

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of study, problem identification, limitation of study, research question, research objectives, and research significance.

1.1 Background of Study

Preparing students to successfully adapt and thrive in the face of the 21st century requires more than just delivering academic knowledge in the classroom; it requires the thoughtful development of practical skills that are directly relevant to real-world situations and future professional careers. 21st-century competencies, including critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity, can be naturally integrated into the school curriculum without replacing existing subjects (Jacobson-Lundeberg, 2016; Nurhidayat et al., 2024; Prasad et al., 2017). These skills are defined as abilities that require innovative thinking, persistence, and strong collaborative performance — qualities which are highly sought after in modern workplaces (Cahyono et al., 2024; Lokollo & Mali, 2024). In Indonesia, this need is reflected in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which promotes student autonomy, contextual learning, and the development of character aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile (Agusdianita, 2023; Fitriyani et al., 2023).

Within this educational landscape, English language competence occupies a particularly strategic position. For students in vocational high schools (SMK), English is not simply a subject to be passed, it is a practical tool for professional

communication. This condition is especially true for students in Hospitality Accommodation programs, who are expected to interact confidently with international guests upon entering the workforce (Amalia et al., 2024). Among the four core language skills, reading, listening, writing, and speaking; speaking holds the most immediate professional relevance for these students (Amalia et al., 2024; Lokollo & Mali, 2024; Wardani et al., 2021). The ability to greet guests, explain services, manage inquiries, and handle complaints in English is a daily requirement in the hospitality industry, and a weakness in this particular skill can have a direct negative effect on service quality and professional performance (Lokollo & Mali, 2024).

Despite this, speaking skills in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom are often underdeveloped, particularly in educational environments where instruction focuses heavily on grammar rules or text-based approaches. Students who participate in authentic, situational speaking practice consistently achieve better learning outcomes than those who are trained only through conventional drill-based methods (Song et al., 2024). This situation clearly points to the need for instructional approaches that place speaking at the center of the learning process, approaches that are contextualized, interactive, and oriented toward real-world use. One model that has gained considerable attention for its potential in this area is Project-Based Learning (PjBL) (Adi et al., 2023; Agusdianita, 2023; Ariningsih et al., 2021; Mentari et al., 2024; Padmadewi et al., 2023; Prasad et al., 2017; Wardani et al., 2021; Yimwilai, 2020).

PjBL is a student-centered instructional model in which learners actively engage with meaningful challenges, collaborate with peers, and produce real

outcomes that reflect actual real-world contexts (Ariningsih et al., 2021; Astawa et al., 2017; Larmer et al., 2015). Different from conventional instruction, PjBL does not separate knowledge acquisition from skill application. Instead, this model integrates both aspects within an authentic learning experience that directly demonstrates the kinds of tasks students will encounter beyond the classroom (Larmer et al., 2015). PjBL has become increasingly popular in Indonesia under the Merdeka Curriculum precisely because it aligns with the curriculum's emphasis on contextual, and competency-based learning (Adi et al., 2023; Amalia et al., 2024; Cahyono et al., 2024). For vocational students in particular, PjBL offers a natural fit: its focus on real-world projects, collaborative problem-solving, and public presentation aligns perfectly with the practical, skills-oriented goals of vocational education (Amalia et al., 2024).

The Gold Standard PjBL framework, proposed by Larmer et al. (2015), outlines seven essential elements of effective project-based learning: Challenging Problem or Question, Sustained Inquiry, Authenticity, Student Voice and Choice, Reflection, Critique and Revision, and Public Product. Each of these elements creates learning conditions that are particularly supportive of speaking development (Amalia et al., 2024; Sayuti et al., 2020). The driving question prompts students to express their ideas clearly and defend their personal positions during the discussion. Sustained inquiry encourages them to ask meaningful questions and discuss their findings with peers. Authenticity situates speaking practice within real-world contexts that mirror real professional scenarios. Voice and choice give students agency to express themselves in a meaningful way. Reflection and critique require students to engage in oral discussions and peer feedback. Finally, the public product

demands a final act of spoken communication, often in the form of a presentation or performance (Sayuti et al., 2020).

A preliminary observation conducted at SMK Negeri 1 Seririt, a vocational high school located in Seririt District, Buleleng Regency, Bali, Indonesia, revealed that the English teacher in the twelfth-grade Hospitality Accommodation program has been implementing PjBL systematically as part of her instructional approach. Projects are carried out once per semester, with students producing final products in formats such as PowerPoint presentations, digital infographics, and simulation videos. The researcher noted that in some previous semesters, certain student video projects had been uploaded to YouTube as part of the school's documentation practice.

However, the specific project cycle observed for this study, which is the data source for Chapter IV, involved in-class presentations only, without public digital publication. During the observation, key elements of the Gold Standard PjBL framework were evident: students engaged in inquiry-based exploration, collaborated in groups, participated in reflection and revision activities, and used digital tools as part of their project workflow. Throughout the process, the teacher played a facilitative role, guiding discussions and supervising the project rather than delivering direct instruction.

