

E-Tourism Communication: Hacking Business English Skills with Digital PBL (A Mixed-Methods Analysis)

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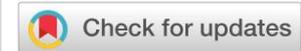
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ABSTRACT

E-tourism, which encompasses the digital marketing, sales, and management of travel services, is a sector critically reliant on effective international communication, making it essential for business students to develop not only linguistic proficiency but also the critical thinking and problem-solving competence necessary to navigate future complex, digitally-driven challenges in the field. This study employed a Convergent Parallel Mixed-Methods design to investigate the effectiveness of Digital Project-Based Learning (DPBL) in enhancing Business English Communication (BEC) outcomes for 15 E-Tourism students (N=15) following a 12-week intervention. Quantitative results showed high agreement on Authenticity (=4.60) and Digital Proficiency (=4.53), alongside significant perceived gains in oral (=4.13) and written (=3.93) communication skills. Qualitative data confirmed DPBL acted as a rapid "hack" for skill acquisition, specifically boosting Confidence in Presentation and Professional Email Tone through constant, situated digital communication. The convergence of findings confirms that DPBL, by integrating authentic digital tools into project tasks, is a highly effective and potent pedagogical model for accelerating the development of critical BEC skills required in the E-Tourism sector for students at a Private Collage in Sulawesi.

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1. Introduction

The tourism and travel sector constitutes a vital growth engine of the global economy. Following its full recovery, international tourism arrivals reached 1.5 billion in 2024, with global travel and tourism's economic contribution projected to reach 16 trillion by 2034 (UN Tourism, WEF). This robust growth is intrinsically linked to e-tourism, where business operations, marketing, and client interactions are overwhelmingly conducted through digital platforms. Consequently, English has solidified its role as the lingua franca of this digitized, cross-border industry (Crystal, 1997; Richards, 2001). Professionals in E-Tourism must not only be fluent in General English but also possess specialized Business English Communication (BEC) skills—the ability to write professional emails, negotiate contracts, and deliver persuasive digital presentations to an international audience. This global economic reliance establishes a clear, high-stakes demand for English-proficient graduates in the tourism and hospitality fields (Bobanovic & Grzinic, 2011; Anggawirya et al., 2021; Yaumi et al., 2023).

Despite this urgent industry demand, a significant pedagogical gap persists between traditional English teaching methods and the real-world communication needs of the E-Tourism sector. Research consistently highlights the following classroom problems, firstly, Lack of Authenticity: Standard English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curricula often fail to align with the actual, dynamic needs of the workplace due to a lack of systematic needs analysis (Tonić, 2010; Hennoun, 2024; Rahman, 2018). Students are taught grammar and vocabulary in isolation but struggle to transfer these skills to real-time professional scenarios like writing persuasive business proposals or dealing with diverse international accents (Prachanant, 2012; Hamad, 2013; Yuniatun et al., 2025), secondly, the Digital Disconnect: While E-Tourism is inherently digital, many classroom activities remain non-digital, failing to simulate the technology-mediated communication (e.g., video conferencing, collaborative cloud drafting) that defines modern business operations. This leaves students lacking crucial digital literacy and collaborative communication skills required for the 21st century (Hava, 2021; Hamilton, 2018) and the last, focus on General vs. Specific Skills: Teachers often report that students have low general English proficiency, which makes moving to business-specific tasks challenging (Ramadan, 2025; Dalyan et al., 2025; Adinda et al., 2025). Moreover,

assessment often focuses on general written tests, neglecting the critical oral presentation and digital collaboration skills demanded by the industry (Maican, 2020).

To effectively bridge this gap, a shift toward student-centered, task-based methodologies is necessary. Project-Based Learning (PBL) is widely recognized as a transformative approach that integrates content and skills acquisition through the completion of real-world, engaging projects (Barrows, 1996; Savin-Baden, 2000). Recent studies affirm that integrating technology into this model, creating Digital Project-Based Learning (DPBL), significantly enhances student engagement, collaboration, and practical communication skills (Chollily et al., 2024; Padmadewi, et al, 2023). DPBL forces students to "hack" their way to effective communication by requiring them to use English authentically to solve complex, digitally-driven problems, thereby developing the highly contextualized BEC skills needed in E-Tourism. This study, therefore, aims to contribute empirical evidence by using a mixed-methods evaluation to specifically assess how DPBL—framed as a method for "hacking" skills—impacts Business English Communication Outcomes in an E-Tourism context, directly addressing the identified gap between current classroom practice and global industry needs.

