


Increasing English as a Foreign Language Students' Interest in Speaking Through Project-Based Learning in West Jakarta

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of Project-Based Learning (PBL) on enhancing the interest and speaking proficiency of elementary EFL students. Employing a mixed-methods case study design, the research was conducted with grade four students at Kalam Kudus III Christian Elementary School, Jakarta. Data were gathered through speaking tests, interviews, and questionnaires to evaluate the effectiveness of PBL, identify implementation challenges, and assess student engagement. The findings reveal that: (1) students' speaking skills significantly improved following the intervention; (2) primary challenges included limited vocabulary and initial difficulties in peer collaboration; and (3) the approach effectively boosted students' motivation and interest in English communication. Consequently, PBL serves as a viable pedagogical strategy to foster active oral participation in young learners.

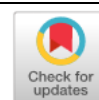
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INTRODUCTION

English, recognized worldwide as an international language, also known as a global lingua franca, serves as a crucial bridge for international communication, cultural exchange, and access to scientific advancements. For young learners, mastering English is a foundational skill for future global citizenship. Among the four language skills, speaking is the most crucial for young EFL learners because it is the primary tool for social interaction and active participation in a global society. Early speaking skills not only foster cognitive flexibility but also build the communicative confidence necessary for long-term linguistic success.

Despite its importance, the transition from theoretical knowledge to practical conversation remains a significant obstacle. Many EFL students struggle with speaking due to psychological barriers, such as anxiety and low self-esteem, which often hinder language acquisition. A recent study by (Azzahra et al., 2025) showed that traditional teacher-centered instruction often leads to student inactivity, as group discussions often fail when topics feel irrelevant to students lived experiences. This lack of engagement turns the classroom into a source of stress rather than a space for linguistic growth.

The urgency of this issue is reflected in preliminary data from grade 4A students at Kalam Kudus III Christian Elementary School for the 2024/2025 semester. The findings reveal a stark gap in language proficiency: only 26.08% of students are fluent in English, while 21.73% demonstrate low proficiency, and 52.17% are unable to speak the language at all. These data highlight a critical gap between curriculum objectives and actual student performance. Research suggests that addressing this gap requires a shift toward a student-centered approach. Specifically, Project-Based Learning (PBL) has been identified as an effective strategy for significantly increasing students' communicative confidence and interest by providing meaningful and authentic tasks (Tia & Wangid, 2024) (Sari et al., 2025). By fostering

a supportive environment, PBL offers a viable solution to break the cycle of avoidance and encourage active oral participation among young learners.

Table 1. Students' Capabilities to Speak English in Semester 1 2024/2025

No.	Categories	Percentages
1.	The students are fluent in speaking English.	26,08 %
2.	The students are not fluent in speaking English.	21,73 %
3.	The students cannot speak English.	52,17 %

Project-Based Learning (PBL) has emerged as a powerful approach in language learning because it promotes collaborative activities that enhance speaking skills through real-world scenarios. This approach encourages students to develop critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving skills while engaging in meaningful communication. In PBL, teachers act as facilitators who provide guidance and resources rather than solely delivering instruction. Through practical tasks and project activities, students can reduce speaking anxiety, improve vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension, and perceive English as a practical and enjoyable subject to learn. Previous studies have also highlighted the effectiveness of PBL in improving fluency, accuracy, creativity, and student engagement. However, limited research has explored students' emotional experiences, interests, challenges, and qualitative perspectives, particularly in junior high school contexts.

Firdaus & Septiady, (2023) conducted a mixed-methods study involving 35 university students as a single sample. Their findings demonstrated that Project-Based Learning effectively enhances speaking skills while simultaneously promoting teamwork, critical thinking, creativity, and active participation. Based on these results, the researchers recommended the implementation of PBL in speaking instruction.

Similarly, (Cecep. & Suparmadi., 2024) employed a qualitative approach using questionnaires and interviews with students as the primary data sources. Their study revealed that PBL significantly improves speaking proficiency, increases students' motivation to express their ideas orally, and provides greater opportunities for speaking practice throughout the learning process.

(Ahmad., 2021) applied qualitative methods using open-ended questionnaires administered to students. The findings indicated that presentation tasks within PBL activities play a significant role in building students' self-confidence, increasing motivation and interest in speaking English, and providing valuable experiences in public speaking.

Furthermore, (Siminto et al., 2024) conducted a qualitative literature review and concluded that PBL functions as a transformative learning strategy that improves students' motivation, engagement, and spoken English ability. The approach encourages student-centered collaboration, intrinsic motivation, sustained effort, and real-world language use, thereby strengthening students' language proficiency and interpersonal communication skills.

