



Project-Based Learning in Higher Vocational Education: Bridging English Communication and Digital Marketing Competencies

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study aims to investigate the impact of implementing digital business project-based learning (PjBL) on vocational accounting students' English proficiency, engagement, and collaborative skills. The background of this study is rooted in the urgent need to align English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction with the demands of the modern digital economy, where graduates are expected to possess not only technical accounting expertise but also cross-functional communication and digital literacy skills.

Methodology – This study employed a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design. The sampling design involved purposive sampling, with a total sample size of 33 students from the Managerial Accounting program. The research procedure consisted of an intervention phase where students participated in a digital marketing project, followed by data collection using a closed-ended questionnaire to measure perceptions and semi-structured interviews for in-depth qualitative insights. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to interpret numerical trends and thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns in students' experiences.

Findings –The study reveals that digital business PjBL significantly enhances student motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and communicative confidence, with an overall domain mean score exceeding 3.90. Findings indicate that authentic digital production shifts students from passive learners to active creators, fostering professional communication skills. However, the study also identifies challenges such as logistical coordination and unequal workload distribution within collaborative groups. It is concluded that while PjBL is an effective pedagogical strategy for vocational education, its success relies on structured individual accountability systems and robust instructor scaffolding to balance technical and linguistic demands.

Novelty – The originality of this research lies in its integration of professional digital marketing content creation into the specific context of an Applied Bachelor of Managerial Accounting curriculum. Unlike conventional ESP studies that focus on general communication, this research provides a framework for embedding automated commercial ecosystems and digital literacy into vocational language training, bridging the gap between classroom theory and real-world industrial expectations.

Significance – This study provides valuable insights for ESP practitioners, vocational lecturers, and curriculum developers in higher education institutions. By offering a proven framework for digital project-based instruction, this research serves as a guideline for optimizing lecturer competency development and fostering student readiness for the digitized global workplace.

Keywords: Digital business; English for specific purposes (ESP); Project-based learning; Student engagement; Vocational Education

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1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of the global digital economy has transformed the way businesses communicate and market their products. Corporate communication is no longer dominated by static, text-based interactions; instead, companies increasingly rely on multimedia-driven digital marketing strategies distributed through social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. This transformation has significantly influenced vocational higher education, particularly in polytechnic institutions, where curricula are expected to align closely with current industry demands (Mukul & Büyüközkan, 2023). Recent studies further emphasize that vocational higher education must actively align its ESP instruction with these changing industry expectations, reshaping traditional frameworks to meet modern vocational demands (Anikina et al., 2024; Asonitou, 2022). Consequently, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), especially English for Digital Business, has become an essential professional competency for students in accounting and business-related programs. Modern accounting graduates are no longer evaluated solely based on technical financial skills, but also on their ability to communicate effectively in global digital environments, promote business ideas persuasively, and engage with international audiences through online platforms (Nie & Mastor, 2024). Therefore, vocational English instruction must move beyond traditional grammar-centered teaching and adopt more authentic, technology-integrated learning approaches that connect language use with real business communication practices. Recent studies further emphasize that multimodal digital platforms offer highly versatile tools for enhancing professional communication and active digital interaction within tertiary ESP contexts (Barrot, 2021; Hafner et al., 2023).

One instructional approach widely recognized for bridging classroom learning and professional practice is Project-Based Learning (PjBL). Previous studies have shown that PjBL promotes active participation, collaborative learning, problem-solving skills, and meaningful language use in authentic contexts (Simbolon and Fitria, 2023; Kokotsaki et al., 2016). Within the context of English for Digital Business, PjBL enables students to engage directly in real-world digital marketing activities rather than merely studying business communication theoretically (Almulla, 2020). This approach is particularly relevant in vocational education, where project-based instructional strategies have been consistently proven to boost students' overall communicative competence and speaking skills (Rohmah et al., 2024; Syakur et al., 2020). In addition, Zang et al. (2022) found that student-generated promotional videos on social media encourage deeper language processing, stronger lexical precision, and more authentic communicative performance than conventional textbook-based writing activities. Similarly, Hwang and Chang (2021) demonstrated that video-production-based activities require learners to optimize their speaking performance while carefully managing cognitive load during digital content creation. In this study, second-semester

students of the Digital Business Accounting Study Program participated in a collaborative digital marketing project in which they designed business concepts, created promotional videos, and produced persuasive English captions for social media platforms. Students worked in randomly assigned groups consisting of four to five members, simulating workplace conditions where collaboration often occurs among individuals with different backgrounds, abilities, and communication styles. Through these activities, students were required to simultaneously apply multiple language skills, including writing promotional texts, speaking in video narrations or dubbing, reading market trends, and communicating within teams.

