

The Effect of Project-Based Method on Improving the English-Speaking Skills

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ABSTRACT

In this era, Madrasah Aliyah students must have skills to compete with others. One of them is English speaking skill. Madrasah Aliyah students must have the English-speaking skills necessary to face challenges worldwide. However, due to the lack of learning strategies that support activeness and communication skills, these skills are still underdeveloped. This study aims to evaluate the effect of implementing a project-based method on the English-speaking skills of Madrasah Aliyah students in Lumajang Regency. A quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design was used in this study with a pretest-post-test and control group design. An English-speaking ability test was conducted to collect data, and the pretest and post-test results of the experimental and control groups were the data sources. English speaking ability between the two groups differed on average, and a t-test at a significance level of 0.05 was conducted for data analysis. Madrasah Aliyah students throughout Lumajang Regency were the subjects of this study, who were selected purposively based on the characteristics of the study. In this study, the tentative assumption is that, compared to conventional learning approaches, the project-based method has a significant effect on students' English-speaking ability. The findings are used for students, teachers, researchers and others to use and improve the method in the process of teaching and learning, & for further research.

1. Introduction

In many Madrasah Aliyah in Lumajang Regency, English speaking ability remains a major challenge for students despite years of formal instruction. Classroom observations and preliminary data indicated that many students were able to understand written texts and complete grammar exercises, yet they struggled to express ideas orally with fluency and confidence. Students often hesitated when asked to speak in front of the class, relied heavily on memorized sentences, and demonstrated limited vocabulary during spontaneous communication. The learning process was generally dominated by teacher explanation and textbook-based activities, providing minimal opportunities for authentic interaction. As a result, students' speaking performance tended to remain at a moderate level with slow progress over time. This phenomenon highlights the need for a more interactive and student-centered instructional approach that can create meaningful speaking opportunities and foster communicative competence in EFL classrooms. To improve the quality of flexible human resources worldwide, Madrasah Aliyah (MA) students must master English speaking skills. Speaking skills require not only grammatical skills, but also courage, fluency, and the ability to communicate correctly in English. However, facts on the ground show that MA students have low English-speaking skills, including at Madrasah Aliyah in Lumajang Regency. Empirical experience gathered by researchers from the English Coaching Clinic (ECC) activity held in November 2025 and involving 102 Madrasah Aliyah students in Lumajang Regency reinforces this phenomenon. The collected data shows that only about 18% of students have English speaking skills in the good category (fluent and confident), 27% have sufficient skills, and 55% are still in the low category. Most students experience difficulties when expressing opinions orally in English; they experience obstacles in speaking fluency, limited vocabulary, incorrect pronunciation, and lack of confidence. This quantitative data shows that the majority of MA students throughout Lumajang Regency have not yet achieved the expected English-speaking skills. In fact, there is a flagship program from the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Lumajang Regency, namely GEMA *Berbaris* (Arabic and English Madrasah Movement), which requires students to be able to speak English well. The low achievement figures indicate a fundamental problem in the English language learning process at Madrasah Aliyah. The conventional teacher-centred approach still dominates learning, with the main focus on grammar mastery and written exercises. Students still have little opportunity to practice speaking actively and contextually. As a result, their oral communication skills are not well developed.

This condition triggers research questions about better learning strategies that might improve MA students' English-speaking skills. Project-Based Learning, or PBL, is considered an alternative solution to this problem. PBL theoretically emphasizes that students must be actively involved in the learning process

through important activities in planning, implementing, and presenting projects (Thomas, 2000; Bell, 2010). With this method, students can actually speak, work in groups, and present in English. Previous studies have shown that project-based learning improves students' speaking ability, motivation, and confidence in English learning (Fragoulis, 2009; Guo *et al.*, 2020). However, there is limited empirical research specifically examining the effect of the Project-Based Method on the English-speaking ability of Madrasah Aliyah students, particularly in Lumajang Regency. Therefore, this study aims to systematically investigate the effect of the Project-Based Method on the English-speaking ability of Madrasah Aliyah students in Lumajang Regency using a quasi-experimental approach. Clear benefits and advantages are expected from this research. Theoretically, this study has the potential to enhance research on English language learning, particularly on the effectiveness of the project-based method in improving speaking skills. Practically, this study is expected to serve as a reference for Madrasah Aliyah English teachers to implement a more creative and communicative approach to teaching English to students. Furthermore, the findings of this study will serve as a basis for policy-making related to the GEMA Berbaris program of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Lumajang Regency.

