

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria

Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

University of Ghardaia



Faculty of Letters and Languages

Department of English

**Project-Based Learning as an Approach for Developing Learner Autonomy
in EFL Classroom: the case Study of Licence Students at the University of
Ghardaïa**

**Dissertation submitted to the University of Ghardaia for obtaining the Master's
degree in Didactics.**

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Academic Year: 2025\2026

Dedication

(يَرْفَعُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ)

/سورة المجادلة, الآية: 11/

*In the Name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful.
With sincere gratitude and a heart full of appreciation, I dedicate this
humble work to those who made this journey meaningful.*

*To **My Mother Lila**, the purest soul and the warmest heart I know. Your
prayers carried me through every difficult moment, and your love has
always been my safe place.*

*To **My Father Miloud**, whose silent sacrifices and endless support
taught me the true meaning of strength and perseverance*

*To **My Brothers Abdenour, Mourad, Abderrezak and Ilyas**, thank you
for being my comfort, my laughter, and my motivation when the road
became difficult.*

*And to **Myself**, for surviving the pressure, overcoming the fear, and
continuing this journey with hope despite every challenge.*

*Finally, to every dreamer who believes that hard work and faith can turn
struggles into achievements — this work is dedicated to you.*

Karima Hamadouche

Dedication

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

*First and foremost, I dedicate this work to **ALLAH** the most merciful, the source of all knowledge and strength, who gave me the patience and the willpower to overcome every obstacle and complete this journey.*

Without His divine guidance and endless blessings, this achievement would never have been possible.

To my lovely parents,

Words cannot express how grateful I am for your endless love, patience, and sacrifices. Thank you for always believing in me, encouraging me, and supporting me throughout every step of my journey. Your prayers, guidance, and unconditional support have been my greatest strength.

To my dear sisters,

Thank you for your love, kindness, and constant encouragement. Your support, laughter, and presence have made this journey easier and more beautiful. I am truly lucky to have you by my side.

This work is dedicated to all of you with love and appreciation.

Aya Boumahres

Acknowledgments

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of all worlds, for blessing us with courage, determination, and perseverance needed to accomplish this work. Peace and blessings be upon Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), whose teachings remain a source of knowledge, mercy, and inspiration for humanity.

*We would like to express our deepest appreciation to our supervisor, **Dr. GHANI ZOHRA**, for her constant guidance, patience, and encouragement throughout the completion of this dissertation. Her valuable advice, insightful remarks, and academic support played a fundamental role in improving this research and enriching our understanding.*

*My sincere thanks also go to the students of the **English Department at the University of Ghardaïa** for their participation, cooperation, and willingness to contribute to this study. Their responses and engagement were greatly appreciated.*

Special thanks are extended to our families for their endless support, understanding, and motivation during every difficult moment of this academic journey.

*My heartfelt appreciation goes to my dear friend, **Nesrine**, for her continuous support and encouragement throughout this journey. Her kindness and motivation were truly valuable.*

Finally, we would like to thank everyone who, in one way or another, contributed to the completion of this research. Your support, whether small or great, will always be remembered with gratitude.

Abstract

This study explores the role of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in promoting learner autonomy among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Licence students at the University of Ghardaia. As traditional teacher-centered approaches often limit students' independence and active participation, PBL has emerged as an effective learner-centered approach that encourages 4Cs skills (collaboration, critical thinking, communication and creativity). Adopting a descriptive design and a mixed-methods approach, the research was conducted through questionnaires administered to the English students and semi-structured interviews with them. The findings reveal that students generally hold positive attitudes toward project-based learning, recognizing its important role in enhancing autonomy, teamwork, communication skills, and classroom engagement. The results also indicate that PBL motivates learners to participate actively in the learning process and helps them develop responsibility for their own learning. However, some challenges such as time management and coordination among group members were identified. The study recommends integrating more project-based activities in EFL classrooms to foster learner autonomy and create a more interactive and student-centered learning environment.

Keywords: Project-Based Learning, learner autonomy, EFL learners, 4Cs skills, student-centered learning

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List of Acronyms

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

PBL: Project-Based Learning

CLT: Communicative Language Teaching

TBL: Task-Based Learning

SDL: Self-Directed Learning

ZPD: Zone of Proximal Development

SCT: Social Cognitive Theory

NBLT: Network-Based Language Learning

ECAs: Extracurricular Activities

4Cs: Critical Thinking, Communication, Collaboration, Creativity

LREs: Language-Related Episodes

PLE: Personal Learning Environment

AI: Artificial Intelligence

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General introduction

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General Introduction

1. Background to the Study

English language teaching in EFL classrooms remains a major challenge, as many learners study English for years without developing effective communication skills or the ability to learn independently. In many educational contexts, traditional teacher-centered methods still dominate classroom practices, focusing mainly on memorization, grammar exercises, and passive learning. As a result, students often struggle to apply language knowledge in meaningful situations and become highly dependent on the teacher.

In the 21st century, educational systems have increasingly emphasized learner-centered approaches that promote critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity. Within this context, Project-Based Learning (PBL) has emerged as an innovative instructional approach that encourages students to participate actively in the learning process through authentic tasks and collaborative projects. PBL not only enhances language use in meaningful contexts, but also promotes learner autonomy by encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning, make decisions, solve problems, and work collaboratively.

Despite the growing importance of PBL in modern education, its implementation in many EFL classrooms remains limited. Therefore, this study investigates the role of Project-Based Learning in developing learner autonomy among EFL students.

2. Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it explores the relationship between Project-Based Learning (PBL) and learner autonomy in EFL classrooms. As modern education increasingly emphasizes student-centered learning and 21st-century skills, this research contributes to a better understanding of how PBL can enhance students' independence, responsibility, and active participation in learning.

The significance of this study can be summarized as follows:

✓ **For Students:**

This study highlights how PBL helps learners move from passive recipients of knowledge to active participants in the learning process. Through project work and collaborative activities, students can develop learner autonomy, critical thinking, communication, creativity, and problem-solving skills.

✓ **For Teachers:**

This research emphasizes the changing role of teachers in modern education. Instead of being the sole source of knowledge, teachers act as facilitators, guides, and motivators who support students throughout the learning process and encourage independent learning.

✓ **For Pedagogical Practice:**

This study provides practical insights into the use of PBL in EFL classrooms. It demonstrates how meaningful projects and collaborative learning can create a more interactive and motivating classroom environment that connects theoretical knowledge with real-life situations.

✓ **For Future Research:**

This research may serve as a useful reference for future studies related to Project-Based Learning, learner autonomy, and student-centered approaches in foreign language education.

3. Statement of the Problem

Despite studying English for many years, many EFL students still face difficulties in communicating effectively and learning independently. In many classrooms, students remain dependent on teachers for instructions, explanations, and learning materials, which limits the development of learner autonomy. This problem is often associated with traditional teacher-centered teaching methods that focus mainly on memorization and passive learning rather than active participation and critical thinking.

In contrast, modern educational approaches such as Project-Based Learning (PBL) encourage students to participate actively in meaningful tasks, collaborate with peers, solve problems, and make decisions independently. These characteristics may contribute to developing learner autonomy and improving students' communication skills.

Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the role of Project-Based Learning in developing learner autonomy among EFL students.

4. Research Questions

Based on the statement of the problem, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

✓ Main Research Question

➤ To what extent does Project-Based Learning (PBL) enhance learner autonomy in EFL classrooms?

✓ Sub-Questions

- How does PBL help students become more responsible and independent in their learning process?
- How does PBL contribute to improving students' communication and collaboration skills?
- What challenges do students face while working on projects in EFL classrooms?
- How do students perceive the effectiveness of PBL in promoting active learning and motivation?

5. Research Hypotheses

This study is based on the following hypotheses:

✓ Main Research Hypothesis

- Project-Based Learning helps students become more autonomous and responsible for their own learning.

✓ **Sub-Hypothesis**

- ✓ Project-Based Learning helps students become more autonomous and responsible for their own learning.
- ✓ PBL enhances students' communication, collaboration, and critical thinking skills.
- ✓ PBL increases students' motivation and active participation in EFL classrooms.
- ✓ Students generally have positive attitudes toward the use of PBL in developing learner autonomy.
- ✓

6. Structure of the Dissertation

This thesis is divided into two main parts: a theoretical part and a practical part.

✓ **Part One: Theoretical Part**

This part consists of three chapters.

• **Chapter One:**

This chapter presents the theoretical background of the study. It discusses the concept of learning in the 21st century, the importance of the 4Cs skills (critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity), and the main theories supporting autonomous learning, namely constructivism, social learning theory, and humanistic learning theory. It also examines the characteristics of autonomous learners and the teacher's role in promoting learner autonomy.

• **Chapter Two:**

This chapter focuses on Project-Based Learning (PBL). It explains its definitions, characteristics, principles, and applications in EFL classrooms. It also discusses the roles of teachers and learners in PBL environments, as well as the advantages and limitations of this approach.

- **Chapter Three:**

This chapter explores the relationship between PBL and learner autonomy. It explains how PBL contributes to developing responsibility, decision-making, self-directed learning, reflection, motivation, collaboration, and active learning in EFL classrooms.

- ✓ **Part Two: Practical Part**

This part includes the practical side of the study. It presents the research methodology, data collection tools, sample population, and data analysis procedures. It also analyzes and interprets the findings obtained from the questionnaire and interview data.

7. Research Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach in order to investigate the role of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in developing learner autonomy among EFL Licence students.

The research relies on both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire administered to EFL students, in addition to semi-structured interviews designed to obtain deeper insights into students' perceptions and experiences with project work.

The collected data were analyzed descriptively through percentages and thematic analysis in order to identify the main patterns related to learner autonomy, communication skills, collaboration, and students' attitudes toward PBL.

8. Population and Sample

The target population of this study consists of Licence students from the Department of English at the University of Ghardaia.

A random sample of 24 EFL Licence students participated in this research. The participants included both male and female students who had previous experience with project work in their English courses

9. Research Aims

This study aims to investigate the role of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in developing learner autonomy among EFL students. It seeks to explore how PBL encourages students to become more responsible, independent, and actively involved in their own learning process.

