

Students' Perceptions of Project-Based Learning in Developing English Negotiation Competence in Business Administration

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Abstract

English negotiation competence is a key requirement for International Business Administration students in preparing for global business competition. Beyond mastering language, negotiation involves persuasive communication, teamwork, and intercultural sensitivity. This study investigates students' perceptions of Project-Based Learning (PBL) as an instructional model for developing negotiation skills in English. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed with 10–15 students enrolled in the English for Business Negotiation course at Politeknik Negeri Bengkalis. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations, and project documentation, and analyzed thematically. Four themes emerged: (1) PBL enhances motivation and engagement through authentic and contextual tasks; (2) it strengthens collaboration and communication by fostering negotiation practice in teams; (3) challenges include limited business vocabulary, time management, and uneven participation; and (4) PBL is perceived as relevant to professional demands, building confidence and intercultural awareness. Overall, students considered PBL beneficial but emphasized the need for scaffolding such as vocabulary support, cross-cultural scenarios, and reflection sessions. The study concludes that PBL contributes to the development of linguistic, discourse, strategic, and intercultural competence while offering practical recommendations for more effective curriculum design in Business English negotiation contexts.

Keywords : Project-Based Learning (PBL); negotiation competence; Business English; students' perceptions; International Business Administration; intercultural communication

1. INTRODUCTION

The ability to negotiate in English has become a fundamental competence for International Business Administration students, especially in the context of globalized and competitive business environments. Negotiation competence requires not only linguistic knowledge but also persuasive strategies, critical thinking, and intercultural awareness (Wills, 2017; Johnson & Johnson, 2018). As English increasingly serves as the lingua franca in international commerce, students are expected to acquire skills that enable them to operate effectively across diverse professional settings (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Brown, 2015). Hence, developing negotiation skills in English is no longer optional but rather a necessity in business education.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) has been recognized as an innovative pedagogical model capable of addressing these needs. PBL engages students through authentic, real-world projects that replicate professional contexts and require active problem solving (Thomas, 2000; Beckett & Slater, 2020). In language learning, particularly English for Specific Purposes (ESP), PBL creates opportunities for learners to integrate communication, collaboration, and critical thinking in ways that go beyond traditional classroom practices (Chi, 2023; Puangpunsi, 2021). Prior studies have demonstrated that PBL not only enhances language competence but also strengthens learner autonomy and motivation, which are essential for long-term success (Bransford et al., 2000; Boud & Feletti, 2019).

In Business English contexts, PBL has been applied to sharpen skills such as business writing, presentations, and negotiation. For instance, Huang (2019) found that students' involvement in project cycles, from planning to final presentation, significantly increased their confidence and practical readiness for workplace demands. Similarly, Haniah (2021) observed

that PBL fosters teamwork, conflict resolution, and the ability to articulate persuasive arguments, which mirror real negotiation processes. These findings suggest that PBL contributes not only to language development but also to the cultivation of professional competencies aligned with the expectations of modern business environments.

Despite these advantages, much of the existing literature has concentrated on the effectiveness of PBL in improving outcomes rather than on students' perceptions (Herlina, 2021). Yet, perceptions play a decisive role in shaping motivation, engagement, and overall attitudes toward learning (Dörnyei, 2005; Ellis, 2016). When students perceive PBL as relevant and beneficial, they are more likely to participate actively and gain meaningful experiences. Conversely, if they perceive it as burdensome or disconnected from their professional needs, its pedagogical impact will be limited (Kolb, 1984; O'Dowd, 2020). This study therefore seeks to explore students' perceptions of PBL in developing English negotiation competence. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically, by enriching discourse on PBL and negotiation pedagogy (Long, 2015), and practically, by informing lecturers in designing curricula that align with the evolving demands of international business.

This study is designed to address the following research questions:

RQ1: How do students perceive their negotiation learning experiences through PBL in terms of motivation, engagement, and confidence?

RQ2: How do students view collaboration dynamics and communication strategies during negotiation projects?

RQ3: What challenges do students encounter (e.g., vocabulary limitations, time management, team roles) in the implementation of PBL?

