

*Nursing Students' Perceptions of Project-Based Learning to Enhance English Proficiency:
A Descriptive Quantitative Study*

**Persepsi Mahasiswa Keperawatan tentang Pembelajaran Berbasis Proyek untuk Meningkatkan
Kemampuan Bahasa Inggris: Studi Kuantitatif Deskriptif**

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Received: January 24, 2025; Accepted: March 23, 2025; Published: March 31, 2025.

ABSTRACT

In today's globalized healthcare environment, English proficiency is essential for nursing professionals to access international resources, communicate across cultures, and deliver high-quality care. This study investigates nursing students' perceptions of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) as a strategy to enhance English language skills within clinical and academic contexts. A descriptive quantitative study was conducted at the Nursing Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Ahmad Dahlan Cirebon, involving 56 students enrolled in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course. Data were gathered through a Likert-scale questionnaire focusing on aspects such as motivation, inquiry, planning, and relevance to clinical practice. The findings indicate that students perceive PjBL as highly effective in connecting classroom English learning to real-world nursing tasks. Reported benefits include increased motivation, improved critical thinking, enhanced self-directed learning, and stronger professional communication. Students also expressed high engagement and satisfaction due to the authenticity and relevance of the tasks. The study concludes that integrating PjBL into ESP instruction for nursing students can significantly improve both language proficiency and clinical readiness. These results highlight the pedagogical value of PjBL in nursing education and suggest further research to examine its long-term effects on language retention and professional performance.

Keywords: Project-Based Learning; Nursing Education; English for Specific Purposes; Student Perceptions; Critical Thinking

ABSTRAK

Dalam lingkungan layanan kesehatan yang semakin terglobalisasi, kemahiran berbahasa Inggris menjadi sangat penting bagi tenaga keperawatan untuk mengakses sumber daya internasional, berkomunikasi lintas budaya, dan memberikan pelayanan yang bermutu tinggi. Penelitian ini mengkaji persepsi mahasiswa keperawatan terhadap Project-Based Learning (PjBL) sebagai strategi untuk meningkatkan kemampuan berbahasa Inggris dalam konteks klinis dan akademik. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif deskriptif dan dilakukan di Program Studi Keperawatan Universitas Muhammadiyah Ahmad Dahlan Cirebon, dengan melibatkan 56 mahasiswa yang mengikuti mata kuliah English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner skala Likert yang menilai aspek-aspek seperti motivasi, inkuiri, perencanaan, dan relevansi terhadap praktik klinis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa memandang PjBL sebagai metode yang sangat efektif dalam menghubungkan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di kelas dengan tugas-tugas keperawatan nyata. Manfaat yang dilaporkan mencakup peningkatan motivasi, keterampilan berpikir kritis, pembelajaran mandiri, serta komunikasi profesional. Mahasiswa juga menyatakan keterlibatan yang tinggi dan kepuasan terhadap keotentikan serta relevansi tugas-tugas yang diberikan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa integrasi PjBL ke dalam pengajaran ESP bagi mahasiswa keperawatan dapat secara signifikan meningkatkan kemahiran bahasa sekaligus kesiapan klinis. Temuan ini menyoroti nilai pedagogis PjBL dalam pendidikan keperawatan dan merekomendasikan penelitian lanjutan untuk mengevaluasi dampak jangka panjangnya terhadap retensi bahasa dan kinerja profesional.

Kata kunci: Pembelajaran Berbasis Proyek; Pendidikan Keperawatan; Bahasa Inggris untuk Tujuan Khusus; Persepsi Mahasiswa; Berpikir Kritis

1. Introduction

In today's global healthcare environment, nursing students must develop both clinical competence and strong communication skills in English. Proficiency in English enables them to access international research, collaborate across borders, and deliver high-quality care to diverse patient populations (Pandey et al., 2021; Schkinder, 2024). Moreover, as nursing professionals increasingly pursue employment opportunities abroad or work in multicultural healthcare settings (Al-Btoush & El-Bcheraoui, 2024; Istianah et al., 2024), they are likely to encounter foreign patients and colleagues making effective English communication essential for success in the global workforce (Larsen et al., 2021; Pressley et al., 2022).

In Indonesia, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses play a central role in preparing nursing students for these demands (Jubhari et al., 2022). However, preliminary findings from this study indicate that many students feel disconnected from the English materials used in class, expressing a strong preference for content that aligns more closely with their future roles and clinical realities.

To bridge this gap, Project-Based Learning (PjBL) offers a promising instructional approach (Nayak et al., 2024). By engaging students in real-world tasks and collaborative projects, PjBL encourages them to solve problems that closely mirror actual nursing scenarios, thereby enhancing both language skills and critical thinking (Song et al., 2024; Xie et al., 2025). Because it emphasizes inquiry, planning, and communication, PjBL allows students to experience English not merely as an academic requirement, but as a practical and essential tool in their professional practice (Asfihana et al., 2022; Shi, 2024).