More specifically, this study aims to:

- ✓ Examine the impact of Project-Based Learning on the development of learner autonomy among EFL students.
- ✓ Identify the aspects of learner autonomy enhanced through PBL, such as responsibility, decision-making, self-directed learning, and collaboration.
- ✓ Explore students' perceptions and experiences regarding the use of project work in EFL classrooms.
- ✓ Investigate how PBL contributes to improving communication, motivation, and active participation.
- ✓ Provide recommendations for teachers on how to use PBL effectively to promote learner autonomy in EFL classrooms.

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Theoretical Part

Chapter one:
Learning and Learner
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Chapter one: Learning and Learner Autonomy in EFL Classrooms

Introduction

Education in the 21st century has shifted from a teacher-centered to a student-centered approach. This transition plays a crucial role in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) because learning English involves more than grammar; it also encompasses effective communication, critical thinking, and autonomous learning.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is considered one of the most effective methods for enhancing language skills and fostering learner autonomy.

This chapter will explore the broad concept of learning, its characteristics in the 21st century, and its particular manifestation in EFL contexts. Following this, the chapter analyzes three major learning theories: constructivism, social learning theory, and humanistic learning theory, which clarify the role of PBL in autonomous learning.

At the end of Chapter One, the characteristics of autonomous learners, the transformed role of teachers as facilitators, motivators, and designers, active learner participation, and the advantages and challenges of supporting autonomy in EFL settings will be presented.

1.1. Learning: Concepts and Scope

1.1.1. Definition and Characteristics of Learning

Since the emergence of humans on Earth, human beings have continuously sought discover, learn, and acquire knowledge in order to adapt to new circumstances and challenges.

This fundamental human need has attracted attention from many educators and psychologists. This interest has resulted in various definitions of learning, each influenced by a different theoretical approach.

In a modern educational perspective, Trilling and Fadel (2009) claim that learning is a continuous process through which individuals acquire, apply new knowledge, and develop critical thinking skills, rather than being merely passive recipients of information.

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Within an educational framework, Solomon and Schrum (2007) view learning as a system that transforms from teacher-centered and context-driven to student-centered and skills-driven thanks to technologies that provide opportunities to bridge the gap for creativity and new prospects.

Furthermore, from the psychological perspective, learning can thus be defined as "an observable change in the behavior of a specific organism as a consequence of regularization in the environment of that organism" (De Houwer & Hughes, 2020, p. 4).

Learning is a complex process that cannot be explained from a single perspective. Understanding this difference helps to clarify how a method such as project-based learning (PBL) can lead to real and useful learning, especially in teaching English, because it encourages students work, think, and interact, not just memorize.

1.1.2. Characteristics of Learning

In the 21st century, the features of learning are no longer limited to knowledge and skills, but according to Trilling and Fadel (2009), they have expanded to include several additional competencies, known as the 4Cs: critical thinking, collaboration, communication, creativity, and innovation skills.

Similarly, learning in the 21st century, according to Fullan (2013, as cited by the Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016), is not only receiving information but also includes crucial skills that prepare students for success in modern life.

Within this context, critical thinking involves a skillful attempt to create and apply projects, going through a series of practical, modern ways to find suitable solutions to a variety of problems. Communication is not limited to written or verbal interaction but also a crucial way that leads to meaningful and effective listening skills.

Moreover, collaboration is not just working in a team, but it necessitates contact, knowledge exchange and full respect to accept differences (language, culture, thoughts, etc.).

Furthermore, Uptis (2014, as cited in Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 13) states that creativity in educational situations provides "students experiences with situations in which there

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is no known answer, where there are multiple solutions, where the tension of ambiguity is appreciated as fertile ground, and where imagination is honored over rote knowledge”. This distinguishes modern learning from traditional forms of education based merely on the transmission of information.

These 21st century competencies and abilities (such as Critical thinking, Collaboration, Communication, Creativity) develop best when education is active and student-centered.

According to Bell (2010, p. 9), project-based learning stands out as one of the most successful instructional strategies which provide students with opportunities to develop the skills and competencies necessary for success in modern life.

Based on this research, PBL is considered one of the most effective learning methods in 21st century education, because it enables students to develop essential skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity simultaneously. This is due to the fact that learning today is no longer just about memorizing information, but rather focuses on developing integrated skills.

1.1.3. The Specificity of Learning in EFL Classrooms

In the context of English as a Foreign Language learning (EFL), these characteristics take on additional significance. Language learning is fundamentally a social and communicative process.

It extends beyond memorizing rules and vocabulary to include interaction with others, listening, engaging, and understanding context. Therefore, collaboration and communication are essential for students to develop their linguistic accuracy and ease of expression.

According to Hymes (1972), communicative competence involves more than the mere comprehension of grammatical rules and vocabulary. He asserts that linguistic knowledge must be integrated with the capacity to interact skillfully and appropriately across various social situations, emphasizing that knowing when and how to speak is just as vital as producing grammatically correct sentences.



Figure 01: The Communicative Competence of a Native Speaker.

Source: Hulstijn (2006, p. 1).

Researchers Fauzi and Khalid (2025, p. 113), observed that increased student participation and motivation, along with improved critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills, are often attributed to the use of 21st century teaching methods such as Project-Based Learning.

1.1.2.1. How 21st Century Skills Contribute to Language Acquisition

Critical thinking: plays a crucial role in enhancing second language acquisition. **1.1.2.1.1**

According to Masduqi et al. (2025, p. 8-9), learners are motivated to discuss issues critically and learn language indirectly through communication, because they are given opportunities to construct meaning through group activities such as working in pairs or in groups.

The learners' critical thinking skills develop and their ability to communicate improves, because these group interactions allow them to exchange ideas, discuss constructively, and understand meanings when talking about new words or ambiguous sentences. Critical thinking and collaboration in language learning are not separate but rather essential parts

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of it, because they create real contexts where communication becomes meaningful and involves deeper mental interaction with the target language.

1.1.2.1.2. Communication: Communication in the 21st century is not limited to oral or written exchange, because it now encompasses much more than just speaking and writing. Effective communication is the primary goal in foreign language learning, and it greatly helps in developing active and purposeful listening (Masduqi et al., 2025, p. 9-11).

According to Fauzi and Khalid (2025, p. 113), integrating group work into education promotes cooperation and interaction among students, allowing them to learn from each other and develop their social and linguistic skills. Students' learning experience is enriched and their communication abilities improve better, because a systematic review of their literature confirmed that 21st century educational approaches increase in-depth interactions and improve learning.

1.1.2.1.3. Creativity: Learners should be able to use language meaningfully rather than relying on rote memorization, because creativity gives them the ability to move beyond rote memorization. Students learn independently and build their own understanding through inquiry and experimentation, because research in project-based learning shows that creative and practical projects engage students more and help them apply knowledge in real-life contexts. Learning a language is more comprehensive and meaningful, because project-based learning effectively improves creativity and encourages students to generate new ideas and think flexibly (Munawaroh et al., 2018).

1.1.2.1.4. Collaboration: Learners can test their assumptions and discover shortcomings in their knowledge of the second language, as cooperation plays a key role in language acquisition.

According to Bllaca and Villarreal (2025), when students participate in cooperative activities, they engage in “languaging,” meaning that they discuss language use, question their linguistic choices, and correct themselves or their peers. Peer interaction provides learners with meaningful input, feedback, and opportunities for language production, which contributes to language acquisition and leads to higher-quality written texts.

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The researchers found that cooperative pairs produce more Language-Related Episodes (LREs) and resolve them more accurately than non-cooperative pairs. Cooperation therefore contributes directly to language acquisition by creating opportunities for meaningful interaction and collaborative problem-solving.

It can therefore be argued that the 4Cs are among the most important outcomes that Project-Based Learning (PBL) can develop among English learners, as these skills are closely integrated with language learning rather than being separate from it

1.1.3. Approaches to Learning in EFL

It is essential to examine the major educational approaches that apply these principles, as contemporary language teaching has undergone a major transformation from traditional teacher-centered instruction to approaches that place the learner at the center of the educational process (Nunan, 2013).

Among the most prominent approaches are the learner-centered approach, communicative language teaching, task-based learning, and blended learning with technology integration.

1.1.3.1 The Learner-Centered Approach:

In this approach, learners become active participants in the learning process, and the teacher is no longer viewed as the sole source of knowledge. Nunan (2013) explains that a learner-centered approach involves giving learners responsibility in making decisions about what to learn, how to learn, when to learn, and how learning is assessed. Information from learners, and sometimes from learners themselves, is used to guide these decisions. Importantly, this approach does not reduce the teacher's role; instead, it requires the teacher to support learners in developing the necessary skills needed to make informed decisions about their learning.

1.1.3.2 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT):

The goal of CLT is to enable learners to communicate effectively in real-life contexts. According to Nunan (2013), CLT emerged in the 1970s from a shift toward understanding language as a tool for expressing meaning rather than merely producing grammatically correct sentences. This approach emphasizes the development of learners' ability to use

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language to accomplish meaningful tasks rather than simply producing grammatically correct sentences.

1.1.3.3 Task-Based Learning (TBL):

Project-Based Learning is closely related to this approach, as TBL is considered an extension of Communicative Language Teaching. According to Nunan (2013, p. 62), a task differs from an exercise: a task has a non-linguistic outcome, whereas an exercise has a linguistic outcome. A task is defined as a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language, with a focus on meaning rather than form, and with a clear beginning, middle, and end. For example, choosing appropriate clothing based on a weather forecast is a task, whereas completing grammar exercises is an exercise.

1.1.3.4 Blended Learning and Technology Integration:

This approach promotes learner autonomy and provides opportunities for authentic language use beyond the classroom. Nunan (2013) notes that information technology and the internet bring the world into the classroom, enabling students to access authentic materials and communicate with language users worldwide. Similarly, Warschauer and Kern (2000, as cited in Nunan, 2013, p. 143) describe Network-Based Language Learning (NBLT) as human communication through computer networks, which is particularly valuable for learners with limited opportunities for real-life interaction in foreign language contexts.

Overall, these approaches make learning more meaningful and effective by equipping students with essential skills for the modern era. It can therefore be argued that they collectively provide a practical framework within which PBL operates to develop self-directed learning among English learners, as they all share a common shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered education.

1.2. Theoretical Foundations of Autonomous Learning

As discussed in the previous section, 21st century skills have become increasingly important, and education has gradually shifted its focus from the teacher to the learner. In this context, EFL approaches such as CLT and TBL provide a practical framework for applying these skills in real classroom situations.