The preliminary observation also revealed a number of points that justify deeper investigation. While the structural elements of PjBL were present in the classroom, it was not immediately clear to what extent each element was actually being implemented with depth and consistency. More importantly, the observation was limited to the teacher's actions and classroom procedures, while it did not

capture how students were experiencing and interpreting the PjBL process from their own personal perspective. In EFL classrooms, student perception is a significant factor in learning outcomes: specifically, how students understand, value, and respond to a teaching approach directly influences their engagement, effort, and ultimately their language development (Robbins & Judge, 2013). If students perceive PjBL as irrelevant, confusing, or poorly facilitated, the potential benefits of the model may not be realized, regardless of how well the teacher plans and delivers the project activities.

This gap between implementation and perception represents a meaningful research opportunity. While several studies have examined PjBL implementation in Indonesian EFL contexts, most have focused on measurable learning outcomes such as writing scores or vocabulary gains, and the majority have been conducted at the elementary, junior high, or senior high school level (Arianto et al., 2023; Astawa et al., 2017; Wardani et al., 2021). Research specifically examining PjBL in vocational high schools and in particular within Hospitality Accommodation programs where speaking skill development is professionally critical remains limited. Furthermore, no study to date has been conducted at SMK Negeri 1 Seririt, leaving the local implementation context entirely undocumented.

The present study therefore aims to address these gaps by investigating two interconnected dimensions of PjBL at SMK Negeri 1 Seririt: how the model is implemented by the teacher in the twelfth-grade Hospitality Accommodation class, and how it is perceived by the students who experience it. By bringing these two perspectives together within a Sequential Exploratory Mixed Method Design, the study offers a more complete and nuanced understanding of PjBL in action. The

findings are expected to contribute both to the theoretical literature on PjBL in Indonesian vocational education and to the practical improvement of English language teaching at this school and similar institutions.

1.2 Problem Identification

The teaching of English in vocational high schools presents a distinctive set of challenges and opportunities. Unlike general senior high schools, SMKs (vocational high schools) are oriented toward preparing students for specific professional fields, which means that English instruction must not only develop general language proficiency but also build the communicative competencies required in industry settings. For students in the Hospitality Accommodation program, this translates most directly into the ability to speak English fluently, confidently, and professionally – a skill that will be central to their daily work when interacting with domestic and international guests.

However, developing speaking proficiency in an EFL classroom is rarely straightforward. Many vocational students arrive with limited exposure to authentic English-speaking environments, and conventional teaching methods, which often prioritize grammar accuracy over communicative fluency. These situations do not always create sufficient opportunities for meaningful spoken practice. There is a pressing need for instructional approaches that embed speaking practice within authentic, purposeful activities that reflect the professional realities students will face after graduation.

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) has become a promising response to this challenge. As a teaching model that focuses on collaborative inquiry, real-world problem-solving, and producing final products, PjBL creates numerous natural

opportunities for speaking practice through group discussions, peer presentations, teacher-student conversations, and public showcases of project products. The Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia now supports PjBL as a main teaching approach, particularly in vocational contexts. This is because the model aligns well with competency-based and character-building goals (Evenddy et al., 2023; Fitriyani et al., 2023).

SMK Negeri 1 Seririt is one of the vocational schools that has used PjBL in their English classrooms. The school's Hospitality Accommodation program provides a contextually rich setting for PjBL implementation, given its strong emphasis on practical skills and its location in a tourism-oriented region of Buleleng Regency. Teachers at the school have reported using PjBL to develop both students' language abilities and their professional competencies, with project outputs that include English-language videos uploaded to YouTube.

Despite this active implementation, two significant gaps in understanding remain. First, there is no detailed or systematic documentation of how PjBL is actually implemented in the English classroom at SMK Negeri 1 Seririt, which elements of the Gold Standard PjBL framework are applied, how deeply they are applied, and how technology is integrated into the learning process. Without this documentation, it is difficult to evaluate whether the implementation is aligned with established PjBL principles or to identify areas for improvement. Second, there is no existing data on how students in this program perceive the PjBL experience. Whether they find it engaging and relevant, how they interpret the various project activities, and to what extent they feel that PjBL supports their English-speaking development. As Robbins and Judge (2013) remind us, perception is not a passive

process, it actively shapes how learners interact with their environment. Understanding student perceptions is not just an add-on to implementation research; it is an important tool for evaluating the effectiveness and meaningfulness of any instructional approach.

Taken together, these gaps point to a clear and significant research problem: while PjBL is being implemented at SMK Negeri 1 Seririt, neither the implementation process nor its perception by students has been systematically investigated. This study focuses on both dimensions, providing a foundation for evidence-based improvement of English language teaching in this context.

