

Research Article

Craft, Write, and Design: Exploring Creative Writing through Narrative Projects in an International Islamic Boarding School

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ABSTRACT

In Indonesia's educational landscape, where English proficiency is essential for global competitiveness, writing remains one of the most challenging skills for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. Despite years of formal instruction, many students struggle to produce original writing due to linguistic limitations and teacher-centered pedagogies. This issue is particularly evident in Islamic boarding schools, where religious priorities often overshadow creative language learning. To address this gap, this study explores (1) how Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is implemented in teaching narrative writing and (2) students' perceptions of using narrative projects to develop creative writing skills. Using a qualitative case study design, the research was conducted at Al Izzah International Boarding School Batu, involving 160 Grade 11 students, including 10 interview participants, and four English teachers. Data were collected through classroom observations, interviews, field notes, and students' writing projects. The implementation followed a seven-stage model adapted from Friska (2018): project initiation, planning, drafting, revision, presentation, reflection, and value integration. Findings showed that PjBL effectively enhanced students' linguistic proficiency, creativity, and moral awareness. Students demonstrated stronger idea generation, narrative organization, and integration of Islamic values such as honesty, perseverance, and empathy. Positive perceptions indicated that narrative projects made writing more engaging, meaningful, and personally relevant. Overall, PjBL functioned as a holistic pedagogical model aligning language development with character education, suggesting its potential for broader application in Islamic and EFL contexts.

Keywords: Classroom Action Research; Learning Engagement; Small Group Discussion; Speaking; Students

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 10.08.2026

Accepted: 28.08.2026

Published: 21.09.2026

ARTICLE LICENCE

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1. Introduction

Formal academic English instruction emphasizes improving students' ability to use language in both spoken and written contexts. Learning genre texts could build knowledge of multimodality, engage in theoretical and practical learning, and raise awareness of their contributions to English teaching and learning practices (Abdullah, et al., 2022; Aslamiah, 2021). Language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, play essential roles. However, among these, writing is often the most challenging skill for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners (Baharudin et al., 2023). Data consistently indicate that ESL students across different levels perform worse in writing than in other language skills (Ghulamuddin et al., 2021).

Difficulties in teaching writing generally stem from two main sources: the students and the teachers. From the student perspective, common problems include limited

vocabulary, grammatical and syntactical issues such as frequent errors in subject-verb agreement, pronoun usage, tense consistency, articles, prepositions, and sentence structures (Gorospe & Rayton, 2022). Many students struggle with organizing ideas coherently and cohesively. Additionally, students tend to rely heavily on textual models, often copying them rather than generating their own ideas, which leads to a lack of originality in their writing (Wakerkwa & Astuti, 2025). From the teacher's side, the use of outdated and monotonous teaching methods often results in students losing interest in learning to write (Suci et al., 2023). Teachers may lack awareness or training in effective writing instruction, leading to an overreliance on tasks such as identifying and rewriting generic structures from textbooks, rather than encouraging students to paraphrase or use their own words (Farizka et al., 2020). This approach limits students' opportunities for critical thinking and expression (Aliakbari & Tarlani-Aliabadi, 2017).

Regarding these challenges, writing instruction must be engaging and relevant. Allowing students to self-assign writing topics based on their interests has been shown to improve intrinsic motivation (Alzubi & Nazim, 2024). Motivation can be fostered through relevant, collaborative tasks, interesting topics, and supportive methods (Hikmah & Al Hafizh, 2024). Teachers are encouraged to create writing tasks that are meaningful, practical, socially engaging, and learner-centered. For instance, visual exposure, such as pictures, can help students generate ideas and reduce plagiarism, as images prompt them to use original language by interpreting symbols and colors. Visual stimuli have been shown to significantly enhance language learning and writing skills, particularly by aiding students in the idea-generation process during narrative writing tasks (Nabilla & Fithriani, 2023).

Narrative texts are particularly effective for such activities. Pardiyono (2007) defines narrative text as writing that entertains through a sequence of events, often involving moral lessons. These texts typically include structures such as orientation, complication, resolution, and reorientation. Common types of narrative texts include myths, fables, and legends. However, in practice, teachers often rely on overly familiar stories (e.g., Situ Bagendit, Tangkuban Perahu) and limit tasks to generic structure identification, which does not foster creativity or language production. Given these issues, writing instruction must be both theoretical and practical.

