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Economics Learning Conditions in Junior High Schools: A Descriptive Qualitative Study as a Foundation for Developing a Student Engagement Project-Based Learning Model

Devi Haerani Harahap*

Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Jakarta, 10270, Indonesia

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* Corresponding author:

E-mail: devihaerani88@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Economics learning at the junior high school level plays a strategic role in building students' economic literacy, yet national and international assessment data indicate a declining trend in the literacy and engagement of Indonesian students. This study aims to describe the actual conditions of economics learning in junior high schools in Jakarta, covering teachers' instructional backgrounds, the characteristics of circulating teaching modules, and student engagement patterns, as an empirical foundation for model development. A descriptive qualitative design was applied. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with social studies teachers and students, classroom observation, and document analysis of circulating economics teaching modules, then analysed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana with source and technique triangulation. The findings show that most social studies teachers do not hold an economics education background, that most modules neither scaffold mastery experience gradually nor address the physiological-emotional dimension of learning, and that behavioural, emotional, cognitive, and agentic engagement indicators appear only sporadically. These conditions provide the rational basis for six characteristics of the Student Engagement Project-Based Learning model, namely contextual economic problems, project activity, collaboration, student autonomy, graduated scaffolding, and structured reflection.

1. Introduction

Economics learning at the junior high school (SMP) level occupies a strategic position in building the foundational economic literacy that underlies rational economic decision-making in everyday life. Within the Indonesian curriculum structure, economics is not taught as a separate subject at this level but is embedded in the integrated social studies (IPS) subject, so that the quality of students' first

encounter with economic reasoning depends heavily on how a single IPS teacher interprets and delivers that content. The implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka presents both an opportunity and a challenge for IPS instruction, as it demands active, contextual, and student-centred approaches rather than the conventional, rote-oriented instruction that has long dominated the classroom. This demand becomes increasingly urgent considering that the achievement of Indonesian students in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 and 2022 shows a declining trend on dimensions closely related to basic economic concepts, accompanied by engagement indicators that remain below the average of the participating countries (OECD, 2023).

Student engagement has emerged as one of the most consistent predictors of learning success and is therefore central to any attempt to explain this decline. The multidimensional framework proposed by Fredricks et al. (2004) distinguishes behavioural engagement, which concerns participation and effort, emotional engagement, which concerns interest and affective reactions to learning, and cognitive engagement, which concerns the investment of deep learning strategies. This framework was later enriched by Reeve (2013) and Reeve & Shin (2020) through the addition of agentic engagement, namely the constructive contribution students make to the flow of instruction they receive. Skinner and Pitzer (2012) emphasised that engagement is dynamic rather than fixed, so that it responds directly to the quality of the instructional design students experience over time. In the specific setting of economics education, Nepal and Rogerson (2020) found that the literature is still dominated by behavioural indicators and pays comparatively little attention to the emotional and cognitive dimensions, while Asarta (2024) argued that limited classroom engagement is one of the most persistent problems reported by economics educators.

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) has become a well-established response to this problem because it positions students to construct knowledge through authentic investigation of real-world problems (Krajcik & Shin, 2014; Larmer et al., 2015). The meta-analysis by Chen and Yang (2019) confirms the consistent effect of PjBL on academic achievement across educational levels, while Chang et al. (2024) demonstrated that projects anchored in an authentic context raise behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement more than projects without such a context.

Zhong et al. (2025) reported comparable gains across the behavioural, emotional, cognitive, and agentic dimensions, indicating that the benefit of PjBL is distributed across the whole engagement construct rather than confined to observable participation. Within Indonesian journals, Sundari et al. (2025) documented a concrete need among teachers for project-based designs that build creative thinking and independent learning, and Musyary and Utomo (2026) showed that a carefully structured project sequence can cultivate discipline and responsibility among school students. Alongside engagement, academic self-efficacy as conceptualised by Bandura (1997) has been shown to predict achievement through its four sources, namely mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal or social persuasion, and physiological-emotional states (Talsma et al., 2018).