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However, understanding these skills and approaches alone is not sufficient; it is essential to understand how they are effectively developed. This is where learning theories play a crucial role in explaining how modern teaching methods contribute to their development.

The following sections explore three major learning theories—constructivism, social learning theory, and humanistic learning theory—that explain why PBL is effective, how learners develop modern skills and become independent, and why the teacher’s role shifts from a traditional instructor to a guide and facilitator.

1.2.1. Constructivism Theory

Constructivist theory supports the principles of Project-Based Learning as a means of promoting student agency, as it views the construction of knowledge as an active process in which learners construct new understandings and meaning from their own experiences (Piaget, 1970).

PBL utilizes constructivist principles by engaging students in authentic tasks that are planned and enacted through structured methods involving goal-directed behaviors. These tasks require students to complete shared project that involves research, experimentation, and problem-solving, while generating new knowledge rather than passively receiving information through direct instruction.

Furthermore, the role of the educator in PBL shifts from teaching to facilitation, with the teacher acting as a facilitator by guiding the process through questioning, monitoring students’ progress, and providing and gradually withdrawing scaffolding.

In supporting student autonomy through the construction of their own learning abilities, students receive appropriate and timely assistance. However, this support is provided within a structured learning environment that ensures learners’ autonomy is not compromised by a lack of guidance (Kokotsaki et al., 2016).

This educational approach, such as PBL, aligns with 21st century education as it develops critical thinking, teamwork, and adaptability skills, integrates technology, helps students identify

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their strengths and weaknesses, encourages active participation, connects knowledge with skills, and empowers learners to face real-world challenges independently (Noss, 2012, pp. 4-5).

1.2.1.1. Contribution of Constructivism to Autonomous Learning:

Learners develop their "meta cognitive" skills, organize their learning strategies, increase their motivation, and allowing learners gradually become independent as they actively participate in learning activities supported by techniques such as scaffolding and working within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

All of this occurs within a learning environment, particularly blended learning, designed to provide opportunities for exploration, interaction, and reflection, allowing learners to gradually take control of their learning.

This perspective is rooted in the constructivist concept that knowledge is not passively received by the learner but actively constructed through interaction with the environment. In this view, learners are placed at the center of the learning process and are responsible for constructing meaning.

It also enables learners to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning, which are essential skills for self-directed learning. Constructivism is not only concerned with collaborative knowledge building but also plays a significant role in fostering learner autonomy (Song, 2024).

Based on the above discussion, it can be argued that constructivism serves as a key theoretical framework for this study in explaining how English students become independent learners, as it underpins Project-Based Learning (PBL) and emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge rather than passively receive it.

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1.2.2. Social Learning Theory

PBL is strongly influenced by Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, which explains how individuals learn by observing their peers, emulating their behaviors, and engaging collaboratively. Through collaboration, team members draw upon their unique areas of expertise (Wegner, 1987) and establish a transactive memory system that enables them to understand the skills each member possesses in order to work together to construct knowledge.

According to Vygotsky's (1978) theoretical perspective, he introduced the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) to describe how learners achieve learning outcomes through progressively greater levels of support until they are able to reach their full potential.

In a PBL context, learners receive a structured means to coordinate tasks and share information through technology-assisted collaborative learning tools (Noroozi et al., 2012). Over time, learner autonomy gradually develops as the reliance on these supporting tools and collaborative structures gradually shifts toward greater independence, in line with the principles of Project-Based Learning (PBL).

1.2.2.1. Contribution of Social Learning to Autonomous Learning:

Learners become capable of self-directed learning, solving problems independently, and gradually developing their autonomy, as Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) demonstrates that learning is shaped by the interaction between personal thinking, behavior, and the environment (Bandura, 1986).

From this perspective, self-directed learning manifests as learners engaging constructively in self-directed activities and employing initiative, resourcefulness, and perseverance (Ponton & Rhea, 2006, p. 39).

Furthermore, a sense of self-efficacy plays a crucial role as a motivator, as learners observe models, reflect on outcomes, and use self-regulation strategies, thereby strengthening their capacity for independence (Carr & Ponton, 1999, p. 6).

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Additionally, this mutual interaction between the learner and his environment makes the learners' actions affect their surroundings, and the environment also influences them (Carr & Ponton, 1999, p. 4). As a result of this interaction, they develop independence, where they begin to set their goals, monitor their progress, evaluate their results, and learn strategies that help them solve problems on their own later (Carr & Ponton, 1999, pp. 6-7).

It can therefore be argued that social processes such as observation, modeling, and collaboration are essential elements in the gradual development of self-directed learning within a PBL environment, as Social Cognitive Theory complements constructivism and emphasizes the role of social interaction in learning.

1.2.3. Humanistic Learning Theory

Humanistic learning theory (Maslow, 1968) emphasized that learners are the foundation of educational process, and we must pay attention to their needs and motivation. Learning has meaning when they set their goals and feel that what they are learning is meaningful in their lives.

PBL applies this idea because it gives students the freedom to select project of topics, decide how to work and how to present their work; which enhances participation and motivation. (Blumenfeld et al., 1991, p. 372).

This viewpoint aligns with Knowles' (1975), major contribution to self-directed learning which views that the learner should be proactive: identifying needs, establishing their objectives, and finding resources for self-directed learning.

1.2.3.1. Contribution of Humanistic to Autonomous Learning:

The humanistic approach recognizes that every student is unique and therefore places the learner at the center of the learning process. Its goal is not simply memorization, but the promotion of personal growth. By encouraging students to discover their abilities and take responsibility for their own learning, learning becomes more self-directed.

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Furthermore, when learning is connected to students' needs and personal goals, they develop intrinsic motivation rather than relying only on external rewards such as grades, which contributes to self-actualization (Syafira et al., 2024).

In this approach, the teacher's role is not to impose or control learning, but rather to guide and support learners by helping them make decisions, manage their time effectively, and reflect on their progress.

Ultimately, this approach empowers students to become independent, creative, and capable of applying what they have learned autonomously, as education focuses not only on cognitive development but also on emotional and social dimensions.

It can therefore be stated that addressing learners' needs, enhancing motivation, and taking their feelings into account are essential for achieving true self-directed learning, as humanistic theory emphasizes the emotional dimension of learning in addition to cognitive and social aspects.

1.3 . Conceptualization Learner Autonomy in EFL

1.3.1. Definitions and Dimensions of Autonomous Learning

The concept of learner autonomy is highly important in language teaching, and its most famous definitions was provided by Holec in 1981 in a report for the Council of Europe. Holec defined autonomy as “the ability to take charge of one's own learning” (p. 3).

Building on Holec's work, Little (1991) expanded the definition by emphasizing the psychological dimensions of autonomy. In his influential work *Learner Autonomy: Definitions, Issues and Problems*. Little describes autonomy as the learner who can move away from total dependence on the teacher, think critically about their learning, make independent decisions, and apply his learning independently.

Benson (2011), in his comprehensive work *Teaching and Researching Autonomy in Language Learning*, offers a complementary perspective by framing autonomy in terms of “control” over learning. Benson defines autonomy as “a capacity to take control of one's own learning” (p. 2). He identifies three dimensions of control: control over learning management, control over

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cognitive processing, and control over learning content. This multidimensional view recognizes that autonomy can manifest differently across various aspects of the learning experience and can be developed gradually over time.

Candy (1991) provides yet another valuable perspective, describing independent learning as an educational approach, method, and philosophy that empowers students to learn through their own efforts and develop research and critical thinking skills, rather than relying on memorization. Candy's definition highlights that autonomy involves both the practical process of autonomous learning and the philosophical orientation that values learner empowerment.

1.3.1.1. Situational Autonomy vs Psychological Autonomy

Learner autonomy can be understood from different perspectives, but two of the most significant are: the psychological and the situational. According to Little (1991), an autonomous learner is able to rely on themselves, make his own decisions, think critically, and work independently, which significantly reduces dependence on the teacher. These abilities stem from strong internal qualities, such as motivation, self-confidence, and the ability to take responsibility for his studies. At the same time, this independence is supported by the learning environment; when the environment is supportive, the teacher provides students with sufficient freedom and provides necessary resources—such as books and online sources to create opportunities for autonomous learning. In conclusion, learner autonomy should be understood as a combination of both psychological and situational perspectives, where internal capacity meets a supportive external context (Little, 1991).

Benson (2011) explains that autonomy has become a central concept in language education and influences various learning practices such as self-access and distance learning. He further argues that autonomy is not only related to the learner's personal abilities, but is also shaped by external factors such as teachers, learning environments, and available opportunities.

Research suggests that when students are given greater autonomy in their learning, they tend to develop deeper understanding, stronger intrinsic motivation, and greater self-reliance. This is largely due to teachers providing opportunities for independence, which gradually leads to the internalization of autonomous learning behavior (Connault, 2010).

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An operational definition of learner autonomy was adopted in this study, referring to the learner's ability to consciously manage their own learning (setting goals, choosing strategies, and self-assessment), while practicing critical thinking and taking responsibility for the results. This is because learning takes place within a structured environment, where the teacher's role is to facilitate and guide the educational process rather than control it. Based on this, this definition is used as an analytical framework to study how PBL promotes autonomy in subsequent chapters.

Learner Responsibility and Self-Direction .1.3.2

According to this foundational perspective, an autonomous learner is capable of making decisions concerning all aspects of the learning process including determining objectives, defining content and progression, selecting methods and techniques, monitoring the learning process, and evaluating learning outcomes (Holec, 1981).

1.4 . Characteristics and Teacher's Role in Promoting Autonomy

Keys Features of Autonomous Learner .1.4.1

Learner becomes independent because they have the freedom and ability to manage their own learning and make their own decisions. Because of this freedom, they must take responsibility for their actions and decisions, meaning they must accept the consequences, whether positive or negative.

Since independence and responsibility are linked, this allows learners to be active participants in their learning process and not just a passive recipient of information.

According to Scharle and Szabó (2000), the main roles and characteristics of the autonomous learner are:

Responsible Contribution: Learners become responsible contributors, not merely .1.4.1.1 studying to satisfy the teacher or get good grades, but with the true goal of genuinely learning and understanding. Because they believe their learning progress depends on their own effort, they take responsibility for their studies and act with seriousness and organization. This allows them to actively participate in learning and rather than simply receiving information passively .without contributing

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1.4.1.2. Cooperative Partner: Learners become cooperative partners because they are willing to collaborate with the teacher and their peers within the learning environment for the benefit of everyone. This collaboration does not imply blindly following instructions, but rather understanding the aim of the activity before beginning it, and potentially asking questions or suggesting ways to improve the activity and make it more effective.

