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Empowering speaking skills through problem-based learning in Indonesian blended classrooms

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift towards remote and blended learning, prompting educators to seek innovative pedagogical approaches. In response, the Indonesian government introduced the Merdeka curriculum, emphasizing student-centered learning, critical thinking, and independent knowledge-building. Problem-based learning (PBL) aligns well with these objectives, engaging students in real-world problem-solving and promoting critical thinking, collaboration, and communication skills. This study examines the effectiveness of PBL in enhancing English-speaking skills within a blended learning environment at a private university in Surabaya. Using a quantitative research approach, data were collected through classroom observations and surveys and analyzed with SPSS. The findings revealed that PBL effectively promoted self-directed learning, peer collaboration, and speaking skill development. These suggest that PBL is an effective strategy for enhancing language proficiency and fostering student engagement that aligns with Indonesia's educational reforms. However, to further optimize PBL's effectiveness, it is recommended to consider adjustments such as flexibility for attendance, scaffolding for highly diverse students, and culturally relevant activities. These modifications can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for English Language Learners (ELLs) in Indonesia.

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ABSTRAK

Pandemi COVID-19 mempercepat peralihan ke pembelajaran jarak jauh dan pembelajaran campuran, sehingga mendorong para pendidik untuk mencari pendekatan pedagogi yang inovatif. Sebagai tanggapannya, pemerintah Indonesia memperkenalkan kurikulum Merdeka, yang menekankan pembelajaran yang berpusat pada siswa, berpikir kritis, dan membangun pengetahuan secara mandiri. Pembelajaran Berbasis Masalah (PBL) selaras dengan tujuan-tujuan ini, karena pembelajaran ini melibatkan siswa dalam pemecahan masalah di dunia nyata dan meningkatkan keterampilan berpikir kritis, kolaborasi, dan komunikasi. Penelitian ini menguji efektivitas PBL dalam meningkatkan keterampilan berbahasa Inggris dalam lingkungan pembelajaran campuran di sebuah universitas swasta di Surabaya. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan penelitian kuantitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas dan survei dan dianalisis dengan SPSS. Temuannya mengungkapkan bahwa PBL secara efektif mendorong pembelajaran mandiri, kolaborasi teman sebaya, dan pengembangan keterampilan berbicara. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa PBL merupakan strategi yang efektif untuk meningkatkan kemahiran bahasa dan mendorong keterlibatan siswa sejalan dengan reformasi pendidikan di Indonesia. Namun, untuk lebih mengoptimalkan efektivitas PBL, disarankan untuk mempertimbangkan penyesuaian seperti fleksibilitas kehadiran, scaffolding untuk siswa yang sangat beragam, dan kegiatan yang relevan dengan budaya. Modifikasi ini dapat menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang lebih inklusif dan mendukung bagi Pembelajar Bahasa Inggris (ELLs) di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: *pembelajaran campuran; pembelajaran berbasis masalah; peningkatan keterampilan berbicara*

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in early 2020, profoundly transformed education systems worldwide, including Indonesia's. Over 68 million students faced disruptions in traditional learning methods, prompting a rapid shift to remote and blended learning. This transition underscored the necessity for innovative teaching approaches emphasizing student autonomy, engagement, and cultivating 21st-century skills. In response, the Indonesian government launched initiatives like the Merdeka curriculum and Independent Campus Policy (ICP), prioritizing critical thinking, self-directed learning, and real-world problem-solving. Problem-Based Learning (PBL) emerged as a critical strategy within this framework, aligning with the reforms by promoting active, student-centered learning.

PBL's impact on enhancing critical thinking and communication has been well-documented. PBL's success in fostering collaboration and problem-solving skills in a probability theory course emphasizes its applicability beyond traditional medical education (Susanti et al., 2023). PBL's role in vocational schools is to nurture analytical and decision-making abilities, preparing students to tackle complex real-life challenges (Sholihah & Lastariwati, 2020). These studies affirm that PBL supports academic development and equips learners with essential 21st-century competencies.

Moreover, PBL has proven particularly effective in enhancing language proficiency. Research showed how PBL fosters critical thinking and communication through real-world problem-solving tasks (Mutanga, 2024). Dual benefits of autonomy and practical skill application. PBL enhances self-directed learning readiness, correlating with improved academic outcomes like higher GPAs (Sundari & Rahmawati, 2022). Provide empirical evidence of PBL's impact on speaking skills, noting a significant increase in student performance (Simbolon et al., 2019). These findings underscore PBL's value as a transformative educational approach, fostering academic and life skills essential for future success.

