

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter outlines the fundamental aspects of this research, including the research background, problem identification, research focus, research objectives, research significance, definitions of key terms, and publication plan of the research.

#### **1.1 Background of The Research**

English has become an essential means of communication in global academic, technological, and professional contexts. The increasing interaction among people across countries has positioned English not only as a foreign language but also as an important competence that enables individuals to access information, participate in international communication, and engage in global communities. In the context of education, this situation has led English language instruction to move beyond simply imparting linguistic knowledge and instead focus on developing students' ability to use the language meaningfully in various situations. Therefore, contemporary English instruction emphasizes communicative competence, critical thinking, collaboration, and active participation in learning processes. Richards and Rodgers (2014) explain that language teaching approaches have continuously developed from teacher-centered transmission models toward approaches that provide learners with meaningful opportunities to use language and construct knowledge. Similarly, Brown and Lee (2015) emphasize that effective language learning requires active learner involvement because language proficiency develops through meaningful practice, interaction, and engagement.

Among the four English language skills, writing is considered one of the most challenging for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) because this skill requires the integration of linguistic knowledge, cognitive processes, and awareness of communicative goals. Writing is not merely the activity of producing grammatically correct sentences but involves generating ideas, organizing information, developing arguments, considering readers, and revising texts to achieve effective communication. Hyland (2019) explains that second language writing is a complex process involving the interaction between linguistic resources, cognitive strategies, and social contexts. Furthermore, Ferris and Hedgcock (2014) state that L2 writing requires learners to manage multiple demands, including language accuracy, rhetorical organization, and the ability to communicate ideas effectively. The modern language curriculum demands that teachers design interactive and flexible classroom environments. Effective remote and classroom language teaching practices require structured frameworks that can address policies and practical challenges in fostering student participation (Utami & Prestridge, 2023). Therefore, writing instruction needs to provide students with opportunities to experience writing as something that involves planning, drafting, revising, and reflection, rather than focusing solely on the final written product.

However, writing learning in many EFL classrooms remains challenging because students often experience difficulties in developing ideas, composing written texts, choosing the proper vocabulary, and applying knowledge of grammar. These challenges may become more complex when writing activities are implemented through approaches that provide limited opportunities for interaction,

collaboration, and meaningful language use. Traditional writing instruction often positions students as recipients of teacher explanations regarding text structures, grammar, and writing procedures, while students have fewer opportunities to explore ideas, negotiate meaning, and make decisions during the writing process. Richards and Rodgers (2014) argue that approaches dominated by teacher transmission may reduce learners' opportunities to actively participate in meaningful language activities. Consequently, writing instruction requires learning approaches that motivates students to actively participate in constructing knowledge through experience, interaction, and reflection.

One approach that reflects these principles is Project-Based Learning (PjBL). Project-Based Learning is a student-centered instructional approach that engages learners in authentic projects requiring investigation, collaboration, problem-solving, and the creation of meaningful products. Through PjBL, students are urged to take responsibility for their own learning process, while teachers function as facilitators who provide guidance and support. Thomas (2000) explains that PjBL involves complex tasks organized around challenging questions or problems that encourage students to construct knowledge through active exploration. Similarly, Blumenfeld et al. (1991) emphasizes that project-based activities can boost motivation and foster meaningful learning because students are engaged in tasks that have clear objectives and require active participation. In language learning contexts, PjBL provides students with the opportunity to use English in real-life situations while developing communication, collaboration, and critical thinking skills (Beckett, 2016; Stoller, 2006).

In the context of writing instruction, Project-Based Learning offers an environment in which students can experience writing as an active and meaningful process. Through project activities, students are involved in various stages of writing, including exploring topics, collecting information, developing ideas, drafting texts, receiving feedback, revising written products, and presenting their final outcomes. These activities correspond with the nature of writing development, which requires continuous practice, reflection, and improvement. Hyland (2022) emphasizes that effective writing instruction should support learners in understanding writing as a process of meaningful creation, not merely the production of a final text. Therefore, the implementation of PjBL in writing classrooms has the potential to encourage students to develop writing competence through authentic communication and collaborative learning experiences.

Previous research has indicated that Project-Based Learning can support students' language development and learning experiences. Mali (2016) found that PjBL implementation in Indonesian EFL classrooms provided students with opportunities to engage in meaningful activities, collaborate with their peers, and use English to communicate effectively. Similarly, Bas (2011) reported that project-based instruction positively influenced students' attitudes toward English learning because students were actively involved in completing meaningful tasks. In addition, Simatupang and Yusuf (2024) found that PjBL promoted students' engagement in EFL classrooms by encouraging interaction, responsibility, and active participation. These findings indicate that PjBL provides supportive conditions for language learning; however, the success of project-based instruction

depends greatly on how students participate and engage throughout the learning process.

