

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Education is an important aspect which has become a concern of every country as education will shape the quality of human resources. The Indonesian government strives to enhance the quality of education by changing the curriculum following the needs of the 21st century. Revising the curriculum to encourage individuals who not only possess knowledge but are able to demonstrate innovation and fundamental life skills. Mustapha (2020) also expressed that in the 21st century education should equip students with the ability to learn, innovate, utilize technology and media, and effectively engage with the workforce. The current curriculum being used in Indonesia is Merdeka Belajar Curriculum formulated by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud) through Kepmendikbud Ristek No. 56/M/2020. This Merdeka Curriculum has the principles: (1) simple, understandable, and easy to implement. (2) centered on students' abilities and dispositions. (3) flexible. (4) harmony. (5) cooperative. (6) adjustable with the results of research and input (Akademik Badan Standar et al., 2022:89). This curriculum has flexible and adaptable characteristics which are believed to help addressing the needs of learning loss during the pandemic by allowing educational institutions to adjust learning objectives with the needs of students' fields of study.

The implementation of the curriculum must be supported by appropriate learning methods. Learning method is a systematic procedure framework that is used as a guideline to achieve a learning goal. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes project-based learning method (PjBL). On the implementation, this method over learners experiences to solve the problem in their real life individually or in groups. Teacher as facilitator will provide authentic real-world problems and necessary resources needed to find or identify solutions and conclusions (Voet, M., & De, 2018). This method will stimulate learners to enhance their critical thinking and problem solving skills by identifying and addressing the problem. S. Ida Kholida (2020) believes that the process will make learners easier to understand the given theory.

Project-based learning method has several characteristics. Based on Stripling, et al (in Sani, 2014), the characteristics of project-based learning are: (1) Considering the problem. (2) Investigate. (3) Addressing the needs of students. (4) Production and presentation of independent work. (5) Creative, critical thinking, and verifying explanations before carrying out research, drawing conclusions and also producing objects. (6) Related to factual and authentic problems. The characteristics of project-based learning are also described by Natty et al (2019): (1) Learners are faced with everyday problems. (2) Given a project related to the topic or learning material. (3) Learners solve problems independently. (4) Involve in activities or make projects in accordance with the problem. (5) Learners are trained to work individually or in groups to solve problems or produce a product. From the characteristics that have been described, this method is able to provide an active learning environment.

Throughout the learning process, learners will design a plan, discuss, make predictions, express ideas to solve problems or make a product as the final result of the project.

In English language learning, project-based learning method is able to enhance speaking and listening skills and increase learners' learning engagement. Speaking is a productive use of language to share and express meanings or ideas with others (Cameron, 2001). While listening is the process by which we understand and pay attention to the meaning and message of a sound. These two skills will be continuously stimulated in project-based learning as the series of activities during the implementation involves discussion, sharing ideas and presenting work results. Learners are stimulated to use the language by having interaction in real-life situations such as asking and answering questions, communicating ideas and engaging in discussion. Moreover, learners have to actively focus and listen to any discussion to be able to gather information to complete the project. That supported by Ma (2010) emphasized that project-based learning will improve learners' listening comprehension through negotiation and collaboration activities using social-affective strategies. Speaking and listening will also be stimulated while learners conduct research and collect data. Collecting data can be done by doing interviews or analyzing something. That way project-based learning provides learners with the opportunity to practice their speaking and listening skills. Some related studies are done and suggest that implementing project-based learning can cultivate students' speaking and listening skills and result in good language achievement. For instance, the study conducted in Thailand by Newprasit and Seepho (2015).

They investigated the effect of project-based learning on language skills and the findings revealed that project-based learning significantly improved language skills. Another study done by Shanthi, Anniepothen and Rao (2015) showed that implementing project-based learning in a community project activity helped develop listening and speaking ability. The improvement of learners' listening and speaking skills will play a crucial role in supporting success in English language learning. Learners are able to communicate effectively which is essential as learners can apply their knowledge in real world settings. Moreover, they can reinforce their other skills to support the overall success in their English learning.

