

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter, the researcher presents the background of the study, problem identification, research limitations, research questions, research objectives and research significance.

1.1 Research Background

The Ministry of Education and Culture launched a new curriculum called Emergency Curriculum in early 2021 in response to the COVID-19. The emergency curriculum represents a simplified version of previous curriculum, designed to assist teachers and students in conducting the learning process by focusing on essential materials (Ndari & Mahmudah, 2023; Sulaiman et al., 2024). Then, at the beginning of the 2022 academic year, the Merdeka Curriculum was introduced as an improved version of the Emergency Curriculum. It was developed to meet the needs of the time, including the growing role of technology in education following the COVID-19 pandemic Syahida and Siminto (2023) explain that the Merdeka Curriculum seeks to reduce and simplify learning materials, which helps students to have a more flexible, focused and suitable learning experience according to their needs. Therefore, teachers are expected to select instructional models that facilitate active participation, develop critical thinking and problem-solving abilities in accordance with their interests and learning needs. This flexibility reflects the student-centered approach emphasized in the Merdeka Curriculum, in which students are positioned as active participants in the learning process while teachers serve primarily as facilitators.

Aligned with the student-centered principles outlined in the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers are urged to implement learning models that encourage meaningful learning experiences and active student participation. One model that is consistent with these principles is project-based learning (PjBL) (Septina & Riza, 2023). Fajra et al. (2020) and Myrtaj (2018), describe project-based learning in which students investigate and address real-world problems to acquire new knowledge through authentic experiences and

create a final product. The products students create from this project-based learning model can be reports, videos, posters, performances, and presentations (Widiyati & Pangesti, 2022). Through these activities, students are given opportunities to learn from experiences and problems while developing their motivation and collaborative abilities (Dewi, 2016). Previous research has also demonstrated the potential of PjBL to increase students' motivation, strengthen problem-solving and communication abilities, improve writing skills, and foster positive attitudes toward learning English (Artini et al., 2018; Chiang & Lee, 2016). Besides offering many benefits, project-based learning also gives students with opportunities to choose the topic, how they learn, and how they explore a topic based on their interests and abilities. Therefore, project-based learning is considered one of the learning models that aligns well with the student-centered principles of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Technology integration constitutes another important aspect of learning under the Merdeka Curriculum. Technology integration in education refers to how teachers incorporate technology into the classroom to facilitate learning and enable students to solve problems using technological tools (Khan & Alamri, 2017). The technologies integrated into classroom learning include computers, smartphones, internet-based resources, collaborative platforms, educational applications, and digital presentation tools, which can support students in searching for information, collaborating with peers, creating projects, and presenting their work. Incorporating technology into the classroom enables students to access a wide variety of information and learning materials outside the classroom (Gilakjani, 2017). In addition, its integration into classroom activities can facilitate communication and interaction while supporting students' engagement, motivation, and access to learning resources (Hazarika, 2017). However, as technology develops, its impact is not always positive. When used inappropriately, technological devices and resources may distract students from learning activities and reduce their concentration during lessons. Therefore, teachers remain responsible for guiding and monitoring students and ensuring technology is used properly when integrated into learning.

The integration of technology can also complement project-based learning by providing resources that support students throughout project development. PjBL already encourages students to conduct

independent inquiry, while technology can expand the ways in which students search for information, communicate, collaborate, and develop their project products. Incorporating technology into PjBL enhances critical and innovative thinking, which are abilities required in the twenty-first century (Haddar et al., 2023). Technology can make project-based learning more effective by reinforcing student interaction, making communication smoother, and facilitating learning based on real problems and situations (Gomez-Pablos et al., 2017). Therefore, technology-integrated project-based learning can support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum by promoting active student participation, creativity, collaboration, and independent learning.

Although project-based learning integrated with technology offers various pedagogical benefits, its effectiveness also depends on how students perceive and respond to the learning process. Students' personal factors, particularly their beliefs about learning, are also critical in influencing how they respond to and engage with these instructional methods. According to Fazilatfar et al. (2015), beliefs are a cognitive entity that is an important factor that can guide and encourage human behavior. Applied to language learning, beliefs refer to “the general assumptions students have about themselves as learners, about the factors that influence language learning, and about the nature of language learning and teaching” (Victori & Lockhart, 1995). Each student has different beliefs because beliefs are made from experience, personality, individual differences, and culture. Riley (2009) further notes that beliefs can influence how individuals interpret situations, make plans, and make decisions when dealing with particular tasks. Therefore, investigating students' beliefs toward the implementation of technology-integrated project-based learning is important, as these beliefs can influence students' engagement and learning experiences. Understanding students' beliefs may also provide valuable information for evaluating students' experiences with the implementation of the learning model in English instruction.