This study investigates the effectiveness of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in enhancing English language proficiency and explicit speaking skills in Indonesian blended classrooms. The study explores how PBL, as a student-centered teaching approach, can foster critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills in language learners. By examining the impact of PBL on students' speaking abilities, the study seeks to contribute to understanding how innovative teaching strategies can improve language proficiency in Indonesia’s educational reforms, particularly in blended learning environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

PBL and Self-Directed Learning

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is widely acknowledged for its ability to nurture self-directed learning (SDL) by empowering students to take control of their educational journey. PBL frameworks encourage learners to seek information actively, establish personal objectives, and critically evaluate their progress, fostering a sense of autonomy and ownership over their learning (Saputro, 2021). PBL significantly enhances SDL abilities compared to traditional teaching methods, as measured by the Self-Rating Scale for Self-Directedness in Learning (SRSSDL). PBL motivates students to proactively identify their learning needs, set achievable goals, and locate resources effectively (Sundari & Rahmawati, 2022). This learner-centered approach aligns with contemporary educational theories emphasizing collaboration, communication, and metacognitive skills essential for navigating complex learning environments (Tzenios, 2022).

Moreover, integrating structured reflection and feedback into PBL environments further strengthens SDL behaviors. The reflective practices embedded in PBL encourage students to monitor their progress, refine strategies, and independently solve problems, cultivating self-regulation and critical thinking (Hermawan,

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2022). SDL is a core aspect of lifelong learning, particularly in integration-based curricula. These findings demonstrate that PBL improves subject-specific knowledge and equips learners with transferable skills such as information literacy and problem-solving, preparing them for success in diverse educational and professional settings (Jeon & Park, 2021). Collectively, these studies affirm the transformative potential of PBL in fostering SDL. By enabling students to manage their learning pathways and engage deeply with content, PBL promotes habits of lifelong learning that are essential in a rapidly evolving global context. This theoretical foundation supports the hypothesis that H1: PBL promotes self-directed learning.

PBL and Collaboration

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is increasingly recognized for fostering collaborative engagement, as it encourages students to work together in groups to address complex, real-world problems. This collaborative approach allows students to actively engage in discussions, debates, and synthesis of ideas, leading to innovative solutions. PBL encourages students to challenge assumptions, consider diverse viewpoints, and critically analyze problems, fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Huri et al., 2024). Furthermore, the collaborative nature of PBL aligns with social constructivist theories, which suggest that knowledge is co-constructed through interaction and shared experiences among learners. This approach deepens students' understanding and cultivates essential communication and teamwork skills for solving real-world problems (Sundari & Rahmawati, 2022). Research has shown that PBL creates a dynamic learning environment where students collaboratively explore complex issues, refine their understanding, and actively engage in reflective practices, further reflecting the principles of social constructivism (Akpan et al., 2020; Mutanga, 2024).

Additionally, social constructivist perspectives argue that learners' development is enriched through peer collaboration, enabling knowledge to be constructed in a social context rather than in isolation (Sundari & Rahmawati, 2022). This is evident in PBL environments, where knowledge is actively shaped through dialogue and mutual exploration. PBL enhances interpersonal skills, particularly effective communication and teamwork, vital for conflict resolution and team-based work in higher education settings. Moreover, research indicates that PBL's collaborative framework promotes a sense of community, motivating students to be more engaged and accountable (Yu & Zin, 2023). Students were more invested in their learning when working collaboratively, contributing to greater motivation and success (Huri et al., 2024). This sense of teamwork leads to higher engagement and accountability as students realize their contributions are essential to the group's progress (Wicaksono, 2024). Furthermore, the opportunity for peer-to-peer evaluation in PBL fosters superior critical thinking skills among students (Djunaidi & Jaya, 2024). These studies collectively underscore that PBL enhances collaboration and communication and prepares students for success in professional, team-oriented environments. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed: H2: PBL fosters collaborative engagement.

