



# Students' Perceived Challenges and Benefits of Integrating Project-Based Learning into English for Specific Purposes Classes

Han Thi Hong Nhung<sup>1\*</sup>, Le Van Tuyen<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Binh Duong Economics and Technology University, Vietnam

<sup>2</sup>HUTECH University, Vietnam

**\*Corresponding Authors:** Han Thi Hong Nhung, Binh Duong Economics and Technology University, Vietnam

**Abstract:** English as a foreign language (EFL) educators have explored various teaching methods to enhance English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction, focusing recently on project-based learning (PBL) and cooperative learning. This study examines EFL students' perceptions of the challenges and benefits of integrating PBL into ESP (Business English) classes to understand their viewpoints on PBL within a specific context. The study was conducted at a college in Vietnam with the participation of 70 students who completed an ESP course. The study employed a mixed methods research design to gather both qualitative and quantitative data through a questionnaire and interviews. For data analysis, descriptive statistics and content analysis were employed. The findings indicate that students faced challenges related to teachers, themselves, and the learning environment. Despite these challenges, PBL integration brought numerous benefits related to content and language knowledge, language skills and workplace skills. The study offers recommendations for both EFL teachers and students to improve the effectiveness of ESP instruction.

**Keywords:** Challenges, Benefits, Project-Based Learning, English For Specific Purposes, Vietnamese context

## 1. INTRODUCTION

English as a foreign language (EFL) educator bear the exciting yet challenging responsibility of facilitating students' acquisition of language skills and workplace skills, aiming to enhance their abilities for future careers. One effective method used to accomplish this is project-based learning (PBL) which is described by Blumenfeld et al. (1991) as a comprehensive approach engaging students in real-world problem investigations. PBL organizes learning around projects, involving complex tasks that require design, problem-solving, decision-making, and investigative activities (Thomas, 2000; Jones et al., 2009; Ngeow & Kong, 2001). This method shifts the focus from teacher-led instruction to student-centered learning, fostering autonomy and responsibility (El-Shaer & Gaber, 2014). In PBL, students work independently or in small groups, promoting active and collaborative learning. The teacher's role transitions from being the primary source of knowledge to a facilitator or guide. This shift reduces reliance on traditional teaching methods like lectures and discussions, promoting active learning and intrinsic motivation, as students are engaged in meaningful projects that capture their interests (Ngeow & Kong, 2001). Furthermore, studies have shown that PBL helps develop critical thinking skills, where students conceptualize, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information (Sonmez & Lee, 2003).

PBL in ESP classes offers significant benefits and presents various challenges. According to Thomas (2000), PBL enriches business-specific vocabulary, fostering a deep understanding crucial for effective communication. It allows students to pragmatically apply specialized knowledge, bridging theory and practice. Continuous use of English in PBL settings refines grammatical skills, ensuring meaningful application and better retention. Bell (2010) highlights that PBL enhances listening, reading, and writing skills through engagement with real-world texts and discussions. PBL also develops workplace-related skills like adaptability, leadership, problem-solving, teamwork, and professional confidence, essential for dynamic environments (Blumenfeld et al., 1991). However, challenges include balancing guidance and autonomy for teachers, adapting to facilitative roles, and possessing content knowledge (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). Students struggle with project requirements,

time management, and decision-making, especially with lower English proficiency (Thomas, 2000; Stoller, 2006). Context-related issues like aligning curricula, resource availability, and fostering supportive environments further complicate PBL integration (Stoller, 2006; Johnson, 2016).

Integrating PBL into English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, particularly Business English, is beneficial as it helps students develop essential communication skills for occupational settings. According to Gatehouse (2001), effective communication in a profession involves using specific jargon and general academic skills. However, challenges such as understanding specialized terminology and dealing with large class sizes, as noted by Nguyen Thi Chau Ngan (2011), can hinder effective ESP instruction. Studies by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Swales (1990), Dudley-Evans and John (1998), and Tabatabaei and Mokhtari (2014) highlight issues like specialized vocabulary and the need for subject-specific knowledge in teaching ESP.