1.3 Limitation of Study

This study has a specific focus in scope to ensure depth and rigor within the available time and resources. Several boundaries are applied to keep the study manageable and meaningful. In terms of setting, this study is conducted exclusively at SMK Negeri 1 Seririt, a vocational high school located in Seririt District, Buleleng Regency, Bali. The school was selected because it actively implements PjBL in its English classrooms and offers a Hospitality Accommodation program that provides a relevant and supportive environment for investigating PjBL and speaking skill development. The findings of this study are therefore specific to this institutional context and may not be directly generalized to other schools or programs.

In terms of participants, the study focused on four classes of twelfth-grade students enrolled in the Hospitality Accommodation program at SMK Negeri 1 Seririt, namely: XII Hospitality 1, XII Hospitality 2, XII Hospitality 3, and XII Hospitality 4; totaling 135 student respondents, along with the English teacher who

implemented PjBL across all four classes. This participant scope was determined by the school's class structure for the twelfth-grade Hospitality Accommodation program and by the need to ensure that the quantitative findings reflected the full range of perceptions across the program cohort. While this scope provides a richer and more representative dataset than a single-class study, the findings remain specific to these four classes and this particular teacher's instructional approach.

In terms of language skills, this study focuses primarily on speaking, because this skill is crucial in the hospitality field due to its strong connection to the project-based activities observed in the classroom. While PjBL may influence other language skills as well, examining speaking allows the study to maintain a clear and organized research focus rather than attempting to address all four skills simultaneously.

Finally, in terms of research design, this study employs a Sequential Exploratory Mixed Method approach, collecting qualitative observational data first, followed by quantitative survey data. While this design provides both deep and broad information, it does not include an experimental component; the study does not measure scores before and after the intervention outcomes or compare PjBL with other instructional methods. Its purpose is descriptive and exploratory, which is to document and understand what is happening in the classroom, not to test a causal hypothesis.

1.4 Research Questions

Based on the background and problem identification outlined above, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How is the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model implemented by the teacher across the four twelfth-grade Hospitality Accommodation classes at SMK Negeri 1 Seririt?
2. How do the twelfth-grade Hospitality Accommodation students at SMK Negeri 1 Seririt perceive the implementation of the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model in their English class?

1.5 Research Objectives

In line with the research questions above, this study has two primary objectives:

1. To describe and analyze how the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model is implemented by the teacher across the four twelfth-grade Hospitality Accommodation classes at SMK Negeri 1 Seririt, with reference to the Gold Standard PjBL framework (Larmer et al., 2015).
2. To investigate how twelfth-grade Hospitality Accommodation students at SMK Negeri 1 Seririt perceive the implementation of the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model in their English class, as analyzed through Robbins and Judge's (2013) perception framework.

1.6 Research Significance

This study is expected to offer meaningful contributions at both theoretical and practical levels.

1.6.1 Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on PjBL implementation in Indonesian vocational education, a context that has received comparatively limited attention in the existing research landscape. By grounding the investigation in two complementary theoretical frameworks, the Gold Standard PjBL model (Larmer et al., 2015) and perception theory (Robbins & Judge, 2013), the study offers a dual-lens approach that captures both the structural and experiential dimensions of PjBL. This integration of instructional theory with perceptual psychology represents a methodological contribution to the field, demonstrating how these frameworks can be productively combined to yield a more holistic understanding of classroom learning.

In addition, the study's emphasis on speaking skills as the primary language outcome of PjBL addresses a gap in the literature, where writing and vocabulary have historically received more research attention. By foregrounding speaking, particularly in a vocational context where oral communication is professionally essential, the study helps to extend and diversify the theoretical conversation about PjBL's impact on language development.

1.6.2 Practical Significance

- 1) For EFL students, the findings of this study offer information about how PjBL supports their English learning journey, especially in developing

their speaking skills. Understanding which elements of PjBL they find most engaging and beneficial can help students approach future project activities with greater awareness and intentionality.

- 2) For English teachers, the study provides a clear description of PjBL implementation in a vocational classroom, including examples of how the Gold Standard elements are used in practice and how technology is integrated into the project process. These results can serve as a practical reference for teachers who want to use or improve their own PjBL approaches, especially in similar hospitality or tourism-related programs.
- 3) For school administrators and curriculum developers, the study's findings on student perceptions can inform decisions about instructional design, teacher professional development, and the allocation of resources to support PjBL implementation. Schools that understand how their students experience PjBL are better positioned to make meaningful improvements to their English language programs.
- 4) For future researchers, this study serves as a foundational reference for further investigation into PjBL in vocational education settings. It opens several avenues for follow-up research, including long-term studies of PjBL's impact on speaking skills, comparative studies between different vocational programs or schools, and experimental designs that test the effectiveness of PjBL against alternative instructional models.