

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### A. The Basic Concept of Project-Based Learning

##### 1. *Definisi Project-Based Learning*

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is an innovative, student-centered approach designed to encourage active student engagement in the learning process. This approach allows students to learn through the implementation of complex projects that are relevant to real-life situations. These projects involve investigation, problem-solving, and the development of tangible products, providing meaningful and in-depth learning experiences. By utilizing the core concepts of a particular discipline, PjBL fosters the development of critical thinking, collaboration, and professional competencies among students (Junisbayeva, 2020; Winangun, 2021).

Methodologically, PjBL integrates a scientific approach by emphasizing concept-based learning, principles, and problem-solving. Students not only learn the material theoretically but also apply it practically in projects designed to provide solutions to specific problems. This process not only strengthens conceptual understanding but also enhances communication, collaboration, and creativity skills. PjBL utilizes active learning based on in-depth inquiry, encouraging students to become more independent and

responsible for their own learning process (Winangun, 2021; Chen & Yang, 2019).

The effectiveness of PjBL is also reflected in the improvement of academic performance at various educational levels. Meta-analysis research shows that this method is more effective than traditional direct instruction because it engages students in meaningful activities that are relevant to their needs. The projects designed encourage the development of tangible products, which ultimately enhance students' motivation and overall engagement. By connecting theory and practice, PjBL provides a holistic learning experience that not only focuses on academic outcomes but also on the development of 21st-century skills, such as problem-solving and decision-making (Chen & Yang, 2019).

In conclusion, Project-Based Learning is an effective approach for the holistic development of various student skills. By emphasizing a scientific approach, problem-solving, and the development of tangible products, PjBL helps create relevant and meaningful learning experiences. This method not only enhances academic achievement but also prepares students to face real-world challenges with applicable skills and strong professional competencies (Junisbayeva, 2020; Winangun, 2021; Chen & Yang, 2019).

## **2. *Benefits Of Project-Based Learning***

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) provides significant benefits in enhancing both academic and non-academic skills

of students. As a student-centered approach, PjBL emphasizes active learning through the implementation of relevant real-world projects. This approach develops critical thinking, learning independence, and collaboration skills. Additionally, PjBL encourages the development of 21st-century skills such as communication, creativity, and problem-solving. In the context of English language education, PjBL has also been proven to improve oral communication skills, vocabulary, learning motivation, and student confidence (EL MOUDDEN & Lamkhanter, 2024). By giving students responsibility, PjBL creates a positive learning environment that supports the holistic development of students.

The main benefit of PjBL is the enhancement of critical thinking skills and 21st-century capabilities. By using the Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) approach, PjBL provides space for students to develop creativity, solve problems, and utilize technology as part of the learning process. Additionally, students are encouraged to work collaboratively, develop ideas together, and present their work to an audience. Research shows that the steps in implementing PjBL through HOTS, such as preparation, execution, development, and presentation, significantly improve students' speaking skills and their mastery of technological media (Karomi, 2022). Thus, PjBL prepares

students to face the challenges of the modern era with relevant and applicable skills.

In addition, PjBL strengthens social learning by honing communication, negotiation, and collaboration skills. During the project work, students learn to listen actively, exchange ideas, and collaborate with their group members. This process not only enhances communication skills but also instills respect, tolerance, and the ability to work as a team. Through collaboration, students create creative ideas together while building foundational communication skills that are productive. This benefit prepares students to work in dynamic and challenging work environments in the future (Bell, 2010). Thus, PjBL becomes an effective tool for developing essential interpersonal skills.

In conclusion, Project-Based Learning provides broad benefits in the development of students' academic, social, and professional skills. Through project-based learning, students not only gain a deep understanding of the material being studied but also prepare themselves to face real-life challenges. With an approach that supports critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity, PjBL plays a crucial role in creating relevant, meaningful, and holistic learning experiences (EL MOUDDEN & Lamkhanter, 2024; Karomi, 2022; Bell, 2010).

### **3. Steps in Implementing *Project-Based Learning***

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is an innovative learning method focused on projects to develop 21st-century skills. This approach places students as active subjects in the learning process, starting with problem identification and culminating in producing real solutions. Following a syntax adapted from the scientific approach, these steps involve observation, planning, gathering information, associating, and communicating project results. PjBL not only enhances critical thinking skills but also fosters a sense of responsibility and collaboration. By integrating scientific elements, PjBL provides meaningful learning experiences that are relevant to the needs of modern education (Sani, 2015; Kahar & La, 2022).

