

# FOSTERING EFL STUDENTS' AUTONOMOUS LEARNING SKILLS THROUGH PROJECT-BASED LEARNING AT A BILINGUAL SCHOOL

Nguyen Thi Bich Phuong<sup>1</sup>, Duong My Tham<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ho Chi Minh City Open University, 97 Vo Van Tan, Ward 6, District 3, Ho Chi Minh city, Vietnam

<sup>2</sup> Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance,  
141-145 Dien Bien Phu, Ward 15, Binh Thanh District, Ho Chi Minh city, Vietnam

Received 14 January 2022

Revised 26 March 2022; Accepted 10 May 2022

**Abstract:** It is universally acknowledged that learners are encouraged to construct their own knowledge through project-based learning as this teaching method reinforces their critical thinking, active learning, independent work, and/or collaboration. This paper, therefore, aimed to investigate how ninth graders at a Ho Chi Minh City-based bilingual school self-evaluated their autonomous learning skills during the use of project-based learning in a Media course. Thirty-five students were involved in responding to a questionnaire and writing diaries, and six of them participated in semi-structured interviews. Descriptive statistics in terms of mean and standard deviation was opted for processing the quantitative data from the questionnaire while content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data garnered from the interviews and diaries. The quantitative results showed quite high mean scores, i.e., the surveyed students were able to conduct autonomous learning skills during the project-based Media class. The findings further indicated the development of autonomous learning skills (e.g., making plans for project fulfillment, self-overcoming the learning challenges, expressing more ideas, and self-assessing their learning capacity) rated by the participants. However, other skills such as goal setting and self-monitoring remained unchanged.

*Keywords:* autonomous learning skills, learner autonomy, project-based learning

## 1. Introduction

It is proven that learner autonomy is one of the best practices in the world of language education. The concept of learner autonomy was described by Holec (1981) as the ability to take charge of one's own learning. It is evident that learners' participation in decision-making process makes the learning more focused and purposeful, and thus entails the immediate and long-lasting effectiveness (Dickinson, 1987; Little, 1991). According to Littlewood (1997), that the traditional teaching approaches which have constrained the students' learning can be minimized when the learners are responsible for their own studies. Additionally, Sun (2013)

asserted that one of the ideal solutions to the assurance of learner differences in case of limited class time and fixed curricula is to equip learners with autonomous learning skills.

Several researchers have viewed project-based learning (PBL) as a key strategy to promote learner autonomy and students' language skills. As a matter of fact, PBL allows students to join learning activities as active and confident participants (Krajcik et al., 1994; Krajcik et al., 1999). With PBL, learners are likely to be more responsible for their own learning and finding solutions to problems regarding real-life contexts. Solomon (2003) and Simpson (2011) pointed out that PBL, as a student-driven and engaging approach to

---

\* Corresponding author.

Email address: [thamdm@uef.edu.vn](mailto:thamdm@uef.edu.vn)

learning, helps cultivate students' confidence, autonomous learning and language competence.

Acknowledging the value of learner autonomy in 21<sup>st</sup> century education, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) of Vietnam has attempted to apply different educational policies that have placed a focus on producing more autonomous learning with more active and responsible learners. However, it is found that Vietnamese secondary school students, particularly those at the research setting, have been given little chance to conduct autonomous learning skills in reality. To enhance learner autonomy, hence, PBL is taken into consideration to help students foster their autonomous learning. The current study aimed at investigating the students' self-evaluation of their autonomous learning skills during the use of PBL in a Media course. The research question is formulated as follows.

*How do ninth graders at a bilingual school perceive their autonomous learning skills during the project-based Media course?*

The current research hopefully cultivates language students' and teachers' awareness of the importance of learner autonomy, especially autonomous learning skills to students' future success. Accordingly, both teachers and students can clearly define their roles and responsibilities in the teaching and learning process. On a broader scale, based on the research findings, school leaders may have a clearer picture of how autonomous learning skills are perceived by students and how they appreciate PBL. They then make a plan for teachers to gain knowledge and skills of such vital issues and have the curriculum reviewed or updated to meet the demands of the present education.

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***Learner Autonomy and Autonomous Learning Skills***

Learner autonomy has become influential as a goal of global education for the past decades. Promoted by Holec (1981), learner autonomy refers to the learner's ability to take charge of his or her own learning. The author also confirmed that autonomy is not an innate attribute of learners, and it can be acquired

through the systematic and purposeful learning process. Dickinson (1987) adopted Holec's (1981) viewpoint and identified students' responsibility as well as capacity in a similar way. Nevertheless, his given definition is assumed to describe learner autonomy at a higher degree. More clearly, this level of autonomy requires the learners to define their learning objectives and self-evaluate their learning process and goal-attainment without the constraints of formal education. Similarly, Crabbe (1993) stated that "the individual has the right to be free to exercise his or her own choices in other areas, and not become a victim (even unwitting one) of choices made by social institutions" (p. 443). Young (1986) and Freire (1996) followed the same path stating that autonomy refers to not only the capacity of learners but also their freedom to generate the learning possibilities and to carry out choices for the construction of knowledge with no suppression from the others.

