

## INCORPORATING GENDER AND SOCIAL ISSUES FOR WRITING CLASS THROUGH PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

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**Abstract:** Gender and social issues are the targets of the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and one of the discussed issues in 2022 G20 presidency summit in Indonesia. The “no one left behind” phrase said by the President Joko Widodo during his 2020 G20 presidency raises awareness on the importance of to grow together among nations and individuals. Thus, there is a need to include gender and social issues in language teaching as a theme for a skill course. In Indonesian context, the inclusion of gender and social issues are possible along with the application of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) as it emphasizes on higher order thinking skills (HOTS). The paper explores the use of PjBL for teaching writing by raising issues of gender and social inclusion. The students under study were those who joined the essay writing course in English department students from one of the private universities in East Java. The project was making You Tube videos that talked about gender and social issues. The teaching of writing follows the process-writing approach, namely planning, drafting, writing, revising, and publishing combined with PjBL. PjBL applied in the teaching and learning process consists of six steps: pre-project activity, project planning, project design, project implementation, project launch, and project reflection. The result implies that incorporating gender and social issues by using PjBL in the writing class is beneficial to challenge the students’ autonomous learning and HOTS.

**Keywords:** gender, social inclusion, writing, Project-based learning

### INTRODUCTION

President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) spoke about the Covid-19 pandemic in his inaugural speech at the 75th General Assembly of the United Nations (UN), and expressed his deep concern about the pandemic and the importance of every nation to work together to recover. He uses the phrase “no one left behind” to imply that everyone has an equal chance to grow and progress. Furthermore, in 2022, gender and social inclusion become one of the issues at the G20 meeting in Bali 2022. The G20 presidency brought the theme of “Recover Together, Recover Stronger”. In line with this, the United Nations [UN] through the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) division launched 17 areas for sustainable development (UN, no year). The seventeen SDG targets realize that to end poverty, the action must go hand in hand with strategies including improving health, education, and reduce inequality. Thus, to support the achievement of SDGs, it is necessary to increase the inclusiveness of development for underprivileged communities and groups of the marginalized. It is noted in the UN through Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UN DESA] report that effort must be taken to achieve equality to prevent potential losses (UN DESA, no year). The work of UN DESA is strongly centered on the inclusion of the most vulnerable, with a focus on youth, indigenous peoples, the elderly, and people with disabilities (UN DESA, in press). Additionally, UN DESA (in

press) also states that advancing gender equality and women's empowerment continues to be a persistent principle.

Therefore, to support the global movement of 'no one left behind', this issue needs to be inserted as one of the contents of language learning. Everyone has the fundamental right to inclusion, which should aim to accept all people regardless of their color, age, gender, ability, religious or cultural beliefs (Sulastyawati, 2020). Thus, it is important to eliminate all barriers, prejudice, and intolerance to achieve inclusion. Furthermore, the students also need to learn that they live in a diverse environment and pluralistic society (Majhanovich & Deyrich, 2017). Acquiring this awareness will enable the students to be more tolerant individuals who will not easily prejudice and stereotype others.

To be able to cultivate awareness and take part in the solutions of social issues, students need critical thinking skills (Setyowati, Sukmawan, & El-Sulukiyyah, 2019). As stated by Werner and Bleich (2017) critical thinking skills are inextricably linked to decision-making, and action-taking abilities. Additionally, Geng (2014) claims that the nature of critical thinking abilities encompasses disposition, metacognition skill, decision-making, inquiring, processing information, and finding solutions. The language teachers can incorporate gender and social inclusion issues in their teaching to practice the students' critical thinking skills by using project-based learning (PjBL) in the writing class.