Based on the previous information, this study aims to determine: 1) Is the English-speaking ability of MA students in Lumajang Regency different from students taught through a project-based approach compared to students taught through conventional methods? 2) Is the English-speaking ability of MA students in Lumajang Regency significantly improved by project-based learning? The purpose of this study is to 1) find out how the English-speaking ability of MA students in Lumajang Regency is different from students taught through a project-based approach compared to students taught through conventional methods; 2) To determine how much influence project-based learning has on the English-speaking ability of MA students in Lumajang Regency. It is hoped that this study will have theoretical and practical impacts on English learning in Madrasah Aliyah. Theoretically, the results of this study will help increase knowledge about English language education, particularly regarding the effectiveness of project-based learning in improving students' speaking skills. Practically, this study is expected to provide teachers with examples of how to use innovative and informed learning strategies. Furthermore, the results can be used as a basis for developing policies and learning models that support 21st-century skills for madrasahs. It is hoped that this study will serve as a reference for further research involving various contexts, variables, and methods.

A literature review, also called a literature review, is a comprehensive description of previous findings related to the current study. The purpose of this section is to describe the research's position, identify similarities and differences with previous research, and identify research gaps (gap analysis) that can be used

as the basis for innovative arguments. According to research conducted by Thomas in 2019, this approach significantly improves students' English-speaking skills compared to conventional learning approaches. During project activities, such as group work, presentations, and discussions, students become more active and confident in using English. In their study of eleventh-grade high school students, Lestari and Suryani (2022) produced similar results. Their study showed that project-based learning improved students' speaking skills and increased their participation and verbal interaction during learning. Nurhayati and Azmi (2021) investigated the use of project-based learning in English language education at Islamic Senior High Schools (Madrasah Aliyah). This study found that project-based learning can improve students' confidence and fluency in speaking English, but there are several obstacles, such as limited time and learning resources. Furthermore, Putra (2020) used a quasi-experimental approach to show that project-based learning benefits high school students' oral communication skills, helping them speak fluently and convey ideas systematically. Previous studies have shown similarities: a focus on project-based learning and measuring students' English-speaking skills. However, there are fundamental differences, particularly in terms of the context of the educational institution, the scope of the study, and the number of research subjects. Previous studies were mostly conducted in public schools (SMA) or in specific educational units with limited scope. Consequently, these findings do not fully reflect the learning conditions at Islamic Senior High Schools (Madrasah Aliyah), especially on a regional scale. Quantitative research, according to a gap analysis, specifically investigating how project-based methods affect the English-speaking skills of Madrasah Aliyah students within a single district is still limited. Furthermore, few studies have investigated the effectiveness of project-based learning when considering the unique characteristics of madrasahs, including the curriculum, academic culture, and student backgrounds. Consequently, this study is novel in its focus, the context of the research location, and its aim to increase knowledge about the effectiveness of project-based methods in English language learning at Madrasah Aliyah in Lumajang Regency.

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is a learning approach that emphasizes active student involvement in the learning process through the completion of authentic, contextual, and product-oriented projects. According to Krajcik and Blumenfeld (2020), PjBL is designed to help students build deep conceptual understanding through the exploration of real-life problems that require critical thinking, collaboration, and communication. In the context of 21st-century education, PjBL is seen as a relevant learning model because it simultaneously integrates the 4C skills (critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication). Theoretically, PjBL is firmly rooted in social constructivism theory, which asserts that learning is an active process built through social interaction and direct experience. Vygotsky emphasized the importance of interaction and scaffolding,

