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The Implementation of Project-Based Learning in Teaching Recount Writing: Students' Perceptions and Writing Performance at a Rural State Junior High School in Banjarsari

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Abstract

Writing instruction in rural English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms requires approaches that connect genre knowledge, authentic communication, and instructional support. This study examined the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in teaching recount writing, students' perceptions of the learning process, and changes in their writing performance. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design involved 32 Grade VIII students, one English teacher, and nine student interviewees representing high-, middle-, and low-achievement groups. Writing tests and a perception questionnaire provided quantitative evidence of changes in writing performance and students' perceptions, while classroom observations, learning artifacts, and interviews documented the implementation process and explained the quantitative patterns. PjBL was implemented through project initiation and planning, idea development and initial drafting, revision and product completion, and presentation and reflection. Students reported very positive perceptions ($M = 4.31$), particularly in the cognitive and collaborative dimensions. Their mean writing score increased from 64.75 to 71.81; the difference was statistically significant, $t(31) = -8.432$, $p < .001$, with a large within-group effect (Cohen's $d_z = 1.49$). Qualitative evidence showed that students' idea development and organization occurred within a structured instructional process involving explicit genre instruction, teacher scaffolding, peer collaboration, feedback, revision, and diorama-based visual support. In this context, PjBL was feasible and was associated with improved recount writing when implemented as a structured writing process rather than merely as product making.

Keywords: project-based learning, recount writing, rural EFL, students' perceptions, writing performance

Abstrak

Pembelajaran menulis di kelas Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (English as a Foreign Language/EFL) di wilayah perdesaan memerlukan pendekatan yang mengintegrasikan pengetahuan genre, komunikasi autentik, dan dukungan pembelajaran. Penelitian ini mengkaji implementasi Project-Based Learning (PjBL) dalam pembelajaran menulis teks recount, persepsi siswa terhadap proses pembelajaran, serta perubahan kinerja menulis mereka. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain explanatory sequential mixed-methods yang melibatkan 32 siswa kelas VIII, satu guru Bahasa Inggris, dan sembilan siswa yang dipilih untuk wawancara dari kelompok pencapaian tinggi, sedang, dan rendah. Tes menulis dan kuesioner persepsi menghasilkan data kuantitatif mengenai perubahan kinerja menulis dan persepsi siswa, sedangkan observasi kelas, artefak pembelajaran, dan wawancara digunakan untuk mendokumentasikan proses implementasi serta menjelaskan pola yang ditemukan dalam data kuantitatif. PjBL diimplementasikan melalui empat tahap, yaitu inisiasi dan perencanaan proyek, pengembangan ide dan penyusunan draf awal, revisi dan penyelesaian produk, serta presentasi dan refleksi. Siswa menunjukkan persepsi yang sangat positif ($M = 4,31$), terutama pada dimensi kognitif dan kolaboratif. Rata-rata skor menulis meningkat dari 64,75 menjadi 71,81; perbedaan tersebut signifikan secara statistik, $t(31) = -8,432$, $p < 0,001$, dengan ukuran efek yang besar (Cohen's $d_z = 1,49$). Data kualitatif menunjukkan bahwa pengembangan dan pengorganisasian ide siswa berlangsung dalam proses pembelajaran terstruktur yang melibatkan pengajaran genre secara eksplisit, scaffolding oleh guru, kolaborasi antarsiswa, umpan balik, revisi, dan dukungan visual berbasis diorama. Dalam konteks penelitian ini, PjBL layak diterapkan dan berasosiasi dengan peningkatan kinerja menulis teks recount ketika dilaksanakan sebagai proses menulis yang terstruktur, bukan sekadar kegiatan menghasilkan produk.

Kata Kunci: EFL pedesaan, kinerja menulis, pembelajaran berbasis proyek, persepsi siswa, teks recount



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INTRODUCTION

Writing is a central component of English language learning because it requires learners to generate ideas, organize information, select appropriate vocabulary, control grammatical forms, and present meaning through recognizable textual structures. For junior high school learners, these demands are particularly visible in recount writing. A recount text retells past experiences through an orientation, a chronological sequence of events, and an optional re-orientation. Successful recount writing therefore depends not only on past-tense accuracy but also on coherent sequencing, sufficient elaboration, appropriate lexical choices, and readable mechanics. Genre-oriented instruction can make these expectations explicit by helping learners understand how communicative purposes are realized through text organization and language features (Hyland, 2007; Knapp & Watkins, 2005). However, empirical studies indicate that EFL writing difficulties extend across both discourse-level and language-level dimensions. (Ahmed et al, 2025; Chandra et al, 2024) highlighted difficulties in developing and organizing ideas and maintaining textual coherence, whereas (Raufi et al, 2024; Siekman et al, 2022) drew attention to vocabulary and sentence-level accuracy. These findings complement one another by showing that EFL writing difficulties are multidimensional rather than confined to a single aspect of writing. This evidence suggests that recount-writing instruction needs to address idea development, text organization, and language control as interconnected aspects of the writing process.

