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## ONLINE PROJECT-BASED LEARNING IN COVID-19 PANDEMIC: EFL PRE-SERVICE TEACHER' STORY

by

Harun Arwanto\*

English Education Department, Universitas Sebelas Maret Surakarta, Indonesia

[harunarwanto\\_17@student.uns.ac.id](mailto:harunarwanto_17@student.uns.ac.id)

Ana Mufidatun Ni'mah

English Education Department, Universitas Sebelas Maret Surakarta, Indonesia

[ana.mufidatun@student.uns.ac.id](mailto:ana.mufidatun@student.uns.ac.id)

\*Corresponding author

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### Abstract:

*The study explored the experiences of a pre-service EFL teacher when participating in online project-based learning activities in critical listening class during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study aimed to investigate students' skills that can be developed through online project-based learning other than language skills and a female pre-service EFL teacher's perspectives on the benefits and challenges of using online project-based learning in English as a foreign language online class. The study employed a narrative inquiry model. The semi-structured interview and narrative frame were employed to collect the data. The result revealed that not only develop critical listening but such skills as technical skills in using technology for learning; self-learning; problem-solving; collaboration and communication with peers; critical and creative thinking; and time management outside the classroom can also be increased after joining online classes that implement project-based learning by using various learning platforms. In addition, implementing online project-based learning also provides several benefits and challenges for the participant.*

**Keywords:** EFL pre-service teacher; narrative inquiry; online project-based learning

### Abstrak:

*Studi ini mengeksplorasi pengalaman seorang guru EFL pra-jabatan ketika berpartisipasi dalam kegiatan pembelajaran berbasis proyek online di kelas mendengarkan kritis selama pandemi Covid-19. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki keterampilan siswa yang dapat dikembangkan melalui pembelajaran berbasis proyek online selain keterampilan bahasa dan perspektif guru EFL pra-jabatan perempuan tentang manfaat dan tantangan menggunakan pembelajaran berbasis proyek online dalam bahasa Inggris sebagai kelas online bahasa asing. Penelitian ini menggunakan model inkuiri naratif. Wawancara semi-terstruktur dan kerangka narasi digunakan untuk mengumpulkan data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tidak hanya mengembangkan pendengaran kritis tetapi keterampilan seperti keterampilan teknis dalam menggunakan teknologi untuk pembelajaran; belajar mandiri; pemecahan masalah; kolaborasi dan komunikasi dengan rekan-rekan; berpikir kritis dan kreatif; Dan manajemen waktu di luar kelas juga dapat ditingkatkan setelah mengikuti kelas online yang menerapkan pembelajaran berbasis proyek dengan menggunakan berbagai platform pembelajaran. Selain*

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*itu, menerapkan pembelajaran berbasis proyek secara online juga memberikan beberapa manfaat dan tantangan bagi peserta.*

**Kata kunci:** , guru prajabatan EFL; penelitian cerita; pembelajaran berbasis proyek daring

## INTRODUCTION

Project-based learning (PjBL) has grown in popularity recently (Greenier, 2020). With the help of group projects, this teaching approach gives students the chance to learn on their own. It is considered an appropriate approach to teaching EFL to replace the conventional methods of instruction, especially in Indonesia (Ngadiso et al., 2021). The majority of educational processes, including EFL, use lectures as their primary teaching method (Greenier, 2020). The teacher serves as the primary resource in this learning setting, which makes it more teacher-centered and frequently causes students to become bored because they only pay attention to the teacher's explanations. Certainly, this approach does not match the educational goals of Indonesia's 2013 curriculum, which offers more chances for independent study. Therefore, PJBL provides students an opportunity to learn independently with teachers' guidance as a facilitator rather than a controller.

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) has been widely used for many years as a method in education, especially in teaching subjects such as science, geography, and history (Fauziati, 2014). PJBL is (Markham et al., 2003) a systematic teaching method that engages students in learning knowledge and skills through an extended inquiry process structured around complex authentic questions and carefully designed projects and tasks. Moreover, PJBL, according to Chen & Yang, (2019), is typically seen as an alternative to traditional education that has a medium to large positive impact on the academic achievement of students. This method may be suitable to be applied in this era for students to improve their skills and achievement in the learning process.