Despite the growing body of research supporting the effectiveness of PjBL in English language learning, limited studies have examined its implementation within authentic, public-facing social media environments in ESP classrooms. Much of the existing literature on business communication and ESP still focuses on collaborative learning through standard computer-supported tools or controlled classroom environments (Carrió-Pastor & Skorczynska, 2015). Relatively few studies investigate how real social media platforms influence students' language production, learning motivation, confidence, and collaborative experiences. Existing studies suggest that digital settings introduce complex affective variables, heavily influencing an individual's willingness to communicate and varying significantly across technology-enhanced project settings (Mulyono et al., 2021; Halim et al., 2023). Publishing work in open digital spheres can create a unique instructional environment where interacting on public networks simultaneously enhances engagement but exposes learners to peer and external scrutiny (Aydin, 2014). Vocational students publishing English content in these digital arenas often experience distinct communication apprehension and heightened anxiety due to public exposure and language accuracy concerns (Gabarre et al., 2016; Mat Husin & Khamis, 2023). In addition, the dynamic nature of multimedia composing introduces complex logistical and instructional challenges rarely discussed in traditional research, such as balancing technical video production with target speaking tasks (Dinh, 2023; Zhang et al., 2021). Furthermore, most previous collaborative learning studies allow students to form their own groups, whereas little attention has been given to randomized group formation and its influence on teamwork dynamics, peer scaffolding, participation, and language anxiety. Recent studies indicate that different grouping arrangements heavily impact student achievement, yet peer interactions can vary widely based on individual roles and structured tasks within the team (Kanika et al., 2022; Strijbos & De Laat, 2010). Randomly assigned digital project teams frequently experience shifting dynamics, requiring systematic tracking of peer feedback to effectively transfer teamwork skills over time (Donia et al., 2018). However, mixed-ability collaborative environments may simultaneously function as critical interactive spaces where distinct patterns of pair interaction and collective scaffolding naturally reduce individual strain and support performance (Storch, 2002).

This study addresses these gaps by examining the implementation of social media-based Project-Based Learning in an English for Digital Business course at a vocational higher education institution. The study specifically investigates students' perceptions across four dimensions: Learning Motivation and Interest, Vocabulary Development and Language Competence, Confidence and Communication, and Learning Experience and Collaboration. By combining quantitative survey data with qualitative student reflections, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how authentic digital business projects shape vocational students' language learning experiences in real social media environments. The findings of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the field of ESP and vocational language education. Theoretically, the study expands current discussions on technology-enhanced PjBL by exploring how authentic digital marketing activities influence

language learning within vocational contexts. Practically, the study offers insights for ESP lecturers, curriculum developers, and vocational institutions regarding the design of engaging, industry-relevant learning activities that integrate language learning, digital communication, and collaborative project work. In addition, the study highlights how authentic social media projects may help students develop not only language competence, but also communication confidence, creativity, teamwork skills, and digital literacy required in contemporary professional environments.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design using an explanatory sequential approach to investigate the impact of social media project-based learning (PjBL) on vocational English for Specific Purposes (ESP) students (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Ivankova et al., 2006). Quantitative data were collected first to measure students' perceptions across four dimensions: learning motivation and interest, vocabulary development and language competence, confidence and communication, and learning experience and collaboration. The quantitative findings were then followed by qualitative data collection through open-ended responses and classroom observations to provide deeper explanations and contextual understanding of the statistical results, aligning with the sequential framework where qualitative data directly helps elaborate on the initial quantitative indicators (Ivankova et al., 2006).

2.2. Participants and Setting

The participants consisted of 33 second-semester students enrolled in the Digital Business Accounting Study Program at a state polytechnic in Indonesia. All participants were taking the compulsory course "English for Digital Business." The students had previously completed general English courses during their first semester; however, they had no formal experience in digital marketing communication, social media content production, or English-based business promotion prior to this study.

2.3. PjBL Intervention and Procedure

The intervention was conducted over six weeks using an authentic Project-Based Learning (PjBL) framework integrated with digital business marketing activities (Simbolon & Fitria, 2023). Students were assigned into groups consisting of four to five members through a randomized digital spinning wheel system to simulate real workplace conditions where team members are not self-selected. The randomized grouping created heterogeneous teams with varying levels of English proficiency, creativity, and technical skills, which heavily influences student achievement and peer interaction experiences in collaborative learning environments (Kanika et al., 2022).

The project implementation consisted of four stages, adapted from standard vocational PjBL frameworks (Kokotsaki et al., 2016; Rohmah et al., 2024). First, students received an introduction to digital business marketing concepts, including target audience analysis, social media marketing strategies, and persuasive communication techniques. Second, each group developed a digital business concept and planned a promotional campaign suitable for social media platforms. Third, students produced digital promotional content in English, including short-form marketing videos, business captions, scripts, and voice-over narrations. During this stage, students were required to apply multiple language skills simultaneously, including writing, speaking, reading, and collaborative communication. Finally, the completed projects were published on public social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube,

allowing students to experience authentic digital communication and professional interaction within multimodal tertiary ESP contexts (Hafner et al., 2023).

2.4. Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected using an online questionnaire consisting of quantitative and qualitative sections. The quantitative section included 18 Likert-scale items measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The items were categorized into four dimensions: Learning Motivation and Interest (Items 1–5), Vocabulary Development and Language Competence (Items 6–10), Confidence and Communication (Items 11–14), and Learning Experience and Collaboration (Items 15–18). This structure builds upon established frameworks designed to assess student engagement, learner autonomy, and peer role dynamics in computer-supported collaborative learning environments (Almulla, 2020; Strijbos & De Laat, 2010).

The qualitative section consisted of four open-ended questions designed to explore students' perceptions and experiences in greater depth. The questions focused on how the digital business project influenced students' motivation, vocabulary development, confidence, communication skills, and collaborative learning experiences. In addition, field observations conducted during the project implementation were used to support the interpretation of students' responses, adhering to triangulation standards in mixed-methods frameworks (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

2.5. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to calculate mean scores and determine the interpretation level for each questionnaire item and domain. The analysis was used to identify students' overall perceptions regarding the implementation of social media project-based learning in the English for Digital Business course. Meanwhile, qualitative data obtained from open-ended responses and field observations were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Student responses were coded, categorized, and grouped into recurring themes related to motivation, language development, communication confidence, collaboration, and learning challenges. The qualitative findings were then integrated with the quantitative results to provide a more comprehensive, cross-verified understanding of students' experiences throughout the project-based learning process (Ivankova et al., 2006).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Learning Motivation and Interest

The quantitative findings indicate strong student support for integrating digital business projects into the English for Digital Business curriculum. As presented in Table 1, the overall domain mean score reached 4.04, demonstrating a high level of student motivation and interest toward project-based digital learning activities.

