

# UNCOVERING BARRIERS ON PROJECT BASED LEARNING IN MERDEKA CURRICULUM

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**Abstract.** The implementation of Project Based Learning (PBL) in English subjects is in line with *Merdeka* Curriculum because students can learn by actively engaging in real-world and personally meaningful projects. This study aims to find out the student challenges that hinder their engagement in English Project Based Learning and find out the roles of teacher that faced by students in overcoming barriers in English Project Based Learning on *Merdeka* Curriculum. This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive approach. The research was conducted at SMPN 189 Jakarta. Data was collected through questionnaires and interviews to identify barriers to student engagement and the role of teachers in overcoming those barriers. A total of 59 students participated as respondents for the questionnaire method and 2 teachers of United Kingdom subjects were interviewed. This study used the Likert scale to calculate the results of the questionnaire and to analyze the data from the interviews used transcription and highlighting of the results points. Data analysis involves transcription and analysis of interview responses to draw overall conclusions. The findings of this study highlight the difficulties in collaboration, project planning and execution, time, and motivation with engagement. Teachers act as facilitators, creating a supportive environment, emphasizing personal connections, and using a variety of feedback strategies to ensure inclusive participation and improve the quality of learning.

**Keywords:** Project Based Learning, Independent Curriculum, Student Engagement

**Abstrak.** Implementasi Project Based Learning (PBL) dalam mata pelajaran Bahasa Inggris sejalan dengan Kurikulum Merdeka karena siswa dapat belajar dengan aktif terlibat dalam proyek-proyek yang nyata dan bermakna secara pribadi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui tantangan siswa yang menghambat keterlibatan mereka dalam PBL Bahasa Inggris dan mengetahui peran guru dalam mengatasi hambatan tersebut dalam PBL Bahasa Inggris pada Kurikulum Merdeka. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan pendekatan deskriptif. Penelitian dilakukan di SMPN 189 Jakarta. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner dan wawancara untuk mengidentifikasi hambatan keterlibatan siswa dan peran guru dalam mengatasi hambatan tersebut. Sebanyak 59 siswa berpartisipasi sebagai responden untuk metode kuesioner dan 2 guru mata pelajaran Bahasa Inggris diwawancarai. Penelitian ini menggunakan skala Likert untuk menghitung hasil kuesioner dan untuk menganalisis data dari wawancara digunakan transkripsi dan penyorotan poin-poin hasil. Analisis data melibatkan transkripsi dan analisis tanggapan wawancara untuk menarik kesimpulan keseluruhan. Temuan penelitian ini menyoroti kesulitan dalam kolaborasi, perencanaan dan pelaksanaan proyek, waktu, serta motivasi dengan keterlibatan. Guru berperan sebagai fasilitator, menciptakan lingkungan yang mendukung, menekankan koneksi pribadi, dan menggunakan berbagai strategi umpan balik untuk memastikan partisipasi inklusif dan meningkatkan kualitas pembelajaran.

**Kata Kunci:** Project Based Learning, Kurikulum Merdeka, Keterlibatan Siswa

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## INTRODUCTION

Implementing the curriculum is crucial in an educational system as it helps achieve the system's objectives and guides teaching across different levels. The curriculum significantly impacts the success or failure of a school (Fauzi, 2019) and serves as a tool for achieving specific educational goals. Vostrikova (2020) describes the curriculum as organized educational opportunities provided by a school, occurring in various settings within the school community, such as fostering supportive environments in public schools. According to Oktavia (2023), it also serves as a plan and arrangement for the content and teaching materials, forming a foundation for effective educational guidelines. In education, content and teaching materials are related but distinct concepts. Content refers to the knowledge or subject matter being taught, while teaching materials are the instruments and resources teachers use to facilitate learning (Guerriero, 2013).

