

**Project-Based Learning And Business Communication Skills In Business English Courses: Students' Perspectives****Wuriy Handayani¹, Zainal Rafli², Muhammad Kamal bin Abdul Hakim³**Universitas Negeri Jakarta^{1,2,3}Email: wuriyhandayani_9906921001@mhs.unj.ac.id¹, zainal.rafli@unj.ac.id², m.kamal.ah@unj.ac.id³**ABSTRACT**

Business communication skills have become essential competencies for university graduates entering the global workforce. However, many Business English courses still emphasize grammar and vocabulary rather than authentic communication practices. This study aimed to explore students' perceptions of the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in a Business English course and its contribution to the development of business communication skills. A mixed-methods design was employed by collecting quantitative and qualitative data from 100 students through a questionnaire administered via Google Forms and interviews with five students. The questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while the interview data were analyzed thematically using ATLAS.ti. The findings revealed that students perceived previous Business English learning as teacher-centered, grammar-oriented, and offering limited opportunities for authentic communication. In contrast, students viewed Project-Based Learning positively because it promoted authentic business-oriented learning, learner autonomy, learning motivation, self-reflection, and improved business communication skills. The study concludes that Project-Based Learning provides a meaningful learning environment that enhances communication competence and better prepares students for workplace communication. These findings contribute to Business English pedagogy by providing empirical evidence of students' perceptions of Project-Based Learning in higher education. Keywords: should be written under the abstract in bold, italic, and should reflect the substance of the paper as also mentioned in the title.

Keywords: *business English, business communication skills, Project-Based Learning, students' perceptions, workplace communication.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization and rapid technological advancement have fundamentally transformed the ways people communicate, collaborate, and conduct business across national boundaries. As economies become increasingly interconnected, communication among individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds has become an essential component of professional life. In this context, English continues to function as the dominant language of international business, higher education, and professional communication, facilitating cooperation across countries and industries (Jenkins, 2023; Rose & Galloway, 2019). Consequently, English proficiency has become a critical employability skill that enables graduates to participate effectively in global professional networks and multinational workplaces (Chan, 2023). Therefore, higher education institutions are expected to equip

students with the language competencies necessary to succeed in increasingly competitive and interconnected labor markets. This growing demand highlights the importance of developing not only language proficiency but also effective communication skills among university students.

In today's workplace, employers increasingly seek graduates who possess strong communication skills in addition to technical and disciplinary knowledge. Effective communication enables individuals to collaborate with others, express ideas clearly, solve problems, and engage in professional interactions. Communication competence has consistently been recognized as one of the most essential employability skills because it supports teamwork, leadership, adaptability, and decision-making processes (World Economic Forum, 2025). In business settings, communication plays a crucial role in conducting meetings, negotiating agreements, delivering presentations, preparing reports, and maintaining professional relationships with clients and colleagues (Andrews & Higson, 2023). As a result, universities are expected to provide learning experiences that prepare students for these communication demands in professional environments.

To address these expectations, Business English courses have become increasingly important within higher education curricula. Unlike General English courses, Business English focuses on the practical use of language in professional and workplace-related contexts. Students are expected to use English for meetings, presentations, negotiations, business correspondence, and report writing, all of which reflect authentic workplace communication practices (Friginal, 2022; Chan, 2023). Through these activities, Business English aims to bridge the gap between academic learning and professional requirements. However, despite the increasing emphasis on Business English instruction, many students continue to face challenges when communicating in professional settings.

Many university students still struggle to communicate effectively in English within business and professional contexts. They often experience difficulties expressing ideas confidently, participating in discussions, negotiating opinions, and delivering presentations. These challenges are frequently associated with limited opportunities for authentic communication practice, as classroom instruction often prioritizes grammatical accuracy and vocabulary acquisition over meaningful interaction and real-world communication tasks (Derakhshan et al., 2024). Consequently, students may possess linguistic knowledge but lack the ability to apply that knowledge effectively in professional situations. This condition suggests the need for instructional approaches that actively engage students in authentic communication experiences.