PJBL has been promoted within English language teaching as it is widely known as an effective methodology to meet the needs of the 21st Century challenges in education. PJBL is useful for students in developing critical thinking, communicative skills, and problem-solving

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skills. This designates to a student-centered approach of teaching, in line with Fried-Booth, (1997) who states that it is student-centered and driven by the need to create an end-product. The teacher merely serves as a guide during the project in project-based learning, which encourages student collaboration (Sumarni, 2013; Greenier, 2020). Students will gain the opportunity to learn and practice their English by working on projects and develop their language skills such as writing (Alotaibi, 2020), reading (Andriansah et al., 2019), speaking and listening (Abu Bakar et al., 2019).

PJBL can also be integrated with the use of technology to make it more user-friendly and up to date. The integration of PJBL with technology has been increased particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic which forced learning and teaching activities changed from face-to-face in the classroom to remote and online-based learning (Seman et al., 2018; Maros et al., 2021; Chaaban et al., 2021; Zainal & Zainuddin, 2021; Ashton, 2022). This condition drives teachers to create learning activities which can accommodate the students' independence in learning by creating projects with their peers and teachers' guidance (King & Smith, 2020). To achieve that aim, online project-based learning seems suitable to be carried out in the teaching and learning process. Project here means the assignment in a wide range that integrates language skills work through a number of activities.

In light of the importance of conducting online PJBL, it is crucial to carry out a study based on teachers' experience to determine what skills may be developed apart from language skills as well as the benefits and challenges of online PJBL activities. The research questions of this study are (1) What are students' skills excluding language skills that can be developed through online project-based learning?; and (2) What are the benefits and challenges of applying online project-based learning based on an EFL teacher's perspective?. Therefore, the aim of study is to investigate: (1) student skills that can be developed through online project-based learning other than language skills; and (2) teachers' perspectives on the benefits and challenges of using online project-based learning in teaching English as a foreign language.

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## METHOD

### *Design*

This research is qualitative research using narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry has as its central concern the stories narrators tell about their life experiences. It is about making meaning of life experiences in the process of telling stories, much more than the telling of stories (Barkhuizen et al., 2013). By conducting narrative inquiry, we have come to see understanding from an intimate place of experiences. In this research, participants' experiences when participating in online project-based learning activities on critical listening course in a university were studied. Thus, this research aimed to investigate student skills that can be developed through online project-based learning other than language skills; and the participant's perspectives on the benefits and challenges of using online project-based learning in teaching English as a foreign language through the story of the participant.

### *Participant*

The participant in this study was a female pre-service EFL teacher who was currently studying at the undergraduate program in one of the universities in Indonesia. As narrative inquiry is “a deeply ethical project” and “an ethical work” in which “we cannot separate the ethical from the living of the inquiry” (Clandinin, 2013), the researcher has taken the following detailed ethical considerations. The participant agreed to sign a consent form to share her story as the source of this study. First, the participant's name, Bulan, and school in this study are pseudonyms. During the inquiry process, the researcher maintained a friendly relationship with the participant and respected her wishes in the research. Last but not the least, our co-composition of the stories was approved by the participant to be published for academic purposes.

### *Data collecting technique*

To collect the data from the participant, semi-structured interviews and narrative frames were employed. The interview was carried out via WhatsApp call and recorded for approximately an hour to obtain deeper information about the participant's story after the narrative frame had been fulfilled. The record then transcribed to make it clear to be analyzed.

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The interviews were conducted by using Indonesian language (Bahasa Indonesia) as well as writing narrative frames.

***Data analysis technique***

Moreover, in data analysis technique, this study employed thematic analysis proposed by Barkhuizen et al., (2013). Thematic analysis is utilized in qualitative research and focuses on examining themes or patterns of meaning within data. Thematic analysis put emphasis on organization and rich description of the data set and theoretically informed interpretation of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, the analysis process was carried out with the following steps: (1) reading the data more than once; (2) labeling and categorizing the data; (3) interpreting the data coding. Moreover, after interpreting the result from the data gathered, it is supported by theories or previous studies.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The data from narrative frames and semi-structured interviews with the participant provide several pieces of information regarding skills that can be developed as well as the benefits and challenges in conducting online PJBL.

