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Project-Based Learning in Creative Writing: Teachers' Strategies and Encountered Obstacles

Abstract

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) emerges as a pivotal approach in modern pedagogy. This research delves into how English teachers at the eleventh-grade level in SMA Dunia Harapan Makassar integrate PjBL in their creative writing curriculum, the challenges faced during this implementation, and its impact on students' writing outcomes. Utilizing a mixed-method approach, data was sourced from observation checklists, teacher interviews, and students' creative writing samples. Findings revealed both participating teachers proficiently applied PjBL syntaxes and began instruction by discussing linguistic elements of short stories. Challenges emerged in time management, sparking student enthusiasm for writing, and aligning PjBL with the Cambridge A-level curriculum and the CCP framework, emphasizing character development, communication, and problem-solving. A review of students' writings showed commendable results; organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics achieved average scores of 19.25, 18.87, 22.37, and 4.5 respectively. Content scored an average of 25.12, denoting good quality. Despite specific hurdles, the study underscores that with adept PjBL integration, students can markedly improve their creative writing prowess.

Keywords: Project-based learning, creative writing, teachers' strategies.

INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, mere cognitive abilities don't solely dictate a student's success. Wongdaeng & Hajihama (2018) emphasize the urgency for students to anticipate future challenges and arm themselves with essential skills for an increasingly complex world. To excel in this competitive era, students must exhibit critical thinking, proactively address problems, and devise impactful solutions. Collaboration and robust communication skills are indispensable, given the pivotal role of networking in contemporary times. Furthermore, fostering creativity and adaptability is vital in keeping pace with swift advancements.

Discussing project-based learning, Ariyana et al. (2019) describe it as a method where students take an active role in solving problems. They can work in groups or alone, and the results are then shared with others. This matches the view of Widhiastuti et al. (2023), who see project-based learning as giving students hands-on experience, helping them be more creative in their tasks. This approach encourages group projects from different subjects, lets students explore information that matters to them, and promotes teamwork in experiments. Using project-based learning offers benefits like better skills, real-world experience, more discipline, improved student-teacher relationships, and a positive learning environment, as mentioned by Afifah et al. (2019). Moreover, Project-based learning offers manifold advantages, such as fostering critical thinking, enhancing problem-solving capabilities, and encouraging collaboration among students. Yet, the approach isn't without its challenges. As noted by Aldabbus (2018), these hurdles can be grouped into several categories: challenges faced by teachers, students, the curriculum, schools, and parents.

Turning to the realm of creative writing, Burroway & Stuckey-French (2007) describe it as the delicate craft of employing words to spark imagination, conjure emotions, and convey thoughts. This form of writing entails producing original fiction, poetry, or non-fiction imbued with an individual's unique style and voice. Echoing this sentiment, King

(1947) views creative writing as the process of transforming personal experiences, ideas, or emotions into distinctive and significant written pieces, be it a short story, poem, or novel. In essence, creative writing is the technique of molding language and imagination into expressive pieces of literature. It distinguishes itself from mere informative writing, diving deep into fiction, poetry, theater, and other genres. With an emphasis on narrative approaches, literary techniques, and delving into emotions and viewpoints, creative writing stands out. Given its inherently experimental disposition, it's no surprise that it takes many forms, such as poetry, short stories, novels, scripts, comics, personal essays, and even comedic pieces, as highlighted by Durand et al. (2020).

Various studies have discussed into the intersection of project-based learning and creative writing. For instance, Hakim et al. (2016) scrutinized the utilization of Cartoon Story Maker in project-based learning. Their findings indicated a noticeable disparity in the success rates of students using Cartoon Story Maker compared to those taught with Comic Life in the context of creative writing. Furthermore, Ismuwardani et al. (2019) found that the integration of project-based learning led to a marked increase in students' creativity and self-reliance in poetry writing. Adding to this, Giawa (2022) investigated a specific form of creative writing, suggesting that incorporating project-based learning into the writing process significantly enhances students' engagement and cultivates their critical thinking abilities.