#### **a. Observing And Determining The Project**

The initial step of PjBL is to determine the project through observation and problem analysis. At this stage, the teacher facilitates students in understanding the driving questions or problem statements relevant to the learning context. This process encourages students' curiosity, engages them in discussions to identify what they already know and what needs to be learned. This phase reflects the scientific step of "observing," which aims to foster observation and reflection skills in students (Sani, 2015; Kemdikbud).

### **b. Planning and Designing the Project**

The next stage is to develop a project plan, including determining group members, work rules, schedules, and assessment criteria. The teacher acts as a facilitator, providing guidance on the workflow and necessary resources. In the scientific approach, this step corresponds to "questioning," where students explore information to design solutions. Effective planning ensures that the project is completed systematically and aligns with the learning objectives (Kahar & La, 2022).

### **c. Gathering Information and Creating a Schedule**

Once the plan is established, students begin gathering relevant information to support the project implementation. The teacher assists students in creating a schedule, setting deadlines, and organizing their activities. This stage reflects the scientific element of "gathering information," which hones students' analytical skills in understanding data. With clear guidance, students can work in a more structured and effective manner to complete the project (Sani, 2015; Kemdikbud).

### **d. Associating and Completing the Project**

The next step is to complete the project with the facilitation and monitoring of the teacher. The teacher provides feedback and monitors students' progress to ensure that the project is proceeding according to plan. This stage reflects the scientific element of "associating,"

where students integrate various pieces of information to develop solutions. Monitoring not only helps students stay focused but also supports the development of time management and problem-solving skills (Sani, 2015; Kemdikbud).

#### **e. Communicating Project Results**

After the project is completed, students compile reports and present their work to an audience. This process reflects the scientific element of "communicating," which develops oral and written communication skills. Students learn to present ideas systematically and receive feedback to improve the quality of the project. The presentation also provides an opportunity for reflection, both on the project outcomes and the process of completing it (Sani, 2015; Kahar & La, 2022).

#### **f. Evaluation and Reflection**

The final stage is the evaluation of the project outcomes and process. The teacher assesses the work based on pre-established criteria and provides feedback to the students. Students are also encouraged to reflect on their learning experiences, identify successes, and address areas for improvement. This step is crucial to ensure that students understand the connection between the project activities and the learning objectives, while also fostering a culture of continuous learning (Sani, 2015; Kemdikbud).

Project-Based Learning provides a comprehensive learning experience through a structured syntax. By integrating a scientific approach, PjBL helps students develop critical thinking, collaboration, and communication skills that are relevant to the needs of the 21st century. Each step in PjBL is designed to encourage students to become active, creative, and responsible learners. Thus, PjBL becomes an effective method in preparing students to face real-world challenges (Sani, 2015; Kahar & La, 2022).

#### **4. Challenges in Project-Based Learning**

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is an innovative method that supports active and collaborative learning, but its implementation faces various challenges. Although it offers benefits in enhancing 21st-century skills, the implementation of PjBL requires support in terms of technology, resources, and effective strategies. Both students and teachers face a range of challenges, from technical skills to time management. In specific contexts, such as primary education in China, challenges include resistance to change from traditional methods and the lack of teacher training (Hu, 2024; Zhao, 2024). Identifying these challenges is crucial to designing appropriate solutions.

One of the main challenges in PjBL is students' skills in using information technology. Many students are not accustomed to using digital tools to access information

resources or complete projects efficiently. Additionally, the reliance on technology often exacerbates the gap between students who have access to technology and those who do not (Aksela & Haatainen, 2019; Al Mulhim, 2022). The lack of training in digital literacy makes it difficult for some students to integrate technology into the learning process. Therefore, providing basic training related to technology becomes an important step in supporting the success of PjBL.

Teachers play a key role in the success of PjBL, but they often face challenges in project design, time management, and the shift from being an instructor to a facilitator. The lack of professional training is a major obstacle, especially in educational environments still dominated by traditional methods (Hu, 2024; Zhao, 2024). Teachers also need skills to develop assessment standards that are relevant to projects and to ensure effective curriculum integration. Without support for training and ongoing professional development, these challenges are difficult to overcome.

The implementation of PjBL requires adequate resources, such as facilities, learning materials, and access to technology. In some schools, these limitations become significant barriers, especially in areas with limited access to technology. Additionally, time management often poses a challenge for both students and teachers, as projects require thorough planning and longer durations compared to

conventional methods (Zhao, 2024; Hu, 2024). The inability to manage time effectively can lead to projects not being completed on schedule or yielding suboptimal results.

PjBL requires an educational environment that supports active exploration and real-world problem-solving. However, resistance to change from traditional teaching methods becomes a barrier, especially in educational systems that are less flexible. Learning environments that do not encourage collaboration or creativity can hinder the success of PjBL (Hu, 2024). Therefore, a paradigm shift in the design of learning environments, including collaborative and flexible classrooms, is an urgent need to support the successful implementation of PjBL.