This study investigates how nursing students perceive the use of PjBL in their English learning. Specifically, it addresses the following research question: "What are nursing students' perceptions of the benefits of Project-Based Learning in learning English, particularly in relation to motivation, inquiry, planning, and relevance to professional practice?" The findings aim to contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting contextualized, learner-centered approaches as effective means of fostering both linguistic competence and professional readiness in health professions education.

1.1. Project-Based Learning

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is widely regarded as a dynamic instructional approach that promotes active learning, critical thinking, and real-world application (Nayak et al., 2024; Williamson, 2023). PjBL as a model where learning is organized around complex tasks based on challenging questions or problems that involve students in planning, problem-solving, and decision-making over extended periods (Afzal & Tumpa, 2025; Sukacké et al., 2022). Unlike traditional instructional methods, which often focus on passive learning and memorization, PjBL emphasizes learner autonomy, inquiry, and the creation of meaningful, authentic outputs.

The key characteristics of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) include real-world relevance, student-centered inquiry, collaborative learning, and the creation of a concrete product or presentation (Al-Thani & Ahmad, 2025; Nghiem et al., 2025). These features not only foster active communication and negotiation of meaning but also promote the contextualized use of language, critical elements in building communicative competence in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts such as nursing.

For nursing students, these characteristics align closely with their educational needs: they must acquire both domain-specific vocabulary and pragmatic communication skills to effectively interact with patients, healthcare teams, and global health resources. Given that many nursing professionals aim to work abroad or in multicultural healthcare settings, English proficiency is essential for accessing research, conducting patient interviews, and coordinating interdisciplinary care. PjBL addresses these requirements by integrating language learning with practical nursing scenarios, thereby enhancing engagement, relevance, and retention. Typical PjBL stages as: identifying a real-life problem or question, organizing and planning tasks, conducting research or gathering information, synthesizing findings into a final product, and reflecting on both the process and the outcomes (Al-Kamzari & Alias, 2025; Sukacké et al., 2022). This structured yet flexible model supports the dual goal of equipping nursing students with both linguistic competence and clinical communication skills essential for professional success.

The procedure of PjBL typically follows five key stages: 1) Initiation and Problem Identification: Students are introduced to a real-world problem or driving question, often rooted in professional practice. In nursing education, this might involve identifying a healthcare communication issue. 2) Planning and Research: Learners collaboratively design a plan to address the issue. They assign roles, set goals, and begin researching, gathering relevant language input and content knowledge. 3) Development and Implementation: Students engage in sustained inquiry, collecting data, designing materials (e.g., patient leaflets, presentations), and applying their English skills in context. 4) Presentation and Public Sharing: The final product be it a report, poster, or performance is shared with peers, educators, or real audiences, simulating professional communication. 5) Reflection and Evaluation: Students reflect on both their language use and learning process. Instructors facilitate debriefing to consolidate learning and assess

performance using rubrics aligned with both language and content outcomes (Bell, 2010; Hindun et al., 2025). These stages support the development of critical language and soft skills. By actively participating in meaningful tasks, students improve their communication, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities. In ESP classrooms, PjBL has been found to enhance vocabulary retention, contextual grammar use, and discourse competence (Nurlely, 2024).

1.2. Pedagogical Advantages of PjBL in Nursing Education

In recent years, nursing education has increasingly embraced active, student-centered pedagogies such as Project-Based Learning (PjBL) and Cooperative Learning to better equip students with essential professional competencies. These approaches move beyond traditional lecture-based teaching by promoting deep engagement with content, fostering skills like critical thinking, communication, and collaboration, all of which are vital in today's complex healthcare environments. A key pedagogical benefit of these methods is the enhancement of critical thinking and learning efficiency. Integrating Cooperative and Project-Based Learning (CPBL) into vocational nursing curricula led to significantly greater improvements in these areas compared to traditional instruction (Xie et al., 2025). This suggests that students not only gain content knowledge but also become more adept at analyzing and applying information in clinical settings.

Additionally, self-directed learning (SDL) is another crucial outcome of PjBL. By requiring students to take initiative in planning and managing projects, PjBL naturally cultivates autonomy and accountability. George & Valsalan (2022) found that nursing students engaged in PjBL reported higher levels of both affective and cognitive engagement, which are central to developing lifelong learning skills, a fundamental trait for health professionals facing ever-evolving medical knowledge. Continuous learning is essential for health professionals facing ever-evolving medical knowledge to ensure safe and up-to-date patient care (Diniarti et al., 2023; Istianah et al., 2024; Istichomah et al., 2024; Nurcahyati et al., 2022; Sianipar et al., 2024).

