The Use of Project Based Learning to Improve Students' Reading Ability for Second-Year Students at MTsN 1 Kota Bengkulu

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Abstract: This study investigates the impact of Project-Based Learning (PBL) on the reading abilities and motivation of second-year students at MTsN 1 Kota Bengkulu Utilizing a classroom action research approach, the research was conducted over two cycles, each comprising planning, action, observation, and reflection phases. The results indicate a significant improvement in both student reading performance and motivation. In Cycle I, the majority of students (42.4%) achieved a 'Good' performance level, while a considerable number (30.3%) fell into the 'Low' category, and 18.2% failed. Observations highlighted moderate engagement and participation, with students showing limited enthusiasm for reading tasks. Cycle II demonstrated marked improvements, with 46.7% of students achieving 'Good' performance and a significant increase in those reaching 'Very Good' (26.7%) and 'Excellent' (10%) levels. Notably, the 'Failed' category was eliminated. Observations revealed heightened engagement, active participation, and increased motivation, attributed to the interactive and real-world relevant nature of PBL. The role of the teacher as a facilitator was crucial in maintaining high levels of student motivation and engagement. The findings suggest that PBL is an effective instructional strategy for enhancing reading skills and motivation. Continued implementation of PBL, combined with ongoing teacher training and diverse project offerings, is recommended to sustain and further improve student outcomes.

Keywords: Project Based Learning, Reading Ability, Second Year Students

A. Introduction

Enhancing students' reading abilities is one of the primary goals of English language education at the secondary school level. Project-Based Learning (PBL) has been recognized as an effective method to achieve this objective. PBL is a student-centered teaching approach where students learn through exploration, investigation, and problem-solving independently or in groups, culminating in creating a relevant product or project (Bell, 2010).

Good reading skills are crucial for students as reading is a fundamental skill that affects their understanding of various subjects. According to Duke (2003), proficient reading skills can significantly improve overall academic performance. In Indonesia, there is a pressing need to enhance students' reading abilities. The 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results showed that Indonesian students ranked 74th out of 79 participating countries in reading literacy, with an average score of 371, well below the OECD average of 487 (OECD, 2019).

Teaching reading in schools often faces several challenges. Traditional teaching methods that rely heavily on rote memorization and teacher-centered approaches can be ineffective in engaging students and fostering a deep understanding of reading materials (Harmer & Khan, 1991). Additionally, students may lack motivation and interest in reading, further hindering their progress.

During the observation made by the researcher on February 2022 in MTsN 1 Kota Bengkulu, the researcher interviewed the teacher of English about how the teaching and learning process is done. Based on the interview, the researcher concluded that the method which the teacher uses in teaching reading was not interesting for the students of junior high school, because he only asked the students to read and answer the question from the text. The activity was monotonous and made students bored. Then, the researcher observed immediately in the classroom while the teaching and learning process done. What the researcher saw the same as what the teacher told to the researcher in his interview. The researcher saw that, the students were bored and sleepy because they never moved since the teaching and learning process was done. The activity was monotonous so they were bored. The student score also below standard so that the new strategy was expected to help students' problems.

At MTsN 1 Kota Bengkulu, the application of PBL aims to address the aforementioned challenges and improve the reading abilities of second-year students. By involving students in meaningful projects that require them to read, analyze, and synthesize information, PBL can help develop their reading comprehension skills and foster a love for reading. Furthermore, PBL can create a more dynamic and supportive learning environment, where students are motivated to actively participate and take ownership of their learning.

PBL offers a promising alternative to traditional methods by providing a more engaging and interactive learning experience. Through PBL, students can connect their learning to real-world contexts, which enhances their motivation and interest in reading (Thomas, 2000). Moreover, PBL encourages collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity, which are essential skills for the 21st century. Research has shown that PBL can improve reading skills by engaging students in meaningful and authentic tasks that require critical thinking and collaboration (Guo et al., 2020; Mergendoller et al., 2006). Moreover, PBL encourages collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity,

which are essential skills for the 21st century. At MTsN 1 Kota Bengkulu, the application of PBL aims to address the aforementioned challenges and improve the reading abilities of second-year students. By involving students in meaningful projects that require them to read, analyze, and synthesize information, PBL can help develop their reading comprehension skills and foster a love for reading. Furthermore, PBL can create a more dynamic and supportive learning environment, where students are motivated to actively participate and take ownership of their learning.