PBL and Speaking Performance

Problem-based learning (PBL) has significantly enhanced students' speaking performance by creating an active, communicative learning environment that encourages verbal interaction and expression. Students who participated in PBL activities performed better when speaking. Additionally, their behavioral, cognitive, and affective attitudes toward ELL were more optimistic (Sutrisna & Artini, 2020). By addressing real-world problems and presenting solutions, students gain confidence in their speaking abilities, learning to express their thoughts more clearly and fluently (Kusumawati et al., 2022). The collaborative nature of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) tasks, which frequently require group work and consistent oral communication, is crucial in helping students improve their speaking fluency and accuracy. Regular speaking tasks allow students to use the target language in meaningful, real-world contexts, which is essential for developing

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their comfort and proficiency in speaking (Mutanga, 2024; Sundari & Rahmawati, 2022). As students participate in these tasks, they become more familiar with various language structures and vocabulary, further enhancing their language skills. This continuous interaction with the language allows them to gain confidence and improve their ability to express themselves clearly and accurately in formal and informal settings.

Moreover, the interactive structure of PBL offers continuous opportunities for students to receive peer and instructor feedback, which is crucial for refining their speaking performance. Research indicates that constructive feedback in PBL settings allows students to identify areas for improvement, adjust their communication strategies, and build upon their strengths (Rodríguez et al., 2022). Adding more speaking exercises, such as group work, to the curriculum improved students' performance and confidence (Cadiz-Gabejan, 2021). The study found that students' confidence levels increased in collaborative environments. Additionally, PBL activities often require students to take on various roles, such as group leader or presenter, providing practice in different communicative styles and enhancing their adaptability in speaking situations (Menggo et al., 2023). Through these collaborative and feedback-rich experiences, PBL enhances speaking performance and prepares students for real-world communication tasks, equipping them with essential language skills for diverse contexts. Understanding all of these ideas leads to the following proposition in this study. H3: PBL enhances speaking performance.

METHODS

Research Design and Rationale

The English Conversation Class (ECC) at a private university's Faculty of Science, Technology, and Design in Surabaya adopts a Problem-Based Learning (PBL) approach to enhance students' English communication skills, aligning with the Merdeka curriculum to better prepare them for the competitive ASEAN job market. The class uses a blended learning model that combines in-person instruction with an E-class online platform, promoting independent learning through asynchronous activities (Corfman & Beck, 2019). This model supports PBL's collaborative nature, which fosters continuous engagement and practical communication skills through real-world tasks.

Classroom observation tracks student behaviors and language use during PBL activities, providing direct insights into communication skill development (Huri et al., 2024). The importance of systematic observation in educational settings, particularly in PBL contexts (Zakaria et al., 2019). Surveys complement this observational data by assessing student engagement and collaboration within group work. Together, these methods offer a comprehensive approach to evaluating how PBL promotes self-directed learning, peer collaboration, and the development of speaking skills within the ECC.

Participants and Research Procedures

Three of the 99 students enrolled in the English Conversation Classes (ECC) for the 2022/2023 academic year could not complete the course due to attendance issues. As a result, the remaining 96 students, accounting for 93.9% of the original cohort, formed the distributed learning group for this study. The study sample consisted of 96 students with an average age of 18.77 years (SD = 0.801, age range: 18-21). Male students accounted for 80.2% of the sample, while female students represented 19.8%. Of these participants, 76 were from the Faculty of Science and Technology, and 20 were from the Faculty of Design.

Each ECC session followed a structured format consisting of pre-class preparation, in-class Problem-Based Learning (PBL) activities, and post-class feedback. To initiate individual research, PBL scenarios involving real-world problem-solving tasks were introduced through the e-class platform (see Table 1 for

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the PBL topics). During on-site classroom sessions, students worked collaboratively in groups to generate ideas, present solutions, and receive feedback. This process fostered a supportive learning environment that promoted language development.

The PBL procedure in ECC was as follows.

Pre-Class Preparation: Before each meeting, students accessed an E-class platform for speaking assignments to introduce a problem-based or action-based scenario related to the week's topic. Students completed initial preparations individually at home. **In-Class PBL Activity**: During the classroom activities, students worked in pre-assigned groups, assuming stakeholder roles relevant to the problem. Within their groups, they identified the problem, generated ideas, gathered and shared information, and selected the most viable solution. Each group presented their solution to the class, simulating real-world presentation skills. **Feedback and Reflection**: The teacher provided constructive feedback on individual contributions and group performance, emphasizing improved communication, language accuracy, and critical engagement.