RQ4: To what extent do students perceive PBL as relevant to professional requirements in the field of International Business Administration?

The contribution of this study is twofold:

(a) Theoretical – enriching the discourse on PBL in the domain of business negotiation by mapping students' perceptions through the lens of negotiation competence (linguistic, discourse, strategic, intercultural).

(b) Practical – offering recommendations for the design of negotiation projects, scaffolding of technical vocabulary, and contextual process–product assessment strategies.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Project-Based Learning (PBL) has long been recognized as a student-centered approach that promotes active learning through authentic and contextual projects. In the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), PBL is reported to enhance communication skills, collaboration, and learner autonomy (Chi, 2023; Puangpunsi, 2021). It encourages students to construct knowledge actively and to link classroom activities with real-world professional contexts (Beckett & Slater, 2020; Thomas, 2000). Such outcomes are consistent with the constructivist paradigm, where learning is seen as an experiential and collaborative process (Kolb, 1984; Bransford et al., 2000).

Within Business English, PBL has been shown to improve students' performance in various domains, including business writing, presentations, persuasion, and negotiation. Huang (2019) demonstrated that projects involving simulated workplace tasks increased students' confidence and provided practical skills applicable to professional contexts. Similarly, Haniah (2021) found that PBL facilitated the development of negotiation strategies and teamwork dynamics. These findings align with broader perspectives in applied linguistics, where authentic tasks are considered effective in bridging the gap between academic learning and workplace requirements (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Long, 2015).

Negotiation competence, in particular, is an area of increasing importance in Business Administration education. Literature on negotiation emphasizes role-play and simulations as common teaching methods (Program on Negotiation [PON], 2025; Wills, 2017). While effective in practicing strategies such as persuasion, concession, and closing, these methods are often conducted in isolation, without integration into larger project cycles. PBL offers the potential to embed negotiation within broader processes, including preparation, execution, and reflection, thereby providing a more holistic learning experience (Johnson & Johnson, 2018; O'Dowd, 2020).

Despite these promising findings, existing research has primarily focused on learning outcomes such as language proficiency and skill development, rather than on students' perceptions of PBL itself (Herlina, 2021; Rosca, 2019). Yet, student perceptions are critical because they influence motivation, engagement, and willingness to sustain learning practices (Dörnyei, 2005; Ellis, 2016). Without understanding how students view the challenges and benefits of PBL, its pedagogical potential cannot be fully realized. This gap highlights the need for research that explores perceptions of PBL specifically in the context of English business negotiation, where linguistic, strategic, and intercultural competences converge.

3. METHOD

This section presents the research methodology, covering the type of study, the setting where it was conducted, the instruments and materials employed, as well as the procedures undertaken, all of which were framed by the theoretical model guiding the investigation.

Research Design

This research employed a qualitative descriptive design to investigate students' perceptions of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in developing negotiation competence in English. The qualitative descriptive method was chosen because it provides thick and detailed descriptions of participants' experiences without imposing rigid theoretical frameworks (Cohen et al., 2018; Ellis, 2016). It is aligned with the constructivist paradigm, which emphasizes the creation of meaning through authentic interaction and reflection (Kolb, 1984; Bransford et al., 2000). In this way, the study captures how learners interpret their involvement in negotiation projects from both personal and collaborative perspectives.

Setting and Participants

The study was carried out at Politeknik Negeri Bengkalis in the International Business Administration program. Participants were students who took the English for Business Negotiation course and had direct experience with PBL.

Purposive sampling was employed to select 10–15 participants. This number was considered sufficient for data saturation while remaining manageable for in-depth qualitative analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The sample size also corresponds with recommendations in applied linguistics research that favor smaller but information-rich samples (Dörnyei, 2005). Students were chosen because they had actively participated in negotiation simulations and were able to reflect on their learning experiences.

Instruments

Data were collected using multiple instruments to strengthen triangulation and reliability. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore students' personal perceptions of PBL, including its advantages, challenges, and relevance to professional contexts. In addition, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held to capture collective perspectives on collaboration, team roles, and conflict resolution.