Table 1 - Student Perceptions on Learning Motivation and Interest (N = 33)

Item	Statement	Mean	Interpretation
1	Learning English through digital business projects is more interesting than conventional classroom learning.	4.00	High
2	Creating business content on social media increases my motivation to learn English.	4.03	High
3	I feel more actively involved in English learning through project-based activities.	4.21	Very High
4	Digital business projects make English learning feel more practical and useful.	4.03	High

5	I enjoy learning English when the learning activities involve creating social media content.	3.93	High
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Among the five indicators, Item 3 obtained the highest mean score ($M = 4.21$), indicating that project-based learning significantly increased students' active involvement in English learning activities. This finding suggests that participating in authentic digital business projects shifted students' roles from passive recipients of information to active participants who were directly engaged in problem-solving, communication, and content production. This result aligns with Almulla (2020), who found that real-world digital learning tasks promote greater learner autonomy, engagement, and participation compared to traditional lecture-centered instruction. Items 2 and 4 also received high mean scores ($M = 4.03$), demonstrating that practical business-oriented activities and hands-on digital content creation positively influenced students' learning motivation. The findings indicate that students were more motivated when English learning was connected to authentic vocational contexts relevant to digital marketing and business communication. This supports the findings of Syakur et al. (2020), who argued that vocational and business students tend to demonstrate stronger engagement when language learning activities simulate real professional tasks and workplace communication demands.

Although Item 5 received the lowest mean score in this domain ($M = 3.93$), the result remained within the "High" category. This slight decrease suggests that while students generally appreciated the use of social media in language learning, a small number of students may still have experienced discomfort or anxiety related to public digital exposure. The use of open-access networking platforms may create additional psychological pressure because students become aware that their language performance can be viewed and evaluated by audiences outside the classroom ecosystem. As noted by Aydin (2014), interactive digital environments can simultaneously stimulate student engagement while generating distinct layers of interpersonal evaluation and anxiety. This finding is further supported by Gabarre et al. (2016), who explained that publishing language content in public digital spheres often introduces an affective trade-off where students must actively navigate performance-related anxiety alongside their instructional tasks.

3.1.1. From Classroom Theory to Authentic Vocational Practice

The high scores for Item 1 ($M = 4.00$) and Item 4 ($M = 4.03$) were strongly supported by the qualitative findings. Many students explicitly contrasted conventional classroom learning with the more practical and engaging nature of digital business projects. One participant stated:

"Learning English through digital business projects feels much more exciting because it is directly practiced in the real world, rather than just being taught as classroom theory."

Another student explained:

"Initially, I regarded English merely as a school subject, but through this project, I have come to realize that English is also crucial in the world of business and employment."

These reflections indicate that students no longer perceived English merely as an academic requirement, but as a functional communication tool relevant to future professional environments. The integration of language learning with authentic business activities appeared to strengthen both instrumental motivation, where students learn English for career-related purposes, and integrative motivation, where learners seek active participation within broader professional and global communication communities. This finding strongly supports

the principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which emphasize contextualized and profession-oriented language instruction. According to Anikina et al. (2024), vocational learners demonstrate stronger engagement when learning activities reflect authentic workplace communication practices and industry expectations. Similarly, Hafner et al. (2023) highlighted that multimodal digital platforms effectively bridge language learning with real-world professional communication, particularly in tertiary ESP contexts. Furthermore, the qualitative responses revealed that students were required to move beyond basic conversational English and engage with persuasive business communication. Students reported that preparing promotional materials required careful vocabulary selection and more professional language use. In vocational accounting and business education, incorporating technology-enhanced project frameworks helps align coursework with automated, digitized commercial ecosystems (Mukul & Büyükožkan, 2023). This active curricular integration matches broader expectations highlighting that contemporary accounting graduates must look beyond traditional technical reporting and develop cross-functional communication abilities to survive in digital industries (Asonitou, 2022; Nie & Mastor, 2024).

3.1.2.Reducing Learning Anxiety through Creative Digital Activities

One of the most notable qualitative findings involved students' emotional responses toward project-based learning. Several students described the learning experience as enjoyable, relaxing, and less monotonous compared to conventional classroom instruction. One participant stated:

"Through project-based learning, I feel the learning process becomes more fun and less monotonous because when I am working on the project, I can learn while 'healing'... it indirectly builds interest."

This concept of “learning while healing” suggests that creative digital activities may reduce the psychological pressure often associated with foreign language learning. Rather than focusing solely on grammatical accuracy or formal assessment, students became engaged in broader creative processes such as video production, visual design, and content creation. Consequently, language learning became integrated into enjoyable and collaborative activities rather than being perceived as an isolated academic task. This finding is consistent with recent research on multimodal and technology-enhanced language learning. Zhang et al. (2022) argued that multimodal digital composing tasks allow learners to develop active creative ownership over their work, shifting their focal point from rigid test performance to immersive digital media creation. Such environments may lower students' affective barriers and increase their willingness to experiment with language use. Similarly, Almulla (2020) emphasized that authentic digital projects increase learner engagement by shifting students from passive recipients of information to active creators of meaningful content. This autonomous architecture significantly increases classroom satisfaction and emotional engagement because students gain greater ownership over the learning process. Supporting this perspective, Zhang et al. (2022) found that multimodal social media tasks such as video scripting, dubbing, and promotional content production redirect learners' attention from formal language anxiety toward immersive communicative task completion.

