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## PROJECT-BASED LEARNING IN INDONESIAN EFL CLASSROOMS: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

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### ABSTRACT

Project based learning (PBL) refers to an approach to instruction that teaches curriculum concepts through a project espousing principles of learner-centered teaching, learner autonomy, collaborative learning, and learning through tasks. This paper justifies the implementation of PBL to design two main projects and their activities in Creative Writing and Second Language Acquisition classes at English Language Education Program of Dunia University Indonesia (ED-DU). Moreover, the paper details pedagogical practices and learning resources deployed in both classes. The discussions would seem to indicate that the use of PBL grounded in the projects shows a high level of students' participation in learning, and teachers' innovative teaching practices. Finally, the paper hopes to provide EFL teachers who have similar teaching practices with practical ideas they can develop to help students achieve particular learning objectives in their classrooms and continue the positive trends of implementing PBL in teaching and learning.

**Key Words:** project-based learning; projects; EFL classrooms

### ABSTRAK

*Pembelajaran berbasis proyek (PBL) merupakan suatu pendekatan instruksi yang mengajarkan suatu konsep kurikulum yang didukung prinsip pengajaran yang terpusat pada siswa, otonomi siswa, pembelajaran kolaboratif, dan pembelajaran melalui tugas. Kajian ini memberikan alasan tentang implementasi PBL untuk merancang dua proyek utama dan aktifitasnya di kelas Creative Writing dan Second Language Acquisition pada program studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Universitas Dunia Indonesia. Selain itu, kajian ini memaparkan secara rinci praktik pedagogi dan sumber pembelajaran yang digunakan di kedua kelas tersebut. Pembahasan dalam kajian ini nampak mengindikasikan bahwa penggunaan PBL dalam kedua proyek tersebut menunjukkan tingkat partisipasi siswa yang tinggi dan praktek pengajaran guru yang inovatif. Akhirnya, kajian ini berharap untuk memberikan guru Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing yang mempunyai praktik pengajaran serupa dengan ide praktis yang mereka bisa modifikasi dan kembangkan untuk membantu siswa mencapai tujuan pembelajaran tertentu dalam kelas mereka dan melanjutkan kecenderungan positif pada implementasi PBL dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran.*

**Kata Kunci:** pembelajaran berbasis proyek; proyek; kelas Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing

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## INTRODUCTION

Project Based Learning (PBL) is social practice into which students are socialized through a series of group activities involving the simultaneous learning of language, content, and skills (Slater, Beckett, & Aufderhaar, 2006). PBL is also “an approach to instruction that teaches curriculum concepts through a project” (Bell, 2010, p.41). In brief, an approach shows how a language is learned (Richards & Schmidt, 2010) and gives ways of teaching something, which uses classroom activities or techniques to help learners learn (British Council, 2008).

In essence, the approach espouses four main principles (Hedge, 2000). The first principle is learner-centered teaching. It encourages students to share responsibility for their learning (Merlot Pedagogy, 2016), in which a teacher offers support and guidance during the learning process (Stoller, 2002). The second principle is autonomy. It suggests, “learners to assume a maximum amount of responsibility for their learning” (Richards, 2015, p. 742). Brown (2007) posits that teachers should provide opportunities for students to solve problems in small groups and practice their language outside their classroom to achieve a value of learner autonomy.

The third principle is collaborative learning is “an instruction method in which students at various performance levels work together in groups to achieve a common academic goal (Gokhale, 1995, p.23). Besides, a collaborative work encourages students to explore and to apply their course materials as an attempt to search for understanding, solutions, or to create a product (Smith & MacGregor, 1992). Then, the last principle is learning through tasks. In essence, a task refers to an activity that enables students to achieve a particular learning goal (Richards & Schmidt, 2010) using their available language resources and leading to a real outcome (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

Further, PBL is a type of contextualized cooperative learning designed within five main phases highlighting the essence of students’ participation (Sharan, 1998, as cited in Dooly & Masats, 2008). The stages start with [1] selecting a topic, [2] planning for the project, and [3] finding information about a topic of the project. They continue to [4] developing and implementing plans to complete the project and [5] presenting and evaluating an output of the project and students’ efforts to finish the project.