Although each of these three theoretical anchors is supported by a substantial body of research, studies that explicitly integrate all three into a single instructional syntax for junior high school economics learning remain scarce. Research on PjBL has largely concentrated on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields (Bell, 2010; Bender, 2012), whereas studies on economics learning in Indonesia have mostly focused on module or media development (Khusnunnisa' & Andriani, 2025; Sukidjo, 2016) or on the effect of a particular method on learning interest (Suparti et al., 2025), without explicitly operationalising the sources of self-efficacy described by Bandura or the engagement dimensions described by Fredricks and Reeve within their instructional stages. Work on the difficulties students experience in economics and accounting content further indicates that the problem lies not only in the material itself but also in study habits and instructional support that are not systematically designed (Imran et al., 2023). This gap underlies the need for an economics instructional model that systematically integrates the three anchors, subsequently referred to as the Student Engagement Project-Based Learning (SE-PjBL) Model.

Before such a model can be developed, however, the conditions of the field must first be described empirically, because a development study that is not grounded in documented need risks producing a model that answers a problem which does not actually exist in the classroom. Preliminary indications point to three structural concerns, namely the gap in the academic background of teachers who deliver economics content, the limited capacity of circulating teaching modules to operationalise the sources of self-efficacy, and the declining trend in the engagement and literacy of Indonesian students.

The extent to which these concerns manifest specifically within economics learning in SMP Jakarta, and what they imply for instructional design, has not been systematically described. To address this gap, this study describes the actual conditions of economics learning in SMP Jakarta through a descriptive qualitative approach. Specifically, this study aims to describe the instructional background of IPS teachers and the characteristics of circulating economics teaching modules in SMP Jakarta, to describe the pattern of student engagement across the behavioural, emotional, cognitive, and agentic dimensions in economics lessons, and to formulate the design implications of these findings for developing the SE-PjBL instructional model.

2. Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. The approach was selected because the study aimed to describe and analyse the actual conditions of economics learning in SMP Jakarta as they naturally occur, particularly the instructional backgrounds of teachers, the characteristics of circulating teaching modules, and the patterns of student engagement, without manipulating the research setting in any way. A descriptive qualitative design is appropriate when the purpose of inquiry

is to produce a comprehensive summary of an event or condition in the everyday terms of those who experience it, rather than to test a hypothesis or to build a substantive theory. In the context of the present study, the design enabled the researcher to portray field conditions systematically so that they could serve as the empirical foundation for the subsequent development of an instructional model, and it allowed the three data sources used in this study to be read against one another rather than in isolation.

Research Site and Participants

This research was conducted in a number of junior high schools implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka in the Jakarta metropolitan area. The research site was selected purposively on the consideration that Jakarta represents a metropolitan socio-economic context with considerable variation in the instructional backgrounds of teachers and in the teaching resources available to them, so that the conditions documented are not those of a single uniform setting. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique and consisted of IPS teachers who teach economics content and students at the Fase D level, that is Grades VII and VIII, chosen on the basis of their direct involvement in and relevant experience with economics learning practices. In addition to teachers and students, the circulating economics teaching modules used in the participating schools were treated as a primary data source in their own right, since the modules constitute the most tangible representation of the instructional design that students actually receive. The detailed number and characteristics of the informants are presented at the beginning of the Results and Discussion section.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through three techniques, namely semi-structured interviews, classroom observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with IPS teachers and students to explore their experiences and perceptions of current economics learning practices, including the instructional strategies used, the involvement of students in learning activities, and the extent to which learning materials and activities foster confidence and interest in economics. Classroom observation was conducted to obtain empirical information regarding instructional practices, the use of learning media, and indications of student engagement during economics lessons, using an observation sheet organised around the four engagement dimensions. Document analysis was conducted on the circulating economics teaching modules used in the participating schools, focusing on the extent to which each module operationalises the four sources of academic self-efficacy proposed by Bandura (1997). The three techniques were deliberately combined so that what teachers and students reported, what actually happened in the classroom, and what the written instructional design prescribed could be compared directly.