Teamwork and creative problem-solving are also strengthened through project-based instruction. Kim (2021) reported that PjBL significantly improved nursing students' teamwork competence, creative personality traits, and self-efficacy. These interpersonal and adaptive skills are essential in nursing, where care is typically delivered in multidisciplinary teams under dynamic conditions.

Finally, PjBL contributes to greater knowledge retention, particularly in specialized fields such as emergency and critical care nursing. In a quasi-experimental study, Maisyaroh et al. (2023) found that students exposed to PjBL outperformed peers in post-intervention tests, indicating better comprehension and long-term retention of clinical content.

Together, these findings underscore the multidimensional advantages of project-based and cooperative pedagogies in nursing education. By mirroring the complexities of clinical environments, these methods support students not only in mastering theoretical knowledge but also in developing the soft and hard skills necessary for effective, patient-centered care.

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive quantitative approach (Nurfikri & Roselina, 2022; Ratnaningsih & Gumiandari, 2022) using a survey design to investigate nursing students' perceptions of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course at the University of Muhammadiyah Ahmad Dahlan Cirebon. A total of 56 nursing students who had completed a semester-long PjBL-based ESP course were selected through purposive sampling. These participants were chosen based on their direct engagement with the PjBL model during the course, ensuring relevance and experience with the instructional method under investigation.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of seven Likert-scale items, which measured students' perceptions across five key domains: engagement, self-directed learning, problem orientation, critical thinking, and relevance to future professional roles. The questionnaire was developed based on prior literature in PjBL and ESP instruction. While formal psychometric validation was not conducted, the instrument was reviewed by two ESP instructors for content relevance and clarity, and pilot-tested with a small group of students (n=10) to ensure reliability and comprehension.

The PjBL intervention was structured around a five-stage framework adapted to clinical nursing contexts. First, students identified an authentic task, assisting patients in completing hospital admission forms. They then collaborated in small groups to plan and research appropriate vocabulary and dialogue, developed scripts with instructor support, and rehearsed their scenarios. This was followed by in-class role-play presentations simulating real-life patient interactions. Finally, students participated in guided reflection sessions and received targeted feedback to consolidate both language proficiency and professional communication skills.

3. Findings and Discussion

The survey, conducted among 56 nursing students, aimed to assess their perceptions of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in the context of learning English, particularly in relation to professional relevance, cognitive engagement, and motivation. Figure 1 presents the results of the questionnaire, illustrating students' perceptions of Project-Based Learning across several key dimensions. The findings strongly support the notion that PjBL has a meaningful impact on students' learning experience.

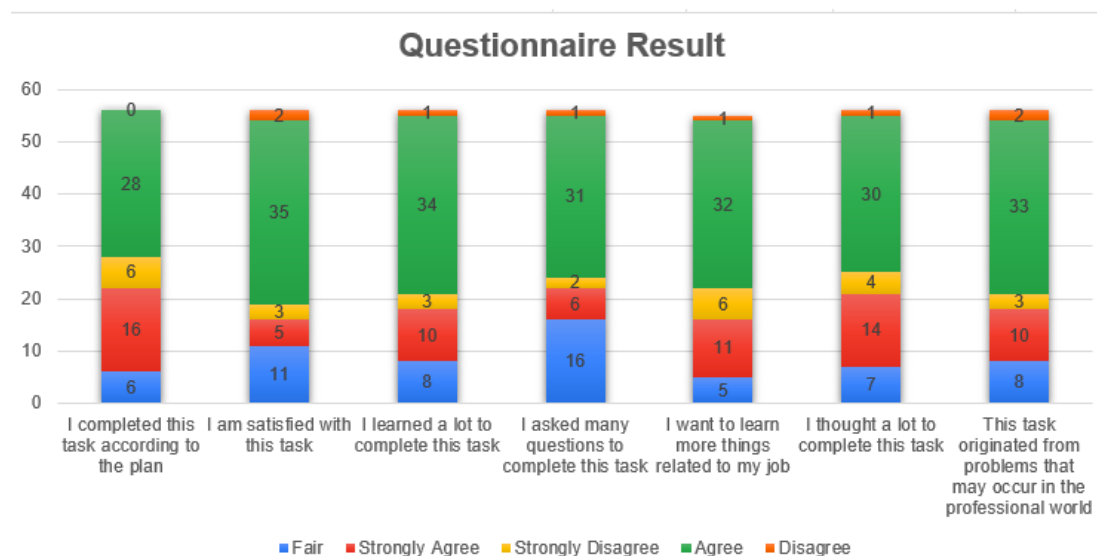


Figure 1. Questionnaire Result

3.1. Alignment with Professional Relevance

One of the core strengths of PjBL identified in the literature is its emphasis on authenticity and real-world relevance (Oktaviani & Safitri, 2024; Silma et al., 2024). This was reflected in the students' responses: 33 students agreed and 10 strongly agreed with the statement that "the task originated from problems that might occur in their future professional work," while only 5 students expressed disagreement. This suggests that the PjBL activities effectively mirrored real-life nursing scenarios, a key factor in enhancing learner motivation and professional preparedness.

