

Student Engagement in Project Based Learning Activities

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze student engagement through a project-based learning model in a seventh grade EFL classroom. This research used a qualitative approach with a case study method to gain an in-depth understanding of how students engage in learning activities when using the PjBL model, where data was collected through observation, open ended questions interviews, and documentation. The research participants consisted of 34 seventh grade students in a junior high school. The results showed that the use of project-based learning model in EFL classroom can provide significant learning engagement for students in English learning process. The PjBL model encourages students to play an active role in learning by involving them in meaningful and contextualized tasks. Project-based learning has been shown to enhance students' enthusiasm, boost their self-confidence, foster creativity, and strengthen both independent and collaborative learning abilities. This study recommends the application of project-based learning in EFL contexts, especially in an effort to improve students' ability to speak and write in English.

Keyword: *Student Engagement, Project Based learning, EFL Classroom*

INTRODUCTION

Student engagement refers to the attention, interest, investment and effort that students put into learning activities. In an EFL context, student engagement is very important because it directly affects motivation and success in learning English. When students are engaged, they are more likely to absorb the material, participate actively and develop skills more effectively. However, in many EFL classes, especially at the junior high school level, students are often seen as passive, unmotivated and disengaged. They may rely heavily on tools like Google Translate, lack participation in class activities, or even avoid using English altogether due to a lack of confidence and understanding. These challenges spotlight the current need for learning models that can stimulate deeper and more active student engagement. Comparing PjBL practices with diverse contexts in terms of student engagement is needed Baklachyan (2022).

Project Based Learning (PjBL) is considered a solution to this problem. This model actively involves students in real-world projects, encouraging student engagement through collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity. According to YAPRAK (2022), PjBL not only improves linguistic skills but also develops critical thinking, collaboration, and confidence. This model is aligned with the 21st century education goals, which emphasize on the 4C (critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity).

The concept of student engagement can be divided into three interrelated dimensions of cognitive engagement, which involves students mental investment and use of learning strategies; Emotional engagement involves students' emotional responses, including feelings of interest, enjoyment, and a sense of connection or belonging, and behavioral engagement, which involves participation, effort, and perseverance in academic tasks Bond et al (2020). Each of these dimensions contributes uniquely to the

overall learning experience and is influenced by contextual factors such as teacher support, classroom environment, and classmate interactions.

This research uses a qualitative case study approach to gain an in-depth understanding of student engagement during PjBL. Observations, interviews, and documentation were used as the primary methods of data collection. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the study can enrich the literature on student engagement in PjBL settings. One of the factors that play a pivotal role in students' engagement and success in an EFL context is the quality of the teacher-student relationship Gan (2021). Practically, it can guide teachers in designing more effective and engaging EFL learning experiences using project-based strategies.

Therefore, this study analyzes how PjBL affects student engagement during the learning process in a seventh-grade classroom, focusing on three dimensions of engagement: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. It also explores the contextual factors that influence such engagement.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative case study approach, which aims to explore student engagement during project-based learning in a live classroom setting. Data collection was done through observation, interview, and documentation. This study was conducted in one of the junior high schools in Cirebon, with 34 seventh grade students. This study analyzed students' engagement in project-based learning in an EFL classroom. The focus of this study is to find out students' engagement in junior high school. In this research, the researcher used two instruments, namely classroom observation and interviews, to determine the implementation of student engagement that occurred during project-based learning in the EFL classroom, especially in the three main dimensions of student engagement, namely cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. The observation sheet used was in the form of a checklist containing indicators of student engagement based on the theory of YAPRAK (2022). These indicators include active participation in group discussions, initiative in completing project assignments, critical and reflective thinking skills towards the learning process, enthusiasm and curiosity, and emotional involvement in the work group.

The group activities which the students had during the project development enhanced their involvement in the learning activities Nurcahya & Sugesti (2020). Observations were carried out directly by the researcher with a non-participatory approach so that the learning process was not disturbed and the data obtained was more objective. Interviews were conducted with several students selected based on their level of activity during the observation, both those who were classified as active and those who were less active. This interview also serves to validate the findings obtained through observation. The initial planning carried out by the researcher was determining the research objectives, formulating the problem, and preparing research instruments such as observation sheets and interview guidelines. The researcher also conducted initial coordination with the school to obtain permission to conduct the research and ensure that teachers used the Project-Based Learning model in the learning process. After that, the researcher conducted classroom observations for three meetings in English learning in grade seven. Observations were carried out directly using structured observation sheets that had been prepared based on indicators of student involvement (cognitive, emotional, behavioral). The researcher recorded student activities during the project implementation, including interactions between students, how students completed tasks, and their emotional expressions during the activities.