Research Instruments

In qualitative research the researcher functions as the primary instrument, responsible for determining the research focus, collecting data, interpreting information, and drawing conclusions. To support the data collection process, the researcher used three supporting instruments, namely a semi-structured interview guide, a classroom observation sheet, and a document analysis rubric. These supporting instruments were developed from the four sources of self-efficacy proposed by Bandura (1997) and the engagement dimensions proposed by Fredricks et al. (2004) and Reeve and Shin (2020), so that every item in the instruments could be traced back to a theoretical construct. The interview guide was reviewed by two experts in economics education before use, and the wording of several items was simplified for the student version so that the questions remained accessible to Fase D learners. The full interview guide is presented in the Results and Discussion section as the basis on which the findings were generated.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), which consists of three interconnected stages, namely data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data condensation involved selecting, focusing, simplifying, and organising the data obtained from interviews, observations, and document analysis, and was operationalised through a two-cycle coding procedure in the sense described by Saldana (2021), in which descriptive codes assigned in the first cycle were grouped into categories in the second cycle. The condensed data were then categorised into thematic patterns related to the research focus and displayed in the form of matrices and thematic descriptions so that patterns and contradictions across sources became visible. Conclusions were drawn and verified continuously throughout the research process rather than only at its conclusion, and each emerging theme was checked against the raw data before being retained.

Trustworthiness of Data

The credibility of the research findings was ensured through source triangulation and technique triangulation in the sense proposed by Lincoln & Guba (1990). Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from teachers, from students, and from document analysis in order to identify the consistency and accuracy of the findings, so that a claim was retained only when it was supported by more than one source. Technique triangulation was conducted by comparing the data obtained from interviews, from observations, and from document analysis, which allowed reported practice to be checked against observed practice. Member checking was carried out by returning the summary of interview findings to the teacher informants for confirmation, and an audit trail of raw transcripts, coded data, and analytical memos was maintained throughout the study. Continuous verification was carried out so that the findings accurately represent the actual conditions of economics learning in SMP Jakarta.

3. Results and Discussion

Data Collection Procedure in the Field

Before the findings are presented, the process through which the data were obtained is described so that the basis of every claim made in this section is transparent. Data collection was carried out over a period of three months, from March to May 2026, in three junior high schools in Jakarta that implement the Kurikulum Merdeka. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four IPS teachers who teach economics content and eight Fase D students, so that the total number of informants was twelve. Teacher informants were selected purposively using the criteria of currently teaching economics content in Grades VII or VIII, having at least three years of teaching experience, and being willing to participate, whereas student informants were selected on the recommendation of the teachers with attention to variation in academic achievement so that the classroom was not represented only by its most active learners. Interviews with teachers were conducted in the school teachers' room outside teaching hours and lasted between forty-five and sixty minutes, while interviews with students were conducted in groups of two to three students in the school library and lasted approximately thirty minutes in order to reduce the social pressure that an individual interview may place on adolescent respondents. The characteristics of the informants are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Number and Characteristics of the Research Informants

Code	Role	Educational Background	Teaching Experience	School	Data Collection
T1	IPS teacher	Economics Education (S1)	12 years	SMP A	Interview and observation
T2	IPS teacher	Geography Education (S1)	8 years	SMP A	Interview and observation
T3	IPS teacher	History Education (S1)	15 years	SMP B	Interview and observation
T4	IPS teacher	Sociology Education (S1)	6 years	SMP C	Interview and observation
S1-S4	Students	Grade VII, Fase D	-	SMP A and B	Group interview
S5-S8	Students	Grade VIII, Fase D	-	SMP B and C	Group interview

All interviews were conducted in Indonesian, audio-recorded with the prior written consent of the informants and, for student informants, with the permission of the school, and transcribed verbatim within three days of each session. Transcripts were returned to the teacher informants for confirmation before being analysed. Classroom observation was conducted twice in each school, covering six economics lessons of eighty minutes each, using a non-participant observation sheet structured around the behavioural, emotional, cognitive, and agentic engagement dimensions, and was supported by field notes and photographic documentation. Document analysis was conducted on the economics teaching modules circulating in the participating schools, which were assessed against a rubric derived from the four

sources of academic self-efficacy. The documentation obtained during classroom observation reinforces the interview data by showing how economics lessons are actually conducted in the participating schools. Two representative moments of the observed lessons are presented in Figure 1 and Figure 2, in which the faces of all teachers and students have been blurred to protect the identity of the participants in accordance with research ethics.