SMK N 1 Seririt provides a relevant context for examining the implementation of project-based learning integrated with technology. From the preliminary observations, English teachers at SMKN 1 Seririt implement project-based learning by designing projects relevant to students' vocational majors. Through these activities, students were not only involved in learning English as theoretical content but also had

opportunities to apply their language knowledge through practical project work. The final results of the projects assigned to students can be in the form of Word documents, PowerPoint presentations, posters, infographics, and videos. During the preliminary observation, an informal conversation with several students indicated that students held different beliefs about the implementation of PjBL integrated with technology. Some students of SMK N 1 Seririt believed that they became more excited and motivated to learn English when working on projects related to their majors. They also perceived that this learning model enhanced their creativity, communication skills, collaboration, and work readiness. In contrast, other students perceived that it was time-consuming and less engaging. Some of them also believed that their limited English proficiency reduced their confidence, so they were not excited when learning English and were not motivated to work on projects.

Based on these preliminary observations, students held different beliefs toward the project-based learning with technology in English instruction. These differences indicate that students may experience and respond to the implementation in different ways. Previous studies have highlighted the benefits of PjBL (Artini et al., 2018; Chiang & Lee, 2016) and technology integration in language learning (Gilakjani, 2017; Hazarika, 2017; Rintaningrum, 2023). In addition, numerous studies have investigated students' beliefs in English language learning (Mulia et al., 2021; Rahmawita & Putriani, 2022). However, fewer studies have specifically examined both the implementation of PjBL integrated with technology with students' beliefs regarding its implementation in vocational high school English instruction. Since students' beliefs influence how they participate and respond in class (LaForce et al., 2017), and can also be shaped by teachers' teaching practices (Sakui & Gaies, 2003), it is important to examine both the way the project-based learning with technology is implemented and the beliefs students hold toward it. Therefore, this study focuses on investigating these two aspects.

1.2 Problem Identification

The researcher discovered variations in students' beliefs regarding the implementation of the project-based learning model with technology in English instruction based on the initial observation. One

of the students said that completing a project required considerable time because there are many steps to be done, and students' limited English skills make them less motivated. In contrast, another student stated it makes them more engaged with the subject, as it aligns with their majors and will be beneficial in their future careers. In addition, prior research has mostly focused on the advantages or efficacy of technology-enhanced project-based learning, while limited studies have described how it is implemented in vocational school contexts. Therefore, it is important to investigate how teachers implement project-based learning integrated with technology in English language learning at vocational high schools. In addition, examining students' beliefs is equally important because understanding these beliefs helps explain how students perceive and respond to its implementation.

1.3 Research Limitation

The researcher focuses on how teachers implemented the project-based learning model integrated with technology in English instruction at SMK N 1 Seririt and students' beliefs towards it. This study has several limitations. First, the study was carried out at only one vocational high school, namely SMK N 1 Seririt. Therefore, the findings may not represent the implementation of technology-integrated project-based learning in other schools with different contexts and characteristics. Second, the qualitative data were collected only through classroom observations. As a result, the findings describe the implementation based on observed classroom practices without exploring the teachers' or students' perspectives in greater depth through interviews. Third, the quantitative data focused only on students' beliefs towards the implementation. The study did not examine other variables, such as students' motivation, learning outcomes, or academic achievement, which may also influence the implementation of this learning model.

1.4 Research Questions

Based on the background and identified problems, this study addresses the following research questions:

How is the project-based learning model integrated with technology implemented at SMKN 1 Seririt?

How are students' beliefs towards the implementation of the project-based learning model integrated with technology in English instruction at SMKN 1 Seririt?

1.5 Research Objectives

According to the research questions, the following are the objectives of this study:

1. To investigate how project-based learning integrated with technology is implemented in English language learning at SMK N 1 Seririt.
2. To investigate students' beliefs toward the implementation of project-based learning integrated with technology in English language learning at SMK N 1 Seririt.

1.6 Research Significance

Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, this study is projected to enrich the existing literature on the integration of technology into project-based learning in English language instruction. It provides empirical evidence on the implementation of this learning model and students' beliefs toward its implementation in the vocational high school context. The findings are also expected to offer further insight into the implementation of project-based learning integrated with technology and students' beliefs toward its implementation in English language instruction.

Practical Significance

The practical contributions of this study are expected to benefit several parties as follows:

- a. Researchers: The finding of this study can serve as a reference for future researchers to get information about the implementation of PjBL integrated with technology in English instruction at vocational high schools. The study may also provide information that can support further research on students' beliefs toward this learning model or related topics.

- b. Teachers: Teachers will get the needed information from this study. This information may help teachers to evaluate or improve the strategies used to teach in the classroom.
- c. Students: For students, this study is expected to provide a deeper comprehension of the purpose and benefits of participating in PjBL activities integrated with technology.

