

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

### A. Background of the Study

At SMA Negeri 3 Kota Bengkulu, English language instruction remains a core component of the national curriculum and plays a pivotal role in preparing students for both academic success and global engagement. Despite this emphasis, many students struggle with foundational skills particularly reading comprehension. Even with standardized lesson structures and approved teaching materials, results from periodic formative assessments reveal consistently low comprehension scores. This outcome highlights a critical disconnect between instructional input and student uptake. Educators have noted that despite their efforts to scaffold lessons, students often fail to make meaningful connections with texts. The problem persists across classes, suggesting a systemic issue rather than isolated teaching lapses. Addressing this challenge requires reevaluating both content delivery and student engagement strategies. An innovative, context-responsive approach is urgently needed.

Teachers at SMA 3 have observed that students' engagement with English texts tends to decline significantly when readings are lengthy, abstract, or include unfamiliar vocabulary and cultural references. For many learners, such materials become cognitive obstacles rather than opportunities

for exploration. Even those with average vocabulary knowledge often feel alienated by topics that lack personal or contextual relevance. As a result, reading becomes a chore rather than an active process of discovery. Educators have reported classroom scenarios where students complete reading tasks mechanically without understanding or reflecting on content. This passive engagement inhibits skill development and reinforces surface-level comprehension. Effective reading instruction, therefore, must move beyond text delivery to include strategies for motivation and contextualization. Understanding the root of student disengagement is the first step toward transforming classroom practice.

These difficulties reflect not just local issues at SMA 3 but a nationwide pattern among Indonesian high school learners. The broader EFL landscape in Indonesia reveals recurring challenges in cultivating reading comprehension, particularly in environments with limited access to authentic English texts. As noted by Widianoro & Sukarno, (2024), the absence of consistent exposure to English outside the classroom restricts students' linguistic intuition and reading fluency. The classroom remains the primary, and sometimes the only, setting for English language engagement. This context limits learners' ability to develop higher-level reading strategies such as inference-making, summarizing, or critical analysis. Moreover, exposure to culturally distant or outdated

materials further discourages deep reading. These barriers must be addressed through both policy-level and classroom-level interventions that recognize the socio-cultural realities of Indonesian learners.

Among the most frequently cited obstacles to reading comprehension is low learner motivation, which in turn is influenced by psychological and cognitive factors. According to (Wiyaka et al., 2024) many Indonesian EFL learners experience heightened anxiety when faced with English reading tasks, particularly under time pressure or unfamiliar formats. This anxiety is exacerbated by poor vocabulary knowledge and the absence of effective reading strategies. Students tend to skim texts without extracting meaning, missing the purpose of reading entirely. As motivation decreases, so does the ability and willingness to engage in complex reading tasks. This cycle of demotivation and underachievement perpetuates a negative perception of reading in English. Breaking this cycle requires an approach that not only improves skills but also transforms students' attitudes toward reading. Instructional design must therefore integrate both affective and cognitive dimensions of learning.

Teacher-centered instruction continues to dominate Indonesian classrooms, particularly in reading activities. These approaches emphasize memorization, repetition, and rigid task completion, leaving little space for critical

engagement or learner autonomy. At SMA 3 Kota Bengkulu, for instance, reading lessons are often structured around textbook content, with teachers reading aloud followed by students answering comprehension questions. This sequence, while organized, often results in surface-level understanding and disengagement. Passive learning environments discourage student inquiry, discussion, or connection-making with the texts. As a result, reading is perceived as an academic requirement rather than a meaningful or enjoyable activity. To address these limitations, teaching methodologies must shift toward constructivist models that prioritize student experience, prior knowledge, and collaborative meaning-making.

Assessment practices further compound the issue, as many reading tasks are evaluated using multiple-choice formats or gap-filling exercises. While efficient to score, such assessments rarely capture the depth of students' comprehension or their ability to synthesize and interpret ideas. (Putra & Hudori, 2024) that these traditional methods fail to measure students' critical thinking, interpretive skills, or genuine understanding. In the long run, they contribute to an assessment culture that values accuracy over insight. Consequently, students may perform well in tests without internalizing reading strategies or developing lasting literacy. This discrepancy between assessment and authentic reading

performance calls for alternative evaluation techniques. Authentic assessments that involve student projects, reflections, or portfolios may offer more holistic insights into reading development.