These challenges require particular attention in rural educational settings, although rural schools should not be treated as a homogeneous category. Cross-national evidence indicates that geographical location can shape access to educational resources and learning opportunities, but the extent and nature of these constraints vary across communities and education systems (Echazarra & Radinger, 2019). Evidence from specific rural settings further illustrates this variation. In a rural secondary school in South Africa, (Ahiaku et al, 2025) identified infrastructure, socioeconomic conditions, and geographical location as factors contributing to digital disconnection, whereas (Muhaimin et al, 2020), in the Indonesian context, documented constraints related to access to resources and digital technology in rural schools. Although these studies were conducted in different educational and national contexts, they complement one another in showing that the feasibility of educational innovation can be shaped by locally available resources and infrastructure. These findings should not, however, be generalized to English-language learning or to all rural schools. In the present EFL context, preliminary information from the school indicated that students had limited opportunities to use English beyond formal lessons and that classroom instruction constituted their primary source of English learning. Thus, rurality in the present study is treated not as a uniform condition of disadvantage, but as a specific educational context in which project design, material requirements, students' language readiness, and teacher scaffolding need to be aligned with locally available resources and learning opportunities.

PjBL is compatible with EFL writing because it gives written language an identifiable purpose. Instead of producing a text only for teacher correction, students may compose a journal, school-event report, digital story, class magazine, or other product intended for peers and a wider classroom

audience. The extended project cycle can provide repeated opportunities to generate ideas, examine model texts, negotiate meaning, use language resources, and improve drafts. Previous studies suggest that the contribution of PjBL to language learning involves both learner engagement and the structure of the learning process. (Culclasure et al, 2019; Guo, 2021; Kavlu, 2017; Waly and Ashadi, 2024) associated project work with engagement, collaboration, autonomy, and meaningful language use, whereas writing-focused studies by (Lu, 2021; Syarifah and Emiliasari, 2019) indicated benefits for organization, creativity, genre awareness, and writing quality. Viewed together, these findings suggest that the value of PjBL for writing lies not simply in producing a final project but in providing structured opportunities for students to develop and refine written language throughout the project cycle. Such benefits, however, depend on explicit learning objectives, manageable tasks, transparent assessment, and responsive teacher support.

Students' perceptions are equally important because instructional quality is partly reflected in how learners interpret and respond to classroom experiences. A method that is theoretically sound may produce limited participation when students perceive the workload as confusing, the group process as unfair, or the teacher's support as insufficient. Conversely, when students perceive activities as understandable, useful, achievable, and relevant, they are more likely to participate actively and persist through challenging stages. Previous PjBL research has generally reported positive affective, cognitive, behavioral, and collaborative responses, although students' perceptions may vary according to language proficiency, project design, group dynamics, and contextual constraints (Guo et al., 2020; Nguyen & Tuan, 2024). This variation is particularly relevant to the present study because the students were encountering PjBL for the first time in a rural EFL writing classroom. Examining their perceptions alongside classroom implementation and writing performance therefore provides a more context-specific understanding of how students experienced PjBL and how those experiences related to the instructional process and writing outcomes.

The present study was conducted in a rural state junior high school in Banjarsari, Ciamis Regency, West Java. Preliminary classroom information indicated that English writing instruction remained largely teacher directed and focused on model texts and grammatical correctness. Students had limited opportunities to generate ideas, prepare outlines, revise drafts, or write for an authentic classroom purpose. A preliminary recount-writing assessment conducted before the formal research pre-test produced an overall mean of 65.3, below the school's Minimum Mastery Criterion of 75. This preliminary assessment was used to establish the instructional problem and was distinct from the study's pre-test mean of 64.75. The most visible problems concerned idea development, chronological organization, simple past tense, vocabulary, and mechanics. Together with the limited opportunities for English use beyond formal lessons described above, these classroom conditions provided the immediate rationale for examining a structured and scaffolded approach to recount-writing instruction in this setting.

Despite growing evidence supporting the potential of PjBL, an explanatory gap remains in rural junior high school EFL writing contexts. Existing studies have reported benefits for learner engagement and writing outcomes, but provide less evidence about how these outcomes develop through specific classroom processes, particularly when students have limited opportunities to use English beyond formal lessons. Moreover, findings from higher education, technology-rich settings, or other educational contexts cannot be assumed to represent the conditions of a rural Indonesian junior high school. Previous research has also tended to examine PjBL implementation, students' perceptions, or writing performance separately, leaving limited evidence about how these dimensions relate within the same instructional experience. What remains insufficiently explained, therefore, is

how a structured and context-responsive PjBL unit is implemented in a rural EFL writing classroom, how students experience the learning process, and how their recount-writing performance changes following the implementation.