(Magfirah & Arridha, 2025) implemented a qualitative research design using closed-ended questionnaires combined with video-based projects. Their study found that video-integrated PBL significantly improves students' English-speaking proficiency despite several challenges, such as hesitation, pronunciation errors, grammatical difficulties, and technical issues. In addition, the approach increases students' motivation, preparation quality, engagement, vocabulary development, confidence, ability to express ideas, and workplace-related communication skills, particularly among non-native learners in underserved regions.

Overall, the studies conducted by (Firdaus & Septiady, 2023) (Cecep. & Suparmadi., 2024) (Ahmad., 2021) (Siminto et al., 2024) and (Magfirah & Arridha, 2025) consistently demonstrate that PBL is effective in improving English speaking skills through motivation, collaboration, and practical learning experiences. However, these studies present several limitations. Most of them focus primarily on university or vocational education contexts rather than junior high school settings. In addition, they pay limited attention to age-specific emotional and motivational factors, such as reducing speaking anxiety and incorporating engaging learning activities appropriate for younger learners.

Therefore, further research is necessary to examine the implementation of PBL in junior high school contexts. This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning in improving EFL students' speaking skills, particularly by focusing on students' interest, emotional experiences, and motivation. Using observations, interviews, and data triangulation, this research seeks to address the limitations of previous studies by exploring students' personal perceptions and the challenges encountered during the implementation of PBL. Specifically, this study aims to: (1) examine the extent to which Project-Based Learning encourages students' English-speaking skills, (2) identify the challenges faced by students during the implementation of Project-Based Learning in speaking activities, and (3) explore how Project-Based Learning influences students' interest and engagement in learning English speaking skills. The research hypothesis is written below

H1: There is significant effect of Project Based Learning increasing students English speaking Skills.

H2: There is significant effect of Project Based Learning increasing students Attractiveness on English Speaking and solving the challenge of English Speaking.

H3: There is significant effect of Project Based Learning increasing students' motivation and interest on English Speaking.

METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods case study design to evaluate Project-Based Learning (PBL)'s effectiveness in improving elementary students' English-speaking skills at SD Kristen Kalam Kudus III Jakarta.

Quantitative data derive from pre-tests, post-tests, and closed questionnaires assessing speaking proficiency (pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension) and student interest, while qualitative data stem from semi-structured interviews and observations exploring perceptions, challenges, and enthusiasm. Purposive sampling targets class 4A (23 students exhibiting speaking difficulties) for comprehensive involvement, alongside three grade 4 students with notable pre-post changes and the speaking teacher for interviews. The unit of analysis centers on these 23 students and the teacher, focusing on PBL implementation, oral skill enhancements, and persistent barriers like hesitancy.

Data collection instruments include speaking tests (pre-test via short story retelling without PBL; post-test via picture description with PBL), semi-structured interviews with selected students to capture challenges and experiences, closed Likert-scale questionnaires (scored 1-5: Never to Always) distributed to class 4A to gauge interest and motivation pre- and post-PBL, and non-intrusive observations post-questionnaire for validation. Procedures encompass pre-tests for baseline abilities, PBL-integrated post-tests with thorough preparation, audio-recorded interviews categorized by significant skill shifts, and printed questionnaires in Indonesian for clarity.

Quantitative analysis involves descriptive statistics (mean, median, standard deviation) for test scores and questionnaire responses, categorized into dimensions (e.g., material understanding, speaking challenges, collaboration, PBL effectiveness) per Arikunto's (2013) criteria: Good (76-100%), Fair (56-75%), Poor (<55%). Inferential testing uses paired t-tests (null hypothesis: no significant increase; alternative: significant increase) via Microsoft Excel to compare pre-post differences, assuming normality and independence. Qualitative analysis applies thematic procedures: accurate transcription of audio and notes, coding relevant excerpts in Microsoft Word, theme grouping with data review for alignment, and final interpretation linking patterns to research objectives, prior literature gaps in elementary contexts, and narrative insights on PBL's impact.

Operational definitions link variables to indicators and measurements: PBL (project activities, task enthusiasm via all instruments); speaking skills (five aspects via tests, observations, etc.); student interest (skill exploration motivation, activity enthusiasm via questionnaires, interviews). Data integration triangulates sources for robust validity,

addressing research questions on PBL efficacy, student perceptions, Quantitative analysis involves descriptive statistics (mean, median, standard deviation) for test scores and questionnaire responses, categorized into dimensions (e.g., material understanding, speaking challenges, collaboration, PBL effectiveness) per Arikunto's (2013) criteria: Good (76-100%), Fair (56-75%), Poor (<55%). Inferential testing uses paired t-tests (null hypothesis: no significant increase; alternative: significant increase) via Microsoft Excel to compare pre-post differences, assuming normality and independence. Qualitative analysis applies thematic procedures: accurate transcription of audio and notes, coding relevant excerpts in Microsoft Word, theme grouping with data review for alignment, and final interpretation linking patterns to research objectives, prior literature gaps in elementary contexts, and narrative insights on PBL's impact.