3.1.3.Contrasting Perspectives: Cognitive Overload and Preference for Conventional Learning

Despite the generally positive findings, several students expressed neutral or less favorable perceptions regarding digital project-based learning. These responses correspond with the slightly lower score obtained for Item 5 ($M = 3.93$). Some students preferred more direct forms of language learning, particularly face-to-face speaking practice and explicit vocabulary instruction. One student stated:

"I am less interested because it is better to learn directly, such as by speaking face-to-face or increasing vocabulary."

Another participant explained:

"Neutral, because sometimes there is English vocabulary that is difficult for me to understand... so it is still neutral for me."

These responses highlight an important contrasting perspective within digital learning environments. Although project-based learning can increase engagement, the combination of technical production demands and language tasks may also create cognitive overload for some learners. Students were required not only to use English, but also to manage video editing, social media platforms, visual design, and content organization simultaneously. This finding aligns with research on video production strategies, where balancing multi-channel media tasks can inadvertently increase students' cognitive load, potentially distracting lower-proficiency learners from the underlying language acquisition goals (Hwang & Chang, 2021). For students with limited vocabulary knowledge or lower English proficiency, balancing technological and linguistic demands may generate frustration rather than motivation. Furthermore, the public nature of social media platforms may intensify pressure because students become aware that their work will be viewed by broader audiences. Mat Husin and Khamis (2023) noted that high communicative demands in professional or public spheres often exacerbate underlying communication apprehension and performance anxiety among less confident learners. As Halim et al. (2023) highlights, technology-enhanced projects induce notable variations in student experience, where open digital workspaces increase real-world relevance but simultaneously amplify affective strain for those struggling with language accuracy. Without sufficient vocabulary preparation or language support prior to project implementation, some students may struggle to fully benefit from project-based digital learning activities.

3.1.4. Peer Scaffolding and Collaborative Motivation

Another important theme emerging from the qualitative findings was the role of peer collaboration in supporting motivation and participation. Several students explained that group work helped them remain motivated because members could support one another throughout the project process. One participant stated:

"...we can teach one another, and whatever our group's shortcomings are, we can complement each other. It also fosters the spirit to be able to use English."

This finding reflects socio-cultural perspectives on collaborative learning, particularly the concept of peer scaffolding, where students develop knowledge and confidence through interaction with peers. In project-based digital learning environments, students naturally exchanged different competencies, including language skills, creative ideas, technical editing abilities, and communication strategies. Almulla (2020) emphasized that collaborative digital learning environments help reduce individual anxiety because students share responsibilities and receive continuous peer support during the learning process. Mulyono et al. (2021) similarly demonstrated that technology-driven collaborative environments play an important role in managing affective variables, helping to sustain students' willingness to communicate through peer-assisted digital networks. In this study, collaboration appeared to create a supportive environment that encouraged students to participate more actively in English communication activities.

However, the findings also suggest that collaborative projects may create challenges related to dependency and unequal participation. Some students appeared to rely heavily on peers with stronger language or technical skills, indicating the need for careful instructor supervision and balanced task distribution. This issue becomes particularly relevant in

randomly assigned groups, where students may experience differences in proficiency, communication style, and work commitment. Storch (2002) argued that randomized group allocation may successfully simulate authentic workplace dynamics, but it frequently uncovers distinct patterns of interaction where unequal technical or linguistic contribution can induce internal group friction. Similarly, Kanika et al. (2022) demonstrated that randomized collaborative grouping often requires explicit instructor scaffolding to prevent high-performing students from carrying disproportionate work burdens while lower-proficiency peers withdraw. Donia et al. (2018) further explained that forced collaboration in project teams requires consistent peer monitoring and structured accountability; without it, participation imbalances occur, leading to a breakdown in the development and equitable transfer of professional teamwork skills. Therefore, while collaborative digital projects effectively increase engagement and motivation, instructors must ensure that all students actively participate and develop individual language competencies throughout the learning process.

3.2. Vocabulary Development and Language Competence

The quantitative findings indicate that students perceived digital business project-based learning as highly beneficial for improving their vocabulary and language competence, with an overall domain mean score of 3.92. As presented in Table 2, all five indicators received positive evaluations, suggesting that the integration of digital marketing content creation into English learning contributed meaningfully to students' linguistic development.