In the age of digital transformation and rapid information exchange, it is increasingly vital for education systems to cultivate deep, transferable literacy skills. The Indonesian government has acknowledged this need through policy efforts such as the Merdeka Belajar initiative, which emphasizes learner agency and relevance in instruction. However, many schools including SMA 3 still struggle to translate these ideals into practical classroom strategies. Students need to be able to critically evaluate sources, synthesize diverse perspectives, and apply reading strategies across contexts. Traditional instructional models are ill-equipped to meet these demands. As digital technologies reshape how learners access and interact with information, reading instruction must evolve accordingly. This includes integrating student-centered pedagogies that foster curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking.

Unfortunately, the design of many Indonesian reading curricula has not kept pace with 21st-century educational demands. Lessons often lack components that promote creativity, problem-solving, and collaboration key skills required for today's learners(Jaya et al., 2025) Reading tasks

are typically isolated from real-world contexts, making them seem irrelevant to students. This disconnect between curriculum content and student interests leads to apathy and low retention. Furthermore, classroom routines remain rigid, with limited room for innovation or flexibility. To prepare students for global citizenship and lifelong learning, schools must embrace pedagogical frameworks that integrate communication, collaboration, and critical thinking into reading instruction. Redesigning reading lessons through such a lens requires both instructional creativity and institutional support.

Global education paradigms are now shifting decisively toward constructivist, student-centered learning models. These approaches position learners as active participants in constructing knowledge, rather than passive recipients of content. For Indonesian EFL classrooms, this shift presents both a challenge and an opportunity. On one hand, it demands a departure from traditional practices that are deeply rooted in exam-oriented instruction. On the other, it opens doors to pedagogies that cultivate autonomy, motivation, and contextual understanding. Such changes require more than curricular revisions they call for transformations in teacher beliefs, classroom culture, and school policies. As the demand for adaptive, literate graduates increases, EFL educators must

adopt models that align with both global standards and local realities.

One such instructional model with growing evidence of effectiveness is Project-Based Learning (PjBL). This approach organizes learning around meaningful, student-driven projects that involve inquiry, collaboration, and real-world problem-solving. Unlike traditional reading tasks, PjBL situates reading as a tool to acquire knowledge for project completion, thereby giving students a clear and motivating purpose. Projects can range from creating digital magazines to investigating environmental issues allowing students to apply their reading skills to relevant and engaging tasks. PjBL not only enhances comprehension but also builds essential life skills such as teamwork, communication, and time management. As such, it aligns strongly with both national curriculum goals and global competencies for 21st-century learners.

In EFL settings, PjBL is particularly valuable because it transforms reading from a passive decoding task into an active meaning-making process. (Afrilyasanti et al., 2025) argue that PjBL empowers learners by framing reading as a means to solve problems, express creativity, and produce tangible outcomes. For Indonesian students, this shift repositions English from a foreign academic subject to a useful tool for exploration and communication. Reading in PBL becomes

purposeful: learners seek information to complete projects, which naturally promotes deeper engagement with texts. This process encourages vocabulary acquisition, inference-making, and the application of reading strategies. Moreover, PjBL offers opportunities for differentiated instruction, allowing students with varying proficiency levels to contribute meaningfully to a shared goal.

Within a PjBL framework, reading instruction can be adapted to promote higher-order thinking and learner autonomy. For example, students might analyze multiple texts to develop a group presentation, design surveys, or write reflective essays all of which require critical reading and synthesis. These tasks align with Bloom's Taxonomy, which promotes cognitive skills beyond recall and comprehension. In addition, the collaborative nature of PjBL supports peer learning, where students scaffold each other's understanding. Reading no longer occurs in isolation but becomes integrated with speaking, writing, and problem-solving. As engagement increases, so does intrinsic motivation to read creating a virtuous cycle of skill development. Such integrative, experiential learning is essential in preparing students for dynamic, multilingual environments.

Research supports the claim that PjBL enhances students' reading comprehension when properly implemented in EFL contexts.(Istihari et al., 2025) that embedding reading

tasks within authentic projects not only improved comprehension scores but also deepened students' critical engagement with texts. Their study highlights how students moved from literal interpretation to analytical and evaluative thinking. PjBL allowed learners to connect ideas across multiple texts, link readings to real-life experiences, and communicate their insights through collaborative outputs. These outcomes demonstrate that reading skills flourish when linked to purpose and context. Therefore, PjBL holds significant promise as a transformative approach to reading instruction in Indonesian high schools, particularly for students with limited exposure to English.

