



UNPACKING PROJECT-BASED LEARNING IN ELT: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS' PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES AT AN INDONESIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL

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Abstract

Project-Based Learning (PBL) has been increasingly implemented in English Language Teaching (ELT) to promote active and meaningful learning. This study aimed to investigate the implementation of PBL in ELT by teachers at an Indonesian secondary school and explore the challenges encountered during its classroom application using Larmer's Gold Standard PBL framework. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The results showed that PBL was implemented through several stages, beginning with authenticity by connecting project topics to students' real-life experiences, followed by challenging questions to encourage students to express ideas and opinions, critical thinking activities during problem-solving and task completion, small group discussions to support collaboration among students, project presentations to allow students to present their work using English, and reflection to help students evaluate their learning process. However, several challenges were also identified, including time constraints, students' language proficiency, teachers' readiness, and students' readiness. This study highlights both the potential and the challenges of implementing PBL in ELT and emphasizes the need for adequate preparation and support to ensure more effective PBL implementation in school settings.

Keywords: English Language Teaching (ELT), secondary school, pedagogical practice, Project-Based Learning (PBL)

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INTRODUCTION

In the global context of education, the 21st century has witnessed a growing demand for innovative pedagogical approaches that promote critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity. Among these approaches, Project-Based Learning (PBL) has been widely recognized as a model that effectively addresses these demands by engaging learners in inquiry-driven, authentic, and meaningful tasks (Bell, 2010; Lucas Education Research, 2021). Scholars agree that PBL is grounded in constructivist learning theories, emphasizing that learners actively construct knowledge through exploration, social interaction, and problem-solving rather than passive reception (Blumenfeld et al., 1991; Thomas, 2000). PBL is a systematic instructional approach in which students acquire knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to complex questions, problems, or challenges (Larmer, Mergendoller, & Boss, 2015). They further introduced the Gold Standard PBL framework, which articulates seven essential design elements ensuring the rigor, relevance, and authenticity of project-based instruction, namely, a challenging problem or question, sustained inquiry, authenticity, student voice and choice, reflection, critique and revision, and a public product. This framework serves as a guiding model for educators to design projects that integrate academic learning with real-world contexts and the development of 21st-century competencies.

Within the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), PBL has gained substantial attention for its capacity to foster learner motivation, communicative competence, and autonomy (Sener & Sahin, 2020; Salam, Kolopita, & Akhmad, 2024). Moreover, recent studies have connected PBL with broader global competencies, illustrating its potential to prepare learners to participate actively in sustainable development and global citizenship (Yusupova et al., 2025). Collectively, these perspectives emphasize the pedagogical significance of implementing PBL into

English Language Teaching (ELT) to ensure that students are equipped with both linguistic proficiency and the essential skills required for success in the 21st century.

In the Indonesian context, English language education continues to face persistent challenges, particularly in fostering student engagement and promoting authentic communication skills. Previous studies have shown that conventional teaching approaches in Indonesia tend to prioritize grammar accuracy and memorization rather than facilitating meaningful language use (Adilah, 2023). As a result, implementing PBL has been regarded as a promising alternative to address these issues, as it encourages collaboration, critical thinking, and digital literacy competencies aligned with the goals of Education 4.0 (Almaida & Jaelani, 2021). Nevertheless, Indonesian teachers frequently encounter difficulties in adapting PBL due to curriculum constraints, insufficient resources, and limited professional readiness (Dewi et al., 2024).

These challenges become particularly relevant within the institutional context of Baitul Jannah Islamic Junior High School, which adopts a distinctive curriculum framework known as the six aspects of curriculum, one of which explicitly incorporates PBL as a core instructional approach (KOSP Baitul Jannah Islamic School, Academic Year 2024). However, based on preliminary interviews with the vice principal for curriculum and English teachers, the implementation of PBL within the school's student project assessment program has not yet reached its optimal potential. Although PBL is included as one of the core learning approaches, it is not consistently implemented across subjects and classrooms. The vice principal explained that many projects are conducted only as final tasks and do not always follow the complete sequence of PBL stages, such as inquiry, reflection, and public presentation, which causes the process to lack direction and coherence (Preliminary Interview, vice principal for curriculum, 2025). As a result, some students continue to obtain low achievement scores in their project assessments, reflecting limited improvement in learning outcomes and performance.

