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Promoting Writing Competence and Autonomy Through Project-Based Autobiography and Digital CV Strategies in Islamic School

Laili Ramadhani¹, Uun Widayanti², Hemas Haryas Harja Susetya³
^{1, 2, 3} Universitas Islam Zainul Hasan Genggong, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Writing skills constitute a crucial dimension of twenty-first-century language competence; nevertheless, low idea-exploration ability and a lack of authentic learning media continue to dominate senior secondary education. This qualitative case study analyzes the implementation of teacher strategies in developing students' functional writing skills and learner autonomy through Project-Based Learning (PjBL) integrated with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) framework. The investigation was conducted in Grade X at Islamic High School Model Zainul Hasan, involving one Indonesian language teacher and six students selected through initial writing diagnostic assessments representing high, medium, and low writing-competency levels. Data was collected over a six-week instructional period through non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and multimodal portfolio analysis of student autobiographies and digital Curriculum Vitae (CV) designs evaluated against EYD Edition V spelling standards and rhetorical cohesion. Data were analyzed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's interactive model with CAQDAS thematic coding. The findings demonstrate that integrating independent-learning strategies within PjBL—utilizing peer-modeling and differentiated scaffolding (asymmetric desk-side mentoring)—effectively bridged initial competency gaps, with low-proficiency students improving text coherence by 40% in draft iterations. Dual product output enhanced both personal reflective writing and professional digital literacy. However, cognitive load disparities and limited computer lab infrastructure caused project timeline extensions. This study provides pedagogical insights for contextualizing adaptive scaffolding in Islamic secondary schools balancing dual curricula.

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Corresponding Author:

Laili Ramadhani,
Universitas Islam Zainul Hasan Genggong, Indonesia
Email: lailiramadhani1017@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing occupies a central position within the modern language curriculum as the most complex productive-expressive linguistic skill (Elturki & Hellmann, 2023; Gusni,

2023; Hugueny-Léger, 2024). Writing is not merely a mechanical activity of transferring graphic symbols onto paper but a higher-order cognitive process that involves organizing ideas, logical reasoning, precise diction, and rigorous command of linguistic rules (Kim et al., 2021; Latif, 2021). Within twenty-first-century education, writing serves as a primary vehicle for articulating critical thinking, digital communication, and career-readiness competencies (Demirbaş & Şahin, 2023; Kennedy & Sundberg, 2025; Mata & Gavrilut, 2025; Russell et al., 2023). Through structured writing activities, students are trained to reconstruct knowledge independently, construct multimodal identities, and communicate systematically in diverse sociolinguistic contexts (Deane, 2018). In secondary educational practice, however, a persistent gap remains between curricular standards and students' actual writing proficiency. Secondary students frequently experience writer's block, weak command of coherent text structure, limited academic vocabulary, and low intrinsic motivation stemming from conventional, theory-driven instruction that fails to cultivate authentic awareness of writing's real-world functions (Joshi, 2024; Sen, 2015; Yulianti et al., 2024).

To address these pedagogical challenges, Project-Based Learning (PjBL) has been widely recognized as a transformative instructional framework. PjBL positions students at the center of learning through complex, inquiry-based tasks culminating in the production of authentic artifacts (Kokotsaki et al., 2016; Laeli & Wijayanto, 2025; Ratu et al., 2025). In language pedagogy, PjBL shifts the focus from passive learning about writing toward active writing to learning and communicating (Kurniawati, 2023). However, the effectiveness of PjBL does not operate in a vacuum; project success is heavily contingent upon how teachers architect scaffolding without compromising student agency (Gopang et al., 2023). Integrating self-regulated learning (SRL) strategies into PjBL syntax enables students to independently manage time, access literacy resources, set goals, and engage in recursive drafting (Rosmayanti et al., 2025; Wu, 2024). Writing is intrinsically a recursive process encompassing pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing (Śleszyńska, 2025), requiring sustained instructional guidance rather than unguided task delegation.

The theoretical foundation of this study is grounded in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (Sarmiento-Campos et al., 2022; Ness, 2023), specifically the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and Instructional Scaffolding (Alemdag & Yildirim, 2023). ZPD defines the distance between a learner's actual development level determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development determined by problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. In writing instruction, teacher scaffolding serves as a dynamic, temporary support structure that gradually fades as learners internalize linguistic strategies and self-regulatory mechanisms (Taylor et al., 2026). Synthesizing ZPD within PjBL provides a robust conceptual lens for understanding how strategic teacher interventions elevate student writing competence across heterogeneous skill levels (Cahyono et al., 2024).