***Result***

***Students' skills after joining online PJBL***

There are several skills, excluding language skills, those are found and increased during the implementation of online PJBL in critical listening class. As narrated by Bulan, besides developing her critical listening skills, such skills as 1) technical skills in using technology for learning, 2) self-learning, 3) problem solving, 4) collaboration and communication with peers, 5) critical and creative thinking and 6) time management outside the classroom can also be increased after joining online class which implements project-based learning by using various learning platforms. She continued by saying that by using this approach, students can strengthen their soft skills, which will aid them in understanding learning material and attentively participating in the various classroom activities.

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*“Based on my experience, when I take classes that apply online PJBL, I can develop technical skills in using technology for self-learning. Then other skills such as problem-solving, collaboration, and communication with friends are also more honed. Then the ability to think critically and creatively also develops because we are asked to understand the material critically and work on projects creatively. At the same time, time management skills are also growing.”* (WhatsApp call, 12 July 2022).

***The benefits and challenges of online PJBL***

The implementation of online PJBL provides the participant with many advantages. After participating in multiple activities with online PJBL, she reported that she could better understand a lesson or topic because the material was being deepened outside of the classroom. Since class meetings are so brief, she believes that additional activities outside of the classroom—such as LMS discussions or easy tasks that can be completed independently—are crucial to deepen understanding and test critical thinking. She also feels more comfortable writing about her thoughts on some asynchronous platforms, like Schoology, than she does speaking out loud in class.

*“I can understand the material better outside of class hours, because of the limited time in class, I can't understand it better. In addition, when asked to express my opinion, I am also more comfortable when writing it through an asynchronous platform.”* (Narrative Frame, 9 July 2022)

Furthermore, online project-based activities also have flexibility in their completion times. Online PJBL usually takes place not only synchronously, but also asynchronously which allows students to finish their job outside the classroom schedule. PJBL online activities, as Bulan said, provide flexible activities. For instance, she might make small progress on her project in Schoology as an asynchronous media when she has free time. In addition to individual projects, she and her friends frequently receive group assignments that require her to collaborate with colleagues, communicate with them, and adjust their schedules via WhatsApp chat with her friends. The communication via WhatsApp chat can also be used to discuss the group division, member's job-desk, task-reminder, and share the meeting link. She also underlined the need of communicating outside of class, particularly when learning is delivered online and there is little opportunity for in-person interaction.

The participant gains other benefits through a series of online project-based learning activities including the development of the ability to search and think creatively. Because the

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projects are frequently extremely complex, such as finding news about certain topics from some online source and then the students are asked to criticize it, she feels challenged to apply her creativity and research abilities. She and her companion were urged, for instance, to look out for a news item that addressed discrimination and then analyze it. This in turn improves Bulan's capacity for original thought and her capacity to discover information that meets her lecturer's expectations. Overall, PJBL is sufficient to reduce the learning loss that Bulan frequently suffers when she is unable to comprehend the material.

*“Overall, PJBL quite reduces the learning loss that I often experience when I can't understand a material.” (Narrative Frame, 9 July 2022).*

Online PJBL activities not only have advantages but also have drawbacks for pre-service teachers. Bulan mentioned that she experienced burnout because she had too many duties outside of class, such as managing her personal matters and completing other projects or assignments. Additionally, because lecturer-assigned projects are typically not finished in just one or two meetings, completing this work requires a lot of time and effort. The work of online projects will be hampered, particularly when the project is carried out in groups. Members who refuse to contribute or lack the necessary abilities will frequently rely on other friends.

