

## The Effectiveness of Project-Based Learning in Improving Students' Narrative Writing Skills

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received: 14/10/2025

Revised: 21/11/2025

Accepted: 07/12/2025

Available online: 30/12/2025

#### Keywords:

Project-Based Learning;  
Narrative Writing Skills;  
EFL Writing Instruction;  
Writing Assessment;  
Student-Centered Learning.

### ABSTRACT

Narrative writing is a fundamental component of language learning, requiring students to organize ideas coherently, use appropriate vocabulary and grammar, and express creativity. However, many learners experience difficulties in developing effective narrative texts due to limited engagement and the continued use of traditional, teacher-centered instructional methods. Therefore, effective and student-centered teaching approaches are needed to improve narrative writing skills. This study aims to examine the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in enhancing students' narrative writing abilities. A quasi-experimental design with a pre-test and post-test control group was employed. The participants were EFL students at the secondary school level. Data were collected using a narrative writing test assessed through an analytic scoring rubric covering content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. The results revealed a significant improvement in the narrative writing scores of students taught using Project-Based Learning compared to those receiving conventional instruction. Students in the experimental group demonstrated higher post-test scores across all writing components. These findings indicate that Project-Based Learning is an effective instructional approach for improving narrative writing skills. It is therefore recommended that PBL be integrated into writing instruction to support students' engagement, creativity, and overall writing development.

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### 1. Introduction

Writing is one of the most essential language skills in language learning, as it enables learners to express ideas, convey meaning, and communicate effectively in written form. Among various types of writing, narrative writing plays a crucial role, particularly in developing students' creativity, critical thinking, and ability to organize ideas logically (Abdel-Hack & Helwa, 2004). Narrative texts require learners to construct a coherent story structure consisting of orientation, complication, and resolution, while simultaneously applying appropriate vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. However, for many language learners, especially those learning English as a foreign language (EFL), narrative writing remains a challenging skill to master.

Many recent studies have explored the application of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in improving students' writing skills, with several focusing specifically on narrative writing. For example, Nurhayati, Herlina, and Usman (2025) conducted a quantitative pre-experimental study to investigate the effects of PBL on students' narrative writing ability. Their research in an eighth-grade classroom showed that PBL significantly improved students' narrative writing scores, with statistical analysis revealing a meaningful increase between pre-test and post-test results ( $\text{sig. } 0.000 < 0.05$ ), thereby confirming the positive impact of PBL on writing proficiency.

Supporting these findings, Syarifah and Emiliasari (2024) examined narrative writing through PBL from a qualitative perspective, showing that PBL not only enhanced students' narrative writing performance but also developed their creativity, understanding of narrative genre structures, and knowledge of social functions and language features. The study highlights students' positive learning experiences and perceptions toward PBL implementation in writing classes. Similarly, Purwanti (2021) investigated the implementation of PBL for narrative writing in a junior high school context, finding that narrative writing skills increased after the application of PBL, with improvements in students' engagement and analytical abilities during the writing process.

In addition to these classroom-based studies, Setyawati, Bakhtiar, and Alfiansyah (2025) conducted quasi-experimental research in an Indonesian elementary school context, showing that students exposed to PBL had greater narrative text writing ability compared to those taught with conventional methods. Their results suggest that PBL can be effectively applied across different grade levels and educational settings to enhance narrative writing skills. In another Indonesian context, Rahmawati, Khatimah, and Rachman (2025) employed a mixed-methods quasi-experimental design involving both experimental and control groups. They found that PBL yielded more favorable outcomes in narrative writing proficiency, providing further evidence of the approach's effectiveness.

Beyond purely narrative writing, related research has also demonstrated broader impacts of PBL on writing skills and learners' creative performance. Arif and Sukarno (2025) used classroom action research methods to show that PBL significantly improved content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics in students' writing, indicating that PBL helps address multiple components of writing proficiency beyond narrative structure. Likewise, Soffiany and Purbani (2017) investigated how PBL compares with direct instruction in teaching writing, finding that PBL was more effective overall and that students with higher creativity tended to achieve better writing outcomes under PBL, suggesting that individual learner characteristics can interact with instructional methods to influence writing success.

