

## THE ENGLISH STUDENTS' ABILITIES IN SPEAKING THROUGH PjBL

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### ABSTRACT

This research investigates the speaking abilities of fourth-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu through the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL). The study involved 20 participants. A descriptive qualitative method was employed to analyze students' speaking development and their responses toward the PjBL approach. Data were gathered through observation, speaking performance assessment, and interviews. The findings revealed significant improvement in students' fluency, vocabulary mastery, and speaking confidence. Furthermore, students showed high engagement when working on local culture-themed projects. It is concluded that PjBL is an effective pedagogical model to enhance speaking skills in EFL contexts.

**Keywords:** *Speaking Ability, Project-Based Learning, English Education, EFL Students*

### I. Introduction

Speaking is a core language skill in English language learning. However, many students in EFL settings still face difficulties due to anxiety, lack of vocabulary, and limited opportunities to practice. These challenges often hinder students from expressing their ideas fluently and confidently in spoken English.

To address this issue, educators have explored alternative instructional models, one of which is Project-Based Learning (PjBL). PjBL is a student-centered approach that involves learners in exploring real-world problems or questions over an extended period. Through collaborative projects, students engage in meaningful inquiry, integrate knowledge and skills, and produce tangible outcomes. In the context of language learning, PjBL encourages authentic communication, fosters creativity, enhances critical thinking, and provides abundant opportunities for speaking practice in a natural context.

Several recent studies have shown that PjBL improves both language proficiency and learner autonomy (Rahmawati et al., 2021; Kurniawan & Fitriyah, 2022). By participating in project

activities such as presentations, interviews, and discussions, students are more likely to develop fluency, accuracy, and confidence in speaking.

This research aims to explore how PjBL can help English education students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu enhance their speaking ability by engaging them in culturally relevant, student-led projects.

### II. Methodology

This study used a descriptive qualitative design to explore students' speaking development through PjBL. The participants were 20 fourth-semester students from the English Education Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu. Data Collection Techniques through: Observation, Performance Assessment, and Interview. The learning process spanned six meetings. Students were divided into five groups and tasked with creating a spoken presentation on a Bengkulu cultural theme (e.g., Tabot Festival, traditional clothing, or folklore). They conducted research, wrote scripts, practiced, and finally presented in front of the class.

### III. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 The Implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL)

The implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in this study followed six main steps adapted from recent PjBL frameworks in EFL classrooms (Apriani & Hidayati, 2021; Susanti et al., 2023). Below is the detailed description along with concrete activities conducted by the researcher (researcher) and the students:

##### 1. Starting with a Driving Question

1. Researcher's Role. Here, the researcher introduced the core question: "*How can we introduce Bengkulu culture to the world in English?*" through a short video and brainstorming session using a digital whiteboard (Jamboard).
2. Students' Activity. In this step, students responded by listing aspects of Bengkulu culture they already knew, such as the *Tabot Festival*, *Dolang-dolang*, *Bengkulu coffee*, and *Rejang dance*. They then discussed in pairs about which aspects could be interesting for an international audience.

##### 2. Planning the Project

1. Researcher's Role. The researcher facilitated group formation (five groups of four students each) and guided students in selecting their specific topics. A sample project timeline was distributed.
2. Students' Activity. Students selected topics such as:
  1. Group 1: *Tabot Festival*
  2. Group 2: *Traditional Bengkulu Foods*
  3. Group 3: *Rejang Dance*
  4. Group 4: *Fort Marlborough*
  5. Group 5: *Bengkulu Folktales*

Each group created a Gantt chart outlining weekly goals, and they shared roles such as scriptwriter,

presenter, and designer. They also discussed initial ideas with the researcher via WhatsApp group.

##### 3. Conducting Research and Gathering Information

1. Researcher's Role. The researcher provided students with bilingual resources and instructed them on how to find credible information using search engines and interview techniques.
2. Students' Activity:
  1. Group 1 interviewed a Tabot committee member.
  2. Group 2 visited a local food vendor to record video documentation and recipes.
  3. Group 3 contacted a traditional dance trainer to explain the Rejang Dance movements and meaning.
  4. Groups also gathered visual materials (photos, videos) and compiled English vocabulary related to their topics, using Google Docs for collaborative notes.

