

THE ROLE OF PROJECT-BASED LEARNING IN FOSTERING STUDENTS' WRITING CREATIVITY: A PERCEPTION-BASED STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine students' perceptions of the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in enhancing creative writing skills. Utilizing Robbins' framework of perception—acceptance, understanding, and evaluation—this research employs a qualitative methodology. The participants consisted of twenty students selected purposively from a larger literacy organization at STKIP ABMUL, Dampal Selatan. Data collection instruments included observational checklists and semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal that the PBL model significantly contributes to the improvement of students' writing abilities, particularly in fostering creativity, imagination, and critical thinking. The participants expressed increased motivation and interest in writing, particularly in crafting short stories. As an outcome of their engagement with PBL, a student-initiated literacy organization was formed, serving as a collaborative space to nurture creative expression through written work.

Keywords: Project-Based Learning, Student Perception, Writing Creativity

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of technology has considerably influenced educational practices, necessitating pedagogical transformations that meet 21st century learning demands. Education serves as a fundamental benchmark for national development, and curricular reform is central to improving educational quality. In the Indonesian context, successive reforms have taken place, including the transition from KTSP to the 2013 Curriculum, culminating in the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) Curriculum. This latest reform, spearheaded by the Minister of Education and Culture, emphasizes learner autonomy, critical thinking, and character development (Hasim, 2020; Makarim, 2020). This approach is consistent with global trends that advocate for constructivist learning paradigms, such as Project-Based Learning (PBL), which supports active inquiry, collaboration, and real-world relevance (Thomas, 2000; Bell, 2010).

Project-Based Learning has been widely recognized for its pedagogical value across various disciplines. It provides learners with opportunities to engage in meaningful and

complex tasks that mirror authentic contexts. According to Larmer and Mergendoller (2015), PBL enables students to acquire deep content knowledge and develop essential skills by solving problems collaboratively. In the Indonesian setting, Nugrohadhi and Anwar (2022) argue that PBL fosters autonomous learning by positioning students as active participants in constructing knowledge through hands-on experiences.

In the context of language learning, PBL has shown promise in enhancing learners' engagement and achievement, especially in writing. Writing, as one of the core productive language skills, is often perceived as challenging due to the demands it places on coherence, organization, vocabulary use, and grammatical accuracy. Hawaena (2022) asserts that writing is a structured articulation of ideas, emotions, and experiences, while Brown (2001) describes it as a process involving the generation, development, and organization of ideas through written language. As such, instructional approaches like PBL can scaffold learners' writing development by providing structure, feedback, and motivation.

A key feature of PBL in language education is its capacity to cultivate creativity. According to Craft (2005), creativity in education involves imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value. In writing, creativity extends beyond linguistic proficiency to include the capacity for narrative invention, emotional expression, and critical reflection. These qualities are essential in literary genres such as short stories. Short stories serve as an accessible and engaging medium for student expression. Nurgiyantoro (2007) defines short stories as fictional narratives that can be read in a single sitting, typically focused on a single theme or conflict with limited characters and settings.

At STKIP Abdul Mujib Laewang, a student-led literacy movement has embraced this pedagogical approach. Students engage in collaborative writing projects that culminate in the production and publication of story original. These experiences foster not only writing proficiency but also a sense of ownership, motivation, and creative identity. Moreover, the use of PBL in such contexts aligns with sociocultural theories of learning, which emphasize the role of community, interaction, and shared meaning-making (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Despite the growing body of literature on PBL and its effectiveness in language learning, limited research specifically addresses its impact on students' creative writing in Indonesian higher education institutions, particularly in localized literacy-based communities. Previous studies have often concentrated on general language proficiency or writing mechanics, overlooking the creative and expressive dimensions that are essential for literary genres. Moreover, studies rarely investigate students' subjective perceptions regarding how PBL influences their creative process and motivation. This study fills that gap by exploring the nuanced perceptions of students actively involved in a community-driven literacy movement, thereby offering a contextualized understanding of PBL's pedagogical potential.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the intersection between project-based pedagogy, student creativity, and literary writing within an indigenous academic setting. By anchoring the investigation in students' lived experiences and applying Robbins and Judge's

(2012) model of perception, the study provides unique insights into how PBL nurtures creative agency in aspiring writers.