Indonesia has experienced numerous curriculum changes to meet societal needs and adapt to the times. The curriculum has evolved 11 times, with changes in 1947, 1952, 1968, 1975, 1984, 1994, 2004, 2006, 2013, and the current Merdeka Curriculum (Oktavia et al., 2023). All national curricula are developed referencing Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution to align with the nation's core values. Indonesia adopted the Merdeka Curriculum, a condensed version of the 2013 curriculum, starting from the pandemic until 2021. In 2022, the Ministry of Education and Culture Research and Technology released a policy for the use of the Merdeka Curriculum. Developed since 2020, it has been adopted in a limited manner by educational institutions in 111 districts or cities (Rizaldi & Fatimah, 2022). Although not yet implemented in all schools, it has begun to be socialized and adopted in some (Ndari et al., 2023). The Merdeka Curriculum reduces basic competencies in each subject, allowing teachers and students to focus on essential competencies for progression. It offers high flexibility, enabling educational units to design curriculum structures, activities, knowledge acquisition, and learning media (Suzana et al., 2020). This plan was created to help students catch up after the COVID-19 crisis. The Merdeka Curriculum has two main structures: scheduled activities based on structured learning content and routine activities as part of the learning process, aimed at improving Pancasila's profile (Ramadhoni & Ahmadi, 2023).

The Pancasila Student Profile embodies Indonesian students as lifelong learners with global competence, adhering to Pancasila values. It includes six main characteristics: faith, piety to God Almighty, and noble morals; global diversity; cooperation; self-reliance; critical thinking; and creativity (Suprianto et al., 2022). This profile is a long-term educational goal, aiming to develop essential competencies and character in each student. Within the Merdeka

Curriculum, it measures the success of forming the ideal Indonesian generation (Yanzi et al., 2022). The Pancasila Student Profile focuses on creating students with desired skills and qualities, emphasizing national identity, ideology, and values (Shofa, 2021). The project to strengthen the Pancasila Student Profile provides students with opportunities to "experience knowledge," enhancing character development alongside learning (Shofa, 2021).

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is a mandatory method in the Merdeka Curriculum, determined by the government to play an active role in the learning process (Halimatusyadiyah et al., 2022). PBL emphasizes problem-solving processes and can produce tangible products, not just focusing on the end result. It strengthens the profile of Pancasila students, making it a key advantage in the Merdeka Curriculum (Halimatusyadiyah et al., 2022). The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum involves teacher training and new teaching materials (Fauzan et al., 2023). PBL is an innovative learning method emphasizing contextual learning through complex activities. According to Almulla (2020), PBL improves students' abilities in attitudes, knowledge, and skills through research and completion of contextual projects.

The use of Project-Based Learning (PBL) can present challenges for both teachers and students. According to Nurhidayati (2020), it is difficult for teachers to understand and remember the learning steps based on the PBL model syntax, making it harder for them to help students identify problems in learning materials. Inhibiting factors for teachers in implementing PBL include high costs, lack of in-depth training on PBL models, unavailability of project-based learner worksheets (LKPD), extensive teacher administration tasks, and time-consuming assessments (Viya, 2023). The researcher specifically aims to identify the students challenges that hinder students' engagements when implementing PBL in SMPN 189 Jakarta, specifically in grade VII B. The study will investigate the spesific students challenges in student engangements and teachers' roles in overcoming obstacles faced by students in implementing PBL within the Merdeka Curriculum

## **METHOD**

This study used a descriptive qualitative technique as its research strategy. Descriptive qualitative research aims to understand phenomena such as behavior, perception, motivation, and actions holistically, with results described in words and sentences (Ramadhani, 2019). This study employs descriptive qualitative research to explore students' challenges and teachers' roles in overcoming obstacles in implementing Project-Based Learning (PBL) within the Merdeka Curriculum.

Conducted at SMPN 189 Jakarta, this research included data collection, analysis, and discussion phases. Participants were 36 students from class VII B and two English teachers. Data was collected using questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire focused on identifying challenges hindering students' engagement in English PBL (RQ1), while interviews with English teachers explored their roles in addressing these obstacles (RQ2). A Likert scale was used to analyze the questionnaire results, measuring perceptions, attitudes, or opinions (Suliyanto, 2011). Data analysis involved transcribing and analyzing interview responses to draw overall conclusions. Methodological triangulation was employed by using both surveys and interviews to study the single topic, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings. Investigator triangulation was also used to provide various aspects of the topic and ensure comprehensive and reliable results (Noble et al., 2019).

## RESULTS

The researcher has collected the data to answered the research questions. This study used a questionnaire and interview.

