



## Teachers' Perception Towards Project-Based Learning in Teaching English to Young Learners: A Case in Mandalika Intercultural School

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### **Abstract**

This study examines teachers' perception of project-based learning when teaching English to young learners. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method to collect data from interviews. The data was then collected to find out teachers in Mandalika Intercultural School when they view PjBL. The results show that the teachers made use of PjBL and its implementation bring a positive impact on young learners' language acquisition. This study also mentions students get to engage with the real world, being self-regulated learners, motivated, collaborative, critical, and communicative. The use of PjBL brings more positive impacts than conventional teaching methods.

**Keywords:** *Project-Based Learning; Teachers' Perception; Young Learners*

### **Introduction**

Education around the world is very important to make students the skills to deal with the environment around them. An educator is certainly a core element in helping students achieves these skills. With such a demand, teachers need to adopt a method that is considered appropriate to be implemented in their teaching. A method in language teaching is a set of guidelines conceptualized by the professionals' beliefs and put into practice by teachers to use in the classroom (Nunan:2003). There has been much debate from the past until now about which method is considered the most promising for teaching English, especially in countries that status English as their foreign or second language. Moreover, the teacher plays an important role as a person who facilitates students so that language learning becomes successful. Teachers are crucial to the teaching and learning process because they should assist/support students in synthesizing knowledge, communicating information, collaborating with information, and validating information (Priyatni and Asari: 2019).

In the present day, with the latest curriculum in Indonesia, namely the Merdeka curriculum, which is promoted for conducting learning is not only limited to the classroom but can also be done outside the classroom, with more varied learning sources (Maipita: 2021). Moreover, the Merdeka curriculum upholds students' critical thinking and improves their communicative skills in English when its status as English as a foreign language in Indonesia. In the embodiment of the curriculum the teacher must be able to support students in skills in critical thinking, solving problems, being creative and

innovative, and being skilled in communicating (Manalu, et.al: 2022). Currently, there are a growing number of kindergarten and primary schools started to introduce English as the medium of instruction to make young learners able to communicate effectively at a very young age. Merdeka curriculum also provides flexibility for teachers to carry out learning in accordance with the stages of achievement and development of each student and make adjustments to the context to build student creativity and innovation (Ministry of Education). With the demand from these circumstances, to improve students' communication skills at a young age, the teachers need to choose the best method, strategies, and techniques in implementing the language learning teaching process. This condition is answered through the implementation of one of the Methods that exist in language learning which is Project Based Learning (PjBL) since its principle is a valuable inquiry approach and is in line with the demanding curriculum used in Indonesia. This method is applied as a solution to keep students motivated in the classroom. Project-based learning is defined as active, student-centered methods of instruction as those that enable students to work individually or in groups to solve problems from the real-world condition to acquire high-order thinking skills (Ferrero et al., 2022). Project-based learning allows students to apply real-world activities and processes that are similar to what professional adults do, like investigating questions, proposing hypotheses and explanations, discuss and trying out new ideas in their lives (Krajcik and Blumenfeld: 2006). Implementation of project-based learning (PjBL) is one form of implementing the Merdeka curriculum in Indonesia. Project learning activities are carried out by children to make contributions and impacts on the surrounding environment to solve problems scientifically (Nurhidayati et al., 2022). Learning using the Project Based Learning Model will stimulate children's skills so that each project produced by children increases conceptual understanding and simultaneously answers questions on other important issues (Sari, et a,l: 2023). Moreover, the teachers' role in PjBL is to become a coach or supervisor after giving the project based on the topic, teachers can also provide students with additional information, and assist students (Yamada:2020).

The case in teaching English to young learners with PJBL has become the best way due to children having the nature of learning from here and now where learning will be meaningful when they can see it in their lives directly. The meaningful word aims at how the projects are authentic and increase student interest. Language analysis and manipulation in the abstract are not yet skills that learners have mastered. By deciphering important messages, they learn (Garton et al., 2019). In project-based learning, it encourages students to play an active role in the learning process as well as making students respect the opinions of others in their real life. There are four major principles of project-based learning according to Krajcik and Blumenfeld: 2006): a) active construction, students are best when learning through interaction and engaging in real-world experiences, the teachers make sure students participate actively to build their knowledge as they started to explorer, observer and interact with surrounding world b) situated learning, the learning process would be successful if it is situated in an authentic real-world context which is students involved in practices, c) social interaction, the need to work together in community by sharing, using, and debating ideas to achieve the goals and d) cognitive tools, the help of tools both online or stuff that helps students achieve the learning experience. The project should also make sure that students conduct research and collaborate in order to improve their ability to solve problems, motivation, and creativity. However, Yamada (2020) asserts that the implementation of PjBL can be done in two ways, those are individual teaching and collaborative teaching, and solo teaching is considered more appropriate for PjBL.

