

Developing Students' Creative Writing Skills through Project-Based Learning

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in enhancing the creative writing skills of EFL students through a quasi-experimental design employing pre-test and post-test measurements. The research utilized a quantitative approach with a one-group pre-test post-test design. The sample consisted of 32 students from class X-2 (Excellent Class) at SMA 3 Kota Kediri in the 2025/2026 academic year, selected through purposive sampling technique. The main instrument was a creative writing test assessed using an analytic rubric covering five components: content, organization, language use, creativity, and coherence. The PjBL treatment was implemented over six instructional sessions across three weeks, involving stages of brainstorming, drafting, revising, and publishing. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and paired sample t-tests. The results demonstrated a significant improvement in students' writing ability. Pre-test scores ranged from 13 to 18, while post-test scores increased to 19 to 21. The mean improvement reached 4.94 points with a standard deviation of 1.64. The paired sample t-test yielded a t-value of 16.98 ($df = 31$) with a p-value of < 0.0001 , indicating a highly significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores. The findings provide strong empirical evidence that Project-Based Learning is effective in improving EFL students' creative writing skills. The improvement occurred consistently across all participants, indicating that PjBL benefits not only high-achieving students but also provides essential support for those with lower initial writing competence. This study contributes valuable insights into the role of structured instructional techniques in fostering writing development among English language learners.

KEYWORDS: *project-based learning, creative writing, EFL, writing skills, quasi-experimental design.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the most essential yet challenging skills in English language learning, especially for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students. According to (Harmer, 2004), writing requires learners to generate ideas, structure information, and choose appropriate language forms. Despite its importance, many students continue to struggle to express their thoughts clearly and creatively in English (Hyland, 2003).

The focus on creativity has gained increased attention in language education. Creative writing offers opportunities for learners to explore ideas imaginatively while engaging with personal emotions and experiences (Maley, 2012). Among the various types of creative writing, short story writing is particularly beneficial because it requires narrative organization, imaginative thinking, and emotional involvement components that support communicative competence (Carter, 2015). Given these considerations, there is a growing need for instructional methods that foster both writing proficiency and creativity within EFL learning environments.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in Writing Instruction

Creative writing promotes divergent thinking and encourages learners to produce original ideas, contributing significantly to writing proficiency (Maley, 2012). Short story writing, in particular, enables learners to develop narrative structure, imagination, and emotional expression, making it an effective tool for improving language production (Carter, 2015).

2.2 Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in Writing Instruction

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is a student-centered instructional approach where learners engage in meaningful tasks through phases such as brainstorming, planning, drafting, revising, and publishing. (Stoller, 2006) emphasizes that PjBL promotes learner autonomy, collaboration, and authentic language use. In writing instruction, PjBL provides a structured yet flexible environment that supports ongoing development of writing skills.

2.3 Previous Related Studies

Several studies have examined techniques for enhancing creative writing skills: (Hasibuan, 2019) found that picture series effectively helped students generate and organize ideas. (Rahayu, 2020) demonstrated that story mapping improved text cohesion and coherence. (Nurhayati, 2018) reported that creative writing activities increased students' motivation. Research by (Usrotul Husna, 2021) further shows that PjBL improved students' writing performance and motivation. However, most earlier studies relied on descriptive or qualitative approaches and did not statistically measure improvements in creative writing ability.

2.4 Research Gap

Although PjBL has been recognized as a beneficial method in writing instruction, few studies have specifically investigated its effectiveness in enhancing creative writing skills using quantitative experimental methods. This study therefore aims to fill this gap by employing a quasi-experimental design.

3.0 RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a quantitative approach to examine the effect of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) on students' creative writing skills using numerical data. As (Creswell, 2014) explains, quantitative research is appropriate when researchers aim to test objective theories by analyzing relationships among variables through statistical procedures. In this study, the independent variable is the implementation of PjBL, while the dependent variable is the students' creative writing performance.

