

# Exploring Students' Attitudes and Motivation Toward Project-Based Learning in Speaking Classes: A Study of Third-Semester English Education Students at a University

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the attitudes and motivations of third-semester students in the English Education Study Program at FKIP Universitas Islam Riau (UIR) towards the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in speaking classes. As PBL becomes an increasingly popular pedagogical method, understanding students' responses is crucial for optimizing its application. A descriptive research design was employed, using questionnaires and interviews to collect data. The study focused on three dimensions of attitude—cognitive, affective, and behavioral—and examined both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors. The findings reveal that students generally hold positive attitudes toward PBL. Cognitive attitude received the highest average score (78.77%), followed by affective (77.87%) and behavioral components (75.03%). Motivation levels were also high, with extrinsic motivation (79.40%) slightly exceeding intrinsic motivation (75.97%). These results indicate that PBL fosters both student engagement and motivation in speaking classes. The positive reception suggests that PBL effectively promotes self-regulated learning, collaboration, and practical language use. However, the study also identified challenges, particularly in time management and the need for continuous instructor support. Project-Based Learning is well-received among UIR English Education students and contributes positively to speaking skill development. Future research should include other institutions to enhance the generalizability of findings.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

English language education in non-native contexts presents a multitude of challenges, particularly in the development of speaking skills. Numerous factors hinder learners' oral proficiency, including minimal exposure to English in daily communication, overcrowded classrooms, and an overemphasis on exam-oriented instruction rather than communicative competence (Richards, 2008; Ur, 1996). Furthermore, learners often experience psychological barriers such as anxiety, fear of negative evaluation,

limited vocabulary, and low confidence, which diminish their willingness to engage in speaking activities (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). These barriers severely impact learners' ability to use English actively and fluently in authentic contexts, thereby limiting their communicative effectiveness.

Speaking is arguably the most crucial of the four core language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—due to its immediate applicability in real-world interactions. It also serves as a visible indicator of language proficiency (Bygate, 2009). However, it remains one of the most difficult skills to master, particularly for learners who lack practice in authentic environments (Goh & Burns, 2012). This study focuses on speaking skills not only because of their practical significance but also due to their association with key employability competencies such as oral communication, presentation, and collaboration.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) has emerged as an innovative approach to address these challenges in English language classrooms. PBL emphasizes learning through the completion of meaningful projects that mirror real-life scenarios and require active collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving (Thomas, 2000). In Indonesia, this method aligns with the national Merdeka Belajar – Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy, which promotes competency-based education and emphasizes the development of both hard and soft skills in higher education (Kemendikbud, 2020). At Universitas Islam Riau (UIR), PBL has been incorporated into the third-semester speaking courses in the English Education Study Program as a strategic response to promote student engagement and improve language proficiency in authentic, collaborative settings.

While PBL presents promising outcomes, it is not without challenges. Students may encounter difficulties related to time management, insufficient background knowledge, fluctuating motivation, and uncertainty regarding task expectations (Bell, 2010; Kokotsaki, Menzies, & Wiggins, 2016). Furthermore, assessing individual contributions in group work remains a key concern. These issues highlight the necessity for guided facilitation, continuous mentoring, and tailored project designs that maintain students' interest and align with their language proficiency levels.

In the context of second language acquisition (SLA), learner attitude and motivation are pivotal determinants of success (Gardner, 1985; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Attitude encompasses learners' cognitive, affective, and behavioral orientations toward language learning. According to Eagly and Chaiken (1993), attitude is a psychological tendency expressed through evaluations of entities with varying degrees of favor or disfavor. Positive attitudes foster greater engagement and resilience, while negative attitudes can result in reduced effort and avoidance behaviors (Allport, 1954; Zeinivand, Azizifar, & Gowhary, 2015).

Motivation, on the other hand, is the internal drive that propels individuals toward goal-directed behavior (Brown, 1994). It can be categorized into intrinsic motivation—driven by personal interest and enjoyment—and extrinsic motivation—driven by external rewards or recognition (Keller, 2010; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). In speaking classes, motivated learners are more likely to initiate communication, persevere through difficulties, and exhibit better speaking performance (Chen, 2014). Without motivation, even the most well-designed instructional methods may fail to produce meaningful learning outcomes.

