



Student Engagement in Project-Based Learning during the Writing Learning Process: A Case Study at State Islamic Senior High School

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-04-07 Revised: 2026-05-19 Accepted: 2026-08-10 Keywords: Student Engagement; Project-Based Learning; Writing Instruction; English as a Foreign Language; Qualitative Case Study DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i1.11381 Corresponding Author: Nur Ikhsan Amal nurikhsannamal@gmail.com Magister Linguistik, Universitas Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha	<i>Student engagement has become one of the most influential factors affecting students' learning experiences and academic achievement, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. In writing instruction, students frequently encounter challenges related to idea generation, organization, language accuracy, and sustained motivation, making meaningful engagement essential for successful learning. Project-Based Learning (PjBL) has been widely recognized as a student-centered instructional approach that promotes collaboration, authentic learning, and active participation. Although previous research has reported the effectiveness of PjBL in improving students' writing performance and motivation, limited attention has been given to how students demonstrate behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement throughout the writing process, particularly within Indonesian Islamic senior high schools. This research aims to analyze student engagement during the implementation of Project-Based Learning in the writing learning process at State Islamic Senior High School. A qualitative case study design was employed involving eleventh-grade students who participated in project-based writing activities. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation and analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). The findings indicate that students demonstrated varying levels of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement during different stages of project implementation. Collaborative learning activities</i>

encouraged active participation, increased learning motivation, and promoted deeper cognitive involvement during writing tasks. However, several students experienced challenges related to confidence, idea development, and sustained participation during revision activities. This research highlights the importance of creating collaborative learning environments that support multidimensional engagement throughout the writing process and provides pedagogical implications for English teachers implementing Project-Based Learning in EFL classrooms.

1. Introduction

English has become an essential international language that functions as a primary medium for global communication, academic exchange, scientific development, technological innovation, and professional interaction. As globalization continues to reshape educational and occupational demands, English proficiency is increasingly recognized as a fundamental competency required for participation in international communities. Consequently, English language education has become an important component of national education systems, including Indonesia, where English is taught as a foreign language from secondary education through higher education. Beyond linguistic competence, English instruction is expected to develop students' communication skills, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving abilities that align with twenty-first-century educational goals.

Among the four language skills, writing is widely acknowledged as one of the most complex competencies for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners because it requires the integration of linguistic knowledge, cognitive processes, and communicative competence. According to Ken Hyland (2003), writing involves not only producing grammatically accurate sentences but also organizing ideas coherently, developing logical arguments, considering audience expectations, and communicating meaning effectively. Unlike receptive skills, writing requires students to construct knowledge actively while simultaneously applying vocabulary, grammar, discourse organization, and critical thinking. Therefore, writing instruction demands learning environments that encourage students to participate actively throughout the entire writing process rather than merely focusing on the final written product.

Despite its importance, writing remains one of the most challenging skills for Indonesian EFL learners. Numerous classroom observations and educational research indicate that students frequently struggle to generate ideas, organize paragraphs coherently, use appropriate vocabulary, maintain grammatical

accuracy, and revise their work effectively. These challenges are often intensified by limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom, resulting in low confidence and reduced willingness to engage in writing activities. Furthermore, writing instruction in many Indonesian classrooms continues to emphasize teacher-centered practices, mechanical exercises, and product-oriented assessment, providing relatively limited opportunities for authentic communication, collaboration, and reflective learning. Such instructional conditions may reduce students' motivation and participation, ultimately influencing the quality of their learning experiences.

One important factor influencing successful learning is student engagement. Student engagement refers to the extent to which students invest behavioral, emotional, and cognitive effort in learning activities. Jennifer A. Fredricks, Phyllis C. Blumenfeld, and Alison H. Paris (2004) conceptualize engagement as a multidimensional construct comprising behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement. Behavioral engagement relates to students' active participation, persistence, and involvement in classroom activities. Emotional engagement concerns students' interest, enjoyment, motivation, and emotional attachment to learning. Cognitive engagement reflects students' willingness to invest mental effort through critical thinking, self-regulation, and strategic learning. These three dimensions collectively determine how students experience learning and influence the effectiveness of instructional approaches implemented in the classroom.

To enhance student engagement, many educators have adopted student-centered instructional models that emphasize active participation and authentic learning experiences. One of the most widely implemented approaches is Project-Based Learning (PjBL), which organizes learning through meaningful projects requiring collaboration, inquiry, creativity, and problem-solving. Rather than positioning students as passive recipients of knowledge, PjBL encourages learners to investigate real-world problems, construct understanding collaboratively, and produce authentic products demonstrating their learning. Within writing instruction, project-based activities enable students to experience writing as a recursive and collaborative process involving brainstorming, drafting, revising, peer feedback, editing, and presentation. Such learning environments provide opportunities for students to become actively engaged throughout every stage of the writing process.