Numerous studies and classroom observations indicate that students commonly experience difficulties in writing narrative texts (MEGA, 2022). These difficulties include poor organization of ideas, limited vocabulary usage, weak grammatical accuracy, and a lack of creativity or originality in developing storylines. Many students struggle to generate ideas and to develop them into a coherent and engaging narrative. As a result, their written products often fail to meet the expected standards of narrative writing. These challenges are frequently exacerbated by the continued use of traditional teaching methods, which tend to be teacher-centered, focus heavily on drills and grammatical exercises, and provide limited opportunities for students to engage in meaningful writing practices. Such approaches often position students as passive learners, reducing their motivation and limiting their ability to develop writing skills holistically.

In response to these challenges, Project-Based Learning (PBL) has emerged as a promising instructional approach in language education. PBL is a student-centered learning method that engages learners in exploring real-world problems or meaningful tasks through extended projects (Ali, 2019). This approach emphasizes collaboration, inquiry, creativity, and active participation, allowing students to construct knowledge through authentic learning experiences. Within the context of writing instruction, PBL provides students with opportunities to plan, draft, revise, and present their written work as part of a meaningful project, rather than completing isolated writing exercises.

From a theoretical perspective, PBL is particularly suitable for teaching narrative writing. By engaging students in collaborative storytelling projects, PBL encourages creativity and imagination, which are essential components of narrative texts. The process-oriented nature of PBL promotes multiple stages of writing, including drafting, revising, and peer

feedback, enabling students to improve both content and language accuracy (Wali, 2017). Furthermore, PBL integrates various language skill reading, writing, speaking, and listening thereby supporting holistic language development and deeper engagement with the writing process.

Although previous studies have demonstrated that Project-Based Learning can improve students' general writing skills, motivation, and engagement, research focusing specifically on its effectiveness in enhancing narrative writing skills remains limited. Moreover, empirical evidence examining the application of PBL in narrative writing instruction within specific educational contexts, particularly among EFL learners in secondary schools, is still scarce. This lack of focused research highlights the need for further investigation to understand how PBL can effectively support the development of narrative writing skills in such contexts (Giawa, 2022).

Therefore, this study aims to examine the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning in improving students' narrative writing skills. By implementing PBL in narrative writing instruction, this research seeks to provide empirical evidence on its impact on students' writing performance. The study is guided by the following research question: Is Project-Based Learning effective in improving students' narrative writing skills? Based on the theoretical foundations of PBL and previous findings, it is hypothesized that students taught using Project-Based Learning will demonstrate significantly better narrative writing performance than those taught using conventional teaching methods.

## **2. Method**

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design to examine the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in improving students' narrative writing skills (Merisa, 2020). Specifically, a pre-test-post-test control group design was used to compare the writing performance of students taught using PBL with those taught using conventional teaching methods. This design was chosen to allow for a systematic comparison of learning outcomes before and after the intervention while maintaining the natural classroom setting.

The participants of this study consisted of 30 students from a 3 at a junior high school, aged between 14-15 years. The students were English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners who shared relatively similar educational backgrounds. They were divided into two groups: an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group received instruction through Project-Based Learning, while the control group was taught using traditional teacher-centered methods. The selection of participants was based on existing class groupings to ensure ecological validity (Keidser et al., 2020). The primary instrument used in this study was a narrative writing test, administered as both a pre-test and a post-test. Students were asked to write a narrative text based on a given topic or prompt within a specified time limit. The writing products were assessed using an analytic scoring rubric adapted from established writing assessment frameworks. The rubric evaluated five components of writing: content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics.

To ensure the validity of the instrument, the writing test and scoring rubric were reviewed by language education experts and aligned with the narrative writing objectives outlined in the curriculum. Reliability was established through inter-rater reliability, in which two independent raters scored the students' writing, and the consistency of the scores was measured using correlation analysis (Liao et al., 2010).

The research procedure was conducted in several stages. First, a pre-test was administered to both the experimental and control groups to assess students' initial narrative writing ability. Following the pre-test, the experimental group received instruction using the Project-Based Learning approach over 4 instructional meetings, while the control group continued learning through conventional instructional methods (Somani & Rizvi, 2018).