Project-Based learning is an approach that promotes critical thinking abilities. Project-based learning is nothing new in American education. Beginning in 1900, John Dewey puts out the notion of learning via experience. According to Dewey (2001), "experience" and "engagement" are two crucial aspects for learners. Additionally, he thinks that the goal of learning is to pique one's attention because doing so will ultimately inspire drive and a desire to pursue additional learning. Dewey's focus on experiential, practical, student-directed learning forms the foundation of project-based learning (Maida, 2011). Ulrich (2016) and Maida (2011) believe that the project-based learning approach can help students succeed in the 21st century. Along with teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking, and technology integration, the approach also promotes unity and an appreciation of cultural diversity (Ulrich, 2016). Teachers can apply project-based learning in writing class. Writing is a tool where one can see how critical one's thoughts are (Quitadamo & Kurtz, 2007). It is a creative and complex activity which involves the process of solving problems.

Scholars have investigated PjBL on language classroom. Kavlu (2015) investigate the effect of PjBL on students' reading comprehension on the first-year students of Faculty of Education in Ishik, Iraq. The result of the study shows that there is a significant improvement in students' reading comprehension and vocabulary skills on the experimental group as compared to the control group. The researcher further concludes that PjBL makes learning more efficient and enjoyable for the students. PjBL is also beneficial to improve the students' speaking skill. Kato, Spring, and Mori. (2020). Through the development of a home page, they investigate the usage of project-based learning for students who are taking a foreign language online. To develop a homepage and complete the project, they form pair groups in their study, each group consisting of an American student learning Japanese and a Japanese student learning English. The outcomes demonstrate that the students' speech length in the target language has increased.

In writing classroom, research on the application of PjBL is flourishing. Thitivesa (2014) looks into the application of PjBL in content courses. The purpose of the study was to determine how well the student performed academically as judged by the fundamental writing elements after PjBL use. The result shows that the students focus more on practicing usage and mechanics than sentence construction. Furthermore, the students also profited from reading texts while working on the project. Secondly, Praba, Artini, and Ramendra (2018) investigate

the use of PjBL on writing. They use a mixed method design which combines quantitative and qualitative data. The result shows that PjBL improves the students' writing abilities. Additionally, they state that PjBL enhances students' writing abilities because it places a strong emphasis on communication. They believe that the students concentrate on putting their point through while also utilizing their knowledge of conventions for their composition. The conventions are applied at various stages throughout the project and are exercised in real-world situations. Thirdly, Sa'diyah and Cahyono (2019) conduct research on the effectiveness of PjBL by using blogging. The result shows that students using PjBL through blogging performed better on writing achievement than those using the traditional approach. Similarly, Anggareni (2022) reports that through classroom action design, the students' writing ability shows improvement from the first cycle to the second one.

Despite of the known research on PjBL in Indonesian context, almost no research is directed toward the implementation of PjBL by incorporating social issues in writing class. Yet, one research is found exploring PjBL method for writing class by using environmental issues. Setyowati et al (2022) explores the application PjBL for writing class in which students were asked to write a process paragraph of how to create items from unused materials. To fill the gap, this conceptual paper is intended to explore the use PjBL in writing class by using gender and social issues based on the writer's experience when applying them in the classroom.

## **METHODS**

### **THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **Project Based Learning**

Project-based strategy is a learning strategy that refers to a way of involved in a project to produce a product through scientific step to achieve attitude, knowledge, and skills (Rachmajanti, Laksmi, Anugerahawati, 2020). Project-based learning is a social practice in which students work in a group, get socialized and learn language, content, and skills (Slater, Beckett, & Aufderhaar, 2006) cited in (Mali, 2016). A project work leads to mirroring real life situation by providing task to work on together and gives opportunities to the students to work cooperatively with the group to complete the project task (Mali, 2016). There are some steps in project-based learning according to Rachmajanti, Laksmi, and Anugerahawati (2020). The first step is to determine the project. In this step, the students choose the project topic/theme, and the topic should be linear with the particular basic competence. The second step is to design the procedure to conduct the project. The third step is to do the project with the teacher ready to assist in order to finish the project on time. The fourth is to monitor the students' progress. The next step is to write report and present the product. And the final step is for the teacher and peer to give feedback for the improvement of the project.