Understanding and addressing the specific challenges of PBL in ESP contexts can promote evidence-based practices for integrating PBL into similar educational settings. For teachers, adapting teaching strategies and classroom management techniques based on these findings can improve student engagement and learning outcomes. Understanding the benefits of PBL helps students navigate and maximize learning opportunities, enhancing their competence in business English. Therefore, this study investigates EFL students' perceptions of the challenges and benefits of integrating PBL into ESP classes. It is expected that the study's implications are valuable for educators and administrators aiming to enhance ESP instruction. The current study attempted to address the following two research questions:

- a) What do EFL students perceive as challenges of integrating PBL into ESP classes?
- b) What do EFL students perceive as benefits of integrating PBL into ESP classes?

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

### 2.1. Participants

A cohort of 70 second-year students enrolling in the Department of Business Management at Binh Duong Vocational Training Center for Technology Management (BVTCTM), Vietnam participated in the study. They were purposely selected from three ESP classes. Their ages ranged from 19 to 20 years; they constituted a gender distribution of 53% male and 47% female. Their homogenous English proficiency levels, as indicated by entrance examination scores, corresponded to an A2 proficiency level in alignment with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

### 2.2. Research Instruments

As an integral component of this investigation, both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed to delve into students' perceptions concerning the challenges they confronted and the benefits they derived when they engaged in project work in the ESP classes. The questionnaire and semi-structured interviews served as the designated tools for data collection. The questionnaire, crafted for its ease and cost-effectiveness (Griffie, 2018), had three main sections. The first section collected demographic information with five items covering gender, age, years of learning English, prior PBL experience, and familiarity with PBL. The second section, with 25 items, assessed challenges in PBL within ESP classes, focusing on teacher, student, and context-related challenges. The last section with 21 items evaluated benefits like language skills and workplace-related abilities. Responses were measured on a four-point Likert scale. Additionally, semi-structured interviews with 10 students used three questions to explore PBL challenges, benefits, and students' interest in advanced courses, providing in-depth insights (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003).

### 2.3. Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire administered to 70 second-year English major students. Prior permission was obtained from the Board of Directors, and students were informed about the study's purpose. After refining the questionnaire through a pilot study, students were briefed on how to complete it with an estimated time of 15-20 minutes. Qualitative data were gathered via semi-structured interviews with 10 volunteer students. The interviews were conducted in Vietnamese to ensure clarity and comfort. These interviews aimed to delve deeper into students' experiences with PBL in Business English classes, focusing on the challenges and benefits. The

responses were recorded, transcribed, and analysed for recurring themes and insights.

Data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of students' viewpoints. Quantitative data were processed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 26.0 for Windows, involving data entry, cleaning, and descriptive statistics to summarize key features such as means and standard deviation. Mean scores and standard deviations were interpreted as: strongly disagree (1.00-1.75), disagree (1.76-2.50), agree (2.51-3.25), and strongly agree (3.26-4.00). Simultaneously, qualitative data from the interviews underwent content analysis. Transcribed data were systematically coded to identify recurring words, phrases, and concepts. This process uncovered the depth and complexity of students' insights regarding PBL. The interviewees were coded as S1...to S10. Triangulation was employed to cross-verify qualitative data with quantitative results, ensuring the study's robustness.

**3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**3.1. Students' Perceived Challenges of Integrating Project-Based Learning into ESP Classes.**

To address research question 1 concerning challenges students faced in the integration of PBL into ESP classes, data collected from a questionnaire and interviews are displayed in order in the following subsections. Quantitative data are shown in tables and interpreted first, then qualitative data are presented.

*3.1.1. Teacher-Related Challenges*

An in-depth examination of the data presented in Table 4.1 unveils nuanced insights into teacher-related challenges.