Little (1991) defined autonomy as a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making and independent action. Alongside students' capacity to carry out their learning independently, psychology also plays a crucial part in this sense. Accordingly, an autonomous learner is one who is aware of his or her role in learning and has the capacity to make independent learning choices, which may be approached then by many metacognitive-focused definitions. As an example, Wenden (1991) concluded that true learner autonomy relates to how students reflect on their learning and how they realize they have effective learning situations. In the same vein, Dam (1995) claimed that autonomous learning cannot be promoted if learners are unaware and unwilling to accept their responsibility for learning. Learner autonomy can be only acquired in case both ability and willingness exist, affirmed by Littlewood (1996).

A number of scholars have attempted to clarify the notion of learner autonomy by identifying the skills which an autonomous learner is capable of. There is a general consensus among the scholars that learner autonomy is the learners' capability of implementing the following four skills or strategies: generating the learning goals,

planning, monitoring and self-evaluating (Dickinson, 1993; Hedge, 2000; Holec, 1981). Together with this indication, autonomous learning skills have been illustrated variously. For instance, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Duong (2020) classified autonomous learning strategies into three primary categories, namely cognitive, metacognitive, and affective or social. The cognitive strategies put an emphasis on learners' memorization and perception whilst the metacognitive relate to their setting goals, planning, monitoring, implementing and evaluating. The affective or social strategies concern the students' participation in communicative interactions such as peer collaboration for task completion.

To increase learner autonomy, learners need to improve a wide range of skills involving goal setting, planning, information searching, organizing and transforming, problem-solving, seeking assistance, monitoring, motivation, self-evaluation, and attention control (Duong et al., 2020; Effeneya et al., 2013; Punhagui, 2019). Such skills are called autonomous learning skills in some studies (Alkandari & Al-Failakawi, 2022; Chiu, 2012; Duong, 2021). Within the scope of this study, autonomous learning skills such as goal-setting, planning, monitoring, self-evaluation, motivation, and attention control are under investigation on the basis of Duong et al.'s (2020) and Duong's (2021) frameworks.

### ***Project-Based Learning***

The application of PBL has a long history dating back to the 1890s and 1900s. Moss and Van Duzer (1998) considered PBL an innovative teaching method which engages students in investigating solutions to a problem or developing a product. In the same vein, Thomas (2000) gave a brief definition of PBL that is a model of organizing learning around projects. In other words, PBL underlines a way of learning by the exploration of real-world situations through plural tasks being student-centered, interdisciplinary and integrated, and these features make it different from the traditional methods (Solomon, 2003; Willie, 2001). In another aspect, Bell (2010) claimed that independent thinkers and learners could be created thanks to this crucial strategy. An inquiry is the core idea of this student-driven and teacher-facilitated approach to learning. From

this perspective, learners explore a meaningful question, produce outcomes and build knowledge through different work stages such as designing investigations, planning, implementing appropriate learning strategies, collecting and analyzing data, and sharing ideas. To conclude, PBL is a learner-centered approach that engages the learners in discovering purposeful questions through a process of collaboration and investigation, from which they are able to gain profound knowledge.

There have been a variety of principles for applying PBL which include addressing driving questions to motivate learning, targeting significant learning goals, using projects to promote learning and dedicating sufficient time to PBL (Condliffe et al., 2017). First of all, a high-quality driving question must be feasible, worthwhile, contextualized, meaningful, and ethical. The second principle is associated with determining primary learning aims. That is, a well-designed project necessitates exposing students to key learning concepts and in-depth understanding, and enabling them to promote success skills such as critical thinking, self-reflection and collaboration. The third principle – using projects to promote learning – implies that projects should be central, not peripheral to the curriculum. Regarding the time dedicated to PBL, it is explained that extended and comprehensive investigations need a good deal of time to be conducted, so they should be administered over an extended period for expected outcomes (Ravitz, 2010).

### ***Previous Studies***

In order to explore and implement the new educational approaches in the teaching and learning process, many researchers have concentrated more on PBL as an efficient means to help students become more active and independent in learning. Numerous studies (Bell, 2010; Fried-Booth, 2002; Skehan, 1998; Yuliani, 2017) investigated the influence of PBL on learner autonomy. Furthermore, most of the results showed that the use of PBL makes a great contribution to the increase of students' autonomous learning.

Ilhan (2014) carried out a study in a social studies class with the purpose of discovering the efficiency of PBL to primary school students. The participants were required

to deliver an oral presentation on the topic they had learnt. The results of the study revealed that the students exercised their responsibility more often and learned to work as an independent participant. The students exhibited a high level of motivation and were engaged to enhance self-regulation, self-evaluation and social studies understanding as well. In another study conducted by Díaz Ramírez (2014), during the semester, the students produced a magazine with the focus on environmental issues. The findings showed a sign of progress on learner autonomy. Collaboration and intrinsic motivation were encouraged during their work to achieve the agreed goals and to construct the knowledge as well. Interestingly, self-regulation was exhibited when the students managed to overcome failure.

