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Project-Based Learning as a Transformative Approach to Enhancing EFL Students' Paragraph Writing Competence

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of project-based learning (PBL) in enhancing the paragraph writing skills of first-year college students. A total of thirty-one students participated in the research, which utilized a pre-test and post-test design to objectively measure improvements resulting from the instructional intervention. The data collected from both tests were analyzed using SPSS, with descriptive statistical methods applied to evaluate the outcomes. The findings reveal a clear advancement in students' writing skills following their engagement in project-based learning activities. The mean score for the pre-test was 67.48, while the post-test mean increased to 75.64. This significant improvement suggests that PBL has a positive impact on students' ability to construct coherent and effective paragraphs. The collaborative nature of PBL was also evident, as students worked together in groups, leveraging a project-based learning assistant to guide them through the writing process. They engaged in drafting, revising, and refining their paragraphs, with particular focus on building strong arguments and supporting them with relevant facts and references. The collaborative environment encouraged peer learning and mutual support, promoting greater engagement and a sense of responsibility among group members. These initial results provide a valuable baseline for future research and instructional practices. They illustrate how project-based learning can not only enhance students' writing abilities but also cultivate essential skills such as teamwork, analytical thinking, and effective communication. The outcomes of this study suggest that integrating PBL into writing instruction may be a promising approach for educators seeking to improve students' academic writing performance and foster active, collaborative learning environments.

Keywords: *EFL Students; Paragraph Writing; Project-Based Learning (PBL)*



1. Introduction

Writing is a non-linear process that involves many stages, not limited to drafting, formulating, reading, and revising. Students will experience difficulties during the writing process such as 'setting macro rhetorical goals, establishing writer identity, and considering readers (Crossley, 2022). Group activities can increase students' awareness of the nature of writing. pre-writing, writing, and revision cannot be separated from each other into neat independent stages (Cheung, 2016). "There are various strategies for teaching writing, such as prewriting, writing warm-ups, collaborative writing, using sentence starters, and guided writing." (Moses & Mohamad, 2019).

Paragraphs are groups of sentences arranged in accordance with the context being discussed and are interconnected between one sentence and another, as well as connecting one paragraph with another (Wirantaka, 2016). Paragraphs are a collection of several sentences written based on good writing systematics to express ideas. "A good paragraph is a paragraph that is correct, formal, systematic, and in accordance with academic nature" (Wirantaka, 2016). A topic sentence is a sentence that states the main idea of a paragraph. In line with (Ghazzoul, 2018) who states that "the topic sentence is usually the first sentence of the paragraph and includes the topic and controlling idea". Supporting sentences are sentences that are organized with the aim of clarifying the topic sentence. Supporting sentences are sentences that help readers to find the main idea and supporting details of the paragraph (Wirantaka, 2016). A concluding sentence is a sentence that summarizes the entire content of the paragraph or the author's opinion and does not provide new ideas. Concluding paragraph is the author's opinion and reinforces the author's point of view (Ghazzoul, 2018).

Paragraphs are composed of several sentences arranged systematically to clearly express ideas and facilitate effective communication. According to (Wirantaka, 2016), a well-crafted paragraph is characterized by correctness, formality, systematic structure, and adherence to academic standards. At the core of every good paragraph is the topic sentence, which conveys the main idea and often appears as the first sentence. (Ghazzoul, 2018) emphasizes that the topic sentence not only introduces the subject but also presents the controlling idea that guides the rest of the paragraph. Following the topic sentence are the supporting sentences, which serve to elaborate and clarify the main idea by providing explanations, evidence, or examples. These supporting details help readers fully understand and engage with the paragraph's central point (Wirantaka, 2016). Lastly, a well-written paragraph concludes with a concluding sentence that summarizes the key points or restates the writer's opinion, reinforcing the overall perspective without introducing new information (Ghazzoul, 2018). By incorporating these essential elements, paragraphs become coherent units that effectively convey the writer's message.