**Table1.** *Descriptive Statistics of Teacher-Related Challenges*

No	Items	N	M	SD
1	The guidance provided by the teacher in project-based learning for English for Business is clear and effective.	70	3.01	.732
2	The teacher's attitudes towards project-based learning positively influenced my learning experience in English for Business.	70	2.73	.962
3	The teacher demonstrates capability in instructing how to conduct project-based activities in English for Business.	70	2.74	.958
4	The teacher possesses sufficient knowledge of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) relevant to Business.	70	2.69	.971
5	The teacher assesses students' work effectively in English for Business.	70	2.83	.851
<b>Total</b>		70	2.80	.894

The data in Table 1 reveal that over half of the students did not find the teacher to be a significant challenge in their ESP classes with PBL integration, with a mean score of 2.80 (SD = 0.89). Most students agreed that the teacher provided effective guidance in PBL (M = 3.01, SD = 0.732), although the standard deviation indicates variability in perceptions. Additionally, slightly over half felt that teachers' positive attitudes influenced their learning (M = 2.73, SD = 0.962), reflecting a range of teacher attitudes towards PBL from enthusiasm to skepticism. Only slightly more than half of the students believed the teacher was capable of instructing project-based activities (M = 2.74, SD = 0.958), and even fewer thought the teacher had sufficient knowledge of Business English (M = 2.69, SD = 0.971). Over half felt the teacher assessed their work effectively (M = 2.83, SD = 0.851), though not all agreed on the assessment methods' effectiveness.

Qualitative data from interviews further illuminated these challenges. Students reported difficulties understanding rapid or complex instructions. One student mentioned, "*The teachers spoke fast, and I had trouble catching every word. It would have helped if they spoke a bit slower or repeated important information*" (S4). Other students struggled with understanding project guidelines, as one expressed, "*Understanding the project guidelines was hard for me. I wished there were more examples or visual aids*" (S5). These insights suggest a need for clearer instructions and better support to enhance student engagement and comprehension in PBL environments.

3.1.2. Student-Related Challenges

**Table2.** Descriptive Statistics of Student-Related Challenges

No	Items	N	M	SD
6	Students find it challenging to clearly understand the requirements of a project in English for Business.	70	3.31	.603
7	Students have trouble planning and organizing tasks.	70	3.31	.603
8	As an English for Business student, managing time for project-related tasks is a challenge.	70	3.31	.603
9	The students have a difficult time prioritizing tasks and activities within project-based learning.	70	3.31	.578
10	The student finds it challenging to express ideas clearly in English during project-based learning.	70	3.34	.587
11	Students have difficulty giving and receiving feedback in English.	70	3.30	.645
12	Making decisions in uncertain situations within project contexts is challenging for students.	70	3.30	.645
13	It is difficult for students to take initiative and assume responsibilities in project work.	70	3.31	.649
14	Students have difficulty adapting to changes or unforeseen challenges during project-based learning.	70	3.36	.591
15	It is difficult for students to set and manage personal goals within the scope of English for business projects.	70	3.37	.569
16	Students have difficulty managing their time effectively and planning projects independently.	70	3.37	.569
<b>Total</b>		70	3.32	.603

The data in Table 2 show that students face moderate difficulty with ESP tasks, with mean scores from 3.30 to 3.37. Item 6 (M=3.31, SD=0.603) reveals challenges in understanding project requirements. Item 7 (M=3.31, SD=0.603) indicates struggles with planning and organizing tasks. Time management difficulties are reflected in item 8 (M=3.31, SD=0.603), while prioritizing tasks is highlighted in item 9 (M=3.31, SD=0.578).

Expressing ideas in English is challenging, as shown by item 10 (M=3.34, SD=0.587), and communication issues in giving and receiving feedback are indicated by item 11 (M=3.30, SD=0.645). Decision-making in uncertain situations is difficult (item 12, M=3.30, SD=0.645), and taking initiative in projects is also a challenge (item 13, M=3.31, SD=0.649). Adapting to changes (item 14, M=3.36, SD=0.591) and setting personal goals (item 15, M=3.37, SD=0.569) are significant hurdles.

Qualitative data corroborate these findings, with students reporting issues due to limited English proficiency and knowledge. Challenges in teamwork and communication are also noted. As highlighted by S6: "In group activities, it was challenging to coordinate with my teammates. Expressing my thoughts and understanding theirs was sometimes confusing". This points to the need for enhanced training in collaborative skills and perhaps more structured formats for group discussions that allow for equitable participation and clearer communication. Incorporating these insights into PBL strategies involves explicit guidance, repetition, and varied materials to address these specific challenges, enhancing PBL's effectiveness in ESP settings.

