

BAB II

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Theoretical Framework

1. The Nature of Reading in EFL Contexts

Reading in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings presents a complex interplay between linguistic competence and cognitive engagement. It is not merely an act of decoding symbols or understanding individual words, but rather a multidimensional process that involves interpreting meaning, recognizing discourse structures, and activating background knowledge. For EFL learners, this process is further complicated by limited exposure to the target language, especially in environments where English is not used beyond the classroom. Razali et al., (2025) emphasize that EFL reading is inherently challenging due to the learners' unfamiliarity with idiomatic expressions, cultural references, and text conventions typically found in authentic English materials.

Moreover, successful reading comprehension in EFL relies heavily on a combination of vocabulary knowledge, grammatical understanding, inferencing skills, and the ability to synthesize information across sentences and paragraphs. Unfortunately, in many Indonesian classrooms, reading activities tend to focus on literal comprehension, often as preparation for standardized tests.

As Widianoro & Sukarno, (2024) found, many students struggle with deeper comprehension tasks because the instruction they receive emphasizes surface-level understanding, not critical engagement. Consequently, improving reading skills requires a shift in both pedagogical strategies and learner mindsets one that prioritizes interaction with texts as sources of meaning rather than just test content.

Reading strategies refer to specific, conscious actions taken by learners to improve their comprehension and interpretation of texts. They help readers move beyond basic decoding and develop skills for analyzing, connecting, and applying information. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), reading strategies are crucial because learners often face linguistic and cultural challenges that hinder comprehension. Scholars commonly divide reading strategies into three main types:

1. Cognitive Strategies Direct ways of processing texts, such as skimming for main ideas, scanning for details, summarizing, predicting, and inferring meaning from context.
2. Metacognitive Strategies Higher-order skills involving planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's reading process (e.g., self-questioning, checking comprehension, adjusting reading speed).

3. Socio-Affective Strategies Strategies that involve collaboration, discussion, and motivation, such as peer reading groups, reading circles, or interactive tasks that reduce anxiety and foster engagement.

Teachers in EFL contexts generally implement a combination of strategies to support students in reading comprehension. Some of the most widely used include:

1. Skimming and Scanning (for identifying main ideas and specific information quickly).
2. Predicting and Activating Prior Knowledge (to connect new information with learners' background knowledge).
3. Annotation and Note-Taking (to highlight important points, vocabulary, and key arguments).
4. Collaborative Reading (such as reading circles or peer-assisted reading).
5. Summarization and Retelling (to check comprehension and encourage students to process texts deeply).
6. Project-Based Learning (PjBL) Approach (where reading is embedded in real-world, meaningful tasks).

One of the reading strategies that can be applied in English classes is Project-Based Learning (PjBL). In this approach, reading is not limited to answering questions but becomes part of completing authentic tasks. Students read texts related to real-world themes, gather and analyze information, and then use it to produce projects such as

presentations or reports. Through this process, learners practice strategies like skimming, scanning, summarizing, and critical analysis in meaningful contexts. When we read a literary work, we are asked to suspend our objections and suspicions in a leap of faith (Anita, 2024). PjBL makes reading purposeful, collaborative, and engaging, which is why researchers often choose it improves comprehension while also fostering problem-solving, teamwork, and real-life language use.

Reading methods in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms play a crucial role in shaping learners' comprehension and engagement with texts. Effective methods, such as extensive reading, intensive reading, and strategy-based instruction, provide structured approaches that help students build vocabulary, enhance critical thinking, and develop reading fluency. Recent studies highlight that integrating methods like extensive reading with digital tools or project-based tasks can significantly improve comprehension and learner autonomy Nguyen, (2021) Moreover, research demonstrates that strategy-focused methods, such as metacognitive reading instruction, empower students to monitor their understanding and apply flexible strategies across different text types Anwas et al., (2020) . These findings suggest that combining traditional methods with innovative approaches tailored to learners'

contexts is essential for optimizing reading outcomes in EFL education.