The success of PjBL learning models to be implemented in the Merdeka curriculum have mentioned by Dewi in Halimatusyadiyah et al., (2022), through it students' motivation become increase, become active collaboration with their classmates, independent learning, increase students creativity, high academic performance, ability in problem-solving and create authentic learning circumstances. Moreover, through the project, students will get highly desirable benefits, independent, self-regulated learning, and meaningful learn (Ferrero et al., 2021). In conclusion, the use of project-based learning in language learning and teaching become more suitable than the conventional model.

This research provides an overview of teachers' perception of integrating project-based learning in their classrooms based on their experience teaching young learners. Due to teachers' perception is affected by how they see the implication of project-based learning during the teaching and learning process, the selection of teaching strategies, and students' needs. Teachers' perception is the notion that they have faith in their own ability to be successful educators (Choi et al., 2019). Perception means how teachers perceive and interpret information based on their experiences and phenomena that occur in their surroundings. Teachers' perception in this case is how the teachers judge and view the use of project-based learning during the teaching and learning process whether it is positive or negative in teaching English to young learners in Mandalika Intercultural School since there is still a lack of literature related to the issue. A project can already be condemned to failure if teachers feel that PBL is too difficult and challenging (Haddad:2022).

## **Method**

Descriptive qualitative research was conducted to obtain in-depth knowledge regarding the application of project-based learning in teaching English to young learners. The data is described in the form of dialogue of interviews with teachers who are now teaching at Mandalika Intercultural School. Interviews were conducted with 3 teachers who are now teaching young learners, which is the case of Kindergarten students. Interview instruments were adopted and developed by Haddad (2022) for the validity of the data to be displayed. To analyze teachers' perception towards the implementation of project-based learning, the data is analyzed, classified, identified, and described teachers' perception in teaching young learners to answer the question regarding the issues.

## **Findings**

During the interview session with the teachers, all participants identified their perceptions of project-based learning as applied to teaching young learners. Classes for Kindergarten are conducted for 30 minutes each meeting session on each subject and each class of students is no more than 20 young learners. They mentioned some of the positive perceptions and challenges during the class session. At the time of the interview, participants were given the initials Participants I, II, and III to maintain privacy. The use of project-based learning in schools based on the results of interviews, that the use of project-based learning is used every culmination day or when there are certain projects at school. The dialogues put in the findings session are only a few that is chosen.

### **Participant I**

*"The use project based in learning if there is a project currently in progress, such as art class, for math tends to use worksheets."*

During the interview session, the teachers also agreed that by using project-based learning, learning is easier and students have enthusiasm when given a project. Related to language, teachers are more dominant when giving instructions in English because most of their students come from bilingual families. The average teachers also have background knowledge about the use of project-based learning in language learning and teaching because they are graduates of the English department. When using project-based learning, the teacher feels a lot of benefits because students are more enthusiastic and actively participating in the learning process. Before conducting teaching and learning the teacher also does the preparation before entering the class. Such as the preparation of tools, materials, and step instructions prepared.

## Teacher II

*"Before entering class, we as teachers also study, such as what needs to be prepared, such as paint, paper, and lesson plans"*

One example of an individual project given by the teacher is with topic art where the teacher is the first time she enters class, the teacher asks her students what they will learn today, at that time the teacher gives a clue by showing several tools such as colored pencils, pieces of cardboard and paper. the teacher gives a few minutes for students to guess what probably they will do in order to stimulate students' cognitive and motor skills. After that the teacher explains and gives instructions that the topic of the day is about moving objects, the teacher gives students a piece of cardboard that is shaped like a wheel, then explains the wheel moves around because it looks like a circle. To enable students to think other than moving wheels, the teacher starts asking students about what objects are moving besides wheels. After that, the teacher gives students time to draw moving objects according to their imagination and as creatively as they can. In the end, the project resulted in students starting to draw planes, cars, and so on as the product of that day's meeting. During the interview, the teacher also mentioned that with project-based learning the teacher does not need to explain a lot of theory but provides topics that students can see and feel so they can think critically about.

For a small group project, teacher III does the same as the individual project, she gives step-by-step instructions so that students understand what is being done. students are divided into several small groups, where the topic of the day is about seasons. The teacher at the meeting explained some of the colors of the leaves on the trees in each season. the teacher gives the students paper and colored pencils, then they randomly select paper containing the names of the seasons. the groups have the task of coloring the color of the leaves according to the season they get. and in the end, they put the product on the wall of the classroom. Apart from doing lessons in the classroom, the teacher also asks students to observe something outside the classroom to better understand what is being taught because they are still children so they must be able to see what they are learning.