Although PjBL offers many benefits, challenges such as students' technological skills, the role of teachers, resources, and learning environments must be addressed for this method to be effectively implemented. Support through training, professional development, and infrastructure enhancement becomes crucial solutions to overcome these barriers. With the right strategies, PjBL can help students develop skills that are relevant to future needs (Zhao, 2024; Hu, 2024). Identifying these challenges provides a foundation for improving the effectiveness of the PjBL method in various educational contexts.

## **B. Critical Thinking**

### **1. Definition of Critical Thinking**

Critical thinking is an essential skill in the modern era used to assess facts, analyze phenomena, and draw conclusions based on logic. This skill enables individuals to make accurate judgments, interpret information correctly, and apply the results of their thinking in real-life situations (Rohovyi et al., 2023). In addition to being an analytical tool, critical thinking also helps individuals face increasingly complex life challenges. However, despite its importance, understanding the definition of critical thinking and its implications is often a challenge for both educators and learners. Various perspectives and approaches to critical thinking show that this concept is multifaceted and requires a deep understanding.

In addition, several prominent scholars have provided influential conceptualizations of critical thinking that have shaped educational research and practice. Ennis emphasizes critical thinking as reasonable and reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do, highlighting the importance of logical reasoning and evidence-based judgment. Facione, through the Delphi consensus, further elaborates critical thinking as a purposeful, self-regulatory process involving interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, and explanation. Meanwhile, Brookfield underscores the reflective and critical dimension of thinking,

particularly the ability to question assumptions, challenge dominant perspectives, and consider alternative viewpoints in educational and social contexts. These perspectives collectively illustrate that critical thinking is not merely a cognitive skill but also a reflective and socially situated process.

Critical thinking not only involves analytical skills but also assessments aimed at specific goals, such as proving something, interpreting meaning, or solving problems. Facione (2020) explains that critical thinking is a process that is not always competitive, but can also be collaborative to generate better solutions. The complexity of this definition often causes confusion, especially for learners who are new to the concept. Furthermore, critical thinking includes reflective skills, which require time and practice to develop. The difficulty in understanding the essence of critical thinking often hinders educators from effectively integrating this skill into the curriculum.

Critical thinking is not only relevant in disciplines like science and mathematics but also in addressing social, political, and ethical challenges in everyday life (Rohovyi et al., 2023). Its application requires the ability to thoroughly analyze problems, consider various perspectives, and draw responsible conclusions. In the field of education, many educators agree that critical thinking should be one of the primary goals of formal learning. However, the integration

of critical thinking across various contexts often faces obstacles, including a lack of teacher training and insufficient understanding of how to effectively assess students' critical thinking abilities.

In the era of knowledge and globalization, critical thinking has become increasingly important to navigate a world full of diversity and complexity. Individuals are required to navigate the abundance of information, filter facts from opinions, and make ethical decisions. However, the greatest challenge is developing this skill in an educational system that often still focuses on memorization rather than analysis (Facione, 2020; Rohovyi et al., 2023). The lack of support for reflective and collaborative learning exacerbates the gap between the theory and practice of critical thinking in schools.

Critical thinking is an essential skill that supports analysis, evaluation, and decision-making across various fields. However, the challenges in understanding and implementing critical thinking include the complexity of its definition, educational gaps, and the ever-evolving global demands. To address this, learning strategies that support the holistic development of critical thinking are needed. With the right understanding, critical thinking can become a powerful tool for facing challenges in the modern world and preparing individuals for a more meaningful and responsible life (Facione, 2020; Rohovyi et al., 2023).

## 2. Components of *Critical Thinking*

The ability of critical thinking is an essential element in modern education that helps individuals understand, evaluate, and make decisions accurately. Savchuk (2024) highlights that critical thinking includes the ability to analyze, synthesize, and make decisions based on information, which is crucial in facing the complexities of life. These components support students in navigating various situations more effectively, making it an essential skill in the context of global education. Through critical thinking, students can enhance their competitiveness in a constantly changing world.

One of the main components of critical thinking is interpretation, which is the ability to understand and classify information. Intan (2024) and Wati (2024) explain that interpretation allows individuals to decode data, experiences, or complex situations. In education, this skill encourages students to process information in-depth, understand the relationships between concepts, and identify patterns. For example, when students study complex material, interpretation helps them break down information into simpler parts for better understanding.

The next component is analysis and evaluation, which play a crucial role in assessing the validity of information. According to Intan (2024) and Savchuk (2024), analysis involves examining ideas, identifying arguments,

and testing the relationships between elements. Evaluation, on the other hand, involves assessing the quality of claims and arguments. This skill ensures that students do not passively accept information but are also able to examine its accuracy and relevance. For instance, students can evaluate arguments in a text to determine the reliability of the source of information.