On the contrary, McCarthy's (2010) study aiming at exploring whether learner autonomy was fostered after the implementation of PBL approach revealed that a plenty of research participants were notably unconcerned about exercising autonomous learning. They did not perform much effort and interest in independent language learning. In addition, they wondered why decision-making was their responsibility. Their learning was oriented towards getting credit, so they were content to follow teacher-centered instructions. Nonetheless, the study came to a conclusion that regardless of the slight variation in the attitudes of the learners, PBL is beneficial to the learners and teachers if the learners are made clear of their capacity to work autonomously and to achieve growth in language learning.

In a narrower sense, Le and Ho (2021) explored university students' perceptions of benefits as well as challenges when PBL is applied in ESP classrooms. Sixty-four fourth-year students majoring in Business English at HUTECH university were involved in answering the questionnaire, taking part in the interview, and writing journals. The findings indicated that the benefits of PBL outweighed challenges they encountered. The participants reported their improvement in language and content knowledge, professional skills, sense of responsibility, and motivation. However, there existed some obstacles such as their absence of skills, their current level of English proficiency, and their negative attitude.

In short, PBL has been considered one of the favorable practices to reinforce learner autonomy despite the fact that it could not benefit a small number of learners. It is assumed that students need to invest in their studies for academic achievement (Murray et al., 2004); therefore, it is useful to promote their ownership in learning. A learner with an ownership mindset will take accountability for their work and success. This sense of ownership can be flourished in the PBL-based environment where learners can often address questions and solve problems (Murray et al., 2004; Helle et al., 2006). Consequently, learners are not products of a society, but producers. The project work gives students plenty of opportunities to develop confidence and independence (Fried-Booth, 2002). Bell (2010) echoed all the views on PBL and generalized that PBL brings students far-reaching outcomes, three of which are learning responsibility, independence and discipline. In this study, the researchers endeavored to examine whether adolescents' autonomous learning skills were developed in a PBL-based Media course at a bilingual school which has not been conducted in previous studies so far.

### **3. Methodology**

#### ***Research Design***

The study employed the explanatory sequential mixed-method design in which a questionnaire and semi-structured interview were included. In the first phase, the quantitative data were collected from the questionnaire and analyzed. In the second phase, the qualitative data were generated from the interview and the diary to support the quantitative results. It is noted that the quantitative and qualitative results were integrated and connected.

#### ***Research Site and Participants***

The present study was conducted at a Ho Chi Minh City-based bilingual school offering Vietnamese and English programs to three levels from primary to high school. With reference to the Vietnamese program, students are taught according to the program designed by the MOET. For the English program, the school has provided a learning curriculum based on K-12 education standards of American Education Reaches Out (AERO) and common core state standard. It is noteworthy that Media classes are

just for students at pre-intermediate level and above. A semester GPA of each subject will be the total of class performance (40%), mid-term test (30%), and final test (30%). Test papers are applied for all subjects except Media as it is only evaluated on the basis of class performance which is evaluated by the teacher-in-charge.

The participants of the study were 35 out of 69 students in grade 9 who were conveniently chosen. That is, there were two grade-nine classes, and one of the researchers was in charge of the studied class. Based on the data obtained from the questionnaire, most of the research participants were at the age of 15 (94.3%). There were 18 males (51.4%) and 17 females (48.6%). Among these 35 students, most of them have studied English for more than 7 years (65.7%). Nearly 50% of the sample spent less than 2 hours for self-study each day and only a few (8.6%) invested more than 4 hours. Regarding the time of project preparation, almost all students (approximately 97%) were able to fulfill the tasks within one month.

**The Application of PBL**

The Media course of the school is designed to enrich students’ knowledge of various aspects such as cultures, geography, science, people or social issues all over the world. More importantly, it is expected to help students develop their English skills and study skills as well. Accordingly, the course exposes students to plenty of practice in reading, speaking and writing skills. Study skills such as

researching, critical thinking, problem solving and self-directed learning are also placed much focus for the development. By this course, each skill area is beneficial to students in different ways. For instance, students are provided with instructions and chances to practice selecting reliable and valuable information from the Internet, which is helpful to their future research endeavors. In order to promote students’ speaking and presentation skills, instructions and learning activities are designed to give students exposure to debates, social conversations or speech delivery. Likewise, the writing instruction focuses on both academic and non-academic paragraph writing to help students produce better writing output. For autonomy enhancement, especially, guidance, learning and teaching strategies and classroom tasks bring students to teamwork and problems or situations they are able to overcome by themselves.

