



Revolutionizing Academic Writing: A Deep Dive into Hybrid Project-Based Learning

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ABSTRACT

This study examines a novel Hybrid Project-Based Learning model in academic writing courses, presenting a revolutionary educational approach. A comprehensive case study was conducted in the English Department of IAIN Ponorogo, East Java, Indonesia. The study employed a robust qualitative research methodology and collected valuable information from data sources such as observations, interviews, and reflection. The investigation centered on 85 fourth-semester students and three academic lecturers to establish a contextualized framework for comprehending the intricacies of implementing Hybrid PBL. The study utilized Thematic Analysis and QDA Miner software for data analysis. The study showed that the Hybrid-PBL academic writing approach begins by developing fundamental skills encompassing reading, note-taking, paraphrasing, and utilizing technology resources. The method proceeded with a project-based learning phase involving authentic writing problems, collaborative tasks, and a thorough process writing approach. Moreover, students offered significant insights emphasizing two primary themes: challenging yet rewarding and promoting a sense of value and approval.

Keywords: academic writing; hybrid learning; project-based learning

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INTRODUCTION

Academic writing proficiency is crucial for higher education success, yet many students struggle to acquire this critical ability. Strong English writing skills are essential for academic success (Yundayani, 2018) and for future professional opportunities (Nikolenko et al., 2021). Writing proficiency is crucial for the success and satisfaction of international students, emphasizing the necessity for support and customized programs (Curtis, 2019). Language proficiency is favorably associated with academic achievement in higher education institutions (Izatullah et al., 2022). Historically, academic writing teaching has typically adhered to a teacher-centered approach, focusing on theoretical knowledge and individual assignments. This method frequently fails to sufficiently equip students for modern professional settings' collaborative and project-based characteristics. Educators and academics are turning to alternate ways that better suit the requirements of the 21st century due to the limitations of traditional methods.

Numerous studies underscore the significance of academic writing in navigating the complexities of higher education. Scholars have emphasized the crucial importance of it in student achievement (Husin & Nurbayani, 2017; Ratnawati et al., 2018). Bailey (2003) highlights the importance of academic writing in preparing English-medium college and university students to create essays and other written tasks following specific style and referencing rules.

Academic writing is essential for students in research reports, essays, exam questions, and dissertations, leading to academic success in various courses (Bailey, 2004). It gives English-speaking college and university students the essential abilities to write academic papers following specific style and reference rules. Despite its significance, students frequently face difficulties in academic writing concerning language, structure, and topic (Noori, 2020). Academic writing research covers teaching and learning methods, digital concerns, lexical bundles, language usage, and identity discovery (Raitskaya & Tikhonova, 2022). Academic writing includes researching, organizing ideas, making arguments, analyzing facts, and conveying ideas clearly and effectively (Prasantham, 2023). The process involves creating ideas, selecting relevant ones, translating them into writing, and refining the material for presentation to engage with the academic community (Ahmed, 2022).

Exploring academic environments presents a captivating narrative that seamlessly integrates the constructivist philosophy of Hybrid Learning with the innovative approach of Project-Based Learning. The hybrid learning model emerges as a transformative framework within this context, offering students a personalized and adaptable educational experience, particularly within higher education settings (Gil et al., 2022). Complementing this paradigm, Project-Based Learning is a dynamic instructional format characterized by its six stages: identifying ELT issues, designing plans, fostering collaboration, integrating technologies, refining projects, and publishing final products (Krajcik & Shin, 2014). The convergence of these approaches forms a cohesive strategy aimed at equipping students with foundational skills essential for success in the Academic Writing course.

This research delves into the intricate fabric of educational settings, emphasizing the seamless alignment of HPBL with the overarching goal of enhancing Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) (Bozkurt, 2022). Furthermore, it unveils that project-based learning not only ignites sustained motivation and active engagement (Asfihana et al., 2022) but also serves as a catalyst for cultivating critical thinking skills (Anazifa & Djukri, 2017; Rochmahwati, 2015) and fostering creative expression (Kuo et al., 2019; Usher & Barak, 2020). These dimensions are pivotal in crafting captivating written compositions and are firmly rooted in extensively researched perspectives (Bender, 2012; Krajcik & Shin, 2014). Hybrid project-based learning emerges as a preferred methodology due to its amalgamation of the benefits of both hybrid and project-based learning. Studies have illuminated a positive effect. The study of academic settings combines the constructivist concept of Hybrid Project-Based Learning (HPBL) with the rigorous analytical criteria necessary for writing tasks.