1.4.1.3. Self-Monitor: Learners consciously monitor their learning progress and take advantage of available opportunities, such as class activities and homework, because they understand that these opportunities contribute to their development. Because of this awareness, if they don't complete a task or activity, they understand that they have missed an opportunity to further broaden their knowledge and learn more.

1.4.1.4. Independent Initiator: Learner act independently of the teacher and do not wait to be instructed, because they understand that learning depends on their own initiative. As a result of this independence, they can interrupt the teacher to ask about a point they didn't understand, search for unfamiliar words used in the lesson but not explained, and pay special attention to areas where they are weak in order to improve their proficiency level.

1.4.1.5. Active Decision-Maker: Learner can exercise their ability to make decisions about their learning, because they have the desire and ability to participate in organizing their learning. Because of this, they can choose some teaching methods, correct their mistakes, and influence the way learning activities are conducted. Although they are not a teacher and cannot assume the entire role of the instructor, when given the opportunity, they can assume certain responsibilities and contribute to the learning process (Scharle & Szabó, 2000).

Autonomous learners learn effectively through experience and practice, by participating in research projects, discussing ideas, analyzing case studies, and conducting simulations. This is because they know what they need to learn, define their goals, manage learning plans, and select the appropriate strategies and resources to achieve those goals.

In this type of learning, the teacher is no longer merely a source of information, but rather a facilitator who supports learners in their self-directed learning (Dewey, 1966; Kolb, 1984; Silcock & Brundrett, 2001, as cited in Serbessa, 2006).

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Autonomous learning is best achieved within the classroom, where students actively participate and learn independently, as a result of a suitable learning environment that is organized and interactive learning environment, providing opportunities for self-learning through active participation and interaction (Serbessa, 2006).

In the context of PBL, the independent learner is characterized by their ability to transfer acquired skills from one project to another, especially in new and unfamiliar situations. This ability is considered a key indicator of true independence in this field. This is because PBL-based learning does not treat knowledge isolated information, but rather enables the student to adapt to problems and know when and how to apply prior knowledge in new situations.

1.4.2. Teacher's Multifaceted Roles in Promoting Autonomy

According to Jan (2017), teachers in the 21st century play several roles because education now require developing learners' independence, and is no longer merely a source of information as in the past.

Due to this shift in teaching methods, the teacher contributes to supporting learner autonomy instead of simply transmitting knowledge, which leads them to adopt multiple roles that serve this goal.

Among the most important of these roles are:

1.4.2.1. Motivator: The teacher contributes to fostering intrinsic motivation in learners by empowering them to choose their own learning methods and make decisions about their learning paths. This, in turn, increases their efforts to learn independently. Through this approach, the teacher creates a supportive and stimulating learning environment, enabling students to see the tools they use (such as devices) as valuable resources for knowledge acquisition, rather than distractions. This allows learning to occur naturally and more effectively.

1.4.2.2. Designer: The teacher designs personalized instruction for each student based on their individual personality, goals, and needs, as traditional rote learning is no longer sufficient to address these differences among learners. Because of this new approach, the teacher relies on project-based learning, where students are asked to

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compare information from different sources, provide feedback to their peers, and express their own ideas. This helps develop their creativity and critical thinking skills.

1.4.2.3. Resource Provider and Counsellor: The teacher guides students on how to use digital tools and smart phones to find answers independently, as the goal is to teach them how to access a wealth of resources and information outside the classroom. In this role, the teacher acts as a mentor, helping students build a positive digital presence and use social media effectively to create and share meaningful content. When students encounter difficulties, the teacher provides support and encouragement while maintaining professional conduct both inside and outside the classroom.

1.4.2.4. Scaffolding Manager: The teacher provides appropriate support at the right time and gradually reduces intervention so that the student becomes more independent in learning, because the goal is for them to rely on themselves in their learning. Because of this approach, the teacher helps students with research, connect with experts, and complete projects, offering only minimal guidance to ensure their success without controlling the entire learning process (Jan, 2017).

Furthermore, this approach encourages collaborative learning and helps students develop the communication and teamwork skills they need in real life. This gradual increase in responsibility allows students to gain the confidence and skills necessary for genuine self-directed learning (Jan, 2017).

The teacher's role becomes more of a guide, helping students take responsibility for their learning and become independent, because technology plays a crucial role in enhancing the independence of English as a foreign language learner.

According to Mote (2023), technology empowers students to learn independently by providing access to a wealth of learning materials and enabling them to choose what and how to

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study. It also offers rapid feedback, helping them identify their strengths and weaknesses, and supports both individual and group learning, both inside and outside the classroom.

In this study, the roles of the teacher in the EFL and PBL context (as a motivator, designer, resource provider, and facilitator of progressive support) are considered practical measures that must be adopted to promote learner autonomy. This is because the teacher's role is not to withdraw from the classroom, but rather to transform their practices, where they facilitate learning through design, motivation, and guidance, and then gradually reduce support (Mote, 2023).

1.4. Advantages and Challenges of Autonomous Learning

Learner autonomy, which refers to the capacity for an individual to take control of his or her own learning (Holec, 1981, as cited in Rizki et al., 2023), brings with it a number of benefits within the EFL setting.

According to Little (2007, as cited in Rizki et al., 2023), autonomy allows learners to have basic human requirements met, therefore addressing motivation problems, and thus fostering intrinsically motivated and self-determined learners.

Autonomy builds motivated, reflective learners who are capable of persevering through challenges, and as a result, develop more quickly in their language skills than their peers who are in traditional teacher-centered classrooms (Tamer, 2013, as cited in Rizki et al., 2023).

Autonomy can also help learners improve their level of communicative competence, as more advanced autonomous learners have a larger opportunity to develop their communication skills outside of the classroom (Scharle & Szabó, 2000, as cited in Rizki et al., 2023).

Nonetheless, there are significant impediments to building autonomy. One of the main barriers is the role of the teacher, as many teachers believe in the benefits of independent learning conceptually, yet have reservations about how those same beliefs apply within their classrooms (Little, 1991, as cited in Rizki et al., 2023). Another barrier is the belief and readiness of students to assume responsibility for their own learning; many low-achieving students feel very uncomfortable and unable to articulate their weaknesses or find appropriate resources to help them succeed when they are asked to take on this responsibility (Rizki et al., 2023).

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In addition to these two barriers, there are also social and cultural barriers. Because many educational systems, curricula, and social norms do not promote or support self-directed or independent learning, they often limit the opportunity for students to develop into independent learners (Fidyati, 2017, as cited in Rizki et al., 2023).

This study acknowledges that fostering learner autonomy is not easy, and that both teachers and students face difficulties, whether internal (such as beliefs and readiness) or external (such as the educational system and social customs). However, PLE (Personal Learning Environment) is considered a possible tool to help overcome some of these challenges (Fidyati, 2017, as cited in Rizki et al., 2023). This is because its thoughtful implementation provides a structured yet flexible learning environment that allows for the gradual development of autonomy.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the theoretical background for understanding the relationship between PBL and learner autonomy in EFL contexts.

It highlighted the importance of 21st-century skills—such as critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity—which align closely with both PBL and autonomous learning.

The chapter also examined key theoretical perspectives, including constructivism, social learning theory, and humanistic psychology, to explain how PBL can support autonomy from cognitive, social, and motivational angles.

In addition, it reviewed major contributions to the concept of learner autonomy, showing that autonomy goes beyond simple independence to include reflection, responsibility, and learner agency, while distinguishing between situational and psychological aspects.

As we move to the next chapter, we will explore more deeply about project-based learning (PBL), it plays a crucial role in developing these skills, from critical thinking and communication. collaboration to creativity. Project-Based Learning is not just a method of teaching, but a practical way for students to build their own knowledge, experiment, solve problems, learn actively, and become more independent.

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Introduction

In PBL Students become familiar with a particular topic through a practical experience that involves solving an open-ended problem, i.e., a problem that does not have a specific and clear solution beforehand. The goal is not just to find a specific solution, but to develop other important skills such as: Acquiring new knowledge, collaboration and teamwork, effective communication with others. PBL was first used in medical education and has since expanded to other educational fields because it equips students with the skill they will need in their future careers.

PBL also fosters critical thinking, encourages students to recall scientific information and literature, and supports the concept of lifelong learning within a practical and interactive learning environment.

In this chapter, we explore the main aspects of project-based learning (PBL) in EFL classrooms. Beginning with presenting its conceptual framework and definitions, with a focus on its process-based and learner-centered nature. Then, we examine the roles both of teachers and learners in PBL environments. This is followed by a comparison between project-based learning and project work, highlighting the difference between process-based and product-based approaches. Furthermore, we discuss the main strengths and limitations of PBL. Finally, we consider its application in EFL classrooms, particularly in enhancing language use, communication, and thinking skills.

2.1 Project-based learning: Conceptual Framework

2.1.1 Definition of PBL

According to Martin and Rodriguez (2015, as cited in Shukla et al., 2024), Project-Based Learning (PBL) is a student-driven approach designed to enhance students' motivation and participation in their academic activities. In today's rapidly changing world, individuals need 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, digital literacy, leadership, creativity,

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and imagination. PBL provides students with the opportunity to work independently over extended periods to address these needs.

PBL also is a comprehensive approach to classroom teaching and learning designed to engage students in the investigation of authentic problems. It focuses on solving real-world problems through individual or group projects. Blumenfeld et al. (1991) encourages learners to be active and autonomous, helping them acquire practical and mental skills essential for the future. According to Condliffe et al. (2017), PBL is associated with cognitive skill development and shows positive connections to students' knowledge acquisition. It helps students learn new information while developing their thinking and problem-solving skills.

To better understand how PBL changes the educational approach, the following table presents the main differences between Project-Based Learning and traditional method:

PBL (Project-Based Learning)	Traditional Learning
Student-Centered	Teacher-Centered
Active and meaningful	Passive and Boring (Student receive the information and write)
4C: Critical thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, Communication	Memorizing Lessons
Teacher : Guide, Facilitator	Teacher : Source of Information
Group Work: Discussion and Collaboration	Limited interaction inside the classroom (The teacher gives exercises)
Online Sources and other resources	Student copy from the board

Table 01: PBL vs Traditional Learning (Designed by the Researcher).

