

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the study by outlining the research background, research questions, and research objectives of this study. Moreover, this chapter also discusses the significance of the research and the definition of terminologies to ensure a clear and consistent understanding of the concepts used throughout the study.

1.1 The Background of the Study

The education of the 21st century emphasizes the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, communication, and collaboration skills. In supporting these skills, Project-Based Learning (PjBL) emerged as an innovative learning method that encourages students to actively engage in real-world problem solving through collaborative projects. As a project-based learning strategy, PjBL is strongly related to the development of 21st century skills. This method provides opportunities for students to work on authentically designed projects, encouraging them to develop creativity, improve their ability to work in teams, and train critical thinking in facing various learning challenges (Hastawan & Suryandari, 2023). PjBL places students at the center of learning compared to traditional learning methods that focus more on lectures and memorization. This approach allows students to conduct in-depth explorations, do independent research, and come up with meaningful solutions or products (Ali, 2019). Thus, PjBL not only improves students' academic understanding but also shapes them into more independent, active, and innovative learners in the learning process (Bell, 2010).

PjBL in secondary education is recognized as an effective approach in enhancing students' deep understanding and engagement in learning (Thomas, 2000). Through providing more active and project-based learning experiences, PBL allows students to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration skills that are essential for their academic and professional success (Rehani & Mustofa, 2023). Moreover, this approach has gained increasing attention in various

educational reforms, including in Indonesia's Curriculum Merdeka, which emphasizes student-centered pedagogy and competency-based learning.

In implementing PjBL, various previous studies have shown that teachers have faced a number of diverse challenges. According to Cintang (2018), one of the main challenges that often arises in the implementation of PjBL is the lack of teachers' mastery of the concept and its application in projects. This condition arises due to the fact that not all teachers possess adequate experience of pedagogical knowledge regarding the design, facilitation, and evaluation of PjBL. The lack of understanding of the concept of PjBL then has an impact on the difficulty of teachers in determining topics or materials that are suitable for the projects (Aldabbus, 2018).

Cintang (2018) also emphasized that challenges in PjBL do not solely stem from the teachers' side, students' lack of abilities in critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving likewise present significant obstacles for teachers. The diverse range of students' abilities within a classroom often hinders teachers from assigning project tasks in a manner that ensures equitable participation among all students. This not only affects the equalization of learning but also discourages the development of social and cognitive skills, which are the main goals of PjBL. Besides, disparities in students' levels of discipline, learning motivation, and interpersonal problem-solving abilities intensify the difficulties teachers encounter in promoting effective teamwork during project-based activities. Consequently, it is essential for teachers to implement targeted strategies that promote equitable role distribution and foster individual accountability for the collective success of the project (Izzatunnisa et al., 2024).

The remaining challenge found in previous research is the limited facilities in schools that make the implementation of PjBL inefficient. Inadequate provision of essential supporting resources, including educational media, practical equipment, and technological access, frequently poses barriers that hinder teachers from delivering optimal instruction and limit students' ability to fully participate in the learning experience (Ferwati et al., 2023). This condition has an impact on the quality of project-based learning because one of the main characteristics of PjBL is

the active involvement of students in completing real projects that are relevant to the learning material (Thomas, 2000).

A curriculum that is heavily focused on content coverage often presents challenges for teachers in terms of managing instructional time and designing project-based activities that align effectively with the expected learning objectives (Aldabbus, 2018). The constrained amount of instructional time available in the classroom presents an additional challenge that teachers must address in planning and implementing effective learning activities. At the same time, teachers are required to fulfil curriculum targets while simultaneously guiding students through the various stages of project-based work (Syahdia, 2024). Thus, teachers need to adjust the project design to the material, utilize existing media, and manage time to ensure that PjBL is well implemented.

A number of strategies have been implemented by teachers in response to some of the challenges mentioned to ensure that the implementation of PjBL remains effective. One of the strategies underpinning the successful implementation of PjBL lies in the teachers' belief and commitment to carrying out the learning process (Cintang, 2018). Teachers who recognize the value and pedagogical benefits of PjBL are generally more motivated to develop purposeful project designs, actively engage students in the learning process, and implement reflective assessment practices to enhance learning outcomes.