Additionally, teachers reported several challenges in implementing PBL effectively, including time constraints in completing project phases and difficulties in assessing students' work fairly and comprehensively (Preliminary Interview, English Teachers, 2025). These findings are consistent with broader challenges identified in the literature, where limited time, inadequate resources, and unclear assessment criteria often hinder the success of PBL implementation (Dewi et al., 2024; Almaida & Jaelani, 2021). Despite this curricular foundation, the practical implementation of PBL in ELT at Baitul Jannah junior high school remains underexplored, particularly in balancing innovative instructional design with classroom realities. Therefore, examining how PBL is applied in this context is both timely and necessary to enrich the existing literature and to provide practical insights for teachers on how to integrate PBL effectively while addressing the challenges that arise in classroom implementation.

Previous studies provide valuable insights into the implementation of PBL in ELT across various settings. Adilah (2023) reported that PBL improves motivation and language skills but faces challenges in implementation. Almaida and Jaelani (2021) emphasized its contribution to developing critical and digital competencies in the context of Education 4.0. Ly et al. (2020) demonstrated its motivational benefits in Vietnam, while Katekina et al. (2020) highlighted improvements in communicative competence and autonomy in Russia. Nigora and Asadbek (2023) revealed gains in student responsibility and participation in Uzbekistan, and Putimasurai et al. (2024) noted that collaborative PBL fosters teamwork but requires teacher readiness. On the other hand, Tuyen and Tien (2021) identified both benefits and design challenges in ESP contexts, whereas Yamin et al. (2023) described step-by-step implementation strategies in Indonesian schools. Romsy and Sulistyarningsih (2024) confirmed its positive effect on writing skills in junior high schools, and Yusupova et al. (2025) showed how PBL contributes to building sustainable competencies in teacher education.

Although these studies (Adilah, 2023; Almaida & Jaelani, 2021; Ly, 2020; Katekina et al., 2020; Nigora & Asadbek, 2023; Putimasurai et al., 2024; Tuyen & Tien, 2021; Yamin, 2023; Romsy & Sulistyarningsih, 2024; Yusupova, 2025) highlight the effectiveness of PBL, there remains a gap in research focusing on its implementation and the challenges faced in junior high school ELT in Indonesia. Based on the previous explanation, this present study formulate two research questions:

RQ1: How is PBL implemented in English language teaching at an Indonesian Secondary School?

RQ2: What challenges do teachers encounter in implementing PBL in English language teaching at an Indonesian Secondary School?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design to assess how English teachers integrate Project-Based learning into their classroom practices and what challenges they encounter during the process at an Indonesian secondary school. The authors used a purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling

technique that enables the authors to intentionally choose individuals with rich and relevant experiences. The two teachers were selected because they had consistently implemented Project-Based Learning in English classes for several years and were among the few teachers in the school who regularly integrated project work into the curriculum. There were three sampling technique justifications, namely experience-based, involved in PBL, and willingness to participate (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015).

Data and Data analysis

The study was performed in Baitul Jannah Islamic Junior High School, located in Bandar Lampung, Indonesia. The data were obtained from grades 7-8. This study involved two English teachers who actively implemented PBL in their English classrooms from November 2025 to January 2026. The data consisted of interview responses obtained from two English teachers who implemented PBL in grades 7 and 8. They were Mr. ABP and Ms. AYP (anonymous).

Data Collecting Technique

This study used semi-structured interviews. Interviews are central in qualitative research because they enable researchers to explore participants' lived experiences and perspectives in depth (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The semi-structured format provides both consistency across respondents and flexibility to follow up on emerging themes, ensuring that teachers' views on implementation and challenges are thoroughly captured. Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with each teacher. The interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to ensure participants could express their experiences comfortably. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

In this phase, all interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis, following Creswell and Creswell's (2023) systematic steps. Such steps were selected for their flexibility and effectiveness. The first step was reading through all the data to obtain a general sense of the material and to reflect on its overall meaning. The second step involves coding, in which significant statements were identified and grouped under relevant labels. After coding, the next stage was developing categories and themes, where related codes were synthesized into broader themes that capture the essence of participants' experiences. The final stage involved interpreting the meaning of the themes in light of the research questions and the theoretical framework guiding the study.

In this study, interview data were coded to identify strategies of PBL implementation and the challenges encountered by teachers. Categories such as authentic tasks, student-centered practices, teacher readiness, and assessment difficulties are used to organize the data. These categories are then synthesized into themes that explain the broader dynamics of implementing PBL into ELT. Creswell and Creswell (2023) emphasize that interpretation should not only restate findings but also connect them to theoretical perspectives and prior studies.