Furthermore, today's educational emphasis, as mentioned by Okur & Göçen (2020), should align with modern writing trends: integrating innovative techniques in classrooms, fostering environments where students express uninhibitedly and creatively, and paving the way for them to hone writing skills that last a lifetime. To nurture and inspire budding writers, it's imperative to prioritize the teaching of writing skills in educational settings. Hence, we arrive at the concept of "creative writing", which Ramet (2007) defines as the aptitude to craft innovative and original literary pieces or compositions

However, review of existing literatures indicates a pronounced focus on specific genres of creative writing, such as poetry, comics, and narrative tales, leaving the domain of short stories largely untouched within the ambit of project-based learning. There's also a noticeable shortfall in examining the challenges of applying project-based learning to creative writing and a limited number of studies evaluating students' work against the five crucial writing elements. Given these gaps, this study aims to: (1) explore the techniques educators use to incorporate project-based learning in creative writing, (2) identify the challenges they face during its application, and (3) evaluate students' short stories as an outcome of this methodology, emphasizing the broader goal of enhancing English writing skills through project-based learning.

METHOD

This research adopted a mixed-methods approach. Drawing from Sugiono (2019), the methodology encompassed exhaustive data collection, analysis, and integration, harnessing both quantitative and qualitative insights. Data were sourced from eleventh-grade students and two English teachers at SMA Dunia Harapan Makassar. These participants were chosen through purposive sampling, with specific criteria such as teacher certification and experience in implementing the Project-based Learning model in their instructional techniques.

To gather the necessary data, a variety of collection tools were utilized, including observation checklists, semi-structured interviews, and the examination of students' written documents. Observations assessed how teachers employed the project-based learning syntax, while interviews with the two English teachers aimed to understand their experiences and challenges in applying Project-based Learning for creative writing instruction. The students' creative writing assignments further enriched the data set, providing tangible outcomes of the teaching approach. These writings were evaluated quantitatively against a set rubric focusing on aspects like content, organization, vocabulary, language application, and mechanics. This quantitative evaluation of students' work complemented the qualitative insights gleaned from observations and interviews, offering a holistic view of the efficacy and challenges of the Project-based Learning model in teaching creative writing.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This study explored the methodologies teachers use to integrate Project-based Learning into creative writing lessons. Using a structured observation checklist, teachers were observed over two sessions to ensure a thorough understanding of their approach to Project-based Learning throughout the course.

Observations indicated that teachers incorporated eight distinct stages of Project-based Learning: selection of the project topic, pre-communication activities, formulation of pivotal questions, design of the project plan, establishment of a project timeline, project culmination, assessment of project outcomes, and a final project evaluation. These findings resonate with Pentury et al. (2020), who observed that educators adeptly navigate various stages of Project-based Learning in the realm of creative writing, enhancing students' creative capabilities. Both the present study and that of Pentury et al. emphasize the significance of the initial phase of Project-based Learning – the project topic selection. In this phase, teachers utilize diverse media, such as short stories or videos, to introduce students to the context and objectives of the forthcoming project.

This study's findings underscore the importance of introducing the linguistic features of short stories. During observations, both T1 and T2 emphasized figurative language and tenses used in short stories, ensuring students grasped these concepts before commencing their writing. In contrast, Ismuwardani et al. (2019) did not delve into the linguistic nuances of creative writing genres. Instead, they focused on monitoring student groups, providing feedback only when difficulties arose. While this research observed similar feedback and consultation methods, it highlighted the imperative of addressing linguistic features before writing. This sentiment is echoed by Syarifah & Emiliasari (2019), who emphasized teaching the linguistic aspects of fiction writing to bolster students' understanding of their chosen topics. Another pivotal insight from this study is that the effectiveness of Project-based Learning hinges on students' collaboration within their groups. Teachers play a crucial role in orchestrating these groups, ensuring active participation from all members. Syarifah & Emiliasari (2019) affirm this perspective, suggesting that Project-based Learning fosters collaboration, networking, and teamwork. Such an environment can be particularly beneficial for students who might not have strong writing skills, making them feel valued and included in the process.