After observation, the researcher continued to the interview stage with eight students who were selected purposively, consisting of students who were active and less active during the project-based learning process. The purpose of this interview was to gain a deeper understanding of how students interpret their involvement in PjBL, the challenges they face, and the factors that influence their motivation and participation. Interviews were conducted in writing using a questionnaire and accompanied by the researcher. The last stage is data analysis, where all data from observations and

interviews are analyzed to find patterns of student involvement during project-based learning. The researcher reduced the data, grouped it based on the dimensions of involvement, then presented it in narrative form.

The data analysis process in this study was conducted qualitatively with the aim of deeply understanding student involvement in project-based learning in EFL classes. Qualitative data can be obtained through open-ended questions that provide participants with the opportunity to provide information that does not limit the participants' opinion (Akinyode & Khan, 2018). The data analyzed came from two main sources, namely the results of classroom observations and the results of interviews with students and teachers. The analysis was carried out through the stages of data reduction, namely the process of sorting, simplifying, and focusing raw data from observations and interviews. data presentation, where the reduced data is arranged in the form of a descriptive narrative containing the main findings from the results of observations and interviews. and drawing conclusions, namely the process of formulating the main findings obtained from the results of data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1. Classroom Observation Report

No	Dimensions & Aspects	Observation Indicator	Notes
1.	Cognitive Engagement	Students actively seek solutions to problems in the project	Yes, because with project-based learning, students are more active in finding solutions and problems solving
		Students reflect and think critically about the project learning process	Yes, students are seen thinking critically when working on project-based tasks in the form of group assignments
2.	Emotional Engagement	Students show enthusiasm and curiosity towards the project	Yes, students show enthusiasm and curiosity when working on project-based tasks
		Students feel proud or satisfied with the project work	Yes, students show pride and show dissatisfaction due to time constraints when working on the task
		Students show emotional attachment to their group	Yes, students show emotional attachment to their group mates during discussions.
3.	Behavioral Engagement	Students are actively involved in group discussions and project activities	Yes, students show activeness during the discussion

		Students attend consistently and complete project tasks on schedule	Yes, students attend and complete project tasks on time
		Students take initiative in organizing task sharing and project completion	Yes, students show initiative in organizing task sharing and project completion
4.	Contextual Factors & (Environment Design)	Teachers provide sufficient freedom and guidance in project implementation	Yes, teachers provide sufficient freedom and guidance in project implementation
		The classroom environment encourages collaboration, exploration, and problem solving	Yes, in the classroom students demonstrate collaboration, exploration, and problem solving

According to the table 1.1 it can be concluded that observation and assessment of student engagement during project-based learning. One key aspect is evaluating how students identify problems and take initiative in seeking and developing solutions, both independently and through collaboration. As explained by Wijayanti & Budi (2023) the implementation of PjBL activities showcases the students' empowerment to become active, engaged, and lifelong seekers of knowledge. This includes assessing their ability to analyze their learning experiences and apply critical thinking in evaluating project processes, strategies and outcomes to support continuous learning improvement. The study by Al-Bahadli et al (2023) showed that the implementation of online PjBL increased students' motivation, engagement, and communication skills in English learning. Emotional and cognitive engagement is also observed, seeing that during the learning process students show enthusiasm, curiosity and initiative when exploring topics and asking questions.

Another focus is on students' social-emotional attitudes and interactions during the project. Observations are directed at identifying expressions of pride, satisfaction and appreciation of the completed project work. In addition, it identifies how students demonstrate a sense of belonging, empathy, cooperation, and positive communication with group members. As explained by Chandrasekar et al (2024). Qualitative data provides deep insights into an individual's behaviors and beliefs, and the contextual factors that may shape these. Such feelings play an important role in creating a supportive and collaborative atmosphere that improves group performance and learning outcomes.

In addition, observations were made to analyze students' independence and leadership in planning the division of tasks and coordinating steps to effectively complete the project. The role of the teacher is also very important in providing timely and relevant guidance that supports students' independence, creativity, and responsibility throughout the project. As explained by Gu (2022). structured classroom observations can provide valuable insights into teaching practice and contribute to professional development.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that Project-Based Learning significantly increases student engagement in EFL classrooms across cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. Istijanto & Nathalie (2024) define student engagement as a psychological investment shown through effort in understanding or mastering the subject matter. Project-Based Learning encourages deeper learning and helps students connect language learning to real-life contexts.

However, the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning also depends on teacher support and classroom learning design. Teachers must be trained to provide engaging instruction to support student learning. Teachers' positive attitudes in teaching encourage the students to be more engaged in the learning process. Project-based learning also allows teachers to teach skills beyond content, make learning more personalized and more varied, and teach academic content more effectively Susanti et al (2020). Implementing Project-Based Learning more broadly can be an effective strategy to increase engagement, especially in English as a Foreign Language environments.

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