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A Project-Based Learning (PjBL) Model Rooted in Local History to Enhance Students' Critical Thinking Skills and Creativity in High School: A Literature Review

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Abstract: History learning in high school requires learning experiences that do not merely emphasize memorization but also develop students' critical thinking and creativity. Project-Based Learning (PjBL) provides opportunities for students to investigate authentic problems, collaborate, produce products, and reflect on their learning. However, the integration of local history into PjBL to simultaneously support critical thinking and creativity has not been sufficiently synthesized in history education. This literature review aims to synthesize previous studies concerning the potential of local-history-based PjBL for developing high school students' critical thinking and creativity. The study employed a literature review method by analyzing relevant national and international scholarly publications concerning PjBL, local history learning, critical thinking, and creativity. The literature was analyzed descriptively and thematically by identifying recurring findings, learning characteristics, implementation strategies, and educational implications. The synthesis of the reviewed literature indicates that local-history-based PjBL can connect historical content with students' surrounding environment while encouraging investigation, source analysis, problem solving, product creation, presentation, and reflection. These activities provide complementary opportunities for developing critical thinking and creativity. The novelty of this review lies in synthesizing local history as contextual content and PjBL as an instructional framework into an integrated learning approach for history education.

Keywords: Project-Based Learning, Local History, Critical Thinking, Creativity, History Learning, Literature Review.

INTRODUCTION

History education plays a vital role in helping students understand the connections between past events, societal conditions, and life today. However, history education in schools still faces challenges because the learning process is often focused more on mastering facts and memorization than on analysis and interpretation. This situation can limit students' opportunities to develop higher-order thinking skills. Mahmud (2020) explains that history education should not stop at mastering facts but must provide space for students to critically analyze and understand historical events. Therefore, a teaching model is needed that can transform the experience of learning history into a more active, contextual, and meaningful activity.

One model relevant to these needs is Project-Based Learning (PjBL). PjBL positions students as active participants involved in the processes of inquiry, planning, product creation, presentation, and reflection. In practice, students do not merely receive information from teachers but develop knowledge through the process of completing projects. Markula and Aksela (2022) note that PjBL is characterized by problem-solving, collaboration, the use of artifacts, the use of technology, conducting investigations, presenting results, and reflection. With these characteristics, PjBL can serve as a suitable approach for learning that requires active student engagement.

Based on the previous studies reviewed, there is a relationship between PjBL and the development of students' thinking skills. Riyadi et al. (2020) found that PjBL can be used to develop collaborative and critical thinking skills among high school students. The results of the meta-analysis by Seftiani et al. (2021) also indicate that PjBL has a positive effect on the critical thinking skills of students in senior high schools and vocational high schools. These findings are supported by Tafakur et al. (2023), whose meta-analysis demonstrated that PjBL has a positive relationship with the development of students' critical thinking skills. Thus, a synthesis of previous research indicates that PjBL has an empirical basis as an alternative teaching method for developing critical thinking skills.

In addition to critical thinking, creativity is an important skill that can be developed through project-based learning. PjBL provides students with the opportunity to generate ideas, choose problem-solving strategies, develop products, and present their results in various forms. Rafik et al. (2022), through a literature review, found that PjBL can support student creativity, including the ability to think fluently, flexibly, originally, and elaboratively. Fitri et al. (2024) also explain that PjBL is oriented toward contextual problem-solving and can provide space for students to generate more creative ideas and works. Meanwhile, Purba et al. (2022) show that creativity in PjBL can be examined through the dimensions of person, process, press, and product.

The question that then arises is how project-based learning can be made more relevant to students' lives and experiences. One alternative is to use local history as a source and context for learning. Local history has geographical, social, and cultural ties to students' lives, which can help connect historical material to their environment. Abidin (2020) explains that local history instruction can be directed toward exploring local potential and can be implemented through project-based learning. Rahayu et al. (2023) also demonstrate that local history can be utilized as history instructional material in secondary schools and can be integrated with PjBL as well as problem-based learning.

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history instruction combined with a contextual approach can enhance students' critical thinking skills.

The use of projects rooted in local history has also been discussed in previous research. Bashori et al. (2023), for example, developed a digital comic project highlighting Indonesia's local history and demonstrated that such projects can serve as a medium for introducing and preserving local history. The study by Rahmawati et al. (2025) more directly examined Project-Based Learning (PjBL) rooted in local history to enhance students' critical and creative thinking skills in history education. Based on a synthesis of these studies, the integration of PjBL and local history is relevant to history education focused on 21st-century skills.

