



Enhancing Students' Literary and Essay Writing Skills through Project-Based Learning: A Qualitative Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine how Project-Based Learning (PjBL) impacts students' literary and essay writing skills in higher education. This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design involving students of the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Study Program. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of student writing. The results indicated that implementing PjBL enhanced students' writing skills, especially in developing ideas, organizing texts, language use, and creative writing style. Students actively engaged in collaborative and reflective writing processes, producing authentic works in the form of poems, short stories, drama scripts, and reflective essays. In addition to technical aspects, PjBL also fostered critical thinking skills, creative literacy, self-confidence, and metacognitive awareness. This model also changed students' perceptions of writing, from a rigid academic activity to a meaningful and contextual expressive practice. Despite constraints such as limited time and varying writing abilities, the implementation of scaffolding strategies and the use of digital learning resources proved effective in supporting the learning process. This study concluded that PjBL is an effective pedagogical approach in improving writing skills while promoting holistic learning in higher education. The findings of this study provide important implications for the development of a more innovative, participatory, and 21st-century competency-oriented Indonesian language and literature learning model. Furthermore, this study confirms that integrating authentic projects into learning can create a more meaningful, adaptive, and relevant learning experience for students' academic and social needs. Therefore, Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is recommended as an alternative learning strategy that can be implemented sustainably in teaching writing in higher education.

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■ INTRODUCTION

Writing is a high-level language skill that requires not only technical mastery of language but also the ability to process ideas, experiences, emotions, and critical awareness of social reality. In the context of higher education, writing skills, particularly in the form of literary works and essays, are important indicators of the development of students' intellectual character and creativity. Through writing activities, students not only learn to convey ideas systematically but also develop reflection, social sensitivity, and critical and argumentative thinking skills (González et al., 2026; Stofiana et al., 2025; Q. Wang & Newell, 2025). Therefore, writing instruction in higher education needs to be innovatively designed to create active,

contextual, and meaningful learning experiences for students. Writing is not merely a medium of communication but also an intellectual and reflective instrument for conveying perspectives, social criticism, and cultural values that exist within society (Erwin, Suyitno & Saryono, 2021; Ningsih et al., 2024; Rezaee & Saleh, 2025).

Unfortunately, teaching writing in various universities still faces significant challenges. Many students lack the interest and motivation to write, lack confidence in expressing their ideas in writing, and experience confusion in constructing the structure and logic of their writing (Setyaningsih & Rahardi, 2021; L. Wang & Lee, 2021). This is exacerbated by a learning approach that tends to be theoretical, lacking practical experience, and providing

little space for students' creative and exploratory processes. When learning focuses solely on structural and normative aspects, the essence of writing as an expression of ideas and personal reflection is neglected. Writing instruction often emphasizes only grammar, formal structure, and adherence to academic rules, while the expressive, reflective, and contextual dimensions of writing receive less attention (Cheung, 2016; Miller et al., 2018). As a result, students view writing as a rigid and boring activity, rather than a means of developing creativity, conveying critical ideas, and establishing their intellectual identity (Edberg et al., 2018). In the long term, this situation has the potential to hinder the development of academic literacy and critical thinking skills in higher education.

In facing these challenges, the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) approach has emerged as a relevant and effective alternative. PjBL is a learning model that focuses on active, collaborative, and contextual processes, where students are directly involved in designing, developing, and presenting a project as a result of their learning (Bell, 2010; Beneroso & Robinson, 2022; Doğantan, 2025). In teaching writing, particularly literary and essay writing, this approach provides a significant opportunity to build meaningful learning experiences. Students not only learn writing theory but also experience the real-life experience of creating work through a structured, reflective, and collaborative process.

As emphasized by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in the implementation guide for the independent curriculum, PjBL supports the realization of the Pancasila student profile through learning activities that emphasize creativity, cooperation, and critical thinking (Chamisijatin et al., 2023). In the context of learning literary writing and essays, PjBL encourages students not only to produce writing but also to construct narratives that inspire, evoke empathy, and reflect human values. Students can develop writing-based projects such as poetry anthologies, short story collections, reflective essays, drama scripts, and literary criticism aimed at a wider audience, both in print and digital formats.

The application of PjBL in learning literary writing and essays is also in line with the characteristics of literary education, which emphasizes the affective and aesthetic aspects. As expressed by Chowdhury (2022) and Wellek & Warren (2016), literary works are a form of expression that has the power to touch the moral, spiritual, and emotional consciousness of their readers. Therefore, literature instruction

that focuses solely on text analysis without direct experience in writing risks alienating students from authentic inner experiences. With PjBL, students are encouraged to write not only to evaluate but also to experience, understand, and process life's values through words.