To address this gap, the present study makes a contextual and methodological contribution by integrating three forms of evidence within a single instructional setting: documentation of PjBL implementation across four meetings, multidimensional data on students' perceptions, and pre-test–post-test changes in overall recount-writing performance and five analytic writing components. The project combined genre-based writing activities with a low-technology diorama. Rather than serving as the principal learning outcome, the diorama functioned as visual support for representing setting, participants, and event sequence, while the written recount remained the assessed language product. This adaptation enabled the study to examine PjBL as a structured writing process that was contextually feasible without relying on sophisticated digital infrastructure.

Accordingly, the study aimed to (1) describe how PjBL was implemented in teaching recount writing at a rural state junior high school in Banjarsari, (2) examine students' perceptions of PjBL in learning to write recount texts, and (3) investigate the extent to which students' recount-writing performance changed following the implementation. By connecting process, perception, and performance, the study sought to provide pedagogically useful evidence for structured, collaborative, and context-responsive writing instruction in rural EFL classrooms.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design with qualitative process data embedded during the instructional phase. The quantitative strand comprised a one-group pre-test–post-test assessment of students' recount-writing performance and a post-intervention questionnaire measuring students' perceptions of PjBL. Alongside this strand, classroom observations, field notes, video recordings, and learning artifacts were collected throughout the four PjBL meetings as embedded qualitative process data. These data were used primarily to document how PjBL was implemented, including project stages, teacher scaffolding, student participation, collaboration, feedback, and revision. Following the post-test and questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the English teacher and nine purposively selected students as the follow-up qualitative phase. The interviews were used to elaborate on students' perceptions and writing experiences and to help explain patterns identified in the quantitative results. Integration occurred at the interpretation stage by comparing and connecting the quantitative results with evidence from the embedded process data and follow-up interviews across the three research questions. Thus, the embedded qualitative data documented what occurred during implementation, whereas the follow-up interviews provided explanatory accounts of the quantitative patterns after the intervention.

The research was conducted in one Grade VIII class at a rural state junior high school in Banjarsari, Ciamis Regency, West Java. The quantitative participants were 32 students from one intact class. The existing class organization was retained so that instruction occurred in a natural school setting. One English teacher served as the key informant and implemented the PjBL unit, while the researcher conducted non-participant classroom observations. The teacher held a master's degree in English Education, had taught English since 2015, and had not previously implemented PjBL. Nine students were selected for follow-up interviews through maximum-variation purposive sampling. They represented high-, middle-, and low-achievement groups based on post-test performance, with classroom engagement also considered to obtain diverse perspectives. To maintain anonymity, the

student interviewees were identified using achievement-group codes: HA for high achievement, MA for middle achievement, and LA for low achievement, followed by a participant number.

The PjBL unit was implemented across four meetings, with each meeting lasting 2 × 40 minutes. Meeting 1 introduced the essential task, the purpose and structure of recount texts, the expected product, group roles, the project timeline, and the assessment criteria. Meeting 2 focused on topic selection, 5W+1H brainstorming, timeline construction, outlining, storyboarding, and initial drafting. Meeting 3 involved teacher and peer feedback, revision, editing, and completion of the written text and supporting diorama. Meeting 4 consisted of product presentation, class responses, reflection, and evaluation. Students worked collaboratively during project development; however, the pre-test and post-test were completed individually so that each score represented the student's own writing performance.

Quantitative data were collected through two individual recount-writing tasks and a student-perception questionnaire. Both writing tasks required students to write a personal recount of at least three paragraphs containing an orientation, a sequence of events, and a re-orientation. Each task was completed within 45 minutes under comparable classroom conditions. The pre-test required students to write about a memorable event they had experienced at school, whereas the post-test required them to write about a memorable event they had experienced with their family or friends. Although the prompts differed in topic, both tasks required the same recount genre, a minimum of three paragraphs containing an orientation, a sequence of events, and a re-orientation, the same 45-minute time limit, and the same analytic scoring rubric. Both writing tasks were included in the expert-validation process conducted by two experts, who reviewed the instruments for relevance, clarity, age appropriateness, and contextual suitability. Thus, task comparability was supported through matched task requirements and expert review rather than through empirical equating of prompt difficulty. Students' pre-test and post-test scripts were scored by the English teacher who facilitated the PjBL unit. The same analytic rubric and scoring descriptors were applied consistently to both tests, allocating 30 points for content, 20 for organization, 20 for vocabulary, 25 for language use/grammar, and 5 for mechanics, for a maximum score of 100. The teacher was selected as the scorer because of the teacher's academic background in English Education, teaching experience, and familiarity with the assessment criteria used in the classroom. However, the scripts were not independently double-scored, and no inter-rater reliability coefficient was available. Because the same teacher both implemented the PjBL unit and scored the writing tests, potential rater-related subjectivity cannot be excluded and was considered when interpreting the pre-test–post-test difference.

The perception questionnaire consisted of two checklist items, 13 five-point Likert statements, and one open-ended question. The checklist identified writing and learning skills that students believed had developed. The Likert statements represented affective, cognitive, behavioral, collaborative, and teacher-support dimensions, with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The open-ended item invited students to describe benefits, difficulties, and learning experiences. The questionnaire was administered in Bahasa Indonesia to reduce misunderstanding. Two experts in English language teaching and educational research reviewed the observation guide, interview protocols, tests, rubric, and questionnaire for relevance, clarity, age appropriateness, and contextual suitability. Within this sample, the 13 Likert items demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .949$).

