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## Fostering Communicative Competence Through Simple Project-Based Learning Approaches

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**Abstract:** *This study investigated the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in enhancing the speaking skills of students at SMAN 1 Sembalun. Using a pre-experimental design with pre-test and post-test assessments, the research involved 16 eleventh-grade students. The results indicated a significant improvement in speaking abilities, with the average pre-test score of 48.75 increasing to an average post-test score of 71.56 after the PBL intervention. This shift reflected enhanced pronunciation, fluency, and grammar usage, demonstrating that students became more confident communicators. While PBL proved beneficial, challenges such as time constraints and the need for effective facilitation were identified. This research contributed to the growing body of evidence supporting PBL as an effective pedagogical approach, highlighting its potential to foster independent learning and improve communication skills.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Effective communication skills, particularly in speaking, are essential in today's interconnected world, where English serves as a primary medium for global interaction. Communicative competence encompasses not only the grammatical correctness but also the ability to convey meaning appropriately in various contexts (Canale, 2014). This competence is crucial for learners to express their ideas clearly and engage in meaningful conversations across diverse settings. Consequently, enhancing speaking skills has become a vital goal in English language education, highlighting the need for innovative instructional approaches, such as Project-Based Learning, that promote active engagement and practical application of language skills (Putri et al., 2017).

Simple Project-Based Learning (PBL) is a valuable solution for the difficulties students encounter in non-English classes, particularly regarding limited vocabulary and grammar (Kavlu, 2017). By fostering collaboration among peers, PBL encourages students to practice speaking freely without fearing mistakes. This method enhances the learning experience, creating a supportive setting for group discussions. These interactions offer essential opportunities for communicative learning, enabling students to gain confidence in their speaking abilities while effectively improving their vocabulary and grammatical skills in real-world contexts.

Simple Project-Based Learning is an educational approach that positions students as the central figures in their learning journey, focusing on the process of creating a tangible product as the outcome, as defined by Almulla (2020). This model grants students the autonomy to choose their learning activities and collaborate on projects until they achieve a final result. The effectiveness of PBL lies in its ability to engage students actively, allowing them to tackle real-world problems that foster deep understanding and lasting knowledge. By emphasizing collaboration and practical application, PBL not only enhances student engagement but also supports the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

According to Fauziati (2014), there are several phases involved in implementing PBL, including initiating the project, developing it, reporting to the class, and evaluating it. Furthermore, Ngereja et al. (2020) identify four phases involved in putting PBL into practice: speculating, project design, project execution, and project evaluation. Nonetheless, Ngereja et al. (2020) and Fauziati (2014) apply the PBL at the same stages.

Speculation is the first phase of PBL, where teachers choose project subjects for their students based on the curriculum and have a discussion with them. During this phase, educator and learner conjecture about potential outcomes that could result in the projects doing well (Bell, 2010). Organizing the framework of a project activity, such as group creation, introducing material, and information source, is referred to as designing the project activities, which is the second step.

Performing the project is the third step. The project that the students planned and designed in the previous stage is what they are working on now. Before consulting the teacher, the learners are expected to gather and discuss the issues with their peers. After that, they must display their finished work to the class, other classes, teachers, and any other media the teacher has approved. This can take the shape of a presentation, performance, publication, etc. The assessment phase comes last. According to Brunia (2006), as described in Riswandi (2018), this stage is defined as "the assessment of activities of the participants and discussion about whether the initial aims and goals have been achieved, implementation of the process, and final products."

Project-Based Learning creates a student-centered environment that emphasizes collaboration, enabling students to work independently and in teams on real-world projects (Žerovnik & Nančovska, 2021). This approach aims to develop critical thinking, social skills, and creativity while fostering human values and a responsible character. As the curriculum shifts from teacher-centered instruction to a facilitator role, students are encouraged to construct their own knowledge through practical experiences. However, despite efforts like Student Activity Sheets (LKS) to promote active learning, many students still depend on teacher guidance, highlighting the need for greater independence in their learning process.

