

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF PROJECT-BASED LEARNING IN ESP AT VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRAK

Bahasa Inggris untuk Tujuan Khusus (English for Specific Purposes/ESP) di Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan menjadi kebutuhan strategis dalam mempersiapkan siswa menghadapi dunia kerja global. Salah satu pendekatan pembelajaran yang dinilai relevan adalah Project-Based Learning (PjBL), karena mendorong pembelajaran kontekstual dan pengembangan keterampilan abad ke-21. Namun, implementasi PjBL dalam konteks ESP masih menghadapi berbagai tantangan, seperti keterbatasan pelatihan guru, kurangnya materi ajar berbasis proyek, dan dukungan institusional yang minim. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji tantangan dan peluang penerapan PjBL dalam pembelajaran ESP di SMK melalui metode kajian literatur dan pendekatan analisis tematik terhadap berbagai artikel ilmiah, jurnal, dan hasil penelitian sebelumnya, dengan fokus pada konteks pembelajaran ESP dan implementasi PjBL dalam pendidikan kejuruan. Hasil penelitian mengidentifikasi empat tema utama: tantangan implementasi, peran guru, peluang pengembangan siswa, dan relevansi PjBL dalam pengajaran ESP. PjBL juga menawarkan berbagai peluang seperti peningkatan motivasi belajar, penguatan kompetensi komunikasi profesional, dan hubungan langsung dengan kebutuhan dunia kerja.

Kata kunci: Project-Based Learning, ESP, SMK, kajian pustaka, analisis tematik.

ABSTRACT

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in Vocational High Schools has become a strategic necessity in preparing students to face the global workforce. One learning approach that is considered relevant is Project-Based Learning (PjBL), as it encourages contextual learning and the development of 21st-century skills. However, the implementation of PjBL in the context of ESP still faces various challenges, such as limited teacher training, a lack of project-based teaching materials, and minimal institutional support. This study aims to examine the challenges and opportunities of implementing PjBL in ESP learning in vocational high schools through a literature review method and a thematic analysis approach to various scientific articles, journals, and previous research results, focusing on the context of ESP learning and the implementation of PjBL in vocational education. The results of the study identify four main themes: challenges of implementation, the role of teachers, student development opportunities, and the relevance of PjBL in ESP teaching. PjBL also offers various opportunities such as increased learning motivation, strengthening professional communication competence, and direct links to the needs of the world of work.

Keywords: Project-Based Learning, ESP, SMK, literature review, thematic analysis.

INTRODUCTION

English has become the primary means of global communication, playing a crucial role in uniting various nations and cultures worldwide. This language is not only used by native speakers but also by millions of people from different linguistic backgrounds, making it the dominant international communication tool. In various contexts of modern life, such as international business, global education, scientific exchange, and cultural interaction, English serves as a medium that enables effective cross-border communication (Crystal, 2003). The strategic role

of English is increasingly evident in international business meetings, academic conferences, and cross-country research collaborations. (Holmes, 2013) also emphasizes that English functions as a lingua franca, a connecting language systematically used by individuals who do not share the same mother tongue, thus enabling broad cross-cultural communication and strengthening global connectivity in this modern era.

In Indonesia, the importance of English proficiency is reflected in its designation as the

first foreign language required to be learned by students at all levels of formal education, as stipulated in the National Education Minister Regulation Number 47 of 2010. In its implementation, the approach to teaching English is differentiated based on the type of educational unit. At the Senior High School (SMA) level, students generally receive General English instruction, which focuses on the general use of the language for everyday communication and basic academic purposes. Meanwhile, at the vocational high school level, the teaching approach is more directed towards English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which is English language learning tailored to the specific needs of students' fields of expertise, such as hospitality, engineering, culinary arts, and others (Hidayati et al., 2023; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987)

In the context of ESP learning, the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) approach has been widely adopted because it has been proven to encourage meaningful and contextual learning. PjBL is considered effective in facilitating the development of 21st-century skills that are highly needed by vocational high school graduates, such as critical thinking skills, the ability to collaborate, and the skill to solve problems creatively (Andanty, 2020; Kavlu, 2020). By involving students in authentic projects relevant to the world of work, PjBL can bridge the gap between theory and practice. However, several previous studies have also noted various obstacles in the implementation of this method, especially in the aspect of teacher readiness in understanding and managing projects, the limited availability of project-based teaching materials that suit ESP needs, and the lack of professional training that supports the development of teachers' pedagogical abilities in implementing PjBL (Tuyen & Tien, 2021; Wulandari, 2022)

