

Applying Project-Based Learning to Improve Vocational English Skills

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ABSTRAK

A common problem in teaching English in vocational secondary schools (SMK) is the mismatch between the curriculum taught and the needs of the job market. The English learning process in SMKs differs from that in general schools, as writing, reading, speaking and listening skills are an integral part of the educational experience in vocational schools, especially in vocational English programmes. One method used to improve English skills is Project-based Learning (PjBL), which is designed to challenge students to solve real problems often encountered in the tourism industry. The purpose of this study is to implement PjBL, specifically in the Tourism department, to improve English skills and understanding of tourism services, planning, and authentic experiences, which ultimately result in products such as brochures. This research employed the Classroom Action Research method with two cycles: planning, action, observation, and reflection. To measure the effectiveness of the programme, pre-tests and post-tests were conducted. The results of cycle 1 showed that PjBL implementation was 67% because teachers and students were still adapting to this learning model. However, in cycle 2, implementation increased to 94.4%, exceeding the minimum target of 80%. The level of student engagement was recorded at 81.25%, and most of the post-test scores were in the range of 70–80. The use of PjBL in English language learning at vocational schools for tourism proved to be effective in improving students' English skills, while also developing critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity skills that are relevant to the current needs of the tourism industry.

Keywords: Project-based learning; Tourism; Vocational

INTRODUCTION

Vocational secondary schools, particularly those offering tourism courses that necessitate English language proficiency, endeavour to equip students with the competencies required in the tourism industry, which frequently entails direct interaction with foreign tourists. In lesser-known tourist areas, such as Palangka Raya, it is particularly important to raise awareness of the various types of tourism that can attract visitors to the area (Anggayana, 2023). Consequently, vocational secondary schools with tourism study programmes are required to prepare their students in fields that support tourism development in their regions.

The tourism industry is a global sector, with extensive job opportunities in various countries. Graduates of vocational secondary schools specialising in tourism are equipped with the English language skills necessary to work in various international tourist destinations or even in tourism companies with overseas



branches. In the tourism sector, there is a significant amount of interaction with visitors from abroad (Tomej & Duedahl, 2023). Consequently, English language proficiency facilitates effective communication with international tourists, encompassing the provision of information, the management of complaints, and the addressing of other requirements. Graduates of vocational high schools specializing in tourism will have a competitive advantage in the job market due to the fact that many tourism and hospitality companies seek employees who can speak English in order to enhance the quality of their services (Stangl et al., 2024).

A significant proportion of the material and information in the tourism sector is presented in English, encompassing a wide range of resources, including guidebooks, travel applications, and international websites. The ability to comprehend such information is contingent upon proficient English language skills. In conclusion, it is evident that English language proficiency constitutes a pivotal component in the preparation of vocational high school students specializing in tourism for employment within this rapidly expanding industry, which frequently entails cross-cultural interaction. Consequently, English language learning is not solely conducted through conventional teaching methods. The utilization of Project-Based Learning (PBL) is of paramount importance, as this pedagogical approach not only instructs language in a conventional manner, but also cultivates competencies that are profoundly requisite in the tourism industry through a more pragmatic and contextualized approach.

The process of English language learning in vocational secondary schools (SMK) is characterized by distinct features that differentiate it from the learning experience observed in general schools. Vocational secondary school students are prepared to have specific skills in accordance with their chosen vocational field and are ready to enter the world of work after graduation. The English language curriculum in vocational schools is distinct from that of general schools, with a greater emphasis on the specific vocational disciplines. A prevalent issue in the context of English language acquisition in vocational secondary schools pertains to the disconnection between the educational material and the demands of the professional sphere. It is frequently observed that students lack motivation in the context of English language learning, primarily due to the perceived absence of a direct correlation between the acquisition of English language proficiency and their selected vocational trajectory (Anggayana, 2023). Conventional teaching methods, which are still widely utilised, have been observed to engender a passive learning environment, resulting in diminished student engagement. Conventional teaching methodologies are predominantly teacher-centred, with a strong emphasis on theoretical concepts and memorization, and a paucity of opportunities for students to engage in practical activities that foster creativity and communication. Consequently, many students encounter difficulties in applying their theoretical knowledge of tourism in practical contexts and in expressing ideas in creative and relevant ways.