According to Evenddy and Gailea (2023), as a concrete form of supporting teachers' beliefs and commitment to PjBL, participation in training programs or workshops is a strategic step that can be taken by teachers to strengthen conceptual understanding and practical skills related to project-based learning. Evenddy and Gailea (2023) also said that training programs and workshops can help teachers understand the concept, planning, and evaluation of projects in greater depth to improve teacher readiness in applying PjBL in the classroom. The program can also provide practical guidance on PjBL pedagogy, project design, and effective assessment strategies (Alrajeh, 2021).

Projects that are considered difficult to realize can be adjusted through a modification process to make them more possible to implement (Cintang, 2018).

Projects that are too complex are often simplified or adapted to the conditions and abilities of students in order to make their implementation more realistic and still aligned with learning objectives. This adjustment is not only limited to the content or scope of the project, but also includes the execution strategy in the classroom. In this context, Cintang (2018) states that one of the steps taken by teachers is to form heterogeneous learning groups as an effort to overcome the inequality of students' abilities, which can encourage active participation from all students in the group.

Beyond challenges related to teacher competence and student capability, constraints in facilities and instructional time also hinder the effective implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL). To address these limitations, teachers adopt adaptive strategies, such as reducing the project duration while preserving its core learning objectives, by integrating two thematically related subjects into a single cohesive project (Cintang, 2018).

The aforementioned strategies are highly relevant when aligned with the current direction of national education policy in Indonesia, known as the Curriculum Merdeka. Curriculum Merdeka is an educational framework that provides diverse learning opportunities through intracurricular activities, characterized by a more streamlined and efficient content structure (Septiana, Karima, & Nusanti, 2023). In this framework, PjBL serves as one of the key pedagogical approaches that embody these principles by promoting critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and real-world problem solving. Thus, the implementation of PjBL not only supports the philosophy of Merdeka Belajar but also operationalizes it through authentic, project-based learning activities.

In Indonesia, the implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka further strengthens the PjBL approach by emphasizing the concept of student-centered learning. This curriculum encourages students to be involved in the learning processes of knowledge (Zidan & Qamariah, 2023). Through this approach, learning is no longer one-way, but places students as active subjects in exploring, building, and applying knowledge through meaningful projects.

The role of a teacher in implementing Project-Based Learning in the Curriculum Merdeka has also significantly changed. Teachers are no longer as the

only source of knowledge, but act as facilitators who guide and create a learning environment that allows for independent exploration, discussion, and problem solving (Sartika et al., 2022). In practice, teachers assist students in developing information searching skills, analytical thinking, and structuring and evaluating their own projects. This approach not only improves students' conceptual understanding but also fosters a sense of responsibility, creativity, communication, and collaboration skills in the Curriculum Merdeka that will be useful in their lives beyond the school environment (Rizal, 2023). However, although PjBL provides various benefits, many teachers still face challenges in implementing PBL in the classroom.

Several previous studies have identified teachers' challenges and strategies in implementing PjBL in secondary schools. The challenges are limited time management, inadequate infrastructure, and the need for teachers who have the competence to implement learning using project-based models (Syahdia, 2024). Teachers often have difficulty in balancing PjBL with the demands of the curriculum, leading to concerns about the effectiveness of implementing this method in a limited time. Research by Noor & Nurhayati (2023) mentioned that assessment in PjBL is more complex compared to traditional assessment, because teachers must evaluate both the process and the final results of the projects that students work on. Another study on teachers' strategies for using PjBL was conducted by Cintang (2018). The study finds several strategies used by teachers, including teachers' belief and commitment, combining relevant projects or learning, making a semester program by calculating the details of the effective week, modifying the projects listed in the teacher's book, and choosing convenient projects and providing time that suits the needs of the project.

