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## Exploring A High School Teacher's Experience in Teaching Speaking Through Project-Based Learning: A Narrative Inquiry

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### ABSTRACT

This narrative inquiry delves into the lived experience of an English teacher navigating the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) to enhance speaking competence within a unique, nature- and science-integrated high school in Indonesia. Addressing the pedagogical gap prevalent in traditional EFL settings—characterized by limited authentic exposure and teacher-centered methods—the study sought to illuminate the teacher's practices, the specific challenges encountered in a non-conventional context, and the adaptive strategies employed. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, data were meticulously collected through semi-structured interviews, intensive classroom observations, and document analysis (including lesson plans and project artifacts). The findings unequivocally demonstrate that PjBL is instrumental in promoting authentic language use and heightened student engagement through real-life tasks, such as presentation and video projects. Crucially, the teacher adopted dynamic, constructivist roles—shifting fluidly between facilitator, guide, and evaluator. The primary implementation hurdles identified were stringent time management demands, accommodating diverse speaking proficiency levels, and managing fluctuating student motivation. These were mitigated successfully via adaptive lesson planning, targeted group scaffolding, the strategic integration of digital tools, and the consistent provision of immediate feedback. This research provides a teacher-centered perspective that significantly contributes to the literature by validating PjBL's efficacy and adaptability within complex, interdisciplinary EFL environments.

## 1. Introduction

Speaking stands as one of the essential productive skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogy, enabling learners to convey ideas, emotions, and intentions clearly and effectively. In the context of Indonesian education, however, mastering speaking is often perceived as the most formidable skill. This difficulty stems from several systemic issues: students typically have limited exposure to real-life communication in English, frequently lack the necessary confidence to

articulate themselves, and are predominantly taught through teacher-centered approaches. Such traditional methods tend to over-emphasize grammar mastery at the expense of genuine communicative competence, a dynamic that often aligns with observations made by Brown & Lee (2020). Consequently, this pedagogical environment frequently breeds passive learners who are hesitant to speak, leading to deficiencies in both fluency and coherence. The necessity to transcend these long-standing limitations in language teaching has spurred the growing popularity of student-centered pedagogies.

Among the innovative approaches gaining traction, Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is highlighted for its emphasis on meaningful collaboration, the real-life application of acquired knowledge, and fostering active student engagement. PjBL encourages students to participate actively in hands-on activities, tackle real-world problems, and concurrently develop crucial 21st-century skills, including communication, teamwork, and critical thinking (Larmer et al., 2020). Within the realm of language education specifically, PjBL is particularly effective in enhancing speaking proficiency. This effectiveness is rooted in the requirement for learners to engage in purposeful communication through various culminating tasks, such as formal presentations, engaging group discussions, creative storytelling, and the final creation of a tangible project. The national educational landscape in Indonesia has further supported this shift through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka), which actively promotes greater flexibility and autonomy in learning design. This curricular evolution has facilitated the rise of innovative school models, specifically those integrating nature- and science-based learning, which combine experiential learning, Islamic values, and interdisciplinary environmental awareness. These unique schools provide a non-traditional context ripe for examining the functions and adaptations of PjBL in distinct educational settings.

Prior academic literature has consistently demonstrated the considerable potential of PjBL in improving various facets of speaking skills. For example, studies have confirmed its capability to boost speaking fluency (Sumarni & Kadarwati, 2020), and its utility in vocabulary development through digital tasks like vlog creation (Dewi & Hidayat, 2022). Furthermore, research by Rohmah & Akbar (2021) and Hidayah et al. (2021) has underscored the critical role of effective teacher facilitation and the use of digital tools in adequately supporting speaking development. However, a notable gap persists in the extant literature. Most previous investigations have predominantly focused on measuring student outcomes, inadvertently sidelining the critical examination of the teacher's pivotal role, perceptions, and the specific operational challenges encountered during PjBL implementation. Moreover, PjBL research has been overwhelmingly concentrated in conventional public or vocational schools, resulting in limited exploration of its operation within non-traditional learning environments, such as the nature-based or science-integrated school models. Addressing this dual lacuna—the lack of teacher-centered perspectives and the scarcity of non-traditional contexts—is the primary driver for the current study.