which in PjBL are realized through group work, project discussions, and teacher guidance. Recent empirical studies have shown that PjBL can increase student engagement and intrinsic motivation because they feel responsible for the learning process and outcomes (Guo et al., 2020). This situation makes Project-Based Learning (PjBL) an effective approach to language learning, particularly in developing productive skills such as speaking. In English learning, Project-Based Learning (PjBL) provides space for students to use the target language actively and meaningfully. Kokotsaki, Menzies, and Wiggins (2021) state that Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is highly effective in language learning because it encourages language use in real-life contexts, rather than simply structured exercises. Project activities such as presentations, video production, simulations, and group discussions provide repeated opportunities for students to practice speaking, thereby increasing their confidence and communicative competence. Speaking is a productive and complex language skill, as it simultaneously involves linguistic and non-linguistic aspects. According to Burns (2021), speaking ability is not only related to the ability to pronounce words or sentences but also includes the ability to convey meaning effectively, accurately, and understandably in specific communication contexts. In learning English as a foreign language, speaking skills are often considered a key indicator of successful language learning. Conceptually, speaking ability consists of several main components: pronunciation, fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, and comprehension. Recent research by Leong and Ahmadi (2020) confirms that these five components are interrelated and must be developed in an integrated manner through intensive communication practice. Learning that focuses too much on grammar without providing opportunities for real speaking tends to hinder the development of students' speaking skills. The theory of communicative competence, further developed in contemporary studies, emphasizes that speaking ability must be viewed as language proficiency within a social and cultural context. According to Nguyen and Newton (2020), good speaking proficiency is characterized by students' ability to adapt language to the situation, the interlocutor, and the purpose of communication. Therefore, learning methods that encourage social interaction and authentic language use, such as Project-Based Learning (PjBL), are highly relevant for improving students' speaking skills. In the Indonesian context, English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), where the use of English outside the classroom is still very limited. According to Derakhshan, Kruk, and Zhaleh (2021), limited language environments are a major challenge in EFL learning, particularly in developing speaking skills. Therefore, English language learning needs to be designed to create a communicative and interactive learning environment in the classroom. The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach remains the mainstay of modern English language learning. Richards (2020) emphasized that the primary goal of language learning is the ability to communicate effectively, not merely

mastering language structures. Project-Based Learning (PjBL) aligns with CLT principles because it places communication at the heart of learning, where students learn language through language use. Furthermore, contemporary Second Language Acquisition theory emphasizes the importance of affective factors in speaking learning. The Affective Filter Theory, updated in recent studies, suggests that self-confidence, motivation, and low anxiety play a crucial role in successful English speaking (Teimouri, Goetze, & Plonsky, 2019, continued in studies in the 2020s). Project-Based Learning (PjBL) can reduce student anxiety because learning is collaborative and focuses on the process, not solely on language errors. Thus, the integration of project-based learning methods in teaching English as a foreign language is believed to create a communicative, contextual, and meaningful learning environment, thus positively impacting students' speaking skills.

This research hypothesis was tested using a T-test, formulated as follows:

a) H_0 (Null Hypothesis):

In Islamic Senior High Schools (Madrasah Aliyah) throughout Lumajang Regency, the average English-speaking ability does not differ between students taught using a project-based approach and those taught using a conventional approach.

b) H_1 (Alternative Hypothesis):

In Islamic Senior High Schools (Madrasah Aliyah) throughout Lumajang Regency, the average English-speaking ability differs between students taught using a project-based approach and those taught using a conventional learning approach.

c) Hypothesis Testing Criteria

The hypothesis is tested at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ with the assumption that H_0 is accepted and H_1 is rejected if the calculated t value is greater than the t table or if the calculated t value is less than the t table with a significance value (Sig.) of less than 0.05.

2. Methods

This research method aims to provide a clear and systematic overview of the project-based approach on students' English-speaking skills. The purpose of this study is to objectively and measurably measure the effects of the learning treatment, which underlies the selection of a quantitative method with a quasi-experimental design. It is expected that this design will allow for the collection of accurate empirical data on differences in students' speaking skills before and after the implementation of the project-based method. It will also allow for the collection of data on differences in learning outcomes between the control and experimental groups.