Project-based learning provides numerous benefits in English learning besides improving speaking and listening skills. Project-based learning can also increase learners' learning engagement in class. This is supported by Handayani's (2020) statement that project-based learning can stimulate learners to be more active and engaged with classroom activities. Unlike traditional teaching methods which are teacher-centred, full of instructions and lectures, project-based learning presents activities in real world situations that are relevant to learners capturing their attention to engage with learning (Poonpon, 2011). Moreover, through sharing and discussion during the project completion process, learners can enhance their engagement by getting new information from each other (Almulla, 2020). Enhancing learners' learning engagement is essential especially in learning foreign language. There are three dimensions of engagement identified by Fedrick et al. (2004) they are behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement, and emotional engagement. These three dimensions will determine how actively

students participate in learning and their level of interest in learning. Given that, language learning is not only about theory but also skill that must be actively practiced. Therefore, without a potent engagement learners will struggle to understand, retain, and use the language confidently.

The successful implementation of project-based learning relies on the role of the teacher. In this method, the teacher role is as a facilitator who requires sufficient knowledge related to project-based learning. Wicaksono and Rahman (2019) interviewed the coordinator of PAUD, DIKDAS, and LS of Selo District, Boyolali Regency, and found that most teachers admitted that they did not understand the project-based learning method, its syntax application, and its integration in the Merdeka Curriculum. Similar conditions also found by Mufidah et al. (2020) in SLB of Central Java Province that 63% teachers still found difficulties in designing PjBL and 59% of them face challenges in implementing PjBL. Another study conducted a discussion with five representative schools together with lecturers of FKIP Sanata Dharma University found that some teachers are still reserved to implement project-based learning as they are not sure with the steps on how to do it. They also said that assessment is one of the difficulties in project-based learning as project-based learning is a long term assignment (Priowuntato et al., 2023). Regarding the steps and syntax of project-based learning that relatively long and time-consuming study conducted by Muhibbudin et al. (2022) with the title “Analisis Kesesuaian Implementasi Sintaks Project Based Learning dalam Proses Pembelajaran” found that many mistakes done by teachers in implementing Project Based Learning in their teaching. Similar results of the study also stated by Afifah et al. (2023) that

teachers are still unfamiliar with PjBL and teachers face difficulties in deciding the topic that is relevant with their learning.

Based on the previous studies on the implementation of project-based learning showed that project-based learning is not well implemented. Many junior high schools in Indonesia are gradually implementing project-based learning. However, the implementation of project-based learning is varied by region, school resources, and teachers' capability. The implementation of project-based learning in junior high schools is not consistent considering some challenges as found in the previous study such as the complicated syntax, time management, and the assessment process. Traditional approaches like teacher-centered are still widely used.

An observation was also conducted at SMPN 14 Denpasar, it was found that the teachers faced challenges in creating active learning experiences in the English classroom. They tried to implement project-based learning in their class to create meaningful and active learning. However, they have not yet implemented project-based learning effectively. As a result, the learning process tends to be more passive and less meaningful. This condition leads to low student motivation that impacted students academic performance. This was also found by Astawa, Artini, and Nitiasih (2017) on their observation. They found that most public schools in Indonesia still use teacher-centered learning. Hence, the students are less engaged, unmotivated, and show low enthusiasm in participating in learning activities (Astawa et al., 2017). Meanwhile, in some schools they experience innovative and interactive student-centered learning. In considering the advantage of project-based learning, it is necessary to develop project-based

learning activities that can create engaging and meaningful learning. To overcome the challenges faced by the teacher in teaching using project-based learning it needs guidance on how to implement project-based learning activities in the class.

To fulfil the needs for the availability of a collection of project-based learning activities for teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language in Junior High School, a two year research was conducted by the research team from post-graduate program of UNDIKSHA in 2023. The first year research was focused on developing the collection of project-based learning activities for Grade 9 in Junior High School. The materials have been validated by the expert judges and have been considered ready for further steps, that is, to be implemented in the classroom. The present research is the second-year research that is aimed at implementing the developed materials and to evaluate its effectiveness. Thus, this research is a pilot test that continues the previous research about the book that has been developed to analyse the effect of the implementation of project-based learning activities on junior high school's engagement as well as speaking and listening achievement in English. This deliberate and authentic implementation emphasizes the novelty of the study and marks a clear distinction from previous research that may have lacked fidelity to the true essence of project-based learning.