The study conducted by Erwin et al. (2023), titled "Literary and Essay Writing," reveals that students involved in writing projects showed significant improvements in the quality of their work, their writing confidence, and their ability to convey ideas systematically. Students also found it easier to discover their personal writing style and were able to relate their writing to social issues relevant to their lives. These findings indicate that Project-Based Learning (PjBL) not only improves technical writing skills but also fosters critical literacy awareness and reflective thinking in students (Weganofa et al., 2024). Furthermore, this learning model encourages students to be more active, creative, and responsible in the learning process (Hsia et al., 2021). Therefore, PjBL is a relevant learning approach to support the development of writing competencies in higher education.

Based on the description above, this article aims to examine in depth the application of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in teaching literary writing and essays. The main focus of this research includes implementation strategies, the resulting project format, student engagement, and its impact on writing skills, learning motivation, and literacy awareness. This research is expected to provide contextual and practical support for the development of innovative, participatory, and contextual writing learning models in Indonesian Language and Literature study programs at universities. Based on these objectives, this research is directed to answer several research questions, namely: (1) How is the interaction in the implementation of lectures in the implementation of PjBL learning? (2) How are students' perceptions in reflecting on project-based learning experiences? (3) What are the challenges faced in the implementation of PjBL? Moreover, (4) How is learning achieved through the implementation of PjBL?

■ METHOD

Research Design and Procedures

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at obtaining a holistic and in-depth picture of the implementation of the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model in teaching literary and essay writing in higher education. This approach was chosen because it aligns with the research objectives, which emphasize the meaning of the process,

participants' experiences, and the social context of learning (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

The design used is an embedded case study because the object of study is focused on one particular course, namely Literary Writing and Essays, which is the area where the PjBL strategy is applied. Embedded case studies are effective for exploring phenomena in complex real-life contexts, especially in the field of education (Yin, 2017). The main focus of this study is to describe the implementation of the PjBL model, student involvement in creative projects, and its impact on students' writing skills and literacy awareness.

Data were collected through three main techniques, namely (1) Participatory observation, used to directly observe the learning process in class, lecturer strategies, and interactions between students in completing writing projects. Observations were carried out with systematic guidance and recorded in a field journal (Spradley, 2016). (2) Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students and lecturers using flexible guidelines to explore their perceptions and reflections on their learning experiences. This method enabled researchers to obtain rich and contextual narratives (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). (3) Documentation includes collecting student work (poetry, short stories, reflective essays), project journals, and individual and group reflection notes. Documents are used as triangulation and supplementary data validation materials.

Participants

The subjects of this study were sixth-semester students of the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Study Program at the University of Muhammadiyah Mataram who had taken the project-based Literary Writing and Essay course. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique because this study required informants who had direct experience and intensive involvement in the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL). From the total population of students taking the course, the researcher established several inclusion criteria, namely: (1) active students who followed all stages of project-based learning for one semester, (2) students who were actively involved in the planning, implementation, revision, and presentation of writing projects, (3) students who produced written works in the form of short stories, drama scripts, or essays as project outputs, and (4) students who were prepared to participate in the learning process and reflection in depth. In addition to considering academic involvement, the selection of participants also took into

account variations in students' writing abilities based on assignment results and lecturer assessments in order to obtain more representative data related to project-based learning experiences. The assignments were written project assignments, while the assessments were evaluations conducted by lecturers in charge of the literary writing and essay courses using predetermined indicators. The researchers did not perform assessments; rather, they obtained assessment data supplied by the lecturers. Based on these criteria, 20 students were selected as the main research participants, and 5 lecturers who taught the course and were directly involved in the design and implementation of project-based learning were selected.

Research Instruments

The interview instrument in this study was prepared in the form of a semi-structured interview guide designed to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and reflections on the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in learning to write literature and essays. The interview guide for students included several key questions, such as: how they experienced project-based learning, how they developed ideas and composed their written work, what obstacles they faced during the writing process, what strategies they used to complete the project, and what changes they felt in their writing skills, creativity, and learning motivation after participating in project-based learning. Meanwhile, interviews with lecturers focused on questions regarding the implementation strategy of PjBL in the classroom, the form of mentoring and scaffolding provided to students, challenges that emerged during the learning process, and lecturers' views on the development of writing skills and student involvement in writing projects. In addition to interviews, document analysis was conducted on students' literary works and essays using several analytical parameters, namely the ability to develop ideas, organization and coherence of writing, creativity in the use of language, accuracy of text structure, depth of reflection, and the ability of students who are interested in writing with social contexts and personal experiences. Student work was assessed using an analytical rubric based on indicators of creative and academic writing skills, allowing for more systematic and measurable monitoring of student writing quality. Therefore, the use of the interview instrument and document analysis rubric is expected to enhance the validity of research findings related to improving student writing