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FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Pre-test assessments in Grade 4A, using a rubric across Content, Pronunciation, Fluency, and Teamwork, revealed baseline deficiencies. Content was rated "Needs Improvement," with frequent incorrect or incomplete sentences. Pronunciation and Fluency were "Satisfactory," marked by errors that impeded clarity and numerous pauses or hesitations. Teamwork achieved "Good," with participation in minor issues but struggles in major ones due to comprehension gaps. This indicated foundational weaknesses in linguistic coherence, phonetic accuracy, speech flow, and interactive dynamics prior to PBL.

Post-PBL evaluations demonstrated substantial gains. Content improved to "Good," featuring mostly correct sentences with minor errors. Pronunciation advanced to "Good," with occasional minor issues. Fluency reached "Excellent," characterized by confident delivery and minimal hesitation. Teamwork attained "Excellent" through active engagement in all activities. The shift from predominant "Needs Improvement/Satisfactory" pre-test ratings to "Good/Excellent" post-test ratings, eliminating lower tiers, confirms PBL's efficacy in enhancing sentence construction, phonetic mastery, continuity, and collaboration. Therefore, H_1 (a significant PBL effect on speaking skills) is accepted.

Observations conducted before and after PBL, scored on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Not interested at all; 4 = Very interested and enthusiastic) across Attractiveness, Active Participation in Group Speaking, Confidence, English Use, and Collaboration, highlighted transformative engagement.

Pre-PBL results were uniformly low – Collaboration scored 1, while the other aspects scored 2 (Sometimes Interested) – reflecting disengagement and minimal interaction. Post-PBL results showed significant improvement: Attractiveness and Active Participation surged to 4, Confidence and English Use increased to 3 (Fairly Interested), and Collaboration rose to 4 (from 1). This progression underscores PBL's role in stimulating enthusiasm, self-assurance, language application, and teamwork, while mitigating speaking barriers through practical, collaborative tasks. These results support H_2 (PBL increases attractiveness and resolves challenges) and H_3 (PBL enhances motivation and interest); therefore, both hypotheses are accepted.

Semi-structured interviews with two students (O and G) elucidated PBL's perceptual impacts. G emerged as the most dominant voice, repeatedly emphasizing fluency gains from diverse activities (conversations, Scrabble, and presentations) and crediting the teacher's patience for deepening proficiency and enjoyment, even from an already strong baseline. O noted a shift from passive pre-PBL tasks (reading and writing) to engaging PBL activities (story and essay reading, interactive projects), which boosted confidence despite initial

vocabulary limitations, and described PBL as "very cool." Both students affirmed increased enthusiasm and practical relevance, with G's detailed and affirmative accounts of fluency and motivation dominating the narrative. These findings reinforce PBL's motivational efficacy in fostering active and enjoyable speaking practice. The inclusion of gamified elements, such as Scrabble and structured presentations within the PBL framework, acted as "meaningful triggers." This aligns with the project-based principle of "authentic products," where students are motivated to speak because they have a clear communicative goal beyond simple repetition.

Based on the results above, it can be explained that: First, in answering research problem number 1, *The Improvement in Students' Speaking Skills After Implementing Project-Based Learning*, PBL markedly elevated Grade 4A students' speaking proficiency and engagement. Pre-PBL observations scored 1 for Collaboration and 2 for other aspects such as Attractiveness, Participation, Confidence, and English Use. After PBL implementation, these scores increased to 3–4 through interactive tasks such as conversations, presentations, and Scrabble. Pre-tests rated Content as "Needs Improvement," Pronunciation and Fluency as "Satisfactory," and Teamwork as "Good." Post-tests showed improvement to "Good" for Content and Pronunciation, and "Excellent" for Fluency and Participation, eliminating the lower performance tiers and supporting H_1 . Questionnaire results averaged 75.07% ("Good" according to Arikunto, 2013), indicating strong effectiveness and collaboration. These findings align with (Firdaus & Septiady, 2023) regarding participation, (Cecep. & Suparmadi., 2024) regarding motivation, and (Burhanuddin, 2021) regarding confidence. They also validate (Siminto et al., 2024) on intrinsic motivation and real-world skills, (Magfirah & Arridha, 2025) on vocabulary and confidence gains despite errors, and (Sirwesvary & Jamaludin, 2025) on learner-centered outcomes. Although minor variability suggests the need for individualized support, PBL successfully transforms EFL learning into a more attractive and engaging process through improved proficiency and enthusiasm.

Second, in answering research problem number 2, *The Challenges Students Face During the Implementation of Project-Based Learning*, the explanation is as follows.