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the qualitative findings, the authors applied Creswell's (2023) validity strategies, namely member checking. This is a technique where the authors shared their findings with the participants (teachers) who provided the data. The authors allowed the teachers to confirm the accuracy of the authors' understanding, provide additional context, and potentially challenge the authors' interpretations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are reported using two RQs. There are six major themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of the data collected through semi-structured interviews.

RQ1: How is PBL implemented in English language teaching at an Indonesian Secondary School?

Theme 1: Authenticity. The implementation of PBL in ELT was carried out through projects that were closely related to students' real-life experiences. The findings indicate that both teachers designed project activities by selecting familiar and meaningful topics, allowing students to connect English learning with their daily lives.

This practice was clearly illustrated in the teacher's explanation during the interview, as shown in the following extract:

Extract 1:

“Yesterday the last project that I gave to the students was an example of describing people and indeed describing people I gave the theme of their idol so that's in their lives they like it actually, it's not just idols but things too or things that they like, that means that's what is in their lives so that in making content or content is based on what they experience.” (Interview, Ms. AYP)

Extract 1 indicates that the project themes were deliberately connected to students' lived experiences, allowing them to draw on familiar contexts when producing descriptive texts. Furthermore, the teacher noted that the use of personally relevant topics contributed to increased student enthusiasm and engagement during the project-based learning process.

A similar pattern was also identified in the interview data obtained from Mr. ABP. He explained that authenticity was implemented by selecting learning materials that reflected real-life situations. In particular, narrative texts were used as a medium to connect the project tasks with students' everyday experiences, allowing them to relate the learning content to familiar contexts. Based on extract 2:

Extract 2:

“So, in my opinion, it is relevant according to real life, because this narrative is important. What is the importance? It can show moral values.” (Interview, Mr. ABP)

Furthermore, Mr. ABP highlighted the significance of using narrative texts in project activities. He explained that narrative texts played an important role in helping students to understand and internalize messages related to everyday life. According to his explanation, the values embedded in narrative texts enabled students to connect the learning content with real-life situations, making the project activities more meaningful for them.

Theme 2: Challenging Questions. According to the interview with Ms. AYP, challenging questions were used to encourage students to think critically and actively engage with the lesson content. She explained that instead of asking questions with fixed answers, she preferred to ask questions that required students to express their opinions and provide explanations related to the topic being discussed. This instructional approach was explained by Ms. AYP during the interview, as reflected in the following extract:

Extract 3:

“Then we make a trigger question, and also we usually connect it with the reality of life or real life, for example, a degrading expression example, have you ever had friends greet in English? How to do it?” (Interview, Ms. AYP)

This extract indicates that the teacher used open-ended and context-related questions as a guiding instructional strategy throughout the learning process. These questions were posed both before and during project work to facilitate students' independent idea development and to minimize reliance on direct teacher explanation. Mr. ABP also explained in the following extract:

Extract 4:

“I ask questions that make them think, not just remember. Oh yes, so before the trigger question, Abi usually prepares a PPT presentation for the taught.” (Interview, Mr. ABP)

Similar findings were also found in the interview with Mr. ABP. He explained that challenging questions were used to help students understand the lesson more deeply, especially when working with narrative texts. The questions encouraged students to think about the content and meaning of the text rather than simply recalling information.

Theme 3: Critical Thinking. This practice was reflected in the interview with Ms. AYP, who described how critical thinking was fostered during project work. She explained that students were encouraged to analyze learning materials and articulate their ideas as part of the project activities, emphasizing that completing the task alone was not sufficient without understanding the content and meaning of what was being learned. This instructional practice was illustrated in the following extract:

Extract 5:

“I ask them to analyze the material first before doing the project.” (Interview, Ms. AYP)

Extract 5 shows that students were guided to engage in analytical thinking before beginning the project task. In addition, the teacher encouraged students to provide opinions and reasons related to the topic being discussed, which required them to think more deeply about the learning material during the project process. This practice was illustrated in the following interview extracts:

Extract 6:

“If we look at the thieves, we must not disobey our parents. then we respect each other. there are also stories in fables, yes, animals. I ask the students to understand the meaning of the story.” (Interview, Mr. ABP)

Based on extract 6, it indicates that students were consistently encouraged to identify moral values and interpret the messages conveyed in narrative texts as part of the project activities. In addition, students were required to explain their thoughts and provide reasons when responding to questions related to the projects. This approach required students to engage more deeply with the learning material and to articulate their understanding beyond surface-level comprehension.