Although various studies have addressed PjBL, local history, critical thinking, and creativity, research that integrates these four aspects into a single framework for history learning still needs to be clarified. Some studies examine the impact of PjBL on critical thinking, while others focus on creativity or the use of local history. Therefore, a synthesis is needed to explain how the characteristics of local history can be used as a project context to foster both critical thinking and student creativity.

Based on these issues, this study aims to analyze and synthesize the potential of a local history-based PjBL model in developing high school students' critical thinking skills and creativity. Specifically, this study examines the characteristics of local history-based PjBL, its relationship to critical thinking, its contribution to creativity, and the forms of project implementation that can be applied in history instruction at School X.

METHODS

This study employs a literature review method with a descriptive-qualitative approach. A literature review was chosen because the purpose of the study is to identify, compare, and synthesize the findings of previous research on PjBL, local history learning, critical thinking skills, and creativity. This approach is also consistent with previous studies that used literature reviews to examine the relationship between PjBL and creativity (Rafik et al., 2022) as well as the relationship between local history education and critical thinking (Mahmud, 2020).

The objects of study consist of national and international scientific articles discussing PjBL, critical thinking, creativity, local history, and the application of PjBL in history education. The literature was selected based on its relevance to the research focus, the traceability of sources, and its connection to the study's objectives. The sources used include journal articles, conference proceedings, and review studies that can be used to strengthen the conceptual synthesis. The literature search focused on publications discussing the secondary school level, history education, 21st-century skills, and the implementation of PjBL.

Data collection was conducted by identifying the titles, abstracts, methods, research findings, and conclusions from relevant sources. Each source was then grouped based on the focus of the study, namely the characteristics of PjBL, critical thinking, creativity, local history, and the integration of PjBL with local history. This process was used to identify similarities, differences, trends in research findings, and opportunities for integration between PjBL and local history.

Data analysis was conducted descriptively and thematically. The analysis phase involved grouping information by theme, comparing findings across studies, interpreting relationships between the variables under study, and compiling a synthesis. The results of the analysis were then used to formulate the characteristics of local history-based PjBL that are relevant for developing students' critical thinking and creativity skills. Since this study is a literature review, all findings presented are the result of a synthesis of previous research and are not the result of direct testing or experiments on students at School X.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Project-Based Learning in History Education

Based on a literature review, PjBL has characteristics that align with the needs of student-centered history education. Project-based learning does not merely treat the project as a final assignment but makes the process of inquiry and problem-solving the central focus of learning. Markula and Aksela (2022) identify several key characteristics of PjBL, such as problem-centered activities, collaboration, artifact creation, technology use, inquiry, presentation, and reflection.

In history education, these characteristics can be applied through projects that require students to examine a historical event based on available sources. For example, students at School X could be assigned a project to examine the development of a local historical site. Students can begin the activity by identifying a problem, formulating historical questions, gathering sources, conducting interviews, documenting the location, analyzing information, and producing a historical artifact.

The use of projects in history education can also transform students' roles in the learning process. Students are no longer merely recipients of information but act as novice researchers who must discover and process information. Research on the implementation of PjBL in history education shows that projects can be used to produce outputs such as historical videos and other forms of work (Julianto et al., 2026). These findings, in the context of this literature review, indicate that PjBL can serve as an approach to steer history learning toward more investigative and productive activities.

These findings align with the meta-analysis by Chen and Yang (2019), which demonstrated a positive impact of PjBL on overall academic achievement. However, the effectiveness of PjBL does not depend solely on the presence of projects. The quality of project planning, the appropriateness of tasks, the timing of implementation, teacher support, and student engagement are also crucial factors. Ferrero et al. (2021), for example, show that PjBL outcomes can vary and that the quality of implementation requires careful attention. Therefore, projects in history education must be systematically designed and should not merely consist of assigning tasks to create a final product.

Local History as a Context for Learning

Local history plays an important role because it provides learning resources that are closely tied to students' communities. Learning local history helps students understand that history is not only about national events and prominent figures, but also about the experiences of the communities where they live. Abidin (2020) explains that local history education can be used to explore a region's potential and meet students' learning needs within the context of their local environment.

This proximity can make history learning more contextual. Students at School X can study history through historical sites, buildings, traditions, archives, artifacts, community figures, and historical stories that have developed in their communities. Rahayu et al. (2023) demonstrate that local history-based learning at the secondary school level can employ strategies that actively engage students and can be combined with Project-Based Learning (PjBL) and problem-based learning.

The use of local history can also help students connect historical facts to social life. When students examine a local site or event, they not only learn when and where the event occurred but can also question its causes, changes, impacts, and significance for the community. This process provides an opportunity to develop analytical skills.

Mahmud (2020) asserts that local history education can be used to enhance students' analytical and critical thinking skills in identifying events occurring in their immediate surroundings. In this literature review, the findings indicate that local history serves not merely

as supplementary material but can also provide a context that supports the thinking process in history education.