Table 2 - Student Perceptions on Vocabulary Development and Language Competence (N = 33)

Item	Statement	Mean	Interpretation
6	Creating business captions helps improve my English vocabulary.	3.93	High
7	Creating promotional content helps me learn business-related terms in English.	3.96	High
8	I have become more familiar with persuasive language in English through digital business projects.	4.00	High
9	Creating content in English helps improve my writing skills.	3.67	Moderate-High
10	I pay more attention to grammar and word choice when creating English social media content.	4.06	High

Among the five items, Item 10 obtained the highest mean score ($M = 4.06$), indicating that students became more conscious of grammar accuracy and vocabulary selection when producing public-facing digital content. The visibility of social media platforms appeared to encourage students to monitor their language more carefully, particularly when creating captions and promotional materials intended for wider audiences. This heightened sense of accountability stems from students' awareness that their language production in open digital workspaces represents both personal and professional credibility. This pattern aligns with Almulla (2020), who emphasized that public-facing digital tasks increase students' motivation to produce more accurate language because learners become aware that their work is visible to peers and external audiences. Meanwhile, Items 6, 7, and 8 also received high scores, demonstrating that the projects effectively supported the development of business-related vocabulary and persuasive communication skills. In contrast, Item 9 received the lowest mean score within this domain ($M = 3.67$), although it still remained within the moderate-to-high category. This finding suggests that while students perceived clear improvements in vocabulary acquisition, persuasive language use, and grammatical awareness, they were

less certain about the project's contribution to broader writing competence, particularly in relation to complex or academic writing structures.

3.2.1. Public Exposure and Linguistic Accuracy

The qualitative findings strongly reinforce the statistical trend observed in Item 10. Many students explained that producing content for public social media platforms increased their awareness of grammatical correctness and appropriate vocabulary use. One participant stated:

"When making captions, we learn to choose words that catch buyers' attention and check so that the grammar isn't wrong."

Another student explained:

" When creating content, I must select appropriate vocabulary, compose engaging sentences, and use correct grammar so the audience can understand the message clearly."

These responses suggest that the authentic and public nature of digital business projects encouraged students to become more attentive to linguistic accuracy. Unlike conventional classroom assignments that are typically viewed only by lecturers, social media content potentially reaches broader audiences, creating an external pressure for language quality. However, publishing language content in public digital spheres often introduces an affective trade-off where students must actively navigate performance-related anxiety alongside their instructional tasks (Gabarre et al., 2016). The need to maintain professionalism in online business promotion appears to have pushed students to review and refine their writing repeatedly to avoid public errors. This interactive digital ecosystem can simultaneously stimulate student engagement while generating distinct layers of interpersonal evaluation and anxiety (Aydin, 2014). Under these conditions, the desire to project a competent professional image on social networks acts as a driving force that compels learners to focus heavily on grammar, sentence structure, and persuasive vocabulary.

3.2.2. Vocabulary Expansion through Contextualized ESP Practices

The findings from Items 6, 7, and 8 indicate that the digital business projects significantly contributed to students' vocabulary development, particularly in relation to business and marketing terminology. Students frequently reported that creating promotional content required them to explore new vocabulary, persuasive expressions, and professional communication styles. One student explained:

"...I became more aware and selective in choosing vocabulary that is suitable for the business world and is persuasive in nature."

Another participant stated:

"Starting from brainstorming ideas, writing scripts, then drafting captions... during that writing process, new words are occasionally discovered, expanding our vocabulary dictionary."

These findings reflect the core principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), where language learning becomes more meaningful when vocabulary is learned within authentic professional contexts. According to Nation (2001), vocabulary retention is more effective when learners repeatedly use language in purposeful and contextualized tasks rather than through isolated memorization. Similarly, Hafner et al. (2023) highlighted that multimodal digital platforms provide highly contextualized opportunities for ESP learners to practice professional communication while simultaneously developing vocabulary and media literacy skills. In this study, students were not simply learning vocabulary lists; instead, they actively applied business terminology while designing promotional campaigns, creating marketing captions,

and producing video scripts. This contextual exposure appears to have strengthened both receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge. Furthermore, Kuswanto (2024) automotive and digital study frameworks argue that integrating digital business projects into accounting education helps students connect technical language learning with real professional communication practices required in the digital economy. Several students also indicated that the projects stimulated higher-order thinking skills such as creativity, analysis, and strategic communication. One participant noted:

"Because it trains our logical thinking and forces us to think about how a piece of content can be interesting and provide added value..."

This finding suggests that the project-based activities supported not only language acquisition but also cognitive development relevant to vocational education. Vocational learners demonstrate stronger engagement when learning activities reflect authentic workplace communication practices and industry expectations (Anikina et al., 2024). The integration of creativity, problem-solving, and persuasive communication reflects the interdisciplinary competencies increasingly required to connect technical language learning with real professional communication practices in modern commercial ecosystems.

3.2.3. Contrasting Perspectives: Limitations of Short-Form Digital Writing

Despite the generally positive findings, several responses revealed important limitations regarding the effectiveness of short-form digital content in developing broader writing competence. This concern is reflected in the lower score for Item 9 ($M = 3.67$). Some students perceived that creating captions and promotional texts improved practical communication skills but did not substantially strengthen more formal or complex writing abilities. One participant stated:

"It is less helpful for me because I have previously taken speaking courses, so I am already accustomed to speaking English."

This response indicates that students with prior English training or different learning preferences may perceive the benefits of project-based digital tasks differently. It also suggests that short-form social media writing may not fully support the development of advanced academic or professional writing skills, such as extended business reports or analytical essays. This finding supports concerns raised in previous studies regarding the limitations of project-based and task-based learning approaches. Syakur et al. (2020) argued that although digital communication projects improve communicative fluency and practical language use, they may not sufficiently develop complex grammatical structures or formal academic discourse unless accompanied by explicit writing instruction. Additionally, several students acknowledged that the technical demands of video production occasionally shifted their focus away from genuine language processing toward memorization strategies. One participant explained:

"...in video production, we indirectly have to be able to memorize and know the English words along with their meanings."