In addition, drawing conclusions (inference), explanation, and self-regulation are other important components. Inference allows students to formulate hypotheses based on relevant information (Intan, 2024; Wati, 2024). Explanation helps students communicate their thinking process clearly, while self-regulation enables them to reflect on their thinking process for future improvement. For example, when facing a math problem, students can use inference to build a rational solution and use explanation to describe the steps they took.

Overall, critical thinking is a multidimensional skill that consists of interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation. These components, as explained by Intan (2024), Savchuk (2024), and Wati (2024), complement each other to create a structured and in-depth thinking process. In the context of education, the development of critical thinking can strengthen students' ability to understand information, make

decisions, and solve problems effectively, thus preparing them to face global challenges.

### ***3. The Importance of Critical Thinking in Language Learning***

Critical thinking is an essential skill in language learning, especially in the modern era marked by the abundance of information and global complexity. This skill not only helps students evaluate information objectively but also enhances their analytical, reflective, and creative abilities. In language learning, critical thinking enables students to understand cultural contexts, evaluate sources of information, and develop more effective communication (Normuratova, 2024). However, despite its significance, the implementation of critical thinking in language classrooms often faces pedagogical challenges, including gaps in teaching methods and a lack of awareness about the importance of this skill.

Critical thinking encourages students to analyze language content in depth, from written texts to verbal interactions. According to Liu (2020), critical thinking allows students to evaluate ideas in texts, compare different viewpoints, and question the assumptions underlying information. This not only enhances language comprehension but also trains students to think independently. However, the main challenge is the limitation of time and resources to integrate this analytical approach

into the curriculum. Teachers also need to employ various strategies, such as group discussions and case studies, to ensure that students are truly engaged in the critical thinking process.

In the 21st century, language learning based on critical thinking becomes increasingly relevant to prepare students for global demands. Odorovska (2024) emphasizes that critical thinking allows students to understand cultural differences and broaden their perspectives, making language learning more engaging and meaningful. The challenge lies in ensuring that students can apply these critical thinking skills in various contexts, including cross-cultural communication. Teachers need to create a learning environment that encourages students to use language as a tool for understanding the world more broadly.

In the midst of technological dominance, critical thinking is essential in helping students understand and effectively utilize information. Normuratova (2024) explains that critical thinking enables students to evaluate the credibility of information sources, understand digital content, and consider the ethical aspects of its use. However, the biggest challenge is the limited digital skills among students and teachers. Therefore, the integration of critical thinking in language learning must be accompanied by adequate digital literacy development. This ensures that

students are capable of tackling the complex information challenges in the digital world.

Critical thinking makes a significant contribution to language learning, from enhancing text analysis to understanding cultural contexts and navigating the digital landscape. These skills prepare students to face the demands of the global era and enrich language learning with a deeper perspective (Liu, 2020; Odorovska, 2024). However, challenges such as limited time, resources, and digital literacy must be addressed to optimize the implementation of critical thinking. With the support of effective teaching strategies, critical thinking can become an essential tool for students to thrive in language learning and face an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

#### ***4. Strategies for Developing Critical Thinking***

The development of critical thinking in 21st-century education has become a crucial priority to equip students with reflective and analytical thinking skills. Da Silva (2024) emphasizes that modern pedagogical approaches—such as Problem-Based Learning (PBL), debates, structured discussions, critical text analysis, and the Socratic questioning method—can stimulate students' critical thinking abilities. These strategies allow students to think deeply, enhance autonomy, and solve complex problems. In this context, education is not merely a means of knowledge

transfer, but also a platform for cultivating strategic thinking and well-grounded decision-making skills.

Concrete steps in developing critical thinking include forming diverse perspectives on an issue, strengthening arguments through group work, and conducting in-depth reasoning evaluations (Al-Ghadouni, 2021). Through this process, students can construct logical expressions to support their viewpoints. This approach also involves cross-perspective discussions that enrich students' insights into various views. Furthermore, students are encouraged to explore new perspectives, training them to think flexibly and critically.

The implementation of constructivist-based didactic strategies and inquiry-based scientific communities has also proven effective in improving critical thinking skills (Cubillos Sánchez, 2024). Through this approach, students are encouraged to take an active role in the learning process through formative assessment and reflection. Studies have shown that this strategy has a positive impact on students' cognitive development, enhancing their ability to analyze, evaluate, and draw conclusions from information in a deep and meaningful way.