The research into language teaching reports that PjBL supports, facilitates, and improves a learning process (Tamin & Grant, 2013), and helps English language learners achieve their language-learning goals (Beckett & Slater, 2005, as cited in Foss, Carney, McDonald, Rooks, 2007). Furthermore, PjBL also makes a real-life task through real-life material. As stated by Stoller (2002), project work leads to mirroring real-life tasks and provides opportunities for students to work cooperatively in a small group, in which they can share resources and ideas in completing a particular project. Accordingly, it helps students to achieve a greater understanding of a topic, increases their learning motivation (Bell, 2010), and inspires them to obtain a deeper knowledge of a particular subject (Edutopia, 2008).

#### **Process Writing Approach**

The writing process is a learning method used to teach writing skills, focusing on the writing process itself rather than the final product. It emphasizes the idea that writing is a dynamic and dynamic process that includes many steps, such as prewriting, rewriting, rewriting

and editing. As stated by Zakime (2018), there five important steps involved in the writing process. The first step is prewriting. This stage involves generating ideas, brainstorming, and planning the writing piece. It may include activities such as freewriting, creating outlines, or using graphic organizers to organize thoughts. The second step is drafting: In this stage, the writer puts their ideas into written form, creating a rough draft. The emphasis is on getting thoughts down on paper without worrying too much about grammar, spelling, or structure. The third part is revising. In this part, the writer reviews and makes changes to improve the content, organization, clarity, and overall effectiveness of the draft. It may involve reordering paragraphs, adding or deleting information, or rephrasing sentences to enhance the writing. The fourth is editing. This stage focuses on correcting grammatical, punctuation, and spelling errors. It involves proofreading the draft carefully, checking for sentence structure, verb tense consistency, word choice, and other aspects of language mechanics. And last step is publishing. The final stage involves sharing the completed piece of writing with others. It may include submitting the work for assessment, sharing it with peers or a wider audience, or publishing it in a suitable format.

In writing, the writer needs to give more attention to some elements of writing to make a good writing, such as writing is a process, the need of feedback, the revision, and the time management to complete the writing task (Davenport, 2020). Davenport (2020) further states time management is also an important part of writing because the writer needs to plan, draft, write, edit and revise the writing to create a well-written composition. In line with this, Fink (2020) believes that by embracing the writing process can improve their overall writing skills.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Implementing PjBL**

This section covers the implementation of PjBL in the teaching and learning of writing, and explore the sample of the students' work when they did writing projects that reflects gender and social issues This section is structured around the steps of PjBL when it was applied in the classroom.

#### ***Planning the project***

##### ***1. Pre-Project activity (Discussing the Essay Structure)***

In this stage, the students and the lecturer discussed what was meant by gender and social issues, and read news about the issues. Next, the discussion about the content of the reading follows. The content of the discussion covers the reasons why social injustice and racism still occurred, what the students thought about that, and the possible solution to overcome it. Next, the students were presented with a model essay and analyzed the essay in small groups. The students also learned about how to make the thesis statement, how to write topic sentences in each body of the paragraphs, and how to give relevant details and examples. The implementation of PjBL applied the following steps, namely planning, designing, implementing, exhibiting, and reflecting. Each step is elaborated as follows:

##### ***2. Planning the project (gathering information, solving problems)***

In this step, the students were asked to write down their overall planning of the project. The lecturers announced the project in which the students had to write an essay which discussed gender and social issues. The content of the writing should be based on the students' real-life experience related to social issues. For instance, the students may write about their feeling of being in different ethnicity, and how it affects their life. Or the students can write about their neighbourhood which consist of different ethnicities and how they react to it. Other topics covered the equality between men and women in the workplace, the poverty, and child labour. Each student was asked to write the topic they are going to write. The lecturer gave questions and problems for the students to solve. The sample questions are *'What can you do*

with the poverty and child labour you find around you?" "Should women work or not? Provide details and examples based on your life/family/friends 'daily experience'. The project was to write an essay relevant to the issue and make a video from their essay.