From the several studies above, it can be seen that previous research has focused more on identifying challenges and strategies in general. However, not many studies have explored in depth how teachers personally perceive these challenges and how teachers adjust strategies based on their experiences and school context in Curriculum Merdeka. This research focuses more on an in-depth exploration of what strategies teachers use to overcome the challenges in

implementing PjBL. Therefore, this study will explore how teachers interpret the challenges they face and the factors that influence teachers' decisions in implementing certain strategies in Curriculum Merdeka. By understanding teachers' experiences, this research is expected to provide more contextual and applicable insights to improve the effectiveness of PjBL implementation in various educational environments.

1.2 Reason for Choosing the Topic

The researcher chose this topic because PjBL has become a popular method to improve students' critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration skills, especially in supporting the Curriculum Merdeka. Furthermore, this topic was chosen due to the importance of the teacher's role in the successful implementation of PjBL. As the main facilitator in learning, teachers have a direct implementation process. The result of this study also provides a reference for schools in designing better strategies to support PjBL implementations.

1.3 Research Question

Referring to the background study that has been presented, this research was designed to answer the following questions.

1. What strategies do teachers use to overcome the challenges associated with Project-Based Learning in Curriculum Merdeka?
2. How is the implementation of the strategies used by teachers in Project-Based Learning within the framework of Curriculum Merdeka?

1.4 Research Objectives

In alignment with the research questions above, this study aims to achieve the following objectives.

1. To explore the strategies used by teachers to overcome the challenges that arise when implementing Project-Based Learning in Curriculum Merdeka.
2. To explore how teachers implement strategies they used in applying Project-Based Learning within the framework of Curriculum Merdeka.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research has several significations that are expected to provide benefits for various stakeholders. First, for teachers, this research can provide insights into the challenges faced in implementing PjBL and the strategies that can be used to overcome them, thus helping teachers to design and implement PjBL effectively. Second, for schools, the results of this study can serve as a basis for providing better support for teachers, such as training resources and policies that are more supportive of PjBL implementation. In addition, this study can provide empirical data on the implementation of PjBL in secondary schools that can be used as a reference in formulating a policy that is more effective and in accordance with the needs of teachers and students. Moreover, this research is also expected to contribute to the academic field by adding references for further research related to project-based learning, especially in understanding the challenges and strategies of teachers in its implementation. Therefore, this research not only has theoretical value but also provides a practical impact on the development of project-based education at the secondary school level.

1.6 Definition of Terminologies

In this research, a few key terms are defined to ensure a clear and consistent understanding. The following is the definition of terminologies relevant to the research topic.

1. Project-Based Learning

Project-Based Learning (PjBL), introduced through the principle of “Learning by Doing” by John Dewey (1938), is a student-centered teaching method in which students actively engage in meaningful, real-world projects to acquire knowledge and skills. This method emphasizes critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and problem-solving skills in a real-world context.

2. Teaching Strategies

Teaching strategies are a plan, method, or sequence of activities designed to achieve specific learning objectives (J.R. David, 1976). These strategies are

used by teachers to help students understand the course material and achieve the expected learning outcomes.

3. Curriculum Merdeka

Curriculum Merdeka is an educational program introduced by the Indonesian Ministry of Education in 2020, designed to offer a more comprehensive and inclusive learning approach that focuses on building character, fostering creativity, and enhancing critical thinking abilities, alongside academic knowledge (Zidan & Qamariah, 2023).

1.7 Scope and Limitation

This study focuses on exploring the strategies used by English teachers to overcome challenges in implementing Project-Based Learning (PjBL) within the Curriculum Merdeka framework at the secondary school level. The research was conducted at one public secondary school in Garut, involving English teachers who have implemented PjBL in their classrooms. The scope of the study emphasizes how teachers apply, modify, and adapt PjBL strategies based on classroom conditions, student abilities, and the availability of school facilities. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations to gain an in-depth understanding of the strategies applied during PjBL implementation.

However, this study has several limitations. It focuses solely on the implementation of PjBL in English language learning and does not include other subjects or perspectives from students. The research involves a limited number of teacher participants from one school, so the findings may not be generalized to all secondary schools in Indonesia. Furthermore, the data were collected within a limited period, which may not capture changes in strategies across different semesters or academic years.