Fostering Communication Skills : Project-Based Learning In An Independent Curriculum

Nastiti Ulil Azmi[1*], Yasiroh[2], J. Priyanto Widodo[3]

[1] Master of English Education, STKIP PGRI Sidoarjo
[1*]nu.azmee@gmail.com, [2]rohmatulyasiroh@gmail.com, [3]prowidodo@gmail.com

Info Artikel	Abstract
	This study explores the implementation of project-based learning (PBL) within the framework of the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) to improve communication skills among fifth-grade students. Employing a qualitative approach, data was collected through interviews and observations at MI Ma'arif Ketegan-Tanggulangin. Findings of this research indicate that PBL effectively improves students' communication skills, fostering active engagement, creativity, and collaboration in classroom projects. Teachers play a crucial role in designing and facilitating PBL activities aligned with curriculum themes. The study suggests active student participation, teacher training in PBL implementation, and further research on the long-term effects of PBL on communication skills and academic performance.

INTRODUCTION

Since communication is an essential component of human contact and the foundation of both corporate and societal cohesiveness, it is imperative that communication skills be continuously improved in a variety of managerial and educational contexts. Success in the workplace and in personal life depends on effective communication (Rao, 2019). In essence, communication is the establishment of communion of minds, which implies identification or oneness of understanding (Sen, 2007). Human existence in society and in organizations depends on such a union of brains. It is appropriate to refer to it as the lifeblood of management because any obstruction in its flow can result in grave issues and disturbances. In light of this, all management training programs and educational initiatives typically incorporate elements pertaining to the enhancement of communication skills, involving reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

For a number of reasons, communication skills are essential for students. Firstly, they are essential for academic success, as students need to effectively communicate their ideas in class discussions, presentations, and written assignments. For instance, in class discussions, students with effective communication abilities can articulate their thoughts clearly, engage in meaningful dialogue with peers, and contribute substantively to exchange of ideas. Secondly, good communication skills are critical for career readiness, as employers value candidates who can communicate clearly and effectively (Sá & Serpa, 2020). For example, in team projects of collaborative endeavors, employees who can communicate clearly and succinctly are better equipped to share ideas, coordinate tasks, and achieve common goals, thus contributing to the overall success of the project or organization.

Accordingly, communication skills are vital for students' social and emotional development because they foster the formation of healthy connections, the development of self-esteem, and the exercise of critical thought (Alawamleh et al., 2022). Additionally, cultural competence requires strong communication skills, which help pupils communicate across a variety of cultural barriers. Lastly, effective communication is essential for cooperation, teamwork, and forming bonds with mentors, instructors, and fellow students. In general, academic achievement, professional preparedness, social and emotional growth, cultural competency, and relationship building all depend on having effective communication skills (Rubtsova, 2019). For example, students with good communication skills are more likely to do well in group and project discussions and actively participate in cooperative efforts.

In today's dynamic educational landscape, fostering effective communication skills is paramount for students to thrive in both academic and professional spheres. Traditional teaching methods often fall short in providing students with opportunities to develop these vital skills in authentic contexts. According to Reigeluth's (2013) prescriptive theory of learning, recommendations for appropriate strategies for the learning process can be made by taking into account the learning objectives and conditions. Recognizing this gap, educators are increasingly turning to project-based learning (PjBL) as a powerful pedagogical approach to cultivate not only subject knowledge but also essential competencies such

as communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity. Sulaeman (2020) claims that in PjBL, students are free to conceive themes or learning points.

Various innovations and developments in designing learning carried out by the Indonesian state, have experienced curriculum changes that affect learning styles. Curriculum modification or reform is a frequent practice that takes into account a variety of elements, including unmet learning objectives, the number of students dropping out, the stress levels of both teachers and students, and a lack of skills to compete in the job market (Gouëdard., et al, 2020). Kurikulum Merdeka, or the Independent Curriculum, is the most recent curriculum in Indonesia. Its primary goal was to restore the country's educational system after the COVID-19 pandemic (Marisa, 2021). Independent curriculum planned by the Ministry of Education and Culture under the command of Nadiem Makarim is a curriculum with various intracurricular learning where content will be optimized so that students have enough time to explore concepts and strengthen competencies. Teachers have the flexibility to choose various teaching tools so that learning can be tailored to the learning needs and interests of learners. The Independent Curriculum also emphasizes the importance of developing students' social and emotional skills, such as the ability to manage emotions, build healthy relationships, and appreciate diversity.

