

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter represents an introduction to the research. It considers the sub-chapters are the background of the study, research questions, aims of the research, significance of the research, clarifications of key terms, and organization of the study.

1.1 Background

Active students and teachers' submissiveness in the EFL classroom practices has been promoted in Curriculum Merdeka, called Emancipated Curriculum (henceforth: Emancipated curriculum). This curriculum has improved every aspect of learning outcomes, from knowledge to attitudes and skills. Emancipated curriculum carries the concept of Emancipated Learning, which means that this curriculum offers freedom to schools, teachers, and students to freely innovate and learn independently and creatively, where this freedom starts with the teacher as the driving force (Kemendikbud, 2019). The learning process should be student-centred, with the teacher only as a facilitator and guide in which students play a crucial role, such as being responsible for their knowledge and taking actively in the learning process (Yuliani & Lengkanawati, 2017). This issue is supported by Yudhawasthi (2023). Teachers must encourage a rational ability for initiative, creativity, and independence through the talents, interests, and physical and psychological development of students. The findings mean that teachers must provide engaging and innovative learning environments and actively encourage student participation. Students play a significant part in designing the learning process in the classroom based on their skills and interests. However, some teachers revealed that many students appeared to be passive, aimless, and had very low motivation (Y. & W. M. Wang, 2016)

At present, the implementation of an Emancipated curriculum obliges the teacher to be creative and critical (Kemendikbud, 2019b). Teachers' characters are only learning sources for students using various kinds of learning sources

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(Baswedan, 2019) However, some schools are not ready to apply an emancipated curriculum and learners centre, which empowers learners to participate actively in the learning process. The main challenge is the readiness of the teachers and school staff. Based on Sumarsih et al. (2022), at the beginning of its implementation, teachers and school staff experienced difficulties in terms of implementing the learning and teaching process with a new paradigm and preparing school administrations based on the Emancipated Curriculum guidelines. One of the problems that a teacher learns from this curriculum is when the teacher has to develop the learning objective in its entirety. Teachers are given independence, but from the side, many teachers still have the ability which is not ready (Kristina, 2022). In line with Ma'rifah (2022), it is found that many teachers have not been able to construct lesson plans appropriately. They still struggle with deficiencies in a variety of learning areas particularly the use of learning approaches, methods, techniques, or strategies to encourage students to learn meaningfully. One of the attempts that can be a solution to the issue is that teachers should use project-based Learning which is student-centered (Bell, 2010b; Farouck, 2016; Gerlach, 2008). Project-based Learning allows students to be involved actively in the learning process (Astawa et al., 2017; Gai Mali, 2016; Larasati, 2015; Wayan N, 2015) by completing a project suggested by the teacher.

Unfortunately, there have been issues related to project-based Learning in language classrooms. The successful implementation of project-based Learning comes from the teacher's understanding of the concept and practices of project-based Learning itself (Alpiani et al., 2023). Some teachers argued that it happens because project-based Learning has not been implemented widely in EFL classrooms. Ravitz (2003), as cited in (Tamim & Grant, 2013), is concerned that teachers might find it hard to implement project-based Learning in their classroom even "after participating in professional development workshops." (p.75). It means that the teacher still lacks the knowledge to comprehend project-based Learning. Grossman (2018) stated that the analysis of teachers' understanding of implementing project-based Learning was

generally good. However, other studies revealed that the lesson plan and the teaching-learning process did not reflect the approach (Rostika & Prihantini, 2019). Hence, by their level of understanding and procedural knowledge, it can be concluded that teachers' understanding tends to be correct and comprehensive for general curriculum topics but only partial for their application. (Ahmad & Mardiana, 2014)

Regarding the issues about project-based Learning, some researchers revealed that Project-based Learning offers many advantages. In general education, Project-based learning models, in addition to motivating students to learn material that exists in everyday life, can also enhance creativity (Guo, 2020; Tiantong, 2013), improve creative thinking skills (Kimsesiz, 2017), improve student performance (Akinoglu & Prof, 2008; Fitriyani, 2016; Pratiwi et al., 2020), facilitate students to gain high cognitive (Pratiwi et al., 2020) and improve students' learning autonomy (Ma'rifah, 2022). Rochmawati, P (2015) found that the main benefits of the Project-Based Learning implementation in TEFL Classrooms can foster students' higher-order thinking skills or HOTS (henceforth: HOTS). They concluded that project-based Learning greatly impacts students in fostering HOTS. Through project-based Learning, students handle the project by themselves and work collaboratively to complete the project. It means that project-based Learning allows students to think creatively and critically, thus leading the higher-order thinking skills (HOTS).