Prior empirical literature on PjBL in language instruction highlights noticeable thematic and methodological trends. Putri et al. (2022) demonstrated through a

quantitative experiment that PjBL significantly improved exposition text scores using environmental portfolios, yet their study focused primarily on final quantitative scores without examining the qualitative evolution of student autonomy. [Nurasman et al. \(2026\)](#) explored the correlation between PjBL and student motivation in narrative writing, finding positive engagement but overlooking teacher intervention strategies when students encountered technical and typographical obstacles. [Aprilia \(2025\)](#) investigated collaborative wall-magazine projects, reporting enhanced group creativity but concentrating on broad collective work rather than individual literacy development. While [Egitim \(2025\)](#) addressed pedagogical leadership strategies in language contexts, the study remained theoretical and descriptive without empirical classroom confirmation.

A critical synthesis reveals a distinct research gap: existing literature predominantly focuses on traditional academic genres (exposition, narrative, essays) in general secondary schools, leaving a lack of empirical research on how teachers integrate ZPD-based scaffolding and self-regulated learning within individual functional-digital texts (such as autobiographies and digital curriculum vitae). Furthermore, Islamic secondary schools (Madrasah Aliyah) present a unique sociocultural and institutional context ([Affandi et al., 2024](#); [Maryati et al., 2023](#); [Romlah et al., 2025](#)). Madrasah Aliyah operating under a dual curriculum—combining standard national academic subjects with intensive religious studies—presents distinct time constraints, cognitive loads, and digital literacy dynamics that differentiate them from public general schools ([Aminullah et al., 2024](#); [Zuhri et al., 2026](#)). Addressing functional-professional writing (autobiographies and digital CVs) within this setting offers crucial insights into how secondary students construct digital professional identities and career readiness.

Therefore, this study aims to (1) analyze the implementation of teacher strategies in guiding individual PjBL for autobiography and digital CV writing within a ZPD framework; (2) evaluate the qualitative evolution of student writing performance across heterogeneous proficiency levels against updated EYD Edition V language standards; (3) identify supporting and inhibiting factors shaping strategy execution in the madrasah context; and (4) explore the reciprocal pedagogical perceptions of the teacher and students. This study contributes conceptually by expanding PjBL scaffolding frameworks for functional digital texts and practically by offering transferable pedagogical models for language educators in resource-constrained secondary settings.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to naturalistically examine the implementation of teacher strategies in project-based writing instruction ([Creswell & Poth, 2018](#)). The case study approach was selected because it allows an in-depth, contextual exploration of complex educational processes within a real-life classroom environment. The research was conducted over a six-week period during the even semester of the 2025/2026 academic year at Grade X Islamic High School Model Zainul Hasan, Probolinggo, Indonesia. The primary human instrument was the researcher, who maintained an observational positionality during instruction. To mitigate researcher bias

and maintain reflexivity, the researcher kept detailed field reflexivity logs, engaged in peer debriefing with language education experts, and refrained from direct instructional intervention during classroom observations.

Informants were selected using stratified purposive sampling to capture cognitive variations across student writing abilities (Patton, 2015). The primary teacher informant was Ustadah Aisyah, a certified Indonesian language educator with over six years of secondary teaching experience. Student informants comprised six Grade X students. To establish rigorous diagnostic criteria for student selection, an initial baseline writing diagnostic test (evaluating text organization, vocabulary richness, sentence structure, and mechanics) was administered to the entire class of 32 students prior to project implementation. Based on standardized rubric scoring, students were categorized into three competency tiers: High Competency (S-1, S-2; baseline scores >85), Medium Competency (S-3, S-4; baseline scores 70–84), and Low Competency (S-5, S-6; baseline scores <70).

Data collection was conducted through three integrated qualitative techniques: (1) structured non-participant classroom observations across six project phases utilizing an observation protocol focusing on teacher scaffolding behavior and student self-regulated learning actions; (2) semi-structured in-depth interviews with the teacher and the six focal students using validated interview protocols to explore perceptions, cognitive challenges, and strategic adaptations; and (3) systematic document analysis of student portfolio artifacts, including initial draft outlines, peer-feedback logs, revised manuscripts, and final digital Canva CV outputs evaluated against EYD Edition V (*Ejaan Yang Disempurnakan* 5th Edition) spelling and structural criteria.