One of the features of the Independent curriculum is the cultivation of character education through the Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5). Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5) is an interdisciplinary learning to observe and think about solving problems in the surrounding environment. Projects to strengthen the achievement of the Pancasila learner profile are developed based on specific themes set by the government. The major goals of Profil Pelajar Pancasila are to uphold the nation's high moral standards, be prepared to become global citizens, embody social justice, and develop 21st-century competency (Nugrohadi & Anwar, 2022). The project is not directed to achieve specific learning outcome targets, so it is not tied to subject content. The approach implemented in the Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5) is project-based learning (PjBL). This approach emphasizes learning through quite complicated activities. Through project learning in the independent curriculum, students will become critical, respond to problems quickly, be more skillful and can work together well. Implementing PBL in an independent curriculum can help students develop their communication skills by providing opportunities for collaboration, communication, and presentation of ideas.

This paper aims to explore the implementation of project-based learning within an independent curriculum framework as a means to elevate students' communication abilities. By integrating PjBL into the curriculum, students are presented with multifaceted projects that require them to engage in meaningful research, analysis, synthesis, and presentation of information. Through these projects, students not only deepen their understanding of academic content but also develop crucial communication skills such as articulating ideas coherently, listening actively, persuading effectively, and collaborating productively.

Literature Review
Project-based learning

Through the exploration of real-world issues, project-based learning influences students' motivation and consideration of design elements (Blumenfeld et al., 1991). In addition, project-based learning also promotes students' active engagement in the learning process, as they are directly involved in exploring real-world problems. Through collaboration with their peers, students learn to communicate, cooperate and problem solve effectively. This approach also encourages students to develop strong research skills, as they need to thoroughly investigate the project topic. In addition, in this learning process students can also produce useful products. In addition, with this method students are directly trained to solve real-world problems. According to Yulianto et al (2017), the steps of Project Based Learning include (1) determining basic questions; (2) creating project designs; (3) scheduling; (4) monitoring project progress; (5) assessing results; (6) evaluating experiences.

METHODS

The method adopted for this study is qualitative. In social science, the qualitative research approach was created to help researchers examine cultural phenomena (Myres, 1997). The PBL method was utilized in this study's qualitative approach to investigate student engagement and perceptions of the learning process as well as the classroom learning process. Ross (1999) states that structured data in numerical form or data that can be quickly converted into numerical form is used in qualitative research, and the precise methodology is closely monitored. In order to describe numerous facts discovered in the field about the application of PBL to improve students' communication abilities, descriptive approaches were chosen for this study.

MI Ma'arif Ketegan-Tanggulangin was the study site for this project. Primary and secondary subjects were selected for this investigation. Students at MI Ma'arif Ketegan-Tanggulangin in the fifth grade served as the main study subjects. The 5th grade homeroom teacher is the secondary research subject since the instructor is crucial in helping students develop their sense of responsibility. In this study, documentation studies, interviews, and observation were the methods employed for gathering data. In order to obtain and collect the necessary data for research operations, the research

instrument is a crucial tool. Documents, interview instructions, and directions for observation were some of the instruments used in this investigation.

According to Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) suggested that the activities in qualitative data analysis were carried out interactively and take place continuously until complete, so that the data was saturated. First the researcher's activity in attempting to locate early data is referred to as data collection. Starting with raw, detailed data and then the right approach to do it is to find patterns. Second data condensation has become an analysis method in which data is condensed, sorted, concentrated, discarded, and arranged in order to draw and verify "final" conclusions. Third data display helps us understand what's going on and allows us to either investigate further or make decisions based on our findings. The final steps of the whole analysis activity were conclusion drawing and verification. As such, the qualitative data analysis process involves a series of sequential steps, from data collection to conclusion drawing, which allows the researcher to carefully understand and evaluate the data to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data in this study were obtained through the in-depth interview method personally using informants as a form of collection & personal documentation in the field. In addition, researchers also use the observation method as a means to complement the data that has been collected. This research focuses on the implementation of Project Based Learning (PjBL) application for grade 5 students with Merdeka Curriculum to improve students' communication skills. Researchers also use a qualitative approach to see the natural conditions of a phenomenon. Researchers conducted observations and interviews with 5th grade teachers at MI Ma'arif Ketegan-Tanggulangin.

The results of interviews with grade 5 teachers obtained by researchers discussed the application of Project Based Learning (PBL) with the Merdeka Curriculum that has been implemented in schools, especially grades 1 to grade 5. Researchers found that using the PBL learning model requires quite a long time for learning to be optimal. Therefore, teachers must be able to organize the schedule in the teaching module correctly and efficiently. Based on observations that researchers conducted at school, PBL subjects with the Merdeka Curriculum have been applied in grades 1 to grade 5. It can be seen from the results of observations and research that at that time the students of 5 ICP 1 were learning with the PBL model. The material presented on the theme "Unity in Diversity" with the project title "Stop Bullying". Classroom learning takes place well and orderly, all students follow the learning with high enthusiasm.