## Teacher II

*"Because this is in the age range of kindergarten children, if you directly learn the number which is called the number 3 it will be difficult, so I take them out of class, then ask them to find out for 3 stones."*

When students are doing their projects, the teacher goes around the class to ask questions to students and help them when they have difficulties. Apart from facilitating teachers in learning, PjBL seems to have several challenges faced by both teachers and students. From the teacher's perspective, sometimes teaching using PjBL cannot be done evenly for all subjects. In terms of language, not all students come from bilingual families, instructions are sometimes given through body movement or using translanguaging. Of course, it will consume a lot of time, and sometimes 30 minutes for a project is very difficult to do. What's more, students have different characters, emotions, and pedagogical knowledge, so often in the middle of a lesson students initially feel excited about learning, but suddenly feel lazy and bored.

## **Discussion**

Based on the results of interviews, the use of PjBL to teach young learners is classified into its benefits and challenges.

### • The Benefits of Project Based Learning in Young Learners

The teacher explains some of the benefits of using project-based learning, such as lessons that will ultimately produce products that will make students more motivated and enthusiastic about learning because they are introduced to new things that they can feel, see and make it. compare to literature by Dewi in Halimatusyadiyah et al., (2022) that PjBl keeps students motivated in the teaching and learning process.

At this point, the second benefit of PjBL improves students become self-regulated learners because giving individual and small group projects makes students more independent. students will know their role, and begin to be responsible for what must be done. The PjBL principle put forward by Krajcik and Blumenfeld: (2006), namely the principle of situated learning where students will learn well if they are involved with the surrounding environment by practicing what is learned, and the principle of social interaction, meaning that they will learn quickly if they have their respective roles, each in a small group. The self-regulated learners are also in line with the benefits mentioned by Ferrero et al., (2021)

The third benefit of PjBl is how it can activate students' cognitive and motoric skills since the teacher at the very beginning provides a stimulus for what to do next by guessing something through the clue given. Rather than telling directly what to do, the teacher provides clue stimulation that will activate students' background knowledge so that they will think critically and far from being spoiled like conventional teaching which focuses on the teacher narrating in front of the class and students just listening. The teacher in the school already implemented the PjBl and it is in line with Manalu, et.al., (2022) that in the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, a teacher needs to activate students' critical thinking.

Another benefit is students can learn in real-life conditions. Students especially young learners have the characteristics of learning in a meaningful way (Garton et al., 2019). effective teaching is how the teachers engage the students with the surrounding around them, when students learn from what they experience (Maipita: 2021), it shows the learning achievement increase in every meeting. This is in line with principle number one of active construction proposed by Krajcik and Blumenfeld: (2006) which are students learn best when they started to explore, observe and view circumstances around them. This principle also applied in the Indonesian latest curriculum demand that the teaching and learning process is not limited to the classroom, but achieving knowledge can be done everywhere, through it students can easy to acquire the target language. Students are also not only able to solve the problem in a scientific way but also they can communicate it through the target language of the project (Nurhidayati et al., 2022). The use of cognitive tools is not a problem in learning carried out at the school because the facilities have been provided directly by the school that is also one of the reasons why students quickly understand lessons because the tools are available.

Moreover, with the use of PjBL in young learners' classrooms, the teachers work as a facilitator, and coaches, and assist in language learning (Yamada:2020). Since teachers give instructions at the very beginning and monitor students' project at that time. As mentioned by Ferrero et al., (2022) PjBL is a learning method based on student-centered and the main element of learning is to produce products.

### • The Challenges Use of Project Based Learning in Teaching Young Learners

Based on the results of interviews, teachers said that sometimes they find challenges when applying PjBL because it will be time-consuming, the mood of students changes, and the application of PjBL in young learners are restricted to 30 minutes in a meeting, if it is carried out with more than 20 students, of course, it will be burdensome for the teacher. At last, teachers' perceptions play an important

role since a project can already be condemned to failure if teachers feel that PjBL is too difficult and challenging (Haddad:2022).

### **Conclusion**

PjBL has undergone many positive impacts on language learning and teaching. Since its principle is in line with the current curriculum used in Indonesia which is Merdeka Curriculum, teachers can take it as a consideration in enhancing students' ability to acquire the target language. Moreover, the significant positive effect can be seen through the application of PjBL in Mandalika Intercultural School especially in teaching English to young learners. Teachers view that students become communicative, collaborative, critical, and self-regulate when applying PjBL in their teaching and learning process due to students being put as the center of the class. Although the implementation of PjBL cannot be applied to all selected materials, PjBL brings many contributions compared to conventional teaching methods.

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