Qualitative data were obtained from structured classroom observations, field notes, video recordings, student drafts, worksheets, project artifacts, one semi-structured teacher interview, nine

student interviews, and open-ended questionnaire responses. The observation guide contained 25 indicators rated on a four-point scale and covered project initiation, student participation, inquiry and idea development, collaboration, the application of recount-text structure and language features, feedback, revision, presentation, reflection, and authentic assessment. The interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, audio-recorded with the participants' consent, and transcribed verbatim. Selected quotations presented in the article were translated into English by the researcher and checked against the original transcripts to preserve the participants' intended meanings. Qualitative analysis followed the interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Coding was guided by the research questions and focused on PjBL implementation, teacher scaffolding, student engagement, collaboration, and writing-process activities. Recurring categories included guided instruction, idea-development support, peer interaction, teacher feedback, revision, and writing-related challenges involving organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. Interpretations were refined by repeatedly comparing field notes, video recordings, interview transcripts, open-ended questionnaire responses, and classroom artifacts. Credibility was strengthened through source triangulation across these data sources. The coding and interpretation were conducted by the researcher without independent double coding.

Quantitative analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize pre-test and post-test scores, questionnaire dimensions, and checklist responses. The normality assumption was examined using the Shapiro–Wilk test on the paired difference scores. A paired-samples t-test was conducted to examine the pre-test–post-test difference at an alpha level of .05, and Cohen's *d*_z was calculated to estimate the magnitude of the paired difference. Likert-scale means were interpreted as very negative (1.00–1.80), negative (1.81–2.60), moderate (2.61–3.40), positive (3.41–4.20), or very positive (4.21–5.00). Formal permission to conduct the study was obtained from the school. The English teacher provided written informed consent before participating in the interview and audio-recording process. Before data collection, the students received an age-appropriate oral explanation of the research activities, confidentiality procedures, and use of classroom recordings. Participants' names were replaced with codes, and the recordings were used solely for research purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of PjBL in Recount Writing

PjBL was implemented as a four-stage writing cycle rather than as an isolated product-making task. Table 1 summarizes the focus of each meeting and the forms of instructional support observed. The sequence began with explicit orientation to the genre and project, continued through guided idea development and drafting, moved into feedback and revision, and ended with presentation and reflection. The stages were cumulative: materials generated in one meeting, such as the 5W+1H worksheet and timeline, were used in subsequent outlining, drafting, editing, and presentation activities.

Table 1.
Summary of PjBL Implementation Across Four Meetings

Stage	Main focus	Observed scaffolding and learning activity
Meeting 1: Initiation and planning	Project orientation and genre preparation	Objectives, recount structure, language features, product criteria, group roles, timeline, topic exploration, and guiding questions.
Meeting 2: Idea development and drafting	Transforming experiences into initial texts	5W+1H worksheet, timeline, outline, storyboard, model text, verb bank, temporal connectives, sentence starters, and group discussion.
Meeting 3: Revision and product completion	Improving drafts and aligning text with the project product	Teacher and peer feedback, C-O-V-G-M codes, revision log, editing checklist, grammar and mechanics correction, and diorama completion.
Meeting 4: Presentation and reflection	Communicating and evaluating the final work	Group presentation, class response, teacher feedback, reflection on learning, project evaluation, and authentic assessment.

Source: Classroom observation, field notes, interviews, and learning artifacts (2026).

During project initiation and planning, the teacher explained the communicative purpose and generic structure of recount text, introduced the essential task, clarified the relationship between the written text and diorama, and discussed the project timeline and assessment. Students responded to guiding questions and considered experiences that could be developed into recount texts. At this early stage, classroom interaction remained relatively teacher led because many students needed examples of how a personal experience could become a structured text. The teacher therefore modelled orientation, events, and re-orientation and highlighted simple past tense, action verbs, and temporal connectives.

The second meeting shifted toward greater student participation. Students selected experiences, identified who, what, when, where, why, and how, arranged events on timelines, and transformed the information into outlines and storyboards. These tools reduced the immediate demands of composing a complete English text by dividing the writing task into manageable planning stages. Group discussion allowed students to compare event sequences, add relevant details, and request vocabulary support. The teacher circulated among the groups, asked probing questions, and provided model texts, verb banks, temporal expressions, and sentence starters such as “First,” “Then,” “After that,” and “Finally.” This support was especially important for students who understood their experiences in Bahasa Indonesia but struggled to express them in English. One lower-achievement student explained, “At first, I was confused because writing in English was difficult and I did not know where to begin. However, the 5W+1H helped me” (LA1). This statement indicates that the 5W+1H questions provided an accessible starting point for students who experienced difficulty initiating their recount texts.