Hybrid project-based learning is favored for combining the advantages of both hybrid and project-based learning. Research has shown that project-based learning benefits students' writing abilities (Aghayani & Hajmohammadi, 2019; Alotaibi, 2020). Viewing writing as a project allows students to use their existing knowledge and experiences, work well with others, choose projects that match their interests, and share their thoughts with the public. It enhances their learning and improves their writing skills. By treating writing as a project, students can leverage their prior knowledge and experiences, collaborate effectively, select projects aligned with their interests, and present their ideas to the public, enriching their learning experiences and honing their writing proficiency.

This case study seeks to achieve two main goals: to investigate hybrid project-based learning (HPBL) in an academic writing setting and to pinpoint the obstacles and practical strategies for incorporating HPBL into academic writing teaching. Hybrid learning, Project-based learning and writing instruction have often been studied independently, but combining those represents a new area of exploration in educational research. HPBL provides a unique approach to addressing the ongoing issue of academic writing teaching by combining the qualities of both techniques. This case study aims to provide valuable insights into educational literature by examining the unique dynamics and outcomes associated with HPBL implementation.

METHOD

The study utilized a robust qualitative research technique, including several data sources to grasp the studied topic thoroughly. The data collection methods utilized were non-participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and reflective diaries to triangulate findings and enhance the reliability and credibility of the conclusions (Creswell, 2023). The investigation focused on 85 fourth-semester undergraduate students and three academic lecturers from the English Department at IAIN Ponorogo. The study utilized theme analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) as the primary analytical method. The researcher used QDA Miner software, a robust computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) tool, to improve the efficiency and reliability of the analytical process.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The Implementation of Hybrid Project-based Learning (HPBL) within an Academic Writing Context

Referring to the result of observation and interview with the lecturers, hybrid project-based learning (HPBL) is implemented in academic writing over 14 weeks to develop essential abilities and lead students through the iterative essay-writing process. The first phase, which lasts from Weeks 1 to 6, establishes a solid foundation by introducing essential academic writing materials and technical tools. This session introduces students to crucial writing strategies such as paraphrasing and citing. It incorporates modern technology like Grammarly and Turnitin for writing improvement and plagiarism detection. The essential abilities are the foundation for the following phases of the HPBL method.

During Weeks 7 to 9 of the course, the focus transitions to the pre-writing phase, where students explore and identify English Language Teaching (ELT) concerns related to essay writing. This time prepares students to comprehend the essay project in the context of HPBL by promoting collaborative brainstorming of ideas. In Weeks 8 and 9, students will be in the drafting phase, focusing on planning and developing their essay assignments. Group activities and scaffolding technologies help students organize their early ideas into cohesive products, like the drafting process in traditional writing instruction.

Weeks 10 to 11 move to the revising stage, reflecting the inquiry process of HPBL. Students showcase their work to receive peer criticism to improve and elevate their projects. This phase emphasizes the significance of utilizing various feedback channels, such as face-to-face conversations and Internet platforms, to support thorough revision. Weeks 12 to 13 focus on composing and revising final versions based on instructor input. This time is similar to the editing and revising stages in traditional writing training, focusing on refining compositions for clarity, coherence, and correctness.

Week 14 marks the culmination of the HPBL process as students transition to the publishing stage. A post-test assesses the development of skills and competencies acquired during the course, similar to presenting final products to an audience for review. HPBL supports students in developing academic writing skills, critical thinking, creativity, and technological literacy by guiding them through each stage of the writing process in a collaborative and inquiry-driven framework. These skills are crucial for success in modern academic and professional environments.

The hybrid project-based learning (HPBL) implementation model in academic writing spans a 14-week timeframe, carefully blending several phases with essential aspects of project-based learning (PBL) to form a unified and thorough approach.