Based on the results of interviews with 5th grade ICP 1's teacher, the application of the PBL learning model is implemented through several stages and preparations starting from planning, implementation and evaluation. Learning planning using the project model is designed by the teacher as interesting as possible to be applied in the classroom. With an attractive design, students will feel interested in learning the material. The teacher will develop a learning project plan and determine the schedule for making it based on the teaching module that has been prepared previously. The project plan made by the teacher is adjusted to the theme presented, taking into account the core of the problem in the theme. The teacher will design the project according to the material to be delivered and determine the implementation schedule. All of these things are done by the teacher when there is material that is difficult for students to understand. In addition, the teacher also always ensures that the project to be made is in accordance with the students' abilities.

The PBL Learning Model for 5th grade students at MI Ma'arif Ketegan is considered effective. This is evidenced by observations made by researchers, seen from students who are very active and enthusiastic in working on projects during learning. When implementing the project in class 5 ICP 1 at MI Ma'arif Ketegan, the teacher divides students into several groups. In project learning, the teacher explains the material to be conveyed first. The teacher also conveyed about the project that would be implemented using the independent curriculum. The material conveyed by the teacher at that time was project material with the theme "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" with the title "Stop Bullying". On this occasion, the teacher asked students to make a project in the form of an anti-bullying video. Before getting into project learning, the teacher makes apperception to students about bullying that is happening in everyday life, especially in the school environment. Then students will be directed to the project by trying to explore their curiosity and creativity.

The implementation of the 5th grade project at MI Ma'arif Ketegan allows students to express their opinions about the material that has been conveyed by the teacher. Not only that, they also convey their point of view about the material they get. Teachers always monitor students in working on projects with each group. The 5th grade ICP 1 students were very active and creative in working on the project. They work together with the group to complete the project properly. The learning model known as Project Based Learning, according to Trianto (in Titu, 2015: 178) has tremendous potential to create a more interesting and useful learning experience for students (Dewi, 2019). Harianja's research (2020) explains that the application of PBL can increase students' creative thinking & mathematical communication. Quantitatively, Pearson relationship statistical test explained that creative thinking is positively affiliated using creative thinking skills (Melinda & Zainil, n.d.).

Based on the results of the interviews conducted, the application of this project model reaches the evaluation stage where the results of the project learning assessment of grade 5 students must be presented in front of the class. Each group will showcase the results of their project in front of the class. Students will explain and show the results of their work to their group mates and the class teacher. In the assessment, the teacher also evaluated each group and asked questions back

to those presenting. Students also gave good responses to the questions of the teacher and their friends. The form of assessment to apply the project results done by students is by observing during learning and seeing student activities in project activities. This is evidenced by the results of the researcher's observation that students also actively ask questions and can answer questions from friends or teachers, so that from this the teacher can provide an appropriate assessment.

Project-based learning conducted by grade 5 ICP 1 makes students more creative. Christine (2016: 11) argues that creativity is the ability of individuals to produce something new from their ideas and thoughts that are useful (Lestasi et al., 2022). Creativity based on Slameto (2011: 119) is the ability to create something else and cannot be produced by others (Purwanto, 2016). Research conducted by (Nugroho et al., 2019) shows that the use of the Project-Based Learning approach has an impact on communication skills and innovative thinking (Khairani Astri et al., 2022). The application of PBL provides a meaningful learning experience for students because it allows them to understand concepts, solve problems through projects, and encourage creative ideas in communication. This research related to the view of Munandar (2012: 50), creativity can be explained as a capacity that reflects fluency, openness, and originality in thinking as well as the ability to develop an idea (Mahrita & Cahyono, 2022). This learning model strengthens students' understanding of the material taught by the teacher, resulting in improved learning achievement. In addition, PBL also helps students to be positive in expressing opinions, respecting the opinions of friends, discussing in groups, and working together in completing projects.

Implications of this Research for Education

The implications of this research for education are significant. The use of project-based learning approach in the independent curriculum brings positive implications in improving students' communication skills. by emphasizing learning through real projects, students are given the opportunity to develop their skills and critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity. This is in line with the development of a curriculum that is adaptive and responsive to the needs of students in a changing era. It also underscores the importance of integrating social and emotional competencies in education, which is the main focus of the independent curriculum. Thus, this study provides encouragement for educational institutions to consider developing project-based learning methods in an effort to improve students' communication skills.