This finding suggests that some students relied heavily on script memorization in order to complete the video tasks successfully. This pattern reflects the challenges of video-production-based tasks, where balancing multi-channel media elements can inadvertently increase students' cognitive load, potentially distracting lower-proficiency learners from the underlying language acquisition goals (Hwang & Chang, 2021). When students become overly focused on production quality, editing, and platform-specific requirements, they may resort to surface-level performance strategies like mechanical memorization rather than deep language processing. Therefore, while digital marketing projects effectively increase communicative fluency and vocabulary expansion, integrating them with structured language instruction and

formal writing activities is essential to ensure a balanced development of comprehensive academic and professional writing competence.

3.3. Confidence and Communication

The quantitative findings demonstrate that the digital business project-based learning activities positively influenced students' confidence and communication abilities in English, with an overall domain mean score of 4.01. As shown in Table 3, students generally perceived the project as effective in encouraging them to actively communicate and use English in authentic contexts.

Table 3 - Student Perceptions on Confidence and Communication (N = 33)

Item	Statement	Mean	Interpretation
11	Digital business projects increase my confidence in using English.	4.00	High
12	I feel more confident expressing ideas in English after participating in social media projects.	3.90	High
13	Creating digital content encourages me to communicate more actively in English.	4.03	High
14	Creating promotional videos helps improve my English speaking skills.	4.12	Very High

Among the four indicators, Item 14 obtained the highest mean score ($M = 4.12$), indicating that students strongly perceived promotional video production as an effective medium for improving speaking skills. Items 11 and 13 also received high scores, suggesting that the digital business projects increased students' confidence and encouraged more active communication in English. Although Item 12 recorded the lowest mean score within this domain ($M = 3.90$), the result still reflects a positive perception overall. This slight difference suggests that while students felt encouraged to practice speaking and communication, expressing original and spontaneous ideas in English remained challenging for some learners. These findings support previous studies emphasizing that authentic project-based communication activities help learners become more actively engaged in language use and develop greater communicative confidence in ESP contexts (Kokotsaki et al., 2016; Simbolon and Fitria, 2023).

3.3.1. Reducing Communication Anxiety through Active Production

The qualitative findings strongly support the quantitative results, particularly regarding the positive influence of promotional video production on students' speaking confidence. Many students explained that the project required them to actively use English, even when they initially felt anxious or insecure. One student stated:

"Whether I want to or not, I have to project my voice when dubbing or making the video."

Another participant explained:

"Before, I was often afraid of making mistakes when speaking English. But because we were 'forced' to be active in making content and presentations for this project, that fear slowly disappeared."

These findings indicate that the project functioned as a practical communicative environment that pushed students to move beyond passive language learning. The necessity to complete real digital marketing tasks encouraged students to practice English not merely as a classroom exercise, but as a functional, goal-oriented communication tool. This result aligns with Almulla (2020), who found that project-based digital communication tasks reduce

language anxiety by shifting learners' focus away from a strict fear of making grammatical mistakes toward achieving broader communicative and collaborative objectives. Recent studies also emphasize that multimedia-driven projects offer flexible tertiary ESP frameworks to practice professional communication while simultaneously developing language fluency (Hafner et al., 2023). By engaging with diverse media channels, students are provided with more opportunities for intensive oral production, which directly contributes to enhanced linguistic output and communicative readiness.

3.3.2. Digital Media as a Transitional Space for Speaking Confidence

An important qualitative finding emerged regarding the role of cameras and digital recording in helping students develop confidence gradually. Several students reported that speaking through recorded media felt less intimidating than direct public speaking. One participant stated:

"True, because we are demanded to use English in public spaces, which ultimately trained my mental stamina... we practice speaking in front of the camera, knowing that the video will be watched by many people."

Another student explained:

"That experience made me braver to use English even when I was in crowded places surrounded by many tourists... I became more confident to try."

These responses suggest that digital media functioned as an intermediate communication space that helped students build confidence progressively. Unlike spontaneous face-to-face speaking situations, video recording allows students to repeat, revise, and refine their oral performance before publication. This flexibility appears to reduce immediate communicative pressure while increasing productive speaking opportunities. This finding is consistent with recent research on video-production-based learning strategies, which indicates that structured digital media tasks allow students to optimize their actual speaking performance while managing their overall cognitive load (Hwang & Chang, 2021). Furthermore, integrating short video projects has been shown to produce tangible improvements in students' individual speaking outputs and performance quality (Dinh, 2023). The public nature of social media platforms in this study also created authentic communicative purposes for students, driving them to balance the visual appeal of their work with structured, serious language production.

3.3.3. Contrasting Perspectives: Unequal Participation and Lingering Insecurity

Despite the positive overall findings, several qualitative responses revealed important challenges related to group dynamics and individual language anxiety. These concerns are reflected in the slightly lower score for Item 12 ($M = 3.90$), indicating that not all students experienced the same level of confidence growth. One significant issue involved unequal task distribution within groups. Some students explained that they tended to choose non-speaking roles, such as writing captions or editing videos, rather than participating in oral communication tasks. One participant stated:

"Maybe not so much for the video project, because in my group I focused more on creating captions, which relates more to writing than speaking."