Project-based learning holds great potential in improving students' reading abilities at MTsN 1 Kota Bengkulu. By addressing the challenges of traditional teaching methods and providing a more engaging and relevant learning experience, PBL can enhance students' reading skills and overall academic performance. As such, implementing PBL in the English language curriculum is a valuable strategy for fostering better reading proficiency among students.

Based on the background above, Project-Based Learning is an appropriate model to be implemented to get a learning model that is active, creative, effective, pleasant, and innovative. The researcher wants to implement Project-Based Learning technique in MTsN 1 Kota Bengkulu, especially in English foreign language as an alternative solution for the reading problem in the class.

The Concept of Reading

Reading comprehension is the capability of understanding what the reader read. In this understanding the reader should recognize eight skills, they are recognizing definitions and examples, enumerations, headings, and subheadings (Langan, 2002). Signal words, main ideas in paragraphs and short selections, knowing how to outline, how to summarize, and understanding graphs and tables. Comprehension is achieved gradually, as you move from a general feeling about what something means to a deeper level of understanding.

In foreign language situations, reading has become the most important subject in teaching or learning English. Reading is the process of getting an understanding of some of the words from the text (Ur, 1999, 2011). It means that we need to understand some of the words to understand the meaning of the text. We gather the meaning from the words we read and the words that we have understood. Reading

with comprehension involves not only understanding through the writer's mind. Reading with comprehension requires the students to understand the details of the text. It can be interpreted that the important thing in reading is the understanding.

In teaching reading, the teacher teaches the students reading not only by saying the words, but try to give the students an appreciation of the difference between the real and fanciful. One of the most effective ways to make the students gain more comprehension towards the text is by considering their interest towards the text. By using interesting materials can make the students enjoy reading and getting wider comprehension. It is also supported by (Nuttal, 1989) who suggested that the aim of teaching reading programs is to make the students enjoy reading in a foreign language and to read without unfamiliar authentic texts, at an appropriate, silently, and with adequate understanding. Reading comprehension program has the aims that the students (Langan, 2002): 1) Finding the main idea of the sentences, paragraph, or text; 2) Choosing the important items; 3) Following the indicates; 4) Determining the reading element organization; 5) Finding the visual form of the written; 6) Concluding; 7) Guessing meaning and the assumption of the effect and also the conclusions; 8) Conclusion what had been read it; 9) Distinguishing the facts of the opinions; and 10) Getting information, the several of the facilities, like an encyclopedia, atlas, and map.

Project Based Learning

PBL is grounded in the constructivist theory of learning, which posits that learners construct knowledge through their experiences and interactions with the world (Piaget & Cook, 1952). Vygotsky & Cole (1978) socio-cultural theory also supports PBL, emphasizing the importance of social interaction and collaboration in learning. PBL aligns with these theories by promoting active, student-centered learning and collaboration. Several studies have highlighted the positive impact of PBL on students' reading abilities. PBL engages students in meaningful tasks that require them to read, analyze, and synthesize information, thus improving their reading comprehension skills (Guo et al., 2020). According to Mergendoller et al. (2006), PBL can enhance critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and motivation, which are essential for developing reading proficiency.

PBL, Student Motivation, and Reading Instruction

Research indicates that PBL can significantly increase student motivation. Blumenfeld et al. (1991) found that students who participated in PBL were more motivated and engaged compared to those who were taught using traditional methods. This increased motivation can lead to improved reading skills as students are more likely to invest time and effort into reading tasks when they are motivated.

PBL can be particularly effective in reading instruction by providing students with authentic, real-world tasks that make reading purposeful and relevant (Thomas, 2000). For instance, students might work on a project that requires them to research a topic, read various texts, and present their findings. This approach not only improves reading comprehension but also helps students develop other literacy skills such as writing and speaking.

Types of Projects Based Learning Tasks and the Implementation of Project-based Learning

Types of Projects-Based Learning Tasks Willis (Du, 2012; Willis, 1992; Zheltoukhova, 2022) (Rizky, 2012) has listed some types of PBL tasks that can be implemented. They are: 1) Listing The learner's prior knowledge of the topic is used in this activity. As a result, a list of notions could be created. 2) Ranking Items Students rank their most significant work responsibilities that require the target language. The information recorded according to particular criteria may be the result of this action. 3) Comparing or Contrasting Items Students can compare and contrast the many layers of the atmosphere. At a higher level, a group discussion activity might be done. This exercise could result in the discovery of similarities and differences. 4) Problem-Solving Activities Students are instructed to identify frequent workplace issues and provide solutions. It improves the ability to solve problems. 5) Creative Task Such activities are difficult because they necessitate thorough planning and skill integration. These difficult undertakings necessitate a higher level of preparation and skill integration.