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To thoroughly investigate this phenomenon, the research employed a qualitative approach anchored in narrative inquiry, a methodology well-suited for capturing stories, reflections, and the meaning-making processes from the participant's perspective (Creswell, 2013). This design allowed the researcher to deeply analyze how the teacher's personal background and the unique institutional context of the nature-based school profoundly influenced her teaching practices. The participant was an experienced English teacher (Miss E), who had been implementing PjBL since 2017 across both junior and senior high levels. Data collection involved a robust process of triangulation using three main techniques : a 90-minute semi-structured interview focusing on lesson planning, project design, challenges, and support systems ; classroom observations documenting key dynamics, student engagement, and teacher roles during a 10th-grade PjBL speaking lesson ; and document analysis, including the teacher's lesson plans (RPP) and student project outputs . Data were subsequently analyzed using the narrative inquiry process, which involved familiarization, initial manual coding to extract recurrent themes (such as "flexible lesson planning" and "time management"), thematic organization into coherent storylines, and final interpretation against existing literature.

The findings revealed that the teacher, Miss E, was fundamentally motivated by her early observation that students were significantly more responsive to hands-on projects than to traditional lectures. Her implementation strategy evolved from initially assigning simple video-making tasks for procedure texts to integrating more diverse and complex projects, including presentations, posters, and thematic discussions on environmental issues. She prioritized flexible frameworks over rigid lesson scripts, focusing on contextual topics like social trends and environmental concerns to maximize relevance and excitement. In terms of classroom implementation, Miss E employed differentiated strategies by forming mixed-ability groups for long-term projects to facilitate peer learning, while allowing students choice for shorter activities . Speaking tasks—which included poster presentations, food demonstration videos, and thematic storytelling—explicitly emphasized purposeful communication in English. She also strategically integrated digital tools like Google Slides and YouTube and provided consistent scaffolding (such as sentence models and immediate feedback) for students with lower proficiency, aligning her shifting roles with the constructivist approach (Fosnot, 1996). The teacher's roles were dynamic, ranging from facilitator to guide and evaluator, mirroring the theoretical model where the teacher provides structure for students to construct meaning.

The essential contribution of this study is its illumination of the interplay between pedagogy, institutional culture, and contextual factors in shaping language instruction. The research focuses on understanding how the teacher plans and conducts PjBL activities, the challenges faced, and the strategies used to address those challenges, also seeking to uncover the teacher's beliefs and motivations in applying PjBL within this unique context. The objective of this study is to explore how an English teacher experiences and navigates the implementation of Project-Based Learning in teaching speaking skills within a nature-based high school, focusing on the strategies employed, challenges encountered, and perceived outcomes of this pedagogical approach.

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## **2. Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

This study employed a qualitative research approach, utilizing narrative inquiry as the core method to explore the lived experience of an English teacher implementing Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in teaching speaking. Narrative inquiry was selected because of its capacity to capture stories, reflections, and meaning-making processes from the participant's perspective (Creswell, 2013). This enabled researchers to analyze how unique personal and contextual factors specifically within a nature- and science-based school environment influenced the teacher's pedagogical practices. Ultimately, this approach was deemed most suitable for gaining a nuanced understanding of the teacher's experience and the adaptive strategies required for PjBL implementation in this alternative educational setting.

### ***Instrumentation***

The primary instruments used in this study were a semi-structured interview guide, an observation checklist, and documentation tools. The interview guide was developed based on the research objectives and consisted of open-ended questions focusing on PjBL implementation, challenges, and teaching strategies. The observation checklist was designed to capture key classroom dynamics, student engagement, and teacher roles during PjBL activities. A digital audio recorder was used during interviews, while field notes were taken for both interviews and classroom observations to support data accuracy. Supplementary documents such as lesson plans (RPP) and project materials were also collected and analyzed to triangulate findings.

### ***Data Collection***

Data were collected through three main techniques: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The participant was an experienced English teacher who had implemented PjBL since 2017 in both junior and senior high school settings. The research took place at a private Islamic-based high school in Depok, West Java, which integrates environmental and scientific themes in its curriculum. The interview lasted 90 minutes and was conducted in the teacher's office to ensure a relaxed and comfortable setting. It covered topics such as lesson planning, project design, speaking skill development, challenges encountered, and support systems available. Classroom observation was conducted one week after the interview in a 10th-grade class. The researcher observed a PjBL-based speaking lesson that included group work and student presentations. Field notes documented teacher-student interactions, use of language, instructional media, and classroom atmosphere.