One instructional approach that has attracted considerable attention in recent years is Project-Based Learning (PBL). PBL is a learner-centered approach that engages students in authentic projects, collaborative activities, and problem-solving tasks that resemble real-world situations (Guo et al., 2020; Krajcik & Shin, 2021). Through project work, students are encouraged to communicate, negotiate, collaborate, and present ideas while working toward a common goal. Rather than learning language in isolation, students use language as a tool for accomplishing meaningful tasks. Therefore, PBL provides opportunities for students to develop communication skills in authentic and purposeful learning environments.

The effectiveness of Project-Based Learning can be explained through constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is actively constructed through meaningful experiences and social interaction (Krajcik & Shin, 2021). In a PBL environment, students collaborate with peers, solve problems, analyze information, and present their findings to others. These activities encourage learners to use language for



authentic purposes rather than merely practicing grammatical structures. Recent studies have shown that authentic project-based tasks promote higher levels of engagement, communication, and collaborative learning among students (Guo et al., 2020; Chen & Yang, 2024). Thus, PBL provides a theoretical and practical foundation for developing communication skills in language learning contexts.

The relevance of PBL becomes even more apparent in Business English courses, where communication is closely linked to workplace practices. Business-related projects often require students to discuss ideas, negotiate solutions, prepare professional reports, deliver presentations, and collaborate with team members to complete assigned tasks. Such activities closely resemble communication processes commonly found in professional environments. Furthermore, project-based activities encourage students to take responsibility for their learning while developing problem-solving and interpersonal communication skills. Research has demonstrated that PBL contributes positively to workplace readiness, communication competence, and employability skills among university students (Aksela & Haatainen, 2023; Markula & Aksela, 2022). These characteristics make PBL particularly suitable for Business English instruction.

Previous studies have reported positive outcomes regarding the implementation of Project-Based Learning in English language education. PBL has been shown to improve students' language proficiency, motivation, collaboration, critical thinking, and communication skills by engaging learners in authentic and meaningful tasks (Guo et al., 2020; Aksela & Haatainen, 2023). In addition, students generally perceive PBL positively because it promotes active participation, learner autonomy, and collaborative learning. These findings indicate that PBL has substantial potential to support communication development in language learning environments.

Despite the growing body of literature on Project-Based Learning, several research gaps remain. First, many previous studies have focused on General English courses rather than Business English courses, where communication demands are often more specialized and professionally oriented. Second, most studies have examined the effects of PBL on language proficiency, motivation, or learning outcomes, while relatively few have explored students' perceptions of how PBL influences their business communication development in authentic classroom practices. Third, research exploring students' lived experiences of communication improvement through PBL in Business English courses within higher education contexts remains limited, particularly in developing countries. Therefore, further investigation is necessary to understand how students perceive the role of PBL in supporting their business communication skills.

To address these gaps, the present study explores students' perceptions of Project-Based Learning in a Business English course and how they experience the development of their business communication skills through project-based activities. Specifically, the study investigates how students perceive their ability to communicate in professional contexts such as presenting business ideas, participating in discussions, writing reports, and collaborating in group projects. By focusing on students' voices and experiences, this study aims to provide qualitative insights into how PBL supports communication learning in Business English education. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing literature on Business English pedagogy and offer practical implications for designing more meaningful, authentic, and learner-centered instructional practices.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to investigate students' perceptions of Project-Based Learning (PBL) and its role in developing business communication skills in a Business English course. A mixed-methods approach was selected because it integrates quantitative and qualitative data, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Quantitative data were used to identify general trends in students' perceptions, while qualitative data offered deeper insights into their learning experiences and views regarding project-based learning activities.

The study was conducted in a Business English course at Perbanas Institute, Jakarta, where Project-Based Learning served as the primary instructional approach. Students completed authentic business-related projects, including developing business ideas, conducting business meetings, writing business reports, and delivering presentations. These activities were designed to simulate real workplace communication and promote the practical application of business English skills.

2.3 Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected from 100 undergraduate students enrolled in the Business English course through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of Likert-scale items measuring students' perceptions of Project-Based Learning in terms of communication confidence, presentation skills, teamwork, workplace readiness, and overall learning experience. The online format facilitated efficient data collection while ensuring participants' anonymity, thereby encouraging honest responses.