The principles underlying Project-Based Learning are closely aligned with Indonesia's 2013 Curriculum (Kurikulum 2013), which emphasizes competency-based education, student-centered learning, and contextualized instruction. The curriculum encourages teachers to design learning experiences that promote critical, communicative, and collaborative competencies. In this framework, reading is not treated as an isolated skill but as part of an integrated learning process that includes listening, speaking, writing, and thinking. Students are expected to interpret, evaluate, and apply information in real-life scenarios. However, the extent to which such ideals are practiced depends on how well teachers can translate curriculum policies into actual teaching strategies. As a result,

implementation often varies across schools and regions. Bridging this gap remains a key challenge for Indonesian education reform.

In line with this vision, teachers are expected to transition from being sources of information to facilitators of learning, guiding students through discovery and inquiry-based processes. However, this shift in teaching identity is not always smooth. Many educators, especially those trained under traditional models, struggle to adjust to these new roles. They may lack confidence in allowing students more autonomy or fear that project work will reduce time for exam preparation. The implementation of PjBL requires not only pedagogical knowledge but also a mindset shift that supports experimentation and learner independence. Consequently, professional development programs must emphasize not just techniques but also the underlying philosophy of student-centered education. Without such preparation, the goals of the 2013 Curriculum risk remaining aspirational rather than operational.

Despite strong policy support, the effective integration of PjBL into English reading instruction remains limited in many Indonesian schools. (Berliana & Tersta, 2024) report that teachers face significant obstacles, such as time constraints, lack of training, and inadequate resources, when attempting to implement authentic assessments or project-based approaches.

Additionally, large class sizes and fixed lesson durations make it difficult to facilitate group projects or differentiated tasks. These practical challenges often lead teachers to revert to conventional methods that feel more manageable under classroom pressure. As a result, the full potential of PjBL is rarely realized. This disconnect between policy and practice raises the need for context-sensitive strategies that accommodate school-specific conditions while retaining the pedagogical integrity of PjBL.

Moreover, existing studies on PjBL in EFL classrooms tend to focus on measurable outcomes such as test scores, vocabulary acquisition, or reading speed. While valuable, such quantitative data often fail to capture the rich, nuanced experiences of students engaged in project-based reading. Fitria, R. Widyantoro, A. Sukarno, (2024) argue that understanding how students perceive and respond to instructional innovations requires qualitative inquiry. For example, how do students interpret their roles in a PjBL classroom? How do they perceive reading when it is embedded within a creative or collaborative task? These questions are vital to understanding the emotional and cognitive dimensions of learning. Therefore, this study seeks to fill a gap in the literature by focusing on learner experiences and perceptions, rather than solely on academic metrics.

Based on the observation in SMA 3 Kota Bengkulu, it was found that the implementation of *Project-Based Learning* (PjBL) in the English reading class has already been initiated but is still in the development stage. At the beginning, students showed varied abilities in reading; some demonstrated good comprehension and active participation in group discussions, while others were less confident, tended to be passive, and relied heavily on their peers. Several essential elements, such as the creation of a final product, the integration of broader learning resources, and project-based evaluation, need to be strengthened to achieve the main goals of PjBL meaningful, collaborative, and problem-solving-oriented learning. It is expected that the implementation of PjBL will not only improve students' motivation but also help them enhance their reading skills more effectively. Therefore, the writer intends to conduct a study entitled ***“An Analysis of the Implementation of Project-Based Learning in the English Reading Class of Eleventh Grade Students at SMA 3 Kota Bengkulu.”***

This gap is especially pronounced in the context of secondary schools located outside Indonesia's main urban centers. Much of the existing research has been concentrated in Java or major metropolitan areas, where resources and teacher training are more readily available. In contrast, regions like Bengkulu often face limitations in infrastructure, teacher

development, and material support. Yet, these locations offer valuable insights into how educational innovations can be adapted across diverse socio-cultural environments. Understanding how PjBL functions in a mid-sized city like Bengkulu can help generate models that are both scalable and contextually grounded. It also expands the conversation about equitable access to quality education across Indonesia. More inclusive research is needed to reflect the diversity of learners and learning environments in the country.

SMA 3 Kota Bengkulu offers a strong case for this study. As a public high school with an established English program, it reflects both the aspirations and constraints common in Indonesian institutions. Teachers have shown openness to project-based approaches but face challenges of time, resources, and support. While PjBL promotes autonomy and deeper comprehension, its application in Indonesian EFL classrooms is often limited by large classes and restricted instructional time (Fitriani et al., 2022) (Sari & Prasetyo, 2023). At SMA 3, some PjBL elements are present but used informally and inconsistently, echoing findings that teachers adapt PjBL flexibly yet rarely systematically (Harini, 2021). However, documentation and evaluation of these practices remain scarce. A qualitative study can thus reveal how PjBL is experienced in daily instruction and guide stronger implementation.