skills through the implementation of PjBL.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Technically, the data reduction process began with transcribing all student and lecturer interviews, organizing classroom observation notes, and categorizing student work documents. Next, the data were read repeatedly to identify meanings relevant to the research focus. Each interview excerpt, observation note, and document finding was tagged, such as student engagement, lecturer strategies, project collaboration, writing barriers, mentoring, student reflection, and writing quality development. The data excerpts were then grouped based on the research problem, for example, PjBL implementation strategies, learning interaction dynamics, implementation challenges, and impact on writing skills. Data presentation was carried out in the form of thematic narratives, direct participant quotes, and a matrix of relationships between categories to display the pattern of findings. Data validity was strengthened through triangulation of sources and methods, discussions with colleagues, and member checking with informants (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Operationally, triangulation was carried out by comparing classroom observation data, lecturer interviews, student interviews, and written documents. For example, when observations indicated that feedback was provided incrementally throughout the drafting stage, this conclusion was supported by faculty interviews, student interviews about their experiences receiving revisions, and comparisons between initial and final drafts of students' work. In this way, conclusions were not based solely on a single source of data but were strengthened through cross-referenced evidence from multiple sources and data collection techniques. In this context, it appears that there is no significant conflict between the observational data, interviews, and work documentation, but rather that they reinforce each other.

■ RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study are presented in several main themes that represent important findings during the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in literature and essay writing learning. The first theme discusses the dynamics of interactions between lecturers and students in the project-based learning process, particularly regarding communication patterns, collaboration, and forms of academic

mentoring during the project. The second theme examines students' reflections on the project-based learning experience, including their perceptions of the creative process, learning engagement, and the development of writing skills. The third theme focuses on various challenges that emerged during the implementation of PjBL and problem-solving strategies applied by lecturers and students in completing writing projects. The fourth theme presents a critical analysis of learning outcomes, particularly related to the improvement of students' writing skills, critical thinking skills, creativity, and literacy awareness. The fifth theme explains the implications of the research for curriculum development and writing learning models in higher education. The final theme discusses various forms of projects produced by students as learning outcomes, such as poetry, short stories, drama scripts, and reflective essays that represent the results of the project-based learning process.

Dynamics of Interaction between Lecturers and Students in PjBL Projects

One of the successes of implementing Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in the Literary and Essay Writing course lies in the change in the lecturer's role from the primary source of information to a learning facilitator. In this model, the lecturer not only assigns writing assignments but also systematically guides students through all stages of the writing process, from idea exploration to publication. The implementation of PjBL in this study was carried out over 30 meetings. The first and second meetings focused on learning orientation, project introduction, and issue exploration and determining the writing theme. The third and fourth meetings were used for project planning, idea development, and group discussions regarding the concept of the work to be written. Furthermore, the fifth to fifteenth meetings were directed at the writing process. In the sixteenth to twenty-second meetings, activities focused on clinical writing and peer review as a means of obtaining input and feedback on the work being prepared. The twenty-third to twenty-eighth meetings were used for revision and refinement of the work based on the evaluation results and input obtained. The twenty-ninth and thirtieth meetings were devoted to presentations, publications, and exhibitions of student work as a form of dissemination of project-based learning outcomes. At each stage, lecturers manage learning in a dialogic, collaborative, and reflective manner through group discussions, peer editing, regular consultations,

and constructive feedback. This strategy creates a more open, participatory, and humanistic learning environment, while also providing space for students to develop creativity, self-confidence, critical thinking skills, and writing skills in a more authentic and contextual manner. Thus, project-based learning focuses not only on the final product of writing but also on the learning process that encourages students to become active, reflective, and independent writers.

These findings were further supported by in-depth interviews with the lecturers, which demonstrated that the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) created a more participatory, dialogic learning environment and focused on students' creative processes. The lecturers observed that students became more active in developing ideas, engaging in discussions, revising their writing, and demonstrating increased confidence in conveying ideas through literary works and essays. This is reflected in the following excerpts from the interviews with the lecturers.