Theme 4: Small Group Discussion (SGD). Interview data indicated that small group discussion was applied during the project process by organizing students into small groups to support collaborative work. Through this grouping strategy, students were provided with opportunities to share ideas and work together while completing project tasks. This classroom practice was described by Ms. AYP in the interview, as illustrated in the following extract:

Extract 7:

“Group work helps them share ideas and support each other. This is the process after there is usually a discussion. I divide the students into small groups.” (Interview, Ms. AYP)

Similar practices were also identified from the interview with Mr. ABP. He explained that students were asked to work in groups when engaging with the learning material, particularly during discussion activities. This practice was illustrated in the following interview extracts:

Extract 8:

“So, create a group first. We share. We make a group. Later, each one will be a group.” (Interview, Mr. ABP)

This practice, as described by Mr. ABP in the interview, allowed students to interact with their peers during the learning process, particularly through group discussions that encouraged the exchange of ideas and collaborative engagement in project activities.

Theme 5: Project Presentation. Interview data indicated that project presentation was implemented as part of the PBL process by requiring students to present the results of their completed projects. Through presentation activities, students were provided with opportunities to explain their project outcomes and share their work with the class. This practice was described by Ms. AYP during the interview, as illustrated in the following extracts:

Extract 9:

“After finishing the project, they present their work.” (Interview, Ms. AYP)

Extract 10:

“They have to present it in front of the class.” (Interview, Ms. AYP)

These extracts highlight that the teacher implemented project presentation as an instructional stage following the completion of project tasks. At this stage, students demonstrated and explained their work to classmates as part of the learning process.

Interview findings from Mr. ABP showed that project presentation was an integral part of the learning activities, in which students were required to present their project outcomes to the class. Through this activity, students were encouraged to communicate the results of their work and engage in spoken English during the presentation process. This was reflected in Mr. ABP’s explanation, as seen in the following interview extracts:

Extract 11:

“So, each of these groups can present the four types of text in the text narrative. So, they will have different moral messages in their presentation.” (Interview, Mr. ABP)

Extract 12:

“They show the result to the class, then present it so that they can also get used to speaking English.” (Interview, Mr. ABP)

From these responses, it can be seen that presentation activities were used to provide students with opportunities to display their project results and explain the moral messages derived from the narrative texts. The presentation stage also enabled students to practice speaking English while sharing their work with classmates.

Theme 6: Reflection and Feedback. Based on the findings from interviews, classroom observation, and document analysis, reflection and feedback were implemented as part of the PBL process after students completed their projects. The findings indicate that teachers provided time for students to reflect on their work and received feedback related to their project performance.

Interview evidence from Ms. AYP showed that reflection was conducted after students completed the project presentation stage. At this point, students were guided to review their work and consider their learning experiences throughout the project process. Reflection was positioned as an activity that encouraged students to think back on what they had done and what they had learned during the project. Ms. AYP described this process in the interview, as reflected in the following extracts:

Extract 13:

“I ask them to reflect on what they have well there, I give some suggestions for them, like that, yes, for the limit rule, there maybe something that we need to convey that it is not too common.” (Interview, Ms. AYP)

Ms. AYP also explained that feedback was delivered directly after students completed their tasks. Furthermore, she stated that feedback was provided to help students understand their strengths and areas for improvement. Similar findings were also identified from the interview with Mr. ABP. He explained that reflection and feedback were also part of his teaching practice after project activities. The interview data is reflected in the following extracts:

Extract 14:

“Then they were also told the writing procedure as well. Don't let them have difficulties in the next material, oh what is the writing? then this is really not the text structure. that's why I explained again, I corrected and also gave revisions related to what the initial presentation was like, then also the most important pronunciation, writing, so that they could improve.” (Interview, Mr. ABP)

Mr. ABP further explained that feedback was provided to support students' understanding of their learning outcomes. Feedback was delivered by clarifying aspects of students' work that required improvement, particularly in relation to pronunciation, writing accuracy, and text structure. Through this feedback process, students were guided to recognize their mistakes and refine their project performance during subsequent learning activities.

RQ2: What challenges do teachers encounter in implementing PBL in English language teaching at an Indonesian Secondary School?