PBL offers a learning environment that inherently supports the development of both motivation and positive attitudes. By engaging learners in real-world communication, collaborative problem-solving, and student-led inquiry, PBL can enhance speaking confidence, reduce anxiety, and improve perceived competence (Seftika et al., 2021; Kormos, Kiddle, & Csizér, 2011). Furthermore, PBL's alignment with career-relevant skills increases its relevance and appeal to students, tapping into both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational sources (Cheng & Ho, 2001).

Although prior studies have explored PBL's impact on speaking performance (Apriyanti, 2018; Kim, 2006) and the general role of attitude and motivation in language learning (Gardner, 1985; Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011), there remains a research gap in understanding how these psychological variables interact within PBL-based speaking classrooms. Specifically, few studies have examined the combined influence of students' attitudes (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) and motivational types (intrinsic and extrinsic) on their engagement and outcomes in PBL tasks, particularly in the Indonesian EFL context.

While substantial research has been conducted on learners' general attitudes and motivations in EFL contexts, little attention has been paid to these variables within the specific framework of PBL-based speaking instruction. Most existing studies focus either on the effectiveness of PBL in improving speaking skills (Seftika et al., 2021) or on learners' emotional and psychological orientations toward English (Abidin, 2012; Vibulphol, 2016). This study addresses this gap by providing a nuanced analysis of how students' attitudes and motivations converge to shape their experience and performance in PBL-based speaking classes. Its novelty lies in its focus on third-semester English Education students at UIR—a demographic and institutional context underrepresented in current research.

This research aims to explore the attitudes and motivations of third-semester students in the English Education Study Program at Universitas Islam Riau toward the use of Project-Based Learning in speaking classes. It seeks to understand how these psychological factors influence their engagement, participation, and perceived outcomes in PBL activities. The findings are expected to offer valuable insights for language educators in designing more effective, psychologically attuned instructional strategies that promote learner autonomy and communicative competence.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform curriculum development, instructional planning, and teacher training. By identifying key motivational drivers and attitudinal patterns, educators can better support learners in overcoming speaking-related challenges and fully leveraging the benefits of PBL. Furthermore, by situating the study within the MBKM policy framework, this research aligns with national educational priorities and contributes to the ongoing discourse on competency-based, student-centered learning in Indonesia.

## 2. METHODS

### 2.1 Research Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design to investigate students' attitudes and motivation toward the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in speaking classes. The descriptive approach was deemed appropriate for systematically identifying, describing, and interpreting students' psychological responses within a natural classroom context.

### 2.2 Participants and Sampling

The population consisted of 62 third-semester students enrolled in the English Education Study Program at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP), Universitas Islam Riau (UIR). The participants were drawn from two classes—3A and 3B—with 31 students in each. A total sampling technique was applied for the distribution of questionnaires, ensuring the inclusion of all students to capture comprehensive quantitative data.

For qualitative data collection, a simple random sampling method was employed to select five interviewees from the same cohort. The class attendance list served as the sampling frame, from which participants were randomly chosen. This dual sampling strategy—total sampling for the questionnaire and random sampling for the interviews—provided both breadth and depth, allowing for a holistic understanding of student perspectives.

### 2.3 Instruments

Two validated instruments were used in this study:

- **Attitude Questionnaire:** Adapted from Tran (2020), this instrument comprises of 15 items targeting three dimensions of attitude: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. Responses were recorded using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."
- **Motivation Questionnaire:** Adapted from Maharani et al. (2024), this tool included 10 items equally divided between intrinsic and extrinsic motivational dimensions. Each item also used a 5-point Likert scale to gauge students' agreement.

Sample items from the instruments included:

- “PBL helps me enhance my speaking competence.”
- “I feel interested in the speaking materials.”

## 2.4 Data Collection Procedure

Questionnaires were distributed to all 62 students to gather quantitative data regarding their attitudes and motivation toward PBL. For the qualitative component, in-depth interviews were conducted with the five randomly selected students. This mixed-methods approach enabled triangulation of data and provided richer insights into students' experiences, perceptions, and emotional responses toward PBL in speaking classes.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Students' attitude towards project-based learning in the speaking class

Analysis of students' attitudes on project-based learning (PBL) in speaking classes revealed positive acceptance across cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains.