3.1.3. Context-related challenges

**Table3.** Descriptive Statistics of Context-Related Challenges

No	Items	N	M	SD
17	The projects in the curriculum align well with developing language skills relevant to business communication.	70	3.41	.525
18	The curriculum effectively integrates real-world business scenarios into project-based learning.	70	3.41	.525
19	The projects in the curriculum are applicable and relevant to real-world business contexts.	70	3.40	.549

## Students' Perceived Challenges and Benefits of Integrating Project-Based Learning into English for Specific Purposes Classes

No	Items	N	M	SD
20	The school provides adequate resources and materials for effective project-based learning in English for Business.	70	3.34	.587
21	The school fosters a supportive learning environment that encourages collaboration and project engagement.	70	3.34	.587
22	The school provides flexible learning spaces conducive to project-based learning in English for Business.	70	3.37	.569
23	The textbooks comprehensively cover the topics relevant to English for Business project-based learning.	70	3.40	.493
24	Supplementary materials and resources provided with the textbooks are accessible and beneficial for project-based activities.	70	3.43	.498
25	The textbooks integrate practical examples that enhance understanding and application in project-based activities.	70	3.40	.522
<b>Total</b>		70	3.39	.539

Table 3 illustrates the complexities of integrating PBL into ESP classes at Binh Duong Vocational Training Center for Technology Management. The data reveal that students find projects in the curriculum align well with developing business communication skills (item 17,  $M=3.41$ ,  $SD=0.525$ ), integrating real-world scenarios (item 18,  $M=3.41$ ,  $SD=0.525$ ), and are relevant to actual business contexts (item 19,  $M=3.40$ ,  $SD=0.549$ ). However, there is room for improvement in resources and materials provided (item 20,  $M=3.34$ ,  $SD=0.587$ ). The supportive learning environment (item 21,  $M=3.34$ ,  $SD=0.587$ ) and flexible learning spaces (item 22,  $M=3.37$ ,  $SD=0.569$ ) are seen as conducive to PBL. Comprehensive textbook coverage (item 23,  $M=3.40$ ,  $SD=0.493$ ) and accessible supplementary materials (item 24,  $M=3.43$ ,  $SD=0.498$ ) are beneficial, while practical examples in textbooks (item 25,  $M=3.40$ ,  $SD=0.522$ ) enhance understanding. Overall, the mean of 3.39 and standard deviation of 0.539 reflect a positive perception of PBL integration.

Regarding qualitative data, the participants highlighted issues like complex instructions, textbook content accessibility, difficulty understanding advanced vocabulary and fast-paced instruction, which emphasizes the need for clearer communication and better instructional support. As S3 noted, "I struggled with the textbooks because some of the readings were quite long, and I couldn't grasp all the information. Having simpler texts or summaries would have made it easier for me to keep up." This points to a need for simpler texts or summaries to ensure that students can keep up with the material, thereby enhancing their learning experience and comprehension. Addressing these challenges through enhanced resources and structured teamwork can improve the PBL framework in ESP courses, making the learning experience more effective and inclusive.

### 3.2. Students' Perceived Benefits of Integrating Project-Based Learning into ESP Classes

The aim of the research question 2 is to examine the perceived benefits of integrating PBL into ESP classes at BVTCTM, as reported by the students. The findings provided and explained below were drawn from the data collected through questionnaires and interviews. Quantitative data are shown in tables and interpreted first, then qualitative data are presented.

#### 3.2.1. Language and Content Knowledge

**Table 4.** Descriptive Statistics of Language and Content Knowledge

No	Items	N	M	St.D
1	Project-based learning has contributed to enhancing students' business-specific vocabulary and terminology.	70	3.34	.587
2	Through projects, the students will be able to apply specialized knowledge in real-world business contexts.	70	3.36	.591
3	Engaging in projects has improved students' knowledge of English grammar	70	3.34	.587
<b>Total</b>		70	3.34	.588

The data displayed in Table 4 show that PBL significantly enhances students' business-specific vocabulary and terminology, with item 1 reflecting a mean score (M) of 3.34 and a standard deviation (SD) of .587. This indicates a generally positive perception of PBL's impact on vocabulary acquisition. Item 2, with a mean of 3.36 and SD of .591, suggests that students see PBL as effective in applying specialized knowledge in real-world contexts, bridging theoretical and practical learning.