1. *Developing Basic Skills*

Students are first introduced to essential academic writing materials and technology tools, establishing a solid basis for future phases. This phase acts as a framework in project-based learning, providing students with essential materials and assistance to begin their writing tasks efficiently.

2. *Pre-writing Phase*

Students focus on the pre-writing process, working together to identify ELT issues relevant to essay writing. This phase is like creating a central question in project-based learning, which initiates the process of investigation and discovery.

3. *Drafting*

Students focus on drafting their essay assignments by engaging in group activities and using scaffolding technologies to plan and develop their work. Students here explore their subjects more thoroughly by participating in scientific techniques corresponding to investigating the central question in Project-Based Learning.

4. *Editing*

Students focus on the revising stage, receiving peer feedback to improve and perfect their work. This phase exemplifies the collaborative nature of Project-Based Learning, encouraging significant interactions among students, teachers, and community members.

5. *Composing and Editing*

Students focus on composing and revising their final drafts with guidance from the instructor. This phase corresponds to the inquiry process in Project-Based Learning, enabling students to actively influence their projects through inquiry, investigation, collaboration, and reflection.

6. *Publication*

Students reach the publication stage, delivering their final projects for examination and review. This phase involves the development of physical goods in project-based learning, allowing students to demonstrate their understanding of learning goals and gained abilities.

Hybrid project-based learning (HPBL) in an Academic Writing Course involves a structured process that combines project-based learning (PBL) concepts with a hybrid learning environment that includes online learning and direct interaction. This method integrates components of the process writing approach, which divides the writing process into planning, drafting, rewriting, editing, and publication (Flower & Hayes, 1981). The theoretical foundations that assist the development of skills in creating academic drafts offer students crucial background information, helping them comprehend how to produce impactful academic papers. The implementation model advances through separate stages.

The pre-writing step entails creating a project plan, which includes activities like brainstorming, taking notes, outlining, and organizing information-gathering tasks (Flower & Hayes, 1981). Collaborative activities facilitate the generation of ideas in the drafting phase, where students structure their concepts into cohesive essays through group discussions and comments (Buchenroth-Martin et al., 2017; Dumford & Miller, 2018)

Using scaffolding tools like Google Classroom and Grammarly helps students finish writing assignments and enhance the quality of their work (Dizon & Gayed, 2021). Students use the inquiry method to improve their essays by receiving input from peers and teachers (Sanchez-Muñoz et al., 2022). The editing step is dedicated to perfecting the final essay in terms of accuracy, lucidity, and readability before submission (Flower & Hayes, 1981). The method results in students autonomously composing academic publications after collaborating in groups, although facing difficulties like assuring flawless final drafts. Students enhance crucial academic writing skills through this organized procedure by participating in genuine, inquiry-based learning experiences.

Students' Insight Associated with integrating HPBL into Academic Writing.

The kids are prompted to reflect by responding to the questions. (1) What is your general opinion of the project-based learning experience? Would you suggest project-based learning to other students? in the reflection phase. The comprehensive solution is depicted in the subsequent illustration.

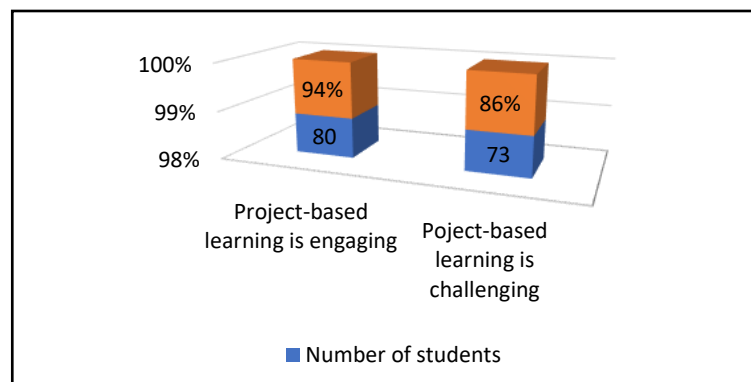


Figure 1 The Students' Reflection

The figure displays the percentage of students participating in hybrid project-based learning in Academic Writing courses. 94% of students consider project-based learning enjoyable, and 86% find it challenging. The result of the Reflection can be categorized into two key themes:

Hybrid project-based learning instruction is Challenging

The results indicate that project-based learning is an excellent teaching technique for engaging and challenging pupils. Examples of replies are shown below.