1.2 Problem Identification

Based on previous studies and observations, as well as the identification of issues concerning the implementation of project-based learning method in English learning activities several concerns arise as follows:

1. It was found that project-based learning has not been much used due its demanding planning procedures and development. Consequently, learners were found less engaged in English classes.
2. Many teachers admitted that the implementation of project-based learning in English learning activity was not easy to prepare and took much time to use.
3. Project based learning activities that were specifically developed through a research and development procedures were intended to provide ideas and materials for the teaching and learning activities that implement Merdeka Curriculum. The developed materials have gone through a limited try out to a small group of junior high school in Denpasar.

Considering the above issues, there are at least three reasons for conducting this research: First, to support English teachers in junior high schools with ideas and ready to use project-based learning activities so that the implementation in the classrooms can be more practical; second, to further analyze the developed project-based learning activities to assure their practicality and appropriateness. Third, to promote student active learning in the classroom since they are engaged in collaborative learning

1.3 Limitation of the Study

This study was the continuation of previous research and development (RnD) study that resumed with project-based learning activities. This current research was based on the need analysis in one particular school. The English teacher in this school has rarely implemented project-based learning activities. Based on the preliminary interview with the teacher, project-based learning activities usually took a long time and not easy to assess. For this situation, the teacher needs ready to use project-based learning activities so that the implementation can be more aligned with the expectation of Merdeka Curriculum, and the same time more systematic and effective. In other words, there is the prospective future of the materials to be used in any other schools of the same grade and implement the same curriculum . The limitation was to do with students' prior knowledge because this may affect students' language achievement and students' learning motivation. Understanding these limitations were critical not only for the accurate interpretation of findings but also for guiding the direction of future research endeavors aimed at bridging gaps in knowledge within the domain of English learning.

1.4 Research Questions

Based on the research background above, the research questions of this study are formulated as follows:

1. Is there any significant effect of implementing project-based learning on students' learning engagement in 9th grade at SMP Negeri 14 Denpasar?

2. Is there any significant effect of implementing project-based learning on students' language achievement in 9th grade at SMP Negeri 14 Denpasar?
3. Is there any simultaneous effect of implementing project-based learning on students' learning engagement and achievement in 9th grade at SMP Negeri 14 Denpasar?
4. How are students' perceptions toward the implementation of project-based learning in English language teaching activities at school?

1.5 Research Objectives

Based on the problem explained previously. The aims of the study were:

1. To analyse the effect of the implementation of project-based learning in English language learning on students' learning engagement.
2. To analyse the effect of project-based learning implementation in English language learning on students' speaking and listening skills.
3. To analyse the simultaneous effect of the implementation of project-based learning in English language learning on students' learning engagement and language achievement.
4. To describe students' perceptions towards the implementation of project-based learning in English language teaching activities at school.

1.6 Research Significance

This research hold both theoretical and practical significance in the context of English language learning. Hence, the explanation of the study's theoretical and practical were explained as follows:

1.6.1 Theoretical Significance

This research has the potential to enrich the theories regarding project-based learning, especially at the junior high school level. This research is expected to enhance the knowledge of teachers about methods that can increase the effectiveness of learning English at school. The results of this research were expected to provide knowledge or view on the effect of project-based learning on students' learning engagement and language achievement. Moreover, this research is expected to strengthen the theory of the positive impact of using PjBL on children's learning. As stated by Kimseiz et al. (2017) that PjBL could make students perform their best during learning.

1.6.2 Practical Significance

The practical significance of this study has important implications for education practitioners, students, and researchers involved in English language learning.

a. Teachers: This research can be used by teachers to gain an overview on how to implement project-based learning in teaching, especially English. This is essential, considering that Merdeka Curriculum, implements project-based learning. Teachers are important element that play pivotal roles in ensuring the

curriculum's success. Teachers are expected to be more creative and explore more activities that attract students' interest to engage in learning English in class.

b. Students: The result of the study is expected to stimulate students to use language more actively in class activities due to the collaboration and discussion that requires students to interact with one another. Moreover, students are expected to have different learning experiences as project-based learning allows them to learn in real life that is more authentic and related to their daily lives. This is also expected to increase students' interest and engagement in learning and elevate their confidence.

c. Future researchers: This research provides information that can be used as a first hand reference or source for further research. This research also opens opportunities for further exploration into the implementation of project-based learning that can be applied in learning other than English.