Reading comprehension in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings is a complex process that integrates linguistic knowledge, cognitive strategies, and contextual interpretation. Learners must not only decode vocabulary and syntax but also engage higher-order skills such as making inferences, connecting prior knowledge, and critically analyzing texts (Alyousef, 2020) highlights the importance of metacognitive strategies that enable learners to monitor and regulate their comprehension. More recent research shows that interactive, learner-centered approaches particularly project-based learning enhance comprehension by situating reading in authentic tasks (Fitriani et al., 2022). Similarly, (Carvajal et al, 2025) demonstrate that combining reading strategies with interactive techniques significantly improves comprehension among A2-level learners. When we read a literary work, we are asked to suspend our objections and suspicions in a leap of faith (Anita, 2024)

Meanwhile, Song, (2021) emphasizes the role of digital literacy in enhancing EFL learners' ability to comprehend multimodal texts, reflecting the growing impact of technology. In another study, Khezrlou & Sadeghi, (2022) found that strategy-based instruction, particularly scaffolding inferencing and summarizing, leads to

measurable gains in comprehension outcomes. Finally, Lee (2023) confirmed that collaborative reading tasks promote deeper comprehension and critical engagement by fostering peer discussion. Collectively, these studies suggest that comprehension in EFL is best supported when traditional linguistic input is combined with strategy instruction, learner autonomy, and meaningful real-world engagement.

2. The Characteristics of Project-Based Learning

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) offers a meaningful alternative to traditional instruction, particularly in language education where authentic communication and learner autonomy are central. Rooted in constructivist learning theory, PBL is defined by Thomas (2000) as a model that centers learning around meaningful projects. These projects are typically student-led, inquiry-driven, and often interdisciplinary, allowing learners to explore real-world issues while developing academic skills. Within this framework, students take responsibility for their learning as they define problems, seek information, collaborate with peers, and present their findings in tangible forms such as reports, videos, or presentations.

The defining features of PjBL distinguish it from conventional classroom approaches. Projects are not supplementary but form the core of instruction, fostering an integrated learning experience. As noted by Song et al.

(2025), the characteristics of PjBL include the centrality of projects in the curriculum, emphasis on learner autonomy and decision-making, relevance to real-life contexts, the creation of concrete outcomes, and an iterative process of feedback and reflection. These elements align closely with the principles of language acquisition, particularly in fostering motivation and engagement, which are essential for successful learning in EFL contexts.

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is characterized by several essential elements that make it distinct from traditional methods of teaching. In PjBL, the project is not treated as an additional task but becomes the central focus of the learning process. Learning is driven by authentic problems and real-world questions that are meaningful to students' lives, allowing them to engage in deeper inquiry and investigation. As part of this process, students are encouraged to conduct research, practice critical reading, and explore multiple perspectives to solve problems or answer guiding questions. Collaboration also plays a vital role, as tasks are usually carried out in groups, enabling learners to develop teamwork, communication, and peer-learning skills. Furthermore, PjBL emphasizes the integration of multiple skills, where reading, writing, speaking, and critical thinking are combined in order to achieve project outcomes. The approach also requires learners to produce tangible outcomes

such as reports, presentations, posters, or digital content, which serve as evidence of their learning. Equally important, PjBL promotes student autonomy by allowing learners to take responsibility in planning, decision-making, and evaluating their own progress.

In terms of curriculum implementation, PjBL fits well into educational frameworks that highlight competency-based learning and student-centered pedagogy. For example, in Indonesia's Kurikulum Merdeka, which emphasizes higher-order thinking, authentic assessment, and learner independence, PjBL is highly relevant. Similarly, within CEFR-based curricula across Europe and Asia, where communicative competence is prioritized, PjBL aligns with the goal of encouraging meaningful language use in authentic contexts. On a global level, PjBL supports the 21st Century Skills Framework, which focuses on critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication (the 4Cs). It is also compatible with Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approaches, since both rely on authentic content to drive language acquisition and meaningful learning experiences. Thus, PjBL is highly flexible and can be embedded into modern curricula that aim to foster problem-solving, real-world application of knowledge, and holistic skill development.