2.1.2 Process-based and Learner-centered Approach

Teachers must become more conscious of their students' roles as knowledge generators and active participants in their own learning. When students and teachers share power, educational methods become a means to an end, not an end in itself.

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According to Schaps and Lewis (1999, as cited in McCombs, 2001), in their thoughts on the “perils” of developing school community, schoolwide transformation must prioritise a feeling of community and academic learning, as well as student and teacher engagement in designing classroom lessons and decisions. Research-validated principles are required to guide the adoption of such procedures.

2.1.2.1. Key Principles:

2.1.2.1.1. Learning Personalization: This principle involves adapting educational experiences, tasks, and instructional paces to meet the diverse needs, backgrounds, and proficiency levels of individual students. In a product-based environment, personalization allows learners to connect project topics to their personal interests, which enhances meaningful engagement (Condliffe et al., 2017).

2.1.2.1.2. Active Learning: Unlike traditional rote memorization, active learning encourages real, hands-on participation. Students engage deeply with the curriculum through authentic problem-solving, critical thinking, and structured classroom discussions aimed at designing a final output (Condliffe et al., 2017).

2.1.2.1.3. Student Autonomy: A cornerstone of product-based learning is fostering learner autonomy. Students are given "voice and choice" in their learning process, which allows them to set personal goals, make decisions regarding their projects, and evaluate their own progress. This shift increases intrinsic motivation and encourages students to take ownership of their learning (Condliffe et al., 2017).

2.1.2.1.4. Collaborative Learning: Collaboration is vital for knowledge construction during the project cycle. As Stoll (2010, as cited in Donohoo, 2013, p. 474) defines it, collaborative enquiry is the process by which learning communities "deconstruct knowledge through joint reflection and analysis, reconstruct it through collective learning from their experiences." In this context, educators and learners work together, reflecting on how collaborative activities directly impact student achievement and the final product outcome (Condliffe et al., 2017).

2.1.2.1.5. Lifelong Learning: By engaging in extended, real-world projects, students develop sustainable skills that extend beyond the classroom. This emphasizes self-directed learning, time management, and communication skills, preparing learners to become

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independent, lifelong problem-solvers in their future communities and careers (Condliffe et al., 2017).

2.1.2.1.6. Technology Integration: Technology serves as a cognitive tool rather than just a substitute for paper. Using educational applications, digital tools, and multimedia platforms improves student engagement, facilitates research, and enables students to effectively design, produce, and share their final products or services (Condliffe et al., 2017).

2.2 Roles of Teacher and Learner in PBL

2.2.1 Teacher as Facilitator and Guide

According to Harden and Crosby (2000), the teacher acts as a guide who supports students in exploring and thinking critically rather than simply delivering information. They identified specific roles for the teacher as follows:

2.2.1.1. Organizer: Responsible for planning the overarching project framework, setting clear learning objectives, and scaffoldingly managing classroom time.

2.2.1.2. Tutor: Providing targeted, individualized instructional support and extra guidance to scaffolding struggling students throughout the project phases.

2.2.1.3. Mentor: Offering continuous academic and personal advice, helping students navigate challenges and develop problem-solving skills.

2.2.1.4. Model: Demonstrating professional behaviors, enthusiasm, critical thinking, and mutual respect within the collaborative community.

2.2.1.5. Evaluator: Assessing ongoing student performance and providing formative, constructive feedback to enhance the quality of the final product.

2.2.1.6. Resource Provider: Facilitating learning by offering access to diverse materials, including books, multimedia, and relevant digital tools.

2.2.2 Learner as Active and Responsible Participant

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Active learning uses learner-centered pedagogical strategies rather than teacher-centered ones: the emphasis is on encouraging student cognitive activities in class rather than simply allowing them to absorb the supplied knowledge. In other words, active learning is a learner-centered instructional strategy in which students actively participate in the learning process rather than passively absorbing knowledge. Furthermore, rather than distributing knowledge, teachers serve as facilitators of learning.

According to Bonwell and Eison (1991, as cited in Nguyen, 2020), active learning refers to “instructional activities involving students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing.” Rather than simply conveying knowledge, active learning focuses on developing learners’ skills and higher-order thinking abilities.

2.3 Project-Based Learning VS Project Work

2.3.1 Process-based VS Product-based Learning

✓ Product-based:

According to Ganefri (2013, as cited in Yulastri et al., 2017) states that “Production-based learning model is defined as the procedures or steps that need to be performed by the educator to facilitate learners to actively learn, participate and interact, with a competency- orientation to produce a product either goods or services required”(p. 1100). Product-based learning involves a set of steps that help students learn actively, participate, and develop skills by creating products or services. It is collaborative, innovative, and focuses on solving real-life problems related to learners’ needs or the community and industry.

✓ Process-Based:

Focuses on how the learner learns. According to Omelianenko and Artyukhova (2024), PBL breaks down traditional classroom barriers to enable students with holistic learning experiences that go beyond rote memorization.

Unlike separated subjects, PBL integrates information from other areas into holistic projects. The multidisciplinary approach shows real-life problems that cannot be placed in just one subject

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area. PBL encourages students to make connections to their surroundings, sparking curiosity which acts as the "engine of achievement".

2.3.2 Comparison of Teacher and Learner Roles

✓ Student's Role in Product-Based Learning:

In the 21st-century product-based classroom, learners are no longer passive consumers; instead, they are treated as "digital natives and producers" of content. Armed with modern tools and devices, students shift from doing traditional handouts to actively creating authentic products such as blogs, infographics, and tutorials. When given this opportunity, they display high creativity and take full ownership of their learning by sharing their products with the community (Jan, 2017, p. 51).

✓ Teacher's Role in Product-Based Learning:

A good teacher can inspire, hope, ignite the imagination and instill a love of learning.

Teachers of 21st century have to take in account the needs of their students, prepare them to meet the challenges of future. Teacher's work is considered complex and demanding. For creating a highquality professional teaching force, it is important to have high quality professional teacher's development program. The developmental program must incorporate use of technology integration in teaching (Jan, 2017).

2.4 Strengths and Limitations of PBL

2.4.1 Advantages: Motivation, Collaboration, Skills Development

2.4.1.1. For Students: Most educators think that PBL helps learners in developing particular abilities. According to an English language instructor, "In this case, students will think not in the way you teach them, but they will get out of the box and can have many great ideas"(Tahiri, 2024, p. 96). She explains her point of view. This means that students have more room and flexibility to be creative and go beyond what their teachers teach.

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2.4.1.2. For Teachers: Fallik et al. (2003, as cited in Tahiri 2024, pp. 95) report that instructors saw more advantages than disadvantages while using PBL. Advantages for students were highlighted more often than those for professors. They include improved teacher-student interactions and more cooperation among colleagues in addressing PBL challenges (Harrigan, 2014; Tamim & Grant, 2013). (Hugerat, 2006; Thomas, 2000; Va den Bergh, et al., 2006). Additional advantages for students are mentioned, including better academic performance, enhanced engagement, and skill development. Also, including better academic performance, enhanced engagement, and skill development.

2.4.1.3. Experiment Findings: In order to examine the impact of project-based learning (PBL) on students' collaborative skills, teachers conducted an experiment involving a group of secondary school students. The learners participated in a project-based learning activity. The project was about the construction of a miniature eco-city.

Students were encouraged to identify the principal space and divided into smaller groups of four to five individuals, with each group assigned specific responsibilities, like urban planning design, renewable energy management, and the visual aesthetics of the city.

The instructor assumed the role of a facilitator, and the project was conducted over four weeks, two hours per week. They focused on three skills: communication, teamwork, problem solving.

✓ **Research Methodology:** qualitative.

The tools they used to gather information were interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis of students' project work.

Each week, students presented their work to the teacher and classmates briefly. The teacher gave notes and solved problems between the students.

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At the end of the project, the miniature eco-city was presented during a classroom exhibition. Each group explained their design choices and proposed solutions.

✓ **The findings:** the students developed collaborative skills, such as effective communication and decision making. This project directly impacted the development of students' collaborative skills. These skills can be seen in three dimensions: communication, teamwork, and problem solving.

Particularly in communication, the percentage of students who struggled to express their opinions decreased from 60% to 25% after the project of (PBL).

In this case, students will think not in the way you teach and what teachers teach them, but they will get out of the box and can have many great ideas. They will be creative and not limited (International Journal of Educational Research Excellence [IJERE], 2024, pp. 994–995).

2.4.2 Limitations: Time, Resources, Uneven Participation

According to Tahiri (2024):

2.4.2.1. Lack of Available Research: The literature review may have been affected by a lack of available research studies specifically targeting certain student populations.

2.4.2.2. Scope of Findings: The findings are based primarily on existing research and may not fully encompass the intricacies and subtleties of PBL implementation in real-time classrooms.

2.4.2.3. Direct Stakeholder Perspective: The perspectives and experiences of stakeholders (such as students and teachers) were not directly investigated through empirical tools like interviews or questionnaires.

2.4.2.4. Contextual Insight: Despite these limitations, the study affords valuable insights into the potential advantages and obstacles of PBL in EFL educational settings.

2.5 PBL in EFL Classrooms

2.5.1 Language use and Communication Through Projects

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EFL classrooms are unique because they use language as a tool for interpersonal communication.

On one hand, PBL helps students use the four language skills—speaking, listening, reading, and writing—together in one project. According to Haines (1989, as cited in Thuan, 2018), projects give students a chance to practice the language they know in a natural way. Similarly, Levine (2004, as cited in Thuan, 2018) argues that the main benefit of using projects in the classroom is improving language levels. This happens because students communicate for a real purpose to finish their tasks (Haines, 1989, as cited in Thuan, 2018). These "authentic activities" help students develop their thinking and problem-solving skills, which are useful in real life (Brown et al., 1993, as cited in Thuan, 2018). While regular activities include anything students do to learn the lesson (Brophy & Alleman, 1991, as cited in Thuan, 2018), PBL focus on connecting all language skills naturally (Stoller, 2006, as cited in Thuan, 2018).