In addition to teaching methods, a classroom environment that supports discussion and collaboration

plays an important role in developing critical thinking. According to Da Silva (2024), teachers need to create a learning environment that enables students to ask critical questions and challenge assumptions. This can be done through a project-based approach, where students engage in an in-depth exploration of real-world issues. This approach enhances creativity, problem-solving, and decision-making.

With these strategies, the development of critical thinking can become an integral component of education. Project-based approaches, structured discussions, and self-reflection not only enhance students' analytical skills but also prepare them to face real-world challenges. Modern education must continue to innovate in designing teaching strategies that encourage students to think critically, creatively, and reflectively.

##### **5. *Obstacles in the Implementation of Critical Thinking***

Critical thinking has become an essential skill in language learning because it helps students analyze, evaluate, and apply knowledge in a deeper way. This ability also enables students to understand the cultural and social contexts underlying language use. However, one of the main challenges in its implementation is teachers' perception that doubts students' ability to think critically on their own. This is worsened by the low enthusiasm of students in class discussions, which are often used as a teaching strategy

(Khalid et al., 2021). As a result, language learning tends to focus on mechanical mastery of material rather than the development of deep analytical skills.

Traditional teacher-centered teaching methods become another obstacle in promoting critical thinking. Although the curriculum has been designed to develop this skill, teachers often still adopt passive learning approaches that do not actively involve students (Rahmi, 2020). This causes students to become mere recipients of information, without space to question, analyze, or discuss the material being taught. Therefore, innovation in more interactive learning methods is needed, such as group discussions, debates, or collaborative projects, which can motivate students to think critically and engage more deeply in the learning process.

In addition, cultural barriers and misunderstandings about the definition of critical thinking also hinder its implementation. Many teachers and students perceive critical thinking as negative criticism, which leads to resistance toward this approach (Heath, 2024). This challenge becomes more complex when certain cultural values do not support the habit of questioning or debating ideas. Therefore, teachers need to understand students' cultural contexts and promote critical thinking as a reflective and constructive effort that does not conflict with social norms.

By understanding these challenges, critical thinking can be effectively integrated into language learning through interactive and inclusive methods. Teachers need to overcome cultural barriers and misconceptions related to critical thinking while ensuring that students are actively engaged in the learning process. This approach not only enhances language skills but also prepares students to face the increasingly complex challenges of the global world (Khalid et al., 2021; Heath, 2024; Rahmi, 2020). Thus, critical thinking can become an essential tool in developing relevant language competencies in the modern era.

## **C. Young Learners**

### **1. *Definition of Young Learners***

Young learners refer to primary school children aged between 6 and 12 years, with groupings based on age and developmental stages (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990). The Younger Group includes children aged 6–8 years, while the Older Group covers those aged 9–12 years. Based on grade levels, they are divided into Lower Classes (grades 1–3) and Upper Classes (grades 4–6). On the other hand, preschool or kindergarten-aged children who begin learning English can be categorized as very young learners. These age differences affect their learning styles and needs, including their attention to the learning materials presented.

According to Butler (2024), young learners include children aged 4–12 who are learning an additional language besides their mother tongue. The language learning process at this age takes place in a teaching context that often focuses on enjoyable activities. They have a natural ability to absorb a new language quickly, especially through interactive and immersive approaches. Therefore, the learning design must take into account their age characteristics, such as short attention spans and the need for activity variation. This approach is essential to maximize children's language potential in a teaching environment.

Ilieva (2022) highlights that young learners need learning materials that are engaging, colorful, and emotionally stimulating. Children at this age learn more effectively through dynamic and enjoyable activities, such as games, songs, or other creative tasks. Interactive language learning not only facilitates their understanding but also helps build an emotional connection with the language being learned. Therefore, it is important for educators to integrate visual and kinesthetic elements into the learning process so that children remain motivated and active throughout the learning experience.

In addition, social and emotional changes are also important factors in the development of young learners. Scott and Ytreberg (1990) state that at around the age of 10, children's attention begins to shift from a self-centered focus

to reciprocal relationships with others. This change affects the way they interact in learning activities. Materials that involve cooperation, such as group discussions or team-based games, become more relevant to encourage their maximum engagement.

By understanding the definition and characteristics of young learners, educators can design more effective teaching strategies that meet their needs. Age divisions, emotional needs, and distinct learning styles indicate that the learning approach must be flexible, interactive, and engaging. A deep understanding of young learners not only improves learning outcomes but also creates enjoyable and meaningful experiences for them.

## **2. *Characteristics of Young Learners' Learning***

Learning for young learners or early childhood children has unique characteristics that distinguish it from learning for other age groups. Children at this age have a high curiosity, abundant energy, and enthusiasm for exploring the world around them. According to Gunn (2022), their learning disposition, which tends to be active and interested, plays a crucial role in building knowledge and skills that support lifelong learning. Therefore, the learning approach must be designed to be engaging and interactive to keep them involved.