Given the growing interest in innovative writing instruction, this study seeks to examine students' perceptions of the effectiveness of PBL in enhancing creative writing. The theoretical framework is informed by Robbins and Judge's (2012) model of perception, encompassing the processes of acceptance, understanding, and evaluation. Through qualitative inquiry, the study aims to address the research question: How do students perceive the implementation of PBL in enhancing their writing creativity within a literacy-focused organizational context.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to explore students' perceptions of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in enhancing their writing creativity, particularly within the context of a student-led literacy initiative at STKIP Abdul Mujib Laewang. A qualitative paradigm is appropriate as it enables the researcher to capture the depth and complexity of participants' lived experiences, thoughts, and meanings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study adopts a case study design, focusing on a single bounded system—a literacy movement involving collaborative short story writing. This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of how PBL influences the creative writing process from the perspectives of students who actively participate in such initiatives.

Participants

Participants were twenty students from the Language and Literature Education program who had engaged in a semester-long PBL-based creative writing project. They were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that only those with substantial involvement in the literacy movement and short stories writing were included. This sampling method is deemed suitable for qualitative studies that prioritize depth over breadth (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Instruments

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility while ensuring alignment with the study's objectives. The interview protocol was guided by Robbins and Judge's (2012) model of perception—covering acceptance, understanding, and evaluation. Participant observation was conducted during writing workshops and group meetings to document students' interactions, challenges, and collaborative processes. Field notes captured spontaneous expressions and contextual behaviors (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Document analysis involved reviewing students' written outputs to triangulate insights from interviews and observations with actual creative artifacts.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the thematic analysis method proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), comprising six phases: familiarization with data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. This method ensures a systematic approach to identifying patterns related to students' perceptions of PBL and creativity. The analysis was also informed by Robbins and Judge's (2012) perceptual model, which facilitated the categorization of data into three perceptual domains:

- Acceptance : How students receive and internalize PBL as a pedagogical approach.
- Understanding : How students interpret its influence on their writing creativity.
- Evaluation : How students assess the outcomes of their engagement with PBL.

To ensure credibility, the study employed data triangulation across interviews, observations, and document analyses. Member checking was conducted by sharing interview transcripts and thematic interpretations with participants for validation. Dependability was addressed through detailed documentation of research procedures. Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional review board, and participants signed informed consent forms. All names were anonymized to protect confidentiality.

RESULTS

This study explored students' perceptions of the Project-Based Learning (PBL) model in the context of creative writing, particularly in developing short stories. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the literacy organization. Thematic analysis revealed three main aspects of perception in line with Robbins and Judge's (2012) perceptual model: acceptance, understanding, and evaluation.

Students' Acceptance of the PBL Model

Attitudes Toward the PBL Model

Students generally expressed positive attitudes toward PBL, emphasizing the model's emphasis on creativity, collaboration, and engagement. One participant noted:

"I think this project is good for me. It focuses on developing creativity. We work together in our literacy organization to write stories, and this model helps me become more imaginative." (Participant 1)

Another participant highlighted the collaborative aspect of PBL:

"We can discuss and collaborate to determine which project to do. This model teaches us to produce real work together." (Participant 2)

Participants also appreciated the enjoyment of group-based learning:

"This project was enjoyable. We worked in groups to discuss story ideas and shared experiences. It helped increase our knowledge through cooperation." (Participant 3)

These responses demonstrate that students welcomed the PBL model, finding it enjoyable and conducive to both creative development and peer learning.