To complement the quantitative findings, five students were purposively selected for semi-structured interviews based on their active participation in project activities and their willingness to share their learning experiences. Each interview lasted approximately 20–30 minutes, was audio-recorded with participants' consent, and subsequently transcribed for analysis. The interview questions explored students' experiences with project-based learning, perceived improvements in business communication skills, benefits of project activities, and challenges encountered during the learning process.

Ethical considerations were maintained throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Participants' identities were protected through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of identifying information from the dataset. All collected data were used solely for academic research purposes.

2.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics, particularly frequencies and percentages, to identify overall trends in students' perceptions of Project-Based Learning and its contribution to business communication skill development.

Qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis with the support of ATLAS.ti software. The analysis followed several stages, including data familiarization, open coding, categorization, theme development, and interpretation. ATLAS.ti facilitated the systematic organization and coding of interview transcripts,

enabling the identification of recurring themes related to students' perceptions of communication development through Project-Based Learning.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, methodological triangulation was employed by comparing results from the questionnaire and interviews. In addition, member checking was conducted by asking interview participants to verify the accuracy of the interview transcripts and the interpretations of their responses. These procedures strengthened the credibility and validity of the study's findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the data analysis was finished, the results were divided into quantitative and qualitative categories in order to fully answer the research objectives. The quantitative results, which were derived from 100 students' completed surveys, outline how students felt about their prior Business English learning methods. In the meantime, the qualitative results, which were obtained from five participant interviews and examined using ATLAS.ti, offer a thorough grasp of how students regard project-based learning in terms of honing their corporate communication abilities. The following sections present the findings.

One hundred students engaged in the Business English course prior to the introduction of Project-Based Learning were given a questionnaire to determine their opinions of prior Business English learning methods. Four factors—learning materials, teaching strategies, learner autonomy, and communication confidence—that were thought to be pertinent to the learning process were examined in the questionnaire. Figure 1 presents the results.

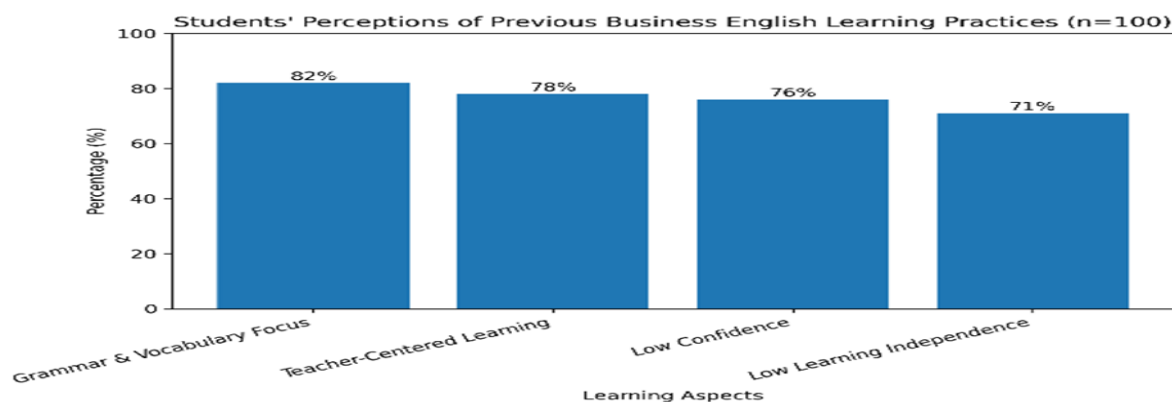


Figure 1. Students' Perceptions of Previous Business English Learning Practices

Figure 1 shows a number of difficulties that students encountered when learning business English in the past. The largest percentage (82%) shows that the development of vocabulary and grammar was the primary focus of business English instruction. In the meantime, 78% of respondents thought that teacher-centered instruction predominated in classrooms. Additionally, 76% of students said they were unconfident while speaking in English, and 71% acknowledged that they had not yet formed independent learning habits and were excessively dependent on professors' advice. Overall, our results show that prior Business English instruction offered little chances for learner-centered activities and real-world communication.