Student engagement plays an important role in Project-Based Learning because project activities require active participation, emotional engagement, and cognitive effort from students. Engagement represents more than students' physical presence in the classroom; it reflects the extent to which students participate, feel connected, and invest effort in learning activities. Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) define student engagement as a multidimensional construct consisting of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. Behavioral engagement refers to students' participation, effort, and involvement in the academic learning process; emotional engagement relates to the students' feelings, enthusiasm, and attitudes regarding learning; while cognitive engagement reflects students' commitment to exerting mental effort and applying strategies to understand and complete tasks. Furthermore, Christenson et al. (2012) explain that engagement represents the dynamic relationship between students and their learning environment, meaning that students' engagement may develop differently depending on classroom experiences, instructional approaches, and learning conditions.

Despite the fact that Project-Based Learning has been widely discussed as an approach that promotes active learning, the implementation of Project-Based Learning cannot automatically guarantee meaningful engagement on the part of all students. Students participating in the same project may show different levels of involvement due to differences in motivation, confidence, prior knowledge, language ability, and perceptions of learning activities. Almulla (2020) described

how project-based learning (PjBL) is closely related and dependent upon active student engagement and their involvement in meaningful learning experiences. Therefore, examining the level of student engagement during the implementation of PjBL is crucial for determining the approach's effectiveness as well as providing insight into how students experience, engage with, and contribute to the project-based learning process.

In Indonesian EFL contexts, There's a clear need to foster students' creativity, collaboration, communication skills, and independent learning abilities, making the implementation of student-centered approaches, such as Project-Based Learning, increasingly relevant. Cahyono and Widiati (2011) explain that English learning in Indonesia faces challenges related to limited opportunities for authentic language use, which influences students' ability to develop communicative competence. Therefore, instructional approaches that provide meaningful opportunities for students to use English are considered important in improving language learning experiences. In this context, PjBL offers potential benefits because it allows students to engage with authentic tasks, collaborate with peers, and use English as a tool for completing meaningful projects.

Despite the potential of Project-Based Learning in supporting meaningful English learning experiences, the implementation of PjBL in EFL writing classrooms still requires deeper investigation, particularly from the perspective of students' engagement processes. Previous research has frequently focused on examining the effectiveness of PjBL by measuring students' achievement, writing performance, motivation, or general perceptions toward project-based instruction.



Although these studies provide valuable evidence regarding the contribution of PjBL to language learning, they provide limited explanation of how students experience engagement throughout the project implementation process. In particular, limited attention has been given to how students demonstrate behavioral engagement through participation and responsibility, how emotional engagement influences students' willingness to participate, and how cognitive engagement develops when students encounter complex writing tasks. Zheng, Yu, and Tong (2022) emphasize that students' engagement in collaborative writing is a dynamic process shaped by interaction, negotiation, feedback, and reflection. Therefore, exploring student engagement requires an in-depth investigation of students' experiences within the actual classroom context.

Based on the preliminary exploration conducted in the research setting, the implementation of Project-Based Learning in the English writing learning process at MAN 1 Bone showed several conditions that indicate the importance of examining students' engagement. The initial condition revealed that students participated in project-based writing activities requiring them to develop ideas, collaborate with peers, produce written texts, and complete project outcomes through several stages of the writing process. However, students demonstrated different levels of involvement during the implementation of the projects. Some students actively contributed ideas, participated in group discussions, and showed responsibility for completing assigned tasks. Meanwhile, other students showed limited participation, depended on their group members, and required additional support to remain involved throughout the project activities.

Furthermore, the preliminary exploration indicated that students encountered several challenges during project-based writing activities. Some students experienced difficulties in generating ideas, organizing written content, selecting appropriate English expressions, and developing confidence in expressing their thoughts through writing. These challenges influenced the way students participated and responded to project activities. Although PjBL provided opportunities for collaboration and meaningful language use, students' engagement experiences were not identical because they were influenced by individual abilities, learning experiences, classroom interaction, and perceptions toward the learning process. These existing conditions indicate that the implementation of PjBL should not only be examined from the perspective of learning outcomes but also from the perspective of how students experience and construct engagement during the learning process.