### 3. Project design

The next step was project design. The students planned the essay and made a rough draft. The rough draft was sent either by email or to WhatsApp private line. The lecturer gave overall feedback on the students' rough draft and gave comments on their content and language problems. The lecturer asked the students to apply their grammatical knowledge about the conjunctions which they learned in the previous meeting. The lecturer gave feedback to the students' essay and introduced them to *Grammarly* to check language problems and punctuation. After the students' writing was given feedback, the students revised their writing and design the power point presentation (PPT). The feedback was given both in English and in *Bahasa Indonesia*.

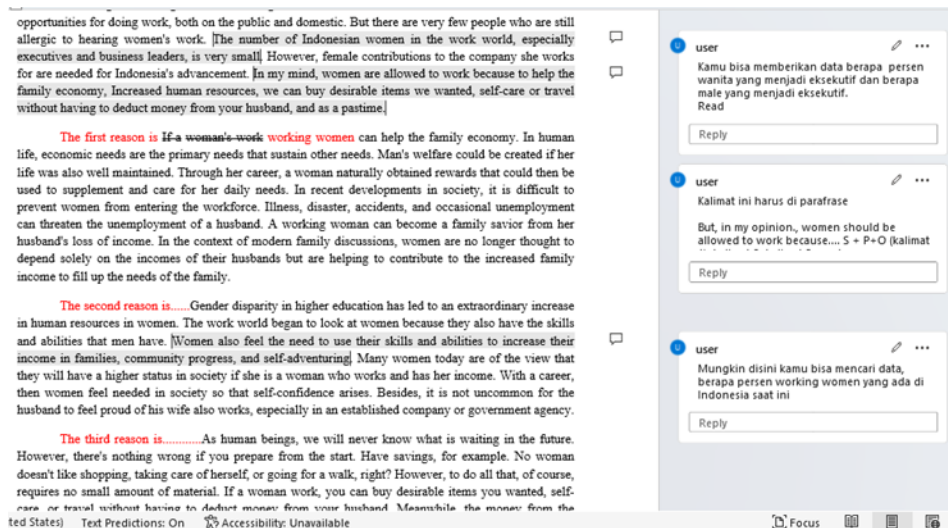


Figure 1. The lecturer's feedback on the student's composition

The students designed their PPT which later was converted into a video. To make the presentation interesting, the students gave pictures or background in their PPT relevant to the topic being written. Some of them design the PPT in Office PPT, while many of them design the presentations in Canva. To make the presentation interesting and readable, they put one paragraph per slide. Sometimes, they put two-three sentences in one slide.

### Implementation of the project (discuss, revise, and develop the project)

The writing and video projects must be completed by students in one week. The lecturer checked on the students' project progress and inquired about any ongoing issues they might be having. The lecturer used the WhatsApp class group to monitor progress. Outside of class, the lecturer and the students could discuss the project. The discussion sometimes used WhatsApp application. The lecturer wrote down the comments in the students' work, used chats, and occasionally used voice mails to clarify points.



Figure 2. The students' revision sent via Whatsapp

Students requested advice from the lecturer regarding the quantity and quality of slide presentations, the information on the slides, and language use. Although a few students claimed to have difficulty managing their time, most students reported no serious problems completing the project. Due to the growing number of assignments from other classes, some students requested an extension of time to complete the project. The lecturer agreed to allow the students more time to complete the project after class discussion.

### 1. Project Launch

The students submitted their work on the deadline agreed beforehand. The students were required to do a similarity check by using plagiarism application provided online for free. The students' writing was accepted only if the similarity checks not more than 10%. Firstly, the students share their video in the WhatsApp for friends to see. The lecturer also gave comments on the students' video project. Some videos had copyrights issues because the students used songs or melodies that belonged to an individual. Thus, the students were advised to use free songs or tunes provided for free by You Tube.