The survey also showed that students thought vocabulary and grammar exercises were the most common classroom activities. Students indicated that real-world corporate communication activities, like presentations, negotiations, meetings, and report writing, were infrequently used, despite the fact that these language components are essential for learning English. As a result, a lot of students thought there was a disconnect between what they learned in school and the communication skills needed in professional settings. In terms of teaching strategies, the majority of respondents said that individual assignments, textbook exercises, and lecturer explanations made up the majority of learning activities. There were comparatively few opportunities for students to actively engage in group discussions or problem-solving exercises. This circumstance implies that prior methods of instruction were more instructor-centered than learner-centered.

Additionally, the questionnaire showed that learner autonomy was still comparatively low. Many respondents said that they seldom looked for extra learning materials on their own and tended to wait for lecturers' directions before doing assignments. Confidence in communication also surfaced as a significant problem. Students were reluctant to voice their thoughts in English because they often felt nervous during talks, presentations, and public speaking exercises. When taken as a whole, these results show that prior business English training did not adequately support the growth of learner autonomy, communication competence, and workplace preparation.

Five students who had finished Project-Based Learning activities in the Business English course participated in semi-structured interviews to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences. ATLAS.ti was used to do a theme analysis of the interview transcripts. The analysis revealed five main themes: Perceived Improvement in Business Communication Skills, Learner Autonomy, Learning Motivation, Self-Reflection on Communication Competence, and Authentic Business-Oriented Learning.

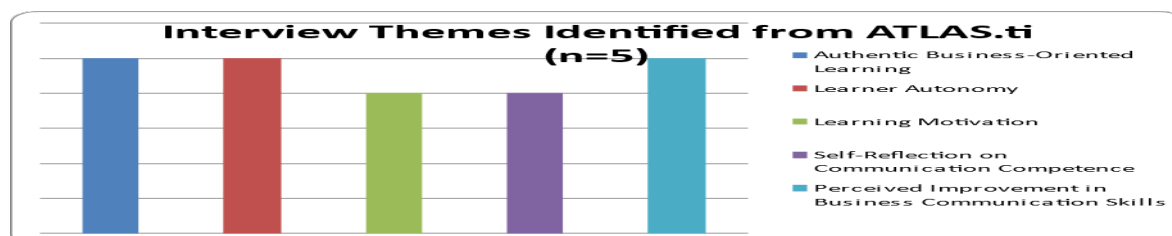


Figure 2: Themes Generated from ATLAS.ti Analysis

Students' opinions that Project-Based Learning offered significant learning opportunities that were closely tied to actual business scenarios are reflected in the first theme, Authentic Business-Oriented Learning. According to the participants, project activities gave them the opportunity to practice utilizing English in real-world situations for presentations, negotiations, discussions, report writing, and cooperation. Students observed how English is used in professional communication rather than only learning grammatical concepts.

Learner Autonomy, the second theme, shows how students grew increasingly accountable for their own education throughout the course of the study. Individual business information searches, learning resource selection, project task organization, and cooperative issue solving were all noted by participants. They became less reliant on lecturers' advice and more self-reliant learners as a result of these encounters.

Learning Motivation emerged as the third theme from the interviews. Students noted that because working on real-world business initiatives was important, collaborative, and



directly related to their future employment, it improved their passion for learning English. Additionally, they stated that they were more inclined to actively participate in talks and presentations.

Project-Based Learning enabled students to assess their own communication skills, according to the fourth theme, Self-Reflection on Communication Competence. Students grew more conscious of their pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, confidence, and presentation skills as the project was carried out. They were able to pinpoint areas that needed further work thanks to this introspective procedure.