The existing conditions in the research setting highlight the importance of investigating student engagement as a central aspect of Project-Based Learning implementation. Understanding students' engagement provides deeper insight into how project-based writing activities support or challenge students' involvement in learning. Fredricks et al. (2019) explain that engagement consists of interconnected dimensions that reflect students' participation, emotional experiences, and cognitive investment. Therefore, analyzing these dimensions can reveal how students interact with project activities, how they respond emotionally to learning experiences, and how they apply cognitive strategies when completing writing tasks.



Although studies on Project-Based Learning and student engagement have increased, research examining the detailed experiences of students during project-based writing activities in Indonesian EFL secondary school contexts remains limited. Existing studies have contributed important findings regarding the benefits of PjBL; however, many studies have focused on general learning outcomes or quantitative measurements of engagement rather than exploring the processes through which engagement emerges during classroom activities. In addition, limited research has specifically investigated behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement simultaneously within an EFL writing classroom using a qualitative case study approach. Creswell and Poth (2018) explain that qualitative case study research is appropriate for exploring educational phenomena within real-life contexts because it enables researchers to obtain detailed understanding of participants' experiences and meanings.

The limited exploration of student engagement in project-based writing activities creates an important research gap in English language education. Previous studies have demonstrated that Project-Based Learning can improve students' motivation, participation, and language learning experiences; however, understanding the process of engagement during PjBL implementation remains essential because engagement determines how students respond to learning opportunities provided by the instructional approach. A project-based classroom requires students to actively participate in decision-making, collaborate with peers, manage learning responsibilities, and reflect on their learning processes. Therefore,

investigating students' engagement provides a more comprehensive understanding of how PjBL functions as a learning approach in an actual EFL writing classroom.

This research addresses the research gap by focusing on students' engagement experiences during the implementation of Project-Based Learning in an EFL writing classroom. Unlike previous research that primarily examined the effectiveness of PjBL through students' achievement, writing performance, or general attitudes, this research explores the processes through which students experience and demonstrate engagement during project-based writing activities. Specifically, this research investigates how students experience engagement, how behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement are manifested during project participation, and what challenges students encounter throughout the implementation of PjBL.

The novelty of this research lies in its attempt to provide contextualized knowledge regarding student engagement within a specific EFL writing classroom environment. Rather than viewing engagement as a single measurable outcome, this research examines engagement as a dynamic learning experience involving students' actions, emotions, and cognitive efforts. By applying a qualitative case study approach, this research provides detailed explanations of how students construct engagement through interaction with project tasks, peers, and classroom environments. This perspective contributes new understanding of the relationship between Project-Based Learning and student engagement, particularly in the context of Indonesian Islamic secondary education.

Furthermore, this research offers new insights into the factors that support and hinder students' engagement during project-based writing activities. The findings may reveal how collaboration, responsibility, confidence, learning difficulties, and classroom interaction influence students' involvement throughout the writing process. Such understanding is important because successful implementation of Project-Based Learning not only relies on the design of the project activities, as well as on the students' experiences while participating in those activities. Therefore, the findings of this research were intended to make a theoretical contribution to the discussion on project-based language learning and student engagement, as well as to offer practical support to English teachers by providing guidance on writing instruction that promotes meaningful involvement and deeper engagement in the learning process.

Based on the aforementioned considerations, this research investigates The Analysis of Student Engagement in Project-Based Learning on Writing Learning Process at MAN 1 Bone. This research aims to examine the level of student engagement during Project-Based Learning by analyzing students' experiences, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive manifestations of engagement, as well as the challenges faced during project-based writing activities. Through a qualitative case study design, this research seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of student engagement as it occurs naturally within an EFL writing classroom context.

## **1.2 Identification of Problems**

Based on the background of the research, several problems related to students' engagement during the implementation of Project-Based Learning in an

EFL writing classroom can be identified. Although Project-Based Learning has been implemented as a student-centered approach to provide meaningful writing experiences, the implementation of project activities does not necessarily result in equal levels of student engagement. Students may respond differently to project-based writing activities depending on their participation, emotional responses, cognitive involvement, learning experiences, and classroom interactions.

The preliminary exploration conducted in the research setting identified several existing conditions during the implementation of Project-Based Learning in the writing learning process at MAN 1 Bone. First, differences were found in students' behavioral participation during project activities. Some students actively participated in discussions, contributed ideas, collaborated with group members, and completed their assigned responsibilities. However, other students demonstrated limited involvement, showed passive participation, and depended on their peers when completing project tasks. This condition indicates that students' participation during project-based writing activities requires further investigation.

