



The implementation of project-based learning to improve students' speaking skills: a systematic literature review

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The implementation of project-based learning to improve students' speaking skills: a systematic literature review

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ABSTRACT

This systematic literature review examines the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in improving students' speaking skills in Indonesian EFL classrooms. The review analyzes 20 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2024, selected based on explicit inclusion criteria: empirical studies conducted in Indonesian EFL contexts, focusing on speaking skills, and employing PBL as the primary instructional approach. Data were synthesized using thematic content analysis to identify patterns of implementation, learning outcomes, and challenges. The findings indicate that PBL is commonly implemented through projects such as debates, storytelling, video-based tasks, and digital presentations. Compared to conventional teacher-centered methods, PBL demonstrates stronger effects on speaking fluency, confidence, vocabulary development, pronunciation, and communicative interaction. Different project types contribute to specific speaking outcomes, with storytelling enhancing pronunciation and intonation, while debates and presentations improve fluency and accuracy. However, several challenges persist, including limited instructional time, uneven group participation, insufficient teacher readiness, and technological constraints, which reflect broader structural and institutional issues. The study highlights the need for systematic scaffolding, teacher training, and curriculum alignment to support effective PBL implementation. Overall, the review confirms that PBL is a flexible and effective approach for enhancing speaking skills in Indonesian EFL contexts.



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Introduction

Speaking is widely recognized as a core component of communicative competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, particularly in contexts where English is not used for daily communication, such as Indonesia. Unlike receptive skills, speaking requires learners to process linguistic input and produce meaningful output in real time, involving both cognitive control and affective regulation. Learners must simultaneously manage pronunciation, intonation, fluency, and

self-confidence while applying grammatical knowledge and vocabulary retrieval under time pressure. This complex integration of linguistic, cognitive, and affective processes makes speaking a particularly demanding skill to develop in EFL classrooms. Empirical evidence from Indonesian EFL contexts indicates that learners frequently experience difficulty in achieving oral proficiency due to limited opportunities for authentic interaction and fear of making errors. In line with these findings, [Meinawati et al., \(2024\)](#) emphasize that speaking is one of the most difficult aspects of teaching and learning a second language.

Despite the emphasis placed on speaking in the revised 2013 curriculum, many Indonesian students still struggle to communicate effectively in English. Several studies, including [Widiawati et al. \(2024\)](#), [Muzri et al. \(2024\)](#) and [Cahyana et al. \(2022\)](#) confirm that students often face problems such as low fluency, limited vocabulary, poor pronunciation, and fear of making mistakes. The traditional teacher-centered methods and lack of authentic speaking opportunities are cited as primary causes ([Mirah, 2020](#); [Zubaidi et al., 2021](#)).

In order to overcome these enduring difficulties, Project-Based Learning (PBL) has become a viable substitute in EFL classes. PBL is a student-centered teaching approach that actively explores real-world problems to generate valuable outcomes. According to [Mirah \(2020\)](#) and [Amalia et al., \(2024\)](#) PBL fosters collaboration, creativity, and purposeful language use, which are essential components of speaking development. Through well-structured group projects such as video presentations, interviews, and digital storytelling, learners are encouraged to engage in authentic and spontaneous communication ([Karjono et al., 2024](#); [Kusmaryani, 2022](#)).

Numerous studies over the last five years have reported positive effects of Project-Based Learning (PBL) on students' speaking abilities across various Indonesian educational contexts. These findings are particularly relevant to the objectives of the 2013 Curriculum [Kurikulum \(2013\)](#), which explicitly requires learners to demonstrate oral communicative competence, including the ability to express ideas, present information, and participate in spoken interaction using appropriate pronunciation, fluency, and accuracy. Within this curricular framework, PBL has been positioned as a pedagogical approach that aligns with experiential learning and student-centered communication practices. For instance, [Latifah et al., \(2019\)](#) reported that Project-Based Learning is effective in improving students' speaking skills. Similarly, [Wuntu et al. \(2022\)](#) documented gains in grammar accuracy and oral expression among senior high school students. Other research by [Alfatihah et al., \(2022\)](#) and [Aryarta & Saraswati \(2024\)](#) also highlighted increased motivation and participation as secondary benefits of PBL.

limiting the generalizability of their findings. Moreover, few studies provide critical or comparative analyses of PBL in relation to conventional teacher-centered instruction, which remains dominant in Indonesian EFL classrooms. Teacher-centered practices often restrict opportunities for authentic oral interaction, place excessive emphasis on form-focused instruction, and position students as passive recipients of knowledge, thereby constraining the development of speaking fluency and confidence. In addition, challenges such as time constraints, [Alfatihah et al., \(2022\)](#), uneven student participation, [Muzri S et al., \(2024\)](#) difficulties in managing group dynamics [Mirah, \(2020\)](#) and limited teacher readiness are frequently mentioned but rarely examined as interconnected structural issues.