In the PBL implementation, students were engaged in a narrative writing project, such as creating a storybook or group-based narrative text. The PBL process followed key stages: planning, where students selected themes and developed story outlines; drafting, during which students wrote initial versions of their narratives; collaboration, which involved peer discussion and feedback; presentation, where students shared their projects with the class; and reflection, in which students evaluated their learning experiences and writing progress. Throughout the process, the teacher acted as a facilitator, providing guidance and feedback rather than direct instruction. After the completion of the instructional treatment, a post-test was administered to both groups using a similar narrative writing task to measure improvements in students' writing skills.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques (Statistics, 2013). Mean scores were calculated to identify differences in students' narrative writing performance before and after the intervention. To determine whether the observed differences were statistically significant, a paired sample t-test was used to compare pre-test and post-test scores within each group, while an independent sample t-test was employed to compare the post-test results between the experimental and control groups. Additionally, effect size was calculated to determine the magnitude of the impact of Project-Based Learning on students' narrative writing skills.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

#### **3.1 Results**

The results of this study indicate a positive effect of Project-Based Learning (PBL) on students' narrative writing skills. Prior to the implementation of the treatment, the pre-test scores revealed that students in both the experimental and control groups demonstrated relatively similar levels of narrative writing ability. The mean pre-test scores showed no significant difference between the two groups, indicating that the students started from a comparable baseline in terms of content development, organization, vocabulary use, grammatical accuracy, and writing mechanics.

Following the instructional intervention, notable improvements were observed in the narrative writing performance of students in the experimental group. The post-test results showed a substantial increase in the mean writing score of students who were taught using Project-Based Learning (Hakimah, 2023). In contrast, although the control group also demonstrated some improvement after receiving conventional instruction, the increase in their mean post-test scores was comparatively smaller. This difference suggests that the instructional approach played a role in influencing students' writing development.

Further analysis of the writing components revealed that the experimental group experienced improvement across all assessed aspects of narrative writing. The most significant gains were found in content and organization, where students demonstrated clearer story development, more coherent plot structures, and better alignment with the narrative framework of orientation, complication, and resolution. Improvements were also observed in vocabulary use, as students employed a wider range of words and expressions to convey ideas more effectively. Additionally, enhancements in grammar and mechanics were evident, with fewer errors in sentence structure, tense usage, spelling, and punctuation.

Statistical analysis supported these descriptive findings. The paired sample t-test results showed a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group, indicating that students' narrative writing skills improved after the implementation of Project-Based Learning. Meanwhile, the control group did not demonstrate a statistically significant improvement to the same extent. Moreover, the independent sample t-test comparing post-test scores between the two groups revealed a significant difference in

favor of the experimental group, confirming the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning over conventional teaching methods.

The results demonstrate that Project-Based Learning had a meaningful and measurable impact on students' narrative writing skills. Students who participated in PBL-based instruction achieved higher writing scores and showed more balanced development across multiple writing components compared to those taught through traditional instructional approaches.

### ***3.2 PBL improved narrative writing***

Project-Based Learning (PBL) proved effective in improving students' narrative writing skills because it fundamentally changes the way students engage with the writing process. Unlike traditional teacher-centered approaches that emphasize isolated grammar exercises and final products, PBL encourages students to view writing as a meaningful, process-oriented activity. Through project tasks, students are required to generate ideas, plan story structures, draft texts, revise content, and present their work, all of which directly support the essential components of narrative writing. This sustained engagement enables students to develop more coherent storylines and better understand the narrative structure of orientation, complication, and resolution.

One of the primary reasons PBL enhanced narrative writing is its strong emphasis on creativity and idea development. Narrative writing demands imagination, originality, and the ability to construct engaging plots. PBL provides students with the freedom to explore themes, characters, and settings collaboratively, which helps reduce writer's block and fear of making mistakes. By working on extended projects such as storybooks or digital narratives, students are encouraged to experiment with ideas and express personal experiences, leading to richer content and more authentic storytelling.

PBL also improves narrative writing through collaborative learning and peer interaction. During group discussions and peer feedback sessions, students exchange ideas, negotiate meaning, and learn from one another's strengths. This collaborative environment allows students to recognize weaknesses in their writing, such as unclear plot development or inappropriate vocabulary choices, and make revisions accordingly. Peer feedback helps students become more aware of narrative coherence and language accuracy, contributing to improvements in organization, vocabulary, and grammar.