Lastly, the theme "Perceived Improvement in Business Communication Skills" shows how students believe project-based learning improved their communication skills. Presentation abilities, teamwork, negotiation, discussion, confidence, and professional communication all improved, according to the participants. In general, students thought that project-based learning better equipped them to communicate in the job in the future. The findings show that students encountered a number of difficulties when studying business English in the past, especially with regard to learner autonomy, communication confidence, and real communication chances. Students reported more positive learning experiences after Project-Based Learning was implemented, highlighting increased independence, better motivation, real business-oriented learning, reflective learning, and enhanced business communication skills. These results imply that Project-Based Learning might offer a useful pedagogical strategy for resolving the shortcomings of traditional Business English training. The results are discussed in light of pertinent theories and earlier empirical research in the section that follows in order to better comprehend the importance of these findings.

3.1 Authentic Business-Oriented Learning through Project-Based Learning

The results of the interview and questionnaire show that prior business English training offered few chances for real-world communication. According to the questionnaire, 82% of students thought that prior instruction had mostly focused on vocabulary and grammar, with very little opportunities to practice English in authentic business settings. In a similar vein, interviewees clarified that prior to engaging in Project-Based Learning, classroom activities hardly ever included real-world communication tasks like meetings, business presentations, negotiations, or professional debates.

However, students felt that the learning process had changed significantly after taking part in project-based learning. The most prevalent topic found in the interview results was authentic business-oriented learning. Students clarified that in order to complete real-world business duties, such as presenting business concepts, debating marketing tactics, writing reports, and working in groups, they had to speak English. Instead of only learning grammatical structures, these experiences allowed students to comprehend how English is actually utilized in professional settings.

These results agree with Friginal's (2022) contention that authentic workplace interactions, rather than isolated language forms, should be the focus of business English training. Chan (2023) also highlights the need for business English to connect classroom instruction with actual workplace communication. Thus, it seems that project-based learning enhances students' communication skills while also offering a learning environment that more closely resembles actual business operations.

3.2 Project-Based Learning Promotes Learner Autonomy

According to the results of the questionnaire, 71% of participants showed little independent study practices and were still reliant on lecturers' advice. The majority of students acknowledged that they seldom looked into extra learning materials on their own

and often waited for lecturers' directions before doing assignments. These results imply that during traditional Business English training, student autonomy had not yet reached its full potential.

On the other hand, after project-based learning was implemented, the interview results showed a different learning experience. The analysis of the interviews revealed the theme of Learner Autonomy. Students clarified that project activities pushed them to manage project deadlines, provide tasks to team members, solve difficulties together, and conduct independent searches for business-related information. Students eventually took on greater responsibility for organizing, supervising, and assessing their own learning processes rather than depending on lecturers' instructions. These results show that project-based learning gives pupils the chance to learn more actively and independently.

Recent research demonstrating the connection between learner autonomy and project-based learning supports the current findings. According to Aksela and Haatainen (2023), project-based learning fosters students' accountability, self-directed learning, and cooperative problem-solving via real-world assignments. In a similar vein, Chen and Yang (2024) discovered that Project-Based Learning improves students' self-directed learning by motivating them to control their own learning, look for pertinent material, and actively engage in group knowledge production. These results are also in line with Ryan and Deci's (2020) contention that learning environments that offer students autonomy, meaningful activities, and active engagement enhance their intrinsic motivation and self-regulation. Thus, the current research indicates that Project-Based Learning offers a productive learning environment for promoting learner autonomy and assisting the growth of self-directed learning in Business English courses.

3.3 Project-Based Learning Enhances Students' Learning Motivation

The results of the interviews also show that students' motivation to learn English was positively impacted by project-based learning. Students frequently expressed low confidence and passive classroom engagement throughout prior learning experiences, despite the fact that the questionnaire did not explicitly measure motivation. Students' willingness to actively converse in English was frequently diminished by these circumstances.

On the other hand, one of the main themes found in the interview analysis was learning motivation. Students noted that because each project had a specific goal and provided observable results, working on real-world business tasks made studying more meaningful. Students were also encouraged to actively participate in collaborative learning because each member was responsible for the success of the group. A few of participants clarified that they increased their English practice because they wanted to do well in talks and presentations.