Figure 1. Classroom observation of an economics lesson in one of the participating schools



Figure 2. Student activity during the economics lesson observed in one of the participating schools

Interview Guide as the Basis of Data Collection

The interviews were guided by a set of focal aspects derived from the research objectives and from the theoretical constructs used in this study, namely the sources of academic self-efficacy and the dimensions of student engagement. Each aspect was translated into open-ended questions that allowed informants to elaborate on their own experience, while probing questions were used whenever an answer needed to be clarified or exemplified. The guide covered the condition of economics learning, the instructional methods used, the level and form of student involvement,

the constraints experienced by teachers, previous experience with project work, the perceived need for project-based learning, and the characteristics that informants expected an instructional model to possess. The complete interview guide is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Teacher and Student Informants

No.	Focus/Aspect	Question Posed to Informants	Informant
1	Condition of economics learning	How is economics content currently delivered in your IPS class? Which economics topics are considered the most difficult, and why?	Teacher and student
2	Instructional methods used	Which methods and learning media do you most frequently use in economics lessons? What considerations guide that choice?	Teacher
3	Level of student involvement	How do students respond during economics lessons? In which activities do they appear most and least involved?	Teacher and student
4	Form of student activity	What kinds of tasks or activities do students carry out in economics lessons? How often do they work in groups, investigate, or present their own work?	Teacher and student
5	Learning constraints	What obstacles do you face in teaching economics content? To what extent do your academic background and the available teaching modules support you?	Teacher
6	Experience with project work	Have you ever implemented project-based activities in economics learning? How did students respond, and what difficulties arose?	Teacher and student
7	Need for project-based learning	To what extent do you need a project-based instructional model for economics content? What support would you require in order to implement it?	Teacher
8	Expected characteristics of the model	What characteristics should an economics instructional model possess so that students become actively involved and confident? Which stages do you consider essential?	Teacher and student

The responses to the questions in Table 2 became the raw material from which the themes of this study were generated, and at the same time became the empirical basis for determining the characteristics of the Student Engagement Project-Based Learning model to be developed. Questions on the first, second, and fifth aspects produced the data underlying the themes on teacher background and module characteristics; questions on the third and fourth aspects produced the data underlying the theme on student engagement; and questions on the sixth, seventh, and eighth aspects produced the data from which the components of the prospective model were derived. In other words, the model characteristics presented later in this section are not imported from the literature alone but are anchored in what teachers and students themselves identified as missing from their current practice.

Coding Procedure and Development of Themes

Analysis began with the repeated reading of all verbatim transcripts, observation notes, and module analysis sheets in order to obtain a sense of the data as a whole. In the first coding cycle, descriptive codes were assigned to every meaningful data segment, producing forty-seven initial codes such as non-economics academic background, dependence on textbook exposition, limited group work, absence of reflection, and material perceived as distant from daily life. In the second cycle, codes that shared conceptual meaning were grouped into categories, and the categories were then examined against the research objectives and the theoretical constructs until five themes were established, namely the instructional background of teachers, the characteristics of circulating teaching modules, the pattern of student engagement, the research gap in project-based economics learning, and the design implications for the prospective model. Each theme was verified through source and technique triangulation before being reported. An excerpt from the coding process is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Excerpt of the Coding Process from Data Segment to Theme