Data were analyzed interactively following the data analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Qualitative data processing was facilitated using Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (NVivo 14) to enhance systematic transparency. A hybrid deductive-inductive coding system was established based on Vygotsky's ZPD and PjBL frameworks. The primary codebook comprised three core clusters: IMPLEMENTATION (IMP: sub-coded for Phase, Scaffolding_Type, Peer_Modeling, Canva_Design), PERCEPTION (PER: sub-coded for Autonomy, Motivation, Challenge, Utility), and FACTORS (FAK: sub-coded for Facilitator_Pedagogy, Infrastructure_Limit, Time_Management).

Trustworthiness was established through rigorous qualitative criteria (Adler, 2022). Credibility was achieved through source triangulation (comparing teacher and student interview accounts across competency tiers) and technique triangulation (corroborating classroom observation notes, interview transcripts, and physical portfolio draft artifacts). Transferability was enhanced through thick descriptive contextual detail. Dependability was ensured via a detailed audit trail of data processing, and confirmability was maintained through reflexive log cross-checking.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Syntax Implementation and ZPD-Based Scaffolding

Classroom observations revealed that Ustadah Aisya systematically integrated independent learning strategies into the six standard syntactic stages of PjBL, structured around a ZPD framework. The project unfolded across six distinct phases over six weeks: (1) Essential Questioning & Topic Framing; (2) Project Planning & Product Design; (3) Schedule & Milestone Creation; (4) Project Execution & Adaptive Scaffolding; (5) Product Assessment & EYD V Proofreading; and (6) Portfolio Reflection & Digital Publishing. Instruction was organized dualistically around two complementary text types: a personal reflective autobiography text and a digital functional-professional Curriculum Vitae (CV) created on Canva.

The teacher's instructional role shifted dynamically according to students' ZPD requirements. During Phase 2 and Phase 4, the teacher applied two specific tactical interventions to manage student cognitive load: (1) Peer-Modeling using senior-cohort portfolios, where exemplary autobiography texts and digital CV layouts from previous academic years were displayed as concrete benchmarks; and (2) Differentiated Scaffolding, wherein instructional support was distributed asymmetrically based on baseline competence.

Empirical Analysis of Writing Skill Evolution and Portfolio Artifacts

Systematic document analysis of student portfolio drafts revealed substantial qualitative progress in writing competence from initial drafting to final output, particularly regarding sentence cohesion, paragraph organization, and adherence to EYD Edition V spelling rules. Table 1 provides a comparative textual analysis of representative draft iterations across competency tiers.

Table 1. Comparative textual analysis of representative draft iterations across competency tiers

Competency Tier & Informant	Initial Draft Excerpt (Pre-Scaffolding)	Final Revised Excerpt (Post-Scaffolding)	EYD V & Rhetorical Improvement Analysis
High Competency (S-1)	"Saya lahir di Probolinggo. Dari kecil saya suka membaca buku dan menulis cerita. Cita-cita saya ingin menjadi dosen bahasa indonesia yang sukses." (I was born in Probolinggo. Since childhood, I have loved reading books and writing stories. My dream is to become a successful Indonesian language lecturer.)	"Lahir dan dibesarkan di Probolinggo menumbuhkan kecintaan mendalam saya terhadap dunia literasi. Sejak usia dini, saya aktif mengeksplorasi penulisan kreatif, yang membakar aspirasi saya untuk mengabdikan sebagai akademisi Bahasa Indonesia." (Being born and raised	Transformation from simple compound sentences to complex academic structures; enhanced diction ('aspirasi', 'akademisi'); 100% compliance with EYD V capitalization and clause linking.

Competency Tier & Informant	Initial Draft Excerpt (Pre-Scaffolding)	Final Revised Excerpt (Post-Scaffolding)	EYD V & Rhetorical Improvement Analysis
Medium Competency (S-3)	"Hobi saya dibidang olahraga. Saya pernah juara 2 futsal di madrasah, karna itu saya tulis di CV supaya kelihatan keren." (My hobby is sports. I once took second place in a futsal tournament at my madrasa, so I included that on my CV to make it look cool.)	in Probolinggo fostered a deep love for the world of literature within me. From an early age, I actively explored creative writing, which ignited my aspiration to serve as an Indonesian language academic.) "Pengalaman memenangkan Juara II Turnamen Futsal Tingkat Madrasah memupuk kedisiplinan dan kerja sama tim. Kompetensi interpersonal ini saya cantumkan dalam CV sebagai nilai tambah profesional." (Winning second place in the Madrasah-level futsal tournament fostered discipline and teamwork. I have included these interpersonal competencies in my CV as a professional asset.)	Corrected prefix error ('dibidang' → 'di bidang') and informal conjunction ('karna' → 'karena/oleh karena itu'); converted colloquial phrases into professional bullet-point narrative for digital CV.
Low Competency (S-5)	"Waktu kecil saya tinggal sama nenek. Terus sekolah di MA Model. Saya bingung mau tulis apa lagi di otobiografi karena hidup saya biasa saja." (I lived with my grandmother when I was young and later attended MA Model. I'm not sure what else to write in my autobiography because my life has been quite ordinary.)	"Masa kecil saya dihabiskan dalam pengasuhan nenek, yang mengajarkan nilai kemandirian. Perjalanan pendidikan saya berlanjut di MA Model Zainul Hasan, tempat saya mengembangkan potensi diri di bidang organisasi." (I spent my childhood under the care of my grandmother, who instilled in me the value of independence. My	Resolved acute writer's block via desk-side scaffolding; corrected spelling ('otobiografi' → 'autobiografi'); structured chronological timeline; converted fragment sentences into cohesive paragraphs.