Table 1. Observation Checklist

No.	Learning Activities	Task	Teacher 1		Teacher 2	
			Yes	No	Yes	No
1	Choosing the project topics	Using the topic according to the basic competence.	✓		✓	
		Stimulating students by showing pictures/videos/stories related to the topic for their creative writing activity.	✓		✓	
2	Pre-communication activity	Providing vocabulary related to the creative writing topic and ask students to learn the linguistic features	✓		✓	
3	Asking Essential Questions	Showing interesting videos or presenting problems around and teacher gives question.	✓		✓	
4	Designing project plan	Decide the type of creative writing for their project.	✓		✓	
5	Creating Project Timeline	Making project timeline	✓		✓	
		Collecting the project timeline sheet from each group.		✓		✓
6	Finishing the project	Asking the students to create the contents for their creative writing project.	✓			✓
		Providing every group with consultation.	✓		✓	
7	Assessing Project Results	Students present their creative writing projects and teacher conducts assessment	✓		✓	
		Stimulating other group members to give questions.	✓		✓	
8	Evaluating the project	Giving feedback and reflection	✓		✓	

Adapted from Hamidah et al., (2020)

Implementing Project-based Learning can bring numerous student benefits, such as promoting creative thinking, problem-solving skills, and student collaboration. However, teachers could also face challenges implementing Project-based learning (Aldabbus, 2018). Challenges came from the teachers, students, and curriculums in its implementation. T1 states:

There are some challenges of using Project-based Learning in teaching creative writing. For the teachers, the schedule sometimes becomes a challenge because the project may take longer time as scheduled. Related to the students, some students seem to be passive because of having less initiative to take parts in the group collaboration. Besides that, how to increase the students' motivation in learning is also a challenge for teachers.

The use of Project-based Learning (PBL) in teaching creative writing brings along its unique challenges. One of the primary challenges teachers faces is in scheduling. The very

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nature of PBL, which encourages a more flexible and open-ended approach to learning, can often mean that projects don't fit neatly into the designated time frames. There's always the potential for students to encounter unexpected challenges or become deeply engrossed in a particular aspect of their project, which can make it run longer than initially planned. This unpredictability poses a challenge for teachers trying to manage and plan the curriculum within a limited time.

Moreover, student engagement varies. Some students, for various reasons, might be less proactive in the PBL environment. They may show passivity, taking on a more subdued role in group activities rather than actively participating. This lack of initiative can hinder the collaborative spirit essential for the success of PBL, where every student's active participation can greatly benefit the group's collective learning. Additionally, the broader challenge is to maintain and increase students' motivation in the learning process. Creative writing, while liberating for some, can be daunting for others. For students who may not naturally gravitate towards writing, finding the spark of interest becomes crucial. Teachers, in these scenarios, need to find innovative ways to inspire and motivate, ensuring that each student feels both challenged and supported in their creative journey. Furthermore, T2 asserts:

The challenges of using Project-based Learning in teaching comes from the students. How we can motivate them in learning, not all students like to write. So, I as the teacher will provide some interesting topics especially for the students who have high interest in writing. Start the writing also by using something simple about their surroundings before going to something unreal. In addition, because of this is about writing, motivating students to read will also be a matter. Approximately, students who like to read will like to write. If they read more, they can start writing better than those have lack interest in reading. That's why, at the very beginning, I did not give a theme for creative writing, they may choose by themselves to let them free to express their ideas.

Utilizing Project-based Learning (PBL) in teaching, particularly in the realm of creative writing, presents several challenges, many of which are rooted in the diverse attitudes and interests of students. Not every student has an inherent passion for writing, making the task of keeping them engaged and motivated a significant hurdle. Teachers, in their role as facilitators, need to craft approaches tailored to this reality. For instance, by introducing captivating topics that resonate with students who already have a predilection for writing, a teacher can ignite the flame of interest.