Ryan and Deci (2020), who contend that meaningful learning activities, learner autonomy, and collaborative contexts boost intrinsic motivation, corroborate these findings. According to Guo et al. (2020), project-based learning greatly increases student motivation and engagement by enabling students to work together to address real-world challenges. As a result, it seems that students are more motivated and actively engaged in their business English education when they participate in authentic project activities.

3.4 Developing Communication Confidence through Authentic Learning Experiences

Another significant difficulty in this study was communication confidence. According to the survey, 76% of students reported feeling nervous when speaking in English, especially during class debates and presentations. A large number of respondents expressed fear of making grammatical errors or receiving unfavourable feedback from their peers. These



results suggest that there were not enough opportunities for repeated communication practice in traditional learning environments.

However, after Project-Based Learning was put into place, the results of the interviews showed a different viewpoint. Students described how taking part in presentations, conversations, and business tasks helped them become more conscious of their strengths and shortcomings through the theme Self-Reflection on Communication Competence. Pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary utilization, and presentation skills all showed gains, but they also pointed up areas that still needed work. More significantly, because project activities offered frequent chances to speak in English in encouraging collaborative settings, students reported growing more self-assured.

Similarly, Derakhshan et al. (2024) contends that consistent engagement in significant communicative tasks fosters the development of communication confidence. As a result, project-based learning seems to offer a useful setting for lowering communication anxiety and boosting pupils' self-assurance when utilizing English for work-related tasks.

3.5 Perceived Improvement in Business Communication Skills

Perceived Improvement in Business Communication Skills, the last interview theme, illustrates students' perceived learning outcomes following Project-Based Learning, which supports the quantitative findings. Pupils often reported gains in professional communication, teamwork, discussion, negotiation, report writing, and presentation abilities. They felt that project activities helped them improve the soft skills necessary for future employment while also allowing them to use English in practical business settings. The results of the questionnaire, which revealed shortcomings in earlier Business English instruction with regard to real-world communication opportunities, are supported by these qualitative findings. While the questionnaire detailed the students' initial difficulties, the results of the interviews show how Project-Based Learning resolved these problems through real-world learning opportunities and group project work. The study's validity is strengthened by the convergence of quantitative and qualitative data, which also shows that project-based learning improves workplace communication skills in addition to language growth.

The current results are in line with earlier research showing that project-based learning improves learner autonomy, critical thinking, communication skills, teamwork, and employability (Guo et al., 2020; Markula & Aksela, 2022; Aksela & Haatainen, 2023; Chen & Yang, 2024). Thus, including real-world project activities into Business English classes is a potential pedagogical strategy for equipping college students to handle the communication demands of contemporary companies.

4. CONCLUSION

Students' opinions of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in a Business English course and its contribution to the development of business communication skills were investigated in this study. The results demonstrate that prior Business English instruction mostly concentrated on grammar and vocabulary, with teacher-centered instruction, little autonomous learning, and little confidence in communicating in English. Students thus had limited chances to practice their English in real-world corporate settings.

Students reported more favourable learning experiences after engaging in project-based learning. Students required learning activities that promoted active engagement and practical communication practice, according to the questionnaire answers. The results of the interviews also showed that students had a favourable opinion of PBL since it offered real-world business-related learning, promoted self-directed learning, raised learning

motivation, assisted them in reflecting on their communication skills, and enhanced their business communication abilities. These results imply that compared to conventional teaching techniques; project-based learning fosters a more meaningful learning environment.

There are various limitations to the current investigation. Only five students participated in the interview, and the study was carried out at a single university's Business English course. Consequently, it is not possible to extrapolate the results to all educational contexts. It is advised that future research evaluate the long-term effects of project-based learning on students' corporate communication abilities using longer research periods and more participants from various universities. To further enhance business English training, future studies might look into how Project-Based Learning can be paired with Self-Directed Learning or digital learning tools.

In addition to English language competency, the current study shows how project-based learning supports the development of essential workplace abilities like cooperation, communication, problem-solving, and responsibility. Through real-world business activities, students get additional opportunities to learn English in circumstances similar to those they would encounter in their future work. Project-based learning can therefore be considered an effective teaching method for business English courses in higher education.

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