In order to address the aforementioned issues, a significant number of studies have been conducted on the application of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) challenges students to solve real problems frequently encountered in the tourism industry, such as handling complaints from foreign tourists, providing tourist information, or planning trips. In the process, students utilise English to discuss, convey ideas, and solve problems, thereby directly training their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. In PBL, students encounter authentic, real-world scenarios that necessitate the utilisation of English in contexts pertinent to the tourism industry (Oon-Seng Tan, 2021). Furthermore, this project-based learning method trains students to work together in groups, thereby demonstrating their ability to collaborate and communicate. However, the extant tourism material studied is still limited, with the majority of the focus on English language skills (speaking, writing) in the context of promotion or communication, and less on other aspects such as destination planning, cultural interaction, tourism service management, real tourism experiences, or collaboration with local stakeholders. The present study aims to apply Project-Based Learning (PjBL) to more comprehensive tourism material (not only speaking/writing or promotion, but also elements of tourism services, planning, and real tourism experiences) that results in a product such as a brochure or video.

RESEARCH METHOD

The present study employed a dual approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies within the framework of classroom action research. The decision to utilize classroom action research was motivated by its capacity to enable researchers who also function as teachers to directly apply a learning method and engage in reflexive analysis of the process and outcomes. The research subjects were 32 students in the Tourism Department of SMK Negeri 3 Palangka Raya in the 2025/2026 academic year.

The present classroom action research is to be conducted in two cycles, each consisting of four stages, namely: (1) Planning, which includes: The following tasks were to be completed: (a) An analysis of the curriculum and the English language needs of students according to their respective majors; (b) The design of learning scenarios using the PJBL method; (c) The development of a lesson plan; and (d) The preparation of observation sheets and other research instruments. (2) **Actions** to be taken: (a) The implementation of vocational English language learning using the PJBL method is to be carried out in accordance with the Lesson Plan. The PBL implementation stages are as follows: (b) Orientation and project theme determination (in accordance with the vocational field); (c) Formation of working groups; (d) Project planning (timeline, division of tasks, etc.). The following tasks must be completed in sequence: firstly, information and resources must be gathered; secondly, project development must take place; thirdly, and finally, the project must be presented in English. (3) **Observation** to be taken: (a) In order to facilitate an

understanding of the learning process and the level of engagement exhibited by students, the following actions are to be taken: (a) The collection of data on student motivation is to be carried out through the utilization of questionnaires and interviews. (b) The assessment of students' English language competence is to be conducted through the administration of tests and the evaluation of project product assessments. (4) **Reflection**: The following three stages were observed in the data analysis process: (a) An analysis of the collected data was conducted, (b) Reflection on the learning process was undertaken, (c) Obstacles were identified and improvements for the next cycle were formulated.

The analysis of qualitative data involves the reduction of the original data set through the processes of selection and simplification, in order to distil the information into its most salient aspects. The subsequent presentation of this data can be accomplished through various means, including the use of narratives, tables or graphs. The final stage of the analysis is the interpretation and verification of the data, which involves the drawing of conclusions based on the insights derived from the initial data set. Quantitative data analysis is a process that employs statistical methods and software, such as SPSS 26, to systematically examine and interpret the data. The hallmarks of effective PjBL implementation are twofold: firstly, the execution of at least 80% of the PjBL steps in a satisfactory manner, and secondly, the engagement of at least 75% of students in the learning process. The percentage of implementation is calculated using the following formula (Sugiyono, 2010).

$$\text{Implementation (\%)} = (Lt / Lk) \times 100\%$$

Explanation:

Implementation (%) : Persentase keterlaksanaan kegiatan pembelajaran

- The quantity of steps taken is hereby documented (Lt): The quantity of steps that have been successfully executed in accordance with the established plan.
- Total Number of Steps (Lk): The total number of steps delineated in the learning plan.

A minimum of 70% of students demonstrated a favourable response to the PjBL method. The English language competence of the students was measured by the number of students who achieved the minimum passing grade of 75, as set out in the curriculum. An enhancement in competence was observed, as evidenced by an increase in the mean score of at least 15 points from the pre-test to the post-test (Widoyoko, 2020).