3. Project-Based Learning in Language Education

The integration of PjBL into language education has gained traction as educators seek ways to enhance learners' communicative competence while maintaining academic rigor. Traditional language instruction often isolates linguistic skills teaching grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing separately. In contrast, PjBL integrates these skills into holistic tasks that mirror real-world communication. (Jaya et al., 2025) observed that learners engaged in project-based tasks demonstrate higher levels of language retention and deeper understanding, primarily because the learning is contextualized and purposeful.

Through PjBL, learners must read to gather information, write to summarize and synthesize their findings, speak to collaborate with peers, and listen actively during group discussions and presentations. This integration leads to natural language use, promoting fluency and accuracy. Furthermore, the demand for critical engagement with texts supports higher-order thinking skills, a key element in effective reading comprehension. (Razali et al., 2025) affirm that PBL enhances reading skills by pushing students to analyze, interpret, and apply textual information in ways that are cognitively stimulating and socially meaningful.

4. PJBL Strategies for Enhancing Reading Skills

In the specific domain of reading instruction, PjBL offers a suite of strategies that can transform passive

reading habits into active, critical engagement. Rather than having students read texts in isolation for comprehension questions, PjBL reframes reading as a tool for inquiry and creation. For example, students might research a social issue through reading multiple articles, then synthesize that information into a multimedia presentation. They may also engage in collaborative reading projects where each member contributes a different perspective or interpretation, enriching the collective understanding of the material. These strategies cultivate both analytical and cooperative skills.

Another valuable approach within PjBL is reflective reading, where learners document their responses to texts in journals, combining personal insights with analytical commentary. Such activities promote metacognitive awareness, enabling students to monitor their own reading strategies and adjust them as needed. (Putra & Hudori, 2024) highlight how PjBL, by providing authentic reasons to engage with texts, increases motivation and deepens comprehension. Through repeated cycles of reading, discussing, and producing, learners begin to view reading not just as an academic obligation but as a meaningful act of discovery and expression.

5. Benefits and Challenges of PBL in EFL Classrooms

The benefits of PjBL in EFL classrooms are manifold. At the pedagogical level, PjBL fosters active learning, nurtures learner autonomy, and encourages the development of 21st-century competencies such as collaboration, critical thinking, and digital literacy. In the realm of reading, PBL offers learners opportunities to engage deeply with texts, moving beyond surface-level comprehension to more nuanced interpretations. (Wiyaka et al., 2024) assert that PjBL promotes not only fluency but also reading confidence, especially when learners are supported by technology and guided feedback.

Nonetheless, the implementation of PjBL in EFL settings is not without its challenges. Teachers often face difficulties in planning and facilitating projects, especially when curriculum standards are rigid and assessment practices are predominantly test-based. Berliana & Tersta, (2024) report that many teachers feel unprepared to manage the time and resources required for project-based instruction. In addition, students accustomed to traditional, teacher-centered learning may initially resist the autonomy and responsibility demanded by PjBL. Language limitations, particularly in lower-proficiency learners, can also hinder full participation.

Despite these hurdles, research increasingly shows that with adequate training and institutional support, PjBL

can transform EFL classrooms. It lings well with Indonesia's educational goals under Kurikulum 2013, which emphasizes active learning and character development. In under-resourced regions such as Bengkulu, PjBL offers an innovative and adaptable framework that makes the most of limited materials while promoting meaningful student engagement. As such, this study situates itself within an urgent pedagogical conversation about how best to teach reading in ways that are empowering, equitable, and effective.

B. Previous Research

Previous studies have significantly contributed to understanding how Project-Based Learning (PjBL) enhances reading skills in language education, particularly in EFL contexts.