"When students write because they feel they have ideas and a voice they want to convey, their writing will be much stronger, even exceeding academic expectations." (Interview, Dsn-02)

Collaboration between lecturers and students is fostered not only formally in the classroom but also through online media. Many

students consult online to revise their work, share inspiration, and even provide feedback within the group through WhatsApp groups and Google Docs. This demonstrates the PjBL model's ability to flexibly bridge offline and online learning.

Student Perceptions of Project-Based Learning

Student perceptions indicate they experienced a paradigm shift in their understanding of the writing process. Previously viewed as an end-of-semester assignment, writing has now become a fun, liberating, and meaningful expressive activity. This is supported by the following student reflective quote:

"I just learned that essays can contain personal experiences. I always thought essays had to be serious and boring. Now I am more confident writing because I feel like my writing is important." (Student reflection, Student 13)

This statement is supported by an analysis of student writing documents before and after the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL). In the initial assignments, student writing tended to be descriptive, rigid, and focused solely on conveying general information without involving personal experiences or critical reflection. However, in the final project work, students began to

Table 1. Learning syntax

PjBL Stage	Meeting	Learning Activities	The Role of Lecturers	Student Output
Project Orientation and Determination	Meetings 1-2	Introduction to the concept of Project-Based Learning (PjBL), course contracts, exploration of themes and issues in literary/essay writing	Explaining project objectives, motivating students, facilitating discussion of themes	Topic and initial draft of the writing project
Planning and Idea Development	Meeting 3-4	Brainstorming, writing outline, group discussion, determining the type of work	Guiding the development of ideas and writing structure	Project writing framework
The Process of Writing a Work	Meeting 5-15	Writing the first draft of a poem, short story, drama script, or reflective essay	Providing academic assistance and consultation	Initial draft of written work
Writing and Peer Review Clinic	Meeting 16-22	Cross-group discussion, peer editing, feedback	Facilitate peer review and reflection on the writing process	Revision notes and feedback on work
Revision and Improvement of Work	Meeting 23-28	Improvements to the content, language, structure and creativity of writing based on input	Provide scaffolding and evaluation of the revision process	Final draft of the paper
Presentation and Exhibition of Works	Meeting 29-30	Presentation of project results, publication of work, reflection on learning	Assess project outcomes and facilitate final reflection	The final products are poetry, short stories, drama scripts, and reflective essays.

demonstrate the ability to develop more expressive, reflective, and contextual narratives. Student 13, for example, initially wrote essays with a simple argumentative pattern and minimal exploration of personal experiences. However, in the final assignment, he was able to explore personal experiences with social issues in the surrounding environment in a more in-depth and emotional way. These changes indicate that PjBL not only improves the technical aspects of writing but also helps students build the courage to place personal experiences as an important part of the academic and creative writing process.

Some students even stated that the writing project encouraged them to start personal blogs, publish articles in campus media, and participate in writing competitions. This demonstrates that the effects of PjBL extend beyond the classroom to literacy practices beyond campus. In addition to the affective aspect, student reflections also demonstrated development in cognitive and metacognitive aspects. Students became better able to evaluate the quality of their own writing, recognize the strengths and weaknesses of their writing style, and understand the importance of revision as part of the creative process. This success was certainly not solely due to PjBL, but also because the previous learning design was not skills-oriented and focused only on knowledge.

Challenges and Solution Strategies in PjBL Implementation

Although the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) has shown a positive impact on the development of students' writing skills, its implementation process also faces various challenges in the field. One major obstacle is the limited time to complete collaborative projects, particularly during the preparation and editing stages of student anthologies. The anthology writing process requires intensive discussion, repeated revisions, and coordination among group members, making it difficult for some students to balance the project schedule with the academic load of other courses. As a result, some works experienced delays in the final revision stage and in preparing the anthology manuscript. Furthermore, differences in writing abilities among students also affected the learning dynamics. Students with writing experience tended to complete projects more quickly and actively participate in discussions. In contrast, novice students required more intensive guidance, particularly in developing ideas, establishing a flow of writing, and improving language structure. Another

challenge is limited access to literary reading materials and essay references, especially for students with limited digital literacy resources.

In addition, lecturers also encourage the strengthening of campus literacy culture through collaboration with Student Activity Units (UKM) in the fields of journalism and literature, so that student work can be published and more widely appreciated. This situation made it difficult for some students to find references for varied and contextual writing models. However, efforts to overcome these obstacles are made through scaffolding strategies, providing digital reading materials, writing clinics, and gradual assistance during the project completion process.

To address the various challenges in implementing Project-Based Learning (PjBL), lecturers implement several gradual and structured mentoring strategies. One form of support provided is dedicated time for individual and small-group project consultations outside of lecture hours, so that students have a more intensive discussion space during the writing process. In addition, lecturers also provide supporting teaching materials in the form of writing modules, examples of literary texts and essays, digital reading lists, and bold references that students can access as sources of inspiration and writing models. In the scaffolding process, lecturers not only provide general direction but also provide concrete mentoring, such as helping students determine writing themes, develop idea frameworks, develop paragraphs, improve cohesion between sentences, and provide examples of revisions to certain parts of students' writing. In the initial stages, lecturers provide more intensive guidance through direct feedback on writing drafts, sentence-by-sentence discussions, and simulations of narrative and argumentative sentence development. As students' abilities and confidence increase, this assistance is gradually reduced so that students can write and revise their work more independently. This mentoring strategy has been proven to help students, especially those who are still in the early stages of developing writing skills, to better understand the creative writing process and produce more structured, reflective, and contextual work.

The Impact of PjBL Implementation on Learning Achievement

Based on student work documents and interview results, it can be concluded that the expected learning outcomes in this course include: (1) Students are able to write various types of literary texts and essays; (2) Students

demonstrate social awareness and humanitarian values in their work; and (3) Students are able to develop critical and reflective thinking skills.

Learning outcomes appear to have been significantly achieved. In fact, in some cases, students demonstrate achievement beyond the core competency description. For example, learning outcomes can be published in the form of a collection of poems, short stories, and essays (with ISBN and QRBN) from Yayasan Pendidikan Cendikia Muslim Publisher, in Jorong Pale, Pematang Panjang, Sijunjung, West Sumatra. The publisher has no affiliation with the authors, lecturers, or the University of Muhammadiyah Mataram. Some of these books are presented in the table 2.

From a literary pedagogy perspective, this achievement shows that writing is not only a matter of linguistic technique, but also the formation of students' identity, empathy, and social agency. The findings of this study provide several important implications for curriculum development and language and literature learning strategies: (1) The Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model should be the primary approach in writing courses, particularly those related to the production of literary texts and essays. (2) The curriculum should provide flexibility for the exploration of contextual themes, cultural locales, and students' personal experiences as primary sources of inspiration for writing. (3) Learning evaluation should not be solely based on the final product, but should also encompass the process, collaboration, reflection, and affective aspects that emerge during the project. (4) Writing learning should be integrated with digital platforms so that student work is better documented, appreciated, and has a broader impact on society.

By consistently implementing this approach, it is hoped that universities will be able to produce graduates who are not only proficient in language but also socially and culturally literate. The implementation of Project-Based Learning in Literary Writing and Essay courses has made a significant contribution to improving the quality of writing instruction in higher education. This model encourages active student involvement, strengthens intrinsic motivation, and facilitates the production of writing that is inspiring, contextual, and imbued with humanitarian value.

The application of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in literary and essay writing has proven to be an effective approach in improving the quality of learning, writing skills, and students' literacy awareness. This method provides meaningful learning

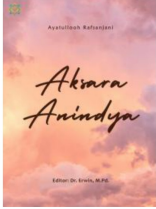
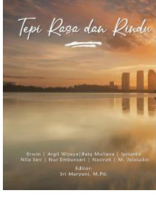
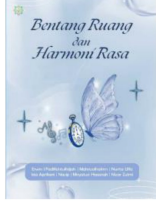
opportunities by actively engaging students in creating real-world works oriented toward life experiences and personal reflection. As stated by Arochman et al. (2024) and Yee & Yui (2024), Students who participate in project-based learning experience significant improvements in writing structure, idea development, and language expression. This process provides greater scope for creativity, exploration, and the strengthening of personal writing styles.

Beyond technical aspects, PjBL also influences students' intrinsic motivation to write. Students who are given the freedom to choose the theme and format of their work demonstrate greater emotional engagement with their work. The PjBL approach creates a sense of ownership over the project, encouraging students to actively engage in discussions, conduct research, and express their ideas openly (Ni, 2025; Nordahl-Pedersen & Heggholmen, 2022). It is emphasized that PjBL is able to increase student involvement in ICT-based learning because the learning activities are challenging and contextual (Iyamuremye et al., 2023; Msafiri et al., 2023).