##### 4. Developing the Product (Presentation)

1. Researcher's Role. The researcher reviewed students' scripts via Google Classroom and provided oral feedback on pronunciation and grammar through recorded voice notes.
2. Students' Activity:
  1. Students prepared PowerPoint slides and rehearsed their presentations.
  2. Group 3 created a short demonstration video of the dance using subtitles.
  3. Group 5 recorded a folktale storytelling segment using background music and costumes.
  4. Each group practiced multiple times in the classroom with peer evaluation forms distributed for mutual feedback.

## 5. Presenting the Product

1. Researcher's Role. The researcher acted as moderator, giving turn-based opportunities for presentation and managing the Q&A session.
2. Students' Activity:
  1. Groups delivered their 8–10 minute presentations in English.
  2. Audience members asked questions in English, such as "Why is the Tabot Festival held annually?" or "How is Bengkulu coffee different from others?"
  3. The Q&A sessions were recorded for speaking assessment purposes.

## 6. Reflecting and Evaluating

1. Researcher's Role. The researcher distributed a reflection sheet containing guided questions (e.g., "What was your biggest challenge during the project?" "What did you learn about English speaking?").
2. Students' Activity:
  1. Students wrote individual reflections using Google Forms.
  2. A whole-class discussion was held where students expressed increased confidence in speaking, better understanding of Bengkulu culture, and improved collaboration.
  3. Researcher provided general feedback on delivery, pronunciation, and coherence, and some exemplary presentations were uploaded to the class's YouTube channel with students' consent.

This structured implementation helped ensure that students were actively engaged throughout the process, and each stage contributed directly to improving their speaking competence.

## 3.2 Improvement in Speaking Skills

Based on observation and assessment, most students demonstrated good achievement in speaking.

- a) Fluency: They spoke more naturally and hesitated less during presentations.
- b) Vocabulary: They acquired new words related to culture, tradition, and storytelling.
- c) Pronunciation: Group practice and repetition improved their articulation and stress.
- d) Confidence: Public speaking in a supportive environment reduced anxiety.

Based on the observation and assessment results of 20 fourth-semester English education students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu, it can be concluded that the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) had a positive impact on their speaking skills across four key aspects: fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and confidence.

### 1. Fluency

Most students demonstrated notable progress in speaking fluently. This was evident in their ability to speak with fewer pauses and better flow during project presentations. Approximately 65% of students scored 4 or higher in this category, indicating that the project activities, such as repeated rehearsals and real-time speaking during group work, helped them internalize language structures and express ideas more naturally.

### 2. Vocabulary

Vocabulary development was a strong outcome of the project. Around 70% of students showed an increase in the use of topic-specific and culturally relevant terms, such as those related to festivals, traditions, and local foods. This was a result of both individual research and group discussions, which exposed them to new lexical items in meaningful contexts.

### 3. Pronunciation

The students' pronunciation also improved, especially in terms of

word stress and clarity. The use of peer feedback and guided practice from the lecturer contributed to this progress. About 60% of students scored in the 'good' to 'excellent' range (4–5), reflecting greater accuracy and intelligibility during their oral performance.

4. Confidence

The most significant qualitative improvement was seen in students' confidence. Engaging in public speaking in a low-anxiety, supportive classroom environment allowed students to overcome nervousness and become more expressive. Roughly 75% of students appeared more confident, as shown by eye contact, body language, and their willingness to respond to questions during the Q&A sessions.

These findings are consistent with Herlina & Suhartono (2023), who emphasized that project-based learning tasks enable students to engage in authentic language use, which not only improves their fluency but also builds intrinsic motivation and confidence. Furthermore, the integration of cultural content allowed students to speak about familiar topics, thus reducing cognitive load and making the language more accessible.

In summary, the qualitative data support the conclusion that PjBL is an effective strategy to enhance speaking ability in EFL contexts, especially when combined with local cultural content that is relevant and meaningful to learners.