PjBL Based on Local History and Critical Thinking Skills

Critical thinking in history learning relates to students' ability to understand information, evaluate evidence, analyze cause-and-effect relationships, compare various sources, provide reasoning, and draw conclusions based on evidence. These activities are highly relevant to the characteristics of local history learning, which requires the process of searching for and interpreting sources.

PjBL provides space for these thinking processes because students must solve a problem or answer a question through a series of activities. Seftiani et al. (2021), through a meta-analysis, demonstrated that PjBL has a positive impact on the critical thinking skills of high school and vocational high school students. Tafakur et al. (2023) also found, based on a synthesis of various studies, that PjBL is effective in enhancing critical thinking skills.

When PjBL is integrated with local history, the critical thinking process can be strengthened through the use of authentic historical sources. For example, students at School X can examine changes in the function of a historic building. It is not enough for students to simply describe the building; they must also seek information regarding its history of construction, original function, changes in function, factors contributing to these changes, and the building's current condition. Students can then compare information from archives, books, interviews, and field observations.

Such activities can generate analytical questions such as: why was the building constructed, what factors led to a change in its function, which sources provide the most reliable information, and how does the community interpret the building's existence. The process of answering these questions requires analytical and evaluative skills, allowing local history to serve as a context for developing critical thinking.

Mahmud and Wardo (2021) found that learning local history through a contextual approach can enhance students' critical thinking skills. This finding reinforces the synthesis that the relevance of historical material to students' environments can be leveraged to create a more meaningful learning process. Thus, PjBL based on local history has the potential to combine project-based inquiry with historical analysis.

PjBL Based on Local History and Student Creativity

In addition to critical thinking, creativity is a skill that can be developed through the project-based learning process. Creativity in learning does not only mean producing visually appealing work, but is also related to the ability to generate ideas, view problems from various perspectives, find alternative solutions, and develop products of value.

Rafik et al. (2022) demonstrate through a literature review that PjBL can support student creativity through the abilities to think fluently, flexibly, originally, and elaboratively. Fitri et al. (2024) also explain that PjBL is oriented toward contextual problem-solving, thereby providing space for students to develop creativity and innovation.

Local history offers a wide range of possibilities for creative products. Students at School X can produce historical documentary videos, history podcasts, digital maps, infographics, historical comics, interactive timelines, mini-museums, interview documentation, or digital exhibitions. These products allow students to choose the form of presentation based on the information they have gathered and the characteristics of the project they are working on.

Purba et al. (2022) show that creativity in PjBL can be linked to the person, process, press, and product aspects. This means that the assessment of creativity should not focus solely on the final outcome of the project. Teachers also need to pay attention to how students generate ideas, develop alternatives, tackle problems, refine their designs, and complete their products.

The development of products based on local history has also been implemented through digital comic projects. Bashori et al. (2023) show that projects highlighting local history can produce digital works while simultaneously helping students recognize and promote local history. These findings indicate a connection between project activities, the development of creativity, and efforts to preserve local history.

Integrating Critical Thinking and Creativity in Local History-Based Project-Based Learning (PjBL)

Based on a literature review, critical thinking and creativity do not have to be developed through separate activities. Both can emerge within a single project sequence. Critical thinking is required when students identify problems, search for sources, evaluate information, compare evidence, and draw conclusions. Meanwhile, creativity emerges when students generate ideas, determine the form of the final product, choose problem-solving strategies, and develop the project's outcomes.

During the problem-identification and question-formulation stages, students begin to develop analytical thinking skills. During the investigation stage, students gather information from various sources. Subsequently, the process of comparing and evaluating sources supports critical thinking skills. After obtaining sufficient information, students need to determine the form of the final product and the method of presentation. This stage provides room for creativity.

Based on a synthesis of previous research, the integration of local history and PjBL can link thinking activities with the creation of works. This is in line with the research by Vinco et al. (2025), which shows that PjBL in history learning can be directed toward the development of the 6C skills, including critical thinking and creativity.

Implementation of Local History-Based PjBL at School X

Based on a synthesis of the literature, local history-based PjBL can be implemented through several stages. The first stage is to identify a local history issue or topic that is relevant to the students' community. Teachers can provide several topic options, and students choose the topic they find interesting and feasible to research.

The second stage is to formulate the project question. The question should encourage students to conduct an investigation, rather than simply look up a definition. For example, instead of asking, "What is the history of Building X?", the teacher might pose the question, "How do changes in the function of Building X reflect changes in the lives of the surrounding community?"