**Table 1.** Collaboration

|   |     |     |     |     |    |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|
| Collaborate with others to finish the job as a team     | 11  | 22  | 16  | 8   | 2  |
|   | 19% | 37% | 27% | 14% | 3% |
| Share tasks with other members of the team              | 10  | 31  | 8   | 7   | 3  |
|   | 17% | 53% | 14% | 12% | 5% |
| Assigning work to other members of a team               | 7   | 17  | 19  | 13  | 3  |
|   | 12% | 29% | 32% | 22% | 5% |
| Resolve conflicts that may arise when working in a team | 7   | 16  | 12  | 19  | 5  |
|   | 12% | 27% | 20% | 32% | 8% |
| Share your knowledge or skills with other team members  | 9   | 18  | 20  | 7   | 5  |
|   | 15% | 31% | 34% | 12% | 8% |

Based on the table above, the majority of students (37%) find it easy to collaborate with others to complete tasks as a team, although 14% find it difficult. Most team members feel confident in their collaborative abilities. Task sharing is well-received, with 53% strongly agreeing that they share tasks with other team members, while 5% disagree. Assigning work to team members shows some hesitation, with 32% feeling neutral and 5% disagreeing, indicating room for improvement. Conflict resolution within teams is challenging, as 32% feel they are not sufficiently capable of resolving conflicts. Sharing knowledge or skills is generally easy for 34% of students, though 8% find it difficult.

**Table 2.** Project planning and execution

|  |     |     |     |     |     |
|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Identify projects that match with your skills and interests. | 5   | 13  | 29  | 9   | 3   |
|  | 8%  | 22% | 49% | 15% | 5%  |
| Plan the project independently                               | 7   | 11  | 18  | 21  | 2   |
|  | 12% | 19% | 31% | 36% | 3%  |
| Apply the concepts learned to the project at hand            | 3   | 19  | 19  | 12  | 6   |
|  | 5%  | 32% | 32% | 20% | 10% |
| Complete the project within the deadline                     | 9   | 11  | 18  | 18  | 3   |
|  | 15% | 19% | 31% | 31% | 5%  |
| Find the resources or equipment needed for your project      | 9   | 20  | 10  | 13  | 7   |
|  | 15% | 34% | 17% | 22% | 12% |
| Present the project results to the class or other audiences  | 7   | 12  | 16  | 14  | 10  |
|  | 12% | 20% | 27% | 24% | 17% |
| Find solutions to problems that arose during the project     | 3   | 19  | 18  | 15  | 4   |
|  | 5%  | 32% | 31% | 25% | 7%  |
| Stay focused and organized while working on the project      | 16  | 17  | 11  | 11  | 4   |
|  | 27% | 29% | 19% | 19% | 7%  |
| Measure the success of the project you were working on       | 4   | 15  | 20  | 14  | 6   |
|  | 7%  | 25% | 34% | 24% | 10% |

The majority of students (49%) feel fairly confident in identifying projects that match their skills and interests, with 22% finding it easy and 5% finding it very difficult. While most respondents can identify suitable projects, planning independently poses a challenge, as 36% find it difficult and only 12% find it very easy. Applying learned concepts to projects is manageable for 32% of students, and 31% feel capable of completing projects within deadlines. Finding necessary resources or equipment is easy for 34% of respondents. Presenting project results varies, with 27% feeling moderately confident but indicating room for improvement. Problem-solving during projects is easy for 32%, and 29% find it easy to stay focused and organized. Measuring project success is manageable for 34% of students.

**Table 3.** Time

|  |    |     |     |     |     |
|--|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Balance the project tasks with other academic tasks  | 4  | 14  | 13  | 18  | 10  |
|  | 7% | 24% | 22% | 31% | 17% |
| Asses your own progress while working on the project | 4  | 20  | 15  | 17  | 3   |
|  | 7% | 34% | 25% | 29% | 5%  |

The majority of students (31%) find it difficult to balance project tasks with other academic responsibilities, with 24% finding it easy and 17% finding it very difficult, highlighting challenges in time management. Additionally, 34% of students feel confident in assessing their own progress while working on projects, although 5% find it very difficult. While most students are fairly confident in self-evaluation, there is room for improvement in this area.