### 3.3 Engagement and Student Reflections

The students responded positively to the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL), particularly due to its integration with local cultural themes. In post-project interviews, many students expressed that the topics—such as traditional dances, foods, festivals, and historical sites—were not only interesting but also personally meaningful. By

exploring their own heritage in English, they felt a deeper emotional connection to their culture. This relevance created a more engaging learning experience and reduced the psychological distance between language learning and their everyday lives.

Moreover, students reported that they began to see English not just as a subject to pass, but as a tool to communicate their identity globally. They recognized the value of using English to promote and explain Bengkulu's cultural richness to an international audience. This sense of purpose increased their motivation and encouraged more effort in preparing content, rehearsing speeches, and participating in class activities. Collaborative tasks further enhanced their soft skills—especially communication, problem-solving, and leadership—as they navigated group dynamics, divided tasks, and resolved conflicts together.

In addition to linguistic and interpersonal gains, students also highlighted their personal growth throughout the project. Many mentioned that they learned to manage their time more effectively, meet deadlines, and take initiative without waiting for teacher instructions. These reflections suggest an increase in learner autonomy and responsibility, confirming findings by Rahmawati et al. (2021), who asserted that PjBL encourages independent learning. By taking ownership of their projects from start to finish, students became more self-directed, reflective, and confident learners—skills that are essential for success in both academic and professional contexts.

### 3.4 Challenges Encountered

Despite the overall positive outcomes, the implementation of PjBL was not without challenges. At the beginning of the project, several groups struggled with internal coordination, particularly in task distribution and equal participation. Some members tended to dominate, while others remained passive, uncertain about their roles. The division of speaking turns during rehearsals

was also uneven in some cases, with stronger students taking on more speaking parts. This highlighted the need for clearer guidelines on teamwork and role-sharing to ensure every student had the opportunity to practice and perform.

Another common difficulty observed was students' hesitation to speak in English due to fear of making mistakes. This anxiety often stemmed from concerns about pronunciation, grammar, or being judged by peers. As a result, some students were reluctant to participate actively in discussions or presentations at the early stages of the project. However, as the project progressed and the classroom atmosphere became more supportive, these students began to show greater willingness to speak. Peer support and low-stakes practice sessions contributed significantly to lowering their affective filter.

These experiences reaffirm previous research suggesting that Project-Based Learning in EFL contexts requires strong scaffolding and consistent teacher facilitation (Kurniawan & Fitriyah, 2022). In this study, the lecturer played a crucial role in monitoring group dynamics, providing timely feedback, and offering motivational support. By guiding students through each stage of the project and modeling effective communication strategies, the lecturer helped create a learning environment that encouraged participation, reduced fear of failure, and promoted gradual improvement in speaking confidence.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The use of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) significantly improved students' speaking skills, particularly in terms of fluency, vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation accuracy, and speaking confidence. Through real-life tasks and collaborative activities, students were able to practice speaking English in meaningful contexts. The incorporation of culturally relevant themes, such as Bengkulu traditions and local heritage, not only made the

learning process more engaging but also fostered a sense of pride and identity among students. This connection between content and context contributed to increased student motivation and participation.

Moreover, the structured stages of PjBL—starting from inquiry, planning, researching, producing, presenting, and reflecting—provided a clear learning pathway and allowed students to develop not just linguistic competence but also essential soft skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, and self-reflection. The interactive nature of the project also helped reduce speaking anxiety, as students worked in groups, received continuous support, and practiced in a safe, low-stress environment.

In light of these findings, it is strongly recommended that EFL instructors integrate PjBL into their speaking classes. This approach can serve as an effective alternative to traditional methods, offering students opportunities to use English authentically and purposefully. To maximize its impact, teachers should provide adequate scaffolding, monitor group dynamics, and design projects that are relevant to students' lives and cultural backgrounds. Future studies are encouraged to explore long-term effects of PjBL on speaking proficiency and to examine its implementation in various EFL learning contexts.

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