In related research about teacher understanding in project-based Learning to foster HOTS, several studies have been conducted. Some teachers argued that Implementing project-based Learning is highly effective and contributes significantly to promoting students' HOTS, and the students were engaged in the process of 'learning by doing' in project-based Learning (Phasuk et al., 2019). Some teachers were also interested in giving a topic project to the students, and they were able to choose their resources and do independent research (McCarthy, 2010). In other research, the students were involved in the project and were motivated to take control of many aspects of their Learning. Other findings revealed that cooperative work in project-based Learning has promoted Higher-order thinking skills because it gave

learners the freedom to explore their preferences (Díaz Ramírez, 2014) and think creatively (Hudaya & Lengkanawati, 2018). In the EFL context, the use of project-based Learning is capable of fostering students' higher-order thinking skills with all dimensions of three domains performed during classroom teaching such as analysis, evaluation, and creation. Students' performance on all identified indicators leads to critical and creative thinking (Ma'rifah, 2022). These studies revealed positive results in implementing project-based Learning to foster HOTS. However, past studies appear to be limited to discussing the teacher's understanding of project-based Learning to foster HOTS. Rochmawati (2015) has investigated how project-based Learning encourages students' critical thinking and HOTS but limits the students' perspective.

Therefore, to fill the gap, the present study focused on investigating teachers' understanding of project-based Learning to foster HOTS and how they apply their knowledge to teaching practices based on the Stoller (2006) stages of project-based Learning and Anderson et al. (2001) dimension of higher-order thinking skills (HOTS). The framework from Stoller (2006) was selected for its comprehensive concept that project-based Learning has six stages to implement in the classroom activity, starting with planning, implementation, and reporting. The emancipated curriculum, which incorporates the fundamentals of project-based Learning, aligns with Stoller's views. This theory is applied in the process of teaching and learning English. Moreover, Anderson (2001) used the teacher's knowledge to determine the dimension of higher-order thinking skills. This dimension of HOTS was investigated during the stages of project-based Learning in terms of features of HOTS that were displayed in the stages of project-based Learning. The existing study examined project-based and higher-order thinking in separation, concentrating exclusively on the student perspective of implementation and impact. The studies were conducted on learners' perception of project-based Learning in enhancing English skills performance and 21st-century skills. Finally, the result of the present study is expected to provide insight into teachers' understanding of project-based Learning to foster HOTS and the practices of the experience.

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1.2 Research Questions

The problems described in the background of the study lead to research questions:

1. How do teachers understand Project-based Learning in English Language classrooms?
2. How do the teachers put their understanding of Project-based Learning to foster higher-order thinking Skills (HOTS) into practices of teaching English at junior high school?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the research questions, the objective of the study:

1. To investigate the teacher's understanding of Project-based Learning in English Language classrooms.
2. To identify How the Teachers put their understanding of Project-based Learning to foster higher-order thinking Skills (HOTS) into practices of teaching English at junior high school.

1.4 Scope of the Study

Based on Simon & Goes (2013) scope of the study refers to the boundaries within which the study operated. As the present study, the scope revolved around the teachers' understanding of Project-based Learning to foster HOTS and also how they put it into practice in the teaching and learning process. This research focused on speaking and writing English skills. This study were limited to the Learning activities (ATP) in the teaching-learning process. This took place in a junior high school in Central Java where the school is well-established applying Project-based Learning. This figured out through the Stroller (2006) framework: choosing a project topic, pre-communicative activities, asking essential questions, designing a project plan, creating a project timeline, finishing the project, assessing the project results, and evaluating the project.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The results of this study are expected to be beneficial in three aspects. Theoretically, the findings are expected to meet the expectation that teachers will have

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a good understanding of project-based Learning to foster higher-order thinking skills and they can implement PjBL in teaching-learning activity in appropriate ways. This research also hopes not only to deepen theoretical knowledge but also to present a theory to guide future researchers in investigating the teacher's understanding and implementation of project-based Learning.