Theme 1: Time Constraints. According to the interview with Ms. AYP, the available instructional time was often insufficient to accommodate all stages of the project process. She explained that project activities required more time than conventional teaching activities, particularly when students needed time to discuss, work collaboratively, and complete project tasks. As a result, managing time during project implementation became challenging. The data is reflected in the following extracts:

Extract 15:

“Here is our material to our students, that's the most challenging, so sometimes for the timing of learning, it will automatically go back. Well, usually the project will also continue to the next learning or the next meeting, that's it, for example, at least at the time, because it's not enough to deliver material to students, especially English, it seems like we really have to make sure that our students understand.” (Interview, Ms. AYP)

Ms. AYP further emphasized that limited instructional time sometimes prevented the project from being completed as planned within the scheduled lesson. As a result, certain project activities had to be adjusted or extended beyond the initial plan to accommodate the available time. This condition affected the pacing of project implementation during classroom instruction.

Similar challenges were also identified in Mr. ABP's classroom. According to his interview, time limitation influenced the execution of project activities, especially when projects required students to engage in discussions

and complete tasks collaboratively. He explained that project-based activities demanded more time compared to regular classroom instruction.

Extract 16:

“This is the challenge during this project-based learning related to the most important thing is time. We still don't have enough time to learning, then there is also the limitation of what it is called.” (Interview, Mr. ABP)

A similar issue was also observed in Mr. ABP's classroom. Interview data revealed that time limitations affected the implementation of project-based activities, particularly when students were required to engage in group discussions and complete tasks collaboratively. Compared to regular classroom instruction, project-based activities demanded a longer duration to allow students to fully carry out each stage of the project.

Theme 2: Language Proficiency. According to the interview with Ms. AYP, students tended to use Indonesian more frequently during project work. Although the project activities were designed to support English learning, students often relied on their first language when discussing ideas and completing tasks. This situation was particularly noticeable during presentation preparation, as described in the teacher's explanation below:

Extract 17:

“Usually, I give directions for the presentation in English; well, the most difficult is there. Most of them still speak Indonesian.” (Interview, Ms. AYP)

Based on extract 17, this condition showed that students limited English proficiency became a challenge during project implementation, particularly when students were required to communicate ideas, collaborate with peers, and present their work in English. Similar findings were also identified from the interview with Mr. ABP. According to him, students experienced difficulties in using English during project activities, which affected their confidence and fluency.

Theme 3: Teacher Readiness. Based on the findings from interviews, classroom observation, and document analysis, teacher readiness was identified as one of the challenges in implementing Project-Based Learning (PBL) in English Language Teaching. The findings indicate that teachers faced difficulties related to designing PBL activities, preparing lesson plans, and conducting appropriate assessment for project-based learning.

According to the interview with Ms. AYP, preparing project-based lessons required more effort compared to regular teaching. She explained that designing projects, planning activities, and determining assessment criteria were challenging parts of implementing PBL. Based on the interview data from the following extracts:

Extract 18:

“Preparing the project design is not easy such as our assessment is a separate assessment especially our assessment is if in pbl it is also a lot.” (Interview, Ms. AYP)

Extract 19:

“Sometimes it is difficult to design project tasks, I have to prepare the lesson plan carefully. For the material, we also refer to the curriculum and syllabus, and also those in the book. The curriculum supports PBL, but guidance is limited.” (Interview, Ms. AYP)

Ms. AYP explained that preparing project-based lessons was not an easy task, particularly because assessments in PBL are separate and more extensive than in regular teaching. She emphasized that designing project tasks and activities required careful planning, taking into account the curriculum, syllabus, and reference materials in textbooks. While the curriculum generally supports PBL, she noted that guidance on how to implement it effectively is limited, making lesson planning even more challenging. Overall, she highlighted that aligning project activities with learning objectives and preparing appropriate assessments demands significant time and effort from teachers.

Similar challenges were also identified from the interview with Mr. ABP. According to him, implementing PBL requires teachers to be well-prepared, particularly in designing learning activities and assessing students' project work. Based on the interview data from the following extracts:

Extract 20:

“The assessment is also important, because the assessment is not only group, but seen from an individual perspective as well, so I have to take more than one assessment for students” (Interview, Mr. ABP)

According to Mr. ABP, assessment plays a crucial role in PBL and presents unique challenges. He explained that evaluations must consider not only group performance but also individual contributions, requiring multiple assessment approaches for each student. In addition, Mr. ABP highlighted the difficulty of designing lesson plans that follow a step-by-step PBL framework, noting that guidance from experts was often inconsistent.