The third stage is the investigation. Students gather information from books, scholarly articles, archives, documentation, interviews, observations, and reliable digital sources. Teachers act as facilitators who help students identify relevant sources and distinguish between credible information and unverified information.

The fourth stage is analysis. Students compare sources, identify similarities and differences in the information, determine relevant evidence, and formulate interpretations based on the data. This stage is a crucial part of developing critical thinking because students do more than simply gather information.

The fifth stage is product creation. Students transform their research findings into a product that aligns with the project's objectives. The product can take the form of a documentary video, a digital comic, a podcast, an infographic, an exhibition, a historical map, or any other format. The choice of product allows students to exercise their creativity.

The sixth stage is the presentation. Students present their project results to their classmates, teachers, or the community. At this stage, students need to explain the research process, the sources used, the reasons for choosing a particular product format, and the conclusions reached.

The final stage is reflection. Students evaluate the process and results of the project, including the challenges faced, the sources used, the contributions of group members, and the knowledge and skills acquired. Reflection is important so that learning does not end with the completion of the product but also leads to a deeper understanding of the learning process.

Challenges in Implementing Local History-Based PjBL

Despite its potential, the implementation of local history-based PjBL is not without challenges. One challenge is the availability of reliable local historical sources. Not all regions have comprehensive historical documentation. Therefore, teachers need to help students use verifiable sources and cross-check information from various sources.

Another challenge relates to time and project management. PjBL requires more time than learning that is solely focused on the delivery of content. Guo et al. (2020) note that the characteristics of PjBL involve the process of producing artifacts and measuring various learning outcomes, so its implementation and assessment require careful planning.

Teachers also need to pay attention to the division of tasks within groups. Group projects can lead to problems if only some students are active. Therefore, each member needs to have clear responsibilities, such as serving as a resource finder, interviewer, documenter, analyst, writer, or editor of the final product.

In addition, assessment should cover both the process and the product. Assessment that focuses solely on the final product risks overlooking the development of critical thinking and creativity throughout the project. Teachers can use rubrics that include problem-formulation skills, quality of sources, information analysis, originality of ideas, product quality, communication skills, collaboration, and reflection.

Novelty of the Study

The novelty of this study lies in the integration of three main components into a single learning framework: local history as an authentic context, PjBL as a learning model, and critical thinking and creativity as skills to be developed. Based on the reviewed literature, each component has been extensively discussed; however, a synthesis that specifically positions local history as a source of projects to develop these two skills in history education still needs to be strengthened.

PjBL based on local history does not merely assign project tasks to students; rather, it transforms local history into a source for investigation and the creation of products. Students are guided to identify historical issues, gather and evaluate sources, interpret information, generate ideas, create products, and reflect on their results. Thus, history learning can shift from a rote-memorization orientation toward an investigative, contextual, critical, and creative learning experience.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Based on the results of a literature review and synthesis of previous research, Project-Based Learning (PjBL) rooted in local history has the potential to serve as a history learning approach that supports the development of critical thinking skills and creativity among high school students. Local history provides a context closely tied to students' lives, while PjBL offers a structured framework for activities through inquiry, source analysis, problem-solving, product creation, presentation, and reflection. The integration of these two elements provides students with opportunities not only to understand historical facts but also to develop the ability to evaluate information, provide evidence-based reasoning, generate ideas, and create meaningful historical products.

Local history-based PjBL can be implemented through projects that begin with problem identification, question formulation, source collection, information analysis, product creation,

presentation, and reflection. In this process, critical thinking is primarily developed through investigative activities, source evaluation, and interpretation, while creativity is developed through idea formulation, strategy selection, and product creation. Thus, the results of this study indicate that local history can be positioned not only as supplementary material but also as an authentic learning resource that supports active and contextual history learning.

However, this conclusion is based on a synthesis of the literature and does not indicate the extent of the improvement in critical thinking skills or creativity among a specific group of students, as this study did not conduct direct testing.

Limitations

This study has limitations because it employed a literature review approach and did not conduct direct testing of students at School X. Therefore, the conclusions regarding the potential of local history-based PjBL are a synthesis of previous research and cannot yet be used to determine the extent of improvement in critical thinking skills and creativity among specific groups of students. In addition, the characteristics of local history, the availability of resources, school facilities, teacher readiness, and student conditions can influence the success of PjBL implementation.

Recommendations

Future research is recommended to test the application of local history-based PjBL through experimental research or classroom action research at the high school level. Such research could develop instruments that separately measure critical thinking and creativity and use assessment rubrics for both the process and the final product. Future research could also compare various forms of local history projects—such as documentary videos, digital comics, historical maps, podcasts, or digital exhibitions—to provide a more comprehensive understanding of which project formats align best with student characteristics and local historical resources in each region.

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