The Media course aims to help learners acquire well-rounded knowledge of diverse cultures, customs as well as traditions of people throughout the world, from which learners are able to increase their perception of social issues. Aside from this, it tentatively intends to enhance the learners’ autonomous learning and accountability for lifelong learning. The acceptance of responsibility for their own actions would help the learners to easily drive their own lives as well as to become valuable citizens of the global community. The course in this study is scheduled as displayed in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Description of the Media Course*

| <b>Topic</b>           | <b>Content</b>   | <b>Week</b> |
|------------------------|--|-------------|
| Culture: Ancient China | Overview of ancient China<br>Learning about Chinese dynasties, early civilizations, and ancient inventions | 1           |
|                        | <b>Diary</b>   |             |
|                        | <b>Presentation</b>  | 2           |
|                        | Studying about religions in ancient China,<br>Introducing Confucius and Lao-tzu                            | 3           |
| Geography: Egypt       | <b>Diary</b>   |             |
|                        | <b>Portfolio</b>   | 4           |
|                        | Exploring location, geographical features of Egypt   | 5           |

|                             |  |    |
|-----------------------------|--|----|
|                             | How these features affect the economic developments                                    |    |
|                             | <b>Presentation</b>  |    |
|                             | Introducing climatic features as well as benefits and difficulties to the pace of life | 6  |
|                             | <b>Diary</b>   |    |
|                             | Discovering the biodiversity in terms of plants and animals                            |    |
|                             | How the biodiversity is beneficial to the scientific research and economy              | 7  |
|                             | <b>Diary</b>   |    |
|                             | <b>Video clip</b>  | 8  |
|                             | <b>Video clip</b>  | 9  |
| Government: Abraham Lincoln | Biography and political life of Abraham Lincoln  | 10 |
|                             | <b>Diary</b>   |    |
|                             | <b>Interview</b>   | 11 |
|                             | <b>Role-play</b>   | 12 |
| People: J. K. Rowling       | Childhood, life achievement and timeline   | 13 |
|                             | <b>Diary</b>   |    |
|                             | <b>Portfolio</b>   | 14 |
|                             | Harry Potter   | 15 |
|                             | <b>Role-play</b>   | 16 |

To collect information for the projects, students were encouraged to make use of the school's e-library resources, cooperated and developed by Gale Cengage Learning. Any other research tools or materials could be used for task accomplishment. Students were only evaluated for class performance based on the criteria agreed by the school teachers, including class attendance, class discipline, presentation and class participation. However, marking can be different as teachers can adapt some criteria that are supposed to be appropriate for their students. Often, students' participation in class was assessed by their contribution to group presentations, writing and projects. These kinds of group work were evaluated by the teacher-in-charge with the rubric. During each week, additionally, special class activities such as individual work, group discussion or debating were employed as tools to assess students' progress.

The students were required to carry out projects according to the following guidelines. Firstly, the students reported their learning

experiences in terms of contents learned, tasks, and suggestions for improvement in their diaries during the course. Secondly, the students searched for information to prepare a presentation. After the presentation, the presenters answered the questions raised by the teachers as well as the peers. Thirdly, the students created digital portfolios comprising a collection of artifacts and contents of the lessons. Next, the students recorded the summary of the lessons and made video clips that would be played in class for feedback and suggestions. Following this, the students designed the interview questions based on the lessons learned. They then interviewed 3 or 4 classmates, took notes and shared what they received from the interviews. As for role-play, finally, the students first read a story of famous people and simulated real-life situations. Each group member decided which role they should take. They performed their situations in class.

#### **Research Instruments**

The study employed three instruments,

namely a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and diaries for data collection. Based on the theoretical foundation, the questionnaire was generated to scrutinize the students' self-evaluation of their autonomous learning skills with the intervention of the project-based Media course. It was divided into two parts: part A to collect participants' general information and part B including 10 questions involving students' self-evaluation of their autonomous learning. These 10 questions were designed with a 5-point Likert scale (from Not at all true of myself to True of myself).

The semi-structured interview had 5 core questions involving frequency of group meetings during the project, individuals' tasks, strengths and weaknesses relating to autonomous learning skills, and development of these skills. The one-on-one interview was conducted with each individual to gain in-depth ideas or perspectives in relation to autonomous learning skills and PBL. The informants were labeled from I1 to I6 according to the order of the interviews.

The structured diaries were also employed to support the results obtained from the questionnaire and the interviews. In particular, the students needed to reflect what they learned and suggestions e.g., topics/contents, assigned tasks, allotted time, pre-determined plans, strengths and weaknesses, suggestions. The students' diaries were submitted to the teacher on a weekly basis.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, the questionnaire, interview questions and diaries were reviewed and consulted by an expert in the field of English language studies before they were delivered to the research participants. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to measure the internal consistency of items. The results show the reliability of the questionnaire as the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was at .90. In terms of language barriers, the language used for collecting the data through the questionnaire, interviews, and diaries was Vietnamese – their mother tongue as the participants may encounter difficulties in

expressing themselves in the target language.

#### ***Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis***

Before the official data were collected, 3 students were invited to pilot the questionnaire, then some adjustments were made to the questionnaire. After that, the questionnaires were administered to 35 students with some clarifications in Vietnamese to assure students' full understanding. It took them 10 minutes to complete the questionnaires. Next, 6 out of 35 students were invited for one-on-one interviews on a voluntary basis, each of which lasted around 15 minutes. All interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, recorded with interviewees' consent, and transcribed. Diaries were carried out in Vietnamese by all of the 35 participants every week. All responses garnered from the interviews and diaries were translated into English.

This explanatory sequential mixed-methods research used both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data yielded from the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS version 25 in terms of mean (M) and standard deviation (SD). The meaning of the mean scores was interpreted as follows: 1.00-1.80: not at all true of myself; 1.81-2.60: slightly true of myself; 2.61-3.40: about halfway true of myself; 3.41-4.20: mostly true of myself; 4.21-5.00: true of myself. Meanwhile, the qualitative data gathered from the interviews and diaries were analyzed on the basis of content analysis. First, the data were read and put in the Excel files. After that, the researchers coded and recorded the data. Finally, the data were categorized and interpreted according to themes. The interviewees were labeled from I1 to I6, and the students' diaries were labeled from the first student (D1) to the last one (D35).

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### ***Results***

As shown in Table 2, the overall mean score of students' self-evaluation of their autonomous learning skills was 3.39 out of 5.00 (SD = 1.03). That is, the participants perceived that they were capable of undertaking part of autonomous learning strategies.

**Table 2***Students' Self-Evaluation of Autonomous Learning Skills*

| Item           | <i>During the project-based Media class, I can ...</i>   | N = 35      |             |
|----------------|--|-------------|-------------|
|                |  | M           | SD          |
| 1              | determine clear learning objectives to achieve them  | 3.17        | 1.04        |
| 2              | set my learning plan whenever each project is given  | 3.37        | .94         |
| 3              | seek clarification of the learned contents on the Internet when needed                           | 3.91        | .95         |
| 4              | arrange discussions with my classmates outside class to complete assigned projects               | 3.26        | 1.22        |
| 5              | ask for help from my classmates or teacher when facing difficulties in given tasks               | 3.54        | .95         |
| 6              | strive to complete given tasks on time and in expectation as well                                | 3.29        | 1.02        |
| 7              | use in-class and outside class time constructively to complete projects promptly and excellently | 3.20        | 1.05        |
| 8              | assess my learning capacity based on my strengths as well as weaknesses during teamwork          | 3.43        | 1.04        |
| 9              | monitor my study through diary writing after each lesson   | 3.31        | 1.11        |
| 10             | consistently engage in Media class as I am given more freedom of ideas expression                | 3.46        | .98         |
| <b>Average</b> |  | <b>3.39</b> | <b>1.03</b> |

Note: M: Mean; SD: Standard deviation

The quantitative data revealed that most students would “seek clarification of the learned contents on the Internet” when necessary (item 3: M = 3.91; SD = .95) and “ask for help from classmates or teacher” to overcome the learning problems or challenges found during their work (item 5: M = 3.54; SD = .95). The participants admitted of “consistently engag[ing]” in Media class as a result of having “more freedom of ideas expression” (item 10: M = 3.46; SD = .98). Moreover, the students displayed the considerable potential for “assess[ing] [their] learning capacity based on [their] strengths as well as weaknesses during teamwork” (item 8: M = 3.43; SD = 1.04). Nevertheless, there was a doubt in the students’ mind about other strategies, especially those in regard to setting goals, planning, monitoring and implementing. By way of illustration, most of them expressed little agreement on the statements that they were able to “determine clear learning objectives to achieve them” (item 1: M = 3.17; SD = 1.04), “set learning plan whenever each project is given” (item 2: M = 3.37; SD = .94) and “monitor [their] study through diary writing after each lesson” (item 9: M = 3.31; SD = 1.11).

Also, participants had an air of uncertainty about their ability to “arrange discussions with [their] classmates outside class” so as to accomplish the tasks given (item 4: M = 3.26; SD = 1.22), “complete given tasks on time and in expectation” (item 6: M = 3.29; SD = 1.02), and “manage time to complete projects properly” (item 7: M = 3.20; SD = 1.05).

The qualitative results gained from the interview reveal that the students could carry out several autonomous learning skills. They set plans to work towards the finished products with a wide range of tasks such as gathering information, assigning particular work and setting deadlines.

My group and I make a plan which covers the contents necessary to be presented in the project, task assignment for each member and the allotted time. (I1)  
We had one week to prepare the script. We made an outline and followed the leader’s assignment. It was very hard to remember the script, but I tried my best and practiced more with my friends. (D22)  
Moreover, the students actively sought



help from peers, instructors or the Internet when facing troubles. In case of limited class time, they also managed to arrange meetings outside the school. For example, I6 revealed, “sometimes my group members and I gather at one’s house, eat and work on some complicated projects like making video clips or role-playing.” Some other students (I2, I3, I6, & D4) said that they communicated with each other through social media apps apart from discussions at school. Zalo, Facebook and Instagram were their favorable social networking sites.

With reference to the self-evaluation, there is a consensus among the students that they could self-assess their capacity for learning during group work. In other words, the students knew what their strengths or weaknesses are, from which they could develop or improve.

I am good at speaking skills but cannot communicate with others effectively. My friends always start a conversation. (I3)

I realize I am good at giving presentations as my friends just read words on slides, not explain the provided information. However, I am not good at technology. (I4)

After weeks of hard work, we had the full video. During this time, I think our group has done a great job although sometimes we had some misunderstandings. Being a leader gives me an opportunity to improve my leadership skills. I feel more confident when working with other people and know how to connect people together. (D1)

Given more freedom of speech, the students voiced their ideas more frequently as I5 declared that “it is so exciting that I can present my ideas and express my understanding without any worries.”

On the other hand, several students did not use goal setting and monitoring skills. They simply checked whether or not each individual’s task was done whilst the quality of products was not paid much attention.

Since the projects are given, group members will be assigned different tasks and try to finish their tasks within given time. Any unfinished task will be cut

when it is about to the submission deadline. (I4)

We come straight to the point – products or performances – to save time. (I5)

This week we presented the culture of Ancient China to the class. We made an outline and each member was in charge of one part of the presentation. With the information I found last week, I could finish my task quickly because I am familiar with PowerPoint. Until the deadline, we combined all parts and edited the presentation. (D22)

### *Discussion*

The present research displayed some positive results. Specifically, learners tried to successfully deal with the difficulties that probably happened during their work in various ways such as making good use of the searching tools or asking for help from their teachers and friends. Also, they strove to complete their parts on time, which is aligned with Bell’s (2010) finding which stated that students may be pushed to take their responsibility due to the expectations of their peers. Each member is expected to make equal contributions to the group projects; therefore, he or she must keep on tasks and finish their work promptly. With regard to students’ ability to be in charge of their studies, students often practiced planning, implementing and self-evaluating strategies without the direct control of their teacher. These findings are in accordance with those of some researchers (Bell, 2010; Díaz Ramírez, 2014; Yuliani, 2017). The students themselves designed plans, selected appropriate contents, discussed the deadline, searched for materials using technology or other resources, and made a good choice for their products. During group work, they could reflect how well their work was and were aware of their merits or shortcomings.

From the garnered data, however, it was found that very few students did practice in goal setting and monitoring. This matter might lead students to the unreliable self-assessment of their learning outcomes. The fact that goal setting and self-monitoring skills were not exercised by the students in this research can be a consequence of students’ insufficient preparation or inexperience in autonomous learning. These

suggested reasons are consistent with Lengkanawati's (2016) position. Accordingly, the students need prolonged training to have effective practice in setting goals and self-monitoring as learner autonomy is an ability that is not innate but could be only acquired through a long process, as stated by Sinclair (as cited in Yuliani, 2017).

## 5. Conclusion

The findings of the study shed light on the issue shown in the research questions. The study results revealed that students were more autonomous during the project-based Media class. Apparently, they demonstrated a habit of planning and implementing numerous strategies in order to accomplish the final products. In addition, the majority of learners took responsibility for their group work and managed to self-overcome the learning problem. They could further carry out the evaluation of their learning capacity, their finished products and the ones of their peers. Nevertheless, the students showed no practice in the other strategies, including goal setting and monitoring skills. Seemingly, the learners are inexperienced in these two aspects and thus need adequate training and a long process for the development.

In order to help maximize Vietnamese secondary school students' autonomous learning skills and to effectively implement PBL, some pedagogical implications are suggested. Firstly, it is essential to raise teachers and students' awareness of their roles and the benefits of PBL in the teaching and learning process. To do this efficiently, teachers should be provided with more opportunities to approach conferences, training, and up-to-date teaching resources in order that they can grasp primary concerns of education or have successful implementation in their classroom. Likewise, the students must be well-equipped for learning in the PBL-related environment and for undertaking successful independent learning, both inside and outside the classroom; especially, students should be instructed to define clear learning goals and to be self-disciplined. Both school administrators and teachers are really important to make it possible. Teachers ought to show students the objectives of each lesson, guide them to set goals for their

own tasks or projects, and control over their work without preventing them from undertaking their independent learning. Teachers also need to inform students of learning objectives at the beginning of each class and seriously supervise their performance. Secondly, PBL has to be made a principal task in the school curriculum and the products students produce ought to be assessed as oral, fifteen-minute or even forty-five-minute tests. Such practice helps students be more engaged in PBL and the learning is more meaningful as well. Finally, school administrators should be aware of the importance of autonomous learning skills and the benefits of PBL approach to learners' success in learning, so they may organize workshops, seminars or training sessions on these aspects. More importantly, they should have the curriculum reviewed or even revised so that it is aligned with learner autonomy enhancement as well as the effectiveness of PBL approach.

The current study still has some limitations; therefore, the following recommendations are drawn for future research. First of all, this study was conducted with the participation of only 35 ninth-grade students at a secondary school, so its results should not be used to make generalizations to other participants with different learning contexts. It will be better if the sample size of further study is enlarged. Second, in spite of the triangulation of data collection instruments, the study results depended much on the perceptions of individual learners, which may leave a distinction between their perceptions and actual behaviors. It was such a distinction that could affect the validity as well as reliability of the research. It is recommended that future study should employ other research instruments such as observations or tests to avoid this limitation. Last but not least, only perspectives of students were explored in this study while the aspects of teachers or school administrators were not. In fact, they can greatly contribute to the development of autonomous learning skills and the success of PBL implementation. For this reason, the future researchers should consider discovering autonomous learning skills and PBL from the perspectives of different stakeholders.

### References

- Akhand, M. M. (2015). Project-based learning (PBL) and Webquest: New dimensions in achieving learner autonomy in a class at tertiary level. *Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics*, 19(2), 55-74.
- Alkandari, K., & Al-Failakawei, A. (2022). Enhancement of preservice Islamic studies teachers' autonomous learning skills: Designing a reverse learning project. *International Journal of Instruction*, 15(1), 153-166.
- Bell, S. (2010). Project-based learning for the 21st century: Skills for the future. *The Clearing House*, 83(2), 39-43.
- Chiu, H. L. W. (2012). Supporting the development of autonomous learning skills in reading and writing in an independent language learning center. *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal*, 3(3), 266-290.
- Condliffe, B., Quint, J., Visser, M. G., Bangser, M. R., Drohojowska, S., Saco, L., & Nelson, E. (2017). *Project-based learning: A literature review*. MDRC.
- Crabbe, D. (1993). Fostering autonomy from within the classroom: The teacher's responsibility. *System*, 21(4), 443-52.
- Dam, L. (1995). *Learner autonomy: From theory to classroom practice* (Vol. 3). Authentik Language learning resources.
- Díaz Ramírez, M. I. (2014). Developing learner autonomy through project work in an ESP class. *HOW, A Colombian Journal for Teachers of English*, 21(2), 54-73.
- Dickinson, L. (1987). *Self-instruction in language learning*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dickinson, L. (1993). Talking shop. Aspects of autonomous learning. *ELT Journal*, 47(4), 331-335.
- Duong, T. M. (2020). First year English majors' use of autonomous learning strategies. *VNU Journal of Science: Education Research*, 36(3), 52-60.
- Duong, T. M. (2021). English majors' perceptions of autonomous learning skills and their writing performance in an e-portfolio-based writing course. *VNU Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 7(5), 577-590.
- Duong, T. M., Nguyen, H. D. T. C., Nguyen, H. L., & Ha, T. T. N. (2020). First-year English majors' perceptions of the importance of learner autonomy: A case study at Nong Lam University. *Journal of Ho Chi Minh City Open University*, 19(1), 63-76.
- Effeneya, G., Carroll, A., & Bahr, N. (2013). Self-regulated learning: Key strategies and their sources in a sample of adolescent males. *Australian Journal of Educational & Developmental Psychology*, 13, 58-74.
- Freire, P. (1996). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Penguin.
- Fried-Booth, D. L. (2002). *Project work* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Hedge, T. (2000). *Teaching and learning in the language classroom*. OUP.
- Helle, L., Tynjala, P., & Olkinuora, E. (2006). Project-based learning in post-secondary education - theory, practice and rubber sling shots. *Higher Education*, 51(2), 287-314.
- Holec, H. (1981). *Autonomy and foreign language learning*. Pergamon.
- Ihan, I. (2014). A study on the efficacy of project-based learning approach on social studies education: Conceptual achievement and academic motivation. *Academic Journals*, 9(15), 487-497.
- Krajcik, J. S., Blumenfeld, P. C., Marx, R. W., & Soloway, E. (1994). A collaborative model for helping middle-grade science teachers learn project-based instruction. *The Elementary School Journal*, 94, 483-497.
- Krajcik, J. S., Czerniak, C., & Berger, C. (1999). *Teaching children science: A project-based approach*. McGraw-Hill College.
- Le, T. V., Ho, T. H. (2021). Integrating project-based learning into English for specific purposes classes at tertiary level: Perceived challenges and benefits. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, 37(4), 128-148. <https://doi.org/10.25073/2525-2445/vnufs.4642>
- Lengkanawati, N. S. (2016). Teacher's beliefs about learner autonomy and its implementation in Indonesian EFL settings. In R. Barnard & J. Li (Eds.), *Language learner autonomy: Teacher's beliefs and practices in Asian contexts* (pp. 134-149). CAMTESOL.
- Little, D. (1991). *Learner autonomy: Definitions, issues and problems*. Authentik.
- Littlewood, W. (1996). "Autonomy": An anatomy and a framework. *System*, 24(4), 427-435.
- Littlewood, W. (1997). Self-access work and curriculum ideologies. In P. Benson & P. Voller, *Autonomy and independence in language learning* (pp. 181-191). Longman.
- Littlewood, W. (1997). Self-access: Why do we want it and what can it do? In P. Benson & P. Voller, *Autonomy and independence in language learning* (pp. 79-92). Longman.