This study aims to explore how English teachers at SMA 3 incorporate Project-Based Learning (PjBL) into their reading classes. It will examine the types of projects used, how reading materials are selected and integrated, and how students participate in collaborative learning processes. Prior studies have shown that PjBL promotes active engagement and collaborative skills in EFL contexts, making it suitable for reading-focused instruction (Fitriani et al., 2022). The study will also investigate the challenges teachers face, including classroom management, time allocation, and alignment with curriculum goals, which have been identified as persistent issues in PjBL practice in Indonesia (Harini, (2021); Sari & Prasetyo, (2023) Additionally, the study will capture student perspectives on the value and impact of PjBL on their reading skills, as learner perceptions are crucial for understanding the effectiveness of instructional innovations (Ramadani et al., 2021). By investigating both instructional strategies and learner experiences, the research seeks to provide a holistic picture of PBL implementation in this particular EFL context. Such findings are essential for refining practice and building professional capacity (Andriansah et al., 2021)

Furthermore, the research will explore whether PjBL leads to noticeable shifts in students' reading comprehension and overall engagement. Are students better able to infer, evaluate, and synthesize information after participating in

project-based tasks? Do they show increased motivation or reduced anxiety when reading becomes purposeful and interactive? These are critical questions that move beyond test results to understand real learning impact. The study will also examine how students perceive their roles within PjBL classrooms whether they feel empowered as active learners or overwhelmed by unfamiliar formats. Understanding these dynamics is key to ensuring that PjBL is implemented not only effectively but also equitably. Student voice will be a central component of the study's methodology and analysis.

Methodologically, the study will adopt a qualitative case study approach, drawing on classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Observation will focus on teacher-student interaction, project implementation stages, and reading activities. Interviews will be conducted with both teachers and students to explore their views, experiences, and reflections. Relevant documents such as lesson plans, student project outputs, and reading materials will be reviewed to triangulate findings. This multi-method approach allows for a rich and contextualized understanding of how PjBL unfolds in practice. It will also reveal whether instructional goals align with classroom realities. The data will be analyzed thematically using Miles and Huberman's (1994) model of qualitative data analysis.

In addition to academic contributions, the study has broader implications for educational equity and innovation in Indonesia. It highlights the need for context-sensitive reforms that support student engagement and critical literacy across diverse regions. As Indonesian schools continue to implement national curricula that emphasize student competence, models of successful PjBL practice can serve as valuable references. The research findings may guide school administrators in providing better support systems for teachers, including mentoring, resources, and collaboration opportunities. They may also inspire educational stakeholders to invest in scalable innovations that empower learners. Through its localized focus and qualitative depth, the study aspires to offer actionable insights for continuous improvement.

Ultimately, this research seeks to promote English reading instruction that is effective, inclusive, and relevant to the realities of Indonesian learners. Project-Based Learning offers a promising pathway to achieve this vision by fostering creativity, collaboration, and meaningful engagement with texts. By focusing on the lived experiences of teachers and students at SMA 3 Kota Bengkulu, the study aims to bridge the gap between pedagogical theory and classroom practice. In doing so, it contributes not only to the academic conversation on PjBL but also to the national goal of preparing students for informed global citizenship. As Indonesia moves

forward in its educational transformation, such research plays a crucial role in shaping responsive and empowering learning environments for all students.

## **B. Research Questions**

Entrenched to the research background above, the researcher aimed to answer the following question, specifically:

1. How does the implementation of Project-Based Learning ( PBL) phases enhance student's engagement during the English reading process?
2. How does the Project-Based method assist senior high school student understanding English vocabulary and text structures contextually ?

## **C. Research Objectives**

Based on the research focus, this study aimed to find and answer as follows :

1. To investigate the enhancement of students' engagement in the English reading process through the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) phases.
2. To explore how the Project-Based Learning method helps senior high school students understand English vocabulary and text structures in contextual reading activities.