The 2013 curriculum revision in Indonesia supports this need by encouraging varied instructional strategies. It recommends the scientific approach and highlights three methods: discovery learning, problem-based learning, and project-based learning (PjBL). This method is well-suited for teaching narrative writing. It involves student-centered projects that are collaborative, creative, and grounded in real-world application. Students engage in planning, problem-solving, and producing tangible outcomes. PjBL as an instructional method focused on creating projects, while the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia [Kemendikbud], 2016) highlights that students are expected to generate creative products based on challenging topics. PjBL fosters skills such as teamwork, critical thinking, and communication.

Moreover, PjBL aligns with experiential learning, where students acquire knowledge through practice. In this model, the teacher acts as a facilitator rather than a teacher (White, 2001). Students are empowered to select relevant topics, lead discussions, assess peers' work, and develop independence. This learner-centered environment supports deeper learning and increases long-term academic success. Despite the documented benefits of PjBL in language education, its implementation in Islamic boarding school contexts remains relatively underexplored, particularly in tahfidz-oriented settings. Previous research has examined PjBL in English language teaching at an Islamic boarding school (Yamin et al., 2023), while other studies have identified

subject overload and limited instructional time as challenges in integrating English into Islamic boarding school curricula (Habiburrahim et al., 2022). These contextual conditions may create challenges for implementing extended, student-centered approaches such as PjBL, particularly when English writing requires sustained time for planning, drafting, feedback, and revision.

This gap calls for an urgent investigation into how PjBL can be meaningfully adapted and integrated within the unique educational culture of modern Islamic boarding schools. These institutions face the dual challenge of maintaining Islamic values while preparing students to engage with global competencies such as critical thinking, collaboration, and creative communication. Thus, cultivating creative writing through narrative projects is not only pedagogically relevant but also strategically significant. It addresses both national curriculum expectations and the growing demand for well-rounded graduates who are both spiritually grounded and academically competent.

The present study aims to explore how PjBL can be utilized to enhance students' narrative writing skills in English within a modern Islamic boarding school. By contextualizing PBL within a faith-based educational framework, this research seeks to offer a balanced instructional model that respects religious commitments while fostering creativity and language development. Investigating this integration is urgent for educational stakeholders seeking to bridge the gap between Islamic traditions and 21st-century learning outcomes. Ultimately, this study aspires to contribute to the development of innovative, contextualized teaching strategies that honor both the academic and spiritual missions of Islamic education. The researcher designs the following research questions.

1. How is project-based learning (PjBL) implemented in teaching narrative writing in a modern Islamic boarding school?
2. What are the students' perceptions of using narrative projects in developing their creative writing skills?

2. Method

This study adopted an embedded single-case study design (Yin, 2018) to explore the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in teaching narrative writing at an international Islamic boarding school. This approach was considered appropriate because the study focused on a single bounded case, the implementation of PjBL within one institutional setting, while examining multiple embedded units of analysis, including English teachers, students, classroom observations, interviews, and students' writing portfolios. The study was conducted from January to July 2025 at an international Islamic senior high boarding school in Indonesia. The project was implemented in three main stages.

First month, students explored narrative texts and became familiar with their structures and features. The following two months were devoted to developing a narrative writing book through a series of writing activities, including planning, drafting, revising, and compiling their work. The remaining months focused on refining and completing the narrative projects, with particular attention to supporting students' creative writing development. The school was selected as an information-rich case because it implements a bilingual curriculum, integrating both the Cambridge Curriculum and the Indonesian National Curriculum, while embedding Islamic character education across its instructional practices. This distinctive educational setting provided an appropriate context for examining how Project-Based Learning (PjBL) was implemented in narrative writing instruction within an Islamic educational environment.