Furthermore, PjBL contributes to strengthening contextual and critical literacy. Students are trained to write based on real-world issues around them, such as social change, local culture, gender inequality, or environmental crises. Writing projects like these position students as active, critical, and reflective learners. The Project Place program demonstrates that PjBL effectively increases social awareness and social studies literacy through a learning approach based on local projects (Duke et al., 2020; Halvorsen et al., 2019). In addition, learning to write through projects not only strengthens linguistic aspects, but also forms students' ideological and ethical awareness in choosing themes and writing perspectives (Arochman et al., 2024; Erwin, 2022).

Students' metacognitive awareness also showed improvement during the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL). These findings were not only based on general observations, but also obtained through analysis of student reflection journals, interview results, and revision notes collected at each stage of the project writing. In the reflection journals, students were asked to document their thinking processes, including strategies used in developing ideas, difficulties encountered during the writing process, ways to improve their writing, and evaluations of the resulting work (Suraworachet et al., 2023). Analysis of these journals revealed changes in how students reflected on their writing process.

Table 2. Learning outputs in the form of books

No	Book title	Book Cover	Description
1	Bayang-Bayang Rasa ISBN 978-634-219-019-7		Aksara Anindya is a collection of poems that presents diverse reflections on human life through universal themes such as love, loss, hope, longing, and the beauty of life. With its poetic and emotional style, each poem not only serves as a medium for expressing feelings but also invites readers to reflect on life's experiences more deeply.
2	Cakrawala Indonesia ISBN 978-634-219-025-8		The book, "Cakrawala Indonesia in the Realities of Politics, Education, and Natural Beauty," is a collection of essays that examines various issues and potentials in Indonesia through three main perspectives: politics, education, and natural beauty. This book presents a critical reflection on the dynamics of national life, educational challenges, and Indonesia's natural wealth, with an informative and inspiring approach.
3	Diantara Kata dan Kenangan QRSBN 62-0025 02047-3		The anthology "Between Words and Memories" is a collection of works that explore various human emotional experiences through themes of love, longing, hope, struggle, and life memories. Each piece presents a profound reflection that connects personal experiences with universal life values.
4	Melintasi Waktu: Kisah Kehidupan dan Kerinduan QRSBN 62-0025-01693-9		<i>Melintasi Waktu: Kisah Kehidupan dan Kerinduan</i> (Traversing Time: Stories of Life and Longing) is a collection of short stories that explore various life experiences, memories, hopes, and longings through stories that are close to human reality. Each story presents a reflection on the journey of life, friendship, family, love, and the search for self-meaning with deep emotional nuances.
5	Tenang Itu Pilihan ISBN 978-634-219-120-0		<i>Tenang itu Pilihan</i> (Calm is a Choice) is a reflective and inspiring book that discusses the importance of inner peace amidst the dynamics of modern life full of stress and uncertainty. This book encourages readers to understand that peace is not something that comes automatically, but rather the result of awareness, self-management, and behavioral choices in facing life's various challenges.
6	Tepi Rasa dan Rindu QRSBN 62-0025-02041-7		<i>Tepi Rasa dan Rindu</i> (The Edge of Feeling and Longing) is a collection of short stories that present an emotional journey through life stories close to everyday reality. The stories within highlight themes of friendship, migration, the search for identity, family, and a life journey filled with humanitarian values. With a simple yet touching style, this book not only presents the inner experiences of the characters but also invites readers to reflect on the meaning of life, honesty, hope, and the warmth of human relationships.
7.	Bentang Ruang dan Harmoni Rasa QRSBN 62-0025-01130-6		<i>Bentang Ruang dan Harmoni Rasa</i> is a poetry anthology that invites readers to explore various dimensions of human experience through reflections on life, feelings, memories, and the relationship between humans and their surroundings. This collection of poems blends free imagination with deep emotion, expressed through poetic, meaningful language.