Data Segment (Informant Code)	Initial Code	Category	Theme
"I graduated in history education, so when the topic turns to markets and prices I mostly follow the textbook." (T3)	Non-economics academic background; dependence on textbook	Limited content readiness of teachers	Instructional background of teachers
"The module already provides the material and the exercises, so I simply follow the sequence." (T2)	Module used as a fixed script; no graduated task	Module does not scaffold success experience	Characteristics of circulating modules
"Economics lessons are mostly note-taking and questions at the end of the chapter." (S3)	Repetitive individual tasks; passive participation	Weak behavioural and cognitive involvement	Pattern of student engagement
"I feel anxious when asked to answer in front of the class because I am afraid of being wrong." (S6)	Learning anxiety; fear of error	Unmanaged emotional condition	Pattern of student engagement
"Students are never asked which topic they would like to study." (T1)	No student choice; teacher-determined tasks	Absence of autonomy support	Pattern of student engagement
"A structured guide would help, because designing a project from scratch takes time." (T4)	Need for a ready-to-use structure	Demand for an explicit syntax	Design implications for the model

Instructional Background of Teachers in Economics Learning

The findings indicate that only 25% of the IPS teacher informants, that is one of the four, hold an academic background in economics education, while the majority come from other social science backgrounds such as history, geography, and sociology education. Interview and document data further indicate that teachers

without an economics background rely more frequently on conventional, textbook-based delivery and report limited confidence in designing project-based economics activities, particularly when the topic requires the interpretation of economic phenomena rather than the recall of definitions. This condition implies a strong need for an instructional model that is ready to use, adaptive, and easy to operationalise by teachers with varied academic backgrounds. The finding is consistent with Octoria et al. (2024), who found that the self-efficacy and teaching commitment of teachers contribute significantly to teaching performance, and it is reinforced by Imran et al. (2023), who showed that difficulties in learning economics and accounting content are shaped as much by the structure of instructional support as by the material itself. The gap in economics-specific academic background identified here therefore has clear implications for the quality of economics instruction unless it is compensated by a well-structured and explicit instructional model.

Characteristics of Circulating Economics Teaching Modules

Document analysis of the economics teaching modules circulating in the participating schools reveals notable limitations in the way these modules operationalise the sources of academic self-efficacy proposed by Bandura (1997). The analysis focused on whether each module provides tasks of graduated difficulty that allow students to accumulate success experience, and whether it contains explicit strategies for managing the emotional state of learners during the lesson. The result of this analysis is summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. Characteristics of Circulating Economics Teaching Modules in Terms of Self-Efficacy Operationalisation

Aspect Reviewed	Not/Not Yet Accommodated	Already Accommodated
Mastery experience (gradual scaffolding of successful experiences)	87%	13%
Physiological-emotional states (management of students' emotional condition)	95%	5%

The data in Table 4 show that the majority of circulating modules are not designed to scaffold mastery experience gradually, and that almost all of them neglect the physiological-emotional dimension of learning, despite both being primary sources of academic self-efficacy. In practical terms, the modules move students directly from the presentation of a concept to an end-of-chapter exercise without an intermediate stage in which a student can succeed at a smaller task first, and they contain no guidance for the teacher on how to respond to the anxiety that students report when they are asked to answer in front of the class. This condition is consistent with Talsma et al. (2018), who found a reciprocal relationship between self-efficacy and academic achievement, which suggests that modules failing to operationalise these sources forfeit a systematic opportunity to strengthen the learning motivation of students. It also echoes the needs analysis reported by Sundari et al. (2025), in which teachers explicitly requested project designs capable

of developing independent learning rather than materials that merely present content.

Pattern of Student Engagement in Economics Lessons

Because engagement is the construct this study ultimately seeks to influence, the findings on student involvement are discussed according to the four dimensions of the framework used in this study rather than reported as a single undifferentiated level of participation. On the behavioural dimension, observation showed that student activity was largely confined to listening, copying notes, and answering closed questions addressed to the class as a whole, with investigation, group work, and presentation appearing only occasionally. Students confirmed this pattern in interviews, describing economics lessons as consisting mainly of note-taking and end-of-chapter questions. This finding is consistent with Nepal and Rogerson (2020), who observed that engagement in economics classrooms is usually discussed in behavioural terms precisely because participation is the dimension most visibly lacking, and with Asarta (2024), who identified limited classroom interaction as a persistent difficulty for economics educators. The comparison indicates that the behavioural deficit documented here is not an isolated local phenomenon but a recurring characteristic of economics instruction that relies on exposition.