The study involved four English teachers responsible for teaching narrative writing and 160 Grade 11 students from five classes (30–34 students per class). The first researcher served as an English teacher at the participating school, providing an in-depth understanding of the instructional context. In contrast, the second and third researchers acted as outsiders throughout the study. They independently conducted classroom observations and interviews, reviewed the data, and engaged in regular discussions to minimize potential bias and enhance the credibility of the findings. The instructional implementation followed the seven essential steps of Project-Based Learning proposed by Friska (2018), including problem introduction, key question discussion, action planning, investigation and reflection, review and reevaluation, final product presentation, and reflection and assessment. These stages provided a pedagogical framework for examining how PjBL was enacted in narrative writing instruction and how students progressed throughout the project.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Study Participants

Participant Group	Code/Class	Male	Female	Total	Description
English Teachers	T1–T4	2	2	4	English teachers responsible for teaching Grade 11 narrative writing using Project-Based Learning (PjBL).
Students	XII- J	0	30	30	Participants in the narrative writing project.
Students	XII-K	0	31	31	Participants in the narrative writing project.
Students	XII-L	0	32	32	Participants in the narrative writing project.
Students	XII-M	0	33	33	Participants in the narrative writing project.
Students	XII-N	0	34	34	Participants in the narrative writing project.
Total				160	Four English teachers and 160 Grade 11 students participated in the study.

Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, students' writing projects, and field notes. Classroom observations were conducted in ten meetings, with each session lasting within 100 minutes. The observations followed a structured checklist adapted from core PjBL principles and focused on the stages of project implementation, teacher facilitation, student collaboration, the integration of Islamic values, and the use of scaffolding strategies and instructional media. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all four English teachers and ten purposely selected students who actively participated in the project. Teacher interviews explored lesson planning, instructional strategies, and challenges in integrating PjBL with English language learning and Islamic character education, while student interviews examined their perceptions of the narrative writing project, collaborative learning experiences, creativity, and writing development. In addition, students' writing portfolios, consisting of drafts and final narrative storybook projects, were collected to examine creative expression, narrative development, and the incorporation of Islamic values. To enhance the validity of the portfolio analysis, the students' written products were independently evaluated by an experienced external English teacher with expertise in writing assessment to reduce the potential researcher bias.

Table 2. Steps of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) Based on Friska (2018).

Step	Stage	Description
1	Problem Introduction	The teacher introduced the project through an explanation and pictures (consisting of elements) to create the imaginative story.
2	Key Question Discussion	Learners explored the project group discussion.
3	Action Planning	Learners developed a plan to design the timeline, built a sequence of plots, translated from Indonesian to English, and decorated the imaginative story.
4	Investigation & Reflection	Learners conduct research based on their plans while engaging in metacognitive reflection.
5	Review & Reevaluation	Groups share findings and reassess their understanding, often prompting additional research.
6	Final Product/Presentation	Students produce a final output: a short report showcasing their imaginative storybook project.
7	Final Reflection & Assessment	Learners evaluate their individual and team performance, reflecting on successes and areas for improvement.

The data were analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) six-phase framework. Interview recordings were transcribed and analyzed with classroom observation records, field notes, and students' writing projects. The researchers first familiarized with the dataset through repeated reading, followed by inductive coding to identify meaningful segments related to PjBL implementation, teacher facilitation, collaboration, creativity, Islamic values, and instructional challenges. Related codes were then grouped into preliminary themes, which were iteratively reviewed, refined, and defined to ensure coherence and alignment with the research questions. Methodological triangulation was employed by integrating evidence from observations, interviews, portfolios, and field notes. Classroom observations, teachers' interviews, and field notes primarily informed the analysis of PjBL implementation (RQ1), and student interviews and portfolios addressed students' engagement and creative development (RQ2).

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, member checking was conducted with the participating teachers, and an audit trail documenting coding decisions and theme development was maintained throughout the analytical process. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the school administration before data collection. Parents or guardians were informed about the study through the students' homeroom teachers, and all participating students received a clear explanation of the research objectives, procedures, and their rights as participants. The students were assured that their decision to participate or withdraw would not influence their academic grades or classroom evaluation. To protect participants' privacy, pseudonyms were used throughout the study, and all identifying information was removed from the interview transcripts, observation records, and students' written portfolios.

