

IMPROVING STUDENTS' ENGLISH READING SKILLS BY USING PROJECT- BASED LEARNING (PjBL) IN MUHAMMADIYAH UNIVERSITY OF BENGKULU

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to determine the effectiveness of project-based learning (PjBL) in improving reading skills while identifying challenges associated with this approach. The research was conducted over two cycles during the second semester of the academic year 2023/2024, specifically from May 20 to July 10, 2024. The participants in the study consisted of 24 second-semester English students, including both male and female students. The qualitative data were gathered through observations and interviews, while quantitative data were obtained from reading assessments conducted before and after the intervention. The expected outcomes of the research included improved reading skills, increased student engagement in PjBL activities, and identification of challenges in the implementation of this approach, with the aim of enhancing the overall educational experience for students. It can be concluded that the use of Project-Based Learning significantly enhanced the students' reading skills in the Second Semester at Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu within the English Education program.

INTRODUCTION

The academic discipline of English encompasses four fundamental language proficiencies: reading, speaking, writing, and listening. Out of the four skills, reading has significant importance. Reading is a multifaceted method for acquiring knowledge of the English language. It is a talent that involves receiving information, similar to the ability to listen. This implies that the task is reacting to the text, rather than creating it. Reading is often overlooked by many individuals, and being a proficient reader is essential for success in modern cultures, as it offers individuals the opportunity to enhance their English language skills and competencies (Tojibeyev Isaqjon Madolimovich, 2022).

One of the most crucial components in helping students understand materials is their understanding of the text. The researcher's memories of the reading skills of students on the midterm test and their understanding of each question related to the assigned material served as the basis for this research. the process of concurrently extracting and generating meaning through interaction with written material is referred to as reading skills (Astri, Z., & Wahab, 2018). When taking the midterm exam, students may encounter difficulties in comprehending the content pertinent to the test as a result of their reading skills.

Considering the current situation of students, who are still having difficulty with reading English texts as well as their lack of desire to take the reading. English reading skills enable students to take advantage of their skills for higher education, acquire an excellent position, and journey, learn new things, promote international understanding, and facilitate successful communication. In addition, it is acknowledged that Indonesian students encounter difficulties in studying English due to substantial disparities between English and Indonesia regarding the alphabet, phonetics, vocabulary, which can be and structure. The students had challenges in comprehending the substance of the English texts they read. The children's low reading ability was influenced by several variables.

The occurrence of this phenomenon may be attributed to both internal variables, originating from the students themselves, and external factors, such as the teacher's instructional methods and techniques. In Indonesia, many English teachers continue to employ classic or conventional approaches in the instruction of reading. The conventional technique often fails to engage the students, as it tends to be repetitive and does not encourage active participation, resulting in students' boredom. One successful method to enhance the effectiveness of teaching reading skills is to actively engage the students, so fostering enjoyment in the learning process and facilitating improvement their reading skills (Almulla, 2020).

Project-based learning has garnered attention as an effective method for developing 21st-century skills. This pedagogical method engages students in the learning process and promotes their desire to investigate significant and pertinent real-world issues or challenges. By involving students in the project being prepared, Project-based learning (PjBL) promotes critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, teamwork, and leadership (Almulla, 2020).

The students are engaged in learning new academic content, developing skills, and collaboration with others while creating meaningful project through project-based learning (PjBL), a learner-centred approach that provides teachers with a suitable alternative to making learning personalised, memorable, and varied (Rendon, 2021). Furthermore, it encourages students to use critical thinking skills and learn individually, which are essential for their development. Given the critical to enhance student motivation, project-based learning (PjBL) serves as an effective method for developing students' life skills in educational settings (Wahyuni, 2022). However, English students frequently encounter a number of challenges when attempting to enhance their reading skills, for example insufficient vocabulary and lack of fluency in reading, and low adaptability to technology. These difficulties can hinder the development of their learning process and impact on the English language learning approaches they use to improve reading skills.

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) has been successful in improving reading skills, especially within the realm of English language acquisition. Almulla (2020) found that project-based learning (PjBL) can improve students' engagement and motivation, leading to deeper learning and improved academic performance. Another study in Rendon (2021) examined the effectiveness of project-based learning (PjBL) on the reading skills attainment of higher education students, demonstrating a beneficial impact of project-based learning on students' comprehension levels. The findings indicate that project-based learning is an advisable method for imparting language skills, allowing students to improve their competencies through participation in authentic project activities.