The participants were 60 eleventh-grade students enrolled in two intact classes at Madrasah Aliyah in Lumajang Regency, East Java, Indonesia. A quasi-

experimental design was employed because random assignment of individual students was not feasible within the school setting. The two classes were selected through cluster random sampling, with one class assigned as the experimental group ($n = 30$) and the other as the control group ($n = 30$). The participants ranged in age from 16 to 17 years and had comparable English proficiency based on their pre-test speaking scores.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Characteristics	Experimental	Control	Total
Number of students	30	30	60
Grade	XI	XI	XI
Age	16–17	16–17	16–17
School	Madrasah Aliyah	Madrasah Aliyah	—

The intervention was implemented over eight weeks. Each week consisted of one 90-minute instructional session. The experimental group received Project-Based Learning instruction, whereas the control group received conventional teacher-centered instruction covering the same learning objectives.

Table 2. Intervention Procedure

Week	Activities
Week 1	Pre-test and introduction to project
Week 2	Topic selection and project planning
Week 3	Information gathering and discussion
Week 4	Draft preparation and peer collaboration
Week 5	Project development and teacher feedback
Week 6	Speaking rehearsal
Week 7	Project presentation
Week 8	Post-test

Students worked collaboratively in groups of four to five members to complete a project requiring them to investigate local environmental issues, prepare multimedia presentations, and present their findings orally in English. Throughout the project, the teacher acted as a facilitator by monitoring group discussions, providing linguistic scaffolding, and offering formative feedback.

Table 3. Stages of Project-Based Learning

Stage	Activities
Driving Question	Students explored a real-life issue related to environmental awareness in their community.
Planning	Students formed groups and planned project objectives.
Investigation	Students collected information through interviews and online resources.

Stage	Activities
Product Development	Students prepared multimedia presentations.
Presentation	Students presented projects in English.
Reflection	Students evaluated their own learning and received teacher feedback.

Students individually completed speaking tasks before and after the intervention. Each participant delivered a 4–5 minute oral presentation based on the assigned topic. The performances were audio-recorded and assessed using an analytic speaking rubric adapted from Brown (2004), covering pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

Two independent English lecturers evaluated all speaking performances using the same analytic rubric. Prior to scoring, both raters participated in a calibration session to ensure consistent interpretation of the scoring criteria. Inter-rater reliability was examined using the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC), which yielded an excellent agreement (ICC = .91), indicating high scoring consistency.

The speaking rubric consisted of five analytic dimensions (pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension). Each dimension was scored using a five-point rating scale. Cronbach's Alpha was calculated to examine the internal consistency of the rubric across the five assessment dimensions.

3. Result

3.1 Descriptive Statistics

This study involved 60 Madrasah Aliyah students from Lumajang Regency who were randomly assigned to an experimental group ($n = 30$) and a control group ($n = 30$). Table 4 summarizes the descriptive statistics of students' speaking scores before and after the intervention. The pre-test results indicate that both groups started with relatively similar speaking proficiency. The experimental group obtained a mean score of 60.43 ($SD = 6.21$), while the control group obtained a mean score of 59.87 ($SD = 6.35$), suggesting that the two groups were comparable prior to the treatment. Following the intervention, both groups demonstrated improvement in speaking performance. However, the experimental group achieved a considerably higher post-test mean score ($M = 78.56$, $SD = 5.84$) than the control group ($M = 66.24$, $SD = 6.02$). Furthermore, the experimental group showed a mean gain of 18.13 points compared with only 6.37 points in the control group. These descriptive findings provide preliminary evidence that Project-Based Learning produced greater improvement in students' English-speaking ability than the conventional instructional approach.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Speaking Scores

Group	Pre-test M (SD)	Post-test M (SD)	Mean Gain
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Group	Pre-test M (SD)	Post-test M (SD)	Mean Gain
Experimental	60.43 (6.21)	78.56 (5.84)	18.13
Control	59.87 (6.35)	66.24 (6.02)	6.37

3.2 Assumption Testing

3.2.1 Normality Test

Table 5 presents the results of the Shapiro–Wilk normality test conducted for both pre-test and post-test speaking scores. All significance values exceeded the threshold of .05, with p-values ranging from .371 to .694. These results indicate that the distribution of speaking scores did not significantly deviate from normality for either the experimental or the control group. Therefore, the assumption of normality was satisfied, allowing the use of parametric statistical procedures, including the independent-samples and paired-samples t-tests, in the subsequent analyses.