## Students' Perceived Challenges and Benefits of Integrating Project-Based Learning into English for Specific Purposes Classes

Item 3, also with a mean of 3.34 and SD of .587, shows moderate improvement in grammar skills through PBL. Overall, the mean score of 3.34 and SD of .588 across all items suggests that students believe PBL positively impacts their language and content knowledge.

Interviews corroborate this, with students highlighting improved reading skills and practical language application in business contexts. One student mentioned, "PBL helped me with my English reading skills. The materials were challenging, but I learned new words and phrases by working on them. It also made me more comfortable expressing myself in English." This demonstrates PBL's effectiveness in enhancing linguistic and practical skills essential for future careers.

### 3.2.2. Language Skills

**Table5.** Descriptive Statistics of Language Skills

No	Items	N	M	St.D
4	Project-based learning has improved students' listening skills, especially in business-related discussions.	70	3.39	.546
5	Students' reading comprehension skills in English for Business have developed through projects.	70	3.43	.554
6	Engaging in project work has enhanced students' writing proficiency, especially in business-related documentation.	70	3.43	.554
7	Project-based learning has equipped students with skills for effective business communication in written and spoken forms.	70	3.43	.554
<b>Total</b>		70	3.41	.551

The data in Table 5 show significant improvements in four fundamental language skills essential for professional communication, with mean scores (M) ranging from 3.39 to 3.43 and low standard deviations (SD) around 0.550. These enhancements are crucial for business success. Students reported marked improvements in understanding spoken language in business contexts (Item 4, M=3.39, SD=0.546), reading comprehension (Item 5, M=3.43, SD=0.554), and writing proficiency, particularly in creating business-related documents (Item 6, M=3.43, SD=0.554). Overall communication skills, including both written and spoken forms, also improved (Item 7, M=3.43, SD=0.554).

Qualitative insights from interviews support these findings. One student noted, "Participating in PBL activities improved my listening skills. During group discussions, I had to pay close attention to my classmates, which helped me understand different accents and improve my overall comprehension" (S8). Another student said, "PBL helped me with my English reading skills. The materials were challenging, but I learned new words and phrases by working on them" (S3). Engagement with PBL projects has also improved students' writing skills and effective business communication. Integrating PBL into ESP classes at BVTCTM enhances language proficiency and develops critical skills, preparing students for modern workplace demands and long-term professional success.

### 3.2.3. Workplace-related skills

**Table6.** Descriptive Statistics of Workplace-Related Skills

No	Items	N	M	SD
8	Project work has improved students' ability to adapt to changes in a workplace environment.	70	3.44	.581
9	Engaging in projects has developed students' leadership skills and ability to take initiative in a professional setting.	70	3.44	.581
10	Project-based learning has equipped students with problem-solving skills applicable to real-world work contexts.	70	3.44	.581
11	Engaging in project-based learning has improved students' ability to collaborate effectively with team members in a workplace setting.	70	3.43	.579
12	Project-based learning has increased students' confidence in engaging in professional settings.	70	3.46	.582
13	Engaging in projects has improved students' effective communication skills, especially in business-related scenarios.	70	3.44	.581
14	Through projects, Students have started to develop a clearer sense of professional identity and career goals.	70	3.44	.581
15	Project-based learning has improved students' organizational skills, both in	70	3.44	.581

## Students' Perceived Challenges and Benefits of Integrating Project-Based Learning into English for Specific Purposes Classes

No	Items	N	M	SD
	terms of time and task management.			
<b>Total</b>		<b>70</b>	<b>3.43</b>	<b>.580</b>

The data in Table 6 highlight significant improvements in four key language skills essential for professional communication, with mean scores (M) ranging from 3.39 to 3.43 and low standard deviations (SD) around 0.550. These findings suggest a consistent enhancement across all assessed skills, which are crucial for business success. Students reported marked improvements in comprehending spoken language within business contexts (Item 4, M=3.39, SD=0.546), reading comprehension (Item 5, M=3.43, SD=0.554), and writing proficiency, particularly in business-related documents (Item 6, M=3.43, SD=0.554). Overall communication skills, both written and spoken, also saw significant improvements (Item 7, M=3.43, SD=0.554).