On the emotional dimension, the data show that students associate economics content with difficulty and with the risk of being wrong in public rather than with interest or curiosity, and that no instructional stage is explicitly allocated to managing this affective condition. This aligns with the module analysis reported above, in which almost all circulating modules neglected the physiological-emotional source of self-efficacy, and it clarifies why a purely procedural improvement in teaching method would be insufficient. Chang et al. (2024) demonstrated that projects situated in an authentic, real-world context produced higher emotional engagement than projects without such a context, which suggests that the affective problem identified here is addressable through the way a task is framed rather than only through classroom management. On the cognitive dimension, the observed and reported activities required recall and reproduction far more often than they required comparison, explanation, or the application of an economic concept to an unfamiliar situation, indicating that students deploy surface rather than deep learning strategies. Fredricks et al. (2004) defined cognitive engagement precisely as this willingness to invest effort in demanding learning, and Skinner & Pitzer (2012) argued that such investment is sustained only when the instructional design repeatedly calls for it.

On the agentic dimension, indicators were the least visible of all. Students were not asked which economic phenomenon they wished to examine, were not given the opportunity to propose the form in which their work would be produced, and were not invited to comment on the course of the lesson, so that the constructive contribution described by Reeve (2013) and Reeve and Shin (2020) had almost no channel through which to appear. Zhong et al. (2025) reported that project-based activities raised engagement across all four dimensions, including the agentic

dimension, which strengthens the argument that the absence of agency observed in these classrooms is a property of the instructional design rather than of the students themselves. Taken together with the national and international assessment data reported by the OECD (2023), which show declining literacy on dimensions closely related to basic economic concepts and engagement indicators below the average of participating countries, these dimensional findings indicate that the engagement problem in SMP economics learning is distributed across the behavioural, emotional, cognitive, and agentic dimensions simultaneously. Any instructional response must therefore address all four rather than concentrate on raising visible participation alone, a conclusion further supported in the Indonesian setting by Suparti et al. (2025), who found that learning interest in social studies improved only when the method deliberately restructured how students interact with the material.

Why Economics Learning in Junior High Schools Requires a Contextual Project-Based Approach

The characteristics of economics learning at the junior high school level provide a specific rationale for a project-based approach that is contextual rather than generic. Fase D learners are in a transitional cognitive phase in which abstract constructs such as scarcity, opportunity cost, and the formation of price become meaningful mainly when they are anchored in situations the learner has actually experienced, so that an expository treatment of these constructs tends to produce definitional knowledge without economic reasoning. The position of economics as embedded content within the integrated IPS subject compounds this difficulty, because the limited time allocated to it and the fact that it is frequently delivered by teachers from other disciplines together reduce the likelihood that the content will be developed through investigation. At the same time, the Kurikulum Merdeka provides an institutional affordance for project work that did not previously exist, which means that a project-based model does not have to be inserted against the grain of the curriculum but can be aligned with a structure schools are already required to implement.

The research gap and the contribution of this study follow directly from this reasoning. Existing PjBL research remains concentrated in science and mathematics fields (Bell, 2010; Bender, 2012), and its effectiveness has been confirmed mainly within those domains (Chen & Yang, 2019), while studies in Indonesian economics education have concentrated on developing modules and media (Khusnunnisa' & Andriani, 2025; Sukidjo, 2016) or on the effect of a method on interest and outcomes (Musyary & Utomo, 2026; Suparti et al., 2025). What remains absent is an economics instructional model in which each stage is explicitly mapped to a source of academic self-efficacy and to a dimension of student engagement, so that the model can be used as a design instrument rather than only as a general recommendation to teach through projects. The contribution of this study is to establish that such a model is required by the documented condition of the field, and to specify, from the field data themselves, which components it must contain.