How to carry out project-based learning (Essien, 2018) asserts that there are three phases of project-based learning, including: 1) Organizing During the planning phase, students are divided into groups. They then select topics, evaluate relevant literature, find the information they need, and arrange the resources. 2) Implementation Students develop project ideas, collect information, assign tasks to groups, and finish projects during this phase. Right now, At this point, students present the results of their projects in groups, and they utilize the comments they receive to reflect on their work.

B. Methods

Classroom action research was the research method used in this research. The researcher conducted the research in the classroom because the researcher believed that reading problems that occurred in MTsN 1 Kota Bengkulu environment, especially in first-year students of junior high school at MTsN 1 Kota Bengkulu, Indonesia could be overcame through Project based learning.

The research was conducted in three cycles. If the first cycle is failed, the researcher continued it as revision cycle with the second cycle and so forth. The cycle was

conducted in four meetings where the approach used by the researcher was implemented repeatedly and simultaneously to solve student's problems in learning English *reading* and improve their ability to perform English reading. The model of classroom action research used by the researcher is Kemmis and and Mc Taggart' model (Nurkhasanah et al., 2019).
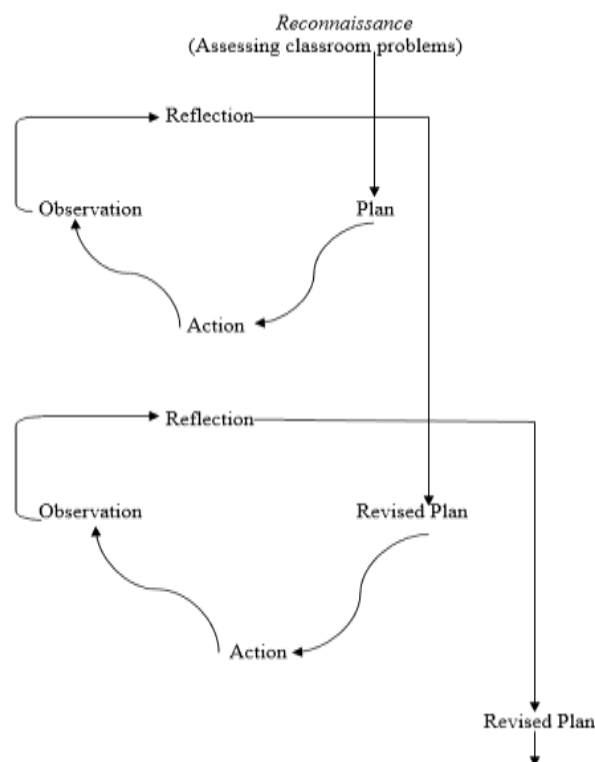
Figure 1. The Action Research Spiral of Kemmis, S., Mc Taggert R. (1998)

According to the above figure, Initially, the process begins with **Reconnaissance**, where specific problems or issues in the classroom are identified and assessed. Following this assessment, a **Plan** is developed, outlining strategies and interventions aimed at addressing the identified issues.

Next, these strategies are put into action during the **Action** phase. During this phase, the teacher implements the plan in the classroom setting. Concurrently, **Observation** takes place, where data is collected on the effectiveness of the implemented strategies by monitoring and recording outcomes and any changes in student behavior or the classroom environment.

After the observation, the **Reflection** phase involves analyzing and reflecting on the collected data to understand the impact of the interventions and to identify areas that require adjustments. Based on these reflections, a **Revised Plan** is formulated, incorporating the insights gained from the previous cycle and making necessary adjustments to enhance the effectiveness of the interventions.

The process then repeats with the revised plan being implemented, followed by further observation, reflection, and refinement. This cyclical nature of Classroom Action Research ensures continuous improvement and adaptation, effectively addressing classroom challenges. The image demonstrates that after each cycle of action, observation, and reflection, the plan is revised and the cycle begins anew, promoting an ongoing process of enhancement and optimization in teaching practices.