The most challenging part of the project was when I was trying to figure out which article would be the greatest to use for the essay and when I was trying to paraphrase the line (P1).

The most difficult part of working on this project is that I have to come up with new concerns and themes that readers will find intriguing. (P5)

Because I am required to locate the genuine evidence pertaining to my problem, this project has the potential to assist me in developing my critical thinking skills. (P7)

Hybrid project-based learning education might provide challenges from students' perspectives. Students must balance their time between online and offline to finish the project by the specified date. Some students struggle to combine their academic work due to additional instructor homework. Students may lack the skills or expertise required to manage their time efficiently. They might lack the ability to establish achievable objectives, divide activities into smaller components, or concentrate on their work. Students must enroll in every six steps of hybrid project-based learning incorporated into the writing process. Hybrid project-based learning requires students to learn new content, complete various tasks, and work together with others. They must find evidence from journal articles to support their perspective, develop an outline and initial version, and then revise the draft based on feedback from the professor and classmates. Students may struggle to formulate arguments (Fajaryani et al., 2021), and maintaining focus can be difficult. While this approach may appear challenging for students, it may also be highly advantageous in enhancing their creative thinking abilities, mainly when they develop a robust thesis statement in an argumentative essay (Rochmahwati et al., 2024).

The hybrid Project-based Learning Method is Engaging.

I am happiest when my essay is appreciated by my friends which makes me more confident to write my essay (P9)

I am also very glad when I am able to debate, share ideas, or revise the work of my friends. (P17)

I can discuss, exchange ideas or correct my friend's work. (Alif)

I am very happy with this project especially the lecturer because it can help my writing become more focused. (P6)

Hybrid project-based learning is rewarding since it fosters a collaborative classroom atmosphere that ensures all students feel valued and respected. Hybrid project-based learning frequently includes students collaborating in groups to discuss, selecting a topic for their argumentative essay, and locating trustworthy sources to back up their arguments offline and online (Vogler et al., 2018). Students can discuss, share their perspectives, and acquire further information (Prata et al., 2019). This situation promotes the formation of inter-student connections, potentially resulting in a more welcoming and inclusive classroom environment. Feedback from lecturers and students helped enhance their final assignment on creating high-quality argumentative essays. It will create a shared learning environment that is friendly and inclusive for all students. Students could contemplate their learning and enhance their work through feedback provided on their drafts. To provide feedback, meet with students individually or in small groups. Students receive personalized assessments of their work, responses to questions, and suggestions for improvement during these encounters.

Moreover, students can inquire about the feedback provided. This approach of offering feedback may enhance students' sense of belonging and acceptance. It pertains to research results indicating that students' satisfaction and motivation rose when they gave and received feedback from instructors and peers (Su & Huang, 2022)

CONCLUSION

Hybrid project-based learning (HPBL) is a planned and unique approach to teaching academic writing over 14 weeks. This methodology combines vital aspects of project-based learning (PBL) with contemporary technological resources to lead students through all stages of the writing process, starting from essential skill development to producing concrete outcomes. Students are encouraged to participate in real-world learning situations that enhance their academic writing skills and critical thinking capabilities. Although HPBL has advantages, it is essential to acknowledge specific inherent difficulties. Students may encounter challenges in efficiently managing their time and juggling many assignments within the HPBL framework. These hurdles offer tremendous possibilities for growth and skill development, with teachers providing advice and assistance to overcome these obstacles.

This research has the potential to significantly improve students' academic writing skills and critical thinking abilities, better equipping them for success in academic and professional settings. Future researchers can improve the effectiveness and influence of the instructional approach by refining HPBL implementation strategies and using supplementary scaffolding technology. Furthermore, it is recommended for future research to explore strategies for refining HPBL implementation, including the development of more precise objectives and standards. Additionally, investigating the long-term effects of HPBL on students' writing performance and critical thinking skills could yield valuable insights into the sustained benefits of this instructional approach, ultimately contributing to ongoing advancements in educational practice and pedagogy.

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