2. Methodology

The researcher employed a Mixed-Methods research design, specifically the Convergent Parallel Design. This design allows for a deep, comprehensive understanding of the intervention outcomes by collecting both quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative (interviews) data concurrently, analyzing them separately, and then merging the findings during the interpretation stage (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). Using purposive sampling method to select participants consisting of N=15 university students enrolled in an E-Tourism or Business English major. This sample was chosen for its specific relevance to the study's focus. Although a convenience sampling based on major enrollment could be used, the researcher prioritized a purposive approach to ensure students had similar pre-existing English proficiency levels, thus providing a focused sample for the in-depth intervention.

The intervention lasted for one academic semester (e.g., 10–12 weeks). Students worked in small groups to complete a comprehensive project, such as developing a digital marketing plan or a virtual tour package for an E-Tourism business. This project necessitated intensive Business English Communication (BEC) and the use of Digital Tools (e.g., video conferencing, content creation software).

The data were collected using two instruments, both administered after the intervention (post-intervention): Firstly, Quantitative Instrument: A Post-Intervention Questionnaire utilized a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree). This instrument was adapted from established instruments in PBL and Business Communication literature (Barrows, 1996; Helle et al., 2006; Hynes & Veltsos, 2022; Poçan, S., Altay, B., & Yaşaroğlu, C. 2023) and was used to measure students' perceived skill gains and experience with the DPBL method. And Secondly, Qualitative Instrument: Semi-Structured Interviews were conducted with all participants to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences, challenges, and specific skill development outcomes related to BEC and DPBL (Savin-Baden, 2000; Dannels, 2001; Hennoun, 2024); Padmadewi, et al 2023).

3. Result and Discussion

The findings strongly validate the core principle of Project-Based Learning (PjBL): that authenticity is paramount for skill acquisition. The mean score for Authenticity (=4.60), corroborated by the qualitative theme of Real-World Relevance, shows students were intensely motivated by designing a "real tour package." This aligns with the necessity for situated communication (Dannels, 2001) where skills become immediately valuable within a professional context. Recent research emphasizes that realistic tasks are key to bridging the gap between abstract instruction and job demands. For instance, Xinming, (2023). highlighted that communication programs must mirror current industry practice to foster meaningful professional development. The DPBL framework successfully bridges this gap by making the Business English Communication (BEC) tasks immediately relevant to the E-Tourism sector, confirming the need for context-specific application over generalized exercises (Prachanant, 2012) as seen on the following table.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Research Constructs

No	Construct	Mean (\bar{x})	Std. Deviation (SD)
1	Engagement & Motivation	4.33	0.59
2	Authenticity	4.60	0.51

3	Skill Gain (Written)	3.93	0.77
4	Skill Gain (Oral)	4.13	0.64
5	Digital Proficiency	4.53	0.51
6	Collaboration	4.20	0.68

The highest mean scores were recorded for Authenticity (=4.60, SD=0.51) and the perceived benefit of Digital Proficiency (=4.53, SD=0.51). This suggests students strongly valued the real-world nature of the E-Tourism project and found the required digital tools essential to their learning. Furthermore, students reported high levels of self-assessed improvement in Oral Skill Gain (=4.13, SD=0.64), indicating the DPBL activities were effective in building speaking confidence. Notably, the construct for Collaboration also received a high mean score (=4.20, SD=0.68), reinforcing the idea that the project successfully promoted interaction and negotiation skills. The lowest, yet still moderate, perceived gain was for Written Skill Gain (=3.93, SD=0.77). meanwhile the data from qualitative data which semi-structured interview transcripts revealed four key themes, providing rich context for the quantitative findings. These themes detail how students felt they "hacked" their BEC skills was shown on the following chart.