On the other hand, it fosters personal growth and social skills; as students collaborate, they build confidence and reduce communication anxiety (Fried-Booth, 2002; Farouck, 2016, as cited in Thuan, 2018).

2.5.2 Thinking and Social Interaction Skills

Brown (2000:165, as cited in Benhikel, 2019) defined interaction as follows “interaction is the collaboration exchange of thoughts feelings or ideas between two or more people, resulting in the reciprocal effect on each other” In other words, social interaction allows learners to communicate, exchange opinions, and cooperate with others.

Anderson and Lawton (2004, as cited in wood, 2020) found that simulations might effectively serve as the problems.

Conclusion

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Project-Based Learning is an effective approach in the EFL classroom that addresses learners' linguistic needs and develops 21st-century skills. To achieve maximum benefits, teachers should set clear goals regarding language and tasks, while including student opinions in all stages. This enhances responsibility, ownership, and provides an authentic learning experience.

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Chapter Three: the role of Project-Based Learning in Developing Learner Autonomy in EFL Classrooms

Introduction

The field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has faced from teacher-centered with more focus on learning, and this includes developing student autonomy through learner-centered methods. In this context, Project-Based learning (PBL) makes learning practical and active, not traditional rote learning.

In the 21st century, learning autonomy signifies a shift from traditional educational models, where learners passively receive information, to a learner-centered approach. Learner autonomy refers to learners who take active control of their learning journey and make informed decisions regarding what, how, and when they learn. According to Little (1999), traditional educational models produce dependent learners, whereas promoting student autonomy over subject-based learning will serve them better in the future. Allowing the learner to choose certain parameters of a task—for example, the theme, the production medium (video, text, audio), or the tools of realization—increases their motivation. Little (1999) argues that learner decision-making is a fundamental level for developing autonomy and responsibility. These choices also reinforce the learner's perception of the personal relevance of the task.

This chapter will explore the connection between PBL and the development of student autonomy. In addition, PBL supports and enhances self-directed learning by providing learners with the ability to take on responsibilities for making decisions and to evaluate their own performance.

At the end of chapter three, will explain the practical and theoretical aspects of PBL and how it makes learning integrated and effective, not just theoretical study.

3.1 The Interdependent Relationship Between PBL and Learner Autonomy

3.1.1. Responsibility and Decision-Making

Despite the fact that PBL is seen as method focus on student, but this does not mean the teacher has no role or importance. In PBL settings, teachers are expected to offer support,

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helping them find resources, keeping a positive group environment, and assisting when students face significant problems hindering them from completing their work. (John R. Mergendoller & John W. Thomas, 2005, as cited in Ghani, 2024).

This shift facilitates students to take greater responsibility for their learning and participate more actively in decision-making throughout the project, with the teacher acting as guider to aid them when needed.

3.1.2. Learner Independence Through Project work

Student autonomy grows thanks to project-based learning (PBL). Students will no longer simply receive information as before. Instead, they will become active participants in the learning process (Steven D. Papamarcos, 2002, as cited in Ghani, 2024).

Students are encouraged to take initiative and make decisions during the project. This interaction and collaborative thinking between the professor and students help develop their independence (Gillian Bolton, 1999, as cited in Ghani, 2024).

Project-based learning encourages independence, teamwork, and self-learning. As a result, it helps develop the learner's independence because responsibilities are distributed between the teacher and the students.

3.2 . How PBL Enhances Autonomous Learning

3.2.1. Self-Directed Learning

Project-Based Learning (PBL) helps students learn independently and become more self-reliant. This means that when working on projects, students don't simply wait for the instructor to provide everything. Instead, they actively: research, investigate, solve problems, and make their own decisions. According to Davidoff and Piñeiro (2017), self-directed learning allows students to monitor their own progress and understand how they are learning, thus becoming more aware of their learning process.

In a PBL environment, students can: work at their own pace, use technology and the internet, collaborate with their peers, and remain independent in their learning.

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Furthermore, projects are often linked to real and practical needs, so students become more motivated and feel they have an important role in their learning.

Ultimately, students become: more organized, more independent, and better able to manage their goals and deadlines.

3.2.2. Reflection and self-Assessment

In Project-Based Learning (PBL), students are not passive learners but active participants in their own learning process. Reflection and self-assessment play a crucial role in developing autonomous learning. According to Flournoy and Bauman (2021), in traditional assessment, students are passive; they simply complete tests or assignments without realizing that their work is also used to evaluate programs or the quality of education. Their work is treated merely as “evidence” used by professors and administrators, but without their participation in the process. Then, this silence or marginalization is a missed opportunity, because it could have been used to:

3.2.2.1. Deepen Student Learning

3.2.2.2. Train them in self-Reflection

3.2.2.3. Foster Better Collaboration Between Students and Professors

As highlighted by Smith and MacGregor (1992), Collaborative learning represents a substantial departure from the traditional teacher- or lecture-centered environment in college courses. In collaborative classrooms, the lecturing/listening/note taking process may not disappear totally, but it coexists with other processes centred on student discussion and active engagement with course material.

Teachers who utilise collaborative learning approaches tend to think of themselves less as expert transmitters of knowledge to students, but as expert designers of intellectual experiences for students as coaches or midwives of a more emergent learning process.

3.3 The Impact of PBL on Learning Outcomes

3.3.1. Engagement and Motivation

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Focuses on real- world context to enhance student engagement (Chang et al., 2024), providing authentic context, this makes knowledge more meaningful and relevant to their daily lives, when students face real_ life situations, they became more engaged and motivated to learn. As Marks (2000, as cited in English, 2018, p. 2) reported, “Students who are engaged with school are more likely to learn, to find the experience rewarding, to graduate, and to pursue higher education” (p. 154). Indeed, educators, education reformers, and anyone concerned with youth development cannot afford to ignore student engagement.

Examples

Instead of giving a traditional math problems, students can work on project to calculate the cost of building house.

Instead of traditional language lessons, students can be asked to write a story or create a real blog.

Real life problems help students connect their learning to their personal experiences, help foster the development of problem solving and allow them to engage in the communities.

Real -life problems help students to:

- Develop problem solving skills.
- Connect their studies to their daily lives.
- Interact with the community.
- Improve their understanding and knowledge.

If the project is not realistic: student enthusiasm and engagement may decrease, Student engagement can be categorized into three main types:

3.3.1.1. Behavioral Engagement: such as:

- Participating in the activity.
- Respecting the rules.
- Using class time effectively.

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He improves language speaking by making discussions in English and participating in the activities of classroom interaction and oral activities such as role-play. Some activities are designed to give learner's opportunity to practice language such as: information gap activities: where the student participate in groups or individually in order to fill some piece of missing information. Discussion: where the student has different argument in favor or against proposal to discuss about it develop debates comments, predictions.... etc Game tasks: to develop skills in communication related to different topics like videos and others (Benhikel, n.d.).

3.3.1.2. Emotional Engagement:

According to Sengöz (2024), emotional engagements refer to the deep, affective connections and interactions that individuals experience in response to stimuli, events, or relationships. These engagements involve a spectrum of emotions, such as joy, sadness, empathy, excitement, anger, and compassion.

These emotions significantly influence behavior, decision-making, and interpersonal dynamics. Emotional engagements are characterized by the intensity and quality of the emotional responses elicited, shaping how individuals perceive and react to their environment.

3.3.1.3. Cognitive Engagement: Such as:

- Deep thinking.
- Understanding the lesson.
- Producing complex ideas (Chang et al. 2024).

3.3.2. Active and Meaningful Learning

Active learning has become an increasingly popular instructional approach in higher education settings over the past decade. It is defined as any teaching method that engages students in the learning process through authentic activities and thinking rather than passive information reception (McConnell et al., 2017, as cited in Doolittle et al., 2023). These learner-centered strategies aim to involve students in knowledge construction and reflection during class time (Prince, 2004, as cited in Doolittle et al., 2023). Common techniques include collaborative group work, problem-based learning, simulations, and discussions, all of which require students

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to apply concepts rather than just listen to lectures (McConnell et al., 2017, as cited in Doolittle et al., 2023). This shift toward application ensures that learning is not only active but also meaningful and enduring.

3.4 PBL in Interdisciplinary Learning: From Theory to Practice

3.4.1 Practical of PBL in Interdisciplinary Learning:

Interdisciplinary project-based learning relies on practical application through addressing real-world problems. It engages students in collaborative activities that allow them to apply their knowledge from different fields in authentic contexts. An authentic real-world issue that requires a solution is defined, such as developing a rural area or improving urban planning. Students are then divided into groups, each comprising students from different disciplines such as engineering, geography, or urban planning. This diversity allows for the integration of multiple fields of knowledge to understand the problem from several perspectives. Then, they go to the actual location (the field) to observe the problem firsthand, where they examine the situation, take notes, and speak with residents to better understand the issue. Afterward, they return to discuss the information they have gathered and brainstorm suitable solutions. Finally, they present the results of their work in the form of a report or presentation that includes the proposed solutions. In this way, students learn through application, not just memorization (Foski et al., 2017, pp. 98–99). Interdisciplinary approach to project-based learning: Experience through student workshops. *New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences*.

3.4.2 Theoretical Foundations of Interdisciplinary PBL:

An interdisciplinary approach to learning is commonly defined as an instructional method where teachers from various fields collaborate in curriculum design and the educational process (Jones, 2009, as cited in Foski et al., 2017, p. 98). This method is applied when a specific issue needs to be examined and explored from different perspectives. The findings are then combined into a unified and consistent result. This approach is also utilized to guide students in learning about diverse professions and their practical work. By learning in this manner, students are encouraged to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for interdisciplinary teamwork. The students began to discuss with each other, exchange ideas, and try to understand the problem from different angles. This is where interdisciplinary learning comes in, because they use

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knowledge from communication, language, thinking, and even understanding society. They were not given a ready-made solution; instead, they had to search, think, and propose solutions. Then, each group tries to negotiate with others to reach a solution, using communication, persuasion, and reasoning, and learning how to resolve conflicts intelligently.

As for the teacher's role, it is not just to explain, but also to guide them, help them if needed, and pose questions to make them think. As a result, students learn from the experience, develop decision-making and problem-solving skills, enhance their autonomy, and improve their collaborative learning skills.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter examined Project-Based Learning (PBL) and its role in EFL classrooms. It showed that PBL encourages active participation, collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and learner autonomy. Despite some challenges, PBL remains an effective approach for meaningful and student-centered learning.