Although the benefits of integrating PjBL in ESP teaching are very potential, there are still research gaps that have not been widely explored, especially in the context of vocational high school. Most previous studies have highlighted the implementation of PjBL in higher education or in general English teaching, not specifically in the context of ESP at the vocational education level. This indicates a need for a more in-depth study of

the specific challenges faced by vocational high school teachers, as well as what opportunities can be maximized through this approach. Therefore, this study aims to comprehensively examine the challenges and opportunities in the implementation of PjBL in ESP learning in vocational high school, through a thorough and structured literature review approach. This research is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions in the development of relevant, adaptive, and contextual English language learning strategies in vocational education environments.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a literature review method analysed using the thematic analysis model from Braun & Clarke (2006). The purpose of this approach is to identify and classify the main themes related to the challenges and opportunities in the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learning in vocational high schools. Data were collected from national and international scientific articles obtained through databases such as Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and DOAJ, with a publication time range from 2000 to 2024. Keywords used in the literature search included "Project-Based Learning in ESP", "Teaching ESP in Vocational High School", and "ESP implementation challenges". Inclusion criteria were strictly determined, only including relevant peer-reviewed articles, while articles that did not discuss ESP or were not available in full text were excluded from the analysis.

The analysis was carried out following six steps from Braun and Clarke, namely: (a) familiarization with the data; (b) initial code creation; (c) theme searching; (d) theme reviewing; (e) theme naming and definition; (f) and final results preparation. The researcher used an instrument in the form of a thematic analysis worksheet compiled independently based on the Braun & Clarke (2006) framework, which included elements such as article focus, main findings, thematic codes, and theme classification. The results produced four major themes, namely: implementation challenges, the

role of teachers, student development opportunities, and the relevance of PjBL in ESP teaching in vocational high school. With a systematic and transparent documentation process, this study not only provides a comprehensive overview of the literature reviewed, but also allows for verification or replication by other researchers in the future.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings from the literature review that have been analyzed using a thematic approach based on the Braun & Clarke (2006) model. The discussion is structured to interpret and relate the review results to the research context of the implementation of PjBL in ESP for vocational high school environment. From the analysis process of 20 scientific articles, four main themes were found that consistently represent the focus of the literature, namely: challenges in implementing PjBL, the role of teachers in implementing PjBL, student development opportunities through this approach, and the relevance of PjBL to contextual and applicative ESP learning in a vocational learning environment.

Challenges in Implementing PjBL in ESP

The Challenges in implementing PjBL in ESP are the most dominant and consistently recurring theme in the analyzed literature. Most articles highlight that the implementation of implementing PjBL in ESP in vocational high school context faces a number of structural and pedagogical obstacles. The three main issues most often mentioned are limited resources, lack of professional training for teachers, and limited implementation time within a dense curriculum structure.

Solihah et al. (2023) identified that one of the fundamental obstacles is the absence of textbooks or teaching materials specifically designed to support a project-based approach in the ESP context. As a result, teachers find it difficult to provide learning materials that suit the vocational needs of students and find it difficult to link English with relevant real-world projects. The materials available tend to be general and not

contextual, thus not supporting the implementation of applicative projects.

In addition, Lungu (2022) found that the implementation of PjBL cannot be done spontaneously, but requires structured planning, adjustment of evaluation strategies, and teacher readiness in managing a dynamic and complex learning process. Many teachers in vocational high school have not received special training on PjBL, especially those relevant to ESP. On the other hand, schools have also not fully provided institutional support such as flexible time allocation, technology resources, and alternative evaluation systems that can comprehensively accommodate student project results. Thus, the challenge of implementing PjBL in ESP is not only related to teacher competence, but also to the readiness of the education system as a whole at the vocational level.

Teacher's Role in PjBL for ESP

Teachers have a key role in the success of PjBL, especially in the context of ESP which demands the adaptation of materials to students' fields of expertise. Based on Sofyan (2016), the role of teachers in ESP includes five main functions: as instructors, collaborators, material compilers, researchers, and evaluators. In the context of PjBL, teachers are required to be active facilitators who guide students in the process of exploring projects relevant to the world of work. The challenge lies in the ability of teachers to develop projects that not only emphasize language competence but are also aligned with the professional needs of vocational high school students. Without adequate training, many teachers find it difficult to carry out these multifunctional roles.