Theme	Description and Key Insights
Confidence in Presentation	Students repeatedly cited the mandatory video pitches and presentations as the most impactful learning activity. They emphasized that the pressure to deliver a "professional" output forced them to practice BEC repeatedly, leading to a substantial gain in speaking confidence.
Professional Email Tone	Students noted a significant shift in their written communication skills. The tasks—such as drafting business proposals and communicating with the 'client' (instructor playing a role)—provided immediate, authentic feedback that clarified the distinction between casual English and formal Business English tone.
Digital Collaboration Efficiency	Students found that using platforms like shared cloud documents and video conferencing accelerated their learning. They viewed these tools as essential for rapidly correcting drafts, negotiating content, and practicing seamless, professional team communication.
Real-World Relevance	The perceived realism of the E-Tourism project was a powerful motivator. Students reported that knowing they were designing a "real tour package" or "actual marketing plan" made them focus meticulously on the accuracy and professionalism of their language, confirming the high score for Authenticity.

The DPBL approach found that digital tools were not merely supplementary but were integral accelerants for learning. The high mean score for Digital Proficiency (=4.53), supported by the theme of Digital Collaboration Efficiency, demonstrated that students felt tools like shared documents and video conferencing helped "hack" (speed up) their collaborative communication. This result is strongly supported by contemporary literature, as Hoesny, et al (2024) emphasized that integrating technology into PjBL is essential for enhancing 21st-century skills, confirming that digital collaboration is now a core learning mechanism. Furthermore, Ermi Sentiyasari, E. (2024). found that digital platforms significantly enhance student autonomy and efficiency in communication tasks. The DPBL approach directly addresses the digital disconnect (Hamilton, 2018), ensuring students practice communication in the technology-mediated environment they will encounter in the modern E-Tourism workplace.

The DPBL structure proved highly effective in driving targeted improvement in specific BEC skills. The high self-assessed Oral Skill Gain (=4.13) was attributed to the theme of Confidence in Presentation, as the requirement for a final digital pitch forced repeated, high-stakes practice. This approach contrasts with the difficulty often reported in achieving high-level professional communication skills through traditional methods (Maican, 2020). By embedding presentation and writing tasks into an authentic project deliverable, the DPBL model forced students to master professional standards (Hynes & Veltsos, 2022). The finding is supported by Marisah, & Robiasih, (2017) whose work showed that project-based tasks focused on authentic output lead to marked increases in both student motivation and communicative performance, particularly in oral delivery.

In alignment with these specific gains, the qualitative data analysis revealed four key themes demonstrating how the DPBL intervention enhanced BEC skills. Students gained Confidence in Presentation because mandatory digital pitches forced repeated practice for professional output (Fitriyani et al., 2023). They also mastered Professional Email Tone through authentic tasks involving "client" communication, clarifying the distinction between casual and formal language (Hynes & Veltsos, 2022). The use of digital tools fostered Digital Collaboration Efficiency, which students felt accelerated their learning by enabling seamless negotiation and drafting (Ermi Sentiyasari, (2024). Ultimately, the perceived Real-World Relevance of designing an actual E-Tourism product acted as a strong motivator, driving meticulous attention to linguistic professionalism and confirming the project's high authenticity Xinming, (2023).

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this mixed-methods study affirms that the Digital Project-Based Learning (DPBL) model is highly effective and relevant for enhancing Business English Communication (BEC) skills among E-Tourism students, demonstrating its potential as a superior pedagogical strategy. The key implication is that curriculum designers should integrate authentic digital collaboration tasks to successfully bridge the gap between classroom theory and professional practice. However, a major limitation is the small sample size and the absence of a control group, which restricts the generalizability and conclusive attribution of causality. Therefore, future suggestions for researchers include expanding the sample size, incorporating a comparison group, and employing pre- and post-tests to quantitatively measure and confirm the longitudinal skill transfer and retention facilitated by the DPBL approach.

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