Theme 4: Students Readiness. Based on the findings from interviews, classroom observation, and document analysis, students' readiness was identified as a challenge in implementing PBL in ELT. The findings indicate that students' confidence and readiness to actively participate in project activities influenced the implementation of PBL in the classroom.

According to the interview with Ms. AYP, some students were not confident in participating actively during project activities. She explained that students tended to hesitate when they were required to speak, share ideas, or present their work. These the interview data from the following extracts:

Extract 21:

“The challenge is indeed again student knowledge, so there are indeed some who may be able to quickly join the learning or material, there are also those who still need to be repeated over and over again.”
(Interview, Ms. AYP)

The teacher also mentioned that students often felt hesitant to express their ideas in front of others. In addition, Ms. AYP explained that students' lack of confidence affected their participation during group work and presentations. She also mentioned that students needed encouragement to participate more actively.

Discussion

Interpretation of Findings under Larmer's Model

The discussion addresses the research questions by first interpreting the implementation of PBL through Larmer's core components, including challenging problems, sustained inquiry, authenticity, student voice and choice, reflection, critique and revision, and public product. It then examines how PBL practices were manifested in the English classroom, followed by an analysis of how challenges interacted with the teaching context and student characteristics. Finally, the discussion synthesizes findings from interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis to provide a triangulated understanding of PBL implementation.

The findings of this study indicate that PBL in ELT at Baitul Jannah Islamic Junior High School was initiated through the use of guiding and challenging questions that framed students' project activities. Teachers introduced projects by presenting problems related to students' learning context and encouraged them to respond, discuss, and develop ideas collaboratively. These challenging questions functioned as the driving force of the projects and helped students understand the purpose and expected outcomes of each task. When interpreted through Larmer's Gold Standard Project-Based Learning model, this practice reflects the element of Challenging Problem or Question, which emphasizes that a project should be driven by a meaningful, open-ended question that stimulates inquiry and critical thinking. In this study, the use of challenging questions supported students in engaging with English learning beyond routine exercises and prompted them to apply language skills in more purposeful ways.

This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Almaida and Jaelani (2021), who reported that PBL implementation in secondary education promoted students' critical thinking and collaboration when learning activities were structured around meaningful problems. Similarly, the presence of challenging questions in the current study encouraged students to analyze tasks, exchange ideas, and work together to complete their projects, indicating alignment with the principles of problem-driven learning.

In addition, the findings can be partially associated with the systematic review by Adilah (2023), which revealed that PBL enhances students' motivation and language skills when learners are actively engaged in solving meaningful tasks. In the present study, challenging questions served as an initial stimulus that motivated students to participate in project activities and communicate their ideas in English. However, Adilah (2023) also noted that PBL implementation often faces practical challenges, suggesting that the effectiveness of challenging problems depends on how well they are adapted to classroom conditions.

Nevertheless, the findings of this study also show that students' responses to challenging questions varied depending on their confidence and language proficiency. This result differs slightly from the findings of Nigora and Asadbek (2023), who reported higher levels of student responsibility and engagement in responding to PBL tasks. The contrast indicates that while challenging problems are central to PBL, their impact may be influenced by learners' readiness and the level of scaffolding provided by teachers. Overall, this discussion suggests that the use of challenging problems or questions in the observed classrooms aligns with Larmer's (2015) PBL framework and supports previous research highlighting the role of problem-based tasks in enhancing student engagement and

critical thinking. At the same time, the findings emphasize the need for teachers to carefully design and scaffold challenging questions to ensure that all students can meaningfully participate in project-based English learning.

After the projects were introduced through challenging questions, the learning process did not stop at initial problem formulation but continued through ongoing inquiry during project implementation. The findings of this study show that sustained inquiry was evident in the implementation of PBL in ELT at Baitul Jannah Islamic Junior High School, although the depth and continuity of inquiry varied across classroom activities. Students were involved in an ongoing process of exploring ideas, discussing information, and refining project outcomes through repeated interactions with peers and teachers. Inquiry was not treated as a one-time activity but developed progressively throughout the project stages.