In light of these limitations, a systematic literature review (SLR) is necessary to critically synthesize existing findings, identify patterns and inconsistencies, and clarify how PBL can effectively address the demands of speaking instruction in Indonesian EFL contexts.

This study aims to examine how Project-Based Learning (PBL) has been implemented to enhance students' speaking skills in Indonesian EFL classrooms from 2020 to 2024. It focuses on how PBL is applied in practice, which specific components of speaking skills have improved, and what challenges and pedagogical implications have been reported. The study is driven by the ongoing concern that many Indonesian students still struggle with speaking despite years of formal English instruction, raising questions about the effectiveness of existing teaching methods. In line with the call of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia for more communicative and student-centered approaches, PBL is considered a promising strategy to create more effective, engaging, and meaningful English-speaking instruction that supports students' academic and professional success.

Furthermore, PBL aligns with current trends in 21st-century education that emphasize student autonomy, creativity, digital literacy, and collaborative learning. In studies conducted by [Latifah et al., \(2019\)](#) and [Ariani et al., \(2023\)](#) students engage actively and have high interest and motivation during the learning process through Project-Based Learning. These outcomes illustrate that PBL does not solely serve linguistic objectives but also broader communication competence. Despite its benefits, the success of PBL is closely tied to contextual factors such as school infrastructure, teacher readiness, and classroom culture. For instance, [Ginusti \(2023\)](#) noted that while students' speaking confidence increased through group presentations, many still hesitated due to fear of making mistakes and lack of supportive feedback. Therefore, implementing PBL requires thoughtful scaffolding and teacher training to maximize its impact.

Another relevant consideration in evaluating the use of PBL for speaking skills is how the nature of the projects themselves influences student engagement and oral performance. According to [Ariani et al., \(2023\)](#) students engage actively and have high interest and motivation during the learning process through Project-Based Learning. This aligns with the notion that meaningful communication occurs when learners are emotionally invested and cognitively challenged. The authenticity of the task played a major role in the development of natural speech patterns, as reported in other project formats such as storytelling videos and digital campaigns.

Moreover, some studies have shown that PBL enhances metacognitive awareness and reflective speaking practices. In research by [Aryarta and Saraswati \(2024\)](#) junior high school students were asked to conduct peer evaluations after presenting their group projects. The reflection sessions helped students identify specific strengths and weaknesses in their speaking, particularly in pronunciation and grammar usage.

These results lend credence to the claim that PBL fosters self-evaluation and learning autonomy, two essential components of long-term language development, in addition to providing speaking practice. Finally, the varied institutional and geographic settings among the reviewed studies demonstrate how PBL can be implemented in a variety of settings in Indonesia, ranging from distant junior high schools to urban universities. But they also draw attention to structural disparities in resource availability, especially with regard to technology and teacher preparation. This emphasizes how crucial it is to localize PBL frameworks while guaranteeing policy-level backing for uniform implementation across geographical boundaries.

Method

The methodological procedures employed in this systematic literature review (SLR) are outlined in this section to ensure transparency, rigor, and reproducibility. A structured and sequential review process was adopted following established SLR protocols, with explicit reference to the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines. The PRISMA framework was applied not merely as a reporting label but as an operational guide throughout the review stages, including identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion. Each stage was documented to demonstrate a clear audit trail from initial data collection to thematic synthesis.

Research Design and Theoretical Framework

Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is a research methodology designed to identify, assess, and synthesize available evidence pertaining to a particular topic using a methodical and transparent process. It is particularly relevant for topics that have seen growing but fragmented research over time. In this study, the SLR method is utilized to explore how Project-Based Learning (PBL) has been implemented in Indonesian EFL classrooms to improve speaking skills from 2020 to 2024.

According to [Petticrew and Roberts \(2006\)](#) SLR is not merely a summary of literature but a rigorous process of evidence synthesis that enables researchers to uncover consistencies, trends, and research gaps. Because SLR makes it possible to categorize and thematically cluster findings from various studies, it is crucial when the body of evidence is vast and diverse. Therefore, using SLR in this study guarantees that the conclusions made regarding PBL's efficacy in improving speaking abilities are thorough, supported by evidence, and contextually relevant.

Data Sources and Search Strategy

To ensure the comprehensiveness of the literature review, the search strategy targeted two key academic databases: Google Scholar and GARUDA (Garba Rujukan Digital). Google Scholar was chosen for its wide coverage of scholarly publications, including international and national journals, while GARUDA was selected due to its specific focus on peer-reviewed articles from Indonesian-accredited journals (SINTA 1–6), thus ensuring local relevance.