From Empirical Findings to the Components of the SE-PjBL Model

The findings reported above are not merely a description of deficiency; each of them functions as a rational basis for a specific component of the model to be developed. A finding becomes a design requirement when it identifies a function that current practice does not perform and that the theoretical framework indicates is necessary for engagement or self-efficacy to develop. The relationship between the empirical findings, their analytical interpretation, and the components of the prospective SE-PjBL model is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Relationship between the Empirical Findings and the Components of the SE-PjBL Model

Empirical Finding	Analytical Interpretation	Design Rationale	SE-PjBL Model Component
The majority of IPS teachers do not hold an economics background and rely on textbook exposition	Content readiness is limited, so instructional decisions default to the safest available format	The model must carry its own structure rather than depend on the disciplinary expertise of the teacher	Explicit instructional syntax with a stage-by-stage teacher guide
Circulating modules do not scaffold mastery experience gradually	Students move from concept to final task without intermediate success	Tasks must be graduated so that competence is experienced before it is assessed	Graduated scaffolding with formative checkpoints
Circulating modules neglect the physiological-emotional dimension, and students report anxiety about being wrong	Emotional condition is left unmanaged, suppressing emotional engagement	The opening stage must lower affective risk and raise curiosity before cognitive demand increases	Contextual economic problems posed as an engaging question
Learning is dominated by individual note-taking and closed questions	Behavioural engagement is confined to compliance rather than participation	Students need a task structure that requires interaction to be completed	Collaborative project work with defined roles
Students are never consulted on topics, tasks, or the form of their work	Agentic engagement has no channel through which to appear	The model must transfer a defined portion of instructional decisions to students	Student autonomy in topic selection and product form
Economic concepts are taught abstractly and perceived as distant from daily life	Cognitive engagement remains at the level of recall	Concepts must be encountered through phenomena the learner can investigate directly	Investigation of authentic local economic phenomena
No stage is allocated to reflection or constructive feedback	Success experience is not consolidated into a belief about capability	Achievement must be made explicit to the learner for self-efficacy to form	Structured reflection and constructive feedback

Read as a whole, Table 5 shows that the six characteristics of the prospective model, namely contextual economic problems, project activity, collaboration, student autonomy, graduated scaffolding, and structured reflection, are each traceable to a

documented condition in the field rather than adopted from the general literature on project-based learning. This traceability matters methodologically, because it is what distinguishes a model grounded in needs analysis from a model assembled from best practice, and it is also what allows the effectiveness of each component to be evaluated against the specific problem it was designed to solve.

Initial Design Implications for the SE-PjBL Syntax

On the basis of the component mapping presented above, initial design implications were formulated in the form of a six-phase instructional syntax, in which each phase is explicitly intended to build a particular source of academic self-efficacy while activating a particular dimension of student engagement. The syntax is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Initial SE-PjBL Syntax, Targeted Self-Efficacy Sources, and Engagement Dimensions

Phase	Learning Activity	Self-Efficacy Source Targeted	Engagement Dimension Activated
1. Engaging Question	The teacher poses an essential question that provokes student curiosity about an everyday economic phenomenon in the surrounding environment	Physiological-emotional states	Emotional
2. Project Planning	Students in small groups design a mini-project addressing the essential question, setting goals, task divisions, and timelines, with the topic chosen by the group	Mastery experience	Behavioural and agentic
3. Investigation and Inquiry	Students conduct investigations through observation, interviews with local economic actors, or document study, with graduated teacher scaffolding	Vicarious experience; Social persuasion	Cognitive
4. Collaborative Construction	Students collaboratively compile their findings into a concrete product whose form is determined by the group	Mastery experience; Vicarious experience	Behavioural and cognitive
5. Public Presentation	Students present their project results and receive appreciation and questions from the audience	Mastery experience; Social persuasion	Emotional and agentic
6. Reflective Evaluation	Students conduct personal and group reflection with constructive feedback from the teacher on what was achieved and how	All sources of self-efficacy	Cognitive and agentic

The sequence in Table 6 was designed so that the four dimensions of student engagement are activated progressively rather than simultaneously, which responds directly to the dimensional pattern documented earlier in this section. The emotional dimension is addressed first because the data showed that affective risk is what prevents students from participating at all; the behavioural and cognitive dimensions are developed through the planning, investigation, and construction

phases, where the task structure requires interaction and the application of concepts to unfamiliar situations; and the agentic dimension is deliberately reserved for the phases in which students exercise choice, present their own work, and comment on their own learning, consistent with the concept of agentic engagement proposed by Reeve (2013) and Reeve and Shin (2020). The syntax therefore operationalises, stage by stage, the components that the field data identified as absent.