Table 1. The Problem-Based Learning Activities Offered During the 14-Week Semester

Week	Problem-based Learning Topics (Materials)
Weeks 1 & 8	Problem solving & Critical Thinking (Which Toyota do we choose? & The Influence of Media on Public Opinion.)
Weeks 2 & 9	Creative Thinking and Innovation Topics (Invent a New Product or App & If You Could Create a New Holiday, What Would It Be?)
Weeks 3 & 10	Discussion games (Island adventure & A matter of life and death)
Weeks 4 & 11	Motivational stories and discussion (Steve Jobs' & Jack Ma's famous speeches)
Weeks 5 & 12	Storytelling (Three random pictures and comic strips)
Weeks 6 & 13	Problem page and role play (Got a problem? Ask Alex! & Abbie's bullying story)
Weeks 7 & 14	Speaking Project I (Video Blog) and Speaking Project II (News reporting)

Source: Author's teaching materials 2022
Note: Problem-based learning materials are drawn from English books, credible online sources, YouTube, and the teacher's ideas.

Instrumentation

This study employed a simple rating scale based on teacher observations of each student to ensure objectivity and consistency across different students. The assessment criteria included task completion, grammar range and accuracy, vocabulary range and accuracy, fluency, and pronunciation, which were evaluated weekly. The individual assessment form can be found in Appendix A, and the same evaluation was applied to speaking projects.

The study developed a five-item survey to investigate learning interactions among students in peer groups. The survey was designed around crucial Problem-Based Learning (PBL) concepts, including collaborative learning, constructive engagement, contextual relevance, and self-directed learning. A closed-ended questionnaire was chosen due to its ability to facilitate faster recall by respondents and more efficient analysis by researchers (Hansen & Świderska, 2024). The questionnaire utilized a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The reliability of the five-question scale was deemed acceptable, with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.75.

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Data Collection Methods and Analysis

This study collected data through systematic observation in classrooms. The teacher evaluated the student's learning process using an individual assessment form. The study examined how frequently they prepared for the task to assess students' self-directed learning. To calculate the increase in daily grades for each student at the end of the semester, we used the following steps:

1. Document each student's daily grades for each meeting (there were 14 meetings).
2. Determine the initial and final grades: the average score from the first seven meetings as the initial score and the average score from the last seven meetings as the final score.
3. Subtract the final average from the initial average to calculate the average increase per student.

Figure 2 in the Results section depicts grade improvement over the semester. Table **2** contains data on student grade increases, organized by improvement ranges and the number of students within each range.

This study employed a closed-ended questionnaire to assess students' collaborative learning experiences with peers or groups. The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), and was distributed to the class on November 30, 2022. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 was used to conduct a descriptive analysis of the survey data using the Frequencies procedure. Likert scale survey responses are commonly analyzed through frequencies or percentages due to the ordinal nature of the scale, which simplifies the interpretation of how many respondents fall into each category (Chen & Liu, 2020). This method is widely endorsed in research, such as studies, because it provides a clear and straightforward way to present data, enhancing the understanding of distributions in respondents' attitudes or opinions (Ngo et al., 2021). The findings from the descriptive analysis of this study are presented in Appendix B, utilizing frequency/percentage distributions for each survey item.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Effectiveness of PBL on Students' Self-Directed Learning

For 14 weeks, from August 22, 2022, to November 30, 2022, participants used E-class, a learning management system, as part of their course. Over this period, 76% of students accessed E-class frequently, preparing their tasks 12 or more times. An additional 18.8% of students accessed E-class and prepared their tasks about 11 times, while only 5.2% used it 10 times. These usage patterns indicate that over 90% of students consistently used E-class to prepare their coursework before attending class sessions. The data suggests that the E-class platform supported a positive learning environment that fostered students' self-directed learning habits. This aligns with our hypothesis (H1) and reinforces that problem-based learning (PBL) effectively promotes student self-directed learning.

Effectiveness of PBL on Students' Engagement with Peers or Groups

On November 30, 2022, an online closed-ended questionnaire was distributed to students to gauge their perceptions of peer and group engagement in the course. The survey used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), and responses were received from 72 students (75% response rate), with 24 students not participating. One likely reason for the lower response rate was timing; distributing the survey during the final meeting, which coincided with Speaking Project II, may have led to reduced participation as students were likely busy or experiencing fatigue.