In addition, documentation such as the teacher's RPP (lesson plans), visual aids, and student project outputs (e.g., posters and videos) were collected. Photographic evidence was also obtained (with consent) to enrich the contextual understanding of the classroom environment and teaching process.

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### **Data Analysis**

The collected data were analyzed using the narrative inquiry process, which involves familiarization, initial coding, thematic organization, and interpretation (Creswell, 2013). First, all interview recordings were transcribed and read multiple times alongside field notes and documentation to gain a holistic understanding of the teacher's experiences. Key narrative elements such as setting, characters, challenges, and actions were identified. Coding was performed manually to extract recurrent themes such as "flexible lesson planning," "speaking confidence," "student engagement," and "time management." These themes were then organized into storylines that reflected the teacher's journey in applying PjBL. The reconstructed narrative was interpreted in relation to existing literature on PjBL, EFL speaking instruction, and constructivist pedagogy to draw insights about effective teaching strategies in non-traditional school settings.

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

This section presents the findings from interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, followed by an interpretative discussion. The results are organized into key themes reflecting the teacher's experience in implementing PjBL to teach speaking skills in a nature-based high school context. The discussion connects these findings with relevant literature to deepen understanding.

#### ***Teacher's Experience in Implementing Project-Based Learning***

The participant, referred to as Miss E, described her journey of adopting PjBL to engage students more actively in speaking English. She emphasized that her motivation stemmed from early experimentation and observation that students were more responsive when working on projects rather than listening to lectures.

*"I want to introduce a way of learning here that involves a lot of practice and not just sitting and reading textbooks."*

*(Excerpt 2, Interview)*

Miss E initially introduced PjBL by assigning video-making tasks for procedure texts. Over time, she integrated more diverse and complex projects such as posters, presentations, and thematic discussions on environmental or social issues (Figure 1).

Miss E planned her projects using flexible frameworks rather than rigid lesson scripts. She prioritized contextual topics such as hobbies, social trends, and environmental concerns to increase relevance and engagement.

*"For example, topics like dreams, hobbies, or issues around them can help them relate more and get them excited about what they're doing."*

*(Excerpt 5, Interview)*

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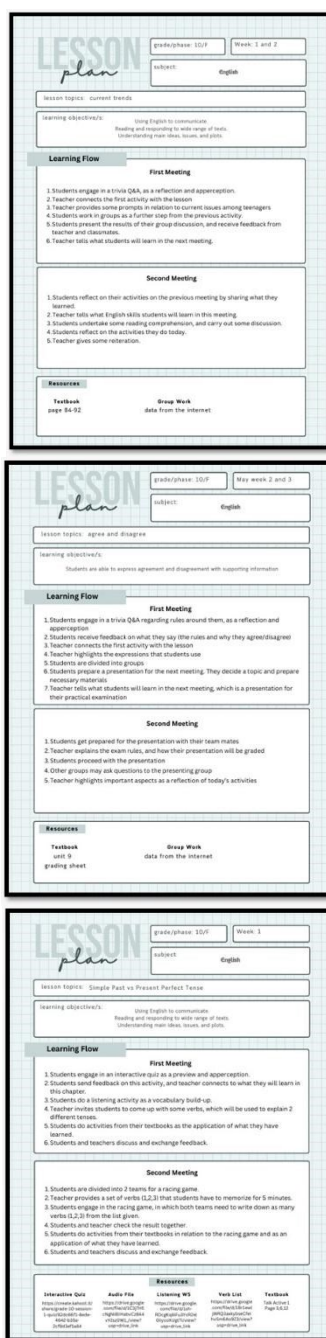


Figure 1. Example of Lesson Plan Used in PjBL Speaking Class

### ***Classroom Implementation Strategies***

The teacher employed differentiated strategies based on project duration and student needs. For long-term projects, she formed mixed-ability groups to encourage peer learning. For shorter activities, students could choose their own teams (Figure 2, Figure 3 and Figure 4).