Another contributing factor is the process-based nature of PBL, which aligns closely with effective writing pedagogy. Narrative writing in PBL is not completed in a single session; instead, it involves multiple drafts and revisions (Giawa, 2022). Through continuous teacher guidance and peer feedback, students have opportunities to refine their language use, correct grammatical errors, and improve mechanics such as spelling and punctuation. This iterative process fosters greater attention to language form while maintaining a focus on meaning and communication.

Furthermore, PBL increases student motivation and engagement, which are critical factors in writing development. The use of meaningful and real-world-oriented projects makes writing activities more relevant and enjoyable for students. When learners perceive writing tasks as purposeful and connected to tangible outcomes, they become more invested in producing higher-quality work. Increased motivation encourages students to put more effort into planning, revising, and polishing their narratives, resulting in improved writing performance.

In addition, PBL supports holistic language skill integration, which contributes to better narrative writing outcomes. Students engage in reading model texts, discussing ideas orally, listening to peers' presentations, and writing collaboratively. This integration strengthens students' overall language competence and helps them apply vocabulary and grammatical

structures more effectively in their written narratives. As a result, improvements are observed not only in content and organization but also in linguistic accuracy.

Project-Based Learning improves narrative writing skills because it promotes creativity, collaboration, and active engagement in the writing process (Chao et al., 2025). By emphasizing meaningful projects, multiple drafting stages, and peer interaction, PBL creates a supportive learning environment that enables students to develop stronger narrative structures, richer content, and more accurate language use. These features make PBL a highly effective instructional approach for enhancing narrative writing skills, particularly in EFL classroom contexts.

### **3.3 Comparison with Previous Studies**

The findings of this study align closely with a growing body of research demonstrating the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in enhancing students' writing skills. Similar to the results reported by Soffiany and Purbani (2017), this study found that students taught through PBL achieved significantly higher writing performance than those instructed using conventional teaching methods. Both studies suggest that PBL's emphasis on student-centered learning and active engagement plays a critical role in improving writing outcomes, particularly in terms of content development and organization.

Consistent with the work of Purwanti (2021) and Syarifah and Emiliasari (2024), the present study also revealed notable improvements in students' narrative writing skills after the implementation of PBL. These previous studies emphasized that PBL facilitates a deeper understanding of narrative text structures and enhances students' creativity. The current findings extend this argument by demonstrating that such improvements are not limited to general writing ability but are evident across specific narrative components, including plot coherence, vocabulary usage, grammatical accuracy, and mechanics. This reinforces the view that PBL supports both creative and linguistic aspects of narrative writing.

Moreover, the results corroborate the quantitative evidence provided by Nurhayati, Herlina, and Usman (2025), who reported statistically significant gains in students' narrative writing scores following PBL implementation. Similar to their findings, the present study observed a significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores in the experimental group, as well as superior post-test performance compared to the control group. These parallel outcomes strengthen the empirical claim that PBL is an effective instructional approach for narrative writing, particularly in EFL contexts.

However, while previous studies often focused primarily on students' overall writing achievement or motivation, this study contributes additional insights by offering a more detailed analysis of improvements across individual writing components. For instance, whereas Arif and Sukarno (2025) highlighted general improvements in writing quality through PBL, the present study demonstrates that the most substantial gains occurred in content and organization two core elements of narrative writing. This distinction suggests that PBL may be particularly effective for text types that require structured storytelling and coherent sequencing of events.

In terms of educational context, the findings are consistent with studies conducted in Indonesian secondary school settings, such as those by Setyawati et al. (2025) and Rahmawati et al. (2025). These studies similarly reported that PBL was more effective than traditional instruction in improving students' writing skills. The consistency of results across different grade levels and institutional settings suggests that PBL has broad applicability and adaptability within EFL classrooms. Nevertheless, the present study addresses a previously underexplored area by concentrating specifically on narrative writing, thereby filling a gap in the existing literature.

When compared with previous research, the findings of this study not only confirm the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning but also extend existing knowledge by highlighting its

specific impact on narrative writing skills. By providing empirical evidence within a focused textual genre and a specific educational context, this study strengthens the argument for integrating PBL into writing instruction and contributes meaningfully to the ongoing discourse on innovative pedagogical approaches in language education.