This finding suggests that collaborative digital projects may unintentionally allow certain students to avoid speaking practice if group responsibilities are not carefully managed. Similar concerns have been identified in collaborative learning research, which argues that although project-based frameworks significantly improve students' practical communication skills, they require explicit individual accountability to ensure all group members participate equally in target language tasks (Syakur et al., 2020). Storch (2002) further noted that randomized group

formation, while beneficial for simulating authentic workplace collaboration, can expose distinctive patterns of interaction where discrepancies in confidence and technical skills can lead to internal group friction or uneven distribution of labor. In addition, several students acknowledged that they still experienced insecurity when speaking English due to limited vocabulary and pronunciation difficulties. One participant explained:

"I am still less confident because I am still in the process of learning to speak English."

Another student stated:

"Still a bit shy, because I still feel insecure when using English due to the many vocabulary words I do not know and the fear of mispronouncing words."

These responses indicate that confidence development is closely connected to students' actual language proficiency levels. For learners who still struggle with foundational vocabulary mastery or pronunciation, participating in public digital projects may create additional affective strain rather than immediately eliminating anxiety. This finding supports Anikina et al. (2024), who argued that communication anxiety in foreign language learning is often linked to underlying linguistic limitations and unaligned industry expectations rather than purely psychological factors. When publishing work on public digital platforms, these underlying limitations can interact with external social pressures, heavily influencing an individual's immediate willingness to communicate (Mulyono et al., 2021). Publishing language content in open spaces often creates an affective trade-off where lower-proficiency students struggle to balance performance-related anxiety with their immediate technical duties (Gabarre et al., 2016). Interestingly, one student warmth-mapped that natural communication habits remained more important than project participation alone:

"Not really, because what actually makes me confident is being accustomed to speaking English naturally."

This response suggests that while project-based learning can create valuable speaking opportunities, continuous conversational exposure and routine speaking practice remain essential for long-term confidence development. Overall, the findings demonstrate that digital business projects effectively enhanced students' confidence and communication skills, particularly through promotional video production and authentic digital interaction. However, the findings also reveal the importance of balanced task distribution, structured speaking opportunities, and additional language support for lower-proficiency learners.

3.4. Learning Experience and Collaboration

To examine students' perceptions regarding collaborative learning and project-based learning experiences, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted on Items 15–18. As presented in Table 4, the findings demonstrate that students generally perceived digital business project-based learning as highly engaging, collaborative, and beneficial for their overall learning experience.

Table 4 - Student Perceptions on Learning Experience and Collaboration (N = 33)

Item	Statement	Mean	Interpretation
15	Learning English through digital business projects is more interesting than conventional classroom learning.	3.75	High
16	Creating business content on social media increases my motivation to learn English.	3.95	High
17	I feel more actively involved in English learning through project-based activities.	4.03	High

18	I enjoy learning English when the learning activities involve creating social media content.	4.24	Very High
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The overall domain mean score of 3.99 indicates that students responded positively toward the collaborative and experiential dimensions of the project. Among the four indicators, Item 18 obtained the highest mean score ($M = 4.24$), suggesting that integrating social media content creation into English learning significantly increased students' enjoyment and reduced classroom monotony. Item 17 also received a high score ($M = 4.03$), indicating that students felt more actively involved when English learning was contextualized through authentic digital business activities. Meanwhile, Item 15 recorded the lowest mean score within this domain ($M = 3.75$), although it still remained within the "High" category. These findings are consistent with Kokotsaki et al. (2016) and Simbolon and Fitria (2023), who highlighted that authentic project-based learning environments increase learner engagement. However, as noted by Stribos and De Laat (2010), such environments simultaneously present significant challenges regarding teamwork management and the necessity for clear individual accountability systems. Furthermore, Carrió-Pastor and Skorczynska (2015) emphasized that while collaborative technologies facilitate communication, they also require students to navigate complex coordination tasks that can influence the overall perceived effectiveness of the learning process.

3.4.1. Enhancing Engagement through Authentic Project-Based Learning

The highest mean score in this section was obtained by Item 18 ($M = 4.24$), indicating that project-based learning significantly increased students' enjoyment during English learning activities. The qualitative findings strongly reinforce this result. Many students described the learning process as enjoyable, interactive, and emotionally engaging because the project activities extended beyond conventional classroom instruction. One participant stated:

"SO MUCH FUN!! ...During video production, we really enjoyed ourselves because we got to visit places we had never been before and relieve stress."

Another student explained:

"Much more enthusiastic because the production process was fast-paced... and it also doubled as a mini-getaway/healing session."

These findings suggest that integrating English learning with creative digital production activities generated positive emotional experiences that enhanced student engagement. Rather than perceiving English as a stressful academic subject, students experienced language learning as a collaborative and meaningful activity connected to real-life contexts. This aligns with Almulla (2020), who demonstrated that project-based learning significantly enhances student engagement and autonomy by providing a more relevant and enjoyable learning experience than traditional methods. Furthermore, Hafner et al. (2023) emphasized that the use of multimodal digital platforms in tertiary ESP contexts provides learners with a sense of agency, as they perceive these tasks as highly relevant to their professional development and daily digital communication habits. In addition, several students highlighted the social benefits of working collaboratively with classmates they rarely interacted with previously. One participant stated:

"Through this project, I was able to interact more with classmates whom I rarely worked with before, and surprisingly we built a very good relationship."

This finding indicates that the randomized grouping system successfully encouraged broader peer interaction and social bonding among students. In vocational education settings,

such collaborative experiences are vital because they simulate professional workplace environments where individuals must cooperate with diverse team members. These findings are consistent with Kokotsaki et al. (2016), who emphasized that authentic and meaningful projects promote deeper learner engagement as students actively apply knowledge to practical tasks. In addition, Storch (2002) noted that randomized group allocation may strengthen workplace readiness because students learn to negotiate communication styles and responsibilities with unfamiliar peers, which is a core requirement in professional environments.