### 2. Project exhibition for general audience

After given feedback and suggestions both by friends and the lecturer, the students revised the video, and prepared for upload in their own You Tube channel. The revision of their writing was submitted in Google classroom, while the You Tube link was sent to the WhatsApp class group.

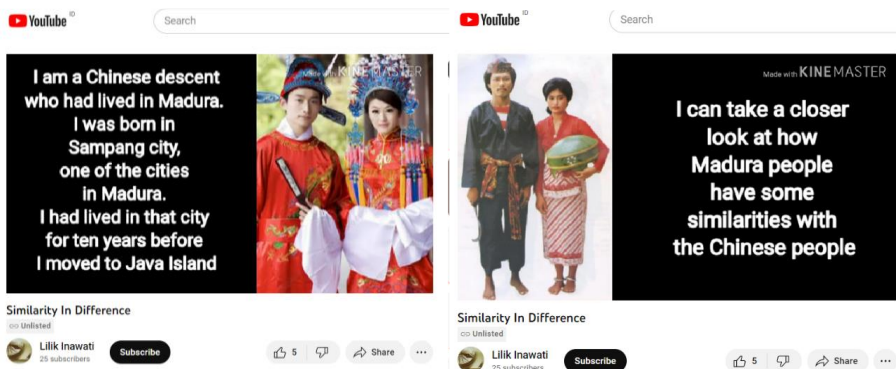
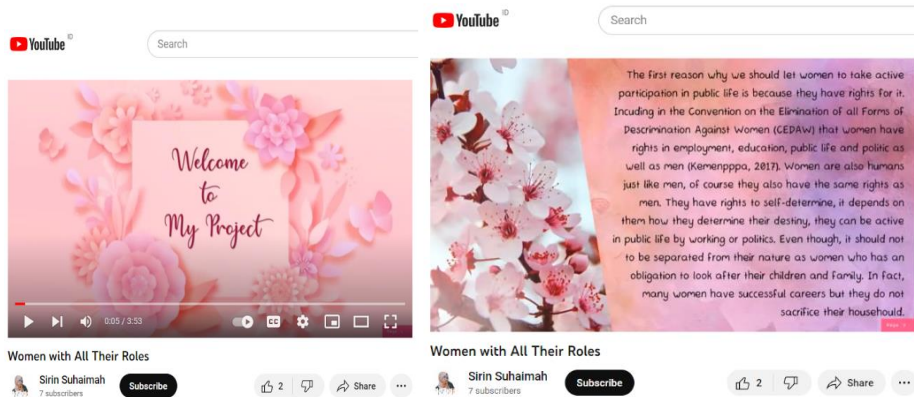


Figure 3. Samples of students' video project with a topic appreciating differences.



**Figure 4. Sample of students' video project with a theme women equality**

The students published their video in their own You Tube channel. Students were encouraged to hit the "like" button to support other students. The lecturer asked the students to watch friends' publication and give comments. The lecturer also reminded the students to give only positive comments and encouragement, and hate comments were prohibited.

### 3. Project Reflection

After all videos were uploaded to YouTube, the students and the lecturer did a reflection. The reflection was related to their feelings, project exhibition, and the content of the project. Many students were happy because they could produce writing and video for presentation. Some of them confessed that it was their first time of making a video and published in You Tube. Other students said that they learned a lot when finishing the project.

The originality of the students' work may cause problem during the implementation of PjBL. Plagiarism may happen because of the easy access of different kinds of information on the internet (Leung & Cheng, 2017). According to Leung & Cheng (2017), some ways to overcome plagiarism are to utilize plagiarism detectors, to provide formative assessment or giving ongoing feedback on the students' work and teaching them how to cite and quote properly. In this context, the work was done outside the classroom hour, and it was also impossible to monitor the students fully when they were doing the task. To minimize the plagiarism, the lecturer gave constant reminder that plagiarism was an academic dishonesty, and that they should not do plagiarize somebody's work or should not copy paste some part of other's work. In the end, the students were required to submit the plagiarism report of their writing task along with the revised version of their draft.