### ***3.4 Project-Based Learning (PBL) supports key aspects of narrative writing and acknowledging challenges and limitations***

Project-Based Learning (PBL) supports the development of creativity in storytelling by providing students with the autonomy and flexibility to explore ideas, themes, and characters in meaningful contexts. Unlike traditional writing instruction that often restricts students to predetermined topics or rigid exercises, PBL allows learners to design and develop narratives based on their interests and real-life experiences. Through extended project work, such as creating storybooks or digital narratives, students are encouraged to experiment with plot development, character creation, and imaginative settings. This creative freedom reduces anxiety toward writing tasks and enables students to produce more original and engaging narratives (Lee, 2019).

In addition to fostering creativity, PBL enhances students' structural understanding of narrative texts. Narrative writing requires a clear organization consisting of orientation, complication, and resolution, which many students struggle to master when taught through isolated instruction. PBL addresses this issue by embedding narrative structure within the project workflow. During planning and drafting stages, students are guided to outline story elements, sequence events logically, and maintain coherence throughout the narrative. Collaborative discussions and teacher scaffolding further reinforce students' awareness of narrative conventions, resulting in better-organized and more cohesive texts.

PBL also contributes significantly to language accuracy through revision and feedback. The iterative nature of project-based tasks encourages students to engage in multiple drafting and revising cycles rather than submitting a single final product. Peer feedback sessions and teacher guidance allow students to identify grammatical errors, inappropriate vocabulary choices, and mechanical issues in their writing. This continuous revision process helps learners refine sentence structures, improve word choice, and apply grammatical rules more accurately, leading to noticeable improvements in language quality and writing mechanics.

Despite these advantages, several challenges and limitations were identified during the implementation of PBL (Aksela & Haatainen, 2019). One major challenge is time constraints, as project-based activities require longer instructional periods than conventional teaching methods. Completing all stages of the project planning, drafting, collaboration, presentation, and reflection can be difficult within limited classroom time, particularly in schools with tight curricular schedules.

Another limitation relates to unequal participation among group members. While collaborative learning is a key feature of PBL, not all students contribute equally to group tasks (Pluta et al., 2013). Some students may dominate the project work, while others remain passive, which can affect individual learning outcomes and the fairness of assessment. This issue highlights the need for careful group management and clear role assignments to ensure balanced participation.

Finally, assessment complexity presents a notable challenge in PBL implementation. Evaluating project-based narrative writing requires teachers to assess both the writing product and the learning process, including collaboration, creativity, and effort. Designing reliable and objective assessment criteria for these multiple dimensions can be demanding and time-consuming. Consequently, teachers must develop clear rubrics and employ multiple assessment strategies to accurately measure students' writing performance.

Project-Based Learning effectively supports creativity, narrative structure, and language accuracy in writing through meaningful projects and iterative learning processes. However, its

successful implementation requires careful consideration of time management, group dynamics, and assessment strategies to maximize its pedagogical benefits.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study investigated the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in improving students' narrative writing skills. The findings indicate that PBL is an effective instructional approach for enhancing students' narrative writing performance. A significant improvement was observed in students' writing scores after the implementation of PBL, particularly in terms of content development, narrative organization, vocabulary use, grammatical accuracy, and writing mechanics. Compared to conventional teaching methods, PBL provided a more engaging and meaningful learning environment that supported students' overall writing development. The results of this study have important pedagogical implications. For teachers, Project-Based Learning can serve as an effective alternative strategy for teaching narrative writing, as it encourages student-centered learning, creativity, collaboration, and active engagement in the writing process. By integrating projects into writing instruction, teachers can help students develop narrative skills more holistically through planning, drafting, revising, and presenting written work. For curriculum designers, the findings suggest the importance of incorporating project-based writing tasks into language curricula. Such integration can align instructional objectives with authentic learning experiences and support the development of higher-order thinking and communication skills. Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The sample size was relatively small, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader educational contexts. Additionally, the intervention was conducted over a short period, which may not fully capture the long-term effects of Project-Based Learning on students' writing development. These limitations suggest that the results should be interpreted with caution. Based on these limitations, future research is recommended to explore the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning across different text types, such as descriptive and argumentative writing, to determine whether similar improvements can be achieved. Further studies should also consider implementing PBL over a longer duration to examine its sustained impact on writing skills. Additionally, adopting a mixed-method research approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data would provide deeper insights into students' learning experiences and the instructional processes underlying the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning.

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