Figure 1 presents the results, showing that more than 50 respondents agreed with questions 1 and 3, indicating that participants felt they actively engaged in problem-solving discussions and listened attentively to their peers' perspectives on assignments. Additionally, 42 participants and 16 strongly agreed

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that they engaged in critical thinking with their group members (Q2). Approximately 50 students agreed that they completed complex tasks collaboratively (Q5). Overall, Figure 1 highlights a positive perception among students regarding their interactions with classmates, supporting our hypothesis (H2) that problem-based learning effectively promotes peer and group collaboration.

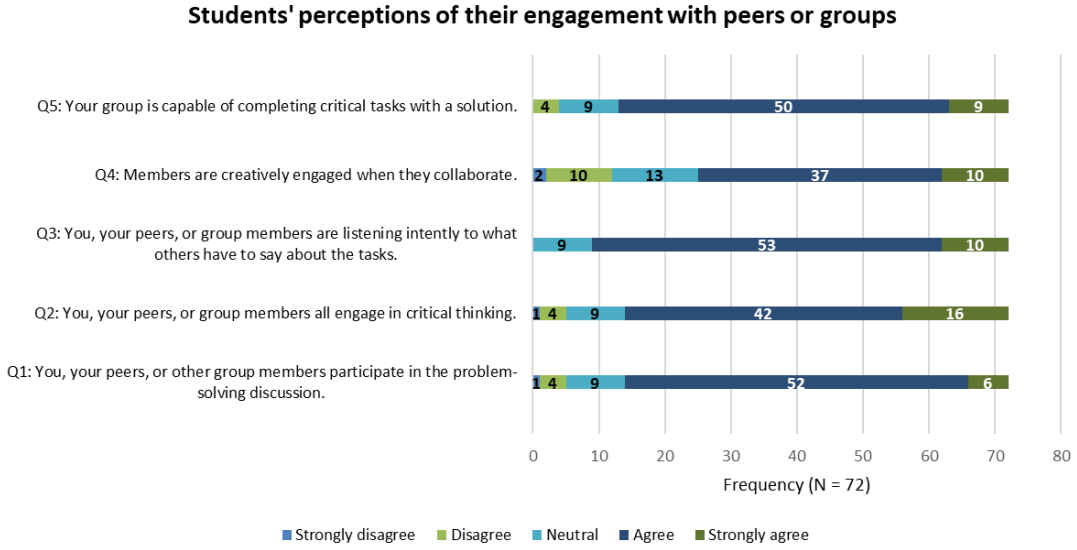

Figure 1. Students' perceptions of their Engagement with peers or groups
Source: Research 2022

Effectiveness of PBL on Students' Speaking Performance

Over 14 weeks, from August 22, 2022, to November 30, 2022, students were assessed daily based on task performance. As described in the Analysis Section, the average grade improvement per student was calculated to provide a precise measure of progress over the semester. The results are shown in Figure 2. The data indicate a steady improvement in students' speaking grades, supporting our study hypothesis (H3) that problem-based learning effectively enhances speaking performance.