To simplify the entry point into the world of creative writing, it's advantageous to begin with topics rooted in the familiar. Encouraging students to write about their immediate surroundings and experiences can serve as a gentle introduction before diving into more abstract or fantastical themes. This approach eases students into the writing process, reducing the intimidation factor. However, a challenge intertwined with writing is the act of reading. The relationship between reading and writing is symbiotic; a passion for one often fuels an appreciation for the other. But how does one instill the habit of reading in students? Those who regularly read tend to develop better writing skills compared to their less-read counterparts. Recognizing this, the teacher opted for an open-ended approach at the outset of the creative writing process. By not confining students to a specific theme and allowing them the freedom to choose their topics, they are more likely to feel a personal connection to their work, fostering genuine expression and creativity.

In terms of challenges to teachers, this research indicated that teachers found difficulties in managing their time well in implementing Project-based Learning. This finding is supported by Aldabbus (2018), who also revealed that using Project-based Learning often takes more time than other teaching methods, and it might delay the processes of presenting and covering the lessons created by the curriculum.

In addition, this research indicated that teachers found it challenging to enhance the students' motivation to write because writing is considered uninteresting for some students if it is not integrated with the appropriate learning model. Another challenge related to the students was that some seemed willing to dominate more, while others were passive. It is supported by Aldabbus (2018), who revealed that some students dominated the work and were not allowed to take active participation in the project. This challenge appeared because of having less exposure or training in group collaboration, and therefore, in this research, teachers revealed that the arrangement of the group and leaders' responsibilities were crucial. The groups must be set varied according to the student's achievement, and leaders must be able to guide their members and divide equal jobs for each member to ensure that all members would feel involved in the project.

Furthermore, this research revealed that students also faced a challenge in adding or expanding their ideas to write. This is also similar to the findings of Utami et al (2022) who also revealed that students' challenge was when they got stuck in the middle of writing and did not have ideas to continue. Before beginning to write, students should be knowledgeable enough by reading as many resources as possible to gain additional ideas for their short tale, according to the teacher who had been observed in this research.

Regarding curriculum, the present findings also revealed that teachers faced a challenge in integrating Project-based Learning with the Cambridge Curriculum and the school's internal curriculum. It is in line with Aldabbus (2018), who agreed that teachers can find it challenging to modify the curriculum so that it can be taught through relevant projects. Indeed, the curriculum challenge appeared because teachers needed more planning time. It is supported by Yang et al., (2021), who agreed that teachers had limited time to implement Project-based Learning. Therefore, an action needed to be taken to solve this; when teachers faced problems related to the curriculum, they would report it to the subject coordinator and share in a weekly meeting called SIT (share, inspire, and transform) to overcome it together.

To strengthen the data obtained from the observation and interview as well as to analyze the result of the students' creative writing, in this research, students' creative writing documents were analyzed and calculated quantitatively or using specific scoring criteria in writing such as content, organization, vocabulary, grammar (language use) and mechanism.

Table 2. The score of students' creative writing

No	Group	Content	Organization	Vocabulary	Grammar	Mechanic	Score
1.	SCI 1	25	18	20	25	5	93
2.	SCI 2	25	20	18	23	4	90
3.	SCI 3	28	20	18	23	5	93
4.	SCI 4	25	20	18	20	4	87
5.	SOC 1	23	18	17	18	4	80
6.	SOC 2	25	20	20	25	5	95
7.	SOC 3	25	18	20	25	5	93