Qualitative insights from interviews support these findings. One student noted, "*Participating in PBL activities improved my listening skills. During group discussions, I had to pay close attention to my classmates, which helped me understand different accents and improve my overall comprehension*" (S8). Another student said, "*PBL helped me with my English reading skills. The materials were challenging, but I learned new words and phrases by working on them*" (S3). Engagement with PBL projects has also led to improvements in writing skills and effective business communication. Students comment, such as one stating, "*PBL activities increased my confidence in presenting. Despite the challenges, presenting our projects in English made me more comfortable speaking in front of others*" (S5), highlight the development of these essential skills. Another student remarked, "*PBL activities enhanced my problem-solving skills. I had to think critically and find solutions to real-world problems. This not only improved my English vocabulary but also deepened my understanding of the subject matter*" (S2).

Overall, integrating PBL into ESP classes at BVTCTM has significantly enhanced students' language proficiency and developed critical skills such as adaptability, leadership, problem-solving, collaboration, confidence, communication, professional identity, and organizational abilities. This comprehensive approach prepares students for real-world workplace challenges by equipping them with practical competencies necessary for their future careers

### 3.2.4. Self-responsibility and Personal Qualities

**Table 7.** Descriptive Statistics of Self-Responsibility and Personal Qualities

No	Items	N	M	SD
16	Through projects, students have gained a sense of ownership and responsibility for their own learning process.	70	3.43	.554
17	Engaging in projects has enhanced students' ability to set and achieve goals, both academically and professionally.	70	3.44	.555
18	Engaging in projects has allowed students to cultivate personal qualities such as resilience, perseverance, and creativity.	70	3.47	.557
<b>Total</b>		<b>70</b>	<b>3.448</b>	<b>.555</b>

The data in Table 7 demonstrate that project-based learning (PBL) significantly enhances students' adaptability, leadership, problem-solving, collaboration, and communication skills, which are essential for professional success. Item 8 shows students agree that PBL has improved their adaptability to changing workplace conditions (M=3.44, SD=.581). Similarly, item 9 highlights the development of leadership skills and initiative (M=3.44, SD=.581), while item 10 indicates improved problem-solving abilities (M=3.44, SD=.581).

Item 11 reflects enhanced collaboration skills (M=3.43, SD=.579), and item 12 shows increased confidence in professional settings due to PBL (M=3.46, SD=.582). Items 13 to 15 suggest improvements in communication, professional identity, and organizational skills (M=3.44, SD=.581).

Qualitative data from student interviews supports these findings. One student stated, "*PBL activities increased my confidence in presenting. Presenting our projects in English made me more comfortable speaking in front of others*" (S5). Another noted, "*PBL enhanced my problem-solving skills. I had to think critically and find solutions to real-world problems*" (S2). A third mentioned, "*Participating in PBL helped me improve my teamwork skills. I learned how to work with others and share ideas*" (S1).

Overall, integrating PBL into ESP classes at BVTCTM significantly enhances language proficiency and develops critical skills, preparing students for real-world workplace challenges and making PBL an essential part of their educational experience.

3.2.5. *Social Interaction Development*

**Table8.** *Descriptive Statistics of Social Interaction Development*

No	Items	N	M	SD
19	Engaging in projects has allowed students to build valuable relationships within and beyond the classroom.	70	3.50	.558
20	Project-based learning has equipped students with skills for effective conflict resolution in interpersonal interaction.	70	3.50	.558
21	Through projects, Students have started to develop a clearer sense of responsibility.	70	3.49	.558
<b>Total</b>		70	3.49	.558

The data displayed in Table 8 highlight consistently high marks across attributes related to social interaction skills, with mean scores ranging from 3.49 to 3.50 out of 4.0 and a standard deviation of around 0.558. This indicates a robust, positive impact of project-based learning (PBL) on these attributes. Specifically, students reported notable improvements in building valuable relationships (item 19, M=3.50), acquiring effective conflict resolution skills (item 20, M=3.50), and developing a clearer sense of responsibility (item 21, M=3.49). Students noted that PBL facilitated the formation of valuable relationships within and outside the classroom, underscoring the importance of collaborative learning environments. The low standard deviation suggests a uniform perception among students about the interpersonal connections fostered by PBL. Moreover, the data reflects students' improved abilities to manage and resolve conflicts effectively, demonstrating that PBL is highly effective in nurturing these essential interpersonal skills for both academic success and future professional growth. The high mean score for developing a sense of responsibility highlights PBL's significant impact on fostering accountability among students, crucial for their overall personal development and professional endeavors.