Literature acknowledges significances of PBL in teaching and

learning. PBL has been “advocated as an effective means for promoting language and content learning in EFL classrooms” (Guo, 2006, p.147). Besides, it helps students to achieve a greater understanding of a topic, increase their learning motivation (Bell, 2010), p.39 and inspires them to obtain a deeper knowledge of a particular subject (Edutopia, 2008). A project work also leads to mirroring real-life tasks and provides opportunities for students to work cooperatively in a small group, in which they can share resources and ideas in completing a particular project (Stoller, 2002). Furthermore, research into language teaching reports that PBL supports, facilitates, and improves a learning process (Tamin & Grant, 2013) and helps English language learners achieve their language-learning goals (Beckett & Slater, 2005, as cited in Foss, Carney, McDonald, Rooks, 2007).

The English Language Education Program of Dunia University Indonesia (ED-DU) (anonymous) offers courses that its students have to complete during their four-year study. Some of the courses are Creative Writing (CW) and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) situated in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting. It is regarded as a situation in which people learn English in a formal classroom with limited opportunities to use the

language outside their classroom (Richards & Schmidt, 2010).

This paper reaffirms the benefits of PBL and ideas that “all program instructors in their PBL learning program are free to design their individual class projects as long as they fit within the framework of the course” (Foss et al., 2007, p.6). With this in mind, two projects and their learning activities were designed using PBL that would seem to help the students achieve learning objectives in both classes. This paper aims to justify why the PBL approach was selected to design the projects (Foss et al., 2007), to explain the implementation of PBL in the contexts of CW and SLA classes, and to share some pedagogical practices that Indonesian EFL teachers can develop to help their students achieve particular learning objectives in their classes. Therefore, to achieve these goals, the paper initially introduces CW and SLA classes and details learning activities that students have done in the classrooms. Then, it explains some learning sources and supporting technology that students used in completing the projects. The paper continues to relate the learning activities with PBL principles, to detail challenges of PBL, and to provide possible solutions to overcome the challenges. Finally, the paper explains

some pedagogical implications for teaching and learning particularly in EFL contexts and possible directions for future research.

## CREATIVE WRITING CLASS

CW is one of language skill courses offered in the first semester at ED-DU. In this course, the students learn English language aspects through creative writing in the forms of poems and a biography (Ragawati & Pattiwael, 2014). At the end of the course, they are expected to possess some competencies, such as to [a] identify some features and language aspects addressed in poems and [b] write some kinds of poems, such as metaphor, acrostic, narrative, and haiku. A metaphor poem is a figure of speech that indicates either an implicit or an explicit comparison between two different things that possess similar characteristics (Literary Devices, 2015):

### **Mother, My Doctor**

(A metaphor poem by Nahason Louiz Wari Yoafifi)

Mother is a doctor  
Her smile is medicine when I am sick  
She nurses me when I am weak  
She makes my life healthy

Another example of the metaphor poem can be seen on a student's blog

(see Pratiwi, 2014). Then, acrostic is a poem in which the first letter of each line spells out a word, name, or phrase when people read it vertically (Poetry Foundation, 2015):

### **Risma**

(An acrostic poem written by Risma Ida Aruan)

Responsible  
Innovative  
Sincere  
Marvelous  
Amazing

Other examples of the acrostic poem can be seen in some students' blogs (see Lawalata, 2014; Natasya, 2015). Meanwhile, in a narrative poem, students may tell a story about anything (Brown, 2015). Brown also notes that the poem's lines have a rhyming pattern (see Rhein, 2006). They sometimes do not have it all:

### **Everything is All Right**

(A narrative poem written by Nadzifa Nur Fadilla)

We used to laugh together  
We used to cry together  
We used to walk together  
We used to be four

Only three of us are now  
Left on the fragile path  
In the darkest night  
In this cruel universe

It won't be easy  
We need someone who can lead  
us  
The true leader who has gone  
forever  
  
The future looked so dark  
We couldn't watch our footsteps  
Our trades faded away  
  
But I realize something  
That you see us from heaven  
Ask God to guide us  
Ask the angels to tell us  
Everything is all right

Another example of the poem can be seen on a student's blog (see Widyastuti, 2015). In essence, writing the poem enables the students to learn simple past tense. Last, Haiku is a 17-syllable verse form of poems that can be about anything (Brown, 2015).

**GOD, my strength**

(A Haiku written by Lutfi Febriawan)

God, you are my strength  
When I am weak, sad, and down  
You are ray of life

Other examples of the poem can be seen on students' blogs (see Agista, 2015; Manihuruk, 2015). In essence, Haiku has three metrical units (Toyomasu, 2001) and consists of five syllables in the first line, seven syllables in the second lines, and five syllables in the third line (William, 2015). In this

class, a poster project (Ragawanti, 2014) was designed to help the students perform the competencies (a-b). This project was done in a group of two until three students. Within an approximately week period, they had to write a type of poems that they have learned in their classroom and to illustrate it in a poster. The poem should be about FDU. At the start of this project, the students were briefed with ideas on how to design a poster (Rochester Institute of Technology, 2014). Also, they were showed some posters created by their seniors in the previous CW class to corroborate the ideas. The group continued to write the poem and consulted it to the lecturer. Then, we discussed the poem to see its meaning and to review grammatical aspects carefully as we would publish the posters in a CW tutor blog (Campbell, 2003) that I run in the classroom.

In addition to uploading any important information about the class, the tutor blog, in this case, also functions as an online gallery space for a review of students' works (Duffy & Bruns, 2006) as people can see the posters online and leave some comments to them. Significantly, "because other people can see the blog, students are more careful about looking up words they need and checking

grammar and spelling” (Abu Bakar & Ismail, 2009, p.49, as cited in Walker & White, 2013, p.76). Moreover, exposure to a broader audience was an opportunity for the students to obtain more diverse feedback on their work (Purcell, Buchanan, & Friedrich, 2013) and to increase their satisfaction that possibly enhances their motivation (Dornyei, 2001). After that, students in the group arranged their time to design the poster and decided who did what to complete the project.

An essential part of PBL phases is to present an output of the project. Therefore, upon completing the poster (see Calvin, 2014), every group was asked to present its poster (see Figure 1) in front of the class. Every group explained meanings of the poem and their relation to the design of the poster.

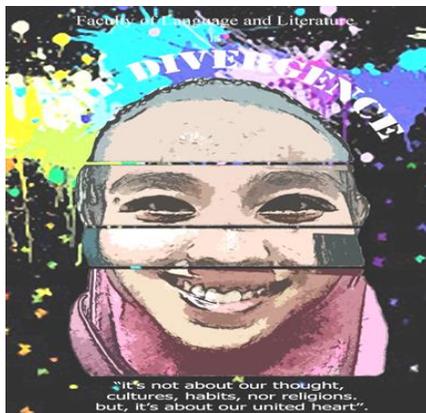


Figure 1. The Group’s Poster (A poster by Cindy Octaviani, Angela Nirmala Nariswari, and Galuh Widyastuti)

A question and answer section was provided in which all students in the classroom might ask the group to clarify particular aspects of the poster. Nevertheless, a clear challenge for doing the project was the fact that only few students who could well utilize supporting software, such as *Adobe Photoshop*, *Corel Draw*, *Photoscape*, to design the poster. Therefore, in a sense, the poster designs done by particular groups were significantly better than those by other groups.

## SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION CLASS

SLA is an elective course held in the tenth semester at ED-SWCU. The course is about how people, including the students as English learners, acquire and learn a second language (L2) other than their mother tongue. The course also reviews research findings of previous SLA studies (see, for instance, Bellingham, 2004; So & Dominguez, 2004; Shoaib & Dornyei, 2004; Mali, 2015a), which are still being continued up to this moment, and great linguists’ opinions on many aspects that influence the L2 acquisition, both from learners’ internal and external factors. Moreover, the course deals with some keys of success in SLA that the students can adopt in their learning and acquisition of English. At the end of the

course, they are expected to be able to [c] explain how people learn and acquire a second language, [d] explain various factors affecting the second language acquisition, and [e] conduct a small-scale SLA study in the form of academic essay paper. The students are assigned to write an academic essay paper to help them achieve the classroom objectives (c-e).

This project was completed in a step-by-step fashion. The students, in a group of two until three students, had to conduct a library study and to write an academic essay paper on an SLA topic that interested them. As a guideline, they were asked to follow a format adapted from a journal (Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 2015). Moreover, at the start of this project, the students discussed a paper that has followed the format to serve as a frame of their reference. At the end of the semester, they had to report their study in the form of 1500-2000 academic essay paper with, at least, eight supporting references (see, for instance, Benson & Nunan, 2004; Ellis, 1985, 1997, 2008; Gass & Selinker, 2001; Trolke, 2006). They were given opportunities to consult their problems in completing the essay. They were also encouraged to write their paper well and to present it in a national undergraduate conference in Indonesia

(see, for instance, <http://uc-pbi-usd.blogspot.co.id/> & <https://www.facebook.com/FLLStudentConference/>) as the follow-up of the project.

The students collaborated with their group members to complete their essay. They communicated to share learning resources they had. They also discussed which parts of their research paper that every group member had to write. They negotiated their different perspectives in writing their essay and looked for their best solution to overcome the differences. These activities reflect the learner-centered teaching in which students solve problems, answer, and formulate questions of their own (Felder, 2015). Some groups communicated online through their Facebook group and WhatsApp during the completion of their project. In another case, the collaboration was done by helping one another to explain difficult concepts that they read from particular books so that they could write them in their essay. Every group was scheduled to have a classroom presentation reporting the progress of the writing and problems encountered in completing the project to monitor the progress of the work. In this activity, other students in the class might ask questions, provide constructive feedback to the essay, and suggest

possible ways to overcome the problems.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section relates the learning activities detailed in the previous parts with PBL principles to explain the implementation of the principles in the contexts of CW and SLA classes. This paper endorses a belief that PBL in both classes can possibly engage the students in “solving semi-structured problems calling for competencies expected in high-performance work organizations” (Lattimer & Riordan, 2011, p.20). The use of PBL in both classes has provided extensive opportunities for the students to work together with their group mates, articulate their thought, negotiate, and appreciate different perspectives they had so that they could complete their projects. This collaboration may be a demonstration of how PBL can mirror real-life tasks (Stoller, 2002) particularly in the twenty-first century (Bell, 2010) that encourages students to understand how to plan, build, and collaborate with their pairs or small groups (Davila, 2015). Interestingly, the students also maximize the use of Facebook group and WhatsApp, in which they can communicate, share related learning materials, and download them

electronically, to support the collaboration.

The real-life tasks are also in line with the substantial policies stipulated in Indonesian Qualification Framework (IQF). In brief, IQF aims to equalize and integrate an educational field, work training, and work experience of every Indonesian citizen (Kementrian Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2012). IQF technically consists of nine qualification levels (see Figure 2), in which each level has specific descriptions to perform.

Concerning the framework, the students who will possess their Bachelor Degree after they graduate are in the level 6. In essence, one of the specific descriptions of the level appears to encourage them to have a cooperation skill:

*“Bertanggung jawab pada pekerjaan sendiri dan dapat diberi tanggung jawab atas pencapaian hasil kerja organisasi (Kementrian Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2012, p.14).*

“Being responsible for their job and able to be given responsibility for an organization work achievement” (translated by the researcher).

The use of Facebook group and WhatsApp to support students’ learning collaboration is also in line

with another description in the Framework:

*“Mampu memanfaatkan IPTEKS dalam bidang keahliannya, dan mampu beradaptasi terhadap situasi yang dihadapi dalam penyelesaian masalah” (Kementrian Pendidikan Nasio-nal Republik Indonesia, 2012, p.14).*

“Being able to utilize ICT in their expertise, and being able to adapt to situations they are facing in solving a particular problem” (translated by the researcher).

These phenomena are translated as an opportunity for students to practice performing the real-world tasks described in IQF that they possibly have to perform after they finish their undergraduate study.

Nevertheless, working in the group to complete the projects in both

classes created some identified challenges. To some extents, it was quite difficult to ensure that every group member contributed equally to writing the essay and designing the poster. It was possible that a particular student in the group dominated ideas and ignored inputs from other team members. This situation might make other team members feel inferior and limit their learning experiences through the projects. Therefore, the students were given a peer-assessment rubric (see Table 1) and asked to assess their group mates’ performance and contributions in their group. It was necessary to do the assessment, for evaluating students’ efforts to complete the project is an essential phase in PBL framework (Sharan, 1998, as cited in Dooly and Masats, 2008).

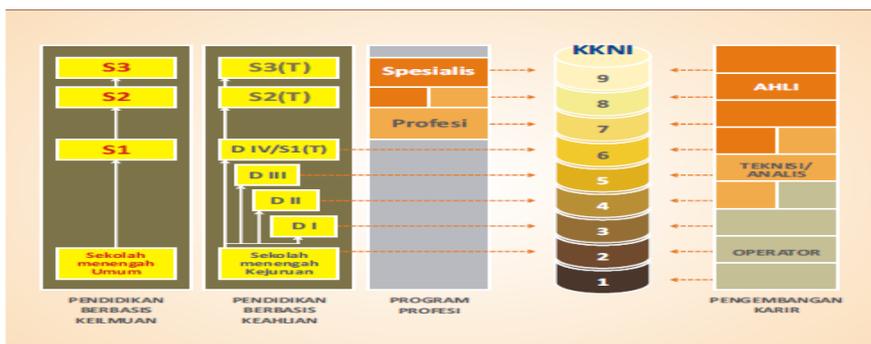


Figure 2. Nine Qualifications Levels in IQF

(Taken from Kementrian Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2012, p.6)

Table 1. The Peer Assessment Rubric  
(adapted from Franker, 2015; Vandervelde, 2015)

	<b>1 Unsatisfactory</b>	<b>2 Partially proficient</b>	<b>3 Proficient</b>	<b>4 Exemplary</b>
Contribution to the team project/work	Does not collect any relevant information; no useful suggestions to address team's needs;	Collects information when prodded; tries to offer some ideas, but not well developed, and not clearly expressed, to meet team's needs;	Collects basic, useful information related to the project; occasionally offers useful ideas to meet the team's needs;	Collects and presents to the team a great deal of relevant information; offers well-developed and clearly expressed ideas directly related to the group's purpose.
Taking responsibility	Does not perform assigned tasks; often misses meetings and, when present, does not have anything constructive to say; relies on others to do the work;	Performs assigned tasks but needs many reminders; attends meetings regularly but generally does not say anything constructive; sometimes expects others to do his/her work;	Performs all assigned tasks; attends meetings regularly and usually participates effectively; generally reliable;	Performs all tasks very effectively; attends all meetings and participates enthusiastically; very reliable.
Valuing other team members	Often argues with team mates; doesn't let anyone else talk; occasional personal attacks and "put-downs"; wants to have things done his way and does not listen to alternate approaches	Usually does much of the talking; does not pay much attention when others talk, and often assumes their ideas will not work	Generally listens to others' points of view; always uses appropriate and respectful language; tries to make a definite effort to understand others' ideas;	Always listens to others and their ideas; helps them develop their ideas while giving them full credit; always helps the team reach a fair decision.



Figure 3. Edmodo Home Page

Besides, the peer assessment system was to make sure that each member of the group was involved in the process of doing the projects. Each member of the group assessed other members of the group using Likert scale of 1-4. Then, the students were asked to submit the rubric at the end of the course. The scored rubric was considered as one of the criteria to determine their final grade in SLA class. The students were explained clearly that the peer assessment could make a significant difference in their final grade, so they should prove their deep involvement in the completing the projects.

Another challenge of PBL is also to reach a balance between an excessive teacher control versus an absence of teachers' feedback and guidance during

the completion of the project (Dooly & Masats, 2008). Building a regular consultation was necessary as a teacher could always monitor and suggest ideas to complete the projects. In that case, Edmodo was utilized (<https://www.edmodo.com/>).

Edmodo (see Figure 3) is a social media service for education (Walker & White, 2013) and a virtual learning environment (Light & Polin, 2010), in which "students can learn even when they are miles away from their teacher and classmates" (Harmer, 2007, p.121).

Edmodo serves as a platform where they could regularly consult the lecturer and submit a draft of their paper online. Besides, Edmodo is a platform from which they could access their lecturer's feedback to their paper

electronically whenever and wherever they are (Mali, 2015b).

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, the use of PBL grounded in the poster and academic essay projects appears to prove a high level of students' learning participation in a way that the students can experience working together with their group mates to articulate their thought, to negotiate, and to appreciate different perspectives. Besides, the use of PBL would seem to help the students to practice real-life tasks described in IQF that they possibly have to perform after they graduate. The discussion also shows students' innovation in a way that they can experience using the technology in completing the projects. Finally, this paper highlights the essence of students' learning collaboration with their group mates and of using technology to help students complete particular classroom projects. It will be interesting for future researchers to explore the place of technology in PBL activities and to what extent the use of technology supports students' learning collaboration and helps them to complete their classroom projects, particularly in content-based instructions.

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