Becoming a writer requires a complex and continuous process. Many experts agree that writing skills are better treated as a process to produce a product rather than being treated as a product (Lurie et al., 2022). English language skills that is particularly difficult for undergraduate students in their early years at university. Writing is an activity of expressing ideas or ideas in written form by (Nirmayani & Dewi, 2021). The ability to write as one of the most important language competencies allows students to

express their thoughts well (Shubhada Deshpande. Asst., 2014). The writing process can be assisted by lecturers by providing directions to facilitate the student writing process. Writing instructors can help students to do the project (Duarte & Brewer, 2019). Using various teaching techniques to practice writing will help students improve their writing skills. "There are various strategies for teaching writing such as pre-writing, writing warm-ups, collaborative writing, using sentence starters, and guided writing" (Moses & Mohamad, 2019).

In writing paragraphs, writers usually make lists and mind mapping as strategies to facilitate the paragraph writing process. This is in line with the opinion of (Ratu & Arrang, 2018), who stated that lists and the use of outlines are writing teaching strategies developed to help students reduce errors in paragraph cohesion and errors in writing paragraph (Lurie et al., 2022). Writing is the skill of using grammar, coherence, word choice, spelling, punctuation (Pradnyani, 2015). Writing is not only pouring ideas or ideas in the form of writing, but a writer must make a writing or information understandable (Friatin, 2018). This is also stated by (Wali & Madani, 2020) that writing is considered as one of the productive skills in language. writing is a way for students to share their ideas with the world. Writing is an activity that takes a long time to do, for example, having an idea, writing, organizing it, and publishing it. In teaching writing, (Moses & Mohamad, 2019), have the same strategy can be used by writing instructors, such as pre-writing, warm-up, collaborative writing, using sentence starters, and guided writing (Duarte & Brewer, 2019).

The first year's students need several skills such as analytical skills, critical thinking skills, problem solving skills, working in groups, and independence in learning. In line with (Riwayatiningih, 2019), who stated that students write by using critical thinking through arguments supported by data and integrated reflection by using analytical skills (Rahman, 2025). To accommodate the above skills, project-based learning is very appropriate to be implemented in the classroom. Project-based learning is a learning model that can improve students' analytical skills, improve thinking skills, solve problems and work in groups, and foster students' independence in learning (I N. Haris Fiktoyana et al., 2018).

Despite the recognized importance of strong writing skills in academic and professional contexts, many students continue to struggle with organizing their ideas and composing coherent paragraphs. Traditional teaching methods often fail to engage students actively or provide sufficient opportunities for hands-on practice, leading to limited improvement in writing competence (Muniroh et al., n.d.). Previous studies have highlighted that students frequently encounter difficulties in generating ideas, structuring sentences, and maintaining paragraph unity, which ultimately affects the quality of their written work (Sukma, 2019). This persistent challenge underscores the need for innovative instructional approaches that not only enhance students' writing abilities but also foster creativity and independent learning. This study aims to improve students' paragraph writing skills through project-based learning model. The Project-

Based Learning model is a way that allows students to design, plan, and implement projects that can increase student learning creativity. "One of the methods included in the process approach is Project-Based Learning" (Argawati & Suryani, 2020). By using the Project-Based Learning model, students can approach learning with lecturers. The use of project-based learning in the teaching and learning process can facilitate students in working on projects given by lecturers. Lecturers as writing instructors be able to monitor every student activity during the learning process. The use of project-based learning in paragraph writing courses can improve students' writing skills (Saputra, 2019).

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research approach with an experimental design to investigate the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in enhancing, selected through purposive sampling. The students were randomly assigned to either the experimental group (n=31) or the control group (n=31). The primary instrument used in this study was a writing test consisting of paragraph writing tasks. The test was administered as both a pre-test and a post-test to measure students' writing skills before and after the intervention. A rubric adapted from [relevant source] was used to evaluate the quality of the students' paragraphs, focusing on content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics.

Pre-test: Both groups took a pre-test to assess their initial paragraph writing skills.
Treatment: The experimental group participated in a series of instructional sessions based on the Project-Based Learning model, where they worked on writing projects collaboratively under the guidance of the instructor. The control group received conventional paragraph writing instruction without the PBL components.

The data collected from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed using statistical methods. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores between the experimental and control groups. A paired samples t-test was also used to determine the significance of the improvement within each group. This design is described as follows:

where

O₁ = Pretest (before treatment).

X = The Implementation of PJBL (treatment).

O₂ = Posttest (After Treatment).