Classroom observations were carried out during PBL sessions to record students' participation, negotiation strategies, and use of English in real time. Furthermore, supporting

documents—such as negotiation scripts, project reports, and reflective journals—were analyzed to validate and enrich the findings (Haniah, 2021; Herlina, 2021). The use of multiple data sources enabled the study to examine the issue from different angles.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process followed three stages: preparation, implementation, and documentation. In the preparation stage, interview guides, observation protocols, and FGD outlines were developed based on theories of PBL and negotiation pedagogy (Beckett & Slater, 2020; Huang, 2019). During the implementation stage, classroom sessions were observed, interviews were conducted with selected participants, and FGDs were organized. Documentation involved collecting and reviewing students' project outputs, including negotiation texts and reflective notes.

By employing multiple techniques, the study aimed to enhance the validity of the data. The triangulation of interviews, FGDs, observations, and documents created opportunities to confirm consistency across different sources (Rosca, 2019). This comprehensive process helped ensure that the results reflected both individual and group perspectives.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which is suitable for identifying and interpreting recurring patterns within qualitative data sets. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-step framework: familiarization, coding, theme generation, reviewing, defining, and reporting (Cohen et al., 2018; Ellis, 2016). NVivo software was used to manage transcripts, organize codes, and cross-check themes systematically.

Themes were then aligned with the research questions, focusing on motivation, collaboration, linguistic challenges, and professional relevance. This ensured coherence between the empirical findings and theoretical constructs of negotiation competence (Long, 2015). The analysis process was iterative, allowing themes to be refined until they accurately reflected participants' voices.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the study was established through Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through triangulation of data sources and member checking, where participants verified the accuracy of interpretations. Dependability was supported by maintaining an audit trail that documented every research step and decision.

Transferability was achieved by providing thick descriptions of the research context, participants, and setting, enabling readers to assess the applicability of findings to other contexts (Dörnyei, 2005). Confirmability was ensured by keeping reflexive memos that minimized researcher bias and clarified the rationale behind analytical decisions. Together, these strategies reinforced the rigor and trustworthiness of the research.

4. RESULT & DISCUSSION

Results

Thematic analysis of interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations revealed four main themes regarding students' perceptions of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in developing negotiation competence in English. These themes were: (1) motivation and engagement, (2) collaboration and communication, (3) linguistic and technical challenges, and (4) professional relevance and confidence. Each theme is described below with supporting excerpts from participants.

Theme 1: Motivation and Engagement

Students consistently emphasized that PBL enhanced their motivation to participate in class. Unlike conventional lectures, project-based negotiation tasks were perceived as authentic and relevant, which sustained their attention and effort. Several participants indicated that the simulation of real negotiations made them more enthusiastic about learning English. For example, one student reported: “Usually, I get bored with theory, but when there is a project simulation, I feel more excited to join” (S02). These findings echo earlier studies which noted that authenticity and contextualization in PBL foster higher engagement and learning satisfaction (Puangpunsi, 2021; Rosca, 2019).

Theme 2: Collaboration and Communication

Students described significant benefits in working collaboratively during negotiation projects. They reported learning to divide roles, manage conflicts, and support one another in achieving common goals. One student explained: “I learned not to force my opinion but to find a middle ground” (S05). Classroom observations also showed that PBL encouraged greater use of English in group discussions and negotiations, although participation levels varied. This result reinforces findings by Haniah (2021), who argued that PBL fosters authentic teamwork and negotiation strategies that mirror professional contexts.

Theme 3: Linguistic and Technical Challenges

Despite the benefits, students reported challenges, particularly limited vocabulary and unfamiliarity with technical business terms. These linguistic gaps sometimes disrupted the flow of negotiation or made students hesitant to speak. As one participant stated: “Sometimes I know the meaning in Indonesian, but I struggle to express it in English” (S09). In addition, limited preparation time and unequal contributions among team members were also reported as obstacles. Such challenges indicate the need for scaffolding, such as vocabulary modules or glossaries, to support students during PBL tasks (Ellis, 2016; Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Theme 4: Professional Relevance and Confidence

Students perceived PBL as highly relevant to their future careers. Many noted that engaging in simulated negotiations increased their confidence to use English in professional interactions. For instance, one participant commented: “I used to feel nervous speaking English, but after practicing negotiations, I am braver now” (S07). Furthermore, some students reported learning to decline offers politely, an aspect that reflects intercultural sensitivity. These perceptions align with Huang (2019), who demonstrated that PBL provides authentic opportunities for students to develop confidence and pragmatic competence in business contexts.