#### 3.1.1 Cognitive Attitude

The findings reveal that students demonstrate strong cognitive engagement in Project-Based Learning (PBL) within speaking classes. This is evidenced by high mean scores across related questionnaire items. Notably, two statements were categorized as "Very High" in the cognitive domain. The highest-rated statement, “It is important for me to do projects in speaking class,” received a mean score of 4.08 (81.81%), followed closely by “PBL helps me to enhance my speaking competence,” which scored 4.05 (80.97%). These results indicate that students not only value the presence of projects in their speaking courses but also acknowledge the role of PBL in improving their communicative skills.

While all items in the cognitive domain received positive ratings, the lowest-scoring item was “PBL helps me to enhance my self-regulated learning performance in speaking class,” with a mean score of 3.81 (76.13%), still falling within the "High" category. This suggests that although students recognize PBL's academic benefits, some may not fully associate it with fostering independent learning habits.

The overall mean score for cognitive attitude was 3.94 (78.77%), categorizing it as "High." These findings highlight that PBL effectively fosters students' awareness of its value in enhancing learning, particularly in developing their speaking competence.

Moreover, qualitative data from interviews supported the quantitative results. Students consistently described PBL as effective, interactive, and personally relevant, emphasizing its role in promoting engagement, real-world application, and collaborative learning. However, some students noted persistent challenges, particularly regarding time management, task distribution, and group coordination, which occasionally affected their ability to fully engage with projects.

These insights reinforce the idea that while PBL is cognitively stimulating and beneficial, its successful implementation requires structured planning and consistent instructor support to minimize obstacles related to autonomy and collaboration. By recognizing and addressing these challenges, educators can optimize the cognitive benefits of PBL and better support students in achieving their speaking goals.

#### 3.1.2 Affective Attitude

The findings indicate that students exhibit a high level of emotional engagement with Project-Based Learning (PBL), as reflected in their affective responses. Among the items measuring affective attitude, the statement “I concentrate on project-based learning teaching material” received the highest

mean score of 4.03 (80.65%), placing it in the "Very High" category. This suggests that students are emotionally invested in the learning process and are capable of maintaining focus during PBL activities.

Conversely, the item "I ask questions about the material being taught" yielded the lowest mean score of 3.56 (71.29%), categorized as "Moderate". This indicates a relatively lower level of active emotional engagement in terms of classroom participation and inquiry. It may reflect students' hesitation to express uncertainty or a preference for peer support over direct questioning.

The overall mean score for affective attitude was 3.87 (77.87%), which falls into the "High" category. These results reflect a generally positive emotional response to PBL, characterized by comfort, interest, and enthusiasm, particularly in collaborative and student-centered learning environments.

Insights from the interviews further support these quantitative findings. Many students reported feeling more relaxed, motivated, and confident when working in groups. The collaborative nature of PBL allowed them to engage more comfortably with tasks, share responsibilities, and support one another emotionally. This sense of community was especially beneficial for reducing anxiety and building confidence in speaking activities.

However, some students also noted occasional challenges related to group dynamics. Instances of uneven participation or lack of cooperation among group members sometimes led to frustration and reduced engagement. These issues highlight the importance of well-structured group roles and active facilitation by instructors to ensure equitable contribution and maintain a positive emotional climate.

In summary, students' affective attitudes toward PBL are largely positive, with evidence of strong emotional involvement and comfort in collaborative settings. Addressing group coordination challenges can further enhance the affective benefits of PBL and foster a more inclusive and emotionally supportive learning environment.

### 3.1.3 Behavior Attitude

The findings reveal that students' behavioral engagement in Project-Based Learning (PBL) was notably positive. Among the behavioral attitude items, the statement "I spend more time practicing speaking skills when doing the projects" received the highest mean score of 4.13 (82.58%), categorized as "Very High." This suggests that PBL effectively encourages students to devote additional time to speaking practice—one of the core objectives of the approach.

In contrast, the lowest-scoring item was "I use different 21st-century skills to complete my projects," with a mean score of 3.44 (68.71%), categorized as "High." While still positive, this result may reflect students' limited awareness or application of broader 21st-century competencies—such as critical thinking, digital literacy, and creativity—when completing their projects.