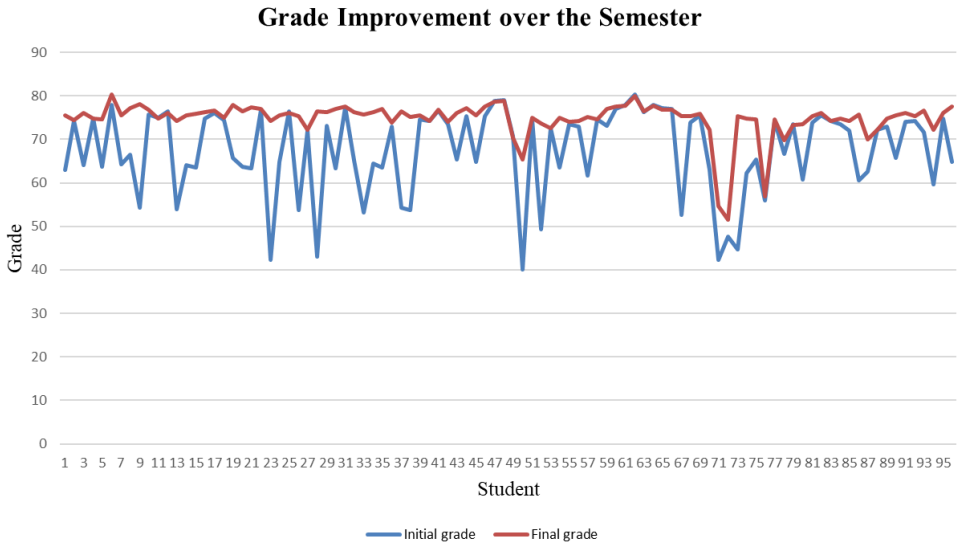

Figure 2. Grade Improvement over the Semester (N = 96)
Source: Research 2022

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Table 2. The grade increases of students, categorized by ranges of improvement and the number of students within each range

Grade Increase Range (point)	Number of Students
0	26
1-10	33
11-20	26
21-33	11

Source: Research 2022

Table 2 provides a detailed analysis of students' grade improvements throughout the course. Most students (33) demonstrated minor improvements, while a smaller group (11) showed substantial progress. However, a significant portion (26) did not experience any grade increase, indicating that some students struggled to improve despite the course structure. These findings suggest that, albeit slowly, problem-based learning improves students' speaking performance.

Discussion

The findings show that problem-based learning (PBL) supports self-directed learning (SDL), as demonstrated by the students' consistent preparation throughout 14 weeks. With more than 90% of students prepared on most occasions, this shows that PBL sets the stage for students to develop ownership of their learning. This result verifies our postulation (H1) that problem-based learning contributes to the positive development of SDL. Integrating Problem-Based Learning (PBL) with self-directed learning (SDL) enhances collaboration and fosters the development of essential skills such as time management, resourcefulness, and independent thinking. These skills lay the foundation for promoting lifelong learning, aligning with critical research on SDL (Suharlan et al., 2023). When students take on more responsibility for their learning, they become more autonomous, which is supported by studies indicating that PBL contributes to deeper learning and strengthens self-regulation, motivating and engaging students (Putri & Saifuddin, 2024).

The importance of SDL in academic success and deep learning shows that learners with strong SDL abilities are more proactive and self-regulated in their learning strategies. Interactive and collaborative PBL environments foster these SDL skills by encouraging students to explore knowledge independently while working in groups (Siswanto, 2024). Students in PBL settings increasingly seek autonomy in their learning, particularly in self-regulation and task management (Tempelaar et al., 2024). These findings highlight the critical role of self-directed learning (SDL) in fostering academic achievement by enhancing engagement and deeper cognitive processing (Siswanto, 2024; Suharlan et al., 2023). Problem-based learning (PBL) is a powerful mechanism that promotes SDL, improves academic performance, and cultivates lifelong learning skills. While a small number of students occasionally appeared unprepared, this did not diminish the contributions of engaged learners who significantly drove the success of PBL in fostering SDL.

The integration of technology, particularly the E-class online platform as a Learning Management System (LMS), further strengthened the development of SDL. Who identified SDL and group problem-solving as defining characteristics of PBL (Van der Vleuten et al., 2019). By leveraging interactive and collaborative approaches, PBL encourages learners to explore and construct knowledge actively, thereby enhancing their SDL skills. Our study revealed that PBL significantly enhances students' engagement with their peers, with more than 50 participants agreeing that they actively participated in discussions and attentively

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listened to their peers. This result verifies our postulation (H2) that problem-based learning fosters collaborative engagement. Creating an environment where students collaborate to solve complex problems, Problem-Based Learning (PBL) fosters deeper cognitive engagement and promotes peer-to-peer learning (Akpan et al., 2020; Kusumawardani & Aminatun, 2024). This supports recent research indicating that students in PBL environments typically perform better than those in traditional lecture-based settings (Hikmah, 2024).