The third meeting emphasized revision and product completion. Students examined drafts using teacher and peer feedback and improved content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. The teacher used C-O-V-G-M feedback codes to direct attention to the relevant component instead of simply providing a corrected version. Students also completed revision logs and a final editing checklist. This procedure encouraged them to compare initial and revised drafts, notice recurring errors, and assume greater responsibility for text improvement. Collaboration became visible through idea exchange, error checking, and task distribution, although some groups still required monitoring to prevent unequal participation.

The fourth meeting created an authentic communicative endpoint. Groups presented their final recounts and used the dioramas to represent setting, participants, and chronological events. The

teacher repeatedly emphasized that the visual product had to correspond to the written text and could not replace it. Presentation was followed by feedback, reflection, and evaluation. Students identified what they had learned, the difficulties they encountered, and the strategies that helped them complete the project. This final stage made the writing visible to classmates and reinforced the idea that revision and presentation are integral parts of communication rather than optional activities after scoring.

The implementation reflected core features of authentic PjBL: a meaningful task, sustained work across meetings, student decision-making, collaboration, iterative refinement, a public product, and reflection. It also showed that learner-centeredness did not mean minimal teacher involvement. The teacher functioned as designer, facilitator, language resource, monitor, and feedback provider. This finding is consistent with Bell's (2010) view that PjBL requires structured inquiry and with Hamidah et al. (2020), who distinguish authentic project-based learning from activities that merely end with a product. In the present classroom, scaffolding made student agency possible by giving learners tools with which to make decisions and improve their texts.

The low-technology diorama was a context-responsive feature. Research in rural settings has warned that innovative pedagogy may become inequitable when it depends heavily on infrastructure that is not consistently available (Ahiaku et al., 2025; Gonzalez-Vidal, 2024; Muhaimin et al., 2020). The diorama required accessible materials and helped students visualize chronological relationships without requiring individual digital devices. Its value, however, depended on maintaining the primacy of the writing objective. The teacher's insistence that each visual element correspond to the recount prevented the project from becoming a decorative craft detached from language learning.

Students' Perceptions of PjBL

Students' overall perception of PjBL was very positive ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.51$). As presented in Table 2, the cognitive dimension received the highest mean ($M = 4.43$), followed by collaboration ($M = 4.38$), affective perception ($M = 4.27$), teacher support ($M = 4.25$), and behavior ($M = 4.16$). The behavioral dimension was the only dimension categorized as positive rather than very positive, but its mean remained well above the scale midpoint. The pattern indicates that students valued the project primarily because it helped them understand and practice recount writing and because it enabled them to work with peers.

Table 2.
Students' Perceptions of PjBL by Dimension

Dimension	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Affective perception	4.27	0.63	Very positive
Cognitive perception	4.43	0.52	Very positive
Behavioral perception	4.16	0.62	Positive
Collaborative perception	4.38	0.71	Very positive
Teacher support	4.25	0.44	Very positive
Overall perception	4.31	0.51	Very positive

Source: Students' perception questionnaire processed with IBM SPSS Statistics 27 (2026).

The checklist data supported this interpretation. Thirty students (93.75%) reported improved understanding of recount structure, 29 (90.63%) selected writing, 28 (87.50%) selected idea organization, and 27 (84.38%) selected idea development. Responsibility was selected by 30 students (93.75%) and collaboration by 29 (90.63%). Vocabulary was selected by 24 students (75.00%) and

grammar by 21 (65.63%), indicating that students recognized improvement but remained more cautious about linguistic accuracy than about structure and idea development. This distinction is pedagogically important because favorable global perceptions should not obscure continuing language difficulties.

The high cognitive mean was explained by the step-by-step nature of the project. Students repeatedly linked their understanding to the 5W+1H worksheet, timeline, outline, storyboard, model text, drafting sequence, and revision checklist. These supports made the genre more concrete and divided a demanding task into manageable decisions. In contrast to a one-stage assignment, students could see how an experience became an organized recount and how feedback could change a draft. This finding aligns with (Lu, 2021), who reported that structured project cycles helped learners conceptualize writing as a recursive process, and with (Syarifah and Emiliasari, 2019), who found that project work supported genre understanding and creativity.

Collaboration was perceived very positively because students could exchange ideas, distribute responsibilities, ask peers for vocabulary support, and check the sequence of events. Lower-achievement interviewees particularly valued the opportunity to consult their classmates before approaching the teacher. One lower-achievement student described both the challenge of unequal participation and the benefit of clear task distribution: “The group work went fairly well, but some members talked a lot while others remained quiet. I was sometimes quiet because I was confused, but after the tasks were divided, I helped with the diorama and captions” (LA1). This account indicates that group work did not automatically ensure equal participation; explicit task distribution was needed to help less-active students contribute. Higher-achievement students similarly reported that group discussion helped them refine the content, check the written text, and prepare the presentation. These experiences reflect the social dimension of PjBL described by (Guo et al, 2020; Waly & Ashadi, 2024). Therefore, the teacher’s use of role cards, clear task allocation, and progress checks was important for promoting accountable collaboration.