The search was conducted using a combination of Boolean operators and keywords as follows "Project-Based Learning" OR "PBL" AND "speaking skills" AND "EFL" OR "English as a Foreign Language" AND "Indonesia". The search was restricted to articles published between 2020–2024, peer-reviewed journal publications, and full-text availability in either English or Bahasa Indonesia. Through this search, a total of approximately 3,400 articles were initially identified. This comprehensive search formed the foundation for the next phases of the review.

Screening and Selection Procedures

A thorough multi-phase screening procedure was used to systematically reduce the dataset and keep only those articles that were most in line with the review's goals and focus after the first identification of potentially pertinent studies. This step was essential to improving the quality, coherence, and credibility of the evidence base used for synthesis, not just to decrease the amount of literature.

In the context of a systematic literature review, not all retrieved articles possess equal methodological strength or relevance. Some may superficially mention the keywords (e.g., Project-Based Learning or speaking skills), but upon closer inspection, lack depth in implementation, empirical analysis, or contextual fit. Therefore, the screening process served as a critical quality assurance mechanism, filtering out studies that did not explicitly apply PBL, did not target speaking as a skill, or were not conducted within Indonesian EFL environments.

This process involved first screening article titles and abstracts to quickly eliminate irrelevant, off-topic, or duplicate records. Articles that passed this initial phase were then subjected to a full-text review to assess methodological rigor, clarity of intervention, and validity of findings. Only studies that clearly demonstrated an empirical engagement with the theme—through data collection, analysis, and reporting—were advanced to the final inclusion phase.

Through a structured and rigorous screening process, this review ensured that only relevant and high-quality studies were included. The selection began with a title and abstract screening to identify studies that explicitly discussed Project-Based Learning (PBL) and speaking skills, while removing duplicates, resulting in 100 articles. These articles then underwent a full-text review and were included only if they implemented PBL as the instructional approach, focused on speaking skills as a primary component, were conducted in Indonesian EFL contexts, and presented empirical data (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method). This stage narrowed the selection to 40 studies. A final evaluation based on methodological quality and contextual relevance further reduced the number to 20 articles, which were ultimately included in the systematic literature review, ensuring a meaningful and well-grounded synthesis.

Data Extraction and Coding Framework

After selecting the final 20 articles, each study was carefully analyzed using a structured data extraction form to ensure consistency and accuracy. The form captured key information such as the authors and year of publication, participants and educational level (e.g., junior high school, senior high school, or university), research design, types of projects or media used in PBL (such as videos or podcasts), main findings, specific speaking components that improved (e.g., fluency, grammar, vocabulary), and any reported challenges. This manual extraction process helped maintain accuracy and ensured that the data aligned clearly with the thematic categories used in the analysis.

Data Analysis through Thematic Synthesis

The next step involved synthesizing the data using a thematic analysis approach. This technique allowed for a structured exploration of common patterns and themes across the selected studies, while still preserving individual study nuances.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion and exclusion criteria served as filters to maintain methodological clarity and contextual relevance. The following table summarizes the applied criteria:

Table 1. The Applied Criteria

| Criteria | Inclusion | Exclusion |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Publication Date | 2020–2024 | Before 2020 |
| Language | English or Bahasa Indonesia | Other languages |
| Context | Conducted in Indonesian EFL classrooms | Non-Indonesian contexts |
| Focus | Project-Based Learning for speaking skills | PBL focusing on writing, listening, or reading only |
| Type of Publication | Peer-reviewed journal articles | Theses, books, or unpublished works |
| Methodological Rigor | Studies with clear empirical research design | Conceptual papers without empirical evidence |

By clearly delineating these criteria, the study maintains consistency in scope while ensuring comparability of findings.

Thematic synthesis steps

The analysis was conducted through a three-step process. First, open coding was used to label key phrases from each study related to PBL implementation, outcomes, and challenges. Next, similar codes were grouped into broader themes aligned with the research questions, focusing on implementation strategies and contexts, improvements in speaking skills, and reported challenges and implications. Finally, the findings were interpreted narratively to identify patterns across studies. This approach allowed the review to develop a clear and cohesive understanding of how PBL was applied in different contexts and what factors influenced its effectiveness.

PRISMA Flow Summary

To ensure transparency, the PRISMA framework was used to visually and textually represent the article selection process.