**Table 4.** Motivation and engagement

|  |     |     |     |     |     |
|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Receive feedback from teammates or the teacher   | 5   | 15  | 23  | 14  | 2   |
|  | 8%  | 25% | 39% | 24% | 3%  |
| Challenging in technological capabilities influence the implementation of project based learning | 2   | 11  | 16  | 19  | 11  |
|  | 3%  | 19% | 27% | 32% | 19% |
| Understand the basic principles of the Merdeka Curriculum  | 6   | 21  | 17  | 14  | 1   |
|  | 10% | 36% | 29% | 24% | 2%  |
| Implement project based learning in the Merdeka Curriculum                                       | 4   | 13  | 28  | 11  | 3   |
|  | 7%  | 22% | 47% | 19% | 5%  |
| The project based learning approach provide enough flexibility to suit your learning style       | 3   | 15  | 20  | 15  | 6   |
|  | 5%  | 25% | 34% | 25% | 10% |
| Overcome the technical obstacles that occurred in your group during project based learning       | 3   | 10  | 23  | 19  | 4   |
|  | 5%  | 17% | 39% | 32% | 7%  |
| The availability of resources to support the easy implementation of project based learning       | 6   | 15  | 16  | 17  | 5   |
|  | 10% | 25% | 27% | 29% | 8%  |
| Use project based learning in English subjects   | 6   | 12  | 10  | 13  | 18  |
|  | 10% | 20% | 17% | 22% | 31% |

The majority of students (39%) find it fairly easy to receive feedback from teammates or teachers, while only 3% struggle with it. Technological challenges affect the implementation of project-based learning for 32% of students, though a few find it very easy. Most students (36%) understand the basic principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, and 47% feel fairly capable of implementing project-based learning within it. The project-based learning approach provides sufficient flexibility for 34% of students to suit their learning styles. Additionally, 39% can overcome technical obstacles in their groups during project-based learning. Resource availability for supporting project-based learning varies, with 29% finding it difficult. Lastly, 31% of students find it very difficult to use project-based learning in English subjects.

Based on interviews with two English teachers at SMPN 189 Jakarta, the role of teachers in addressing students' difficulties in project-based learning (PBL) within the Merdeka Curriculum is crucial. Teachers play a pivotal role in motivating students to actively engage in PBL, which emphasizes differentiated learning. They conduct initial assessments, surveys, direct observations, and discussions to understand students' characteristics, needs, and learning styles, tailoring instruction accordingly. Acting as facilitators, teachers create a supportive environment, bridging gaps for students facing challenges and ensuring inclusive participation in PBL. They emphasize personal connections to enhance motivation and engagement, collaborate with peers to improve learning quality, and use diverse and creative feedback strategies. A responsive and inclusive approach is prioritized to support each student's

development and success, aiming for a learning environment where every student feels valued and supported, in line with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum.

## DISCUSSION

Identifying and analyzing barriers in PBL on the Merdeka Curriculum is crucial to understanding the challenges faced by educators and students. There are many barriers that students face in implementing PBL in English subjects, such as, most students faced some difficulties on plan project independently, resolving conflicts that may arise during project, balance the project tasks and academic tasks, challenging in technological capabilities on implementation PBL, experiencing difficulties in implementing PBL on Merdeka Curriculum, and use PBL on English subjects. One of the foremost challenges students face is planning projects independently. PBL requires students to develop their project ideas, timelines, and deliverables with minimal guidance from teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). The reason why students face difficulties in planning project independently, because a lack of project management skills and limited prior experience. Many students may not have support project management skills to plan and execute projects independently. Difficulty in independently planning projects can lead to reduced learning effectiveness, where students may not achieve the expected learning outcomes (Halimatusyadiyah et al., 2022).

PBL often involves collaborative work, and conflicts among group members can disrupt the project flow. Additionally, projects may be delayed or unfinished on time. Students also face difficulties in resolving conflicts that arise during projects. This occurs due to lack of social and communication skills, as well as the diversity of students' backgrounds (Hanurawan & Yusuf, 2024). Students may lack adequate skills to resolve conflicts that arise during projects, and those from different cultural backgrounds, values, and ways of thinking may struggle to collaborate effectively. These barriers can disrupt collaboration (Hussein, 2021). Projects with unresolved conflicts may not achieve optimal results because these conflicts can hinder the progress of group work. Furthermore, students faced difficulties on balancing project tasks with academic assignments. Balancing the demands of project tasks with other academic responsibilities is also a critical challenge. According to Chamidah (2021), this happens because of heavy academic workload and lack of time management. Students often have packed academic schedules and may find it challenging to balance project tasks with other academic assignments. Many students are not yet skilled in effective time management, which is crucial for juggling multiple tasks simultaneously. The impact of these barriers can lead to

stress, fatigue, and a decrease in work quality (Barrett, 2017). This balancing act requires strong time management skills and can be particularly stressful during peak academic periods.

