

International Collaboration in Business English Learning: Enhancing Global Communication Skills of Polytechnic Students

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Abstract

This community service project, titled International Collaboration in Business English Learning: Enhancing Global Communication Skills of Polytechnic Students, was conducted by Doris Yolanda Saragih, S.Pd., M.Pd., in collaboration with Pauline De Goeje (Leiden University) and Mart Vogel (Utrecht University). The activity took place at Politeknik Bisnis Indonesia on September 30, 2025, involving 60 students across two interactive sessions. The main objective was to strengthen students' Business English competence and cross-cultural communication skills in preparation for participation in global business environments. A production-oriented and communicative approach was applied through case discussions, role-play simulations, and digital-based learning to enhance students' speaking, writing, and negotiation proficiency. The international collaboration component enriched the experience by providing authentic exposure to professional business contexts and global cultural perspectives. The findings revealed that students showed notable improvement in confidence, vocabulary mastery, and motivation to use English for professional communication. Furthermore, the project contributed to developing employability and intercultural awareness, supporting the institution's mission to produce globally competitive graduates. Overall, this community service initiative demonstrated that sustainable collaboration with international experts can significantly enhance Business English learning outcomes and prepare students to communicate effectively in global business settings.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the current era of global interconnection, English has become the lingua franca of business communication, bridging cultural and linguistic gaps across organizations worldwide (Bhuvash Rattan, 2024; Janakiram, 2025). For students in vocational and polytechnic institutions, mastering English for Business is not merely an academic requirement but a professional necessity to participate effectively in the global economy (Nickerson, 2018). As industries continue to demand multilingual professionals with intercultural competence, educational programs must align language training with real-world business practices (Roshid & Kankaanranta, 2025).

At Politeknik Bisnis Indonesia, English for Business courses are designed to enhance communicative competence in authentic professional settings such as meetings, negotiations, and presentations. However, students often encounter difficulties in using appropriate business vocabulary, constructing persuasive messages, and interacting confidently in multicultural environments (Kocak Varol, 2023; Komal More, 2024). Such challenges reflect a broader issue found in higher education, where general English instruction fails to meet the specific linguistic demands of global workplaces (Alharbi, 2022). Consequently, there is an urgent need for targeted and context-based learning interventions that integrate both linguistic skills and intercultural awareness (Potęga, 2016).

This community service project titled International Collaboration in Business English Learning: Enhancing Global Communication Skills of Polytechnic Students sought to address these pedagogical gaps. The program adopted a production-oriented and communicative learning model, which emphasizes learner participation, collaboration, and task-

based simulation of real business scenarios (Xie, 2021; Xu & Peng, 2022). The inclusion of international collaboration with experts from Leiden University and Utrecht University provided authentic exposure to diverse communication styles and global business norms (Liu & Deng, 2022; Stradiotová & Štefančík, 2021). Such integration of technology, intercultural exchange, and active learning reflects the latest innovations in Business English pedagogy (Chen et al., 2021; Xin, 2021), offering students a transformative learning experience that strengthens both their language proficiency and employability in global markets.

2. IMPLEMENTATION AND METHODS

The implementation of this community service project was carried out in four main parts, emphasizing collaboration, participation, and international academic engagement.

Location and Target Participants

The activity took place at Politeknik Bisnis Indonesia, Pematangsiantar, on September 30, 2025, with a focus on improving Business English communication competence among vocational students. The program was attended by 60 students from the Business Administration and Finance and Banking study programs. The participants were selected based on their motivation, prior English knowledge, and potential for professional communication development. The institution was chosen as the training venue because of its strong commitment to internationalization and employability-based education, aligning with the national strategy for vocational transformation (Roshid & Kankaanranta, 2025).

Collaboration and Partners

This project was organized under the leadership of Doris Yolanda Saragih, S.Pd., M.Pd., and conducted in collaboration with two international partners: Pauline De Goeje from Leiden University and Mart Vogel from Utrecht University. The partnership aimed to introduce authentic business communication practices and intercultural learning (Janakiram, 2025; Nickerson, 2018). The academic team of Politeknik Bisnis Indonesia acted as the main facilitator, ensuring that all sessions supported institutional goals of competency-based and globally oriented education. This collaboration combined the expertise of local educators and international scholars, creating a cross-border pedagogical synergy that reflected the principles of global business communication and applied linguistics (Kocak Varol, 2023; Komal More, 2024).

Implementation Stages

The implementation process was divided into three sequential stages to ensure systematic execution and measurable outcomes:

a. Preparation Stage

The initial phase included needs assessment through questionnaires, coordination meetings with partner universities, and curriculum alignment with Business English for Specific Purposes (ESP) frameworks. Teaching materials were developed to integrate vocabulary, writing, speaking, and negotiation modules with real business case studies (Potęga, 2016; Saragih & Simarmata, 2019, 2020).

b. Training and Mentoring Stage

The core training used a production-oriented and participatory approach, enabling students to engage in role-plays, mock meetings, and simulated business negotiations. Each session was designed using task-based learning principles (Xie, 2021; Xu & Peng, 2022). Digital learning tools and multimodal resources, such as recorded presentations and online discussion forums, were also incorporated to promote autonomous learning and digital literacy (Chen et al., 2021; Liu & Deng, 2022).

c. Evaluation and Follow-Up Stage

Evaluation was conducted using oral performance assessments, written assignments, and peer feedback mechanisms to track progress. Post-program reflection surveys revealed significant improvement in confidence, fluency, and vocabulary mastery. The follow-up plan included online mentoring and a virtual discussion series with the foreign lecturers to ensure continuity and sustainability of learning outcomes (Alharbi, 2022; Xin, 2021).