According to Larmer's Gold Standard Project-Based Learning framework, sustained inquiry emphasizes a continuous cycle of questioning, investigation, discussion, and revision that enables learners to deepen their understanding over time (Larmer, 2015). The findings of this study suggest that such an inquiry cycle was present, as students revisited project goals, negotiated meaning, and improved their work gradually rather than completing tasks in isolation.

This finding is consistent with the study by Ly et al. (2020), who reported that PBL implementation in EFL classrooms supported continuous engagement and improved students' communicative competence through sustained interaction during project activities. Similarly, in the present study, inquiry processes encouraged students to use English repeatedly while discussing ideas and collaborating on project tasks. In addition, the findings align with Nigora and Asadbek (2023), who found that sustained engagement in PBL increased students' responsibility and active participation. In this study, students were required to contribute ideas, seek information, and complete tasks collaboratively, indicating that sustained inquiry supported both engagement and learner responsibility.

Moreover, the inquiry practices observed in this study can be related to Katekina et al. (2019), who emphasized that continuous involvement in problem-solving activities fostered learner autonomy. Likewise, students in the present context were gradually encouraged to manage their learning processes and take initiative during project work, reflecting the autonomous dimension of sustained inquiry. From a broader ELT perspective, the findings also correspond with Almaida and Jaelani (2021), who highlighted that PBL promotes critical thinking and collaboration when students are continuously challenged to analyze problems and refine solutions. Sustained inquiry in the present study similarly required students to think critically and collaboratively as projects progressed.

Furthermore, the inquiry process identified in this study can be partially associated with the findings of Romsy and Sulistyansih (2024), who reported that extended project engagement improved students' writing skills and confidence. Although their study focused on writing outcomes, the improvement was closely linked to sustained inquiry processes that required students to revise and refine their work over time.

However, despite these positive indications, the findings also suggest that sustained inquiry was occasionally constrained by classroom realities such as time limitations and students' varying levels of language proficiency. This observation is comparable to Putimasurai et al. (2024), who reported that while PBL enhanced collaboration, its implementation was influenced by teacher readiness and classroom conditions. In the present study, teachers' scaffolding played a crucial role in maintaining inquiry continuity.

Overall, this discussion indicates that sustained inquiry was a significant component of PBL implementation in the observed ELT context and resonates with Larmer's (2015) framework and a wide range of previous studies. At the same time, the findings highlight that sustained inquiry requires careful planning, adequate time, and teacher support to be implemented effectively in EFL classrooms.

How Challenges Interact with Teaching Context and Student Characteristics

The findings of this study indicate that the challenges encountered in implementing PBL in ELT at Baitul Jannah Islamic Junior High School were closely intertwined with the teaching context and students' characteristics. Rather than standing as isolated obstacles, these challenges interacted dynamically with instructional conditions, teacher preparedness, and learners' language proficiency and confidence.

One prominent challenge identified in the findings was time constraint, which influenced how PBL activities were planned and executed. Limited instructional time often required teachers to adjust project scope and pacing, particularly when students needed additional guidance. This challenge corresponds with Tuyen and Tien (2021), who reported that time management and assessment demands frequently complicate PBL implementation in EFL contexts. Similarly, in the present study, teachers had to balance curriculum demands with the iterative nature of project work.

Teacher readiness also emerged as a significant factor shaping PBL implementation. Designing projects, preparing lesson plans, and developing appropriate assessment strategies required substantial preparation and pedagogical understanding. This finding aligns with Putimasurai et al. (2024), who emphasized that teacher readiness plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of PBL, particularly in collaborative and project-oriented classrooms. In the observed context, teachers' experience and familiarity with PBL influenced how confidently they facilitated project activities.

In addition to instructional factors, students' language proficiency notably affected their participation in PBL activities. Many students tended to rely on their first language during discussions, especially when expressing complex ideas. This challenge is consistent with Ly et al. (2020), who found that although PBL enhances communicative competence, learners with limited proficiency may initially struggle to use English consistently. In the present study, teachers responded by providing scaffolding and gradual support to encourage English use during project work.

Students' confidence and readiness further shaped the implementation of PBL. While some students actively participated in discussions and presentations, others were more hesitant, particularly during public product presentations. This finding resonates with Romsy and Sulistyarningsih (2024), who reported that student confidence plays a key role in determining the success of PBL, especially in language production tasks. In the present context, confidence levels influenced how students exercised voice and choice within project activities.