Technological capabilities also play a significant role in the successful implementation of PBL. Students also face challenges with technological capabilities in implementing PBL within the Merdeka curriculum. This occurs due to limited access to technology and curriculum transitions (Kurniawati, 2022). Not all students have adequate access to technological devices and the internet. Some students and teachers may lack the necessary skills to effectively utilize technology in PBL. These technological difficulties can hinder project implementation, reduce effective interaction, and collaboration. Ensuring that students have the required technological resources and skills is crucial for effective PBL implementation (Wang et al., 2021). Additionally, the curriculum transition from traditional to the Merdeka curriculum may require significant adaptation for students. Therefore implementing PBL in the Merdeka curriculum can disrupt the learning process and achievement of educational goals. Using PBL in English subjects is challenging for students due to language limitations and lack of resources (Jon et al., 2021). Students with limitations in English language proficiency may struggle to participate in projects conducted in that language. Not all schools may have sufficient resources to support PBL in English subjects. The impact of these difficulties includes students having difficulty understanding the material and experiencing a decrease in motivation (Sultan & Ikhsanuddin, 2023). Students may struggle to understand and work on projects in English, which affects their grasp of subject material. Language difficulties can reduce students' motivation to actively engage in projects.

PBL in the Merdeka Curriculum aims to enhance students' skills through direct experience in solving real-world problems. However, in its implementation, teachers often face various obstacles that students experience, which can affect the effectiveness of PBL, especially in learning English. The role of the teacher here includes conducting initial assessments or surveys, acting as a facilitator (Alrajeh, 2020), creating a supportive environment, ensuring inclusive and effective learning, and maintaining teacher commitment. Understanding students' characteristics, weaknesses, and learning styles is an essential first step in designing appropriate learning by conducting initial assessments or surveys (Panadero et al., 2014). These assessments or surveys can help teachers identify the specific needs of each student in the class. In PBL, teachers are not just content deliverers but also facilitators who support the students' learning process (Halimatusyadiyah et al., 2022). They provide services that facilitate learning, such as offering resources, guidance, and necessary support.

According to Halimatusyadiyah (2022), teachers serve as facilitators who support students in developing collaboration, problem-solving, and creative thinking skills. Teachers bridge the gaps for students who face difficulties, both in understanding the material and in the collaborative aspects of the project. In learning, there needs to be a supportive learning environment to make classroom learning effective and inclusive (Halimatusyadiyah et al., 2022). Teachers help create a positive and supportive classroom atmosphere where every student feels valued and motivated to participate (Maulana et al., 2020). This includes creating opportunities for all students to actively engage in the project and providing constructive feedback. Inclusive and effective PBL allows all students to learn and grow according to their abilities (Taufiqur Rahman et al., 2023). By tailoring the learning experience to individual student needs, teachers ensure that each student receives the support needed for success. The impact of PBL implementation in English learning is influenced by student motivation, English language skills, collaboration and social skills, and the improvement of learning quality.

## **CONCLUSION**

Implementing a curriculum is crucial in education, guiding teaching and significantly impacting a school's success. Since the pandemic, Indonesia has adopted the Merdeka Curriculum, which reduces basic competencies to give teachers and students more flexibility to focus on essential skills. This curriculum includes the Pancasila Student Profile, aiming to develop students' competencies and character through six main traits. Project-Based Learning (PBL), a key method in this curriculum, focuses on problem-solving and contextual learning to enhance students' attitudes, knowledge, and skills. However, challenges such as high costs, insufficient training, and extensive administrative tasks for teachers make implementing PBL difficult.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

To address the challenges faced in implementing Project-Based Learning (PBL) within the Merdeka Curriculum, several recommendations are suggested. Firstly, providing in-depth training for teachers on PBL methods and effective project management can enhance their ability to guide students through the process. Additionally, increasing access to technological resources and offering technical support can help overcome barriers related to technological capabilities. Schools should also implement time management workshops for students to better balance project tasks with other academic responsibilities. Establishing a supportive environment through continuous assessments and feedback can help students develop essential

collaboration and conflict-resolution skills. Moreover, incorporating flexible curriculum components that allow for differentiation based on individual student needs can make PBL more accessible and effective. Finally, fostering a culture of inclusive participation by emphasizing personal connections and using diverse feedback strategies will ensure all students are engaged and motivated, ultimately enhancing the overall quality of learning within the Merdeka Curriculum.

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