Table 2 PRISMA Table

| Stage | Description | Number of Studies |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Identification | Articles identified via database search | 3,400 |
| Screening | Articles screened by title and abstract | 100 |
| Eligibility | Full-text articles assessed for eligibility | 40 |
| Inclusion | Studies included in final review | 20 |

Visual PRISMA Flow Diagram

The following diagram summarizes the systematic review process visually:

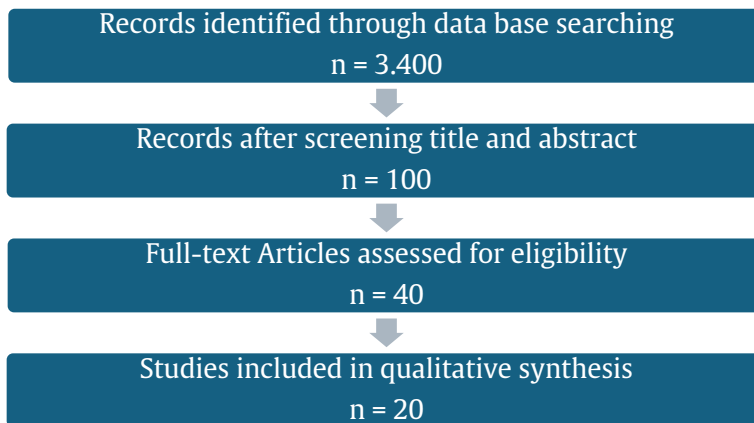


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow of Article Selection Process

Every stage of the PRISMA diagram was necessary to guarantee that the papers examined were pertinent, reliable, and directly addressed the main goals of this investigation. The validity of the review's themes and conclusions was reinforced by this stringent filtering procedure.

All things considered, this review's methodological rigor guarantees that its conclusions are supported by empirical data that has been methodically located, meticulously screened, and thematically synthesized. This approach not only makes the findings more credible, but it also offers a reproducible template for upcoming reviews of the literature on PBL and language acquisition in Indonesian settings.

Results and Discussions

The results of the systematic literature review, which is organized to address the three research questions (RQ1–RQ3) previously posed, are summarized in this section. The review is based on 20 peer-reviewed journal articles that specifically look at how Project-Based Learning (PBL) can help Indonesian EFL students become more proficient speakers. These articles were published between 2020 and 2024. These studies, which reflect a variety of educational settings and instructional approaches, were chosen in accordance with explicit inclusion criteria.

A thematic analysis of the chosen studies revealed a number of recurrent themes. These trends relate to the ways in which PBL has been applied, the particular aspects of speaking abilities that were enhanced, and the difficulties and educational ramifications that have been documented in various settings. To give a concise and logical summary of the available data, the findings are arranged according to each research question.

Implementation of PBL in Indonesian EFL Speaking Classrooms

The reviewed studies show that PBL has been used in many different ways. Even though the projects and settings vary, a broad trend that prioritizes student cooperation, media integration, and practical speaking assignments shows up.

Types of Projects Used

Across the reviewed studies, the variety of project types reflects a shared pedagogical orientation toward authenticity, multimodality, and sustained oral production rather than isolated speaking drills. Despite differences in educational level and media choice, the projects consistently positioned speaking as a meaning-making activity embedded in collaborative and task-oriented contexts. Video-based and digital projects tended to promote fluency, confidence, and vocabulary expansion through repeated rehearsal and performance, while narrative-based projects such as storytelling and drama more strongly supported pronunciation, intonation, and discourse organization. Visual-supported tasks, including posters and digital slides, functioned as cognitive scaffolds that reduced speaking anxiety and supported structured oral delivery. Collectively, these patterns suggest that the effectiveness of PBL in speaking instruction is less dependent on specific project formats and more on how projects integrate interaction, rehearsal, audience awareness, and reflective practice. This synthesis highlights that PBL projects operate along complementary pedagogical functions rather than as isolated techniques, offering a coherent framework for developing multiple dimensions of speaking competence in Indonesian EFL classrooms.

Throughout the 20 studies, a wide range of project types were used to improve the speaking abilities of students in Indonesian EFL classes. Video-based projects like vlogs, video presentations, and recorded dialogues were among the most popular. For instance, [Zubaidi et al., \(2021\)](#) engaged students in producing vlogs about daily life, which not only promoted spontaneous language production but also encouraged personal expression and authenticity in speaking. Similarly, [Widiawati et al., \(2024\)](#) designed a project in which engineering students participated in online video conferences to present technical content in English, demonstrating significant improvement in fluency and topic-specific vocabulary.

Other studies, such as [Ginusti \(2023\)](#) used poster presentations as a medium to encourage structured oral output paired with visual aids, allowing students to combine verbal explanation with creative design. Aryarta and [Saraswati \(2024\)](#) included oral storytelling projects, enabling junior high

school learners to retell narratives in English with an emphasis on intonation and clarity, thus enhancing their pronunciation and narrative fluency.

Another emerging trend is the use of podcasts as student-created media. Pratiwi et al., (2024) integrated video podcast production into their PBL model, showing that learners became more engaged and developed improved articulation and confidence due to repeated practice and peer evaluation. Additionally, projects like drama performances were used in Hidayat et al., (2024) although the focus on a single genre (drama) sometimes limited student creativity and participation.