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research comprised two cycles, each consisting of the following phases: 1) planning, 2) action and observation, and 3) reflection. Cycle 1: (1) The initial phase of the project involved a thorough examination of the curriculum and English language requirements specific to the Tourism department. According to the

learning material entitled 'Travel Guide Showcase', the implementation of projects designed to promote local tourism has been demonstrated to facilitate the development of English language competencies in reading, writing and listening skills. The results of the analysis of the curriculum and English language requirements for the Tourism Services programme are shown in Table 1. The PjBL method is supplemented with an assessment rubric, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 1.
Results of Curriculum Analysis and English Language Requirements in the
Tourism Services Business Specialisation Programme

Speaking Skills	Writing Skills	Reading Skills	Listening Skills
○ Describe the location, directions, and points of interest ○ Provide factual information about tourist attractions ○ Answering tourists' questions ○ Formal presentations in English	○ Writing descriptive texts about tourist destinations ○ Preparing an itinerary/travel schedule ○ Writing promotional content for digital brochures	○ Understanding information from various sources about tourist destinations ○ Analysing English-language tourism promotion content	○ Understanding tourists' questions and needs ○ Following instructions and feedback during project preparation

(2) designing learning scenarios with PjBL The learning scenario design is in line with the learning objectives using the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model, as illustrated in Figure 1.

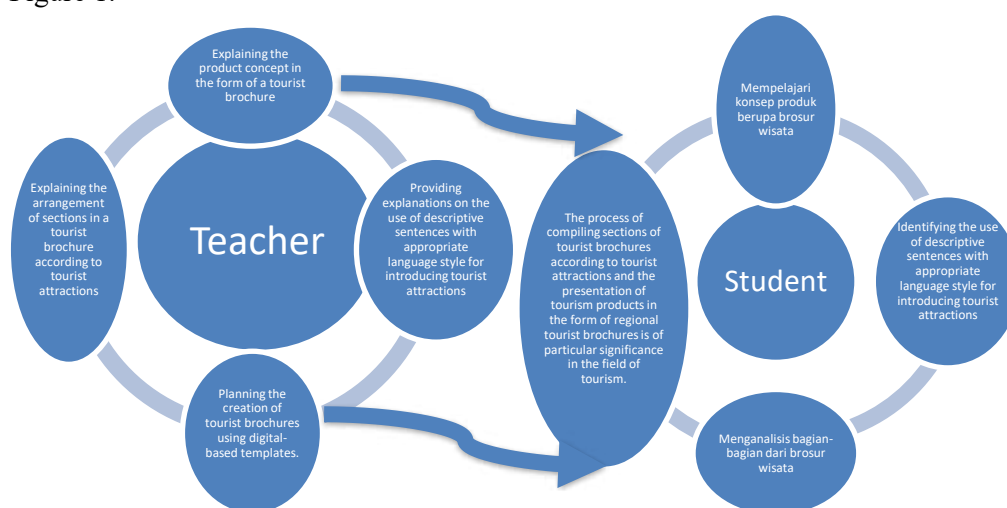


Figure 1. PjBL Learning Process Scenario Design

(3) lesson Implementation Plan. The Lesson Plan is the result of curriculum analysis and requirements. The requirements referred to are that this Lesson Plan is in accordance with the current semester at the time of the research (odd semester 2024/2025). (4) results of observations on the implementation of PjBL and active student participation in learning. The results of PjBL implementation in the cycle are shown in Table 2.

Table 2.
Observation of the implementation of PjBL Cycle 1

PjBL Step	Indicator	Score 1 (Not applicable)	Score 2 (Partially Implemented)	Score 3 (Well done)
1. Defining Fundamental Questions	Teachers formulate essential questions that challenge students.	-	-	√
2. Designing Project Planning	Teachers and students jointly develop project plans	-	-	√
3. Drawing up Schedules & Phases	The schedule for learning activities and projects is drawn up	-	√	-
4. Project Implementation Monitoring	Teachers monitor, guide, and provide feedback	-	√	-
5. Project Outcome Assessment	Teachers assess processes and products	-	√	-
6. Reflection & Evaluation	Teachers and students reflect on learning outcomes	-	√	-

(5) The results of implementation in this cycle based on Table 2 show that for score 2, there were 4 steps that were partially implemented well, representing 67% of implementation carried out well. Meanwhile, there were 2 (two) steps that were implemented but not carried out well, representing 33%.

Student engagement results are categorised as active if they obtain a minimum of 70%. Student participation or engagement in learning is measured by five distinct indicators: (1) active participation in discussions, (2) cooperation in groups, (3) contribution to projects, (4) responsibility in completing tasks, and (5) participation in project result presentations. The results of student participation are

displayed in Table 3. Consequently, the mean student engagement score is 74.65%, which is categorised as active engagement (Mc Donald et al., 2024).

Table 3.
Results of Student Engagement Analysis Cycle 1

Student Enggement Score			Percentage (%)			Explanation
Maximum	Minimum	Evarage	max	min	Evarage	
17	13	14,87	85	65	74,35	Active

The test materials are tailored to the project title 'Travel Guide Showcase: Promoting Destinations with a focus on vocabulary and grammar that is relevant to the theme. The pre-test results for 32 students showed a minimum score of 61, a maximum score of 75, and an average score of 64.75.