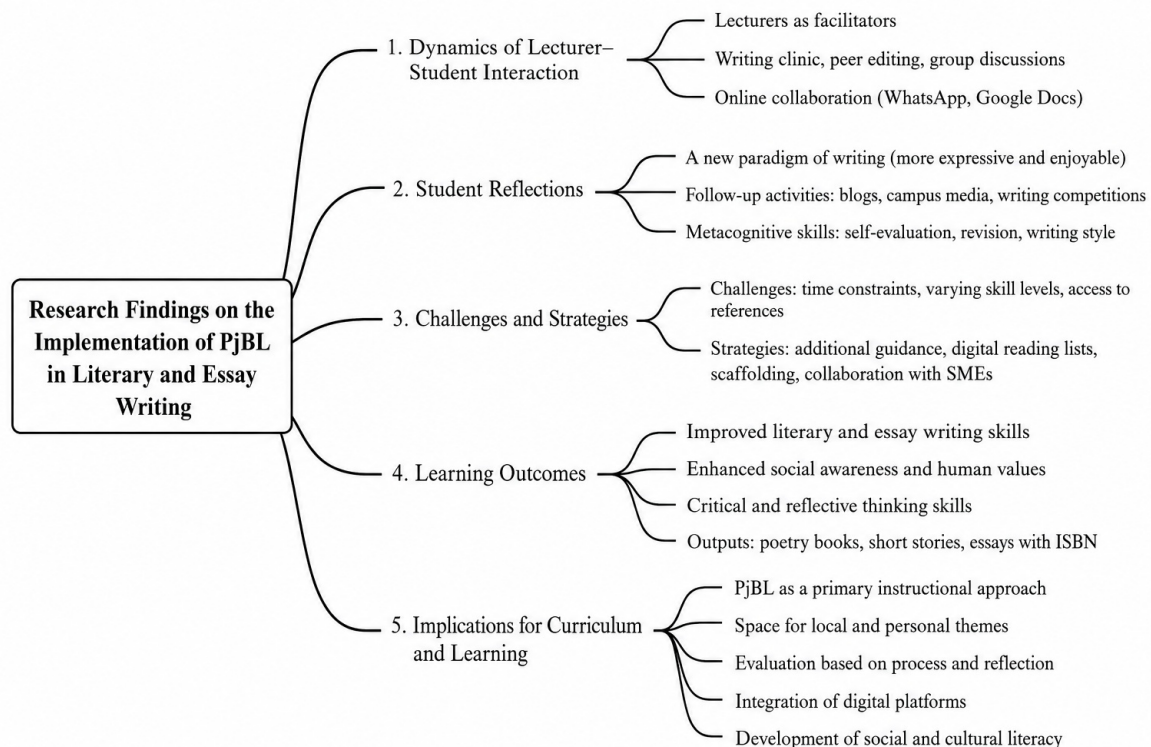


Figure 1. Research findings

In the initial stages, most student reflections focused on technical difficulties, such as determining themes or structuring paragraphs. However, in the final stages of the project, students began to demonstrate the ability to reflect on writing strategies in greater depth, such as demonstrating the effectiveness of diction choices, argumentation flow, and the appropriateness of the message to the writing purpose. These findings were reinforced by comparisons between initial and final drafts of students' work, which showed improvements in aspects of writing coherence, idea development, and realizing meaning. The repeated reflective activities throughout the project encouraged students not only to produce writing but also to develop awareness of their own thinking processes in writing. This is in line with findings showing that awareness of genres, academic structures, and reflective strategies can develop through exploratory and reflective learning approaches (Deng et al., 2024; Hedgcock & Lee, 2017; Negretti & Kuteeva, 2011).

Collaboration is also a crucial element in PjBL, contributing to students' social learning. In group writing projects, students learn to work together, reconcile differences of opinion, and appreciate each other's creative processes. Co-creation in an educational context increases student engagement, especially when they work

to create a shared product that has both personal and academic value (Gkogkidis & Dacre, 2020). In the context of literary and essay writing, this kind of collaboration not only trains social competence but also strengthens appreciation of the writing process as a dialogic and intersubjective activity. This is also supported by studies (Duke et al., 2016; Halvorsen et al., 2019) which show that collaboration in PjBL at the elementary school level is effective in reducing achievement gaps and increasing overall student engagement in the curriculum.

Beyond its direct benefits in learning, the PjBL approach is also relevant to the development of values- and character-based literacy education. Students are not only required to write correctly but also to convey meaningful and socially responsible messages. Therefore, this model aligns with the spirit of transformative literacy, namely literacy that develops not only technical language skills but also critical awareness of social and cultural structures. This is crucial in the context of higher education, where students need to be trained to become learners who are not only academically intelligent but also sensitive to humanitarian issues.