The psychological characteristics of young learners include a strong memory, sharp perception, and a high level

of curiosity (Qizi, 2022). They are quick to understand new information, but they need creative activities to maintain their focus. Children also tend to be egocentric, meaning they connect learning with their own experiences (Suyanto, 2007). This requires educators to create material that is relevant to their daily lives to make the learning experience more meaningful.

In addition, children at this age have a short attention span and can easily become bored. They prefer learning that involves physical activities, such as games, songs, and stories (Suyanto, 2007). The "learning by doing" approach is very effective, where children learn through direct experiences that involve body movement to support their understanding. This type of learning also allows them to develop creativity and imagination, which are characteristic traits of early childhood.

The real world and imagination for young learners often do not have a clear boundary. This allows them to engage deeply in learning that incorporates imaginative elements such as fictional stories or role-playing games (Suyanto, 2007). Therefore, approaches that encourage exploration and fantasy are important to support their cognitive development. These activities also help them learn new concepts in a fun and engaging way.

In conclusion, learning for young learners must take into account their unique characteristics, including curiosity,

imagination, and active engagement. Interactive and creative approaches, such as games, songs, and stories, are key to maintaining their motivation and interest in learning. With the right strategies, learning for these children can provide a strong foundation for the development of their knowledge and skills in the future.

### **3. *Teaching Strategies for Young Learners***

Teaching young learners requires a creative and interactive approach to make learning enjoyable and relevant for them. According to Kasap (2024), effective teaching strategies involve the use of visual aids, games, and storytelling to create a positive learning environment. These strategies not only increase children's interest in learning but also help them understand the material more effectively. Therefore, it is important for teachers to adopt teaching methods that utilize engaging and diverse media.

One effective strategy is the use of picture books. Picture books have a strong visual appeal and are able to stimulate children's imagination (Shih, 2020). They not only provide knowledge but also help convey concepts and offer emotional guidance to children. In addition, the use of picture books can develop children's empathy toward others, making them a valuable tool in both language learning and character development.

Visual media is also an essential component in teaching young learners. According to Ridha (2022), the use

of learning materials such as films can raise children's awareness of various aspects of life and make learning more engaging. Visual media simplifies abstract concepts through illustrations and animations. In this way, visual media serves as a bridge to deliver complex material in a simple and enjoyable manner.

Another equally important strategy is storytelling. Children love stories, and diverse stories can enrich their learning experiences (Shih, 2020). Teachers can use storytelling to introduce new vocabulary, language structures, or life values. Through storytelling, children learn to appreciate the beauty of language while developing their listening skills and imagination. Moreover, storytelling can be an effective tool to build positive relationships between teachers and students.

In conclusion, teaching strategies for young learners should be designed interactively and creatively by incorporating picture books, visual media, and storytelling. This approach not only makes learning more enjoyable but also helps children better understand the material. By applying appropriate methods, teachers can create an effective learning environment that supports children's cognitive, emotional, and social development.

#### ***4. Challenges in Teaching Young Learners***

Teaching young learners presents unique challenges because they are at different stages of cognitive, social, and emotional

development. Teachers must understand their age characteristics and align learning materials to keep them engaging, relevant, and developmentally appropriate. However, the diversity of students' backgrounds, such as proficiency levels and individual needs, often complicates the application of effective teaching strategies. This requires an innovative approach to create an inclusive learning environment that supports students' development (Goto Butler, 2024).

One of the main challenges is the limitation in infrastructure and technology that supports learning. Poor technical support, lack of equipment, and inadequate internet connectivity often hinder the use of technology in teaching (Kgosi, Makgato, & Skosana, 2023). Additionally, the teaching materials used are not always able to meet the diverse needs of students. Teachers often rely solely on resources such as textbooks, video clips, or downloaded materials, without any specific adaptations to cater to students with varying abilities (Nilsson, 2024).

Another challenge is recognizing and meeting the needs of gifted students, who are often overlooked. Preschool or elementary school teachers may feel unprepared to identify the potential of gifted students and tailor learning materials individually (Kamińska, 2024). This situation is exacerbated by time constraints and the lack of adequate training, resulting in gifted students not receiving

optimal attention. This highlights the need for specialized training for teachers to support the individual needs of gifted students while creating a fair learning environment for all students.