Less conventional but highly impactful were collaborative digital posters (e.g., Canva) and audio storytelling, as found in Muzri & Sunra (2024) and Meinawati et al., (2024) which combined asynchronous speaking practice with visual elements. These digital tasks were especially effective during online or hybrid learning periods.

Table 3. PBL Project Formats Used in Speaking Instruction

| No | Project Format | Studies |
|----|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Video Presentations and Vlogs | Zubaidi et al. (2021); Pratiwi et al. (2024) |
| 2 | Posters and Digital Slides | Widiyati & Pangesti (2022); Aryarta & Saraswati (2024) |
| 3 | Podcasts | Pratiwi et al. (2024) |
| 4 | Drama Performances | Hidayat et al. (2024) |
| 5 | Oral Storytelling | Aryarta & Saraswati (2024) |
| 6 | Dialogue Recordings | Muzri et al. (2024) |

These findings underscore that multi-modal and technology-assisted project outputs dominate the landscape of PBL in EFL speaking, providing students with authentic and varied contexts for oral communication. This diversity not only caters to different learner preferences and proficiencies but also aligns with 21st-century learning demands that emphasize creativity, collaboration, and communication.

Distribution of PBL Project Types Across Studies

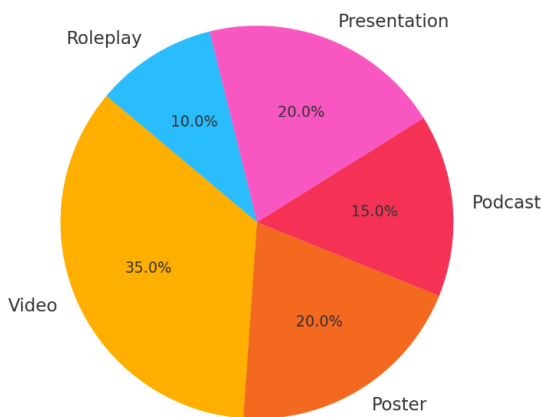


Figure 2. Distribution of PBL Project Types Across Studies

Video-based projects dominate the landscape (35%), followed by poster presentations and podcasts, reflecting the growing use of multimedia in language education.

Stages of PBL Implementation in Indonesian EFL Classrooms

A core sequence of PBL implementation stages in EFL speaking contexts is consistently described by the majority of the 20 reviewed studies. These stages typically follow the widely adopted five-phase PBL framework: project planning, designing, execution, presentation, and reflection, as originally popularized by Bell (2010) and later adapted by numerous scholars and practitioners for EFL classrooms.

Before beginning the projects, teachers typically introduce the theme, objectives, and outcomes. For instance, [Mirah \(2020\)](#) emphasized that student autonomy was integral in the initial phase, particularly in allowing learners to choose themes relevant to their interests. This choice increased their investment and reduced speaking anxiety. This emphasis on student-centered project topics was echoed in [Muzri S et al., \(2024\)](#) who reported that students became more confident and expressive when allowed to determine their own presentation content.

During the planning and preparation phase, scaffolding plays a critical role. Several studies emphasized the teacher's role in supporting students during brainstorming, drafting, and outlining. For instance, [Aryarta & Saraswati \(2024\)](#) and [Amalia et al. \(2024\)](#) both highlighted the importance of language scaffolding, including model scripts, visual aids, and structured rubrics to guide student performance. Similarly, [Widiawati \(2024\)](#) implemented rubric-referenced feedback throughout the process to ensure continuous speaking development.

The execution phase involves collaboration in small groups, draft rehearsals, and task refinement. [Muzri & Sunra \(2024\)](#) noted that students were engaged in real-world tasks such as preparing debates and promotional campaigns, which promoted higher-order thinking and contextual language use. Students often conducted role-plays, created video content, or presented posters, practicing both content and fluency.

In the presentation stage, students delivered their projects in front of peers or on digital platforms. This stage served as an opportunity for authentic performance and often required formal use of English. For example, [Zubaidi et al., \(2021\)](#) facilitated a vlog-based project where students uploaded videos to a classroom platform, promoting both spontaneity and self-evaluation. Likewise, [Ginusti \(2023\)](#) asks each group of students to make a live presentation to the class. They also developed the template or designed the digital poster.

The final stage, reflection, was implemented in various ways across the studies. Some projects included peer assessment, while others emphasized individual reflection logs. Project-based learning (PBL) reflection is used to assess the course's overall project activities ([Kusmaryani, 2022](#)). Teachers often facilitated post-project discussions focusing on challenges, language gains, and strategies for improvement.