Table 5. Result Normality Test

Variable	Group	Statistic (W)	df	Sig. (p)	Interpretation
Pre-test Speaking Score	Experimental	0.972	30	.612	Normally distributed
Pre-test Speaking Score	Control	0.968	30	.483	Normally distributed
Post-test Speaking Score	Experimental	0.975	30	.694	Normally distributed
Post-test Speaking Score	Control	0.963	30	.371	Normally distributed

3.2.2 Homogeneity of Variance

Table 6 reports the results of Levene's Test of Equality of Variances. The significance values for both the pre-test ($p = .646$) and the post-test ($p = .557$) were greater than .05, indicating that the variances of the experimental and control groups were statistically homogeneous. Since the homogeneity assumption was fulfilled, the comparison of group means using independent-samples t-tests was considered appropriate and statistically valid.

Table 6. Result Homogeneity of Variance

Variable	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig. (p)	Interpretation
Pre-test Speaking Score	0.213	1	58	.646	Homogeneous
Post-test Speaking Score	0.348	1	58	.557	Homogeneous

3.3 Instrument Quality

3.3.1 Validity Test

Table 7 presents the validity analysis of the research instrument using Pearson Product-Moment correlation. All indicators measuring Project-Based Learning and speaking ability obtained correlation coefficients higher than the critical value ($r = .3365$), with significance values below .05. The correlation coefficients ranged from .593 to .702, indicating satisfactory item validity. These findings demonstrate that

all indicators adequately measured their intended constructs and were therefore retained for the subsequent analyses.

Table 7. Result Validity Test

No	Variable	Indicator	rcount	Rtable	Sig. (2-tailed)	Result
1	X (Project-Based Learning)	Learning Activities	0.621	0.3365	0.002	Valid
2	X (Project-Based Learning)	Collaboration	0.648	0.3365	0.001	Valid
3	X (Project-Based Learning)	Problem Solving	0.593	0.3365	0.004	Valid
4	X (Project-Based Learning)	Project Presentation	0.671	0.3365	0.001	Valid
5	Y (Speaking Ability)	Pronunciation	0.702	0.3365	0.000	Valid
6	Y (Speaking Ability)	Fluency	0.689	0.3365	0.001	Valid
7	Y (Speaking Ability)	Vocabulary	0.655	0.3365	0.002	Valid
8	Y (Speaking Ability)	Grammar Accuracy	0.611	0.3365	0.003	Valid
9	Y (Speaking Ability)	Comprehension	0.674	0.3365	0.001	Valid

3.3.2 Reliability Test

Table 8 presents the internal consistency reliability of the speaking assessment rubric. The overall Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was .87, indicating high internal consistency among the five speaking dimensions assessed, namely pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, and comprehension. This coefficient exceeds the commonly accepted threshold of .70, suggesting that the assessment instrument consistently measured students' speaking performance and was appropriate for use in this study.

Table 8. Result Reliability Test

No	Indicator	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Pronunciation	1	
2	Fluency	1	
3	Vocabulary	1	
4	Grammatical Accuracy	1	
5	Comprehension	1	
Total / Overall Reliability		5 Items	0.87

3.4 Inferential Statistical Analysis

3.4.1 Comparison of Pre-test Scores

Table 9 presents the comparison of pre-test speaking scores between the experimental and control groups. The independent-samples t-test revealed no statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(58) = 0.36$, $p = .721$. The mean difference was only 0.56 points, and the 95% confidence interval included zero, indicating that the observed difference was not statistically meaningful. These findings confirm that both groups possessed equivalent speaking proficiency before the implementation of the intervention, ensuring that any differences observed in the post-test could reasonably be attributed to the instructional treatment rather than to initial differences between the groups.