Difficulty in Understanding the Material

Pre-PBL observations recorded scores of 1 for Collaboration and 2 for other aspects such as Attractiveness and English Use. Post-PBL scores increased to 3–4, indicating improved comprehension through PBL tasks such as stories, essays, and games. Interviews revealed O's perception of PBL as "very cool" and G's improvement in fluency. Pre-tests rated Content as "Needs Improvement" due to frequent errors, while post-tests improved to "Good" and "Excellent," supporting H_2 . Questionnaire results reached 62.41% ("Fair"). These findings align with (Firdaus & Septiady, 2023) regarding critical thinking and (Cecep. & Suparmadi., 2024) regarding skill development. They also validate (Siminto et al., 2024) regarding active learning and interaction, (Magfirah & Arridha, 2025) regarding overcoming pronunciation and vocabulary difficulties through collaboration, and (Sirwesvary & Jamaludin, 2025) regarding knowledge construction. PBL mitigates incorrect sentence formation and fluency issues through practice and collaboration, increasing motivation despite moderate vocabulary challenges that still require tailored support.

English Speaking Challenges

Before PBL implementation, scores were 1 for Collaboration and 2 for Participation, Confidence, and other aspects. After PBL implementation, scores improved to 3–4, reducing speaking barriers through collaborative tasks. Pre-tests confirmed "Needs Improvement" and "Satisfactory" levels, whereas post-tests improved to "Good" and "Excellent," supporting H_2 . Questionnaire results reached 60.88% ("Fair"). Interviews with students O and G highlighted PBL's role in improving fluency and confidence despite vocabulary limitations. These findings align with (Firdaus & Septiady, 2023) regarding improvements in speaking and critical thinking, (Cecep. & Suparmadi., 2024) regarding increased practice opportunities, and (Ahmad., 2021) regarding experiential learning. They also support (Siminto et al., 2024) regarding motivation and skill development, (Magfirah & Arridha, 2025) regarding handling

errors through interaction, and (Sirwesvary & Jamaludin, 2025) regarding learning outcomes. PBL creates a supportive environment that minimizes speaking challenges and enhances enthusiasm, fluency, and participation, although vocabulary limitations remain. However, the interview with Student O revealed that the collaborative nature of PBL allowed for "peer scaffolding." Students used contextual clues and peer support to overcome lexical limitations, suggesting that PBL does not eliminate linguistic errors but provides a safer environment for managing them.

Third, in answering research problem number 3, The Effect of Project-Based Learning on Students' Motivation and Interest in Learning English Speaking Skills, the explanation is as follows.

Collaboration with Friends and Teacher

Before PBL implementation, Collaboration scored 1, while other aspects scored 2. After PBL implementation, Collaboration increased to 4, and other aspects improved to 3–4, indicating enhanced teamwork and speaking engagement. Pre-tests showed Teamwork as "Good" but other aspects remained low, whereas post-tests improved to "Excellent" and "Good," supporting H₃. Questionnaire results reached 61.61% ("Fair," but showing improvement). Interviews with students O and G indicated that O gained confidence through tasks despite vocabulary limitations, while G improved fluency through daily practice and teacher support. These findings align with (Firdaus & Septiady, 2023) regarding teamwork, (Cecep. & Suparmadi., 2024) regarding interaction, and (Ahmad., 2021) regarding confidence. They also support (Siminto et al., 2024) regarding motivation and real-life application, (Magfirah & Arridha, 2025) regarding collaborative learning benefits, and (Sirwesvary & Jamaludin, 2025) regarding adaptive learning outcomes. PBL increases motivation through frequent English use and support from peers and teachers, making language learning more integrated and less intimidating. However, individual differences still require continuous practice and guidance.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concluded that the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) significantly improved the English-speaking skills and engagement of fifth-grade students at Kalam Kudus III Christian Elementary School. The transition from a teacher-centered approach to a student-centered project-based framework resulted in substantial improvements across all speaking parameters-Content, Pronunciation, Fluency, and Teamwork. Quantitatively, the shift from "Needs Improvement" on the pre-learning test to "Excellent" on the post-learning test, supported by a high questionnaire average of 75.07%, confirmed the acceptance of H₁ (the effect of PBL on speaking skills). Furthermore, this study identified that although PBL effectively reduced psychological barriers such as shyness and low self-confidence (accepting H₂ and H₃), certain linguistic challenges, particularly limited vocabulary, remained as minor obstacles. However, the collaborative nature of PBL provided a supportive environment in which students could address these gaps through peer interaction and teacher guidance. The dramatic increase in student engagement and participation-from low interest to high enthusiasm-confirms that PBL is not only a linguistic tool but also a motivational catalyst that makes English learning meaningful and enjoyable for young learners.

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