Research Findings Based on Data Triangulation

The consistency of the findings obtained from interviews, observations, and document analysis was verified through source and technique triangulation, so that no finding reported in this study rests on a single source. The result of this verification is summarised in Table 7.

Table 7. Research Findings Based on Data Triangulation

Research Focus	Interview Findings	Observation Findings	Document Findings	Research Finding
Instructional background of teachers	Most teachers reported a non-economics academic background and limited confidence in designing project-based economics activities	Instruction was largely delivered through conventional, teacher-centred methods	Teacher assignment records show a low proportion of economics-background teachers	Only 25% of the IPS teacher informants hold an economics education background
Module characteristics	Teachers reported that the available modules provide limited guidance for building student confidence gradually	Learning activities rarely included structured stages of increasing challenge or explicit emotional-support strategies	Circulating modules were found to lack explicit scaffolding for mastery experience and emotional-state management	87% of modules do not scaffold mastery experience; 95% neglect physiological-emotional states
Student engagement	Students reported limited opportunities for active investigation or presentation of their own work	Behavioural and agentic engagement indicators appeared infrequently during the observed lessons	National assessment reports show declining literacy and below-average engagement trends	Engagement is weak across the behavioural, emotional, cognitive, and agentic dimensions
Design implications	Teachers expressed a need for a ready-to-use, structured instructional model	Existing practices lacked a systematic syntax linking activities to specific motivational outcomes	No circulating module explicitly maps its stages to sources of self-efficacy	An explicit six-phase SE-PjBL syntax was formulated to address this gap

Overall, the triangulated findings confirm three interrelated empirical gaps, namely the limited economics background of IPS teachers, the inadequacy of circulating modules in operationalising the sources of self-efficacy, and the weakness of

student engagement across all four of its dimensions, alongside a literature gap in the explicit integration of project-based learning, multidimensional student engagement, and self-efficacy theory within junior high school economics instruction. Theoretically, these findings reinforce the argument that the three frameworks are complementary and can be synthesised into a single coherent instructional syntax rather than applied separately, as has been the pattern in most prior studies. Practically, the design implications formulated here provide a concrete foundation for IPS teachers with varied academic backgrounds to deliver economics instruction that explicitly builds the academic self-efficacy of their students, and they serve as the empirical basis for the subsequent prototyping of the SE-PjBL model.

4. Conclusion

This study set out to describe the actual conditions of economics learning in junior high schools in Jakarta as an empirical foundation for model development, and it answers that question on three counts. First, the proportion of IPS teachers who hold an economics education background is low, and teachers from other social science disciplines rely on textbook exposition because they lack an instructional structure they can follow with confidence. Second, the teaching modules circulating in these schools do not scaffold mastery experience gradually and give almost no attention to the emotional condition of learners, so that two of the primary sources of academic self-efficacy remain unoperationalised in the documents that shape daily practice. Third, student engagement is weak across the behavioural, emotional, cognitive, and agentic dimensions simultaneously, which indicates that raising visible participation alone would not resolve the problem.

The study succeeded in translating these conditions into design requirements rather than leaving them as a description of deficiency. Each documented condition was mapped to a component that a prospective instructional model must contain, yielding six characteristics for the Student Engagement Project-Based Learning model, namely contextual economic problems, project activity, collaboration, student autonomy, graduated scaffolding, and structured reflection, which were then arranged into an initial six-phase syntax. The limitation of the study lies in its descriptive scope and its confinement to one metropolitan setting, so the design implications reported here are proposals rather than validated claims. Further research is recommended to proceed toward prototype development and expert and practitioner validation before effectiveness testing, and to extend the descriptive analysis to other regional contexts in order to examine the transferability of the design implications identified here.

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