- McCarthy, T. (2010). Integrating project-based learning into a traditional skills-based curriculum to foster learner autonomy: An action research. *The Journal of Kanda University of International Studies*, 22, 221-244.
- Moss, D., & Van Duzer, C. (1998). *Project-based learning for adult English language learners*. National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education.
- Murray, R., Shea, M., & Shea, B. (2004). Avoiding the one-size-fits-all curriculum: Textsets, inquiry, and differentiating instruction. *Childhood Education*, 81(1), 33.
- O'Malley, J. M., & Chamot, A. U. (1990). *Learning strategies in second language acquisition*. Cambridge University Press.
- Punhagui, G. C. (2019). Using problem-solving as a method for the development of self-regulation of learning with adolescents: An experience report. In N. Feza (Ed.), *Metacognition in Learning*. Intechopen. <https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/68346>
- Simpson, J. (2011). *Integrating project-based learning in an English language tourism classroom in a Thai university institution*. Australian Catholic University.
- Solomon, G. (2003). Project-based learning: A primer. *Technology and Learning*, 23, 20-27.
- Sun, L. (2013). A study on student-centered language pedagogy based on humanism. *Sino-US English Teaching*, 10(6), 457-463.
- Thomas, J. W. (2000). *A review of research on project-based learning*. Purdue University. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/A-REVIEW-OF-RESEARCH-ON-PROJECT-BASED-LEARNING-Thomas/556a3e15b4cfe31588cff520206fcf764a413c25>
- Wenden, A. (1991). *Learner strategies for learner autonomy: Planning and implementing learner training for language learners*. Prentice Hall International.
- Willie, S. L. (2001). *Project-based learning with multimedia*. San Mateo County Office of Education.
- Young, R. (1986). *Personal autonomy: Beyond negative and positive liberty*. Croom Helm.
- Yuliani, Y. (2017). Project-based learning in promoting learner autonomy in an EFL classroom. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 7(2), 285-293.

## TĂNG CƯỜNG TÍNH TỰ CHỦ TRONG HỌC TẬP THÔNG QUA PHƯƠNG PHÁP HỌC TẬP THEO DỰ ÁN TẠI MỘT TRƯỜNG SONG NGỮ

Nguyễn Thị Bích Phương<sup>1</sup>, Dương Mỹ Thảo<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Trường Đại học Mở TP. HCM, 97 Võ Văn Tần, phường 6, quận 3, Tp. Hồ Chí Minh, Việt Nam

<sup>2</sup> Trường Đại học Kinh tế-Tài chính TP. HCM, 141-145 Điện Biên Phủ, quận Bình Thạnh, Tp. Hồ Chí Minh, Việt Nam

**Tóm tắt:** Phương pháp học theo dự án được biết đến như là phương pháp giúp người học tự tiếp thu kiến thức bởi vì phương pháp này thúc đẩy tư duy phản biện, học tập chủ động, làm việc độc lập và/hoặc làm việc nhóm của người học. Vì thế, nghiên cứu này tìm hiểu mức độ tự đánh giá của học sinh lớp 9 tại một trường song ngữ ở thành phố Hồ Chí Minh về khả năng tự chủ trong học tập sau khi giáo viên sử dụng phương pháp dựa theo dự án trong lớp Media. Dữ liệu được thu thập dựa vào bảng khảo sát và nhật ký của 35 học sinh lớp 9. Ngoài ra, 6 trong số 35 học sinh sẽ được tham gia phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc. Thống kê mô tả (cụ thể là giá trị trung bình và độ lệch chuẩn) được sử dụng để phân tích dữ liệu định lượng thu thập từ bảng khảo sát. Trong khi đó, dữ liệu định tính thu thập từ nhật ký của học sinh và phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc được xử lý thông qua phương pháp phân tích nội dung. Kết quả cho thấy rằng những học sinh này có các kỹ năng tự chủ trong học tập. Cụ thể là học có khả năng lập kế hoạch để hoàn thành dự án, tự vượt qua những khó khăn trong học tập, đưa ra nhiều ý tưởng hơn và tự đánh giá năng lực học tập của mình. Tuy nhiên, họ không nhận thấy sự thay đổi ở các kỹ năng khác như thiết lập mục tiêu và tự giám sát.

*Từ khóa:* kỹ năng tự chủ trong học tập, tự chủ trong học tập, phương pháp học tập theo dự án