To address these challenges, teachers need to develop innovative strategies, such as using a more personalized approach, effectively utilizing technology, and providing relevant training to recognize students' needs. With careful planning and an inclusive approach, learning can become more effective and enjoyable for young learners. Increased support for teachers is also necessary to ensure they can meet students' needs optimally and create meaningful learning experiences (Kgosi et al., 2023; Kamińska, 2024; Goto Butler, 2024).

##### ***5. The Role of the Teacher in Young Learners' Learning***

Teachers play a central role in young learners' education by being facilitators, motivators, and mentors. As facilitators, teachers create a learning environment that supports exploration and active participation from students. They also provide motivation that encourages students to learn enthusiastically and develop self-confidence. As mentors, teachers help shape positive behavior patterns, build self-esteem, and create a pleasant atmosphere to promote children's personal and social development (Malureanu & Enachi-Vasluianu, 2021).

In addition, teachers serve as conflict mediators and agents of social change. They help students overcome interpersonal challenges, such as conflicts with classmates, using approaches that emphasize empathy and peaceful resolution. Teachers also act as role models, imparting moral and social values, positively influencing students' attitudes and behaviors. With the support of comprehensive training programs and collaboration with colleagues, teachers can continuously enhance their competencies to meet the diverse needs of students and strengthen the education system as a whole (Shih, 2020).

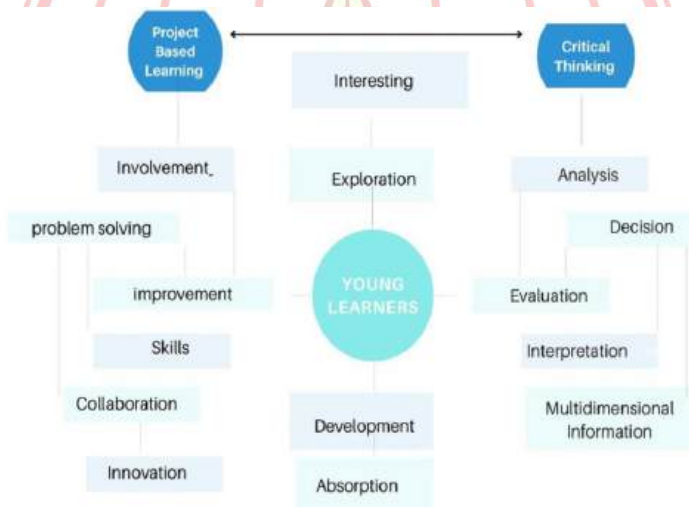
Positive interaction between teachers and students forms an essential foundation in the learning process. A supportive teacher attitude can build a trusting relationship and have a significant impact on student motivation. When students feel supported and encouraged through constructive interactions, they become more active and independent in their learning. Furthermore, the use of engaging teaching techniques and relevant materials will further facilitate student involvement, thus improving their learning outcomes (Ferreira, 2024).

The role of the teacher in young learners' education is not limited to academic aspects but also includes character formation and social development. By being an innovative facilitator, an inspiring motivator, and a caring mentor, teachers can create an inclusive and supportive learning

environment. This not only enhances students' learning outcomes but also lays the foundation for their lifelong development (Malureanu & Enachi-Vasluianu, 2021; Ferreira, 2024).

#### D. Conceptual Framework

In research, a logically structured, systematic, and theory-based conceptual framework plays a crucial role in explaining the relationships between concepts, developing arguments, and formulating analysis strategies that support the clarity of direction and focus of the study.



**Figure 2.1: Framework of the research**

The Project-Based Learning (PjBL) approach positions students as active participants in the learning process through direct involvement in projects. This involvement encourages students to develop a sense of responsibility for the learning

process, both individually and as a group. The process of problem-solving, seeking solutions, and independent reflection provides a deeper and more meaningful learning experience. Moreover, projects also develop 21st-century skills such as time management, communication, collaboration, and reflective thinking. In a team environment, students learn to share roles and build solutions together, fostering innovation and creativity.

Through the implementation of projects, students' critical thinking skills develop naturally. They are required to analyze information, sift through relevant data, and formulate problem-solving strategies based on logical considerations. Evaluation is carried out not only on individual work results but also on group contributions, which strengthens reflective abilities. Interpretation of data and information becomes an integral part of understanding the meanings contained within. Furthermore, students learn to view problems from various perspectives, training their multidimensional thinking skills. Managing information from various sources during the project further enriches their critical thinking process.

Through the implementation of projects, students' critical thinking skills develop naturally. They are required to analyze information, sift through relevant data, and formulate problem-solving strategies based on logical considerations. Evaluation is carried out not only on individual work results but also on group contributions, which strengthens reflective abilities. Interpretation of data and information becomes an

integral part of understanding the meanings contained within. Furthermore, students learn to view problems from various perspectives, training their multidimensional thinking skills. Managing information from various sources during the project further enriches their critical thinking process.