Affective responses were also very positive. Students described the learning process as more active and less monotonous than conventional writing lessons, and the diorama increased interest by making stories visible. Enjoyment was not treated as an end in itself; it was productive when it encouraged students to discuss, revise, and present. (Culclasure et al, 2019) similarly associated PjBL with behavioral and social-emotional engagement. At the same time, some students remained anxious about presenting and making grammatical errors, indicating that positive class-level perception did not eliminate individual differences in confidence.

Perceived teacher support was an important element of students’ favorable responses to PjBL. Students recognized the usefulness of model texts, verb banks, sentence starters, direct explanations, feedback codes, and editing checklists. One high-achievement student explained, “The C-O-V-G-M feedback helped us because we knew whether we needed to improve the content, sequence, vocabulary, grammar, or punctuation” (HA1). This statement illustrates that component-specific feedback made the revision process clearer by directing students’ attention to particular aspects of their writing. The finding indicates that PjBL in a lower-proficiency EFL context should not be interpreted as unguided discovery. (Hsin and Wu, 2023) emphasized the importance of deliberate scaffolding when projects are implemented across diverse contexts, while (Nguyen and Tuan, 2024) showed that students’ perceptions of instructional clarity and support may influence their participation. The slightly lower behavioral mean may reflect the demands of time management, task completion, and sustained responsibility across four meetings. Thus, the perception findings portray PjBL as

engaging and useful, while also showing that its implementation depends on explicit organization, continuous guidance, and classroom monitoring.

Students' Recount Writing Performance

Students' overall recount-writing performance improved following the PjBL unit. The pre-test mean was 64.75 (SD = 9.73), whereas the post-test mean was 71.81 (SD = 9.53), producing a mean gain of 7.06 points. The minimum score increased from 47 to 55 and the maximum from 84 to 90. The Shapiro–Wilk test on difference scores was non-significant, $W = .954$, $p = .184$, indicating that the normality assumption was met. The paired-samples t-test showed a statistically significant difference, $t(31) = -8.432$, $p < .001$. Expressed as post-test minus pre-test, the mean improvement was 7.06 with a 95% confidence interval from 5.35 to 8.77. Cohen's d_z was 1.49, representing a large within-group effect. Because the study did not include a control group, this result indicates substantial improvement following the intervention but does not establish that PjBL was the sole causal explanation. No separate inferential tests were conducted for the five analytic writing components. Therefore, the component-level differences reported below are interpreted as descriptive patterns and should not be understood as statistically established component-specific effects.

Table 3.
Overall Inferential Results and Descriptive Changes in Writing Components

Indicator	Pre-test	Post-test	Change / analysis
Overall score, M (SD)	64.75 (9.73)	71.81 (9.53)	+7.06
Content	20.47	22.44	+1.97
Organization	13.38	14.94	+1.56
Vocabulary	13.34	14.50	+1.16
Language use/grammar	14.31	16.22	+1.91
Mechanics	3.25	3.72	+0.47
Normality of difference scores	—	—	$W = .954$; $p = .184$
Paired-samples t-test	—	—	$t(31) = -8.432$; $p < .001$
Effect size	—	—	Cohen's $d_z = 1.49$ (large)

Source: Writing-test data processed with IBM SPSS Statistics 27 (2026).

Descriptively, the post-test means were higher than the pre-test means across all five analytic writing components. Content showed the largest mean difference (+1.97), followed by language use/grammar (+1.91), organization (+1.56), vocabulary (+1.16), and mechanics (+0.47). Because separate inferential tests were not conducted for these components, these differences are interpreted as descriptive patterns rather than statistically significant component-level effects. Nevertheless, the patterns provide useful contextual information when considered alongside the classroom-process data. Planning activities were particularly relevant to idea generation and chronological development; genre modelling and visual sequencing corresponded with organizational support; verb banks and feedback addressed grammar and vocabulary; and editing checklists focused on mechanics. Content showed the largest descriptive mean difference. Students did not begin by writing full paragraphs; they first identified participants, time, place, events, and feelings, and then transformed this information into a timeline, outline, and storyboard. Classroom evidence suggested that these activities provided students with opportunities to elaborate their experiences and develop more complete recounts. Peer discussion also allowed students to remember details and evaluate whether information was relevant. (Brown, 2007) conceptualizes writing as a recursive process of planning,

composing, and revising, and the present findings illustrate how a project structure can operationalize that process for young EFL learners.

Language use/grammar showed the second-largest descriptive mean difference, even though grammar was the least frequently selected area in the self-reported writing checklist. This apparent difference is informative. This descriptive pattern, together with the qualitative evidence, suggests that model texts, verb banks, sentence starters, teacher feedback, and revision were relevant forms of support for students' use of past forms and sentence structures. However, interview and open-ended data showed that students continued to struggle with irregular verbs, subject–verb relations, and transforming Indonesian ideas into English sentences. Improvement therefore did not mean mastery. The finding supports the use of analytic assessment, which makes progress visible while still identifying components requiring sustained instruction (Jacobs et al., 1981; Taufiquilloh et al., 2025; Weigle, 2002).