Second, differences were also identified in students' emotional responses toward Project-Based Learning activities. While some students showed interest, enjoyment, and confidence when participating in collaborative writing activities, others experienced hesitation, lack of confidence, and difficulties in expressing their ideas using English. These differences suggest that students' emotional engagement may influence their willingness to participate and their overall learning experiences during project implementation.

Third, students encountered challenges related to cognitive involvement during the writing process. Students experienced difficulties in generating ideas, organizing information, developing written texts, selecting appropriate vocabulary, and revising their writing products. Since project-based writing activities require students to make decisions, solve problems, and reflect on their learning processes, these challenges may influence the extent to which students invest cognitive effort during project completion.

Furthermore, previous research has extensively discussed the implementation of Project-Based Learning in language classrooms; however, limited attention has been given to understanding how students experience engagement during project-based writing activities, particularly in Indonesian EFL secondary school contexts. Many previous studies have focused on the outcomes of PjBL implementation, while fewer studies have explored the processes through which students demonstrate behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement during authentic classroom activities.

Based on these identified problems, this research focuses on exploring students' engagement during the implementation of Project-Based Learning in an EFL writing classroom. Specifically, this research investigates students' experiences of engagement, the manifestation of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement, and the challenges encountered by students throughout the project-based writing process.

### 1.3 Focus of the Research

This research focuses on the analysis of student engagement levels during the project-based learning (PjBL) implementation in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing class. The focus of this research is not examining the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in improving students' writing performance or comparing students' writing performance before and after the implementation of PjBL. Rather, this study focuses on understanding how students experience, demonstrate, and interpret their engagement throughout the project-based writing learning process.

Specifically, this research focuses on the three dimensions of student engagement, namely behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement. Behavioral engagement focuses on students' participation, involvement, collaboration, responsibility, and persistence during project-based writing exercises. Emotional engagement focuses on how students feel, their attitudes, enthusiasm, motivation, self-confidence, and responses to the implementation of Project-Based Learning. Cognitive engagement focuses on students' efforts in understanding writing tasks, developing ideas, applying writing strategies, solving problems, revising written products, and reflecting on their learning experiences.

Furthermore, This research focuses on students' experiences throughout various stages of implementing Project-Based Learning in writing learning processes. These stages include students' involvement in understanding project tasks, planning project activities, developing written products, collaborating with



peers, revising their work, and completing project outcomes. Through these processes, this research explores how students construct their engagement while participating in meaningful and collaborative writing activities.

This research is conducted within the context of an EFL writing classroom involving eleventh-grade students at MAN 1 Bone. As a qualitative case study, this research focuses on understanding student engagement within its natural classroom context. Therefore, the findings of this research are interpreted based on students' experiences, perceptions, and challenges during the implementation of Project-Based Learning rather than intended to provide statistical generalization to other educational contexts.

#### **1.4 Research Objective**

According to the research questions of this research, the researcher employed several strategies to address these questions. Specifically, this research aims to:

1. To explore students' experiences of engagement during the implementation of Project-Based Learning in an EFL writing classroom.
2. To analyze how students' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement are manifested during their participation in Project-Based Learning activities.
3. To identify the challenges encountered by students during their engagement in Project-Based Learning activities.

#### **1.5 Research Significance**

The findings of this research are expected to provide theoretical and practical benefits for English language education, particularly in understanding students'

engagement during the implementation of Project-Based Learning in an EFL writing classroom.

#### **1.5.1 Theoretical Significance**

Theoretically, this research is intended to provide new insights into student engagement in Project-Based Learning, particularly in the context of teaching English as a foreign language. This research provides an in-depth understanding of how students experience and demonstrate behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement during project-based writing activities. Furthermore, the findings of this research may enrich existing discussions regarding the relationship between student engagement and student-centered learning approaches by providing qualitative evidence from an authentic classroom context.

#### **1.5.2 Practical Significance**

Practically, the findings of this research are expected to provide benefits for several parties, including English teachers, students, schools, and future researchers.

##### **a. For Teachers**

The findings of this research may provide English teachers with insights into students' engagement experiences during Project-Based Learning implementation. By understanding behavioral, emotional, and cognitive student engagement, teachers can design project-based writing activities that are more meaningful and that encourage active participation, collaboration, motivation, and deeper engagement in the learning process.

### **b. For Students**

The findings of this research could help students develop an awareness of their own engagement throughout the writing learning process. By understanding the importance of active participation, emotional engagement, and cognitive effort, students can become more responsible and reflective learners as they complete project-based writing activities.