A quasi-experimental design was used in this study, specifically a one-group pre-test and post-test design. This design is suitable for classroom research where random assignment is not feasible due to institutional or ethical constraints (Fraenkel, 2012). In this design, students' creative writing skills were measured before and after the application of PjBL. The pre-test was conducted to determine students' initial ability, followed by several instructional sessions implementing PjBL, and finally a post-test to assess improvement. The comparison between pre-test and post-test scores revealed whether PjBL had a significant impact on students' creative writing performance.

3.2 Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of all tenth-grade students at SMA 3 Kota Kediri in the 2024/2025 academic year. The sample was class X-2 (Excellent Class), consisting of 32 students selected through purposive sampling. This group was chosen because preliminary observations showed challenges in grammatical accuracy, particularly in applying English tenses in narrative writing.

3.3 Instrument of The Study

The main instrument was a creative writing test assessed using an analytic writing rubric. The test was administered twice (pre-test and post-test). The rubric evaluated five components: 1) Content, 2) Organization, 3) Language Use, 4) Creativity, and 5) Coherence. Each component was rated on a five-point scale (1 = poor to 5 = excellent). The rubric was adapted from (Weigle, 2002) and (Jacobs, 1981) and validated by two English teachers and a research advisor.

3.4 Research Procedure

The procedure consisted of three stages conducted over three weeks:

Table 1: Research Procedure

Stage	Activities	Duration
Pre-test	Students wrote a short story to measure initial ability	60 minutes
Treatment	Implementation of PjBL in six sessions covering present, past, and future tenses using brainstorming, drafting, revising, and publishing steps	3 weeks
Post-test	Students wrote another short story under the same conditions	60 minutes

The final sessions involved publishing and presenting their stories to classmates, which aimed to build confidence and encourage peer learning. Throughout the process, worksheets were used to guide and record students' progress.

3.5 Data Collection

Data collection involved writing tests, instructional materials, rubrics, and documentation. The writing tests served as the primary instruments to measure students' creative writing performance before and after the intervention. The instructional materials and worksheets supported the learning process and provided supplementary data on students' progress. The rubric was used consistently to evaluate both tests based on content, organization, language use, creativity, and coherence. All data, including students' writing samples, worksheets, teacher feedback, and rubric scores, were organized systematically in both physical and digital formats using Microsoft Excel for further analysis.

3.6 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive analysis was used to present the mean and standard deviation of the students' scores, providing an overview of performance trends. Inferential analysis was performed using a paired sample t-test to determine whether the difference between pre-test and post-test scores was statistically significant (Gravetter, 2016). The null hypothesis (H_0) stated that there was no significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores, while the alternative hypothesis (H_1) stated that there was a significant difference. The data analysis was conducted using SPSS software, which facilitates accurate computation and clear presentation of results (Pallant, 2020). This analysis provided empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning in improving students' creative writing skills.

4.0 RESULT

Based on the results of the pretest and posttest administered to 32 students, a clear improvement in their writing ability was observed following the instructional intervention. During the pretest phase, the students' scores ranged from 13 to 18, with most students achieving scores around 15 or 16. This result answers the first research question, indicating that students' initial creative writing performance was still limited. After the implementation of Project-Based Learning, the posttest scores increased significantly, ranging from 19 to 21. This finding responds to the second research question by showing that students demonstrated better organization, language use, and creativity in their writing. This improvement is consistent with (Harmer, 2004) explanation that writing instruction should provide structured guidance to help students develop coherent ideas and accurate language expression.

Further analysis of the gain scores revealed a mean improvement of 4.94 points and a standard deviation of 1.64, indicating that the progress was consistent across all participants. This aligns with (Maley, 2012) view that creative writing activities support students' engagement and imagination, enabling them to express personal ideas more confidently. To statistically verify the effectiveness of the intervention, a paired sample t-test was conducted. The analysis showed a standard error of 0.29 and a t-value of 16.98 with 31 degrees of freedom. The p-value of < 0.0001 indicates a highly significant difference between pretest and posttest scores. This result answers the third research question, confirming that Project-Based Learning had a significant influence on students' creative writing skills. This also supports previous studies which reported that PjBL enhances students' motivation and performance in writing because they are actively involved in producing meaningful outcomes (Soffiany, 2020) (Syarifah, 2019)

Overall, these findings confirm that Project-Based Learning effectively improved students' creative writing skills, and the enhancement was not due to chance. This supports (Stoller, 2006) theoretical claim that PjBL provides authentic learning experiences that promote autonomy and writing development. Thus, the improvement observed in this study provides strong empirical evidence that the use of Project-Based Learning contributed to a meaningful and significant improvement in students' ability to write creative short stories.