Engagement with Short Stories Writing

Students were also enthusiastic about writing *cerpen*, viewing it as a medium for emotional expression and self-therapy. As one participant explained:

“Writing allows us to tell stories. It’s therapeutic—I can express feelings through it.”
(Participant 4)

Others mentioned the importance of reading, discipline, and motivation in writing:

“To write well, we need references—reading and joining webinars help. But most importantly, the desire to write must be there.” (Participant 5)

“I express myself through writing about life experiences. It’s a way of exploring personal phenomena.” (Participant 6)

These insights suggest that short stories writing was perceived not just as a task but as a meaningful creative outlet, promoting emotional well-being and personal identity development.

Challenges Encountered in PBL Writing

Despite the benefits, students also described challenges, particularly related to idea generation, time constraints, and motivation. One student reflected:

“I experienced writer’s block and struggled to read more due to other activities. Working in groups can also be challenging.” (Participant 7)

Another noted:

“Sometimes we have ideas, but it’s hard to develop and manage the storyline.”
(Participant 8)

Mood and motivation also influenced writing productivity:

“When I’m in a bad mood, I feel lazy to write. That’s the hardest part.” (Participant 9)

These reflections highlight typical barriers to creativity in writing, such as lack of time, fluctuating motivation, and cognitive constraints—common issues in project-based learning environments.

Students’ Understanding of the PBL Model

Application of PBL in Literacy Activities

Participants demonstrated a clear understanding of how PBL functions in their writing practice, especially through their literacy community. One participant explained:

"We apply PBL in our literacy group by generating and developing ideas together. We've done projects like writing novels, and now we focus on short stories." (Participant 10)

Others emphasized autonomy and exploration:

"This project makes us more independent and allows us to freely explore different skills." (Participant 11)

"We are encouraged to read, try new things, and even if we only write a few words, we keep going." (Participant 12)

These responses suggest that PBL fosters autonomy, initiative, and sustained creative effort.

Students' Writing Portfolios

Many students had already produced substantial creative work. As one shared:

*"I've written novels, comics, and short stories. Some of my books have been published with ISBNs, like *Adaptasi*, *Memoar Luka*, and *Ikrar Cinta*." (Participant 13)*

Another added:

*"I wrote a novel called *Mengenang 2020*, and another group project was *Aku dan Duniaku*." (Participants 14 & 15)*

These achievements reflect that PBL has facilitated real-world outcomes in the form of published work, reinforcing the model's effectiveness in cultivating sustained writing practice.

Motivations for Writing

Students expressed varied and personal motivations for writing. These included emotional expression, role modeling, and intrinsic interest. One participant shared:

"Writing helps me express what I can't say aloud. It's my hobby and makes me feel relaxed." (Participant 16)

Another was inspired by a peer:

"My motivation is Sister Indar. I admire her for publishing many books. She encouraged me to join the organization. At first, I wasn't confident, but I ended up writing my first short story." (Participant 17)

One participant added:

"I love to write imaginative stories. Writing is a way to channel feelings that are hard to express verbally. It's therapeutic." (Participant 18)

These insights reveal that writing serves both as a psychological outlet and a social motivator, confirming the deep personal investment many students had in the writing process.

Students' Evaluation of the PBL Model

Perceived Benefits of PBL

Overall, students evaluated PBL positively, particularly in terms of fostering creativity and independence. As one student noted:

"This model suits me as a writer. I enjoy doing creative projects, especially writing."
(Participant 19)

"At first I was just trying it out, but now I'm interested. Writing short stories was my first real writing project." (Participant 20)

The active involvement in determining project themes was also appreciated:

"In PBL, we're directly involved in every activity. We choose our own themes, and that makes it meaningful." (Participant 21)

Benefits for the Literacy Organization

Students felt that PBL strengthened the organization's culture of learning. One shared:

"It made me more independent and creative. I could explore anything freely."
(Participant 22)

"I became more focused and motivated. I learned to value others' knowledge and skills."
(Participant 23)

"The organization became a support system. That's the real benefit." (Participant 24)

These responses indicate that PBL enhanced community learning, peer support, and creative productivity within the literacy group.