3.4.2. Peer Scaffolding and Collaborative Skill Development

Items 16 and 17 also received high evaluations, indicating that collaborative digital business projects increased students' motivation and active involvement in English learning. The qualitative responses revealed that group collaboration created opportunities for peer scaffolding, where students supported one another based on their respective strengths and abilities. One student explained:

"We could brainstorm creative ideas together. Friends who were better at English helped correct our grammar and pronunciation."

Another participant stated:

"The benefit I felt was that we could understand each other's weaknesses as group members so that moving forward, we could cover for those shortcomings."

These findings demonstrate that collaborative learning allowed students to exchange knowledge and develop complementary skills throughout the project process. Students with stronger English proficiency often assisted peers with language accuracy, while those with better technical or creative abilities contributed to video editing, design, or content production. This collaborative dynamic reflects Vygotsky's socio-cultural learning theory, particularly the concept of peer scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where students develop new competencies through interaction and support from more capable peers. Similarly, Syakur et al. (2020) emphasized that collaborative project-based learning environments encourage communicative interaction, teamwork, and shared problem-solving skills, which are highly relevant for vocational and professional contexts. Moreover, the interdisciplinary nature of the project enabled students to combine English communication with digital marketing, creativity, and multimedia production. Such integration reflects the competencies increasingly required in modern workplaces, where communication skills are closely connected with digital literacy and teamwork abilities. These interdisciplinary demands are consistent with the findings of Anikina et al. (2024), who argued that aligning ESP instruction with industry expectations requires vocational higher education to implement frameworks that integrate professional language use with practical, technology-driven workplace tasks that are difficult to achieve through conventional classroom instruction alone.

3.4.3. Contrasting Perspectives: Coordination Challenges, Unequal Participation, and Technical Difficulties

Despite the generally positive findings, several students reported challenges related to coordination, unequal participation, and technical difficulties during project implementation. These concerns help explain why Item 15 received the lowest mean score in this domain. One major issue involved scheduling and coordination among group members. Several students explained that arranging meetings and managing responsibilities became difficult because some members had different schedules or work commitments. One participant stated:

"The challenges were differences of opinion and difficulty arranging discussion schedules due to each member's individual schedule."

Another student explained:

"The challenge was mostly about time, because some team members attend classes while working."

These responses indicate that collaborative project-based learning requires significant coordination outside the classroom. This finding aligns with Carrió-Pastor and Skorczynska (2015), who argued that complex collaborative digital projects may create logistical burdens that interfere with the learning process if students possess varying levels of commitment and availability. Another important issue concerned unequal participation within groups. Several students reported frustration regarding members who contributed minimally. One participant stated:

"However, one of the challenges I experienced was that there were group members who lacked participation in the project... other members had to work more."

Another student commented:

"...the challenge was group members who were difficult to cooperate with because they would go missing in action (MIA)."

These findings reflect common challenges identified in collaborative learning literature, particularly regarding unequal workload distribution in group-based assignments. According to Anikina et al. (2024), collaborative projects may create imbalance when individual contributions are not clearly monitored or evaluated, resulting in dissatisfaction among more active group members. In addition to social challenges, students also experienced technical difficulties during the project implementation. Some participants mentioned problems related to video editing, software usage, and copyright restrictions on social media platforms. One student stated:

"The challenge I experienced was when posting the video on TikTok; the song used hit a copyright strike, so we had to find another song..."

Another participant explained:

"...we all didn't really know how to edit videos, so you could say we became impromptu editors."

These responses demonstrate that digital business projects involve not only language learning but also technical and multimedia problem-solving. While these experiences may strengthen students' digital literacy, they may also increase cognitive load and distract attention from language learning objectives. Similar concerns were highlighted by Hwang & Chang (2021), who noted that complex multimedia production tasks may overwhelm learners when technical problem-solving overshadows language practice. In addition, Kanika et al. (2022) emphasized that collaborative digital projects often require students to balance linguistic, technological, and organizational responsibilities simultaneously, which may increase learning pressure if adequate instructional support is not provided. Overall, the findings indicate that digital business project-based learning created highly engaging and collaborative experiences. These findings are consistent with Almulla (2020), who found that authentic digital collaboration enhances learner engagement and communicative participation in ESP contexts. Likewise, Syakur et al. (2020) argued that project-based digital learning environments effectively support vocational students' development of communication, teamwork, and workplace-related competencies. Therefore, instructors implementing similar projects should carefully structure group responsibilities, provide clear individual accountability systems, and offer technical guidance to ensure that collaborative digital projects remain balanced and supportive of language learning objectives.

4. Conclusions

This study highlights the potential of social media-based Project-Based Learning (PjBL) as an effective instructional approach in vocational ESP education. By integrating authentic digital business activities into English learning, the project enabled students to connect language use with real-world communication practices relevant to contemporary digital industries. The findings suggest that authentic social media tasks not only promote language engagement, but also support the development of professional communication, collaboration, and digital literacy skills. The study further contributes to ESP and vocational education research by demonstrating how public-facing digital projects create meaningful learning experiences beyond traditional classroom simulations. At the same time, the findings emphasize the importance of balanced instructional support to address challenges related to language anxiety, technical demands, and collaborative dynamics. Overall, this research reinforces the value of contextualized, industry-oriented learning environments in preparing vocational students for modern professional communication contexts.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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