Qualitative data from interviews support these findings. S1 noted, "*Participating in PBL, I learned how to work with others, share ideas, and listen to different opinions. It also made me more confident in speaking English with my classmates.*" This illustrates how PBL enhances interpersonal skills and confidence in communication. S2 added, "*I had to think critically and find solutions to real-world problems. This improved my English vocabulary and deepened my understanding.*" This underscores PBL's role in encouraging critical thinking and problem-solving, essential for conflict resolution and navigating complex interpersonal dynamics.

The study on integrating PBL into ESP classes at BVTCTM highlights the complex interplay between various benefits and challenges affecting student experiences. Analysis of student feedback and performance data illuminates how PBL influences language learning and professional skill development in a Business English context. Several teacher and student-related challenges have emerged, necessitating adjustments in instructional methods to accommodate varying learning speeds and language proficiencies. For instance, variability in teacher guidance effectiveness (M=3.01, SD=.732) and attitudes (M=2.73, SD=.962) significantly impacts student engagement and outcomes, as per Shaalan (2020). On the student side, difficulties in task comprehension and time management are noted, aligning with Hidayati et al. (2023). Despite these challenges, PBL substantially benefits language and professional skills, enhancing vocabulary, application of knowledge, and interpersonal skills, supporting findings by Lee and Jo (2023) and Ngo Huu Hoang (2014). This underscores the need to refine instructional strategies to maximize PBL's effectiveness in language education.

**4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study investigates the integration of PBL into ESP courses at the BVTCTM, analysing the challenges and benefits as perceived by students. The challenges are categorized into context-related, teacher-related, and student-related issues. Teacher-related challenges were less significant, with around 50% of students noting difficulties mainly in teacher guidance and knowledge of business English. Conversely, over 75% of students did not experience substantial student-related and context-related challenges. On the benefits side, PBL was positively received, enhancing language and content knowledge and fostering self-responsibility, resilience, perseverance, and creativity. These benefits



highlight PBL's effectiveness in improving language proficiency and integrating content understanding with essential professional skills.

Pedagogical implications for teachers include the need for continuous professional development to design and manage effective PBL projects, transitioning from traditional roles to facilitators, integrating interdisciplinary approaches, and developing comprehensive assessment strategies. For students, PBL demands active engagement, effective time management, resilience, and adaptability. They must embrace feedback, reflect on their learning experiences, and leverage available resources to maximize PBL's benefits. Administrators should enhance teacher training, allocate adequate resources, develop clear guidelines, foster a collaborative culture among teachers, and incorporate feedback mechanisms. These steps will create a conducive environment for PBL, addressing challenges and optimizing benefits.

Despite insightful findings, the study faces limitations due to its narrow research site and small sample size of 70 students from a single institution, limiting the generalizability of conclusions. Future research should expand geographically and demographically, incorporating multiple institutions and a more varied participant base. Longitudinal and comparative studies, along with a mixed-methods approach, would provide deeper insights into PBL's long-term effects and its comparative efficacy against traditional teaching methods. This would facilitate the development of culturally sensitive and pedagogically effective PBL strategies adaptable across different educational frameworks.