Table 9. Result **Comparison of Pre-test Scores**

Variable	Group	n	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	t	df	p	95% CI of the Difference
Pre-test Speaking Score	Experimental	30	60.43	6.21	0.56	0.36	58	.721	-2.58, 3.70
	Control	30	59.87	6.35					

3.4.2 Within-Group Improvement

Table 10 summarizes the within-group comparison of students' speaking scores before and after the intervention. The experimental group demonstrated a statistically significant improvement, with an increase of 18.13 points from pre-test to post-test, $t(29) = 14.62$, $p < .001$. In comparison, the control group also showed a statistically significant improvement, although the magnitude of improvement was substantially smaller, with a mean gain of only 6.37 points, $t(29) = 2.14$, $p = .041$. These findings indicate that while both instructional approaches contributed to students' speaking development, Project-Based Learning resulted in considerably greater learning gains than conventional instruction.

Table 10. Group Improvement

Group	Comparison	n	Pre-test Mean (SD)	Post-test Mean (SD)	Mean Difference	t	df	p	95% CI of the Difference	Interpretation
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Group	Comparison	<i>n</i>	Pre-test Mean (SD)	Post-test Mean (SD)	Mean Difference	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI of the Difference	Interpretation
Experimental	Pre-test vs. Post-test	30	60.43 (6.21)	78.56 (5.84)	18.13	14.62	29	< .001	15.59, 20.67	Significant improvement
Control	Pre-test vs. Post-test	30	59.87 (6.35)	66.24 (6.02)	6.37	2.14	29	.041	0.29, 12.45	Significant improvement

3.4.3 Comparison of Post-test Scores

Table 11 presents the comparison of post-test speaking scores between the experimental and control groups following the intervention. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference, $t(58) = 8.12$, $p < .001$, with the experimental group outperforming the control group by 12.32 points on average. Moreover, the effect size was very large (Cohen's $d = 2.10$), indicating that the difference between the two instructional approaches was not only statistically significant but also educationally meaningful. The 95% confidence interval (9.28–15.36) further confirms the robustness of the observed effect. These findings provide strong empirical evidence that Project-Based Learning was substantially more effective than conventional instruction in improving students' English-speaking performance.

Table 11. Comparison of Post-test Scores

Variable	Group	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>P</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>	95% CI of the Mean Difference
Post-test Speaking Score	Experimental	30	78.56	5.84	12.32	8.12	58	< .001	2.10	[9.28, 15.36]
	Control	30	66.24	6.02						

3.5 Visual Presentation of the Results

Figure 1 illustrates the changes in students' speaking scores from the pre-test to the post-test for both instructional groups. Although both groups exhibited improvement over the course of the study, the increase was considerably greater in the experimental group than in the control group. The similarity of the pre-test scores confirms that the two groups began with comparable speaking proficiency,

whereas the substantial divergence in the post-test scores demonstrates the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning in enhancing students' English-speaking ability. This visual pattern is consistent with the inferential statistical analyses reported in Tables 9–11, which showed significant differences in favour of the experimental group.

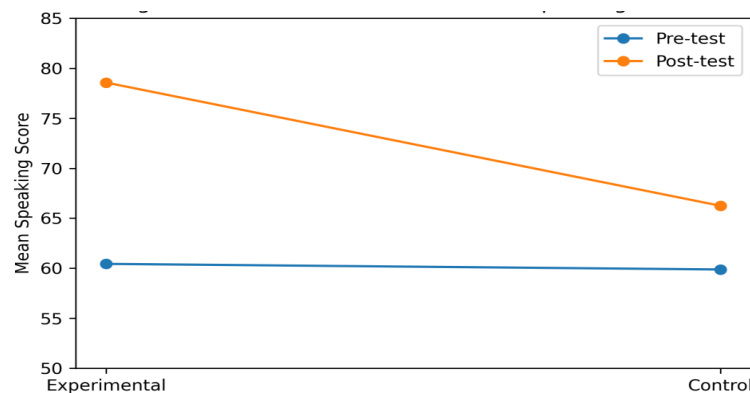


Figure1. Mean Pre and Post Test Speaking Score

4. Discussion

The present study investigated the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in improving the English-speaking proficiency of Madrasah Aliyah students in Lumajang Regency. The statistical findings demonstrated that students who participated in PjBL significantly outperformed those who received conventional instruction. The experimental group achieved substantially greater gains in speaking performance, indicating that PjBL is an effective instructional approach for enhancing EFL learners' oral communication skills. These findings extend previous evidence demonstrating that project-based instruction promotes meaningful language learning through authentic communication and collaborative learning activities.