## **D. Significance of the Study**

### **1. Theoretical Significance**

This study contributes significantly to the growing body of literature on Project-Based Learning (PjBL), particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction in secondary education. By focusing on qualitative insights, the research adds depth to previous studies that primarily emphasized quantitative measures such as reading scores or vocabulary growth. This study enriches the academic discourse by presenting a comprehensive understanding of how PjBL is implemented in real classroom contexts, how students and teachers interact with the model, and how reading comprehension is constructed through project-based tasks.

More specifically, the study advances the theory of learner-centered pedagogy by demonstrating how PjBL can serve as a concrete model for promoting autonomy, collaboration, and critical thinking in language classrooms. It also extends the concept of reading as a social and cognitive practice rather than a solitary skill. The findings offer empirical evidence on how PjBL enhances not only reading proficiency but also learner motivation and engagement, which are often underrepresented in theoretical models. Thus, this research provides a foundation for refining and contextualizing existing

frameworks of PjBL in EFL settings, especially in underexplored regions like Bengkulu.

By linking curriculum policy (e.g., Kurikulum 2013) with classroom reality, the study contributes to the theory practice interface, offering a model for how national-level educational reforms can be operationalized through student-centered, project-based strategies. It encourages further theoretical development of PjBL models tailored to the sociocultural and educational contexts of Southeast Asia and other multilingual, developing nations.

## **2. Practical Significance**

The findings of this research are expected to offer actionable insights for various stakeholders in education. Practical benefits include:

### **a. For English Teachers:**

Providing real classroom strategies and techniques for implementing PBL in reading instruction. Offering examples of effective project types, assessment methods, and ways to motivate students through authentic tasks. Helping teachers identify and address common challenges, such as time constraints, classroom management, and assessment alignment.

### **b. For Students:**

Enhancing learning experiences by promoting more engaging, relevant, and collaborative reading

activities.Improving reading comprehension skills through contextualized learning that integrates critical thinking and creativity.Encouraging learner autonomy and responsibility in completing reading-based projects.

c. For School Leaders (Principals, Supervisors):

Informing policy decisions regarding curriculum implementation and pedagogical innovation. Supporting professional development programs that focus on 21st-century skills and student-centered learning.Helping allocate resources or adjust schedules to better accommodate project-based instruction.

d. For Curriculum Developers and Policymakers:

Providing feedback on how national curriculum goals (like Kurikulum 2013) are being translated into practice.Guiding revisions or supplements to curriculum materials to support more effective PBL integration.Encouraging context-sensitive frameworks that consider school capacity, local needs, and student diversity.

e. For Future Researchers:

Serving as a qualitative reference for further studies on PjBL in EFL reading classes, particularly in less-studied areas.Highlighting methodological approaches suitable for analyzing classroom practices, including

interviews, observations, and document analysis. Offering recommendations for scaling or adapting PjBL practices across different educational levels or subject areas.

## **E. Definition of Key Terms**

To avoid ambiguity and ensure conceptual clarity, the following key terms are defined operationally as they are used within the scope of this study entitled “*An Analysis of the Implementation of Project-Based Learning in the English Reading Class of Eleventh Grade Students at SMA Negeri 3 Kota Bengkulu.*”

### **1. Project-Based Learning (PjBL)**

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is a student-centered instructional model that organizes learning around authentic, meaningful projects that require sustained inquiry, problem-solving, collaboration, and the production of tangible outcomes (Thomas, 2000). Rooted in constructivist learning theory, PjBL emphasizes active knowledge construction, where learners engage in real-world tasks that integrate multiple skills and promote higher-order thinking. In the context of this study, PjBL refers to the pedagogical approach implemented in the eleventh-grade English reading classroom at SMA Negeri 3 Kota Bengkulu. Within this framework, students engage with various English texts as primary sources of

information to complete structured projects. These projects may include presentations, written reports, reflective journals, or collaborative products that demonstrate their comprehension and application of the texts. PjBL in this research is characterized by inquiry-driven reading tasks, group collaboration, teacher facilitation, and authentic assessment practices.

## **2. Reading**

Reading is a complex cognitive and interactive process through which readers construct meaning from written texts by integrating linguistic knowledge, background knowledge, and strategic processing skills (Alyousef, 2020). It involves decoding, vocabulary recognition, syntactic processing, inferencing, and critical interpretation. In this study, reading refers specifically to students' engagement with English texts as part of project-based learning activities. Reading is not limited to answering comprehension questions but is conceptualized as an active meaning-making process that supports inquiry, discussion, and project completion. It includes activities such as identifying main ideas, analyzing arguments, synthesizing information from multiple sources, and evaluating textual relevance for project tasks.