From a pedagogical perspective, the success of PjBL in writing instruction demonstrates the need for a transformation in

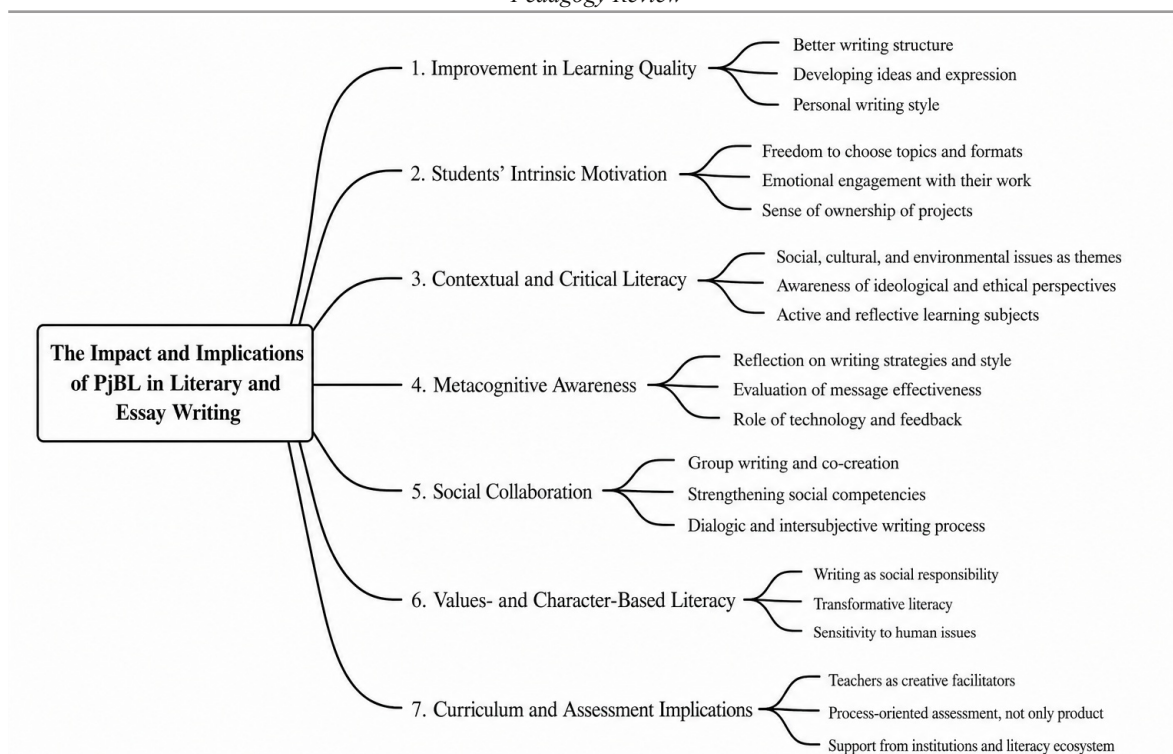


Figure 2. Impact and implications

curriculum design and evaluation strategies. Lecturers are no longer simply transmitters of material, but rather facilitators who intensively and reflectively support students' creative processes. Assessment should not only assess the final written product but also consider the collaboration, creativity, and reflection students undergo throughout the project. Therefore, PjBL integration needs to be supported by institutional policies, faculty training, and a conducive literacy ecosystem on campus.

■ CONCLUSION

This research shows that the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in literary and essay writing significantly improves the quality of writing instruction in higher education. This model provides students with the opportunity to explore personal experiences, social issues, and cultural values through a structured, collaborative, and reflective creative process. PjBL not only improves technical writing skills, such as idea development, writing organization, and use of language style, but also strengthens students' affective and cognitive aspects, including learning motivation, metacognitive awareness, and critical and reflective thinking skills. Furthermore, project-based learning encourages contextualized and product-oriented learning experiences, so that writing is no longer viewed

merely as an academic requirement but as a means of student expression, self-reflection, and social participation. The writing projects produced through this model also encourage students to become more active, independent, and responsible learners.

The important contribution of this research lies not only in exploring previous findings regarding the effectiveness of PjBL, but also in its novelty in the context of Indonesian Language and Literature instruction in higher education. Unlike most global PjBL literature that focuses on improving general academic skills, this study shows that integrating PjBL into literature and essay learning can connect the creative writing process with personal experiences, social reflection, and the strengthening of students' humanistic literacy. Theoretically, this study confirms that PjBL in the context of language and literature learning not only functions as a product-based pedagogical approach, but also as a reflective learning framework that integrates the development of writing skills, metacognitive awareness, and the construction of social meaning simultaneously.

■ DISCLAIMER FOR THE USE OF GENERATIVE AI IN MANUSCRIPT WRITING

In preparing this article, the author used ChatGPT (OpenAI) as an aid for language

refinement, grammar editing, paraphrasing, and improving readability and academic clarity. Generative AI was not used in the data collection, data analysis, interpretation of research results, or summary of scientific conclusions. The author has reviewed, validated, and revised all content generated with the assistance of AI. Therefore, all responsibility for the content, precision, academic integrity, and originality of this article rests solely with the author.

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