Wijayati et al. (2019) show that Project-Based Learning has significant advantages, including the encouragement of creativity and the development of essential skills. This approach, as highlighted by Damşa & de Lange (2019), engages students in meaningful problem-solving activities focused on core concepts. PBL fosters student autonomy, allowing them to construct their own learning and produce valuable work. Additionally, Chen & Yang (2019) note that PBL enhances academic achievement and prepares students for skill-based work environments. By promoting independent project completion and teamwork, PBL helps students adapt to real-world challenges and fosters self-regulated learning, as emphasized by Pande & Bharathi (2020).

Various studies show the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning in improving students' speaking skills. Al-Balushi and Al-Aamri (2014) found that PBL significantly enhances oral communication by encouraging active participation in real-life tasks. Bell (2010) emphasized that

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PBL develops critical thinking and communication skills as students present their projects. Overall, these studies suggest that PBL effectively enhances speaking skills through interactive learning experiences. Additionally, Kokotsaki et al. (2016) noted that PBL fosters a supportive environment for practicing speaking in authentic contexts, boosting confidence and fluency. Building on this research, the current study aims to investigate the effects of Project-Based Learning (PBL) on EFL students' speaking skills at SMAN 1 Sembalun. Specifically, it will evaluate how PBL strategies influence improvements in fluency, pronunciation, and confidence. This study seeks to enhance the understanding of PBL's effectiveness and its practical application in EFL contexts.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employed a pre-experimental design utilizing a one-group pre-test and post-test model. The purpose of this design is to evaluate the impact of interventions on variables like skills or attitudes before and after implementation within non-randomly assigned groups (Thyer, 2010). Specifically, this research aimed to examine the effects of Project-Based Learning (PBL) as an EFL teaching method on students' speaking skills and to explore students' perceptions of the effectiveness of PBL.

The research was conducted at SMAN 1 Sembalun, focusing on a group of eleventh-grade students. This setting provides a representative sample of EFL learners in a typical Indonesian secondary school environment, enhancing the relevance of the findings to similar educational contexts. The researcher employed random sampling based on class attendance to select participants, ensuring a fair representation of the eleventh-grade students in evaluating the effectiveness of Simple Project-Based Learning.

A combination of pre- and post-tests were used to gather data. The purpose of the pre-test and post-test was to evaluate how students' communicative skills had changed both before and after PBL was implemented. The speaking proficiency of the pupils was assessed with the Douglas Brown (2004) rubric grading system. The students' pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and understanding of the material were assessed using this grading method. Dividing the range of student scores into five categories: outstanding (85–100), good (70–84), fair (55–69), poor (40–54), and very poor (0–39). This method made it possible to analyze PBL's effectiveness in improving speaking skills in great detail.

Over the course of several teaching sessions, Project-Based Learning was implemented as the main teaching strategy as part of the intervention. PBL places a strong emphasis on using meaningful tasks as the mainstay of the learning process, giving students the opportunity to hone their language abilities via practical applications and problem-solving exercises. Students participated in a variety of speaking exercises during the intervention that called for them to practice their communicative skills.

Before the PBL intervention, a pre-test assessed students' baseline speaking skills, including fluency, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension. These results served as a benchmark to measure the effectiveness of PBL. After the intervention, a post-test, mirroring the pre-test, evaluated any improvements in speaking abilities. Comparing the pre- and post-test results highlighted PBL's impact. Additionally, students' perception questionnaire responses were analyzed to examine the relationship between their attitudes toward PBL and their performance outcomes.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section contains the report on the research project's findings, which were conducted in August and September of 2024. The focus of SMA N 1 SEMBALUN's eleventh grade was on a single pre- and post-test group. The aim of this study is to show how project-based learning improves students' speaking abilities. The results of the PBL technique, which employed the learning project activity, are arranged after the presentation so that a comparison between the speaking abilities of the pre- and post-test results can be made.

As for the results of the study, the researcher focused on 5 components of speaking assessment based on Douglas Brown's (2004) theory, that are fluency, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension. It can be concluded through the following table percentage.

**Table 1**  
*The distribution score of pre-test and post-test category*

Category	Pretest		Posttest	
	Number Of Student	Percentage	Number Of Student	Percentage
Excellent	0	0%	3	18.75%
Good	1	6.25%	7	43.75%
Fair	2	12.5%	6	37.5%
Poor	13	81.25%	0	0%
Very Poor	0	0%	0	0%

The results indicate a marked improvement in students' speaking skills following the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL). In the pre-test, 81.25% of students were categorized as "Poor," suggesting that their frequent errors in pronunciation, fluency, and grammar made communication difficult and required significant effort from listeners to understand. Only 6.25% of students were rated as "Good," with clear communication that included minor errors, while no students achieved "Excellent" or "Very Poor" ratings.