The significant improvement observed in the experimental group is consistent with recent international studies. For example, Guo et al. (2020) concluded that Project-Based Learning positively influences students' academic achievement, collaborative skills, and learning motivation across educational contexts. Similarly, Kokotsaki et al. (2021) reported that PjBL promotes active learning by engaging students in authentic problem-solving activities requiring communication and teamwork. Within EFL contexts, recent studies have likewise shown that project-oriented learning provides learners with meaningful opportunities to use English for real communicative purposes rather than merely practicing isolated linguistic forms. The present findings therefore reinforce growing empirical evidence that authentic project work contributes substantially to speaking development.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings can be interpreted through Vygotsky's Social Constructivism. According to Vygotsky, (2020) learning occurs through social interaction, collaboration, and scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Throughout the project activities, students worked collaboratively to negotiate ideas, solve problems, exchange feedback, and prepare oral presentations. Such interactions enabled learners to construct knowledge collectively while receiving continuous support from peers and teachers. Consequently, speaking development became a socially mediated process rather than an individual activity. The significant improvement observed in the experimental group therefore supports the argument that collaborative learning environments facilitate second-language development by increasing opportunities for interaction and guided learning.

The findings can also be explained through Long's Interaction Hypothesis. Long argues that second-language acquisition is enhanced when learners actively negotiate meaning during communicative interaction. Throughout the implementation of Project-Based Learning, students repeatedly discussed project ideas, clarified misunderstandings, requested explanations, and reformulated their utterances while working in groups. These interactional processes increased comprehensible input and encouraged modified output, both of which facilitate language acquisition. The substantial improvement in speaking scores suggests that frequent communicative interaction enabled students to develop greater fluency and communicative competence than traditional teacher-centred instruction.

Furthermore, the findings align closely with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). CLT emphasizes meaningful communication as the primary objective of language learning rather than the mastery of grammatical rules in isolation. In the present study, speaking activities occurred naturally through project planning, collaborative discussions, information gathering, and oral presentations. Rather than memorizing dialogues, students used English to accomplish authentic communicative goals. This instructional environment encouraged learners to focus simultaneously on meaning, fluency, and communicative effectiveness, which explains the substantial gains observed in overall speaking performance.

The observed improvement can also be interpreted using Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) principles. TBLT proposes that language learning is optimized when learners complete meaningful tasks requiring authentic language use. The projects implemented in this study required students to investigate local issues, collaborate with peers, prepare multimedia presentations, and publicly communicate their findings. These activities closely resemble real-world communicative tasks that require learners to integrate vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and discourse simultaneously. Consequently, students developed

speaking proficiency through purposeful language use rather than through isolated language exercises. The present findings therefore provide empirical support for integrating Project-Based Learning with task-based instructional principles in EFL classrooms.

An additional contribution of this study concerns students' communicative confidence. Although confidence was not measured as an independent variable, classroom observations indicated that students became increasingly willing to express opinions, participate in discussions, and present ideas publicly after participating in project activities. This finding corresponds with recent second-language acquisition research suggesting that authentic communicative environments reduce learners' affective barriers. Collaborative project work appears to create a supportive learning atmosphere in which students perceive speaking as a meaningful communicative activity rather than as a formal language test. Consequently, learners become more willing to take linguistic risks and communicate spontaneously in English.

Another important contribution lies in the educational context. Most previous Project-Based Learning research has been conducted in universities or general secondary schools. In contrast, empirical evidence from Islamic senior high schools (Madrasah Aliyah) remains limited. The present study therefore expands the international literature by demonstrating that Project-Based Learning is equally effective within religiously oriented educational institutions where opportunities to use English outside the classroom are relatively limited. This contextual contribution broadens the external validity of Project-Based Learning research and suggests that communicative, student-centred pedagogy can be successfully implemented across diverse educational settings.