Perceived Disadvantages of PBL

Despite its strengths, students identified time constraints as a key limitation. For instance:

"It's hard to balance time between this project and homework from lectures."
(Participant 25)

"I'm also a schoolteacher, so it's difficult to find time for writing." (Participant 26)

However, some participants reported minimal drawbacks:

"Every model has disadvantages, but for me, this one works well for writing activities."
(Participant 27)

This suggests that while PBL is broadly effective, scheduling and competing responsibilities can hinder its implementation, especially for students with external obligations.

Table 1. Summary of Key Themes

Theme	Sub-Themes	Observations
Acceptance	Enjoyment, collaboration, storytelling, creative freedom	Students feel PBL supports creativity, enjoyment, and peer learning
Understanding	Application of PBL, writing portfolios, motivation	Students understand how to apply PBL in real writing projects and are intrinsically motivated
Evaluation	Independence, real-world outcomes, time challenges	Students recognize both the benefits (e.g., motivation, productivity) and challenges (e.g., time constraints) of the model

DISCUSSION

This study provides compelling insights into how Project-Based Learning (PBL) can positively impact students' perceptions, experiences, and outcomes in the context of creative writing. The qualitative data obtained through in-depth interviews with twenty active members of a student literacy organization revealed several critical themes regarding student acceptance, understanding, and evaluation of the PBL model. These themes are in line with recent scholarly discussions on the benefits and challenges of PBL, especially within language and literacy education.

Students' Acceptance of PBL

The data demonstrate strong student acceptance of the PBL model. Students expressed that PBL not only facilitated their creativity but also made writing more enjoyable and meaningful. They appreciated the collaborative nature of the projects and the opportunity to express personal feelings through literary forms such as short stories. These findings align with those of Nugrahani and Suryani (2022), who found that students engaged in PBL contexts exhibited greater ownership of their learning and higher levels of motivation compared to those in traditional instruction. In a similar vein, Mubarok and Fitriana (2022) reported that students working on collaborative creative writing projects displayed increased confidence and deeper emotional investment in their tasks.

Participants also referred to writing as a form of therapy and a method for expressing their inner thoughts and emotions. This observation resonates with Wulandari and Widodo (2023), who described writing as a psychological release mechanism for students, helping them process emotional experiences and gain mental clarity. Such findings reinforce the affective dimensions of language learning, suggesting that writing is not only a cognitive activity but also a means of emotional regulation (Zins et al., 2020).

However, acceptance does not imply that students encountered no challenges. Some mentioned difficulties in group coordination and initial resistance due to a lack of familiarity with the model. These barriers echo the findings of Ariyanti et al. (2020), who observed that initial adaptation to PBL can be overwhelming for students unfamiliar with autonomous and

collaborative learning frameworks. Nevertheless, as learners became accustomed to the model, their acceptance grew, indicating that structured support during early phases is crucial.

Students' Understanding of PBL

The responses further indicate that students gained a strong understanding of how to apply PBL in writing contexts. They described the process of collaboratively selecting topics, brainstorming ideas, writing drafts, and editing stories for publication. This aligns with the constructivist principle that learning is most effective when students are actively engaged in creating knowledge rather than passively receiving it (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf & Poehner, 2020).

Students emphasized that PBL gave them the freedom to explore diverse themes and ideas. They reported increased independence and a deeper sense of engagement, especially when writing pieces based on personal experiences or imaginative scenarios. These findings corroborate those of Putri et al. (2021), who found that PBL encourages student autonomy and nurtures problem-solving skills. Furthermore, the students' ability to publish their work, such as novels and short story collections with ISBNs, highlights the authenticity of the learning process. This supports Mubarok and Fitriana's (2022) assertion that product-oriented learning enhances learner identity and agency.