Practically, the results of this study are expected to be used as a reflection of teachers in a classroom about their understanding of Project-based Learning. Additionally, this study also hopes to provide practical strategies and recommendations for teachers to make their learning process more critical, interactive, and enjoyable using Project-based Learning.

Professionally, the result is expected to highlight the teacher's awareness of the strength of project-based Learning in a pedagogical context. This study also hopes to encourage the teacher to deepen the theory and application of Project-based Learning as it can be useful and helpful for teachers to promote higher-order thinking skills through project-based Learning.

1.6 Clarification of Terms

To avoid misunderstanding and misconception, several fundamental operational terms frequently mentioned in this study should be clearly defined as follows.

Project-based Learning: a teaching approach that places a strong focus on task assignments, especially for projects that might help students engage in the process of inquiry. As a result, it is anticipated that students will be able to acquire the knowledge, abilities, and attitudes that teachers would use to assess their students (Skinner et al., 2019). Project-based Learning for language learning consists of three main stages, namely planning, implementation, and reporting (Stroller, 2006), with eight learning activities.

In this study, Project-based Learning refers to the teachers' ability to decide every stage of project-based Learning in the learning process, including choosing project topics, pre-communicative activities, asking essential questions, designing a project plan, creating a project timeline, Finishing the project, Assessing the project result,

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and Evaluating the projects.

Higher-order thinking Skills (HOTS): Brookhart (2010) noticed that higher-order thinking Skills (HOTS) is the process of taking information that has been stored in memory, restructuring it, and combining it to serve a purpose in unfamiliar situations. HOTS is categorized into 3 basic concepts: transfer, critical thinking, and problem-solving. The top three levels of Bloom's Taxonomy include Analyze, Evaluate, and Create. (Anderson, 2001)

In this case, HOTS are the abilities that come from using project-based Learning in a foreign language classroom. HOTS is used here as an integral part of project-based Learning, not independently. In line with Rochmawati, (2015) theory, which states that using project-based Learning helps enhance critical thinking abilities.

Teachers' understanding: Understanding can be understood as a process very similar to theory development, involving searching for labels and categories for events and labels and categories for events as well as clarifications and projections (Skinner et al., 2019). Teachers' understanding means how they can be seen as a process whereby the student develops a unique interpretation or representation of what is happening.

In this study, understanding refers to teachers' ability to apply their knowledge regarding project-based Learning to foster HOTS both in theory (lesson plan) and practice (teaching practices). The understanding also refers to how teachers understand that HOTS can be obtained through project-based Learning.

Fostering: The Oxford Dictionary mentions that fostering means to promote the growth or development of; further; encourage: to foster new ideas.

In this case, the product of the fostering was higher-order thinking skills. It was argued by Cosgun & Atay, n.d. (2021) that project-based Learning is statistically significant to the student's level of critical thinking and creativity and improvement in their English language scores.

1.7 Organization of the Study

This study is organized into six chapters as follows:

Chapter I is the Introduction. It presents several notions, including the rationale or background of the study, aims and questions of the study, scope of the study,

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significance of the study, clarification of terms, and organization of the study.

Chapter II is Theoretical Framework which elaborates theoretical foundation and dimensions that are relevant to this study. This foundation was used as the basis references to keep this study in line. It was also used as the foundation to develop instruments for this study, to guide data analysis and data collection, and to draw a conclusion about the result of the study.

Chapter III is Research Methodology that provides the research design employed to answer research questions in this study. It consists of the formulation of the problem research design, participants, data collection, and data analysis.

Chapter IV is Findings and Discussion. It explores the whole finding and discussion discovered in this study based on the data obtained through all techniques of the data collection of this study and analyzed based on the framework of this study.

Chapter V is Conclusions, Limitations, and Recommendations. This chapter covers the conclusions derived from the findings and discussion. The limitations and weaknesses of this study were also floored to be used as a reflection to offer recommendations for the pedagogical practice and further study regarding the topic of this study.