3. Results

3.1. The Implementation of Project-based Learning (PBL) in Teaching Narrative Writing in a Modern Islamic Boarding School

The implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in teaching narrative writing at Al Izzah International Boarding School followed a structured, seven-step process

based on Friska's (2018) PBL model. Through classroom observations, teacher interviews, and field notes, it was evident that the PBL approach was adapted to meet both academic goals and the spiritual values embedded within the school's Islamic framework. The first step is Project Initiation and Problem Introduction. English teachers introduced the writing project through engaging visual prompts, such as symbolic and colorful illustrations designed to stimulate imagination and originality. Teachers explicitly encouraged students to develop fictional stories with Islamic values, moral lessons, and cultural relevance.

This stage effectively generated curiosity and laid the groundwork for learner ownership of the writing task. The narrative text themes explored in this study include fables involving the lives of mermaids and forest animals, legends inspired by Javanese cultural heritage, as well as classic fairy tales and stories about princesses. Based on the teacher's observation, the students responded positively to the visual prompts and theme options. Many students showed enthusiasm in selecting characters, setting, and moral messages that reflected both their creativity and cultural or spiritual understanding. The diversity of themes ranges from mystical forest creatures and mermaids to local legends and fairy tales. The teacher allowed students to explore familiar elements while also reimagining them in new ways. This encouraged them to engage more deeply with the writing process from the beginning.



Figure 1. The Interactive and Engaging Prompts to Increase Students' Imagination

The second stage of the project-based learning implementation focused on collaborative exploration and planning. Students were divided into small groups and tasked with developing the key components of their narrative texts, including character development, plot structure, and moral message. During this phase, there was strong evidence of active student engagement, particularly in group discussions that required negotiation, critical thinking, and idea generation. Classroom observations revealed that students worked together to shape the narrative elements, specifically orientation, complication, and resolution. These tools helped scaffold the storytelling process and encouraged structured creativity. Teachers acted as facilitators by posing reflective and open-ended questions such as, "What lesson do you want the readers to learn?" or "How does your character change by the end of the story?".

From the interview data, teachers reported a noticeable increase in student autonomy and initiative. One teacher stated, "When students asked, 'Can we make the mermaid powerful but still kind?' or 'Can our story mix Javanese legends with a modern city setting?', it was clear they were taking creative risks and applying their own ideas, not just copying from models." Such questions, as also documented in the field notes, indicated that students were engaging in imaginative thinking and stepping away from retelling toward more original, student-driven storytelling. Students not only collaborated

effectively but also began to demonstrate learner agency, as they assumed responsibility for content development, divided writing and illustrating tasks, and consulted peers on narrative logic. These findings revealed that the project-based activities encouraged students to take a more active role in creating content rather than simply following teacher-directed instruction, which is consistent with the principles of project-based learning.

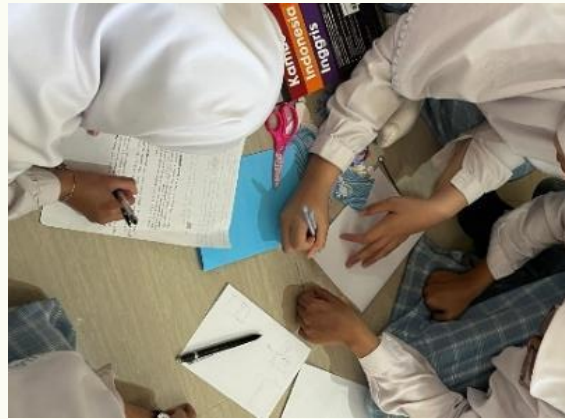


Figure 2. The Students Had a Collaboration to Develop the Story

In the third stage, students began drafting their narratives by sequencing plots, translating ideas from Bahasa Indonesia into English, and designing visual elements like cover pages. Each group created action plans and delegated roles, showing increased autonomy and collaboration. Classroom observations and field notes revealed a clear shift from passive learning to active creation. Students asked meaningful questions and integrated Islamic values naturally into their stories. Teachers supported the process by reviewing outlines and offering feedback on grammar, vocabulary, and moral content. The teacher noted, “They started to care about how their stories sounded and what messages they delivered.” This phase highlighted growing student ownership, creativity, and awareness of writing as both a linguistic and moral expression.



Figure 3. The Students Started to Design the Story Book

During this fourth stage, Investigation and Revisions. The students conducted informal research on moral lessons or Islamic themes to include in their stories. This was complemented by peer discussions and teacher feedback. Reflection activities allowed students to evaluate the relevance and clarity of their content. Teachers used this

opportunity to integrate language instruction, focusing on aspects like tense consistency and sentence variety. The fifth stage culminated in a mini-exhibition, where groups presented their storybooks to classmates and teachers. Each presentation included a synopsis, highlighted the moral message, and showcased creative visuals. Assessment was based on a rubric covering language use, originality, collaboration, and integration of Islamic values. This stage reinforced students' confidence and sense of accomplishment as authors and presenters.

The next stage was reflection and self-assessment. Following the project, students engaged in guided self-reflection through writing journals and group debriefing sessions. They assessed their learning experiences, challenges faced, and group dynamics. Teachers also reflected on the instructional process and shared their perceptions during the interviews. Most teachers described students as more engaged in the activities and more confident in using English. They also noted that students were able to develop and produce narrative texts as part of the project.

The last step was Adaptation to Islamic Values. One unique feature of PBL implementation in this context was its integration with Islamic values. Teachers encouraged students to embed Qur'anic principles such as honesty, perseverance, and kindness into their storylines. The Islamic curriculum coordinator highlighted that this integration ensured the alignment of PBL activities with the school's vision of producing spiritually grounded yet globally competent learners.

4.2 The Students' Perceptions of Using Narrative Projects in Developing Creative Writing Skills

The interviews revealed that students generally perceived the narrative project as an engaging and empowering experience that significantly contributed to the development of their creative writing skills. Several recurring themes emerged from their responses. Students felt that the project allowed them greater freedom to express themselves. Being able to choose their own topics, characters, and plotlines made them feel more like "real writers," moving away from the rigid structure often found in textbook-based learning. Many students expressed enjoyment in developing original ideas rather than copying models, which made the writing process more meaningful. One student reflected, "I usually copy from the book, but this time I created everything with my friends. It felt different, like I was really writing for the first time."

Visual prompts used at the beginning of the project were mentioned as helpful tools for generating ideas. These symbolic and colorful images sparked imagination and made it easier for students to begin developing their stories. A student commented, "The pictures helped me imagine what kind of world I wanted my story to take place in. It made the writing easier and more fun." Collaboration also played a key role. Students appreciated working in groups where they could brainstorm, share responsibilities, and negotiate plot ideas together. Group work helped reduce writing anxiety and made the process more dynamic. As one student described, "We combined our ideas, a legend from Java with a fairy tale ending. It was more exciting than just writing alone."

Another important aspect was the integration of Islamic values. Students felt proud to include themes such as honesty, patience, and kindness in their stories. They believed that this not only added depth to their narratives but also aligned with the values they learn daily in the boarding school. "We told a story about a greedy animal who changed after realizing the importance of gratitude. It reflected what we learn in Islamic lessons," one student explained.

Finally, the opportunity to present their finished work during a mini-exhibition was seen as both exciting and nerve-wracking. Despite initial nervousness, many students

reported feeling proud and accomplished after sharing their stories publicly. One student shared, "It was scary at first, but when people clapped after hearing our story, I felt really proud. It was my own creation."

In sum, students viewed the narrative project as a powerful learning experience. It supported their creative development, enhanced their motivation, fostered collaboration, and helped them connect personal, cultural, and religious values with language learning in a meaningful way.

4. Discussion

4.1 The Implementation of PjBL in Teaching Narrative Writing

The implementation followed a structured seven-stage model adapted from Friska (2018), consisting of project initiation, planning, drafting, revision, presentation, reflection, and value integration. These stages were not only directed at improving students' writing abilities but were also intentionally aligned with the school's Islamic character-building mission. The findings suggest that PBL offered a flexible yet purposeful framework that supported both language skill development and the cultivation of moral values. Prior related studies indicate that PBL enhances student engagement, motivation, and language proficiency in various contexts, including Mandarin and English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction (Joseph & Añazco, 2025).

This study explored the stage leaning of Friska (2018). One key aspect in the initial stage of the PBL implementation was the use of rich visual prompts, including colorful illustrations and symbolic imagery, to initiate the narrative writing process. These multimodal resources served not only as creative stimuli but also as scaffolding tools that guided students in generating original ideas. Additionally, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory emphasizes the role of mediated tools in supporting learners' cognitive development. In this context, visuals did not merely capture attention; they activated students' prior knowledge and imagination, enabling them to develop meaningful narratives.

During the second phase, students engaged in collaborative planning. Group discussions were observed to be rich in negotiation and critical dialogue, particularly as students built the structure of their stories, including orientation, complication, and resolution. This stage exemplifies the impact of collaboration in PBL; it has been shown to improve critical thinking skills and language competencies such as vocabulary acquisition, speaking, writing, and reading comprehension in EFL learners (Song et al., 2024). This collaboration also leads to and increases the students' initiative and reflects growing their role as active content creators (Lyu, 2023)

The third phase involved drafting narratives and visual design. Students translated their ideas into English, structured their plots, and developed visual elements like cover pages. This stage clearly demonstrated students' evolving awareness that writing is not only a language task but also a tool for moral expression. Students demonstrated autonomy and responsibility, as they delegated roles, cross-checked content, and integrated Islamic values organically into their texts. Furthermore, PjBL boosted participation, time management, and interaction among middle school students (Isnaini et al., 2024). The study of Hendrawati et al (2024) also claimed that PBL could lead to dynamic interaction and mutual assistance skills for the elementary level. It could be concluded that this approach was well-applied at various levels. Teachers should guide and actively support this activity by providing feedback on both linguistic and moral aspects.

In the fourth stage, students conducted informal research and engaged in peer review to refine their stories. The emphasis was on ensuring that the content conveyed clear moral lessons and aligned with Islamic values. Teachers guided reflection sessions to help students identify areas for improvement, both in content and language. This phase emphasized emotional and reflective growth, as students revisited their ideas, evaluated their clarity, and adjusted their language use. The integration of grammar instruction within moral discussion also reinforced the holistic nature of this approach. Teachers reported that students began to question not only the accuracy of their sentences but also the meaningfulness of their messages.

The fifth stage of PBL was showing a mini-exhibition where students presented their storybooks. Based on the prior related studies, this stage has been shown to significantly foster students' speaking skills, self-confidence, and learning achievement (Gamarra-Pautt & Giraldo-Martinez, 2025). The presentation consisted of a synopsis, visual display, and moral reflection. Assessment rubrics also involved language accuracy, originality, collaboration, and Islamic integration. This public sharing allowed students to perform as authors and presenters, reinforcing their confidence and sense of achievement (Manda & Arifin, 2024). It also reinforced the social aspect of learning, as students received peer and teacher feedback in a supportive environment.

The sixth phase involved structured reflection. Through group discussions, students identified challenges, celebrated successes, and evaluated group dynamics. Teachers also reflected on instructional strategies and student outcomes during follow-up interviews. These current findings also showed improvements in social skills, such as creativity, grammar awareness, and teamwork (Manda & Arifin, 2024). Teachers noted that the reflection stage helped consolidate learning and provided valuable insights for improving future instructional design.

A distinctive feature of this PBL implementation was its alignment with Islamic values. Students were encouraged to embed Qur'anic principles such as honesty, perseverance, and kindness within their narratives. This integration was not superficial but embedded meaningfully into plotlines and character development. This incorporation ensured that the project did not merely achieve academic goals but also fulfilled the school's vision of shaping students with both global competence and spiritual depth. Prior researchers also believed that PBL could boost Islamic values in educational settings (Afifah & Yuliyanti, 2024).

4.2 The Students Perceptions of Using Narrative Projects in Developing Creative Writing Skills

The findings of this study revealed that students perceived narrative projects within the Project-Based Learning (PBL) framework as a meaningful and engaging way to enhance their creative writing skills. This perception aligns with earlier studies that PBL significantly improves students' writing abilities by promoting active engagement, critical thinking, and creativity through real-world, student-centered tasks (Abrudan, 2025; Chao et al., 2025).