Competency Tier & Informant	Initial Draft Excerpt (Pre-Scaffolding)	Final Revised Excerpt (Post-Scaffolding)	EYD V & Rhetorical Improvement Analysis
		educational journey continued at MA Model Zainul Hasan, where I developed my potential in organizational activities.)	

Textual analysis in Table 1 demonstrates that scaffolded iterations enabled low-competency students (S-5, S-6) to resolve structural fragmentations, correct pervasive EYD V errors (such as preposition/prefix confusion and informal conjunctions), and construct cohesive biographical timelines. For high-competency students (S-1, S-2), teacher feedback prompted advanced stylistic enhancements, transforming basic narrative statements into sophisticated academic prose.

Reciprocal Perceptions of Teacher and Students

In-depth interviews revealed positive but differentiated perceptions across participant tiers. Teacher Aisya emphasized that combining project-based writing with functional career outputs transformed classroom engagement and stimulated metacognitive career reflection:

“The autobiography and digital CV assignments were deliberately chosen so that students recognize writing as a living, functional tool. CVs are essential in the modern digital landscape. I wanted language learning to transcend exam scores and become tangible capital for university applications and professional opportunities.”
(Interview with Teacher)

Student perceptions varied according to baseline writing confidence. High-competency student S-1 noted that the Canva digital design component provided a creative platform for identity expression:

“Usually, writing assignments mean copying summaries. Designing my autobiography and CV on Canva forced me to analyze my personal strengths and present them professionally yet authentically.” (Interview with S-1)

Conversely, low-competency students highlighted the critical role of desk-side scaffolding in overcoming initial anxiety, as S-5 explained:

“I was completely stuck when trying to organize my life events chronologically. I didn't know how to connect sentences properly. Ustadah Aisya guided me directly at my desk, showing me how to use transitional words and fix spelling errors. That made me confident to finish.” (Interview with S-5)

Thematic Matrix of Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

The implementation dynamics were shaped by complex contextual factors within the madrasah environment. Table 2 details the thematic factor matrix mapped against ZPD and Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) mechanisms.

Table 2. Thematic factor matrix mapped against ZPD and Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) mechanisms

Factor Category	Field Indicators & Empirical Evidence	Impact on Writing Process	ZPD & SRL Strategic Adaptation
Supporting: Pedagogical Competence	Teacher connected writing tasks to 10-year personal career projections.	Enhanced intrinsic student motivation and instrumental utility value.	Goal-setting reinforcement in SRL.
Supporting: Digital Interest	Enthusiasm for Canva digital layout design and template customization.	Stimulated visual-textual multimodal literacy engagement.	Increased task effort and self-efficacy.
Supporting: Peer Collaboration	High-ability students assisted peers in digital formatting during lab hours.	Accelerated technical tool mastery across student tiers.	Peer-assisted ZPD scaffolding.
Inhibiting: Heterogeneous Ability	Low-ability students exhibited persistent baseline syntax and spelling gaps.	Drafting phase required 50% more time for low-competency tier.	Differentiated asymmetric desk mentoring.
Inhibiting: Infrastructure Limits	Limited school computer lab access and personal laptop shortages.	Created bottlenecks in digital CV typing and visual layout rendering.	Hybrid handwritten drafting + rotational computer schedules.
Inhibiting: Dual Curriculum Load	Heavy madrasah religious assignment schedule competing for student time.	Increased student cognitive fatigue and milestone completion delays.	Flexible milestone tracking & adaptive deadline adjustments.