After the intervention, the post-test results reveal a substantial positive shift. The absence of students in the "Poor" category indicates that the PBL approach effectively addressed the issues previously faced, allowing students to improve their speaking skills significantly. In the post-test, 18.75% of students were categorized as "Excellent," demonstrating exceptional speaking skills with minimal to no errors in pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and vocabulary, marking them as highly effective communicators.

Furthermore, 43.75% of students reached the "Good" category, indicating clear communication with only minor errors that did not hinder understanding. Additionally, 37.5% of students were rated as "Fair," showing that while they still made noticeable mistakes in grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary, their communication was generally understandable. The increase in students performing at higher levels—"Good" and "Excellent"—highlights the effectiveness of PBL in enhancing their speaking abilities and promoting a more confident and competent use of English in practical contexts. Overall, the implementation of PBL led to a significant improvement in students' speaking skills, demonstrating its value as an instructional approach in EFL education.

**Table 2**  
*Descriptive Statistic*

Test	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	16	40	70	48.75	8.851
Posttest	16	60	90	71.56	9.953
Valid N (listwise)	16				

The data presented in the table summarizes the pre-test and post-test results for the students who participated in the Project-Based Learning (PBL) intervention. In the pre-test, involving 16 students, the minimum score was 40, while the maximum score reached 70, indicating that some students were struggling significantly with their speaking skills. The average score for the pre-test was 48.75, categorizing the overall performance as "Poor," reflecting substantial challenges in speaking proficiency. The standard deviation of 8.851 indicated a moderate level of variability in scores, highlighting differences in performance among the students. In contrast, the post-test also included 16 students, with the minimum score improving to 60 and the maximum score increasing to 90. The average score for the post-test rose to 71.56, moving the majority of students into the "Good" category, demonstrating a notable improvement in speaking skills after the PBL intervention.

The standard deviation of 9.953 suggested a similar level of variability, but the overall increase in the mean score indicates the effectiveness of the PBL approach in enhancing students' communication abilities. This comparison illustrates that the PBL intervention significantly impacted students' speaking skills, fostering their ability to communicate more effectively in English.

The implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) significantly improved students' speaking skills, as evidenced by the transition from a majority of students struggling with their communication abilities in the pre-test to a notable increase in proficiency levels in the post-test. The data revealed a substantial enhancement in students' performance after the intervention, indicating the effectiveness of the PBL approach in fostering their speaking abilities.

These findings align with previous research, such as the studies by Al-Balushi and Al-Aamri (2014) and Kokotsaki et al. (2016), which highlighted the positive impact of PBL on language skills by encouraging active participation and providing authentic contexts for practice. Moreover, the results are consistent with Bell's (2010) assertion that PBL fosters critical thinking and communication skills through project presentations. Overall, the significant advancements observed in this study underscore the value of PBL as an effective instructional method in EFL contexts, ultimately preparing students to communicate more competently and confidently in English.

## CONCLUSION

This research highlights the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning in enhancing students' speaking skills in an EFL setting. The marked improvement in students' abilities following the

PBL intervention underscores its potential to engage learners actively and promote practical communication. By fostering collaboration, problem-solving, and real-world application, PBL not only boosts speaking skills but also supports creativity and critical thinking. These findings align with existing studies on the benefits of PBL in language learning, suggesting that it is a valuable method for improving language proficiency and preparing students for real-life communication challenges.

While Project-Based Learning has shown numerous benefits, several drawbacks have been identified that require careful consideration. One major issue is that PBL can be time-intensive, which may complicate the ability to complete the curriculum within set timeframes. Furthermore, not every student may thrive under this model; some might find the collaborative nature of PBL challenging, especially if they prefer more structured approaches. Teacher readiness is also a concern, as successful PBL requires educators to have strong facilitation skills and a thorough grasp of the project content. Additionally, assessment can be difficult, as traditional grading methods may not fully capture the complexities of student learning and teamwork. Addressing these issues is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of PBL and ensuring that all students can succeed in this educational framework.

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