Across these stages, the teacher's role shifted from a traditional transmitter of knowledge to a facilitator and coach, as described by [Cahyana et al. \(2022\)](#) and supported by the work of ([Ginusti , 2023](#)). Teachers' important role is to monitor, facilitate, and give feedback to students during this process.

This staged implementation model demonstrates a shared pedagogical consensus on how to conduct PBL effectively in EFL speaking contexts. However, variations in the depth of scaffolding, the integration of assessment tools, and the use of digital platforms reveal the adaptive nature of PBL depending on student level, institutional resources, and teacher experience.

Contextual Implementation Across Educational Levels

The studies reviewed represent a diverse range of educational settings, from junior high schools (SMP/MTs) to senior high schools (SMA/MA) and universities. Most secondary-level projects emphasized fluency and vocabulary, while university-level studies ([Cahyana et al., 2022](#)) focused more on professional language, technical vocabulary, and critical thinking.

Despite the contextual differences, a shared goal across all levels was to shift from teacher-centered instruction to student-driven speaking activities that mimic real-life communication.

Speaking Skill Components Improved through PBL

Which aspects of speaking were enhanced by the use of project-based learning is the subject of the second research question. Improvements in speaking performance across the 20 reviewed studies can be categorized into four main areas: vocabulary and grammar, pronunciation and intonation, fluency and confidence, and interpersonal and organizational communication skills.

Fluency and Confidence

Improved fluency and learner confidence were consistently highlighted in nearly all reviewed studies. In [Aulia et al. \(2024\)](#) MTs students involved in video-based debates and promotional campaigns

demonstrated significant improvement in spontaneous speech and reduced hesitation during conversations. Similarly, [Mirah \(2020\)](#) found that PBL enabled students to express ideas more freely, particularly through presentation tasks that allowed them to prepare and rehearse.

[Husnu et al., \(2024\)](#) and [Karjono et al., \(2024\)](#) observed that repeated exposure to speaking activities like project presentations led to greater confidence among students. Furthermore, [Menggo et al. \(2023\)](#) reported a medium-to-high improvement in university students' fluency levels, noting that real-world PBL tasks helped reduce students' speaking anxiety and fostered expressive communication.

Pronunciation and Intonation

Several studies emphasized that pronunciation benefits from repeated practice and performance-based tasks. PBL significantly improves students' speaking skills in terms of fluency, pronunciation, grammar, and confidence ([Amalia et al., 2024](#); [Ariani et al., 2023](#); [We, 2020](#)). [Widiyati & Pangesti \(2022\)](#) state that video scripts and audio recordings enabled learners to self-correct and receive feedback, improving clarity and rhythm in their speech.

[Aryarta and Saraswati \(2024\)](#) also emphasized that through storytelling projects, students began to demonstrate more accurate intonation and better emphasis on key phrases, especially in narrative-based tasks. They further noted that teacher and peer feedback played a critical role in the refinement of pronunciation, especially during group rehearsals.

Vocabulary and Grammar Usage

Vocabulary development was another consistently reported outcome of PBL, especially due to the thematic nature of most projects. For instance, in [Muzri & Sunra \(2024\)](#) entrepreneurship-themed presentations contributed to an 18.5% increase in vocabulary use as measured in post-tests. [Widiawati et al. \(2024\)](#) emphasized that vocabulary acquisition occurred naturally as students prepared materials relevant to their chosen project topics.

In terms of grammar, [Putri Cahyana et al. \(2022\)](#) found that students became more aware of verb tense consistency and sentence structure after peer evaluations and revisions during project work. Although some grammatical challenges persisted, particularly in longer or complex sentence constructions, studies agreed that integrating grammar into meaningful tasks led to noticeable improvements ([Aryarta & Saraswati, 2024](#); [Mirah, 2020](#)).

Challenges and Pedagogical Implications in Implementing PBL

Even though project-based learning has many advantages for improving speaking abilities, the reviewed studies also found persistent issues that prevent the best possible implementation. These difficulties, which affect the caliber and sustainability of PBL in the classroom, include time restraints, uneven group dynamics, restricted access to technology, and teacher readiness.

Time Constraints and Classroom Management

The lack of instructional time for full-cycle PBL activities was one of the most commonly mentioned challenges. Instructors reported that it took a lot of time to help students with the project planning, execution, and evaluation stages. [Mirah \(2020\)](#) and [Muzri & Sunra \(2024\)](#) both highlighted that multi-week project timelines clashed with dense curricular schedules, making it difficult to provide continuous support or ensure deep engagement. Similarly, [Hidayat et al. \(2024\)](#) reported that teachers felt overwhelmed with time allocation, especially when teaching large classes, leading to compromised feedback and limited opportunities for student reflection.