Figure 2. Group Formation During Project-Based Activities

Speaking tasks included poster presentations, food demonstration videos, role plays, and thematic storytelling. These tasks emphasized the use of English in purposeful communication.

*“They create projects like presentations, videos, or dramas... from there, they automatically learn to speak English.”*

*(Excerpt 11, Interview)*

Digital tools such as Google Slides and YouTube were integrated to support learning.

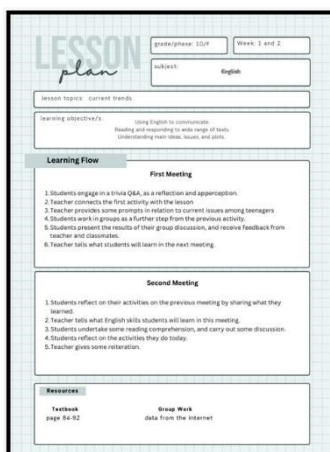


Figure 3. Use of Google Slides for Student Presentation

Miss E also used formative assessments and offered scaffolding for lower-proficiency students. She encouraged rehearsal, gave sentence models, and provided immediate feedback after student presentations.



Figure 4. Teacher's Role in Group Facilitation and Feedback

### ***Challenges Faced During PjBL Implementation***

Miss E identified four main challenges: time management, diverse speaking abilities, engagement fluctuation, and resource limitations.

#### **Time Management**

She developed weekly schedules and sent reminders via WhatsApp to keep students on track.

- **Student Speaking Proficiency**

To address varying speaking abilities, she adjusted expectations and provided extra support for less confident students.

#### **Student Engagement**

Breaks, music, and task rotation were used to maintain motivation, especially during lengthy projects.

- **Resource Limitations**

Though the school provided internet and multimedia tools, occasional connectivity issues were overcome by offering offline alternatives.

*“The facilities are quite complete... but sometimes the internet slows down. So I allow students to present without video if needed.”*

*(Excerpt 26, Interview)*

### ***Project Examples***

Miss E described various projects that helped enhance student speaking skills. One project involved students demonstrating a cooking procedure in English via video while others included poster campaigns, short dramas, and environmental-themed debates (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Student Cooking Video Project on Procedure Text

These projects encouraged students to speak spontaneously and confidently in front of peers.

### ***Discussion***

The findings reinforce the role of PjBL in promoting authentic speaking practice in EFL contexts. Miss E's experience aligns with Kolb's experiential learning theory, which emphasizes learning through real-world tasks. Her shifting roles from facilitator to guide and evaluator mirror the constructivist approach, where students construct meaning while the teacher provides structure (Fosnot, 1996; Larmer et al., 2020).

Student engagement also supports Vygotsky's (1978) view of language development through social interaction. The flexible planning, integration of Islamic values, and context-based topics illustrate how PjBL can be adapted in religious, interdisciplinary, and non-traditional school settings. The challenges reported especially related to time, student diversity, and engagement echo earlier findings (Rahmawati & Kusumaningtyas, 2024; Maqbulin, 2023).

## **4. Conclusion**

This research was driven by the core question of how an English teacher experiences and navigates the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) for teaching speaking in a nature- and science-based high school setting.

The results of this exploration confirmed a significant success. It was found that PjBL is a highly responsive framework that effectively advances students' communicative competence. Through authentic projects such as cooking videos, posters, and presentations, PjBL successfully fostered authentic language use, increased student engagement, and encouraged students to take ownership of their learning process. The teacher's role underwent a crucial evolution, acting dynamically as a facilitator, guide, and evaluator. This shift in role was critical in building students' speaking confidence.

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Nevertheless, the study also identified challenges encountered, indicating that the application of PjBL is not without obstacles. These challenges included time constraints, gaps in student proficiency levels, fluctuating interest, and resource availability issues. However, the research affirms the teacher's success in overcoming these challenges. Thanks to continuous professional development, the teacher was able to respond to the obstacles through adaptive planning, targeted scaffolding strategies, and digital tool integration. PjBL proved to be not only effective in enhancing speaking ability but also highly flexible for adaptation to the unique cultural, pedagogical, and institutional context of the school. This study presents a practical guide and a teacher-centered perspective for applying PjBL in non-traditional educational environments.

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