Limitations of this study

Although this study made a positive contribution, it also has some shortcomings that need to be further addressed by future researchers. One of the main shortcomings is that the focus of the study was limited to one school and one grade level only. This makes the generalizability of the findings limited and unable to represent the overall situation in various educational contexts. In addition, this study used qualitative methods, so the results are not statistically reliable. Future research could expand the sample coverage and use a mixed-methods approach to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of this learning method in the process of improving students' communication skills

CONCLUSION

The study's findings support the notion that using the Merdeka Curriculum in conjunction with Project Based Learning (PBL) to teach fifth-grade children is a very successful way to help them develop their communication abilities. This is evidenced by the learning process at MI Ma'arif Ketegan, especially in class 5 ICP 1, implementing learning with a project-based learning model. Before the learning is implemented, the teacher has prepared a plan for the learning. When the implementation of project learning takes place, students' communication skills are seen to increase. The increase can be seen from students who are very active and become more creative when the learning process takes place in class. From this, teachers can evaluate student learning outcomes and provide good and appropriate assessments according to student abilities. Learning with the project model can make students be positive in expressing opinions, discussing well in groups, and working together in completing projects. Teachers employed various strategies to facilitate PBL, including designing engaging project plans aligned with the curriculum theme, organizing group work, and fostering a supportive learning environment. Through projects like creating anti-bullying videos, students were encouraged to express their opinions, collaborate with peers, and develop creative solutions to real-world problems. The evaluation stage of PBL involved students presenting their project outcomes to their classmates and teacher, showcasing their learning and receiving feedback. These findings are consistent with existing research highlighting the positive impact of PBL on student learning outcomes and creative thinking abilities. Overall, the PBL approach offers a valuable framework for educators seeking to enhance students' communication skills and foster a dynamic, student- centered learning environment.

Suggestion

Based on the study's findings, here are some straightforward recommendations:

For students, it is crucial to actively participate in project-based learning, work together with classmates, and approach challenges with positive attitude. For teachers, on the other hand, should receive training on how effectively implement project-based learning and collaborate with other educators in order to improve teaching methods. For further research,

it would be beneficial to investigate long-term effects of project-based learning on students' communication skills and academic performance. Additionally, exploring how technology can enhance project-based learning and understanding socio-cultural influences in the classroom would be valuable area of study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

REFERENCES

Alawamleh, M., Al-Twait, L. M., & Al-Saht, G. R. (2022). The effect of online learning on communication between instructors and students during Covid-19 pandemic. Asian Education and Development Studies, 11(2), 380–400. https://doi.org/10.1108/AEDS-06-2020- 0131

Arbi, A. P. (2023). Investigating the Use of Project-Based Learning and Students' Satisfaction in the Teaching of Descriptive Texts: A Case Study at MTS Al-Ihsan Krian. *JURNAL HURRIAH: Jurnal Evaluasi Pendidikan Dan Penelitian*, *4*(2), 266-277. https://doi.org/10.56806/jh.v4i2.134

Blumenfeld, P., Soloway, E., Marx, R., Krajcik, J., Guzdial, M., & Palincsar, A. (1991). Motivating Project-Based Learning: Sustaining the Doing, Supporting the Learning. Educational Psychologist, 26, 369-398. https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.1991.9653139.

Christian, Y. A. (2021). Meta Analisis Model Pembelajaran Project Based Learning terhadap Kreativitas dan Hasil Belajar Siswa di Sekolah Dasar. EDUKATIF: JURNAL ILMU PENDIDIKAN, 3(4), 2271–2278. https://doi.org/10.31004/edukatif.v3i4.1207

Dewi, Y. K. (2019). Penerapan Project Based Learning (PjBL) Pada Pembelajaran Tematik Untuk Meningkatkan Kreativitas Peserta Didik Di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 3 Bondowoso Kelas V Skripsi Diajukan kepada Institut Agama Islam Negeri Jember

Gouëdard, P., Pont, B., & Huang, S. H.P. (2020). Curriculum reform: A literature review to support effective implementation, OECD Education Working Papers, No. 239, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/efe8a 48c-en.

Kusmiati, K. (2022). Pengaruh Model Pembelajaran Project Based Learning Terhadap Kreativitas Siswa Sekolah Dasar. EDUCATOR : Jurnal Inovasi Tenaga Pendidik dan Kependidikan. https://doi.org/10.51878/educator.v2i2.1309.