The overall mean score for behavioral attitude was 3.75 (75.03%), indicating a "High" level of active participation. These findings underscore students' willingness to engage in project tasks, especially through consistent speaking practice and collaborative involvement.

Qualitative data from interviews further support these results. Students reported displaying constructive behaviors such as sharing ideas, preparing for presentations, managing their time, and helping peers to complete group tasks. Such behaviors contribute significantly to the success of PBL activities and foster a collaborative learning environment. However, students also acknowledged that group dynamics sometimes posed challenges, particularly when certain members were uncooperative or lacked commitment, which occasionally disrupted group cohesion and project efficiency.

In conclusion, when comparing the three components of attitude—cognitive, affective, and behavioral—the behavioral component achieved the highest overall score. This indicates that students were most actively engaged through their actions during PBL, particularly in practicing speaking and contributing to group efforts. The high behavioral engagement reflects a positive approach to participation, task ownership, and accountability within a collaborative framework.

In contrast, the affective component scored the lowest, highlighting areas where students may still struggle emotionally, such as managing anxiety, building confidence, or actively asking questions

during lessons. These emotional factors may inhibit full participation and suggest the need for additional support strategies to foster a more emotionally inclusive learning environment.

Overall, the findings suggest that while students are behaviorally and cognitively engaged in PBL, there remains room for growth in affective engagement, particularly in building emotional resilience and confidence in speaking tasks.

### 3.2 Students' Motivation for Project-Based Learning

The motivation of students toward PBL was analyzed through intrinsic and extrinsic indicators, both of which showed high levels of engagement.

#### 3.2.1 Intrinsic Motivation

The findings indicate that students exhibit a high level of intrinsic motivation toward participating in Project-Based Learning (PBL) in speaking classes. Among the items assessing intrinsic motivation, the statement *"I feel interested in the materials presented in speaking classes"* received the highest mean score of 4.08 (81.61%), categorized as "High." This suggests that students are genuinely interested in the course content, which plays a crucial role in sustaining their engagement and encouraging deeper learning.

On the other hand, the statement *"I am independent in answering and doing the tasks given"* scored the lowest within the intrinsic category, with a mean score of 3.58 (71.61%), categorized as "Moderate." This result implies that while students show interest and enthusiasm toward the learning material, some may still lack the confidence or autonomy to complete tasks independently. This could be attributed to the collaborative nature of PBL, where task completion often depends on group efforts rather than individual initiative.

The overall mean score for intrinsic motivation was 3.80 (75.97%), placing it in the "High" category. This reflects a strong internal drive among students to learn and succeed, particularly when the tasks are perceived as relevant and meaningful to their personal and academic development.

Qualitative data from interviews further support these findings. Many students expressed that their motivation stemmed from the relevance and practicality of the PBL tasks, which helped them connect classroom activities to real-world contexts. They also reported a sense of achievement and personal growth after successfully completing challenging projects, which contributed to sustained motivation throughout the course. Additionally, students appreciated the opportunity to actively participate in discussions and share ideas, which enhanced their sense of ownership and involvement.

However, a few students admitted they occasionally struggled with task independence, especially when project instructions were unclear or when group members took dominant roles. This highlights the need for balanced task delegation and teacher facilitation to ensure that all students have the opportunity to develop their autonomy and contribute meaningfully to the learning process.

In summary, the findings demonstrate that students are intrinsically motivated by their interest in the materials, the sense of relevance in PBL tasks, and the personal satisfaction gained through overcoming challenges. Enhancing instructional strategies that promote individual responsibility, while maintaining collaborative engagement, can further strengthen intrinsic motivation in PBL-based speaking classes.

#### 3.2.2 Extrinsic Motivation

The findings indicate that students exhibit a high level of intrinsic motivation toward participating in Project-Based Learning (PBL) in speaking classes. Among the items assessing intrinsic motivation, the statement *"I feel interested in the materials presented in speaking classes"* received the highest mean score of 4.08 (81.61%), categorized as "High." This suggests that students are genuinely interested in the course content, which plays a crucial role in sustaining their engagement and encouraging deeper learning.