Student Development Opportunities through PjBL

The implementation of PjBL in ESP for vocational high school environment makes a major contribution to the holistic development of student competencies. Not only does it improve English language skills in a vocational context, but this approach also facilitates the growth of 21st-century skills that are highly needed in today's world of work, such as critical thinking,

creativity, collaboration, and communication. In contextually designed projects, students learn not only to understand the language, but also to use it functionally in situations that reflect their professional world.

Studies by Kavlu (2020) and Kokotsaki et al. (2016) reveal that active student involvement in collaborative projects encourages the emergence of individual and group responsibility, increases intrinsic motivation, and builds independence in learning. Through activities such as compiling technical reports, presenting project results, creating promotional materials, or simulating work situations, students gain first-hand experience using English as a tool for professional communication. These activities not only improve mastery of vocabulary and language structure, but also shape a productive mindset that is oriented towards problem-solving and tangible work results. In other words, PjBL becomes a means of learning that balances cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects, as well as bridging the gap between classroom learning and the needs of the world of work.

Relevance of PjBL in ESP Teaching in Vocational High School

The final theme in this study shows that the PjBL approach has a very high level of relevance to the teaching of ESP, especially in the context of vocational education. This relevance lies in the similarity of orientation between PjBL and ESP, which both focus on mastering applicative and contextual skills, which aim to prepare students to face real professional situations.

Hidayati et al. (2023) affirm that ESP learning is designed to meet specific language needs based on students' fields of expertise, such as engineering, business, hospitality, or culinary arts. In this context, PjBL provides space for students to apply English directly in project-based activities that are relevant to their majors. For example, culinary arts students may be asked to create a recipe tutorial video in English or compile an international restaurant menu, while marketing students can create product promotion materials or present business proposals in English. Projects like these allow students to not only learn the

language theoretically, but to use the language as a contextual professional communication tool.

Fitria (2023) reinforces this finding by showing that the implementation of PjBL in ESP is able to bridge academic and vocational needs in a balanced way. PjBL facilitates targeted and meaningful ESP learning, because students are not only working on abstract assignments, but are actually practicing using the language in a task format that reflects the world of work. This is in accordance with the principle of "learning by doing", where direct experience becomes an effective means of building deeper understanding and skills.

Furthermore, Goodianti & Fitrianingsih (2023) state that this approach is very much in line with the goals of vocational high school as educational institutions that produce job-ready graduates, because PjBL supports the integration between vocational competencies and English language communication skills which are added value in the modern industrial world. In other words, the implementation of PjBL in ESP teaching in vocational high school is not only relevant, but also strategic in responding to the challenges of globalization and the demands of the 21st century labor market.

Thus, PjBL in ESP is not just a methodological innovation, but also part of an effort to transform vocational education that is more adaptive, responsive, and directly connected to the needs of the workplace.

CONCLUSION

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learning in vocational high school has specific demands because it must adapt to the language needs in students' fields of expertise. One approach that is considered relevant is Project-Based Learning (PjBL), which encourages learning based on real-world experience, collaboration, and problem-solving. However, the implementation of PjBL in the context of ESP in vocational high school is inseparable from various challenges, such as lack of teacher training, limited contextual teaching materials, and minimal institutional support, so that learning has not been able to be fully optimized.

This study aims to examine in depth the challenges and opportunities of implementing PjBL in ESP learning through a literature review method and the Braun & Clarke (2006) thematic analysis approach. From the review of 20 scientific articles, four main themes were found: implementation challenges, the role of teachers, student development opportunities, and the relevance of PjBL to ESP learning in vocational high school. The analysis shows that in addition to facing various technical and pedagogical obstacles, PjBL also has great potential in increasing motivation, independence, and 21st-century skills that vocational high school students desperately need to enter the world of work.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that schools and education policymakers provide special training to vocational high school teachers in designing and implementing contextual project-based learning. In addition, the development of PjBL-based ESP teaching materials needs to be carried out so that the material is more applicative and relevant to the world of work. Schools also need to provide institutional support such as flexible time allocation and alternative evaluation systems that are appropriate to the characteristics of the project. Thus, PjBL in ESP is not only a methodological approach, but also a transformational strategy in improving the quality of adaptive vocational education that is ready to face the challenges of the 21st century.

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