrative writing repeatedly and observe their own progress. This process may have contributed to students' improvement in both content construction and language use. The use of portfolios also made assessment more comprehensive because it did not rely only on one final test, but considered students' writing development during the intervention.

The collaborative nature of PBL may also have contributed to students' writing improvement. Through discussion and group work, students had opportunities to share ideas, clarify content, ask questions, and receive peer support. This type of interaction is particularly useful in EFL writing classrooms, where students may lack confidence in developing ideas independently. Marwan (2015) found that PBL supported English learning by encouraging students to work collaboratively and use information and communication technology in meaningful ways. In the same direction, Khulel (2022) reported that PBL, when combined with process writing and digital media, improved students' writing skills by making the learning process more interactive and engaging.

In addition to improving writing skills, PBL may also support the

development of broader academic competencies. PBL requires students to manage tasks, make decisions, collaborate, solve problems, and present their work. These competencies are relevant to the demands of higher education and future professional contexts. Bell (2010) explains that PBL promotes responsibility, inquiry, collaboration, and independent learning. In EFL writing instruction, these qualities are valuable because students need not only linguistic competence, but also the ability to develop ideas critically and communicate them effectively in written form.

Nevertheless, the findings of this study should be interpreted with caution. Since the study used a one-group pre-test and post-test design without a control group, the improvement cannot be attributed exclusively to PBL with absolute certainty. Other factors, such as students' independent practice, lecturer feedback, familiarity with the writing task, and increased exposure to narrative writing, may also have contributed to the improvement. Therefore, while the findings provide evidence that PBL was associated with better narrative writing performance, further studies involving control groups, larger samples, and mixed-method data are recommended to strengthen the validity of the findings.

Overall, the discussion confirms that Project-Based Learning is a relevant approach for teaching narrative writing in EFL higher education contexts. The approach provides students with structured, collaborative, and meaningful writing experiences. It also supports the development of narrative organization, grammar accuracy, word choice, and reflective writing practice. For lecturers, PBL offers a practical framework to move writing instruction

from isolated exercises toward process-oriented and product-based learning. For students, it provides opportunities to become more active, creative, and responsible writers.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Project-Based Learning had a positive and statistically significant effect on students' English narrative writing skills. The increase in the students' mean score from 12.68 in the pre-test to 19.68 in the post-test indicates that students demonstrated better writing performance after participating in the seven-week PBL-based writing intervention. The paired-sample t-test result, with a significance value of 0.0005, further confirms that the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores was statistically significant.

The improvement occurred in all assessed aspects of narrative writing, including introduction, body, conclusion, grammar, and word choice. Among these aspects, grammar showed the highest post-test mean score, followed by conclusion, word choice, introduction, and body. This indicates that Project-Based Learning supported not only students' ability to organize narrative content, but also their ability to use more accurate language forms and more appropriate vocabulary. However, the body component remained the lowest among the post-test scores, suggesting that students still need further guidance in elaborating ideas, sequencing events, and developing coherent narrative paragraphs.

The findings imply that Project-Based Learning is a relevant instructional approach for EFL writing classrooms because it provides students with meaningful opportunities to plan,

draft, discuss, revise, and evaluate their writing products. Through writing portfolios and collaborative project activities, students can engage more actively in the writing process and gradually improve their narrative writing competence. Nevertheless, since this study used a one-group pre-test and post-test design without a control group, the findings should be interpreted carefully. Future studies are recommended to involve larger samples, control groups, qualitative data, and longer intervention periods to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning in EFL writing instruction.

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