*“Honestly, I experienced burnout because I had other activities outside of college. and sometimes, friends who are less active and don't have enough skills also hinder the progress of group projects.” (WhatsApp call, 12 July 2022).*

### ***Discussion***

The current study revealed that online PJBL can be employed in EFL classrooms to grow several skills outside the language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). As mentioned in the result section, online PJBL can increase technical skills in using technology for learning. Due to the PJBL's online-based design, this skill is the most prominent. This finding is in line with previous studies (Seman et al., 2018; Splichal et al., 2018; Karismawati, 2021), which claimed that the skills of operating several applications to support learning is increased in the implementation of online PJBL for students. Moreover, through the use of technology, teachers and students can change the way that they teach and learn so that it

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increases students' self-learning to be more student-centered rather than heavily teacher-dominated (Evseeva & Solozhenko, 2015). Splichal et al., (2018) added that self-regulatory learners are capable of effectively planning, monitoring, and revising their learning as necessary.

Furthermore, other skills such as collaboration and communication with peers, problem-solving skills, and critical and creative thinking also grow during the involvement in online PJBL. Greenier, (2020) explained that project-based learning has a crucial impact on an educational strategy that attempts to combine communicative interaction and creative thinking, encourage peer collaboration, and strengthen students' ability to solve problems and think critically. The other study Fauziati, (2014) strengthens the findings that PJBL can be used to develop students' teamwork, critical thinking, and presentation skills. Additionally, they claimed that as online PJBL activities advance, this skill can be developed if the student actively engages in working on projects assigned by the teacher.

Benefits and challenges were also gathered by conducting activities in online PJBL. As narrated by Bulan, she obtains advantages after joining online classes which implement online PJBL. Some of them relate to the development of the abilities described in the previous sentence, such as enhancing creativity, critical thinking, teamwork and communication skills, and time management. This finding is supported by Karismawati's (2021) study which revealed that the activity in online PJBL is beneficial to provide students with the chance to boost communication skill, teamwork, critical thinking, and creativity. On the other hand, when conducting online PJBL, Bulan also faces obstacles such as passivity from group members when a project needs to be completed collectively and fatigue from working on lengthy projects that require a lot of time and at the same time, she has to finish another job. the same results show that prolonged PJBL online activities make students feel tired because they have to work on projects apart from having other jobs outside of lecture assignments. In addition, the role of other members who are passive also adds to the fatigue of those who have tried their best (Karismawati, 2021).

## CONCLUSION

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Based on the findings, it can be said that besides helping students improve their language abilities, online Project-Based Learning can also help them acquire a number of soft skills. The use of online PJBL also offers benefits and challenges for pre-service teachers who have other affairs, such as personal matters outside of lectures and other tasks to complete for lecture assignments. In addition, the benefits of using online PJBL for learning are personal, but the challenges which arise can also be influenced by other students' inaction and lack of skill when working on group projects.

***Limitation***

The researcher realizes that there are still many limitations in the preparation of this article. There are several things that should be further developed to investigate cases like this, for example by increasing the number of respondents so that the data obtained is more varied. The use of other data collection methods such as questionnaires to participants can also be used to strengthen the data.

***Implication***

This study implies that despite of learning activities switching back to face-to-face classroom settings, online PJBL can still be implemented as they offer a lot of advantages. Teachers and lecturers, in addition, have to be aware of the needs of their students by providing the appropriate amount of online PJBL activities. Suggestions are for further researchers to examine the use of online PJBL to overcome the existing challenges and apply it to various levels of students, such as junior high and high school students.

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**BIO-PROFILE**

**Harun Arwanto** earned his bachelor's degree in English Education from Universitas Sebelas Maret Surakarta in 2021 and is currently continuing his study at Universitas Sebelas Maret in

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the same major. His research interest includes theories and approaches to teaching and learning, learning motivation, Systemic Functional Linguistic, and Critical Discourse Analysis. Corresponding email: [harunarwanto\\_17@student.uns.ac.id](mailto:harunarwanto_17@student.uns.ac.id)

**Ana Mufidatun Ni'mah** is an English teacher at a private school in Surakarta. She is currently studying at Universitas Sebelas Maret Surakarta, majoring in the English Education Master Degree Program. Her research interest includes theories and approaches to teaching and learning, and language assessment. Corresponding email: [ana.mufidatun@student.uns.ac.id](mailto:ana.mufidatun@student.uns.ac.id)

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