The connection between PjBL, critical thinking skills, and the characteristics of young learners creates a synergy in the learning process. PjBL offers an approach that aligns with children's learning styles while gradually fostering critical thinking abilities. Collaborative projects enable students to practice analyzing, evaluating, and making decisions naturally. This process does not overlook children's developmental aspects; instead, it strengthens them in a fun and meaningful way. Therefore, PjBL is not only effective in transferring knowledge but also in building a strong foundation for critical thinking that supports lifelong learning.

#### **E. Some Related Previous Studies**

Many previous studies have focused on Project-Based Learning (PBL) in English language learning. However, most of them highlight its effectiveness in improving language skills, including speaking, writing, reading, and listening (Tu, 2024; Sedubun, 2024; Rahardi et al., 2023). Previous studies show that PBL creates a contextual learning environment, motivates students to actively participate, and develops

linguistic and collaborative skills. In addition, PBL has been proven to encourage meaningful language use, enhance student autonomy, and strengthen critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Research findings also reveal that students feel more confident in using English after implementing PBL in their learning. Overall, prior studies affirm that PBL is an effective approach to improving English language skills and 21st-century competencies.

Research on critical thinking in language learning highlights how this skill helps students analyze, evaluate, and deeply understand texts and learning materials (Ma & Xu, 2024; Su, 2024; Huang et al., 2023; Purohit & Jayasurya, 2022). Previous studies show that critical thinking plays a role in increasing student engagement, cognitive reading strategies, and enjoyment of learning a foreign language. Additionally, critical thinking skills have been proven to contribute to improved language performance through enhanced motivation and a better understanding of the material. The integration of critical thinking in language learning also helps students become more independent and effective communicators. Overall, prior research affirms that critical thinking has a positive impact on mastering and using a foreign language.

Research on the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in enhancing critical thinking skills shows that this method encourages students to be more reflective, analytical, and creative in completing academic tasks (Boleng & Maasawet, 2019; Astaifi, 2024;

Buchman, 2024). Previous studies found that integrating PBL with other strategies, such as Cooperative Script, has a significant impact on students' critical thinking. Moreover, PBL is effective in improving the analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information in real-world situations, as well as strengthening students' soft skills. Other findings indicate that PBL increases student engagement, motivation, and collaboration, making them more prepared to face challenges in the workforce. Overall, prior research affirms that PBL is an effective approach to developing critical thinking skills in education.

Research on English language learning for young learners highlights various effective strategies that align with their cognitive and emotional characteristics (Rosalina & Salam, 2024; Ibrakhimovna, 2024; Ramirez, 2024). Previous studies indicate that reading strategies such as emerging literacy, mnemonic techniques, and read-aloud practices can enhance students' comprehension of English texts. Furthermore, the use of games in speaking instruction has proven to be effective, as children find it easier to learn when engaged in fun activities. The preference of students for instruction by native and non-native speakers also plays an important role in improving their learning experience. Overall, prior research emphasizes that interactive and experience-based methods can increase motivation and understanding in English language learning for young learners.

Research on the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in Indonesia highlights its application across various educational levels and the challenges teachers face in its implementation (Usoh et al., 2024; Riani, 2024; Tuo & Najmi, 2024). Previous studies show that the main barriers in PBL implementation include teachers' lack of understanding, limited resources, and insufficient administrative support. However, research also reveals that teacher training and systematic mentoring can enhance the effectiveness of PBL, enrich students' learning experiences, and improve their critical and collaborative skills. These findings emphasize that, despite the existing challenges, well-planned PBL implementation can improve the quality of education and provide more meaningful learning experiences for students.

Although much research has discussed the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in improving critical thinking skills and English language proficiency, there is still a gap in research that specifically focuses on its impact on young learners at the junior high school (SMP) level (Tu, 2024; Sedubun, 2024; Rahardi et al., 2023). Most studies focus on higher education or senior high school levels, with limited attention given to how PBL shapes students' critical thinking skills in junior high school. Additionally, there is a lack of research exploring students' direct experiences with project-based learning and how this contributes to the development of their critical thinking in English language classrooms.

This study offers novelty by exploring in depth how Project-Based Learning (PBL) influences the critical thinking skills of junior high school students in English language learning, specifically at SMPN 11 Bengkulu Tengah. Using a student experience-based approach, this research not only analyzes the effectiveness of PBL in enhancing critical thinking but also explores how students perceive and respond to this method within the context of their learning. Thus, the findings of this study are expected to provide new insights into the effectiveness of PBL in developing critical thinking skills among young learners and offer practical recommendations for teachers to implement PBL more optimally in junior high school English classes.