8.	SOC 4	25	20	20	20	4	89
	Average	25.12	19.25	18.87	22.37	4.5	90

The short story that the students wrote and scored after using PjBL to teach creative writing as shown on Table 3. There are eight groups altogether namely Science 1 (SCI 1), Science 2(SCI 2), Science 3(SCI 3), Science 4(SCI 4), Social 5(SOC 5), Social 6(SOC 6), Social 7(SOC 7) and Social 8(SOC 8). Science means eleventh grade science program and Social means eleventh grade social program. Based on the table above, it is clearly seen that in terms of content, students' average score is 25.12 and it is classified as good. In organization, students' average score is 19.25 and it is classified as excellent. In vocabulary itself, students' average score is 18.87 and it is also classified as excellent. In terms of grammar, students' average score is 22.37 or classified as excellent while in mechanic, students' average score is 4.5 or classified as excellent as well. Based on the result of the analysis, it could be concluded that from five elements of writing, there is only one element of writing where students did not achieve the excellent classification which is content element while other four elements of writing, the students' average classification is excellent. As indicated by the good outcome, the students' excitement for fiction stories motivated them to write a short story as part of their creative writing and fiction writing tasks. This finding is in line with Utami et al (2022) who revealed that most of the students were interested in and preferred fiction story.

Vocabulary constitutes a significant component within the realm of creative writing. The analysis of the student's creative writing revealed a notable proficiency in the vocabulary aspect, as indicated by an average score of 18.87. The present study demonstrates the successful implementation of PjBL, which positively impacted students' vocabulary proficiency. As previously stated, the validity of the result was confirmed by the approval of both teachers during the early stage of project topic selection and the execution of pre-communicative activities. These exercises aimed to familiarize students with specific language relevant to their chosen topic, enhancing their vocabulary competency. This finding is substantiated by a prior investigation conducted by Nappu et al (2018), which showed that implementing suitable instructional methods in English language education enhanced students' vocabulary proficiency. Consequently, these students could utilize English concerning specific subject matter successfully. This finding is consistent with a prior investigation in which teachers implemented Project-based Learning, leading to students attaining high scores in the vocabulary aspect of their writing assessments.

In light of these demands, Project-Based Learning (PjBL) emerges as a quintessential learning model for the 21st century. Yusri et al. (2021) posit that PjBL commences with a problem, serving as a launchpad for assimilating and applying knowledge through hands-on tasks. To harness the full potential of PjBL, educators should embrace a comprehensive teaching approach. This entails crafting learning environments that not only immerse students in real-world dilemmas but also deepen their subject comprehension and empower them with critical tasks. Echoing this, Wongdaeng & Hajihama (2018) highlighted the multidisciplinary essence of PjBL, noting its capacity to draw upon students' diverse academic insights to culminate a project.

Project-based learning should be designed with activities that meet teachers' goals, like improving writing skills and understanding English. Writing has become crucial today, acting as a bridge for people across different places and times. Students who write well can convey their thoughts clearly, as highlighted by Praba et al. (2018). Moreover, writing helps

in deepening knowledge, as pointed out by Graham & Perrin (2007). Nappu et al. (2022) noted that students are familiar with different writing techniques and can produce clear and relevant paragraphs.

CONCLUSION

In this study, educators thoroughly executed all stages of Project-based Learning, from topic selection to the evaluation of project outcomes. A salient observation was the emphasis on group dynamics, especially the pivotal role of group leaders in equitably distributing tasks to ensure all students actively participate, thereby leaving no student uninvolved. The challenges encountered spanned three categories: teacher-related, student-related, and curriculum-related issues. Teachers grappled with time management for the projects. On the student front, a notable concern was their diminished motivation to write. The dynamics within groups also revealed that certain dominant students unintentionally overshadowed their quieter peers, leading to passivity in the latter. The integration of Project-based Learning with the Cambridge Curriculum and the school's unique CCP (character, communication, and problem-solving) curriculum presented its set of complexities. To address these challenges, the school's administration introduced the SIT (share, inspire, and transform) platform, designed to help teachers navigate and overcome classroom obstacles, especially when integrating new learning models.

An evaluation of students' written expression showcased commendable performance in four writing aspects: organization (19.25), vocabulary (18.87), grammar (22.37), and mechanics (4.5). However, the content dimension received a score of 25.12, placing it in the 'good' bracket. This research has its constraints; its focus is limited to short story writing and includes a restricted student sample size. Future studies could expand to encompass other linguistic skills, such as speaking, listening, and reading. There's also potential for employing diverse research methodologies, including experimental and classroom action research designs, to ensure a broader, more holistic understanding of the subject.

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