Previous research has consistently demonstrated the positive contribution of Project-Based Learning to English language instruction. Research has shown that PjBL improves writing achievement, increases learning motivation, strengthens collaboration, and develops higher-order thinking skills. Nevertheless, existing research predominantly focuses on measurable learning outcomes, such as writing scores or general academic achievement, while providing relatively limited explanations regarding how students experience engagement throughout

project implementation. In addition, many investigations have been conducted in universities or general secondary schools, leaving Islamic senior high schools relatively underrepresented in the literature. Moreover, only a limited number of qualitative investigations have explored how behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement emerge dynamically during collaborative writing activities.

This limitation indicates an important research gap. Although Project-Based Learning has been widely acknowledged as an effective instructional approach, insufficient attention has been given to understanding the processes through which student engagement develops during project-based writing instruction, particularly within Indonesian Islamic secondary school contexts. Examining engagement from behavioral, emotional, and cognitive perspectives is essential because these dimensions influence not only students' participation but also the quality of their learning experiences and writing development. Without understanding how engagement is constructed and sustained during classroom interaction, educators may find it difficult to design instructional practices that effectively support meaningful participation.

This research addresses the identified gap by investigating student engagement during the implementation of Project-Based Learning in the writing learning process at State Islamic Senior High School. Unlike previous research that primarily emphasizes learning outcomes, the present research focuses on students' lived experiences and multidimensional engagement throughout project-based writing activities. Specifically, this research analyzes how behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement are manifested during collaborative writing tasks and explores the factors that facilitate or constrain students' engagement. By providing an in-depth qualitative understanding of classroom interaction within an Indonesian Islamic senior high school, this research contributes to the growing body of literature concerning student engagement and Project-Based Learning in EFL writing instruction. Furthermore, the findings are expected to provide practical implications for English teachers seeking to design more engaging, collaborative, and meaningful writing instruction.

2. Method

This research employed a qualitative case study design to explore students' engagement during the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in the writing learning process at State Islamic Senior High School, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the research sought to obtain an in-depth understanding of students' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement within their natural classroom setting. Rather than measuring engagement through numerical data, this research focused on understanding how students participated, interacted, responded, and invested cognitive effort throughout project-based writing activities. A case study design enabled the researcher to investigate the phenomenon comprehensively within its real-life educational context, where Project-Based Learning had been implemented

as part of English writing instruction.

The participants of this research were eleventh-grade students who had experienced Project-Based Learning in English writing classes. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who could provide rich and relevant information regarding their learning experiences during project implementation. The English teacher was also involved as an additional participant to provide contextual information concerning classroom instruction, learning activities, and students' participation throughout the implementation of Project-Based Learning. The selection of participants was based on their direct involvement in collaborative writing projects, enabling the researcher to obtain comprehensive insights into student engagement from multiple perspectives.

Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation to ensure methodological triangulation and enhance the credibility of the findings. Classroom observation served as the primary data collection technique because student engagement is reflected through observable classroom behaviors and interactions. During the observations, the researcher examined students' participation in discussions, collaboration with peers, persistence in completing project tasks, emotional responses during learning activities, confidence in expressing ideas, motivation to participate, and cognitive efforts demonstrated through idea development, problem-solving, revision, and reflection during the writing process. Observation activities were conducted throughout the implementation of Project-Based Learning to capture students' engagement across different stages of project completion.

To obtain deeper explanations regarding students' experiences, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students and the English teacher. The interviews provided opportunities for participants to explain their perceptions, feelings, challenges, and learning experiences during project-based writing activities. Open-ended interview questions were designed to explore how students participated in collaborative learning, maintained motivation throughout project implementation, solved writing-related problems, responded to peer feedback, and developed their written work. The teacher's interview complemented students' perspectives by providing additional information regarding classroom implementation, instructional strategies, and observed patterns of student engagement.

Documentation was employed as supporting evidence to strengthen the credibility of the research findings. The collected documents included lesson plans, students' writing products, project reports, classroom photographs, field notes, and other instructional materials related to the implementation of Project-Based Learning. These documents were used to verify observational findings and interview responses, thereby increasing the trustworthiness of the data through source triangulation.