Organization showed a descriptive mean increase of 1.56 points. Classroom-process evidence indicated that students repeatedly connected their written recounts to chronological plans. The orientation established participants, time, and place; the events followed the timeline; and the re-orientation closed the experience with a feeling or reflection. Temporal connectives supplied linguistic signals for the sequence. The diorama added another representational layer because students needed to arrange scenes in the same order as the text. Genre pedagogy emphasizes explicit awareness of how texts are staged for particular purposes (Hyland, 2007; Knapp & Watkins, 2005), and the project gave students several opportunities to apply that awareness rather than encounter it only in a model-text explanation. Vocabulary showed a smaller descriptive mean increase. Students benefited from model texts, peer suggestions, verb banks, and contextual discussion, yet many still reported knowing an intended idea in Bahasa Indonesia without knowing the English expression. This limitation is consistent with research showing that lexical range and word choice remain persistent constraints in EFL writing (Raufi et al., 2024).

A four-meeting project can provide useful contextualized vocabulary practice, but lexical development requires repeated exposure and retrieval across a longer period. Future cycles should therefore recycle key verbs, adjectives, and temporal expressions before, during, and after the project. Mechanics showed the smallest descriptive mean increase. Students used final editing checklists and received feedback on punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and paragraphing, but these elements were addressed mainly after the more substantive content and organization decisions. Some errors also recurred despite correction. This pattern does not imply that mechanics was ignored; rather, it suggests that surface conventions may require more frequent short practice and multiple writing cycles. The relatively small change also illustrates the benefit of reporting component-level results. An overall significant gain can conceal areas in which progress is more limited and targeted follow-up remains necessary.

Feedback and revision were the most plausible instructional mechanisms connecting the project process to the score improvement. Students produced drafts, received component-specific comments, discussed changes, recorded revisions, and completed final checks. This cycle created time between initial expression and final evaluation, allowing students to notice both meaning-level and language-level problems. The finding is consistent with (Lu, 2021), who emphasized structured project and planning support in writing development. It also reinforces the principle that PjBL should not be assessed only through the attractiveness of the final artifact; the quality of drafting, feedback, and revision is central to the language-learning value of the project.

Collaboration may have supported individual performance indirectly. Although the tests were completed individually, project discussion exposed students to alternative ideas, vocabulary, organizational choices, and error corrections. Students could rehearse the recount orally, compare drafts, and observe how peers responded to feedback. This social support was especially useful in a context where classroom time represented the main opportunity for English interaction. Nevertheless, collaboration needed to be balanced with individual accountability. Individual testing, personal reflection, role distribution, and teacher monitoring helped ensure that group support did not obscure each learner's own writing development.

Integrated Interpretation, Rural Context, and Limitations

Taken together, the findings should be interpreted as evidence from a structured PjBL-based writing unit rather than from PjBL in isolation. The project cycle incorporated explicit genre instruction, teacher scaffolding, peer collaboration, feedback, revision, and low-technology visual support. Because these instructional elements were embedded within the same intervention and were not experimentally separated, the study cannot determine the independent contribution of PjBL relative to each form of instructional support. Instead, the evidence indicates that the observed short-term writing improvement occurred within this integrated instructional configuration. The project created a sequence in which students generated ideas, examined genre expectations, drafted, obtained feedback, revised, edited, presented, and reflected. Each stage addressed a specific difficulty identified in the preliminary context. Planning addressed limited idea development; timelines and storyboards addressed weak event organization; language resources and feedback addressed vocabulary and grammar; and checklists addressed mechanics. The integrated design made it possible to connect statistical change with observable instructional practices.

The results also clarify the relationship between PjBL and genre-based writing instruction. PjBL supplied authenticity, collaboration, decision-making, and a public endpoint, while genre instruction supplied explicit knowledge of purpose, structure, and language features. Their integration appeared pedagogically important in this setting. Without a clear language focus, the project could have prioritized the diorama and presentation over written quality; without project activity, genre instruction might have remained teacher directed and disconnected from meaningful production. In combination, the two approaches enabled students to work toward an authentic product while retaining a clear writing objective.

The rural context influenced both project design and interpretation. Limited access to English outside school increased the importance of classroom interaction and teacher support. A low-technology visual product made the project feasible, but the absence of advanced technology did not prevent inquiry, collaboration, revision, or presentation. This supports the argument that PjBL should be adapted to local resources rather than equated with digital production. Rural implementation remains demanding, however, because teachers must manage time, heterogeneous proficiency, material preparation, group participation, and language scaffolding within regular curriculum constraints (Ahiaku et al., 2025; Echazarra & Radinger, 2019).

Several challenges remained. Students continued to experience difficulty with irregular past-tense forms, sentence construction, vocabulary, punctuation, and presentation confidence. Some groups encountered unequal participation or differences of opinion, and the four-meeting schedule limited opportunities for repeated independent writing. These constraints explain why the behavioral perception mean was lower than the other dimensions and why mechanics and vocabulary showed

smaller gains. They also demonstrate that a positive overall result should not be interpreted as the elimination of all writing problems.