Marisa, M. (2021). Inovasi kurikulum "Merdeka Belajar" di era society 5.0. Santhet: (Jurnal Sejarah, Pendidikan Dan Humaniora), 5(1), 66–78. https://ejournal.unibabwi.ac.id/inde x.php/santhet/article/view/1317

Melinda, V., & Zainil, M. (n.d.). Penerapan Model Project Based Learning untuk Meningkatkan Kemampuan Komunikasi Matematis Siswa Sekolah Dasar (Studi Literatur).

Mujiburrahman, Suhardi, M., & Hadijah, S. N. (2022). Implementasi Model Pembelajaran Project Base Learnig di Era Kurikulum Merdeka. COMMUNITY : Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat, 2(2), 91–99. https://www.kemdikbud.go.id

Musfa'ah, A. ., Slamet, J., & Arbi, A. P. . (2022). Pelatihan Pembuatan Video Pembelajaran Berbasis KineMaster untuk Pendidik di SDN Petemon X/358 Surabaya. Jurnal Abdidas, 3(4), 748 - 755.

Nafik, I., & Efendi, N. (2022). The Effect of Project Based Learning Model on Science Learning Outcomes for Grade 4 Elementary School. Academia Open. https://doi.org/10.21070/acopen.7.2022.4291

Nugrohadi, S. & Anwar, M.T (2022). Pelatihan Assembler Edu untuk Meningkatkan Keterampilan Guru Merancang Project-based Learning Sesuai Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar. Media Penelitian Pendidikan: Jurnal Penelitian dalam Bidang Pendidikan dan Pengajaran. 16 (1), 77-85. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.26877/mpp.v1 6i1.11953

Prasetyo, M. A. T., & Arbi, A. P. (2024). Project-Based Learning on Solar System Materials in Grade 6 Elementary School. *Gudang Jurnal Multidisiplin Ilmu*, *2*(1), 220-224.

Prasetyo, M. A. T., Arbi, A. P., & Jalil, A. (2023). Enhancing Education Quality at SMP Islam Insan Kamil Wonoayu Amidst the Merdeka Curriculum. *Jurnal Filsafat, Sains, Teknologi, Dan Sosial Budaya*, *29*(4).

Rao, P. S. (2019). VS Publications Alford Council of International English & Literature Journal(ACIELJ). Alford Council of International English & Literature Journal(ACIELJ), 401(2), 6– 18.

Reigeluth, C. M. (2013). Instructional-design theories and models: A new paradigm of instructional theory, Volume II. Routledge.

Romsi, A., Widodo, J. P., & Slamet, J. (2024). Empowering Slow Learners: Gamification's Impact on Students' Engagement and Academic Performance in an LMS for Undergraduate Students. *International Journal of Information and Education Technology*, 14(2).

Rubtsova, A. (2019). Socio-linguistic innovations in education: Productive implementation of intercultural communication. IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering, 497(1). https://doi.org/10.1088/1757- 899X/497/1/012059

Sá, M. J., & Serpa, S. (2020). The covid-19 pandemic as an opportunity to foster the sustainable development of teaching in higher education. Sustainability (Switzerland), 12(20), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12208525

Sen, L. (2007). *Communication skills*. PHI Learning Pvt. Ltd.

Sulaeman, M. (2020). Aplikasi Project-Based Learning. Jawa Barat: Bioma Publishing.

Widodo, J. P., & Slamet, J. (2020). Students' Perception Towards Google Classroom as E-Learning Tool (A Case Study of Master of English Education of the Second Semester at STKIP PGRI Sidoarjo). *Magister Scientiae*, 2(48), 99–109.

Widodo, J. P., & Slamet, J. (2021). Lecturers' Perspectives Through E-learning by Using Moodle for Post-Graduate Students at STKIP PGRI Sidoarjo. *International Seminar on Language, Education, and Culture (ISoLEC 2021)*, 161–171.

Widodo, P., Subandowo, M., Musyarofah, L., & Slamet, J. (2023). Interactive gamification-flip-book for developing students' outcomes. *Advances in Mobile Learning Educational Research*, 3(2), 754–762. https://doi.org/10.25082/amler.2023.02.002

Yulianto, A., Fatchan, A., & Astina, I. K. (2017). Penerapan Model Pembelajaran Project Based Learning Berbasis Lesson Study untuk Meningkatkan Keaktifan Belajar Siswa. *Jurnal Pendidikan: Teori, Penelitian, Dan Pengembangan*, 2(3), 448–453. http://journal.um.ac.id/index.php/jptpp/