Previous studies have demonstrated the efficacy of project-based learning (PjBL) in enhancing students' English performance, indicating that students developed pertinent reading skills, improved their learning, and acquired a diverse range of academic and non-academic competencies through project-based learning (Zhang & Ma, 2023). The project-Based Learning (PjBL) approach is effective in enhancing students' engagement and motivation, leading to deeper learning and improved academic performance. The research showed that the project-based learning (PjBL) method enhances

student participation by facilitating knowledge and information exchange and discourse (Almulla, 2020).

Several studies related to project-based learning aimed at enhancing students' reading skills. The initial relevant study that investigated project-based learning was conducted by Almulla (2020). The study examined the effectiveness of the project-based learning (PjBL) approach in education. The subject of this research were higher education students, and the results indicate that the PjBL approach enhances student participation by facilitating knowledge and information exchange and discourse. According to research, institutions need to support the project-based learning (PjBL) approach since it is highly suggested for students' educational use.

The second relevant research study is conducted by Wardani et al. (2020). The research findings demonstrated that project-based learning (PjBL) enhances pre-service teachers' abilities to create teaching materials aligned with 21st-century skills, students character development, and the relevant curriculum.

The third is about The Implementation of Project-Based Learning to Enhances Students' Reading Comprehension by Fajar Andriansah et al. (2019). The findings indicate that students' reading skills of narrative texts utilizing PjBL has improved. A substantial improvement in student accomplishment can be achieved following instruction through project-based learning.

The next relevant research study about Project-Based Learning on Critical Reading Course to Enhance Critical Thinking Skills by Dina Merris Maya Sari & Yudy Prasetyo (2021). This research generated multiple outcomes. The implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in the crucial reading course to improve critical thinking abilities comprised three phases: Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation. Secondly, the researcher can provide insights into students' critical thinking and provide a suitable learning strategy to improve their skills.

The last relevant study is the one by Aziza Kavlu (2019). The results indicate that the measured variable exhibited substantial positive advancement in the experimentation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) enhances the efficiency and enjoyment of reading and vocabulary acquisition for the students.

While previous studies have successfully demonstrated the implementation of project-based learning (PBL), none have specifically focused on its potential to enhance students' English reading skills. These studies indicate that PBL can improve reading skills, particularly in skimming, scanning, information gathering, and critical text analysis, thereby aiding in reading comprehension and analytical abilities. This research addresses the challenges faced by students at Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu, noting that current teaching methods often fail to engage students or meet their individual learning needs, resulting in limited progress. Although PBL shows promise, its effectiveness may wane over time and can vary with different subjects and educational levels. The study highlights significant improvements in some students while acknowledging challenges in implementation, including the need for appropriate resources and cross-disciplinary collaboration. Additionally, students' difficulties with English pronunciation complicate efforts to enhance reading skills, affecting effective communication.

To address these issues, the research proposes several classroom action plans aimed at improving students' reading skills through PjBL. These plans include defining clear learning objectives, designing collaborative projects that require critical reading and analysis, and implementing formative assessments to monitor progress. After project completion, evaluating its effectiveness and gathering feedback will help identify areas for improvement. The central research question focuses on how PjBL can enhance reading skills at the university, with the objective of investigating this approach. The expected outcomes are to provide theoretical insights for future

research on PjBL and practical benefits for English lecturers and researchers in developing effective teaching strategies and enhancing the quality of English education at the university.

METHODS

The study involved a collaborative approach, where the researcher was assisted by colleagues, including an English lecturer and a colleague responsible for monitoring the implementation. The research was conducted over two cycles during the second semester of the academic year 2023/2024, specifically from May 20 to July 10, 2024. The research setting included well-equipped classrooms that facilitated the learning process.

The participants in the study consisted of 24 second-semester English students, including both male and female students. The research aimed to determine the effectiveness of project-based learning (PjBL) in improving reading skills while identifying challenges associated with this approach. The research was implemented in two stages: a needs analysis to assess students' requirements and the integration of PjBL into the curriculum, followed by the actual implementation of the project-based activities tailored to students' interests.

Data collection involved both qualitative and quantitative methods, including classroom observations, interviews, pre-tests, and post-tests. The qualitative data were gathered through observations and interviews, while quantitative data were obtained from reading assessments conducted before and after the intervention. The analysis of the data utilized descriptive statistics for quantitative data and qualitative content analysis for qualitative data. The expected outcomes of the research included improved reading skills, increased student engagement in PjBL activities, and identification of challenges in the implementation of PjBL, with the aim of enhancing the overall educational experience for students.

RESULTS

Research Findings

Cycle 1

The distribution of handouts to students can enhance their understanding of the topic.