The study has several methodological limitations. It involved one intact class in one school and employed a one-group pre-test–post-test design. The absence of a comparison group means that maturation, task familiarity, regular classroom learning, and other uncontrolled factors cannot be completely separated from the intervention. The relatively small sample also limits statistical generalization, while the questionnaire captured students' perceived experiences rather than objective evidence of skill development. In addition, the four-meeting implementation did not establish the long-term retention of students' writing development. All pre-test and post-test scripts were scored by the English teacher who facilitated the PjBL unit. Although the same analytic rubric and scoring criteria were applied to both tests, independent double scoring and inter-rater or intra-rater reliability evidence were not reported. Consequently, possible rater-related subjectivity and scoring inconsistency cannot be completely ruled out. The qualitative coding and interpretation were conducted by a single researcher without independent double coding. Therefore, possible researcher subjectivity cannot be completely excluded, although source triangulation was used to strengthen the credibility of the interpretations. The large effect size should therefore be interpreted as a substantial within-group change in this particular context rather than as definitive evidence that PjBL was the sole cause of the improvement.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes a contextually detailed account of how PjBL can be implemented for recount writing in a rural junior high school. It extends outcome-focused research by showing the interaction of project stages, genre scaffolding, teacher support, collaboration, perception, and component-level writing development. The findings are consistent with broader evidence that PjBL can strengthen engagement and meaningful learning when it is carefully designed (Bell, 2010; Guo et al., 2020), while also supporting calls for contextual adaptation and sustained scaffolding in diverse classrooms (Gonzalez-Vidal, 2024; Hsin & Wu, 2023).

CONCLUSION

Project-Based Learning was implemented as a structured, scaffolded, collaborative, and process-oriented approach to recount-writing instruction in the rural junior high school EFL context examined in this study. Across four meetings, students progressed from project initiation and genre orientation to idea development, drafting, feedback, revision, product completion, presentation, and reflection. Explicit genre instruction, teacher scaffolding, peer collaboration, feedback, revision, and the low-technology diorama supported different stages of this process, while the written recount remained the primary learning and assessment outcome. Students perceived the learning process very positively, particularly in the cognitive and collaborative dimensions, although behavioral demands related to sustained participation, task completion, and responsibility remained comparatively more challenging. Students' recount-writing performance improved following the PjBL unit, with the mean score increasing from 64.75 to 71.81. The pre-test–post-test difference was statistically significant and represented a large within-group effect. At the component level, descriptive mean differences were positive across all five writing components, with the largest differences observed in content, language use/grammar, and organization, while vocabulary and mechanics showed more modest changes. Because these component-level differences were not tested inferentially, they should be interpreted as descriptive patterns rather than statistically established effects. The qualitative evidence helped explain these patterns by showing how planning tools

supported idea development and sequencing, language resources and feedback supported grammar and vocabulary, and revision and editing provided opportunities to improve drafts. The findings therefore suggest that the combination of project-based activity with explicit genre instruction, structured collaboration, teacher scaffolding, feedback, revision, and context-appropriate resources may have supported students' recount-writing development.

These findings should be interpreted within the methodological boundaries of the study. The use of one intact class and a one-group pre-test–post-test design without a comparison group prevents the observed improvement from being attributed exclusively to PjBL. In addition, the same English teacher implemented the PjBL unit and scored both writing tests without independent double scoring or inter-rater reliability evidence, while the qualitative data were coded by a single researcher. The findings therefore represent context-specific evidence of improvement following the instructional unit rather than definitive causal evidence of the effectiveness of PjBL. Future research should examine similar implementations with comparison groups, independent or blinded writing raters, longer intervention periods, and follow-up assessment to determine whether the observed writing development is sustained over time. Within these boundaries, the study contributes a contextually grounded account of how PjBL can be adapted for recount-writing instruction in a rural EFL classroom without relying on sophisticated digital resources. Its contribution lies not in the project product alone, but in showing how project activity can be integrated with explicit genre instruction, writing-process scaffolding, collaboration, and iterative feedback while maintaining written language development as the central instructional objective.

RECOMMENDATIONS

English teachers are recommended to design PjBL as a writing cycle rather than as a final-product assignment. Each project should include explicit genre modelling, manageable planning tools, staged deadlines, individual accountability, formative feedback, revision, and reflection. Language support should be differentiated for lower-proficiency learners, and mechanics and vocabulary should receive repeated practice beyond the final editing stage. Visual or digital artifacts should be selected only when they directly support the communicative and linguistic objectives of the text. Schools should provide sufficient instructional time, basic materials, and opportunities to display student work. Future research should involve comparison groups, larger and more diverse samples, longer implementation periods, delayed post-tests, and repeated independent writing tasks. Further studies may also compare low-technology and digital project formats and examine which forms of scaffolding contribute most strongly to particular writing components.

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