

Implementing Project-Based Learning to Promote Learner Autonomy: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

ABSTRACT This systematic review explores how project-based learning (PjBL) influences in promoting the development of learner autonomy in the context of language education. Recognized for its capacity to engage students actively and support decision-making, PjBL aligns well with the principles of autonomous learning by allowing students to steer their own educational paths. By analyzing a range of journal articles through thematic methods, this review investigates key issues including how PjBL fosters autonomy, the barriers students encounter when engaging with this approach, instructional strategies to optimize its benefits, and ways learners exhibit autonomy in PjBL environments. The results emphasize the important contribution of project-based learning to fostering learner autonomy, while also pointing out the obstacles and approaches needed for its successful implementation. The review accentuates the importance of structured support systems and mentorship to facilitate students' transition to project-based learning environments, ultimately to enhance independent learning, critical thinking, and collaboration skills which are essential for success in learning environment.

Keywords: Project-based learning, Learner autonomy, Self-directed learning

69 Introduction

In recent years, learner autonomy has become a goal in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching and learning. In learner autonomy, students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning process. Furthermore, to support that process Project-based Learning is recognized to engage learners in enhancing meaningful learning, real-world tasks activity to foster critical thinking, and collaboration to do self-regulated learning.

This research highlights how Project-Based Learning (PBL) can enhance learner autonomy by promoting positive attitudes and intrinsic motivation through real-world tasks. PBL fosters a sense of agency and empowerment among students. However, challenges arise, such as limited resources and the need to accommodate diverse learning preferences. According to Anderson (2022) and Borg & Al-Busaidi, (2012), educators must create supportive, inclusive environments and provide ongoing guidance and scaffolding to help students gradually develop autonomy.

To find out the how project-based learning can promote learner autonomy in detail, this research tried to address the following questions:

1. How does project-based learning contribute to enhancing learner autonomy?
2. What are the challenges faced by students in adopting project-based learning to support autonomy?
3. What strategies can teachers use to promote learner autonomy through project-based learning?

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70 Literature Review

Project-based Learning

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is a student-centered learning strategy that typically progresses through phases such as topic selection, planning, inquiry, implementation, and outcome evaluation (Dooly & Masats, 2008 in Mali, 2016). PBL aligns with Dickinson's framework for learner autonomy by encouraging students to take control of their learning. Giving learners meaningful choices throughout the process builds their confidence and fosters autonomy (Díaz Ramírez, 2014).

The integration of 21st century skills, such as communication, collaboration, dan digital literacy within project-based learning contributes to its effectiveness. As Bell (2010) noted, Project-based learning prepares students for the demands of moderns workforce by encouraging inquiry, creativity, and ownership of learning. Moreover, Project-based learning also aligns with constructivism learning theories, such as Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) where learning can be occurred as long as students are guided beyond their current capabilities through social interaction and appropriate support.

Learner Autonomy

Dickinson's framework for learner autonomy emphasizes key elements such as self-instruction, decision-making, access to resources, and personalized instruction, all of which help students take greater responsibility for their learning. By allowing learners to study independently, make choices, and use varied resources, autonomy fosters motivation, ownership, and a mindset for lifelong learning. Personalized teaching further supports this by adapting to individual needs and learning styles, enhancing engagement and outcomes (Dickinson, as cited in Yuliani & Lengkanawati, 2017).

71 Research Methods

This research adopts a descriptive qualitative framework, reviewing existing literature to analyze how project-based learning promoting learner autonomy. Four articles (as summarized in table 1) were selected based on the following criteria: the articles focus on project-based learning and learner autonomy contexts, the articles published in reputable and accessible journal, and the articles were published between 2017-2024. During analysis, findings are synthesized using thematic analysis to identify patterns and trends in the literature. Thematic analysis involves identifying key ideas, grouping into categories, and organizing into broader themes. The themes were aligned into the contributions of project-based learning, challenges, and strategies (Braun and Clarke, 2021).

72 Result and Discussion

Project-Based Learning Contribute to Enhancing Learner Autonomy

In Project-Based Learning, self-access learning encourages students to explore resources independently, though some may need support due to limited experience or motivation. Educators can assist through group work, technology, and self-assessment strategies. Individualized instruction further promotes autonomy by allowing students to tailor learning to their needs. By offering guidance and adjusting support based on students' autonomy levels, PBL fosters self-direction, confidence, and responsibility in learning as noted by Yuliani & Lengkanawati (2017).

Table 4: Reviewed studies and their alignment with research questions

No	Benefit	Disadvantaged
1	How does project-based learning contribute to enhancing learner autonomy?	(Yuliani & Lengkanawati, 2017) (Phuong & Tham, 2022)
2	What are the challenges faced by students in developing a positive attitude towards project-based learning for promoting learner autonomy?	(Aminah et al., 2023)
3	How can teachers encourage students to realize the benefits of project-based learning in improving learner autonomy?	(Khoudri et al., 2023)

Students demonstrate moderate levels of confidence in their autonomous learning skills through Project-Based Learning (PBL). The data indicates students' adeptness at seeking clarification online, engaging in class activities, goal setting, task assignment, and self-assessment. However, challenges persist in goal determination, planning, monitoring, and implementation (Phuong & Tham, 2022).

The Challenges Faced by Students in Developing a Positive Attitude towards Project-Based Learning

According to Aminah et al., (2023), learners encounter various obstacles when trying to cultivate a constructive mindset toward employing Project-Based Learning (PBL) for autonomous learning. These challenges encompass a lack of clarity about PBL principles, difficulties in executing projects, maintaining motivation, navigating team interactions, coping with failures, integrating feedback, balancing creative expression with academic requirements, limited time, adjusting to new ways of thinking, and struggles with self-discipline and time management.

Strategies to Encourage Students in Promoting Learner Autonomy using Project-Based Learning

Studies indicate that Project-Based Learning supports students in becoming more responsible for their learning and helps them build important skills needed for success in both academic settings and real-world contexts. Findings from surveys and interviews indicate that this approach supports the development of critical thinking, collaboration, hands-on learning experiences, student agency, involvement in curriculum-related decisions, and the ability to apply knowledge beyond the classroom (see Khoudri et al., 2023).

The findings show that Project-Based Learning (PBL) supports learner autonomy by promoting self-direction, collaboration, experiential learning, and real-world application. Educators should harness these benefits to help students unlock PBL's potential in building autonomy and academic readiness. The study also emphasizes the need for ongoing support and scaffolding to strengthen autonomous learning. With proper guidance, students can become more self-directed, proactive, and reflective, boosting both their autonomy and academic achievement.

73 Conclusion

The review concludes that Project-Based Learning (PBL) is a promising approach for promoting learner autonomy in EFL classroom as it contributes significantly to the development of autonomous learning. Although it also acknowledges the difficulties students may encounter when engaging with this approach. When aligned with Dickinson's framework, PBL can enhance critical thinking, promote collaboration, and encourage independent learning. Nevertheless, learners often face challenges such as grasping PBL concepts, maintaining motivation, working effectively in teams, and dealing with setbacks. These difficulties emphasize the necessity of providing well-organized support systems to ensure students can fully benefit from PBL in modern educational settings.

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