Moreover, approximately 50 participants in our study reported completing critical tasks through collaboration. This underscores the effectiveness of PBL in fostering task-oriented cooperation. Cooperative learning improves individual academic outcomes and interpersonal skills (Hikmah, 2024; Mutanga, 2024; Sundari & Rahmawati, 2022). By sharing responsibility and diverse perspectives, students develop academically and gain crucial interpersonal skills necessary for real-world problem-solving. More recent research supports that view. In blended learning, PBL enhances critical thinking ability and peer interaction (Kusumawardani & Aminatun, 2024). The study's findings emphasized that small group discussion has fostered cognitive skills and social and emotional learning, both essential for holistic peer engagement (Lim, 2023). This study supported that PBL encourages collaborative group activities aimed at functional tasks, enhancing thinking, assisting in communications, and problem-solving skills necessary for their academic and professional achievements (Kusumawardani & Aminatun, 2024; Lim, 2023).

The findings of this study demonstrate a steady improvement in students' speaking performance over 14 weeks, supporting H3, which posits that PBL positively influences speaking skills during this timeframe. Specifically, the study highlights that PBL facilitates significant progress in English-speaking abilities through interactive tasks such as storytelling, problem-solving discussions, and news reporting. These activities provide students with authentic opportunities to practice the language, an essential factor in building fluency and confidence in speaking. PBL promotes real-life problem-solving and enhances essential communication skills, such as improving speaking competence through PBL in language learning contexts. PBL immerses students in meaningful and interactive language production, fostering fluency and confidence. The current study reinforces these conclusions, showcasing the effectiveness of PBL in engaging students with practical language use and improving their overall speaking performance in structured, real-world scenarios (Hikmah, 2024; Mutanga, 2024; Sundari & Rahmawati, 2022).

Recent literature continues to emphasize the effectiveness of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in improving students' speaking performance, as do the findings of this study. Problem-solving tasks within a PBL framework significantly boost students' confidence and language skills, particularly in English as a Second Language (ESL) settings (Cadiz-Gabejan, 2021). PBL promotes communication skills by encouraging the application of knowledge in discussion-based tasks, where students actively engage in real-life scenarios that improve both fluency and competence (Lim, 2023). Our study shows that many students showed no improvement in their grades. Several potential factors may explain this outcome. One key consideration is attendance; students who missed three to four 14 sessions demonstrated little to no progress, highlighting the importance of consistent engagement to benefit from PBL. Teacher facilitation is vital in guiding students through the problem-solving process, providing scaffolding, and creating a supportive learning environment, all essential for fostering critical thinking. This underscores the need for professional development opportunities to enhance educators' facilitation skills, ensuring the successful implementation of PBL in classrooms (Williamson, 2023).

Language anxiety is another factor influencing students' speaking performance, a common problem that frequently impedes participation and progress in second-language learning. Many students are nervous or self-conscious about speaking in front of their peers, particularly in graded situations, which can lead to avoidance behavior (Fattahi & Cuocci, 2022). Furthermore, students with a limited vocabulary or weak grammatical foundations may struggle to express themselves, making them reluctant to participate in speaking activities (Cadiz-Gabejan, 2021). This issue is compounded if their previous English education

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focused on reading and writing rather than conversational practice, leaving them underprepared for verbal interactions (Lim, 2023). Next, cultural and societal factors play an important role. In many Indonesian communities, the idea of face-saving can affect how comfortable students are, particularly when learning a language, where peers and performance can see mistakes are frequently public. This cultural hesitancy may limit students' involvement in PBL activities, which rely heavily on active participation and peer interaction to promote language development.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that problem-based learning (PBL) is a highly effective approach in English-speaking courses, with a notable positive impact on students' speaking abilities. The findings indicate that PBL promotes self-directed learning, enhances student participation and collaboration, and fosters gradual and continuous improvement in speaking performance. Moreover, PBL encourages active engagement, motivating students to practice their language skills consistently. The study also emphasizes the benefits of implementing PBL within a student-centered, e-learning environment, using blended learning techniques that combine onsite classrooms with an E-class platform. This setup fosters meaningful peer interaction, further strengthening students' speaking capabilities. The results affirm that PBL significantly enhances English language teaching and learning. While challenges exist in implementing PBL in an ESL context, such as in Indonesia, these can be addressed through supportive structures, cultural sensitivity, and scaffolded language development. By addressing the challenges and leveraging the strengths of PBL, educators can create engaging and effective learning environments. Through careful planning, supportive instruction, and a student-centered approach, PBL can significantly enhance English language teaching and learning.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest in publishing this article and confirm that the data and content are free of plagiarism. The author would like to thank the students who agreed to participate in this study. Data collected from respondents is kept strictly confidential.

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