Moreover, 32 students agreed and 11 strongly agreed that the task inspired them to learn more about topics related to their nursing career. This supports the idea that PjBL helps students see the relevance of English in clinical communication, report writing, and interdisciplinary collaboration essential skills in global healthcare environments (Aley et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2024).

Importantly, this relevance stems from the students' opportunity to first explore real-world nursing experiences using their native language, which allows them to connect personally and contextually with the task. They then translate or reconstruct these experiences in English, making the learning process more authentic and learner-centered. Because the content originates from the students themselves, the outcome is more meaningful, promoting deeper engagement, professional identity development, and language acquisition rooted in practice.

3.2. Cognitive and Metacognitive Engagement

PjBL encourages students to actively construct knowledge by engaging in critical thinking, problem-solving, and inquiry (Karan & Brown, 2022; Wulandari et al., 2025). This was affirmed in the findings: 30 students agreed and 14 strongly agreed that they "thought a lot to complete the task." Similarly, 34 students agreed and 10 strongly agreed that they "learned a lot" during the process.

In line with Wulandari et al. (2025), these findings indicate that the PjBL approach fostered deeper cognitive engagement, allowing students to move beyond rote memorization. Furthermore, 31 students agreed and 6 strongly agreed that they "asked many questions to complete the task," highlighting the inquiry-based nature of PjBL and its capacity to encourage students to seek information autonomously, a hallmark of self-regulated learning (Cao, 2024).

A key reason for this active inquiry is that students were tasked with creating their own version of a dialogue based on a clinical scenario, which required them to determine what specific information or materials were necessary to complete the project. Since each group approached the task differently—selecting their own language structures, formats, and ways of presenting the administrative dialogue—they were naturally led to identify knowledge gaps,

pose questions, and conduct research tailored to their chosen strategy. This variability in execution illustrates how PjBL supports differentiated learning paths and fosters a more personalized and engaged learning process.

3.3. Planning, Motivation, and Autonomy

The students also expressed positive attitudes toward project planning and goal completion. 28 students agreed and 16 strongly agreed that they completed their tasks according to plan, with no respondents selecting “disagree.” This reflects the PjBL characteristic of structured autonomy, where learners take ownership of both the process and outcome of learning (Khoudri et al., 2023). Motivational outcomes were also notable: 35 students agreed and 5 strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the task. The satisfaction aligns with the literature’s claim that PjBL increases student engagement and intrinsic motivation by allowing learners to produce meaningful work with tangible outcomes.

A critical aspect that contributed to this satisfaction was the student-led planning process: students began by understanding the overall task, which then prompted them to plan the necessary steps to complete it. This progressive structuring not only promoted curiosity but also helped them take greater ownership over their work. As they moved from one stage to another, their engagement deepened, reflecting the motivational power of tackling an authentic challenge with clearly defined, self-directed goals.

Overall, the results substantiate several key benefits of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in the context of nursing education. First, students clearly recognized the real-world connection of the tasks, indicating that the projects were closely aligned with scenarios they may encounter in their future professional roles. This authenticity helped bridge academic content with practical application. Secondly, the approach promoted deep learning, as students actively engaged in critical thinking, inquiry, and reflection throughout the project stages. These cognitive processes enhanced their understanding beyond surface-level knowledge.

Furthermore, the experience was found to be highly motivating and satisfying, as students felt that the tasks were meaningful and aligned with their personal and professional interests. Lastly, the structured autonomy within PjBL empowered students to manage their own learning processes effectively. They appreciated the opportunity to plan their projects independently and take responsibility for their outcomes, reinforcing self-directed learning and decision-making skills essential competencies in healthcare practice.

4. Conclusion

This study found that nursing students perceived Project-Based Learning (PjBL) as an effective and engaging approach to enhancing English proficiency within clinical and academic contexts. Participants reported that PjBL not only improved their language skills but also fostered critical thinking, self-directed learning, and professional communication abilities. The use of authentic, collaborative tasks helped bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world nursing scenarios, reinforcing the relevance of English for their future professional roles.

However, this study has several limitations. The sample was limited to 56 students from a single institution, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, data were based solely on self-reported perceptions without triangulation from other sources such as instructor observations or language performance assessments. Future research should consider longitudinal or mixed-method designs to explore the long-term impact of PjBL on language retention and professional competence in clinical settings.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes to the growing body of evidence supporting contextualized, learner-centered approaches in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction. It highlights the potential of PjBL to enhance both linguistic competence and professional readiness in nursing education. Educators and curriculum designers are encouraged to integrate PjBL into ESP courses to create more meaningful, practice-oriented language learning experiences.

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