The research instruments consisted of an observation sheet, a semi-structured interview guide, and a documentation checklist. The observation sheet was developed based on the multidimensional framework of student engagement proposed by Fredricks et al. (2004), encompassing behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. Behavioral engagement was indicated by students' classroom participation, collaboration, attendance, persistence, and task completion. Emotional engagement was identified through students' enthusiasm, confidence, interest, motivation, and positive emotional responses toward learning activities. Cognitive engagement was reflected through students' critical thinking, idea generation, problem-solving strategies, self-regulation, and revision efforts during writing tasks. Meanwhile, the interview guide was designed to explore participants' experiences corresponding to these three dimensions, while the documentation checklist facilitated the organization of supporting classroom documents.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive qualitative data analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Initially, the researcher transcribed interview recordings, organized observation notes, and reviewed supporting documents. Subsequently, the data were coded according to the three dimensions of student engagement, namely behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement. Similar codes were then grouped into broader categories representing recurring engagement patterns observed throughout project-based writing activities. Following the categorization process, the researcher organized the findings into thematic displays to facilitate interpretation and comparison across participants. Finally, the themes were interpreted by relating the findings to the theoretical framework of student engagement and previous empirical research before conclusions were drawn.

To facilitate the interpretation of the findings, participants' engagement was categorized into three levels: high, moderate, and low engagement. The categorization was based on the consistency and intensity of students' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive involvement demonstrated throughout project-based writing activities. Participants who consistently showed active participation, positive emotional involvement, and sustained cognitive effort across different stages of project implementation were categorized as highly engaged. Participants whose engagement fluctuated across one or more dimensions were categorized as moderately engaged, whereas participants who demonstrated limited participation, low motivation, and minimal cognitive involvement were categorized as having low engagement. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, methodological triangulation was applied by comparing evidence obtained from classroom observations, interviews, and documentation. The researcher continuously compared information from these multiple sources throughout the analysis process before drawing the final conclusions.

3. Result

The findings of this research revealed that students demonstrated multidimensional engagement throughout the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in the writing learning process. Analysis of classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation indicated that students' engagement emerged through behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. Furthermore, several contextual factors influenced the extent to which students engaged during collaborative writing activities.

Behavioral Engagement

The observation data indicated that most students actively participated in project-based writing activities from the beginning to the completion of the projects. Students demonstrated behavioral engagement by attending classroom meetings consistently, participating in brainstorming sessions, contributing ideas during group discussions, asking questions when they encountered difficulties, and completing assigned responsibilities within their groups. During collaborative writing sessions, students worked together to identify topics, organize ideas, prepare drafts, and present their final projects.

Interview data further supported these findings. Several participants explained that Project-Based Learning encouraged them to become more active because each member was expected to contribute to the completion of the project. Students perceived collaborative discussions as opportunities to exchange ideas, clarify information, and assist one another in solving writing-related problems. As one participant stated:

“Working in groups made me more confident to express my ideas because my friends helped me whenever I did not know how to continue my writing.” (Student 4)

These findings suggest that Project-Based Learning encourages students to become active participants rather than passive recipients of classroom instruction. Collaborative learning activities require continuous interaction among group members, thereby increasing students' participation throughout the writing process.

Emotional Engagement

The findings also demonstrated positive emotional engagement during Project-Based Learning. Observation data showed that students appeared enthusiastic during brainstorming activities, collaborative discussions, and project presentations. Most students expressed enjoyment while working collaboratively because they felt more comfortable sharing ideas with peers than completing writing tasks individually.

Interview findings revealed that collaborative learning reduced students' anxiety toward English writing. Participants explained that discussing ideas before writing enabled them to organize their thoughts more effectively and increased their confidence in producing written texts. One participant explained:

"I was not afraid of making mistakes because my friends and teacher gave suggestions before I finished my writing." (Student 7)

Despite these positive responses, emotional engagement fluctuated during the revision stage. Several students reported feeling less confident when correcting grammatical errors and reorganizing paragraphs because they doubted the accuracy of their writing. Nevertheless, teacher guidance and peer feedback gradually strengthened their confidence and encouraged them to continue improving their work.

These findings indicate that emotional engagement develops through supportive classroom interactions where students receive encouragement from both peers and teachers.

Cognitive Engagement

The findings further revealed that Project-Based Learning promoted students' cognitive engagement during writing instruction. Students actively generated ideas through brainstorming sessions, searched for relevant information from various learning resources, discussed alternative solutions with peers, and revised their writing after receiving feedback from classmates and the teacher.

Interview data suggested that collaborative writing activities encouraged students to think more critically before making decisions regarding vocabulary selection, paragraph organization, and content development. Students explained that they became more aware of the importance of revising their writing rather than submitting their first drafts immediately. One participant commented:

"Before this project, I usually finished writing once. During the project, I realized that revising my writing made it much better." (Student 2)

Observation data also indicated that students continuously evaluated their own ideas while negotiating different perspectives during group discussions. Such activities demonstrated students' willingness to invest cognitive effort throughout the writing process instead of focusing solely on task completion.

These findings suggest that Project-Based Learning facilitates deeper learning by encouraging students to engage in reflection, problem-solving, critical thinking, and collaborative knowledge construction during writing activities.

Factors Influencing Student Engagement

Although the implementation of Project-Based Learning generally promoted positive engagement, the findings identified several factors influencing students' participation. Differences in English proficiency affected students' confidence during discussions, while group dynamics influenced the distribution of responsibilities among members. Some students naturally assumed leadership roles, whereas others tended to participate less actively due to limited confidence in expressing ideas in English.

Time allocation also emerged as an important factor. Several participants explained that completing collaborative writing projects required more classroom time than conventional writing instruction, particularly during brainstorming, discussion, and revision stages. Consequently, some project activities had to be

continued outside regular classroom meetings.

These findings indicate that successful implementation of Project-Based Learning depends not only on instructional design but also on effective classroom management, sufficient learning time, teacher facilitation, and balanced group collaboration.

4. Discussion

The findings of this research demonstrate that Project-Based Learning (PjBL) provides a learning environment that encourages multidimensional student engagement throughout the writing learning process. The implementation of collaborative project activities enabled students to participate actively, develop positive emotional responses toward writing, and invest greater cognitive effort during the completion of writing tasks. These findings support the theoretical framework proposed by Jennifer A. Fredricks, Phyllis C. Blumenfeld, and Alison H. Paris (2004), who conceptualize student engagement as a multidimensional construct consisting of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. The interaction among these three dimensions suggests that meaningful engagement is not limited to observable participation but also involves students' emotional investment and cognitive effort during learning activities.

Behavioral Engagement

The findings indicate that students actively participated throughout project implementation by engaging in classroom discussions, collaborating with peers, completing assigned tasks, and contributing to the development of project outputs. This active participation demonstrates that Project-Based Learning shifts students' roles from passive recipients of information to active constructors of knowledge. The collaborative characteristics of PjBL require students to negotiate ideas, share responsibilities, and solve problems collectively, thereby creating greater opportunities for classroom participation.

These findings are consistent with the theory of Fredricks et al. (2004), who argue that behavioral engagement is reflected in students' participation, persistence, and involvement in academic activities. Similarly, previous studies have reported that Project-Based Learning increases students' classroom participation because authentic projects require continuous interaction and collaboration among learners. Unlike conventional teacher-centered instruction, project-based learning provides meaningful contexts in which participation becomes a necessary component of task completion rather than merely a classroom expectation.

However, the present research also revealed that behavioral engagement varied among participants. While some students consistently demonstrated active participation, others contributed less frequently during group discussions. This finding suggests that collaborative learning does not automatically ensure equal

participation. Individual confidence, language proficiency, and group dynamics continue to influence the extent to which students engage behaviorally. Therefore, teachers play an essential role in facilitating balanced participation by monitoring group interaction and ensuring that every student has opportunities to contribute meaningfully.

Emotional Engagement

The findings further demonstrate that Project-Based Learning positively influenced students' emotional engagement throughout the writing process. Students expressed greater enthusiasm, confidence, and enjoyment while completing collaborative writing projects compared with conventional writing activities. Working together with peers reduced students' anxiety toward English writing and created a supportive learning atmosphere in which students felt more comfortable expressing their ideas.

These findings support Fredricks et al. (2004), who describe emotional engagement as students' affective reactions toward learning activities, including interest, enjoyment, motivation, and a sense of belonging. Within the context of Project-Based Learning, collaboration appears to strengthen these positive emotional responses because students receive continuous encouragement, feedback, and social support from both peers and teachers. Such interactions contribute to increased learning motivation and create a classroom environment that encourages students to remain engaged throughout project implementation.

Nevertheless, emotional engagement was found to fluctuate during more demanding stages of the writing process, particularly during drafting and revision. Several students reported decreased confidence when evaluating grammatical accuracy and organizing ideas into coherent paragraphs. This finding indicates that emotional engagement is dynamic rather than static and may change according to students' perceptions of task difficulty and their confidence in performing academic tasks. Consequently, teachers should provide constructive feedback and emotional support during revision activities to maintain students' motivation and confidence.

Cognitive Engagement

The findings also reveal that Project-Based Learning facilitates students' cognitive engagement by encouraging them to participate in higher-order thinking processes throughout writing activities. Students demonstrated cognitive engagement by generating ideas collaboratively, evaluating information critically, discussing alternative solutions, revising written drafts, and reflecting upon teacher and peer feedback before producing final writing products.