Discussion

The findings suggest that PBL was generally perceived as a valuable method for enhancing negotiation competence, but students’ experiences also revealed important tensions. First, in terms of motivation, students found that authentic tasks encouraged stronger engagement compared to conventional learning. This supports prior research indicating that contextualized learning tasks foster intrinsic motivation and connect classroom experiences with professional needs (Bransford et al., 2000; Beckett & Slater, 2020). It also highlights how motivation serves as a bridge between linguistic knowledge and strategic competence (Long, 2015).

Second, the role of collaboration emerged as central to students’ experiences. PBL required students to take on negotiation roles, engage in persuasion, and practice concession strategies, which are all elements of discourse competence. These findings are consistent with Rosca (2019) and Haniah (2021), who found that PBL creates authentic environments for

developing communication strategies and teamwork. Importantly, students' reflections show how group dynamics facilitated not only language use but also the acquisition of soft skills essential in professional negotiations.

Third, the linguistic and technical challenges reported suggest that while PBL offers authentic practice, it may also expose gaps in vocabulary and preparation. This aligns with Ellis (2016), who argued that learners in task-based environments often need structured scaffolding to maximize their performance. Without adequate support, students may feel frustrated or demotivated, which can undermine the benefits of active learning approaches (Dörnyei, 2005). Thus, instructors should provide supplementary tools, such as business vocabulary lists or scenario-based prompts, to reduce cognitive load and increase participation.

Finally, students' recognition of PBL's professional relevance and their growing confidence in negotiation contexts is particularly significant. Their reflections demonstrate that PBL facilitated not only linguistic development but also intercultural competence, as they became more aware of politeness strategies and cultural expectations in international business (Wills, 2017; O'Dowd, 2020). These findings confirm Huang's (2019) argument that PBL strengthens students' readiness for real workplace interactions. However, they also underscore the importance of designing projects that explicitly incorporate intercultural dimensions and reflective sessions to consolidate learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2018).

Taken together, these results reinforce the idea that PBL is both motivating and professionally relevant for students, while also highlighting the need for careful instructional design. The combination of authentic engagement, collaborative learning, and scaffolding ensures that students not only perceive PBL positively but also achieve tangible development across linguistic, discourse, strategic, and intercultural dimensions.

5. CONCLUSION

This study explored International Business Administration students' perceptions of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in developing negotiation competence in English. The findings revealed that PBL was generally perceived as engaging, motivating, and professionally relevant. Students highlighted its role in enhancing teamwork and communication while also acknowledging challenges such as limited vocabulary, time constraints, and unequal participation. Overall, PBL contributed to the development of negotiation competence across linguistic, discourse, strategic, and intercultural dimensions, which are essential for global business contexts.

Theoretically, this research enriches the discussion on the integration of PBL into English for Specific Purposes (ESP) by mapping students' perceptions within the framework of negotiation competence. It demonstrates how PBL supports experiential learning, as outlined by Kolb (1984), and aligns with previous studies emphasizing autonomy, collaboration, and authentic learning (Beckett & Slater, 2020; Huang, 2019). Practically, the study suggests that lecturers should design negotiation projects with appropriate scaffolding, including business vocabulary modules, intercultural case scenarios, and structured reflection sessions. These strategies would help maximize the pedagogical impact of PBL while addressing the linguistic and technical challenges faced by learners.

Nevertheless, the study has limitations. As the data were drawn from a single institution with a relatively small number of participants, the findings may not be generalizable to all contexts. Future research could employ mixed methods to triangulate perception data with actual performance outcomes or extend the investigation across multiple institutions. Such efforts would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of PBL in negotiation education. By doing so, future studies could strengthen both the empirical evidence and practical recommendations for the integration of PBL into Business English curricula.

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