#### REFERENCES

- Blumenfeld, P. C., Soloway, E., Marx, R. W., Krajcik, J. S., Guzdial, M., & Palincsar, A. (1991). Motivating project-based learning: Sustaining the doing, supporting the learning. *Educational Psychologist*, 26(3–4), 369–398. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.1991.9653139>
- Bell, S. (2010). Project-Based Learning for the 21st century: Skills for the future. *The Clearing House*, 83(2), 39–43.
- Dudley-Evans, T., & John, M. J. S. (1998). *Developments in English for specific purposes: A multi-disciplinary approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- El-shaer, A., & Gaber, H. (2014). Impact of problem-based learning on students' critical thinking dispositions, knowledge acquisition and retention. *Journal of Education and Practice*. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Impact-of-Problem-Based-Learning-on-Thinking-and-El-shaer-Gaber/51eef74118919589622a5cfd96c7d0d39d5a9411>
- Fraenkel, J. (2011). *How to design and evaluate research in education (8th Ed.)*. McGraw-Hill Publishing.
- Griffie, D. T. (2018). *An Introduction to second language research methods, 2nd Edition: Design and Data, 2nd Edition*. TESL-EJ.
- Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hidayati, D., Novianti, H., Khansa, M., Slamet, J., & Suryati, N. (2023). Effectiveness project-based learning in esp class: Viewed from Indonesian students' learning outcomes. *International Journal of Information and Education Technology*, 13(3), 558–565. <https://doi.org/10.18178/ijiet.2023.13.3.1839>
- Hmelo-Silver, C. E. (2004). Problem-Based Learning: What and how do students learn? *Educational Psychology Review*, 16(3), 235–266. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:EDPR.0000034022.16470.f3>
- Johnson, A.-A. (2016). The effect of project based learning on the academic achievement of at-risk advanced placement students. <https://doi.org/10.13016/M2DB63>
- Jones, B. F., Rasmussen, Claudette M, & Moffitt, Marry C. (2009). Real-life problem solving: A collaborative approach to interdisciplinary learning. *American Psychological Association*.
- Kristen Gatehouse. (2001). Key issues in English for specific purposes (ESP) curriculum development. *The Internet TESL Journal*. <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Gatehouse-ESP.html>
- Ngan, N. (2011). Content-based instruction in the teaching of English for accounting at the Vietnamese college of Finance and Customs. *English Language Teaching*, 4(3), Article 3. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v4n3p90>
- Ngeow, K., & Kong, Y.-S. (2001). Learning to learn: Preparing teachers and students for problem-based learning. *ERIC Digest*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, Indiana University, 2805 E. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED457524>
- Ngo, H. H. (2014). Some utilization of project-based learning for Vietnamese university students of English in the course "Intercultural Communication". *International Journal of English Language Education*, 2(1), Article 1. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijele.v2i1.5220>

## Students' Perceived Challenges and Benefits of Integrating Project-Based Learning into English for Specific Purposes Classes

---

- Lee, N., & Jo, M. (2023). Exploring problem-based learning curricula in the metaverse: The hospitality students' perspective. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education*, 32, 100427. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhlste.2023.100427>
- Sonmez, D., & Lee, H. (2003). Problem-Based Learning in science. *ERIC Digest*. ERIC/CSMEE, 1929 Kenny Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1080. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED482724>
- Swales, J. M. (1990). *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge University Press.
- Stoller, F. (2006). Establishing a theoretical foundation for project-based learning in second and foreign language contexts. *Project-Based Second and Foreign Language Education: Past, Present, and Future*, 19–40.
- Shalan, I. E.-N. A. W. (2020). Integrating project-based learning strategies in the design of an ESP dental vocabulary course for ESL Malaysian majors. *Arab World English Journal*, 11(3), 464–483.
- Tabatabaei, O., & Mokhtari, A. (2014). ESP learners' perception of ESP program problems at Iranian universities (A Case Study of Islamic Azad University Najafabad Branch). *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 4. <https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.4.6.1144-1154>
- Thomas, J. (2000). A review of research on project-based learning. *San Rafael, CA: Autodesk Foundation*.
- Wilkinson, D., & Birmingham, P. (2003). *Using research instruments: A guide for researchers*. Psychology Press.

### AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHY

Han Thi Hong Nhung, Lecturer of English, Binh Duong Economics and Technology University, Vietnam  
Le Van Tuyen, Lecturer of English at the Faculty of English Language, HUTECH University, Vietnam

**Citation:** Han Thi Hong Nhung & Le Van Tuyen, "Students' Perceived Challenges and Benefits of Integrating Project-Based Learning into English for Specific Purposes Classes", *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL)*, vol. 12, no. 7, pp. 19-28, 2024. Available: DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20431/2347-3134.1207004>.

**Copyright:** © 2024 Authors. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.