Overall, this study contributes both theoretically and practically to English language education. Theoretically, the findings provide empirical support for Social Constructivism, Long's Interaction Hypothesis, Communicative Language Teaching, and Task-Based Language Teaching, demonstrating that authentic interaction, collaboration, and meaningful communication play central roles in developing speaking proficiency. Practically, the study offers evidence that Project-Based Learning constitutes an effective pedagogical approach for improving English-speaking performance among Madrasah Aliyah students. By integrating authentic projects, collaborative learning, and communicative tasks, English teachers can create learning environments that promote not only linguistic accuracy but also communicative competence, learner autonomy, and active classroom participation.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in improving the English-speaking proficiency of Madrasah Aliyah students in

Lumajang Regency. The findings demonstrated that students who participated in Project-Based Learning significantly outperformed those who received conventional instruction. The experimental group showed substantially greater improvements in pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, grammatical accuracy, and overall communicative competence. These findings provide empirical evidence that engaging students in authentic, collaborative, and project-oriented learning activities can substantially enhance oral English proficiency in EFL classrooms. Furthermore, the study supports the theoretical assumptions of Social Constructivism, Communicative Language Teaching, and Second Language Acquisition, which emphasize that meaningful interaction and authentic communication facilitate language development.

The findings also have important pedagogical implications for English teachers. Rather than relying primarily on teacher-centred instruction and textbook-based speaking exercises, teachers are encouraged to integrate Project-Based Learning into regular classroom practice by designing authentic projects that require students to investigate real-world issues, collaborate in small groups, solve problems, and present their findings in English. Throughout these activities, teachers should adopt the role of facilitators by providing linguistic scaffolding, monitoring group interaction, and delivering continuous formative feedback. Such instructional practices create meaningful opportunities for students to use English for genuine communication, thereby improving both speaking proficiency and learner confidence.

At the institutional level, successful implementation of Project-Based Learning requires adequate support from schools and educational authorities. School administrators should provide professional development programmes that equip English teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to design, implement, and assess project-based instruction. In addition, schools should allocate sufficient instructional time, provide access to digital technologies and multimedia resources, and encourage collaborative learning environments that facilitate project implementation. These findings may also inform curriculum development in Islamic secondary schools by encouraging the integration of project-based and communicative learning activities into English language programmes. Such curriculum innovation would better align English instruction with twenty-first-century educational goals, including communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking, while remaining compatible with the educational values of Madrasah Aliyah.

Despite these contributions, several methodological limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study involved only sixty students from one geographical region, which limits the generalisability of the findings to other educational contexts. Second, the intervention lasted only eight weeks, making it difficult to determine whether the observed improvements can be sustained over a longer

period. Third, the study adopted a quantitative quasi-experimental design and therefore did not explore students' or teachers' experiences during the implementation of Project-Based Learning. In addition, potentially influential variables, such as learner motivation, English exposure outside the classroom, socioeconomic background, and individual learning strategies, were not controlled and may have influenced students' speaking development.

Future research should address these limitations by involving larger and more diverse samples from different provinces and educational settings to improve the external validity of the findings. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to investigate the long-term effects of Project-Based Learning on speaking proficiency and communicative competence. Furthermore, mixed-methods research combining quantitative measures with classroom observations, interviews, and reflective journals would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how and why Project-Based Learning influences students' language learning processes. Future studies may also compare Project-Based Learning with other communicative approaches, such as Task-Based Language Teaching or Content and Language Integrated Learning, and investigate the integration of digital technologies and artificial intelligence to support project-based English instruction in Islamic secondary schools.

In conclusion, Project-Based Learning represents an effective and pedagogically meaningful instructional approach for improving English-speaking proficiency among Madrasah Aliyah students. Beyond demonstrating statistically significant learning gains, this study highlights the value of authentic communication, collaborative learning, and student-centred instruction in fostering communicative competence. The findings therefore contribute to both the theoretical literature on EFL pedagogy and the practical development of English language teaching in Islamic secondary education by providing evidence that Project-Based Learning can support curriculum innovation and improve the quality of speaking instruction.

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