1.7 Definition of the Terms

There are two definitions of key terms, namely conceptual definition and operational definition. Accordingly, the explanation of each key term of the research is given below.

1.7.1 Conceptual Definition

1. Project-based Learning Activities

Project-based learning is a learning in which a project is designed aligned with the learning topic. According to Hamidah et al. (2020), there are eight stages of project-based learning activity. First, learning starts with *determining the topic* where teacher and students discuss the topic of the project. Second, *pre-communicative* activity which pointed out the language features and key vocabulary of the material. The third is *driving fundamental questions* where the teacher poses provoke questions to focus students on the project's objective. Fourth stage is *designing project plan*, students arrange the activities and objective of the project. Further, the fifth stage is *designing a timeline* which include the task distribution and its due date. The sixth stage is *project execution* where students start to work on the project. Seventh stage of project-based learning activity is *project presentation*. In project presentation, students are presenting the result of their project that can be inform of a product or a problem solving. The last stage is evaluation, teacher and students conduct an *evaluation and reflection*. Therefore, project-based learning activities are activities that make students active individually or in groups.

2. Learning Engagement

Student learning engagement is commonly defined as the time and effort students dedicate to activities that support their education (Kuh et al., 2011). Student engagement, also described as the actions students take to enhance their learning experience, encompasses behaviors such as participating actively, critical thinking, emotional involvement, and interaction with others (Baldwin, 2019). According to Fredricks et al., (2004), learning engagement involves three aspects namely cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement.

3. Learning Achievement

Tu'u (2004) explores the topic of learning achievement, highlighting its close to cognitive abilities. Tu'u suggests that how well students understand, remember, apply, and analyze information affects their learning outcomes. In essence, the way students learn directly influences what they achieve academically. Learning achievement is a target that is measured usually in the form of a score where it can be seen whether students can master the learning objectives that have been set by the teacher.

4. Speaking Skills

Speaking is an interactive activity of making meaning that involves productions, reception, and processing information (Brown, 2001). According to Cameron (2001) speaking is a productive use of language to share and express meanings or ideas with others. Therefore, speaking skill is the ability to communicate thoughts, convey messages and information through spoken words. The component that can be used to measured speaking skill are pronunciation, vocabulary, accuracy, fluency, and comprehension (Brown, 2012).

5. Listening Skills

Brown (2001) defines listening as understanding information and responding to the spoken message. Moreover, Nunan (2003) provides more comprehensive definition of listening. Listening is a cognitive process that involves decoding the sounds that are heard and constructing the complete message into meaningful language. There are some aspects that can be a potential assessment objective proposed by Brown (2003), they are comprehending of

surface structure elements, understanding pragmatic context, determining meaning of audio input, developing comprehensive understanding.

1.7.2 Operational Definition

1. Project-based Learning Activities

In this research project-based learning activities are the implementation of project-based learning in English class at SMPN 14 Denpasar. The activities that were implemented in the class based on the book that was developed by the researchers team from the previous research and development.

2. Learning Engagement

Learning engagement among students refers to observable behaviors and attitudes demonstrated during the learning process. This includes active participation in classroom activities, such as asking questions, contributing to discussions, and completing tasks. The instrument used to assess students' learning engagement was a questionnaire adopted from Burch Engagement Survey for Students (2015). (see appendix 3)

3. Learning Achievement

In the context of conducting research on lower secondary students, learning achievement in English learning is operationally defined as the demonstrated proficiency and effectiveness in the language learning. Learning achievement were assessed based on students' post-test. The instrument used to assess students' learning achievement were speaking and listening test.

4. Speaking Skills

In this research, speaking skill refers to the ability of the grade 9 students of SMPN 14 Denpasar in communicating and expressing their ideas in the class during English learning activity. Speaking skills include students' active participation in group discussion and presentation.

5. Listening Skills

Listening skills refer to the grade 9 students of SMPN 14 Denpasar ability to actively listen, understand, and make meaning of the spoken words. Listening skills are also demonstrated by students' actively listening to the instruction, discussion, and feedback related to their project during the English learning activity.