The PjBL stages used in this context is almost similar to the one used by Setyowati et al (2022). The steps of PjBL in Seyowati et al (2022) comprises three major stages: planning, implementing, and reflecting. In the project planning and project implementation, there are different substages. The planning stage consists of pre-project activity, project planning, and project design. Meanwhile in the project implementation, the activity comprises project launch and project exhibition. Finally, in the project reflection, the students make reflection of their project and what they feel about it.

In summary, according to the PjBL implementations described in this article, PjBL is beneficial and relevant for student writing courses. The data from student writing showed that they had no trouble expressing themselves on paper. The students produced a well-structured essay as evidenced by the introduction, the development of the body of essay, and the conclusion. Based on the observation throughout the implementation of PjBL, the students learned not only how to write an essay, but also learned how to maximize the use of technology, how to cite from relevant sources, and how to get relevant information to support their ideas.

In line with this, Setyowati et al (2022) state that PjBL is helpful for the students-writer. During the implementation of PjBL, the lecturer gave varied strategies, such as building positive classroom atmosphere, giving continuous feedback and constant monitoring of the project, and giving praise or positive encouragement for any project accomplishment. As stated by Fatmawati and Zulyanty (2022), PjBL helps the students in maximizing the creativity, as well becoming more active in their learning.

## CONCLUSIONS

Using PjBL by incorporating gender and social issues for writing class is helpful to train the students' critical thinking skill. The students learn not only about how to write essays well, but also how to make use of the technology to finish the project. Yet, writing teachers/lecturers who are interested in applying PjBL need to be aware that the process of accomplishing the project is more important than the product itself. The process is the time when students learn a lot about the issues, the writing task, and the project accomplishment. Furthermore, the teacher/lecturer should give continuous progress checks to the students by monitoring how far they have gone with the project, and what difficulties they face during the project. Since PjBL is mostly done outside the class, the teacher/lecturer needs to constantly remind the students that project originality matters. It means that plagiarism is not tolerated. Therefore, to minimize the plagiarism, the writing teacher/lecturer needs to ask the students to check the writing originality by using free online plagiarism checker before submitting the composition. Furthermore, before publishing the project in social media, the writing teacher/lecturer also needs to constantly remind the students to avoid any copyrights issues that may hinder their publication. In summary, to reach the success of PjBL application is the two-way work between the students and the teacher/lecturer. Research has shown that PjBL promotes learner's independence and autonomy. Yet, creating an autonomous learner is not as easy as it may seem. The writing teacher/lecturer needs to play his/her role to be the facilitator, the controller, and the assessor to help the students to be a better autonomous learner. Without the help or guidance from their teacher/lecturer, it is a doubt that they will be able to be a better writer and a better individual.

This paper has some limitations. Firstly, the study did not investigate the cause-effect relationship between PjBL and writing achievement. Thus, future researchers are suggested to investigate the effectiveness of PjBL on the students' writing performance. Secondly, the study also did not explore the students' errors in writing. Future researchers can analyze the students' linguistic errors by employing one of the many errors analysis theoretical frameworks. Thirdly, the study also did not explore to what extent gender and social issues are depicted in the students' writing. Future researchers can direct their research on analyzing the students' idea, problems, solutions toward gender and social issues through a content analysis design. This will give some information to the teacher/lecturer whether applying gender and social issues do train the students' higher order thinking skills.

In summary, the Indonesian president's, Joko Widodo, principal of 'no one left behind' is not only an expression spoken in UN General Assembly in 2020. The spirit of togetherness to recover and grow should be realized in the classroom. In the field of teaching and writing in Indonesian context, bringing up the issue of gender and social inclusion is a good way to start. Through the implementation of PjBL, using this theme would challenge the students critical thinking skills, and make them to be more aware individuals that people are created differently embedded with their uniqueness.

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