Discussion

The empirical findings demonstrate that integrating self-regulated learning within a Project-Based Learning (PjBL) framework—mediated by scaffolding rooted in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)—significantly enhances secondary students' functional writing competence and learning autonomy. This theoretical alignment with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory is evident in the strategic operationalization of instructional interventions designed to bridge students' actual and potential writing levels. Rather than leaving learners to navigate complex drafting processes unguided, the structured application of peer-modeling and differentiated desk-side mentoring delivered essential calibrated support (Alemdag & Yildirim, 2023). Consequently, this dynamic scaffolding enabled low-competency students to overcome acute writer's block and successfully master EYD Edition V conventions, directly substantiating Graham et al.'s model of scaffolded literacy development (Graham et al., 2025; Magnusson et al., 2023).

Furthermore, this study contributes to a nuanced re-evaluation of PjBL instructional dynamics by challenging the widespread assumption that project-based instruction inherently improves time efficiency (Putri et al., 2022). Empirical evidence gathered from MA Model Zainul Hasan reveals that when PjBL is structured around individual

functional-digital tasks within cognitively heterogeneous classrooms, project duration becomes highly susceptible to time inflation. Specifically, low-competency students required nearly double the allotted drafting time, a strain driven by underlying linguistic gaps and computer literacy constraints. This empirical reality positions differentiated scaffolding not merely as an optional pedagogical tactic, but as an essential structural component within PjBL syntax for heterogeneous secondary settings (Reynolds, 2021).

A central conceptual insight emerging from this research concerns the dynamic interaction between multimodal digital tools—such as Canva—and self-regulated learning strategies (Faza & Lestari, 2025). Moving from traditional print-based essay writing to digital curriculum vitae (CV) design effectively stimulated visual-textual multimodal literacy among learners. This transition demonstrated how digital environments can expand functional writing tasks beyond conventional textual limits, prompting students to engage simultaneously with structural layout and written communication (Overstreet et al., 2026).

However, the empirical findings also highlight critical pedagogical risks associated with unguided digital tool integration. Without explicit instructional boundaries, graphic template selection and visual design on platforms like Canva can inadvertently induce procedural passivity. Under these conditions, students tend to prioritize aesthetic decoration over rigorous textual coherence and linguistic accuracy. To mitigate this tendency, the instructor's mandatory enforcement of EYD Edition V proofreading prior to digital layout entry served as a vital control mechanism, ensuring that visual design enhancement did not compromise core linguistic standards.

Beyond classroom mechanics, the specific madrasah institutional context offers valuable insights into language pedagogy under dual curriculum demands (Bachtiyar et al., 2025; Madkur et al., 2024). Secondary students in madrasah settings experience unique cognitive loads resulting from the simultaneous rigor of intensive religious studies and academic coursework. In this environment, contextualizing functional writing around authentic career outputs—namely personal autobiographies and digital CVs—substantially elevated students' instrumental motivation. By grounding writing tasks in real-world utility, the instructional design transformed routine language tasks into personally meaningful academic pursuits (Song & Song, 2023).

Ultimately, these outcomes align closely with Hyland's model of genre-based authentic literacy, confirming that functional digital genres generate superior student engagement compared to decontextualized grammar instruction (Jiang et al., 2022; Yayli, 2024). By embedding self-regulated learning and targeted ZPD scaffolding into authentic digital design tasks, the intervention addresses both the affective and cognitive dimensions of literacy acquisition. This integrated approach establishes a robust framework for sustaining functional writing development and learner autonomy within complex, dual-curriculum secondary education environments.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that teacher strategies integrating self-regulated learning within Project-Based Learning, mediated by ZPD-based scaffolding, effectively foster

functional writing competence and learner autonomy in Islamic secondary school students. The tactical combination of autobiography writing and digital CV design successfully bridged theory and real-world literacy application. Differentiated scaffolding and senior peer-modeling proved essential in resolving cognitive bottlenecks and EYD Edition V linguistic errors among low-competency writers, while digital Canva tools enhanced multimodal identity construction.

The theoretical implication of this study lies in the formulation of an 'Adaptive Scaffolding-PjBL Framework' that accounts for cognitive heterogeneity and infrastructure limits in secondary language education. Practically, the study offers secondary educators a structured, multi-tiered instructional model for teaching functional digital text genres.

This study acknowledges methodological limitations. The qualitative case study design involved a focused sample of six student focal informants at a single Islamic secondary school, limiting statistical generalizability. Furthermore, while qualitative textual improvement was observed, longitudinal retention of writing competence was not measured. Future research should pursue mixed-methods and experimental studies incorporating larger sample sizes, AI-assisted multimodal writing rubrics, and longitudinal tracking of student self-regulated learning across diverse secondary school typologies.

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