The are 42 students for every class from the experimental and control class; therefore researcher choose 31 students of this study. They were second-semester students in the English Education Study Program at one of the universities in North Maluku. The subjects of this study were chosen based on several considerations; first, the suitability of the purpose of this study and the characteristics of the students and lecturers; Second, the students were learning English as a foreign language; Third, the students were learning to write in English, which is related to this study.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Result

These are descriptive statistical results of the two samples studied, namely the pre-test and post-test scores.

Table 1. Paired Samples Statistics

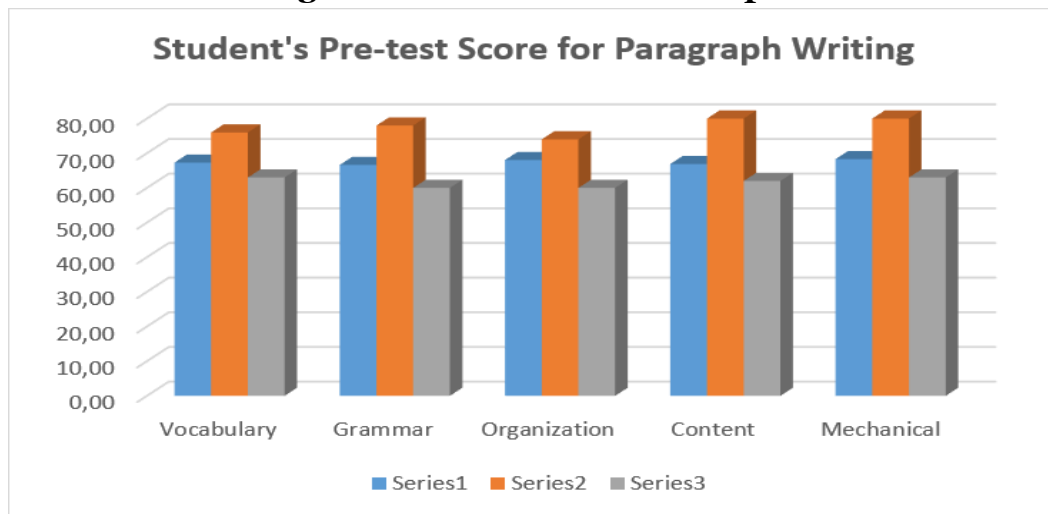
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest	67.4839	31	2.29014	.41132
	Posttest	75.6387	31	1.98287	.35613

The results of table 1. above show a summary of the descriptive statistical results of the two samples studied, namely the pre-test and post-test scores. For the pre-test value, the average learning outcome or mean is 67.4839. While for the post-test value, the average value of learning outcomes was 75.6387. the number of samples or students who participated in this study was 31 students. For the value of Std. Deviation in the pre-test was 2.29014 and the post-test was 1.98287. Furthermore, the value of Std. Error Mean for Pre-Test is 0.41132 and post-test is 0.35613.

Table 1 shows the summary statistics for the scores obtained by 31 participants on both a pretest and a posttest. The mean score on the pretest was 67.48 with a standard deviation of 2.29, indicating that the participants' scores were fairly close to the average. The standard error of the mean for the pretest was 0.41, reflecting the precision of the sample mean estimate. After the intervention or over time, the mean score on the posttest increased to 75.64, with a slightly lower standard deviation of 1.98, suggesting that the scores became a bit more consistent around the mean. The standard error of the mean for the posttest was 0.36, indicating a similarly precise estimate of the mean. Overall, the table suggests that there was an increase in scores from pretest to posttest, and the group's performance became slightly more consistent after the intervention.

Because the average value of student learning outcomes in the pre-test 67.4839 < post-test 75.6387, it shows that descriptively there is a difference in the average learning outcomes between the pre-test and post-test results. Furthermore, to prove whether the difference is really real (significant) or not, then we need to interpret the results of the paired sample t-test in the output table "paired sample test" output table.

Diagram 1. Students' scores in pre-test

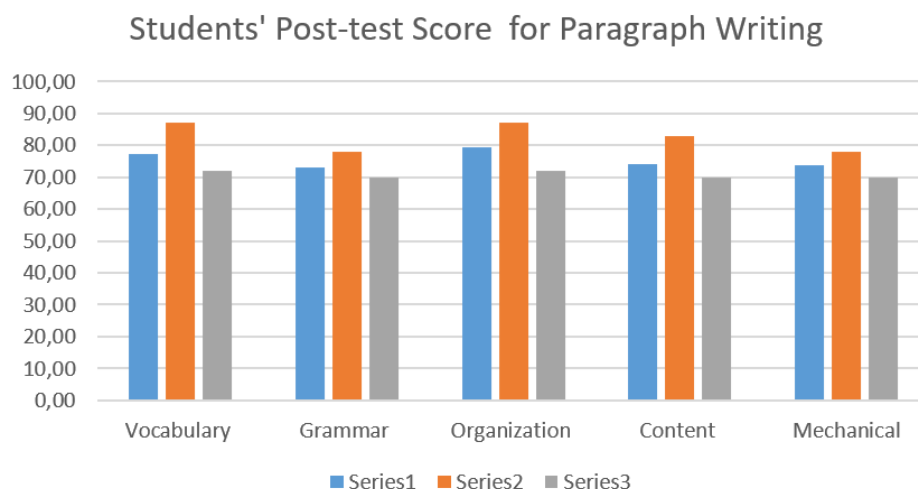


The pre-test results illustrate the students' initial abilities across five key components of writing: vocabulary, grammar, organization, content, and mechanical skills. The average scores show that students began with moderate proficiency, with vocabulary at 67.29, grammar at 66.62, organization at 68.04, content at 66.89, and mechanical skills at 68.31. These averages suggest that while students had a basic command of writing, they still needed significant improvement to achieve a higher level of academic writing performance. The relatively close range among the scores also indicates a fairly consistent writing ability across the measured components.

When looking at the higher individual scores 76 in vocabulary, 78 in grammar, 74 in organization, 80 in content, and 80 in mechanical skills it becomes evident that some students already possessed strong foundational writing abilities. These higher values reflect the presence of students who demonstrated good control of sentence structure, logical flow, and content development even before instructional intervention. Their strong performance, especially in content and mechanical accuracy, shows that a portion of the class had the potential to excel early on.

In contrast, the lower individual scores 63 in vocabulary, 60 in grammar, 60 in organization, 62 in content, and 63 in mechanical skills highlight the challenges faced by other students. These scores suggest difficulty in selecting appropriate vocabulary, applying correct grammatical rules, structuring paragraphs coherently, developing ideas thoroughly, and maintaining consistency in punctuation and spelling. Such weaknesses point to the need for instructional support that targets both language accuracy and writing fluency. The pre-test results reveal a diverse group of learners whose writing skills ranged from moderately proficient to struggling. The variation between the highest and lowest scores indicates that students entered the course at different readiness levels, making differentiated instruction essential. These initial findings also provide a valuable baseline for measuring progress, allowing researchers and instructors to clearly observe how students' writing skills improve after instructional interventions such as project-based learning or guided writing tasks.

Diagram 2. Students' score of post-tests



The post-test results show clear improvements in all five assessed components of writing vocabulary, grammar, organization, content, and mechanical skills. The mean scores indicate strong overall performance, with vocabulary reaching an average of 77.13, grammar 73.13, organization 79.52, content 74.00, and mechanical skills 73.72. These averages suggest that students demonstrated strengthened writing abilities after participating in the implemented learning activities, particularly in the area of organization, which shows the highest mean score among all components.

When observing individual scores within the post-test set, the higher-performing student achieved notable results across categories: 87 in vocabulary, 78 in grammar, 87 in organization, 83 in content, and 78 in mechanical skills. This profile shows balanced strengths, especially in vocabulary and organization, indicating the student's ability to structure ideas clearly while using appropriate word choices. The consistency across the components also highlights a solid mastery of both the creative and technical aspects of writing.

In contrast, the lower-performing student obtained scores of 72 in vocabulary, 70 in grammar, 72 in organization, 70 in content, and 70 in mechanical skills. While these scores are lower than those of the higher-performing student, they still reflect satisfactory performance and an improvement compared to typical pre-test values. The relatively uniform distribution of the scores suggests that this student shows stable development across all writing components, though more targeted support may be needed in grammar and content development. The post-test results reflect meaningful progress among the students in mastering the fundamental elements of academic writing. The notable rise in organization and vocabulary indicates that students became more capable of structuring their ideas coherently and selecting appropriate language to express their thoughts. Furthermore, the gains in content and mechanical skills demonstrate improved ability to present relevant ideas with fewer technical errors. These outcomes reinforce the effectiveness of the instructional approach used in the course, suggesting that the

learning activities successfully enhanced students' writing competence.

Table 2. Paired Samples Test

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pretest - Posttest	-8.15484	2.68165	.48164	-9.13847	-7.17120	-16.931	30	.000

The table presents the results of a paired samples test comparing pretest and posttest scores for the same group of participants. The analysis focuses on the mean difference between the two measurements and evaluates whether the change is statistically significant. Because the scores come from the same individuals measured at two different times, a paired t-test is an appropriate method to detect improvement or decline. The mean difference shown in the table is -8.15484 , indicating that posttest scores were higher than pretest scores (the negative value reflects subtraction: pretest minus posttest). The standard deviation of the paired differences is 2.68165 , showing some variability in the amount of score improvement among the participants. Meanwhile, the standard error of the mean is 0.48164 , which suggests a fairly precise estimate of the average improvement. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference ranges from -9.13847 to -7.17120 . Because the entire interval is below zero, the result supports the conclusion that the posttest scores are consistently higher than the pretest scores. The absence of zero within the confidence interval indicates a statistically reliable improvement across the group.

The t-value obtained is -16.931 with 30 degrees of freedom, and the associated significance value (Sig. 2-tailed) is $.000$, meaning the result is statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. This provides strong evidence that the intervention or treatment applied between the pretest and posttest had a meaningful effect on participants' performance. The research's hypothesis formulation

H_0 = There is no effect of ICT-assisted project model on students' ability to write paragraphs.

H_a = There is an effect of Implementation of ICT-assisted project based learning on the ability to write paragraphs

According to Singgih Santoso (2014: 265) the guidelines for making decisions and the paired sample t-test based on the significance value (Sig.) of the SPSS output results are as follows:

1. If the sig value. (2 tailed) < 0.05 then H_0 is rejected and H_a is accepted
2. If the Sig value. (2-Tailed) > 0.05 then H_0 is accepted and H_a is rejected

Based on the results of the “paired sample test”. It is known that the Sig value, (2-Tailed) is $0.001 < 0.05$, so H_0 is rejected and H_a is accepted. It can be concluded that there is a difference between the Pre-test and Post-test in the learning outcomes. These results show that the use of ICT-assisted project based learning in learning to write can improve students' paragraph writing skills. The “paired sample test” output table above also contains information about the value of “mean paired differences” which is -8.15484. This value shows the value of the difference between the average pre-test and post-test learning outcomes.

The findings from the analysis revealed a clear and significant improvement in students' writing skills after participating in the learning activities. The statistical results indicated that the post-test scores were substantially higher than the pre-test scores, suggesting that the instructional strategy had a meaningful effect on their writing performance. This improvement was not only statistically significant but also practically observable in the structure, coherence, and clarity of the students' written work. These results highlight the effectiveness of the learning intervention in enhancing academic writing competencies.

A key contributing factor to this improvement was the use of project-based learning (PBL). Through PBL, students were encouraged to engage in authentic writing tasks that required them to plan, draft, revise, and refine their work collaboratively. This method allowed students to explore real-world issues, conduct research, and learn how to construct arguments supported by evidence. The interactive nature of PBL motivated students to be more responsible for their own learning and helped them develop essential academic skills such as critical thinking, organization, and creativity. Moreover, throughout the project work, students demonstrated strong collaboration and active participation. They made effective use of the Project-based Learning assistant to guide them in producing well-developed paragraphs that contained clear arguments and factual support taken from credible references. Working in groups, students selected relevant information, evaluated sources, and formulated arguments that strengthened their thesis statements. This collaborative process not only improved the quality of their writing but also fostered teamwork, communication skills, and shared responsibility for learning outcomes.

3.2. Discussion

The results of this study show that the use of project-based learning assisted by Information Communication Technology (ICT) in teaching writing can improve students' ability to write paragraphs. The improvement can be seen in the mean difference between the pre-test and post-test results. The analysis results show that the mean value of students' post-test results is greater than the mean value of students' pre-test. Furthermore, the paired sample t-test results showed an increase in students' ability to write paragraphs. The results of this study are in line with some previous research results showing that the use of Project-based learning can improve students' writing skills

(Martini et al., 2024). The research shows that the use of Project-Based Learning can improve students' abilities not only in linguistics and cognition when writing a paragraph but also the ability to collaborate and independence.

Furthermore, (Nhan, 2025) using project-based learning also gives students the opportunity to express their feelings and ideas. In this study, students were also allowed to use the internet to find the information needed. This situation shows that the use of assisted project-based learning also plays an important role in facilitating communication between students to work on their projects. The use of project-based learning can improve students' ability to write paragraphs. There are several important activities in the application of PBL in class, namely, the Instructor provides stimulus questions to students regarding the criteria for a good paragraph, and students are given the freedom to use the internet to find information related to good paragraph criteria (Badaruddin et al., 2022). The information is discussed in class to add insight into good paragraphs.

The next thing to do is to work together with the instructor and students to determine the topic of the project to be written. Next, students in groups create an outline of the topic to be written. Students are divided into groups and being collaborate to find information about the topic. In addition, the agreement on the target for completing the project assignment is a concern for each group that can be monitored by the instructor (Rasmi, 2023). On the other hand, an instructor can monitor students' projects by giving assessments and evaluations. This can give students an idea of the quality of their writing. The descriptive statistical results provide an overview of the students' performance before and after the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL). The pre-test mean score of 67.4839 indicates that students' initial writing ability was still in the moderate range, showing several areas that needed improvement, such as vocabulary use, grammar accuracy, organization of ideas, content development, and mechanics. This baseline data is essential because it serves as a comparison point to measure the effectiveness of the learning treatment.

In contrast, the post-test mean score increased to 75.6387, demonstrating a noticeable improvement in students' writing performance after experiencing the PBL-assisted learning process. This increase suggests that students became better at constructing paragraphs with clearer ideas, richer vocabulary, and more accurate grammar. The rise in the mean score also indicates that students were more capable of applying writing strategies and producing paragraphs that met academic writing standards. The results of the paired samples test further strengthen this conclusion. The significance value (Sig. 2-tailed) obtained is 0.001, which is lower than the standard significance threshold of 0.05. Because the value is below 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0), which states that there is no difference between pre-test and post-test scores, must be rejected. Conversely, the alternative hypothesis (H_a), which states that there is a significant difference between the two tests, is accepted. This confirms that the improvement in writing performance did not occur by chance, but rather due to the instructional treatment.

These statistical findings imply that the use of Project-Based Learning assisted activities has a significant positive effect on students' paragraph writing skills. Through

PBL, students likely engaged in more meaningful writing tasks, collaborative discussions, and hands-on activities that required them to analyze information, construct arguments, and revise their writing. Such learning conditions foster deeper understanding and help students become more independent and confident writers.

In addition, the “mean paired difference” value of -8.15484 shows the numerical difference between the average pre-test and post-test scores. The negative sign indicates that the post-test scores were higher than the pre-test scores, thus confirming the direction of improvement. This difference of more than eight points is substantial and illustrates that the treatment produced a real and measurable impact on students' writing abilities (Rasmi, 2023). The statistical analysis demonstrates that implementing PBL-assisted writing activities significantly enhances students' competency in paragraph writing. The improvement shown across the scores reflects better mastery of writing components, including content, structure, and language features. These findings reinforce the idea that PBL is an effective teaching approach for EFL learners, as it promotes active learning, critical thinking, creativity, teamwork, and improved writing performance.

4. Conclusion

In summary, learning to write paragraphs using project-based learning models assisted by ICT can improve students' ability to write. In addition, students can utilize the internet guided by lecturers to gather information about the issues written. This can lead the content of the paragraph also has a strong argument. Project-based learning also encourages students to collaborate and participate to produce a well-written paragraph. The statistical results clearly indicate that project-based learning had a significant positive impact on students' paragraph writing skills. The comparison between the pre-test mean score of 67.48 and the post-test mean score of 75.63 demonstrates a notable improvement in students' performance after the implementation of the learning intervention. This finding is reinforced by the paired sample test, where the Sig. (2-tailed). The value of 0.001 is lower than the 0.05 significance level, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis. Thus, there is strong evidence that the difference between pre-test and post-test scores is not due to chance. Overall, these results confirm that project-based learning effectively enhances students' writing competence, particularly in constructing well-developed paragraphs.

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