- 1) The use of attractive instructional media throughout the execution of project-based learning methods in the reading instruction process might capture students' attention towards the lesson.
- 2) The students engaged in reading practice when project-based learning was incorporated into the teaching and learning process. The integration of reading activities inside project-based learning stimulated student' enthusiasm for reading.
- 3) The implementation of project-based learning helps students in understanding the context of the reading material. Moreover, project-based learning facilitated collaborative group work, enabling students to exchange their ideas, insights, and knowledge.
- 4) Significant progress was made by the students in the reading-related aspects. Additionally, In the context of the project-based learning series, the researcher provided the students comments on their reading.
- 5) Students enthusiastically engaged in class activities following the implementation of the project-based learning technique. They looked motivated to complete the project and group work.

Cycle 2

- 1) Providing students with handouts as educational resources made it easier for them to understand journal article texts. They could read a journal article text using the knowledge they have learned.
- 2) The use of project-based learning improved students' engagement with the topic. They engaged positively in the teachings. They seemed motivated because of their enthusiastic engagement in the teaching and learning process.
- 3) The use of attractive instructional media in the implementation of project-based learning methods could attract students' interest in the reading instruction process.
- 4) The development of project-based learning strategies provides students with more reading practice. The students are starting to get accustomed to the reading activities in the classroom.

Students' Score

This section discusses the mean score for each component of reading skills, such as: Interpretation, Detail, Use of information, Clarity, and mechanics. The following table demonstrates these to improve efficiency:

Table 1. The mean score of the students in the aspect of Interpretation

Aspect	The First Text	The Second Text
Interpretation	2.13	2.33

The table above presents the mean scores of the interpretation aspect obtained by the students, comparing the first text from the first cycle with the second text from the next cycle. The students' mean score in the first text is 2.13, which increased to 2.33 in the second text. The gain score was derived from the comparison of the mean scores of the two texts, which is 0.2.

Table 2. The mean score of the students in the aspect of Detail

Aspect	The First Text	The Second Text
Detail	1.96	1.88

The mean scores in the detail element of reading, as provided in the table above, indicate the progress achieved by the students in the classroom. The students obtained scores of 1.96 on the first assessment and 1.88 on the second assessment. The acquired gain score is 0.08.

Table 3. The mean score of the students in the aspect of Use of Information

Aspect	The First Text	The Second Text
Use of information	2.13	2.00

The table indicates that the mean score for the use of information in reading is 2.13 for text 1 and 2.00 for text 2. The acquired score in this aspect is 0.13.

Table 4. The mean score of the students in the aspect of Clarity

Aspect	The First Text	The Second Text
Clarity	1.92	2.21

The table above examines the two texts regarding clarity. The students obtained a mean score of 1.92 in the first text and 2.21 in the second text. The gain score is 0.29.

Table 5. The mean score of the students in the aspect of Mechanics

Aspect	The First Text	The Second Text
Mechanics	1.92	2.29

The mean scores in the mechanics aspect of reading, as provided in the table above, indicate the development achieved by the students. The students achieved a score of 1.92 on the first test. The advancement is evident from the results of the second text, which received a score of 2.29. The acquired gain score is 0.37.

Following several days of research in the researcher used the proposed methods to improve the students’ reading skills, the students demonstrated significant improvement. By contrasting the two texts generated during the first and second cycles. The interpretation’s gain score is 0.2. Moreover, the detail aspect increased by 0.08, as the use of information increased by 0.13. For clarity, the achieved result is 0.29, and for the mechanical aspect, it is 0.37.

Project-based learning can improve students’ reading skills, as evidenced by the significant improvements observed in the pre-test and post-test results conducted before and after the research. The students’ results in the reading components of the pre-test and post-test are displayed in the next table:

Table 6. The mean score of the students in the pre-test and post-test including the aspect of reading

Aspects	Pre-test	Post-test
Interpretation	2.13	3.17
Detail	1.96	3.04
Use of Information	2.17	3.46
Clarity	2.08	3.21
Mechanics	2.25	3.25
Mean	10.59	16.13

The students’ pre-test mean score was 10.59, which gained to 16.13 in the post-test, resulting in a gain score of 5.54, indicating substantial progress. The pre-test and post-test findings in the interpretation component indicate an increase in the students' mean score from 2.13 to 3.17, providing a gain score of 1.04. In terms of detail, the pre-test score ranges from 1.96 to 3.04, with a gain score of 1.08. Regarding the use of information, the students obtained a score of 2.17 in the pre-test, which increased to 3.46 in the post-test, resulting in a gain score of 1.29. The pre-test score is 2.08, while the post-test score is 3.21. The clarity aspect produced a gain score of 1.13. The final aspect, mechanics, demonstrates significant advancement, with the pre-test obtaining a score of 2.25 and the post-test attaining a score of 3.25, resulting in a gain score of 1. In conclusion, the use of PjBL significantly enhanced the students' reading skills.

Discussions

This section presents an analysis of the data obtained from the first and second cycles. This section intends to clarify how project-based learning approaches can improve students’ reading skills. The researcher performed a preliminary observation before conduct the research to gather information and evaluated the classroom interactions during the reading instruction process. This

observation was performed to get insight into the challenges and difficulties typically encountered by students in relation to their reading skills, particularly in English. According to the first observations, the researcher implemented various action plans to enhance the students' reading skills.

The activities intended for implementation during the study were determined by the researcher in collaboration with the partners. This study was divided into two cycles, each containing two sessions conducted in the classroom by the researchers. Following that, it was discovered that employing a project-based learning approach together with diverse activities can improve students' reading skills, particularly with journal article texts. The students achieved substantial advancements in the first cycle and showed significant progress in the second cycle. The students demonstrated improved understanding of motivation because of the implementation of project-based learning in the educational process. The students get a series of assignments that are both demanding and motivating through project-based learning. These activities encourage student motivation, enthusiasm, critical thinking, and creativity in their approach to the teaching and learning process. Krajcik & Blumenfeld (2006) state that when students are involved in meaningful projects that require them to solve authentic, complex problems, they are more likely to be motivated, produce creative solutions, and develop a deeper understanding of the content. This indicates that project-based learning can improve students' reading skills, particularly in English acquisition. Nevertheless, some students still have many problems that they encounter during classroom learning, especially when they are learning in reading skills. There are several problems that students have in reading skills, such as low motivation to read, poor behavior, and lack of vocabulary (Juniardi, 2016). In addition, students' reading skills are still low because they have several problems, especially in mastering vocabulary and their motivation in reading is also low.

The results of students' reading indicate significant improvements, although students still have various problems. Poor behavior is often triggered by a lack of social motivation in learning (Bandura, 2024; Hagedorn et al., 2022; Meşe et al., 2019; Nakamura et al., 2021; Wester et al., 2021). If students are not engaged in a positive way in class, they may lose interest in reading. Lack of vocabulary and low motivation can also cause them to feel anxious or incompetent in the face of more difficult texts. As a result, they should see positive models that support engagement in reading, then they will feel motivated to engage in the instruction process. The use of project-based learning strategies additionally provides students an increased number of opportunities to practice their reading and writing skills. In the process of producing the project, the students were capable of understanding successfully and simply understand the lesson by using this method, which allowed them to address difficulties that were based on real-world situations. In addition, the students' engagement in the learning activities was enhanced by the group strategies they developed during the project. Students working in groups have the opportunity to discuss and create solutions together (Inganah et al., 2023; Kasneci et al., 2023; Metcalf, 2021; Simanjuntak et al., 2021; Sweet & Michaelsen, 2023). This increases their sense of involvement in the learning process.

Their motivation tends to increase as they feel they have an important role in the group, which also increases their participation in the project. The students managed to dedicate themselves because of the group activities, which allowed them to share information, knowledge, and experiences. Based on the topics of competence, they successfully collaborated and contributed to the project. The group enjoyed students with different levels of skill. It inspired them to support and motivate each other. Additionally, the situation increased the relationships amongst students.

It can be concluded that the implementation of project-based learning methods improved reading skills in the Second Semester at Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu within the English

Education program. The activities conducted throughout the research implementation improved the students' knowledge and understanding. Furthermore, the activities, assignments, and exercises provided the students an additional opportunity to achieve their goals as well.

CONCLUSION

The research examined the implementation of project-based learning (PBL) techniques to enhance students' reading skills in journal articles, providing both qualitative and quantitative data that indicate PBL is an effective method for this purpose. Key findings include that PBL significantly improved students' reading skills in interpretation, detail, information utilization, clarity, and mechanics, while also increasing their engagement and motivation during lessons. The use of engaging instructional media and continuous feedback facilitated active participation and collaborative learning among students. The study suggests that PBL serves as a viable alternative method for teaching reading skills, emphasizing the importance of lecturer involvement and frequent feedback to enhance understanding. Recommendations include encouraging English lecturers to adopt PBL for effective reading instruction, advising students to embrace mistakes as part of the learning process, and suggesting that future researchers explore PBL's application in various text types and conduct needs analyses to further improve students' reading skills.

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