C. Results and Discussion

Cycle I
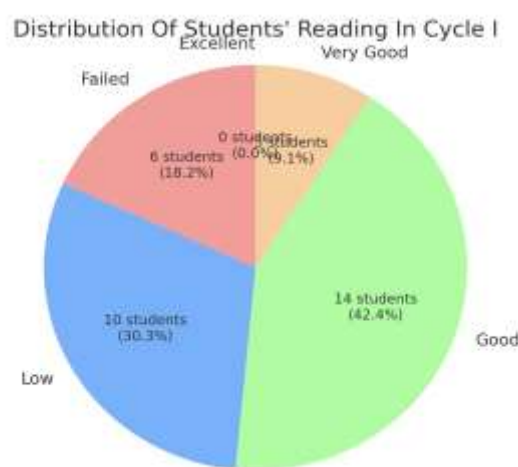
Figure 2. Students' Reading Score in Cycle I

From the figure above, the students' score is into percentages. The percentages can be seen from the following table:
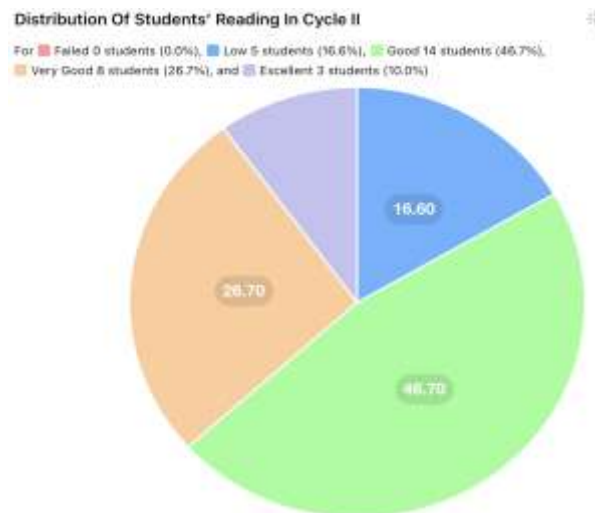
Table 1. The Distribution of Students' Reading in *Cycle I*

| Interval | Qualification | Cycle I | |
		Number of Students	Percentages
85-100	Excellent	-	0%
71-84	Very good	3	10%
60-70	Good	14	46,6%
40-59	Low	10	33,4%
0-39	Failed	6	20%

From the table above, it can be seen that there is improvement in students' reading than in cycle I. The data shows that 0% of students are excellent categories, 10% are very good, 46,6% are good categories, 33,4% are low categories and 20% are failed. Based on the evaluation and reflection, researcher and collaborator conclude that there is improvement in students' reading. However, researcher feels that it is important to increase students' reading because indicator of success has not been

reached yet because some of students it because of the problems such as their lack of understanding of the text, unfamiliar word and sentences, and lack of vocabularies. Besides that, the teaching method that applied before was not interest. Therefore, researcher and collaborator need to do action again.

Cycle II

Figure 3. Students' Reading Score in Cycle II

From the figure above, the researcher collects the students' reading score into percentages. It can be seen from the following table:

Table 2. The Distribution of Students' Reading in Cycle II

| Interval | Qualification | Cycle II | |
		Number of Students	Percentages
85-100	Excellent	3	10%
71-84	Very good	8	26,7%
60-70	Good	14	46,7%
40-59	Low	5	16,6%
0-39	Failed	0	0%

From the table above, it can be seen that students' reading ability increase in teaching reading activity. It shows that 10% of student total numbers are categories excellent, 26,7% are very good, 46,7% are good, 16,6% are low and 0% are failed categories. From the data above, researcher feels that the indicator of success has been reached. Therefore, the researcher decided to stop the action.

Result of Observation Sheet

Classroom observations revealed that student motivation in learning reading significantly increased when using the Project-Based Learning (PBL) method. This method proved to be more effective than traditional methods due to its interactive and real-world relevant nature. Through PBL, students became more engaged and active in the learning process, particularly because the reading tasks assigned felt more meaningful and practical. Collaboration in project groups also fostered a sense of community and teamwork, motivating students to contribute actively. The improvement in students' reading abilities was evident from their assessment results and classroom participation. Their overall positive attitude towards reading and learning increased, thanks to the supportive and encouraging environment created by PBL. Additionally, the role of the teacher as a facilitator and guide was crucial in maintaining student motivation, and providing the necessary support and feedback. The shift from a traditional teacher-centered approach to a student-centered approach allowed students to take ownership of their learning, thus increasing their motivation to engage in reading activities.

D. Conclusion

Implementing Project-Based Learning (PBL) significantly improved test results and observed student behaviors from Cycle I to Cycle II. The increase in the percentage of students achieving 'Very Good' and 'Excellent' performance indicates that PBL positively impacted reading proficiency. Moreover, the reduction in the number of students in the 'Low' and 'Failed' categories reflects the success of PBL in addressing reading difficulties. The observation sheets corroborate these findings, showing marked improvements in student engagement, participation, and motivation. The role of the teacher as a facilitator was crucial in this process, providing the necessary support and encouragement to foster a positive and interactive learning environment.

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