The results of the evaluation in cycle 1 require re-planning in the project-based learning process for components that were only partially implemented. Therefore, there is a need for cycle 2, which in this classroom action research begins again with the planning stage.

Cycle 2 : Planning phase, As shown in Table 4, the assessment rubrics for project-based learning should be reorganised according to this plan.

Table 4.
Assesment Rubric

Component	Criteria	Value
Video Content	- Completeness of information, Visual quality, Creativity, Duration in accordance with regulations (3-5 minutes)	25%
Digital Brochure	- Information that is accurate and relevant layout and design use of persuasive language Information that is clear.	25%
Oral Pretentation	- Fluency, pronunciation, intonation, eye contact, body language and the ability to answer questions.	25%
Use of Language	- Grammatical accuracy, vocabulary diversity, accurate sentence structure, and coherence and cohesion.	25%

(1) Results of observations on the implementation of PjBL and active student participation in learning. The results of the implementation of PjBL in Cycle 2 are shown in Table 5. Table 5 shows that PjBL implementation in Cycle 2 was 94.4%, which is well above the minimum target of 80%. However, the scheduling and activities were not implemented as well due to time constraints preventing students from further exploring the results of the project carried out with the teacher. Student participation in learning was also observed in this second cycle, as shown in Table 6.

Table 5.
Implementation of PjBL in Cycle 2

PjBL Step	Indicator	Score 1 (Not applicable)	Score 2 (Partially Implemented)	Score 3 (Well don\)
1. Identify the fundamental questions	Teachers formulate essential questions that challenge students.	-	-	√
2. Designing project plans	Project plans are developed in collaboration between teachers and students.	-	-	√
3. Prepare the schedule and stages.	The schedule for learning activities and projects has been arranged.	-	√	-
4. Project implementation monitorin	Teachers monitor, guide, and provide feedback	-	-	√
5. Assessment of Project Result	Teachers assess both the process and the product.	-	-	√
6. Reflection & Evaluation	Teachers and students reflect on learning outcomes.	-	-	√

Table 6.
Results of student engagement analysis in cycle 2

Student Engagement Score					
Number of active students	Number of inactive students	Maximal Score	Active student	Inactive Student	Keterangan
26	6	20	81,25	18,75	Siswa aktif $\geq 70\%$

The number of active students increased from 30 in Cycle 1 to 32 in Cycle 2, which resulted in a difference in scores among students involved in Cycle 2. In the results of the reflection on cycle 2, the implementation of PjBL has been carried out well in the activities of teachers monitoring, guiding, and providing feedback,

which previously had not been fully implemented. Similarly, teachers conducted process and product assessments.

Post-test Results for cycle 2 are shown in Table 7.

Table 7.
Frequency Distribution of Post-Test Scores

POST-TEST					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	70.00	7	21.2	21.9	21.9
	75.00	6	18.2	18.8	40.6
	80.00	7	21.2	21.9	62.5
	85.00	4	12.1	12.5	75.0
	95.00	4	12.1	12.5	87.5
	100.00	4	12.1	12.5	100.0
	Total	32	97.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	3.0		
Total		33	100.0		

Table 7 shows the post-test frequency distribution, which indicates that students' scores ranged from 70 to 100. This shows an improvement in learning outcomes compared to the pre-test, which had a maximum score of 75. In the post-test results, scores of 70 and 80 were the most common scores obtained by students, with a frequency of 7 students or 21.2% each. Meanwhile, a score of 75 was obtained by 6 students (18.2%), a score of 85 was obtained by 4 students (12.1%), and scores of 95 and 100 were also achieved by 4 students (12.1%) each. More students were in the 70–80 range, but there was also a significant increase in the number of students who were able to achieve very high scores, namely 95 and 100.

Discussion

The study found that the learning outcomes of the Tourism Services programme, student engagement and learning implementation all increased significantly when the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model was applied to the Travel Guide Showcase.” English language skills are required for speaking, writing, reading and listening, as detailed in the 'Study Needs Analysis on English Language Use in Tour Guiding' (Mella Narolita & Aulia Restu Ariyanto Putri, 2025). The study shows that speaking is the most important skill for direct interaction with

tourists, followed by listening, writing and reading. A study entitled 'Exploring English Language Needs for Tour Guides in Heritage Tourism (Mangkunegaran Palace)' also found that tour guides make extensive use of speaking and listening, particularly when dealing with tourists' diverse accents and cultural variations (Altika Avantie et al., n.d.). Similarly, an evaluation of materials used in vocational high schools specialising in tourism revealed that, while the curriculum already covers aspects of everyday communication, the materials often lack specificity with regard to the tourism context, such as destination promotion, types of foreign visitors and local cultural content (Wedhanti et al., 2024).