### **c. For Educational Stakeholders**

For education stakeholders, especially curriculum developers and policymakers, this research is expected to provide valuable insights regarding the implementation of Project-Based Learning in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL).. The findings may serve as empirical evidence to support the development of policies and instructional programs that promote meaningful student engagement through authentic, collaborative, and student-centered learning. Furthermore, the research may inform professional development initiatives by highlighting classroom practices that foster behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement, thereby contributing to the continuous improvement of English language teaching and learning in secondary education.

## **1.6 Definition of Key Terms**

To avoid misunderstanding and to provide clear boundaries of the concepts discussed in this research, several key terms are operationally defined based on the context of the research. The key terms include student engagement, Project-Based Learning, writing learning process, and EFL students.

### **1.6.1 Conceptual Definition**

#### **a. Student Engagement**

Student engagement is technically described as the level of students' involvement, participation, and psychological commitment to the learning process. According to Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004), Student engagement contains three interrelated dimensions, namely behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement. Behavioral engagement relates to students' involvement and participation in the academic activities, while emotional engagement relates to students' feelings, interests, and attitudes toward the learning process, and cognitive engagement relates to students' commitment to use their mental resources and apply learning strategies to understand and complete tasks.

#### **b. Project-Based Learning (PjBL)**

Project-Based Learning is conceptually defined as an approach to learning that is student-centered, in which students acquire skills and competencies through engagement in authentic projects that encourage inquiry, collaboration, problem-solving, and the creation of meaningful outcomes. Thomas (2000) explains that PjBL involves the use of challenging questions or problems as the basis for complex tasks, which encourage students to construct knowledge through exploration and active experience.

#### **c. Writing Learning Process**

Writing Learning Process is conceptually defined as a developmental process through which learners generate, organize, express, and refine ideas

in written form. According to Hyland (2003), writing is not merely a product of language use but a process involving stages of planning, drafting, revising, and editing. In an EFL context, the writing process requires students to develop linguistic knowledge, rhetorical awareness, and strategies for producing effective written communication.

#### **d. EFL Students**

EFL students are conceptually defined as learners who acquire English in situations where English is not the primary language of communication outside the classroom. In this research, the term “EFL students” refers to Indonesian students who are learning English as a foreign language within formally-organized education and who engage in writing in English as part of their learning process.

### **1.6.2 Operational Definition**

#### **a. Student Engagement**

In this research, student engagement is operationally defined as students’ observable and expressed involvement during Project-Based Learning activities in English writing classes at MAN 1 Bone. In this research, student engagement is identified through three dimensions: behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement. Behavioral engagement is identified through students’ participation in project activities, collaboration with peers, responsibility in completing tasks, and involvement in classroom discussions. Emotional engagement is identified through students’ interest, enthusiasm, confidence, enjoyment, and attitudes toward

writing activities. Cognitive engagement is identified through students' efforts in developing ideas, applying writing strategies, revising written products, solving writing difficulties, and reflecting on their learning process.

**b. Project-Based Learning (PjBL)**

In this research, PjBL is operationally defined as the instructional approach implemented during English writing activities in the eleventh-grade class at MAN 1 Bone. The PjBL implementation consists of six stages: defining the driving question, designing the project plan, creating a project timeline, monitoring project progress, assessing project outcomes, and reflecting on the learning process. In this research, PjBL is examined based on students' experiences and engagement throughout the completion of writing projects related to environmental issues.

**c. Writing Learning Process**

In this research, writing Learning Process is operationally defined as the sequence of activities undertaken by students when producing written texts through Project-Based Learning. The writing process includes students' activities in generating ideas, organizing information, developing drafts, receiving feedback, revising written work, and presenting final project outputs. The focus of analysis is placed on students' involvement and experiences throughout these writing stages rather than on measuring writing achievement through standardized tests.



#### **d. EFL Students**

EFL Students are operationally defined as eleventh-grade students at MAN 1 Bone who participate in English writing activities using Project-Based Learning. These students are involved as research participants who provide information regarding their engagement, experiences, and challenges during the implementation of PjBL writing tasks.

#### **1.7 Publication Plan of The Research**

The researcher intends to disseminate the findings of this study by publishing the research in a journal indexed with Sinta 3. This journal specializes in articles related to educational methods and student experiences with Project-Based Learning (PjBL). The publication aims to contribute to the field of English education by offering qualitative insights into how PjBL influences academic writing and student engagement. By sharing the research outcomes, the researcher hopes to reach educators, curriculum developers, and fellow researchers who are interested in innovative teaching approaches and their implications for enhancing student learning.