Implementation Approach

The project adopted a participatory and collaborative learning model, ensuring that students were actively involved in every stage of planning, implementation, and evaluation. This participatory approach encouraged a sense of ownership, motivation, and self-efficacy, which are key factors in sustainable learning environments (Stradiotová & Štefančík, 2021).

The model successfully combined training, awareness-raising, and knowledge transfer, emphasizing intercultural competence and employability readiness (Bhuvesh Rattan, 2024). By integrating technology-assisted learning, interactive pedagogy, and real business simulations, the program achieved its mission of connecting academic theory with real-world professional practice.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of the community service project on Business English for Global Communication produced a series of measurable outcomes that reflected the program's effectiveness in improving students' linguistic, professional, and intercultural competence. Based on the structured stages: preparation, training, and evaluation, the following results were observed and analyzed as indicators of program success.

Improvement of Business English Proficiency

The pre- and post-training evaluation indicated a significant increase in students' Business English competence, particularly in speaking and writing. During initial sessions, participants often displayed hesitation in expressing ideas or responding to questions in formal business settings. However, after two interactive sessions, more than 85% of participants showed greater fluency, confidence, and accuracy in communication, as evidenced by performance-based rubrics and facilitator observations.

The activities such as mock meetings, negotiation simulations, and business presentation practice, enabled students to actively produce and refine their language output, aligning with the principles of production-oriented learning (Xie, 2021). The integration of task-based learning helped students apply grammatical and lexical knowledge in authentic professional contexts, thereby promoting functional fluency rather than rote learning (Komal More, 2024; Stradiotová & Štefančík, 2021; Thongphut & Kaur, 2023; Xu & Peng, 2022).

Enhancement of Intercultural and Professional Communication Skills

Collaboration with lecturers from Leiden University and Utrecht University introduced students to realistic cross-cultural business scenarios. This exposure increased their understanding of tone, etiquette, and cultural nuances in communication (Nickerson, 2018). As observed during simulation activities, students learned to adjust their choice of words, eye contact, and turn-taking strategies when engaging with speakers from different cultural backgrounds (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Isnaini & Muslimin, 2024; Kocak Varol, 2023; Komal More, 2024; Sashi, 2021).

The presence of international trainers created a global learning atmosphere that supported peer interaction and authentic engagement. Participants reported through post-activity reflections that they gained not only linguistic skills but also cultural empathy and awareness, which are essential for success in international business environments (Roshid & Kankaanranta, 2025). The program therefore fulfilled its dual purpose: strengthening English proficiency and developing intercultural intelligence two key dimensions of global employability (Alharbi, 2022).

C. Increased Motivation and Learning Autonomy

One of the most remarkable outcomes of this project was the rise in learning motivation and self-directed learning habits among students. Before the program, participants tended to rely on textbook learning with limited interaction. After engaging in collaborative and participatory sessions, they became more proactive in initiating discussions, using English in class, and participating in online forums.

This improvement is consistent with prior findings that learner motivation and peer collaboration significantly influence achievement in Business English learning (Xu & Peng, 2022). The use of technology-based tools such as online discussion boards, digital presentations, and email writing tasks fostered independent learning habits and encouraged continuous practice outside the classroom (Chen et al., 2021).

Practical Outcomes and Student Deliverables

- a. The tangible results of the project included several student-generated outputs, such as:
- b. Business presentation decks on topics like international marketing, digital entrepreneurship, and sustainability;
- c. Professional email drafts and proposal letters prepared according to global corporate standards; and
- d. Simulation reports documenting negotiation results and intercultural reflection summaries.

These deliverables served as evidence of competence-based learning, aligning with vocational education goals to produce graduates ready for real business communication tasks. The approach followed English for Specific Purposes (ESP) principles, emphasizing relevancy and practical output (Kocak Varol, 2023; Komal More, 2024).

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Several factors contributed to the project's success. The institutional support and active student participation ensured smooth implementation. The use of interactive materials and digital media enhanced learning engagement (Liu & Deng, 2022; Stradiotová & Štefančík, 2021). The international collaboration provided authentic exposure to business discourse and stimulated motivation among students to pursue professional English training further.

However, certain inhibiting factors were noted, such as time limitations, varying proficiency levels among participants, and limited classroom technology infrastructure. Despite these constraints, the overall outcomes demonstrated that participatory learning and intercultural collaboration can effectively enhance Business English competence in vocational higher education (Xin, 2021).