Moreover, the challenges identified in this study can be partially associated with Adilah (2023), who highlighted that while PBL offers pedagogical benefits, its implementation is often constrained by contextual factors such as classroom conditions and institutional demands. Similarly, the interaction between time limitations, teacher preparedness, and student readiness in this study shaped the overall effectiveness of PBL implementation.

How was PBL Manifested in the ELT

The findings of this study demonstrate that PBL was manifested in ELT at Baitul Jannah Islamic Junior High School through a series of interconnected instructional practices that emphasized student-centered learning, meaningful language use, and collaborative engagement. PBL was not implemented as an isolated teaching strategy; rather, it was integrated into daily classroom activities, project tasks, and assessment practices.

One prominent manifestation of PBL in the observed classrooms was the shift from teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered interaction. Students actively participated in group discussions, project planning, and presentations, while teachers functioned primarily as facilitators who guided learning processes and provided scaffolding.

This finding aligns with Ly et al. (2020), who emphasized that PBL enhances communicative competence when learners are actively engaged in collaborative and interactive tasks. Similarly, students in this study were encouraged to use English as a medium of communication throughout the project process. In addition, PBL was manifested through the integration of authentic and contextual learning tasks. Projects were designed to reflect students' real-life contexts, interests, and social environments, which supported meaningful language use. This finding corresponds with Yamin et al. (2023), who reported that contextual PBL implementation in Islamic educational settings increased student engagement and relevance of learning. In the present study, authenticity helped students relate English learning to their everyday experiences.

Another key manifestation of PBL was the emphasis on collaboration and peer interaction. Students worked in small groups to discuss ideas, divide responsibilities, and complete project tasks collaboratively. This collaborative learning environment resonates with Putimasurai et al. (2024), who found that PBL enhances teamwork and cooperative learning outcomes. Through group work, students in this study developed not only language skills but also interpersonal and collaborative competencies.

Furthermore, PBL implementation in this study emphasized the development of language skills through meaningful project outputs. Students practiced reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills as part of project activities, such as preparing written materials, discussing ideas, and presenting final products.

This finding is consistent with Romsy and Sulistyarningsih (2024), who reported that PBL contributes to improvements in students' writing skills and confidence when language learning is embedded in project work. From an instructional perspective, PBL was also manifested through formative assessment practices, including feedback, reflection, and revision. Teachers provided ongoing feedback to guide student learning, and students were encouraged to reflect on their progress and revise their work. This practice aligns with Almaida and Jaelani (2021), who emphasized that PBL supports critical thinking and continuous learning through reflective and evaluative activities.

Moreover, the manifestation of PBL in this study reflects a balance between structure and flexibility. While teachers designed project guidelines and learning objectives, students were given opportunities to exercise autonomy and make choices within project activities. This balance corresponds with Katekina et al. (2019), who highlighted that PBL fosters learner autonomy when students are allowed to take an active role in learning decisions. Overall, the discussion indicates that PBL at Baitul Jannah Islamic Junior High School was manifested through student-centered instruction, authentic project tasks, collaborative learning, and continuous language practice. These practices collectively supported meaningful English learning and align with findings from previous studies. However, the effectiveness of PBL manifestation depended on contextual factors, including teacher

readiness, time availability, and students' language proficiency, which are further discussed in the following section.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the implementation of PBL in ELT at Baitul Jannah Islamic Junior High School, focusing on classroom practice and challenges encountered during implementation. The findings indicate that PBL was implemented systematically and intentionally, following Larmer's Gold Standard Project-Based Learning model. Essential components such as challenging questions, authentic projects, sustained inquiry, student voice and choice, reflection, critique and revision, and public product presentation were integrated into classroom practices. A notable finding is that teachers adapted these components to students' varying English proficiency levels by providing scaffolding, differentiated tasks, and ongoing guidance, demonstrating flexible and context-sensitive application of PBL.

The study identified key challenges influencing PBL implementation, including limited instructional time, students' varying proficiency and confidence, and teacher readiness. These challenges were addressed through strategic project modifications, balancing curriculum requirements with project activities, and continuous teacher support, ensuring that projects remained meaningful, engaging, and achievable for all students.

In conclusion, PBL enhances student engagement, collaboration, and authentic language use when carefully planned and contextually adapted. These findings offer practical guidance for ELT teachers and contribute to a deeper understanding of context-specific strategies in Islamic junior high school settings. They also highlight the importance of teacher adaptability and project contextualization as critical factors for successful PBL implementation, providing clear directions for future pedagogical practice and research.

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