This finding is consistent with constructivist learning theory, which views learning as an active process through which learners construct knowledge based on meaningful experiences and social interaction. Project-Based Learning encourages students to become active problem-solvers rather than passive

learners because they continuously evaluate, revise, and improve their work throughout project completion. Such learning experiences foster critical thinking, self-regulation, and reflective learning, which are fundamental components of cognitive engagement.

The present research extends previous findings by demonstrating that cognitive engagement develops not only through individual learning activities but also through collaborative interaction. Classroom discussions, peer feedback, and collaborative revision enabled students to negotiate meaning, reconsider their ideas, and refine their written products. Therefore, cognitive engagement emerged as a socially mediated learning process rather than an entirely individual cognitive activity.

Factors Influencing Student Engagement

Besides identifying the three dimensions of engagement, this research also found that student engagement was influenced by several contextual factors, including English language proficiency, group collaboration, teacher facilitation, and classroom time allocation. Students with higher language proficiency generally participated more actively during discussions because they possessed greater confidence in expressing ideas. Conversely, students with lower proficiency occasionally hesitated to contribute despite participating in collaborative activities.

Teacher facilitation also played an important role in maintaining students' engagement. Continuous guidance, constructive feedback, and encouragement enabled students to overcome writing difficulties and remain involved throughout project implementation. Furthermore, balanced group collaboration significantly affected students' learning experiences because unequal participation occasionally reduced opportunities for some students to engage actively. These findings indicate that Project-Based Learning alone does not automatically guarantee meaningful engagement; its effectiveness depends largely on how teachers design collaborative learning activities, manage classroom interaction, and provide appropriate instructional support.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that student engagement emerges through the interaction between instructional design and classroom context. Project-Based Learning provides authentic opportunities for students to participate behaviorally, engage emotionally, and invest cognitively in writing activities. However, the quality of engagement is shaped by teacher facilitation, peer collaboration, learner characteristics, and classroom conditions. Therefore, successful implementation of Project-Based Learning requires careful instructional planning that promotes balanced participation, meaningful collaboration, and continuous academic support throughout the writing process.

Contribution of the Research

This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing an

in-depth qualitative understanding of how student engagement develops during Project-Based Learning in an Indonesian Islamic senior high school. While previous studies have primarily examined the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning in improving writing achievement, the present research shifts the focus toward the learning process itself by exploring students' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement during project implementation. This perspective offers a more comprehensive understanding of why Project-Based Learning supports writing instruction beyond measurable academic outcomes.

Furthermore, the findings provide practical implications for English language teachers. Designing collaborative writing projects should involve not only authentic tasks but also structured opportunities for equal participation, continuous feedback, guided reflection, and peer interaction. Such instructional practices are expected to strengthen students' engagement and ultimately improve the quality of English writing instruction in EFL classrooms.

This research investigated student engagement during the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in the writing learning process at State Islamic Senior High School by examining behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of engagement. The findings demonstrate that Project-Based Learning provides meaningful learning experiences that encourage students to actively participate in classroom activities, develop positive emotional responses toward writing, and invest greater cognitive effort throughout the writing process. Behavioral engagement was reflected in students' active participation, collaboration, and responsibility during project activities. Emotional engagement emerged through increased motivation, confidence, and enjoyment, although students occasionally experienced anxiety during drafting and revision. Cognitive engagement was demonstrated through students' critical thinking, collaborative problem-solving, idea development, and continuous revision of their written work. These findings indicate that Project-Based Learning not only supports students' writing development but also promotes multidimensional engagement throughout the learning process.

Furthermore, the research reveals that student engagement is influenced by several contextual factors, including English language proficiency, teacher facilitation, peer collaboration, and classroom learning conditions. The interaction of these factors determines the extent to which students participate behaviorally, respond emotionally, and engage cognitively during project implementation. Therefore, the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning depends not only on the instructional model itself but also on how learning activities are designed, facilitated, and supported by the teacher.

This research contributes to the existing literature by providing an in-depth qualitative perspective on student engagement during Project-Based Learning within the context of an Indonesian Islamic senior high school. Unlike many previous studies that primarily focused on learning outcomes or writing

achievement, this research emphasizes students' learning experiences throughout the writing process by examining the interconnected dimensions of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. The findings suggest that English teachers should design collaborative writing projects that encourage active participation, provide continuous feedback, promote reflective learning, and create supportive classroom environments that sustain students' engagement throughout project implementation. Future research is encouraged to investigate student engagement in different educational contexts, employ longitudinal designs to examine changes in engagement over time, or integrate qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of engagement in Project-Based Learning.

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