Part Two: Practical Part

Chapter Four: Research Methodology and Data Analysis

Introduction

4.1. Research Methodology

4.2. Population and Sample

4.3. Data Collection Methods and Instruments

- Students' Questionnaire
 - Description of the Questionnaire
 - Administration of the Questionnaire
- Students' Interviews
 - Description of the Interview
 - Administration of the Interview

4.4. Data Analysis Methods

- Quantitative Data Analysis
- Qualitative Data Analysis

4.5. Analysis of the Questionnaire Data

4.6. Analysis of the Interview Data

4.7. Discussion of Findings

4.8. Limitations of the Study

Conclusion

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Introduction

This chapter presents the practical part of the study, which investigates the perceptions of EFL students regarding the use of project work in enhancing their learner autonomy. It outlines the research methodology, describes the sample and instruments used for data collection, and discusses the main findings obtained from the student questionnaire. The analysis follows a descriptive-analytical approach to identify recurring patterns and key insights into how engaging in projects helps students take responsibility for their own learning process.

4.1. Research Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, primarily utilizing quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of how project work influences the development of learner autonomy. A structured questionnaire and follow-up interviews were designed to gather detailed information on student perceptions and experiences regarding their involvement in projects within the EFL classroom. This approach allows for a thorough investigation of how such pedagogical practices encourage students to take charge of their own learning process.

4.2. Population and Sample

The target population for this study includes the students at the Department of English, University of Ghardaia.

A random sample of students was selected. The sample consisted of both male and female English student who have been engaged in project work as part of their academic curriculum. The variety of participants helped provide a better understanding of their views about learner autonomy and their ability to learn independently.

4.3. Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using two primary instruments: a structured questionnaire and a set of semi-structured interview questions. The questionnaire included both closed-ended and open-ended items, making it possible to obtain both quantitative patterns and detailed qualitative insights.

4.4. Data Analysis Methods

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The quantitative answers were analyzed by counting how often they appear and using percentages to find the main patterns in students' participation in project work and their level of learner autonomy.

This statistical analysis allows for a clear representation of the findings through tables, Thematic Analysis and providing an objective interpretation of how English students at the University of Ghardaia perceive their transition toward independent learning.

4.5. Analysis of the Questionnaire Data

Section I: General Information

This section aims to gather general background information about the participants, including their gender, age, and years of learning English. These data help provide a clearer understanding of the sample characteristics and learning background of the students.

Question 01: Gender

Options	Student Number	Percentage
Female	22	92%
Male	2	8%
Total	24	100%

Table 02: Participants Gender

The analysis of the gender distribution shows that **92%** of the sample identifies as females, while **8%** identifies as males, this sample shows a great representation of female students than male students

Question 02: Age

Options	Student Number	Percentage
18-20	15	63%
21-23	8	33%
24 or above	1	4%
Total	24	100%

Table 03: Age Groups

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The analysis shows that the majority of participants fall within the 18–20 age range, followed by **33%** aged between 21 and 23. While only **4%** of respondents are 24 or above. These results may be explained by the fact that most participants belong to the same age group—university students still in their early years—and this similarity led them to share almost identical ideas and a similar level of social interaction. On the other hand, the presence of a small number of older students may have resulted in differences in maturity and experience among them, which could affect their participation in **classroom activities** and their level of confidence in communication.

Question 03: Years of Learning English

Options	Student Number	Percentage
1-4 years	8	33%
5-7 years	6	25%
8-12 years	10	42%
Total	24	100%

Table 04: Students' Years of Learning English

The results show that the largest group of participants, representing **42%** has been learning English for 8–12 years. This is followed by **33%** who have studied the language for 1–4 years, while **25%** have 5–7 years of experience. **These differences in years of exposure** to English explain the variation in student's levels of language proficiency. At the same time, since most students have considerable experience in learning English, this facilitates the implementation of more advanced and sophisticated learning activities.

Section II: Students' previous Experiences with Project-Based Learning (PBL)

This section seeks to identify whether the participants have previous experience with project-based learning activities. It helps to find out if they are used to working on projects in the English department or not.

Question 04: Have you ever worked on a project before?

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This section looks at students' previous experiences with Project-Based Learning (PBL) and how they view it compared to traditional teacher-centered lessons, especially in encouraging better use of English.

Options	Student Number	Percentage
Yes	17	71%
No	7	29%
Total	24	100%

Table 05: Experience with Projects

The data shows that a significant majority of the participants, **71%** have worked on projects before. On the other hand, 29% stated that they have no prior experience with project work.

Section III: The Role of PBL in Developing Speaking Skills

This section explores students' perceptions of the impact of project-based learning on the development of speaking skills. It focuses on oral fluency, self-confidence, and overcoming psychological barriers related to speaking English.

Question 05: Project activities encourage me to speak English more than traditional lessons

Options	Student Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	9	37,5%
Agree	12	50%
Neutral	3	12,5%
Disagree	----	----
Strongly disagree	----	----
Total	24	100%

Table 06: The Effect of Project Activities on Students' Speaking Engagement

The analysis indicates that **50%** of the participants agree that project activities encourage them to speak English more than traditional lessons, while **37,5%** strongly agree with this statement. On the contrary, only **12,5%** expressed a neutral opinion.

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Question 8: Preparing for a project presentation helps me improve my (you can choose more than one): Oral fluency, Pronunciation, Vocabulary and grammar, Self-confidence when speaking

Options	Student number	Percentage
All options	10	41,7%
Oral fluency	1	4,2%
Pronunciation & Grammar + Self-confidence	3	12,5%
Vocabulary & Grammar +Oral fluency	3	12,5%
Self-confidence	5	20,8%
Oral fluency +Self-confidence	2	8,3%
Total	24	100%

Table 07: Speaking Skills Improved Through Project Presentations

These results indicate that preparing for project presentations provides students with opportunities to practice speaking and develop their English language skills. This led **41.7%** of them to experience an overall improvement in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and even self-confidence. Additionally, **20.8%** focused solely on self-confidence, demonstrating that presenting in front of the class makes them feel more comfortable speaking. The differences in the remaining choices are attributed to the varying levels of students, their learning experiences, and how each student benefits in their own way.

Question 14: Which psychological barriers has project work helped you overcome during speaking?

Options	Student number	Percentage
Fear of making mistakes	16	67%
Shyness	6	25%
Low-self confidence	2	8%
Lack of motivation	--	----
Total	24	100%

Table 08: Psychological Barriers Overcome Through Project Work

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The results show that the majority of students 67% reported that project work helped them manage the fear of making mistakes during speaking activities. In addition, 25% stated that it helped reduce shyness, while only 8% believed it improved low self-confidence. These findings suggest that project work plays an important role in reducing psychological barriers related to speaking.

SectionIV: Project-Based Learning and Learner Autonomy

This section investigates how project-based learning contributes to developing learner autonomy. It examines students' ability to learn independently, make decisions, and rely on their own efforts during project work.

Question 6: Group project work improves my ability to learn independently and make my own decisions.

Options	Student Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	5	21%
Agree	16	67%
Neutral	2	8%
Disagree	1	4%
Strongly disagree	---	---
Total	24	100%

Table 09: Independent Learning In Group Work

These analysis show that the most of participants **67%** have a positive view of teamwork in projects, and **21%** stating they strongly agree with the statement. On the other hand, a small minority of participants **8%** remained neutral, while **4%** disagreed with the idea of working on groups support autonomy.

Question 7: During a project, do you rely more on:

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The teacher's instructions or Your research and group efforts

Options	Student number	Percentage
Teacher's instructions	5	21%
Research & group efforts	11	46%
Both	1	4%
No response	7	29%
Total	24	100%

Table 10: Students' Views on Self-Reliance and Teacher Guidance

The results clearly showed that most students **46%** prefer student-centered learning, meaning they enjoy participating and researching independently. Their responses focused on three main ideas:

- 1. Developing independence in learning:** This means the student learns to be more self-reliant.
- 2. Improving social interaction and the exchange of ideas:** Group work allows them to discuss and exchange opinions and ideas.
- 3. A deeper understanding of the project:** Because they participate in the research and analysis themselves, they understand the project better.

One student said that this method: **"allows us to express our opinions and reveal our hidden abilities."**

On the other hand, **"29%"** of participants preferred to rely on the professor's instructions, because they felt the professor: has more experience and knowledge, and provides accurate and precise information. They also considered the teacher: a reliable mentor and he is the main person who evaluates their work. In contrast, only one student **"4%"** preferred a middle ground or a balanced approach. He states that the professor is necessary to guide and advise, but the group is also important because it provides ideas, inspiration, and encourages creativity.

Section V: Collaboration and Group Interaction

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This section examines the role of collaboration and teamwork in project-based learning. It focuses on participation, communication, active listening, task distribution, and conflict resolution among group members.

Question 9: How do you characterize your contribution and participation in a team setting?

Options	Student Number	Percentage
Very active	8	33%
Active	15	63%
Passive	1	4%
Total	24	100%

Table 11: Team participation

As shown in "table 10", the majority of students **63%** identify themselves as active members within their groups. Furthermore, **33%** reported as very active which shows they are highly engaged and interested in working on groups. In contrast, a very small minority **4%** reported a passive role, which shows that the rest all participated and felt the spirit of participation.

Question 10: How do you usually divide responsibilities within your group?

Options	Student number	Percentage
Based on each members skills	19	79%
Randomly	2	8%
One person does most of the work	3	13%
Total	24	100%

Table 12: Division Of Responsibilities in Group Work

The findings reveal that the majority of participants **79%** stated that responsibilities within their group are usually divided based on each member's strengths and skills. In contrast, a small

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number of participants **8%** reported that tasks are assigned randomly without any specific plan. Meanwhile, **13%** indicated that one person tends to complete most of the work. These results suggest that most groups prefer an organized distribution of responsibilities that takes into account members' abilities and competencies.

Question 11: Does working in groups help you communicate better with your peers?

Options	Student number	Percentage
Strongly agree	8	33%
Agree	11	46%
Neutral	4	17%
Disagree	1	4%
Strongly disagree	-----	-----
Total	24	100%

Table 13: Group Work and Communication

The results show that a substantial portion of students **46%** agreed that working in groups helps them communicate better with their peers, closely followed by **33%** who strongly agreed. Meanwhile, **16%** remained neutral, and only **4%** disagreed with the statement. These findings suggest that group work plays an important role in enhancing students' communication and interaction with their peers.