The first research, (Fitriani et al., 2022) in their study *The Implementation of Project-Based Learning in Improving Reading Comprehension of the Eleventh Grade Students of SMA Negeri 2 Sigi* proved that PBL significantly improved high school students' reading comprehension scores. The gap is that the study only focused on quantitative test results without exploring students' actual learning experiences. The novelty of the proposed study lies in examining students' qualitative experiences and strategies in reading. The similarity is that

both studies address reading comprehension through PjBL. The difference is in the approach: the previous research was quantitative, while the proposed study emphasizes qualitative exploration.

The second research, (Sari & Prasetyo, 2023) in their article *Project-Based Learning on Critical Reading Course to Enhance Critical Thinking Skills* showed that a three-stage PjBL process successfully boosted motivation and critical thinking among university students. The gap is that the main focus was on critical thinking skills, not comprehensive reading ability. The novelty of the proposed study is to investigate reading comprehension more deeply rather than critical thinking. The similarity is the recognition of PBL's effectiveness, but the difference is in orientation: the previous study targeted critical thinking, while the new study targets reading comprehension.

The third research, (Andriansah et al., 2021) in *The Implementation of Project-Based Learning to Enhance Students' Reading Comprehension* showed significant gains in reading scores among vocational students after PjBL-based classroom action research. The gap is that it did not examine social, cultural, and psychological factors that may influence the success of PjBL. The novelty of the proposed study is in analyzing students' experiences in a more contextualized manner. The similarity is that both

studies highlight PjBL's effectiveness in reading comprehension, while the difference lies in methodology: the previous study used quantitative classroom action research, whereas the proposed one applies qualitative in-depth exploration.

The fourth research, (Ramadani et al., 2021) in *Developing a Reading Project Assessment to Stimulate Students' Critical Thinking and Creativity* designed and validated a PBL-based assessment tool that improved comprehension, creativity, and critical thinking. The gap is that the study emphasized assessment design rather than students' learning experiences during PjBL. The novelty of the proposed research is focusing on the reading strategies and dynamics of learners instead of product-oriented assessment. The similarity is in employing PBL as the instructional strategy, while the difference is that the former focused on assessment tools, whereas the latter focuses on student learning experiences.

The fifth research, (Harini, 2021) in *EFL Learners' Perception of the Project-Based Learning Method in an Extensive Reading Course* found that PBL improved comprehension and positioned the teacher as a facilitator, though students mentioned time constraints. The gap is the very limited number of participants, making the findings less representative. The novelty of the new study is

extending the participant scope and connecting learners' perceptions with real classroom practices. The similarity lies in the focus on PBL in reading classes, while the difference is that the previous study emphasized perceptions, whereas the proposed one emphasizes students' lived learning experiences and strategies.

The reviewed studies collectively highlight the potential of PjBL to improve reading comprehension, engagement, and motivation among EFL learners. However, most of these studies focus on university or junior high school settings, use quantitative approaches, or emphasize general literacy or critical thinking skills rather than the specific challenges of reading comprehension in senior high school EFL classrooms, especially in rural Indonesian regions.

All five previous studies share a core similarity with this research in applying Project-Based Learning (PjBL) to enhance reading in EFL contexts. However, key differences highlight the uniqueness of this study. While most prior research focuses on general 21st-century skills like critical thinking (Razali), collaboration (Pujiani), or digital literacy (Yuniar), this study specifically targets academic reading comprehension. In terms of context, earlier studies often used digital platforms or focused on literary texts (e.g., poetry in Kartika), whereas this research

is conducted face-to-face using informational and curriculum-based texts in a senior high school setting. Methodologically, unlike the dominant quantitative or mixed-methods approaches, this study uses a qualitative descriptive design, allowing a deeper exploration of students' experiences and engagement during PjBL.

C. Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework refers to a system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs research. It provides a logical structure that explains the key variables or concepts involved in a study and illustrates the presumed relationships between them. The conceptual framework serves as a map or blueprint for how the researcher understands the research problem and guides the development of research questions, data collection, and analysis.

As stated by Croswell & Roy, (2023), A conceptual framework provides a visual and narrative structure that links theoretical foundations with the practical aspects of research, offering clarity on how different concepts interact within the context of the study. It helps researchers connect abstract theories to real-world research problems and ensures coherence throughout the research process.

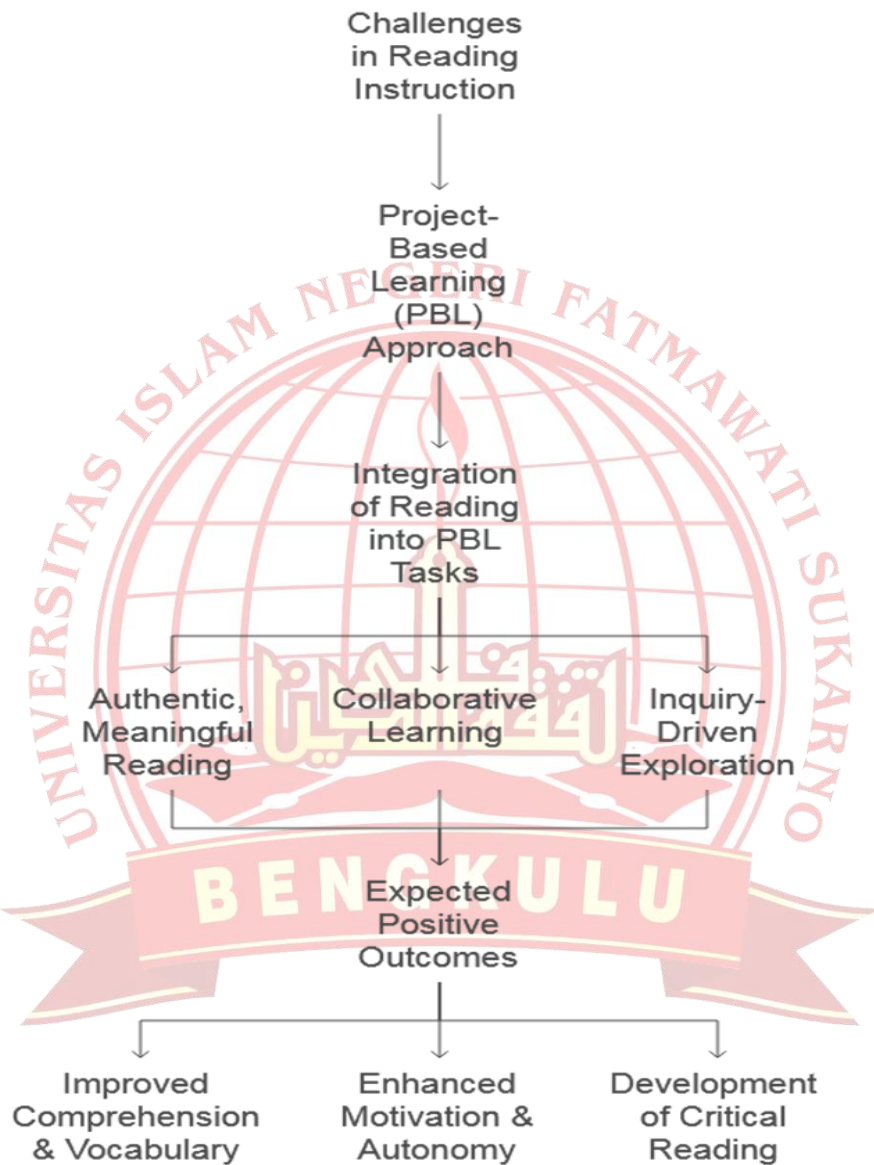


Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework