

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Teachers' professionalism is the main foundation in attaining a quality education system that is responsive to the needs of the era. Professional teachers must not only know a lot about their subject, but they also need to have a number of basic skills (Biletska, I. O et al., 2021), such as pedagogical competence, which means they know how to plan and carry out effective lessons, social competence, which means they know how to communicate effectively with students and the rest of the school community, and personality competence, which means they show honesty and good behavior. Aside from information impartation, teacher professionalism entails a strong dedication to learner development (Amerstorfer & Freiin von Münster-Kistner, 2021), the ability to reflect on and improve teaching practice on an ongoing basis, and active participation in self and professional development activities. As such, the quality of the teacher has a direct effect on how well students learn and their general educational growth (Mulang, 2021).

Within the field of prospective teacher education, universities play a significant role in establishing the groundwork for professionalism from the outset. A complete teacher education program should not only cover academic topics through on-campus lectures, but should also give students the chance to learn useful skills and understand how education works in general (Rivera-Vargas et al., 2021). Effective teacher education programs strive to integrate subject matter knowledge

(Kim, 2024) and new pedagogy, and leave space for prospective teachers to experiment with and reflect on what they learned (Behera, 2024). Direct involvement of students in the learning process has been reported to increase intrinsic motivation, increase understanding of subject matter, and raise awareness of the need for professionalism in task completion as aspiring teachers (Aslan, 2024).

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is increasingly recognized as one of several pedagogical approaches capable of preparing effective and professional teacher candidates (Bhardwaj et al., 2025). However, PjBL is deliberately selected in this study due to its strong empirical support in fostering key dimensions of teacher professionalism. Recent studies report that PjBL significantly enhances pre-service teachers' pedagogical competence, reflective practice, and professional responsibility through sustained engagement in authentic, practice-oriented tasks (Aslan, 2024). PjBL is a learner-centered education approach that engages students in a sustained investigation of a problem or theme, which concludes with the creation of an innovative product or presentation (Sukacké et al., 2022). Through PjBL, future teachers not only acquire theoretical knowledge (Demchenko et al., 2021), but also develop competencies required to meet the demands of contemporary education. These competencies align with internationally recognized 21st-century skills frameworks, which emphasize critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, communication, and creativity.

The advantage of Project-Based Learning in the context of future teacher education lies in its ability to integrate multiple dimensions of required

competencies (Martinez, 2022). Pre-service teachers are expected to acquire subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and technological knowledge to support the design and implementation of project-based instruction (Taskiran, 2021). The integration of content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and technological knowledge is conceptualized in the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) model (Santos & Castro, 2021). The application of the TPACK framework within Project-Based Learning activities enable prospective teachers to visualize the relationship between theory and practice and to develop the ability to design learning experiences that are effective, meaningful, and engaging for their future students.

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) has been demonstrated to enhance conceptual understanding, learning motivation, student engagement, and the development of 21st-century skills in higher education, as evidenced by multiple empirical studies (Kareem et al., 2022). PjBL provides practical chances to apply theoretical knowledge in the unique context of pre-service teacher education. For example, pedagogical competency and overall teaching effectiveness are developed by microteaching, also known as project-integrated simulated teaching (Obae, 2024). However, despite these documented benefits, further examination is needed to understand how such project-based course experiences contribute to the professional development of pre-service teachers.

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) holds significant potential for fostering holistic and contextualized professionalism in pre-service teachers by bridging theory and practice. Recent empirical evidence indicates that Project-

Based Learning cultivates essential professional competencies, including collaboration, problem-solving, and reflective practice, through authentic and student-driven projects de Jong et al. (2023). For example, when pre-service teachers design and implement interdisciplinary projects (e.g., community-based learning initiatives), they engage in real-world problem-solving that mirrors the complexities of modern classrooms (Azzahra & Nurkamto, 2024). This finding aligns with Darling-Hammond's assertion that teacher education should emphasize active, practice-based learning experiences to equip future teachers for complex and dynamic classroom contexts, as reiterated by Dumbuya (2025)

Moreover, PjBL's emphasis on reflection and iteration supports the development of adaptive expertise, a hallmark of teacher professionalism (Noor & Nurhayati, 2024). Studies show that pre-service teachers in PjBL programs demonstrate deeper pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) as they contextualize academic theories within their projects (Erviana et al., 2022). For instance, Capraro et al. (2013) found that PjBL-trained teachers were 40% more likely to employ student-centered strategies during practicums compared to peers in traditional programs.

Despite a growing body of research examining teacher professionalism from various perspectives such as Teacher Professionalism in Facilitating Students to Have 21st Century Skills, Developing Pre-Service Teachers' Professionalism by Sharing and Receiving Experiences in the Kampus Mengajar Program, Project-based online learning experiences of pre-service teachers, The author identifies a significant research gap. Specifically, there appears to be a lack of research

explicitly investigating how the experience within a methodically designed and structured PjBL course, delivered in face-to-face or blended learning contexts, enhances various dimensions of pre-service teacher professionalism.

While previous studies have explored the role of professionalism in 21st-century skill development, professional growth via field experience, and online PjBL, less attention has been focused on how the specific design of in-class (face-to-face or blended) PjBL courses can deliberately equip pre-service teachers with the crucial professional competencies needed before entering the field. This thesis can close that gap since it thoroughly investigates how PjBL experiences in a classroom setting can enhance pre-service teachers' professionalism.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on the research background above, the problem statements are :

1. What are learning experience through project based learning to strengthen the professionalism of pre-service teachers?
2. Which steps of implementation of PjBL-based courses are most significantly contribute to improving pre-service teachers' professionalism?
3. How is the rule learning experiences in to strengthen the professionalism of pre-service teachers?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

Based on the statement of the problem above, the purposes of study are:

1. To find out learning experience through project based learning to strengthen the professionalism of pre-service teachers
2. To describe of specific aspects learning experience through project based learning to strengthen the professionalism of pre-service teachers
3. To explain the rule of learning experience through project based learning to strengthen the professionalism of pre-service teachers

1.4 Benefit of the Study

1. Pre-service Teachers

This research offers reflective insights into how engagement in a structured Project-Based Learning (PjBL) course can shape their professional competencies, particularly in pedagogical decision-making, collaboration, and reflective practice. Through peer discussions with fellow pre-service teachers (Erlina, Adinda, and Septi), participants are encouraged to critically examine their learning experiences, recognize professional growth emerging from project work, and develop greater awareness of how PjBL can prepare them for the complexities of real classroom contexts.

2. Learning Design

This research can provide empirically grounded insights for lecturers and course designers into how specific stages of PjBL implementation such as project planning, collaborative inquiry, and reflection can be intentionally

structured to foster pre-service teacher professionalism. Insights generated through collaborative reflections and peer discussions among participants (Erlina, Adinda, and Septi) further illuminate how instructional design decisions influence the quality of learning experiences and professional engagement in teacher education courses.

3. Teacher Professional Development

The findings of this research may inform teacher professional development initiatives by offering contextualized evidence on how Project-Based Learning can be utilized as a professional learning model rather than merely an instructional strategy. Reflections emerging from peer discussions among pre-service teachers highlight the potential of PjBL to support sustained professional growth through collaboration, inquiry, and reflective practice elements that are essential in both pre-service and in-service teacher development programs.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

The scope of this study focuses on learning experiences that adopt a Project-Based Learning (PjBL) approach within English Education programs. The primary objective is to provide a comprehensive description of how PjBL is integrated into course design and classroom implementation. This includes examining the types of projects assigned, the role of lecturers as facilitators, and the level of student engagement and collaboration throughout the learning process.

Furthermore, this study investigates how PjBL-based learning experiences contribute to the professional development of pre-service teachers. The dimensions of professionalism explored in this research include the enhancement of pedagogical knowledge and instructional awareness, the development of practical teaching skills such as lesson planning and classroom implementation, the cultivation of collaboration and communication skills, the strengthening of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities in educational contexts, and the promotion of reflective practices and commitment to continuous professional growth.

The study is primarily conducted from the perspective of pre-service teachers enrolled in the English Education Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo (UMPO), which serves as the main case site. To enrich the analysis and provide comparative insights, supplementary data are also collected from pre-service teachers at UIN Kiai Ageng Muhammad Besari Ponorogo who have experienced PjBL-based courses. However, the in-depth qualitative interpretation remains centered on UMPO as the primary institutional context.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, although participants were drawn from two higher education institutions, the study primarily focuses on PjBL implementation within selected English Education courses. Consequently, the findings may not be fully generalizable to other courses, study programs, or teacher education institutions that apply PjBL in different ways or operate under different institutional conditions.

Second, the investigation of pre-service teachers' professionalism relies mainly on self-reported data collected through questionnaires and reflective responses, which may not fully capture the multidimensional and dynamic nature of professionalism. As a result, aspects of professional development that are not explicitly addressed through the research instruments are beyond the scope of this study.

Third, this research does not control for or isolate other factors that may influence the development of pre-service teachers' professionalism beyond the PjBL experience. Factors such as teaching practicum experiences, extracurricular involvement, institutional culture, and individual academic or personal backgrounds may also contribute to professional growth. Therefore, the outcomes of this study should be interpreted with caution, acknowledging that the observed professional development cannot be attributed solely to the PjBL approach.

1.6 Definition of Key Term

To avoid misunderstanding of this research, the researcher will give definition of key term as follow as:

Learning Experience: Learning experience is the process through which individuals gain knowledge, skills, attitudes, or values from their active participation in educational activities. In this study, it refers to how pre-service teachers engage in and reflect on Project-Based

Learning (PjBL) activities such as collaboration, problem-solving, and classroom practice that contribute to their professional development. This concept aligns with Kolb's (1984) idea that learning happens through direct experience and reflection.

Project-Based Learning: Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is a student-centered approach where learners engage in an in-

depth exploration of real world problems or questions, resulting in a final product or presentation. In this study, PjBL refers to the application of this model within teacher education courses. As defined by Thomas (2000), PjBL involves students working over an extended period to investigate complex, authentic issues and produce meaningful outcomes or artifacts.

Pre-service Teacher: This term refers to students who are currently studying at the Educational Personnel Education Institution (LPTK) and are prepared to become teachers at various levels of formal education. Pre-service teachers are participants in courses that apply the PjBL approach.