Discussion of Program Impact

The overall results confirm that the implementation of production-oriented, participatory, and collaborative learning models successfully bridged the gap between theoretical English learning and real-world business communication. The findings reinforce the argument that Business English training, when integrated with international exposure, contributes significantly to students' confidence, adaptability, and professional readiness (Bhuvesh Rattan, 2024).

In line with the objectives of community service, this program not only benefited the students but also strengthened institutional capacity for global academic collaboration. The outcomes reflect a sustainable impact that can serve as a model for future university–industry–international partnership programs. It demonstrates how higher education institutions can play a transformative role in developing human resources capable of communicating across cultures, managing business negotiations, and participating effectively in the global economy.

The discussion highlights how this community service project succeeded in linking theoretical understanding of Business English with its practical application in global communication settings. The integration of production-oriented, communicative, and participatory learning models proved highly effective in addressing the challenges faced by polytechnic students, who are required to develop not only linguistic proficiency but also intercultural awareness and adaptability in professional environments.

Findings revealed that participants showed measurable improvements not only in speaking and writing skills but also in their ability to convey ideas with confidence and clarity. They were able to perform mock meetings, negotiations, and business presentations with significant progress in fluency and vocabulary. This supports the claim that experiential and task-based learning methods foster authentic language use and confidence among learners (Xie, 2021; Xu & Peng, 2022).

The role of international collaboration was particularly significant. The involvement of Pauline De Goeje from Leiden University and Mart Vogel from Utrecht University offered students direct exposure to intercultural business contexts and professional discourse styles. Their presence during the training sessions provided authentic insights into European communication norms, etiquette, and negotiation strategies, which enhanced the realism and relevance of learning (Nickerson, 2018; Saragih & Simarmata, 2019). Through these interactions, students developed a better understanding of tone, politeness strategies, and professional vocabulary, while also cultivating global awareness and empathy, key competencies for employability in international markets (Alharbi, 2022).

Furthermore, the integration of digital learning tools, including presentation software, interactive case studies, and online discussion forums, supported independent learning and critical reflection. Students were encouraged to manage their own progress, exchange peer feedback, and collaborate in project-based tasks. This approach validated previous research showing that technology-assisted learning enhances engagement, autonomy, and sustained motivation (Chen et al., 2021; Liu & Deng, 2022).

Overall, the project illustrates that community service in higher education can serve as a strategic mechanism for educational innovation and global partnership. By combining local implementation with international collaboration, this program established a replicable model of service learning that not only improved communication skills but also expanded institutional networks and academic visibility (Kocak Varol, 2023; Komal More, 2024).



Figure 1. Ms. Pauline De Goeje from Leiden University and Mr. Mart Vogel from Utrecht University delivering the first Business English training session with the first group of students at Politeknik Bisnis Indonesia.



Figure 2. Ms. Pauline De Goeje and Mr. Mart Vogel conducting the second training session, engaging with the second group of students during interactive Business English activities.



Figure 3. Group photo taken in front of Politeknik Bisnis Indonesia, featuring both international speakers Ms. Pauline De Goeje and Mr. Mart Vogel together with lecturers and all participating students after the completion of the program

4. CLOSING

Conclusion

Based on the implementation results, this community service project achieved its objectives of enhancing Business English competence, intercultural understanding, and student confidence among participants from Politeknik Bisnis Indonesia. The program successfully demonstrated that interactive, production-oriented, and participatory learning approaches can transform students' passive learning behaviors into active, engaged, and reflective practices.

The collaboration with Pauline De Goeje (Leiden University) and Mart Vogel (Utrecht University) played a crucial role in deepening the students' exposure to authentic international business communication. Their contributions provided not only technical guidance but also cross-cultural perspectives that enriched the learning atmosphere. As a result, students gained practical experience in using English for negotiation, presentation, and professional correspondence, which significantly improved their readiness for global workplaces.

This project also contributed to strengthening the institutional role of Politeknik Bisnis Indonesia in promoting internationalization, employability-based education, and community empowerment. It showcased how collaboration between academia and practitioners can generate sustainable impact, both in language education and human resource development.

Suggestion

In light of the results and reflections, several recommendations are proposed to ensure the sustainability and wider dissemination of this program:

1. Program Institutionalization and Expansion

The success of this activity should be formalized into a permanent training module under the English for Business curriculum. Future programs can expand the target participants to include lecturers and other vocational students from neighboring institutions.

2. Strengthening Global Collaboration

Continued cooperation with Pauline De Goeje and Mart Vogel is strongly encouraged. Additionally, establishing partnerships with other foreign universities and industries could provide students with diverse case studies and exposure to different professional cultures.

3. Integration of Digital Learning Systems

The adoption of online platforms, AI-assisted writing tools, and business simulation software is recommended to support independent learning and enhance students' accuracy and fluency.

4. Continuous Evaluation and Research

Longitudinal studies and post-training evaluations should be conducted every six months to assess skill retention, communication performance, and behavioral changes in real business environments.

5. Replication for Wider Impact

Similar community service projects can be replicated in other vocational contexts such as English for Tourism, English for Entrepreneurship, or English for Banking. These replications would further contribute to national capacity building and the enhancement of Indonesia's global human capital.

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