Organization and Interpersonal Communication

Project tasks in PBL also nurtured learners' ability to organize ideas and communicate interpersonally. In another case, [Menggo et al. \(2023\)](#) showed that interpersonal communication skills improved through structured group interactions, where learners were required to negotiate meaning, plan content, and collaboratively present their work.

[Mirah \(2020\)](#) and [Zubaidi et al. \(2021\)](#) highlighted how cooperative tasks, like debates and group discussions, fostered active listening, turn-taking, and empathy in dialogue, supporting both language and soft skill development. Additionally, [Pratiwi et al. \(2024\)](#) observed that students engaged in podcast projects developed confidence not only in expressing ideas but also in responding appropriately during group dialogues.

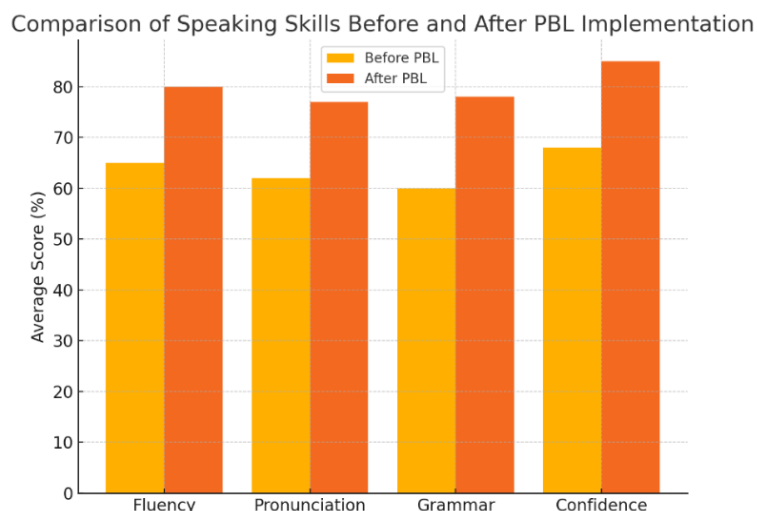


Figure 3. Comparison of students' speaking skills before and after PBL implementation

The bar chart illustrates measurable improvement across all four speaking components, with the highest gain seen in Confidence (from 68% to 85%).

Unequal Group Participation

Group-based PBL occasionally produced unequal contributions, according to several studies. While others stayed passive, students who excelled or were self-assured tended to take charge. [Alfatihah et al. \(2022\)](#) observed that such dynamics often occurred when students were allowed to choose their own groups, leading to uneven distribution of speaking tasks. [Amalia et al. \(2024\)](#) also noted that shy or low-proficiency learners hesitated to participate actively, especially during performance stages. The lack of structured group roles and monitoring mechanisms further exacerbated this inequality.

Technology Access and Skills

PBL activities increasingly rely on digital media—videos, posters, slideshows, and podcasts. However, unequal access to technological resources remains a pressing issue. [Widiawati et al. \(2024\)](#) found that many students in rural areas lacked reliable internet or devices, affecting their ability to participate in online collaboration or submit digital assignments. [Aryarta & Saraswati \(2024\)](#) emphasized the need for pre-training in tools like Canva, video editing apps, and screen recording software, especially for students unfamiliar with such platforms.

Teacher Readiness and Assessment Practices

Implementing PBL effectively requires a shift from traditional instruction to facilitation and coaching—roles for which many teachers are not yet fully prepared. [Syahida et al., \(2022\)](#) and [Cahyana et al. \(2022\)](#) indicated that some teachers lacked training in using performance rubrics, assessing oral output, and giving effective feedback. Additionally, [Hidayat et al., \(2024\)](#) revealed that some teachers misunderstood the PBL process itself, mistaking final products for the only focus, rather than emphasizing the entire learning cycle.

Implications for Practice

To address the challenges in implementing PBL for speaking instruction, several pedagogical implications were highlighted across the studies. Researchers emphasized the use of rubric-based feedback, peer evaluation, and reflection sheets to help students monitor their progress and develop greater self-awareness. They also stressed the importance of scaffolding tools, such as language templates, sample dialogues, and sentence starters, to support students with lower proficiency levels. In addition, some studies pointed out the need for stronger institutional support, including teacher training and improved IT facilities, to ensure the sustainable integration of PBL into speaking-focused curricula.

The results show that Project-Based Learning is widely and innovatively used in different Indonesian EFL classrooms, with measurable advantages for learner confidence, grammar, pronunciation, and speaking fluency. To fully realize its potential, though, issues like time constraints,

gaps in teacher preparation, and group dynamics must be resolved. The deeper theoretical and pedagogical discussion that takes place in the following section is framed by these insights.