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## Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that Project-Based Learning (PBL) positively influences students' attitudes and motivation in developing their English-speaking skills. This supports existing literature suggesting that PBL promotes active learning, fosters engagement, and enhances learners' willingness to communicate. For instance, Abidin (2012) emphasized that students with positive attitudes toward language learning are more likely to succeed, while Nugroho and Anugerahwati (2019) demonstrated that PBL stimulates learner autonomy and enthusiasm in speaking tasks. The present study adds to this by showing that PBL provides a relevant, meaningful, and authentic context in which students can apply their speaking skills, thereby increasing both their confidence and motivation.

In the Indonesian educational setting, these results offer important cultural and contextual insights. This study aligns with Apriyanti (2018), who found that intrinsic motivation, such as personal satisfaction and interest in tasks, plays a vital role in promoting student engagement. Students in this study expressed enthusiasm for topics they found relevant, which in turn sustained their participation throughout the projects. Simultaneously, extrinsic motivation, such as praise from teachers and collaboration with peers, was also a key driver—corroborating Vibulphol's (2016) findings that social support systems significantly affect students' motivation and classroom behavior.

The collaborative aspect of PBL appears especially beneficial in the Indonesian context, where group-based learning aligns well with collectivist cultural norms. Working in teams not only helped reduce speaking anxiety but also fostered a sense of shared responsibility and emotional support. These results are consistent with Nugroho and Anugerahwati's (2019) argument that PBL enhances not just communicative competence, but also critical thinking, teamwork, and interpersonal skills, which are essential for 21st-century learners.

Moreover, the current study reinforces the view that PBL is a viable pedagogical approach for enhancing speaking proficiency in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. However, it also identifies several challenges that must be addressed for optimal implementation. Issues such as time

constraints, uneven participation within groups, and the need for continuous teacher guidance emerged as limiting factors—echoing concerns raised in previous research (Kokotsaki, Menzies, & Wiggins, 2016). These findings suggest that for PBL to be truly effective, instructors must be proactive in scaffolding group tasks, monitoring progress, and offering regular feedback.

In addition to affirming previous studies, this research provides novel contributions by integrating the psychological dimensions of attitude and motivation into the evaluation of PBL. It demonstrates that when students' psychological profiles—particularly their cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes, along with intrinsic and extrinsic motivations—are acknowledged and integrated into instructional design, PBL evolves from a teaching technique into a holistic educational strategy. This perspective supports Dörnyei and Ushioda's (2011) framework, which emphasizes the role of psychological and contextual variables in language learning motivation.

From a practical standpoint, English educators should consider designing PBL tasks that align closely with students' interests and career aspirations to stimulate intrinsic motivation. At the same time, incorporating extrinsic motivators such as recognition, grades, or opportunities for peer presentation can help maintain student focus and accountability. To further strengthen self-regulated learning, teachers are encouraged to include reflective components, such as journaling or debrief sessions, at the end of each project. These strategies can assist learners in internalizing their motivations and transforming external rewards into internalized goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of literature supporting PBL as an effective, student-centered approach for developing English-speaking skills in EFL contexts. It emphasizes that the success of PBL depends not only on task design but also on how well it responds to students' motivational needs and psychological readiness. Future research could build on these findings by involving students from different institutions, regions, or educational levels, thereby enhancing the generalizability and practical applications of PBL in diverse Indonesian learning environments.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Project-Based Learning (PBL) has a positive and significant impact on students' attitudes and motivation in English-speaking classes. The main findings reveal that students demonstrated high levels of cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement, supported by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. PBL effectively enhanced students' speaking competence, self-regulated learning, and collaboration, confirming its value as a student-centered and communicative teaching method in EFL contexts. However, several limitations emerged, including challenges related to time management, uneven group participation, and gaps in foundational knowledge, which may hinder optimal engagement and learning outcomes. These limitations highlight the need for more structured planning, teacher support, and clearer instructional guidance to ensure successful implementation. For future research, it is recommended to examine the long-term effects of PBL on speaking proficiency, explore its integration with other instructional approaches, and assess its impact across diverse student populations and technology-enhanced learning environments. Such studies can deepen our understanding of how PBL can be adapted and optimized to address evolving classroom needs and prepare learners for real-world communication demands in global contexts.

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