First, students highlighted that the narrative project provided them with greater freedom of expression. The opportunity to choose their own topics, characters, and plots gave learners a sense of ownership, shifting their role from passive recipients of textbook-based writing to active authors of original narratives (Sultan et al., 2023). This finding supports research by Beckett and Slater (2020), who argue that autonomy in project work stimulates students' intrinsic motivation and fosters creativity. The students' reflections in this study indicate that when given a choice, they were more invested in the writing process and developed a stronger sense of identity as writers.

Second, the use of visual prompts and multimodal resources was perceived as highly supportive in generating ideas. Students noted that colorful illustrations sparked imagination and helped them conceptualize the setting and characters for their stories. This confirms the argument of Mayer's (2009) multimodal learning theory, which suggests that visual stimuli enhance comprehension and creativity. The role of visual scaffolding in this study not only lowered students' anxiety at the beginning of the task but also made narrative writing more approachable and enjoyable.

Third, collaboration emerged as a central theme in students' perceptions. Group work encouraged peer negotiation, idea sharing, and co-construction of narratives. Such collaborative dynamics reduced individual writing anxiety and enabled students to pool their linguistic and creative resources. These findings from Lyu (2023) and Song et al. (2024), suggest that collaborative PBL environments enhance both social interaction and language development. In this study, students reported that joint brainstorming and task distribution strengthened their sense of community and made the process of writing more dynamic and supportive (Choustoulakis et al., 2025).

Fourth, students valued the integration of Islamic values into their narratives. Embedding moral lessons such as honesty, patience, and kindness made the stories personally and spiritually meaningful. The incorporation of religious values gave students a sense of pride and relevance, as they could connect language learning with their daily lives and faith. This aspect distinguishes the present study from previous PBL research in secular contexts, highlighting the adaptability of PBL in Islamic educational settings. It also resonates with Afifah and Yuliyanti (2024), who argued that project-based tasks can be effectively contextualized to reinforce moral and cultural education.

Finally, the presentation stage of the project contributed to students' sense of accomplishment. Although students initially felt nervous, they later expressed pride in sharing their creations with peers and teachers. This aligns with prior research by Gamarra-Pautt and Giraldo-Martinez (2025), who found that public presentation of project outcomes builds students' confidence and communicative competence. In this study, the presentation phase served as a powerful motivator, allowing students to experience authentic authorship and receive recognition for their work.

Taken together, these perceptions demonstrate that narrative projects fostered not only linguistic development but also creativity, collaboration, moral reflection, and self-confidence. The findings therefore support the view that PBL is not simply a pedagogical strategy for language learning but also a holistic framework for developing learners' cognitive, affective, and social dimensions. In the context of a modern Islamic boarding school, the integration of faith-based values further enhanced the meaningfulness of the project and ensured its alignment with institutional educational goals.

5. Conclusion

The implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in teaching narrative writing, through a structured seven-stage model adapted from Friska (2018), successfully fostered both linguistic and moral development. Students not only improved their creative writing skills but also embedded Islamic values such as honesty, perseverance, and kindness into their stories. The findings revealed that PBL supported autonomy, collaboration, critical thinking, and confidence, while simultaneously aligning with the institution's mission of character building. Students' positive perceptions confirmed that narrative projects made writing more meaningful, enjoyable, and personally relevant.

These results imply that PBL can serve as a holistic pedagogical model in EFL contexts, particularly in Islamic education. By integrating visual scaffolds, collaborative

planning, multimodal outputs, and value-based reflection, teachers can design language lessons that go beyond grammar and vocabulary, nurturing students' cognitive, affective, and moral capacities. The study also highlights the adaptability of PBL in religious schooling, showing its potential to harmonize global competence with local values. Future educators may consider using narrative projects as a strategy to cultivate creativity and intercultural awareness while reinforcing institutional missions.

Despite its promising outcomes, this study has several limitations. First, it was conducted in a single Islamic boarding school, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts. Second, the research relied primarily on qualitative data, such as classroom observation and student reflections, without measuring language gains quantitatively. Third, the implementation covered only one semester, leaving questions about the long-term sustainability of PBL's effects. Future research should include larger samples, mixed-method approaches, and longitudinal designs to provide deeper insights into the impact of PBL on narrative writing and value integration.

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