Importantly, students' achievements in publishing creative works illustrate a key feature of PBL—authentic outcomes. The sense of accomplishment derived from seeing one's work in print reinforces motivation and validates the learning process. This phenomenon has been discussed by Sari and Marlina (2020), who argue that authentic assessment in PBL settings boosts learners' intrinsic motivation and encourages continued participation in academic and extracurricular writing activities.

Students' Evaluation of PBL

Students' evaluations of PBL were predominantly positive. They cited multiple benefits, including increased creativity, improved focus, enhanced collaboration, and a stronger sense of belonging to a community of writers. These responses are consistent with research by Hidayati and Fatimah (2022), who found that PBL strengthens both cognitive and social dimensions of learning. Students in their study reported higher engagement and a stronger connection with peers when involved in collaborative writing projects.

Furthermore, students expressed that the PBL model provided a flexible and motivating framework that allowed them to explore and refine their unique voices. The freedom to choose topics, collaborate with peers, and publish their writing fostered a deeper engagement with the writing process. This supports the sociocultural theory advanced by Vygotsky (1978), which emphasizes the role of social interaction and cultural tools in cognitive development. The student literacy organization served as a Zone of

Proximal Development (ZPD), where learners supported one another's growth through shared experiences and mutual encouragement.

However, challenges were also acknowledged. Students identified time management as a major obstacle, especially for those juggling academic responsibilities and teaching jobs. These findings reflect those of Kusuma and Hidayati (2021), who reported that time constraints and workload imbalance often hinder the successful implementation of PBL, particularly in higher education settings. Similarly, Rahman and Hasanah (2021) emphasized the need for institutional support and realistic scheduling to optimize the benefits of PBL.

Additionally, students mentioned difficulties such as writer's block, lack of reading references, and occasional lack of motivation. These factors hindered their ability to generate ideas or maintain productivity. As noted by Ariyanti et al. (2020), these obstacles are common in creative disciplines, where intrinsic motivation and mental state significantly impact performance. Nonetheless, the overall positive evaluation of PBL indicates that such issues are manageable within a supportive and well-structured learning environment.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study have several pedagogical implications. First, they affirm the value of integrating PBL in writing instruction to foster student creativity, independence, and engagement. Second, they highlight the importance of building supportive communities, such as literacy organizations, where students can share knowledge, provide feedback, and motivate each other. Third, the challenges reported by students suggest the need for teachers and curriculum designers to provide guidance on time management, collaborative work, and emotional resilience.

Future research should explore the long-term impact of PBL on students' writing skills and identity development. Mixed-method studies that include both qualitative and quantitative data could offer deeper insights into how various elements of PBL contribute to learning outcomes. It would also be beneficial to compare PBL's effectiveness across different educational settings and student demographics.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Project-Based Learning (PBL) significantly enhances students' engagement, autonomy, and emotional investment in creative writing, particularly when integrated into a supportive literacy organization. The participants' experiences revealed that PBL fosters creativity, collaboration, and ownership of learning, enabling students to explore personal and imaginative themes while developing authentic literary products. These findings are consistent with recent research (e.g., Nugrahani & Suryani, 2022; Mubarak & Fitriana, 2022; Wulandari & Widodo, 2023), which underscores

the multifaceted benefits of PBL, not only as a pedagogical tool but also as a medium for emotional expression and identity development.

Moreover, this study highlights how writing, when embedded in a meaningful social context, can serve as both an academic and therapeutic practice. While students faced challenges such as time constraints, motivational lapses, and limited resources, these obstacles were mitigated by peer support and structured guidance. The overall positive outcomes suggest that PBL holds strong potential for transforming writing instruction, especially in settings that emphasize authentic output and learner agency. Future research is encouraged to investigate the long-term impacts of PBL across diverse educational contexts and to explore its integration with digital platforms and hybrid learning environments.

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