In Cycle 1, implementation of the new learning reached 67%, indicating that the PjBL stages had not yet been fully optimised. Several areas, including the division of project roles, the use of authentic sources and time management, were not yet effective. This finding aligns with the observations of Halim et al. (2023), who reported that in the initial stages of PjBL implementation, educators and students must adjust to a shift in roles, transitioning from a teacher-centred to a student-centred learning paradigm (Halim et al., 2023). Following the implementation of enhancements in cycle 2, the implementation rate increased to 94.4%, which is notably above the minimum target of 80%. This enhancement signifies that educators and learners effectively executed all phases of PjBL, encompassing project planning, field activities, promotional product creation, and project presentation. This finding is consistent with Wang (2023), who asserts that the effectiveness of PjBL increases significantly after the second cycle because teachers have adjusted their facilitation strategies and assessment rubrics (Wang, 2023).

It is evident that student engagement in cycle 2 has undergone a notable increase, reaching an impressive 81.25%. This indicates that the majority of students have demonstrated a high level of engagement, actively participating in all learning activities. The activities encompassed the collection of information on tourist destinations, the formulation of itineraries, and the rehearsal of oral presentations in English. This increase is consistent with the findings of research conducted by Farida & Sukraini (2024), which determined that PjBL can enhance student engagement. The investigation revealed that projects offer students opportunities to demonstrate creativity, collaborate, and showcase their language proficiency in a tangible real-world setting through the creation of contextual products (Farida, 2024). With regard to the attainment of learning outcomes, the students' post-test scores in cycle 2 demonstrated that the majority of these students had achieved scores in the range of 70–80, thereby exceeding the Minimum Passing Criteria (KKM) that had been established. This finding suggests an enhancement in the English proficiency of the students, with notable improvements observed in the domains of speaking, writing, and reading. Yulianty & Al Farhan (2023) also reported similar results in their study on Project-Based Learning for English for Tourism Students. The study found that students demonstrated significant

improvement in sentence structure, tourism vocabulary and speaking fluency after participating in project-based (Yulianty & Farhan, 2023). Research conducted by Aldobekhi S. (2024) also demonstrates alterations in English language skills through the utilisation of the project-based learning methodology (Aldobekhi & Abahussain, 2024).

English teachers at vocational high schools (SMK) specializing in tourism need to strengthen their competencies in designing and managing project-based learning. Teachers are expected to be able to: (1) Develop authentic projects that are contextual to the tourism industry, such as creating digital tourist brochures, promotional videos, or tour presentations; (2) Develop comprehensive assessment rubrics that measure all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) as well as attitude and collaboration; (3) Provide formative and reflective feedback during the learning process so that students can continuously improve their project outcomes. In general, the implementation of project-based learning is a necessity in vocational education programs.(Ahmad et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

The implementation of Project Based Learning (PjBL) in the Travel Guide Showcase material was effective in improving learning implementation, student engagement, and English learning outcomes in the Tourism Services Business Program. In cycle 1, learning implementation was still limited (67%) because teachers and students were still adapting to the project learning model. However, the level of student engagement had reached 74.65%, indicating interest and active participation from the early stages. The average pretest score of 64.75 also confirmed that students' initial abilities still needed to be improved, especially in productive skills such as speaking and writing. The improvements made in cycle 2 resulted in significant improvements with an implementation rate of 94.4%, student engagement of 81.25%, and the majority of posttest scores in the range of 70–80. These data show that PjBL can improve students' English language skills in the context of tourism, particularly in the areas of speaking, writing, and listening, which are needed in tourism promotion activities. Overall, PjBL has been proven to not only improve learning outcomes but also strengthen 21st-century skills such as collaboration, communication, creativity, and problem-solving.

Consequently, PjBL is advocated as a pioneering pedagogical paradigm in the instruction of English for tourism at vocational high schools (SMK). It is evident that the implementation of PjBL in Travel Guide Showcase learning has the capacity to enhance students' English skills, whilst concomitantly cultivating critical thinking, collaboration and creativity skills that are pertinent to the requirements of the contemporary tourism industry.

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