5.0 DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) had a significant and measurable impact on students' creative writing skills. The consistent increase in students' scores from the pretest (range: 13–18) to the posttest (range: 19–21), as well as the mean gain score of 4.94 with a standard deviation of 1.64, indicates that the improvement occurred across all participants. These results confirm that PjBL effectively enhanced students' writing performance in terms of organization, language accuracy, and creativity.

The improvement in students' writing aligns with (Harmer, 2004) perspective that learners require structured instructional support to develop coherent and meaningful written texts. Prior to the intervention, students demonstrated limited ability to structure ideas and maintain grammatical accuracy, which was evident in the lower pretest scores. Through the sequence of PjBL stages such as brainstorming, drafting, revising, and publishing students received guided opportunities to develop and refine their writing. This structured process contributed to the higher posttest results.

Moreover, the findings correspond with (Maley, 2012) claim that creative writing activities promote imagination, engagement, and learner autonomy. The collaborative and product-oriented nature of PjBL allowed students to express personal ideas more confidently and explore narrative elements more freely. This is reflected in the qualitative improvements noted during the posttest, such as clearer storylines and more creative expression.

The statistical analysis using a paired sample t-test provides strong evidence of PjBL's effectiveness. The calculated t-value of 16.98 and p-value below 0.0001 indicate a highly significant difference between pretest and posttest results. This supports earlier studies by (Soffiany, 2020) and (Syarifah, 2019), who also reported that PjBL enhances writing skills by engaging students in meaningful learning tasks. In addition, the relatively small standard deviation of the gain scores (1.64) suggests that improvement occurred across students with different proficiency levels. Even lower-achieving students demonstrated substantial progress, supporting (Stoller, 2006) assertion that PjBL can benefit diverse learners by providing authentic learning experiences and encouraging active participation.

Despite the positive outcomes, the study acknowledges certain limitations. Variations in text length during the pretest may have affected score differences. Future research may consider

setting a minimum word count and providing more detailed rubrics to ensure consistency in assessment.

Overall, the integration of theoretical perspectives, empirical results, and statistical evidence confirms that PjBL is a highly effective method for improving EFL students' creative writing skills. The instructional model not only strengthened students' linguistic and organizational abilities but also fostered creativity, confidence, and ownership in writing short stories.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The findings of this study confirm that the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) had a significant positive effect on students' creative writing skills. The substantial improvement from pretest to posttest, supported by a mean gain score of 4.94 and a highly significant t-test result ($t = 16.98$; $p < 0.0001$), demonstrates that PjBL effectively enhanced students' ability to organize ideas, construct coherent narratives, apply accurate grammar, and express creativity. These results validate the theoretical claims that structured, process-oriented, and collaborative learning experiences foster meaningful progress in students' writing performance.

These findings also carry important implications for instructional practice and curriculum development in EFL contexts. The success of PjBL in this study indicates that teachers should consider integrating project-based activities such as brainstorming, drafting, peer feedback, and publishing into writing lessons to foster student engagement, autonomy, and creativity. Curriculum designers may likewise incorporate PjBL into writing syllabi, particularly for narrative and creative tasks, as it supports competency-based learning objectives and authentic skill development. Furthermore, the process-oriented nature of PjBL suggests that writing assessment should emphasize formative feedback and iterative revision to more accurately capture students' growth.

Overall, Project-Based Learning can be considered an effective teaching method for fostering students' creative writing skills in EFL classrooms. The results of this study provide strong empirical evidence that PjBL can facilitate students' progress in developing well-organized, creative, and grammatically accurate written texts.

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