By placing the results from the previous section in larger theoretical and empirical frameworks, this section interprets them. This discussion's objectives are to highlight important pedagogical insights that come from the analysis of 20 chosen journal articles and to further our understanding of how Project-Based Learning (PBL) improves speaking abilities in Indonesian EFL classrooms.

This discussion interprets the reviewed findings through a sociocultural and communicative lens, positioning Project-Based Learning (PBL) not merely as an instructional technique but as a socially mediated learning framework that supports spoken language development. From a sociocultural perspective, speaking competence emerges through interaction, collaboration, and scaffolded participation within meaningful activities. The empirical patterns identified across the reviewed studies suggest that PBL creates conditions for learners to operate within their zone of proximal development by engaging in dialogic tasks, peer negotiation, and guided performance. The recurring emphasis on collaboration, reflection, and multimodal project outputs indicates that speaking development in PBL is driven less by isolated practice and more by participation in socially situated communicative events. Therefore, the effectiveness of PBL observed in Indonesian EFL classrooms can be theoretically understood as a result of mediated learning processes, where language use is shaped through interactional support, task authenticity, and gradual internalization of speaking strategies. This framing provides a conceptual foundation for interpreting the empirical findings that follow and clarifies how PBL aligns with broader theories of language learning and communicative competence.

The diverse implementation of PBL across Indonesian EFL classrooms reflects the flexibility and adaptability of the model when applied thoughtfully. Consistent with the five-phase model of Bell (2010), most studies (e.g., Amalia et al., 2024; Aryarta & Saraswati, 2024; Mirah, 2020) employed structured processes involving planning, production, and reflection. In line with sociocultural theory, collaborative project work also fosters scaffolding opportunities that are crucial for speaking development, as reported by Amalia et al. (2024) and Hidayat et al., (2024). Further supporting this, studies by Zubaidi et al. (2021), Muzri et al. (2024), and Wuntu et al. (2022) have shown that effective PBL planning in Indonesian classrooms aligns with national curricular goals, especially when students are given autonomy in project selection.

From the perspective of skill development, improvements in fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and interpersonal communication suggest that PBL supports both accuracy and spontaneity in speech. Findings from Menggo et al. (2023), Binnendyk et al., (2024), and Muzri & Sunra (2024) support the notion that learning is more effective when integrated with authentic, student-centered communication. This aligns with the communicative competence framework proposed by Siahaan & Siahaan (2023), which emphasizes not only grammatical accuracy but also sociolinguistic and strategic competence. Similarly, Mirah (2020) and Aryarta & Saraswati (2024) found that students' speaking improvements were most visible when projects included peer collaboration and multimodal delivery platforms. In a study by We (2020), students confirmed that repeated project-based speaking practice enhanced their fluency, confidence, and understanding of vocabulary and grammar through peer support and teacher guidance.

However, the discussion would be incomplete without acknowledging the practical constraints reported across the studies. Time limitations (Mirah, 2020), technology gaps (Widiawati et al., 2024), and teacher preparedness (Kuswahyuningsih et al., 2023) reveal important institutional barriers. In particular, the variability of teacher experience with PBL, as noted by Hidayat et al., (2024) suggests a pressing need for professional development that prepares educators to function as facilitators and assessors. These institutional and contextual limitations were echoed by Hidayat et al. (2024), who found that teachers struggled with unclear project expectations, large class sizes, and unstructured assessment procedures.

Additionally, Pratiwi et al., (2024) argue that integrating digital tools and allowing students to present through video or podcast formats can compensate for classroom time limitations while still meeting pedagogical objectives. Lastly, the findings by Kasdianti et al., (2024) support the importance of explicit speaking assessment rubrics and teacher mentoring to help learners benefit fully from PBL activities.

In summary, while PBL has been shown to enhance multiple components of speaking performance in the Indonesian EFL context, its effectiveness depends heavily on structured implementation, scaffolding support, and institutional readiness. The results of this review support the view that PBL is a promising approach to language learning, but one that requires thoughtful design and support in order to achieve its full potential.

Conclusions

This systematic literature review synthesizes evidence from 20 peer-reviewed studies published between 2020 and 2024 to examine the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) for improving speaking skills in Indonesian EFL classrooms. The findings indicate that PBL has been applied across educational levels through diverse project formats and is commonly implemented using a structured multi-phase process that promotes authentic communication and learner engagement. Consistent improvements were found in key speaking components, including fluency, confidence, vocabulary, pronunciation, and interpersonal communication, alongside gains in learner autonomy and motivation. However, the review also identifies recurring challenges related to time constraints, unequal participation, technological limitations, and teacher readiness, highlighting the need for stronger institutional support, instructional scaffolding, and professional development. Overall, this review confirms that PBL is a pedagogically effective and adaptable approach for speaking instruction in Indonesian EFL contexts, provided it is supported by systematic planning, assessment alignment, and contextual readiness.

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