Question 12: Group projects helped me develop active listening

Options	Student number	Percentage
Always	8	33%
Often	10	42%
Sometimes	6	25%
Rarely	---	----
Never	--	----

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Total	24	100%

Table 14: Development of Active Listening

The results show that a considerable number of students **42%** claimed that group projects "often" helped them develop active listening skills, while **33%** stated that they "always" benefited in this aspect. Meanwhile, **25%** indicated that group projects "sometimes" participated to improving their active listening. These findings show the positive role of group projects in enhancing students' listening abilities.

Question 16: How do you usually resolve conflicts or disagreements during a project?

Options	Student number	Percentage
Through discussion	12	50%
By following the teacher's decision	9	37,5%
Others	3	12,5%
Total	24	100%

Table 15 : Conflict Resolution Strategies

The results show that the majority of students **50%** resolve conflicts or disagreements during a project through discussion, while **37.5%** stated that they follow the teacher's decision. Meanwhile, **12.5%** chose other methods. These findings suggest that most students prefer communication and dialogue as the main strategy for handling conflicts in group projects.

Section VI: The Teacher's Role in Project-Based Learning

This section aims to explore students' views regarding the teacher's role during project work, particularly whether the teacher acts as a facilitator rather than a traditional lecturer.

Question 13: When doing projects, the teacher acts more as a facilitator than a lecturer.

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Options	Student number	Percentage
Strongly agree	8	33%
Agree	11	46%
Neutral	4	17%
Disagree	1	4%
Strongly disagree	----	-----
Total	24	100%

Table 16: Teacher's role In Projects

The findings show that the majority of students **46%** agreed that the teacher acts as a facilitator rather than a lecturer during project work. This indicate that project-based learning encourages a more supportive teaching approach that helps develop learner autonomy.

SectionVII: Challenges of Project-Based Learning

This section identifies the main difficulties and challenges students encounter while working on projects, especially during collaboration and task management.

Question 15: What was the biggest difficulty you faced during collaboration?

Options	Student number	Percentage
Lack of resources	3	13%
Time management	7	29%
Difficulty in coordinating with group members	13	54%
Financial costs	1	4%
Total	24	100%

Table 17: Collaboration Difficulties

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According to the findings, the majority of students **54%** reported that difficulty in coordinating with group members was the biggest challenge during collaboration. Furthermore, **29%** indicated that time management was their main difficulty, while **13%** mentioned a lack of resources. Only a small percentage **4%** considered financial cost as a challenge. These findings suggest that coordination among group members is the most significant barrier faced during collaborative work.

Section VIII: Students' Evaluation of PBL in the Algerian Educational System

This section aims to explore students' views regarding the effectiveness of using projects in the Algerian education system and the extent to which its goals have been realized.

Question 17: Do you think projects have achieved its goals in the Algerian education system?

Options	Student number	Percentage
Yes	14	58,4%
No response	7	29,1%
Yes/No	2	8,3%
No response	1	4,2%
Total	24	100%

Table 18: Students' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Project-Based Learning In The Algerian Educational System

The results show that the majority of participants **58,4%** believe that projects have achieved their goals in the Algerian educational system. In contrast, **29,1%** students expressed a negative opinion, while **8,3%** students gave a mixed response. Only one student did not answer the question.

Most students who answered “**Yes**” emphasized that projects help them develop essential skills such as speaking, vocabulary, teamwork, and creativity. They also highlighted that project-based learning encourages active participation and shifts the focus from memorization to learner-centered education. This indicates that students perceive projects as an effective tool for improving both academic and personal skills.

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On the other hand, some students perceive the education system as still traditional and not fully supportive of project-based learning. Coupled with a lack of motivation, unequal participation within groups, and a limited number of projects, these factors lead some students to consider projects insufficiently effective. Therefore, the results show that the effectiveness of projects depends not only on their existence but also on how they are implemented and organized.

In addition, due to the imbalance of work within groups, as well as the need for better teaching strategies, some students remained uncertain about the effectiveness of projects. Therefore, the results suggest that project-based learning is theoretically effective; however, it still requires better implementation and organization.

4.6. Analysis of the interview data:

After analyzing the questionnaire data quantitatively, this section presents a qualitative view of the students' experiences. Using thematic analysis, the researcher organized the responses into different themes that correspond to the main objectives of the study.

4.6.1. Analysis of Student 1:

Student **number 01** gave a detailed description of her experience, and how she went from being heavily dependent on the professor for learning, to becoming more independent in learning, and also becoming more able to use technology in her studies.

A. Shifting from Teacher Reliance to Self-Learning Independence

The participant (student) said that her study methods changed significantly. Previously, in the traditional education system, she relied entirely on external sources, meaning she simply copied and pasted information without thinking or personal effort; However, after adopting Project-Based Learning, she began to change, she started giving greater importance to her own opinion, thinking for herself, and sharing her ideas instead of relying solely on copying or memorizing.

"But now, you taught me to trust my own thoughts, opinions, and choices instead of just copying from websites."

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B. Social Interaction and Collaborative Leadership

The main idea is that the project helped the student develop important social skills (soft skills). Initially, the student said she had a strong leadership personality (she liked to control and lead the group), and this made it difficult for her to work with others because she didn't allow them to participate much. However, with the Project-Based Learning (PBL) method, her approach changed, and she began to lean towards democratic leadership—that is, leadership that involves participation and respect for others.

"Voting was the most important thing because it allowed everyone to participate equally... it made the process fair and democratic."

C. Integrating 21st-Century Skills (Digital Skills)

The interview revealed that Project-Based Learning (PBL) helped the student overcome her fear of technology. Initially, she was hesitant or afraid to use digital tools, but with the projects, she became motivated and encouraged. Belli said she became inspired to use new tools like Artificial Intelligence (AI) and video editing, instead of relying solely on paper and traditional writing.

"Honestly, I used to be afraid of technology and video editing... but now, they ask me to help them with their own projects."

D. Improving Language Skills in Real-Life Contexts

In this section, the student explains how the learning project helped her improve her language skills practically, not just by memorizing words in isolation.

Learning Words in Context:1

This means she no longer memorized words in lists, but rather learned them within sentences and texts related to the project. This allowed her to understand them better and use them correctly.

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. Language Awareness (Her Language Errors):2

Through writing the script (the project text), she discovered her weaknesses, especially with tenses and verbs. She understood where she was making mistakes.

E. Confidence in Public Speaking:

Although she was afraid of judgment or criticism during presentations in front of an audience, her advocacy for the project helped her improve her fluency and gave her the courage to speak English.

F. The Student's Perspective on the Professor's Role:

According to the interview responses, students no longer see the professor as a "strict leader" who only gives orders. On the contrary, they now see him as a facilitator and guider, meaning his role is to: Help students understand, guide them on the right path, offer them advice, support and not impose everything on them in a rigid manner.

" He did not directly tell us do this or do that, but he encouraged us to do things by ourselves."

4.6.2. Analysis of Student 02:

The second interview provided further evidence that Project-Based Learning (PBL) is highly effective in developing higher-order thinking skills (deep thinking, analysis, and problem-solving) as well as improving digital skills (the use of technology and modern tools). This is especially true for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, meaning students learning English when it is not their native language.

A. Acquiring Vocabulary Intelligently and in Context:

Student 2 said that the project gave her the opportunity to learn new words in a meaningful context, rather than simply memorizing them without meaning. In other words, instead of the traditional method (memorization and repetition only), the project allowed her to learn words naturally through:

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Reading, Listening And writing the script (text). This repeated use of the language helped the words stick in her memory more easily and effectively.

"Through reading, listening, and repeating the words many times during the project, we started to remember them... I can use those words now."

B. Group Organization and Role Distribution:

The student said that their group was well-organized and not random. They didn't assign tasks by chance; instead, they chose tasks that suited each person's abilities and skills. For example: those who are good at technology work on AI tools, and those who are good at writing work on scriptwriting.

Conflict Resolution:

She said that sometimes disagreements or discussions occurred within the group, but they resolved them in an organized way: They used voting to reach a decision and were open to each other's opinions.

C. Critical Thinking and Self-Evaluation:

Here, the main idea is that the student spoke about a skill called **"metacognition"**, which means how a person observes and evaluates their own work. She said that her group would take a step back and look at their work as if they were outsiders, not just the ones who created it. To do this: they would identify the errors and mistakes in the work and correct them before submitting it.

" We listened to it [the project] again as if we were strangers watching our own work... We criticized our own work in order to create the best possible version of it."

D. Using Artificial Intelligence Purposefully:

Student 2 clearly explained the difference between relying on technology and using it as an aid. She said that they didn't rely on artificial intelligence completely, but rather used it only as an aid. For example: they used tools like Chat GPT and Gemini to help them edit or improve text or in image generation, but the core ideas and scriptwriting were their own style.

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"We only used AI for support and small improvements. We did not depend on it completely... we had to guide it carefully and interact with it step by step."

4.6.3. Analysis of Student 03:

The third interview highlighted an important psychological aspect of project-based learning (PBL), and how this type of learning helps students overcome some of their personal difficulties. Specifically, how it enables them to: overcome fear or hesitation, and change their learning style from a teacher-centered system, where the student is heavily dependent, to a learner-centered system where the student participates and takes responsibility for their learning.

A. Developing Self-Confidence and Overcoming Shyness:

Student number 3 connected working on the project with her personal development. For her, the project wasn't just a language assignment; it was a way to grow as a person. The project helped her: Increase her self-confidence overcome shyness and become more courageous she came to see that project-based learning contributes to character development, not just language learning.

"It made me more confident. I am also trying to overcome shyness and improve myself... I learned how to speak freely in front of people."

B. Transition from High School to University (A Change in Independence):

The interview revealed a significant difference between the student's high school experience and her current experience with project-based learning at university. She said that in high school, the system relied heavily on written research, and the teacher was the primary source of information—they provided almost everything.

What was it like before? She was 100% dependent on the teacher. She didn't make her own learning decisions.

What is she doing now at university? She has become more independent. She sees the teacher only as a guide and prefers to make her own decisions and work independently.

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"I think classroom projects help students become more independent... Because the teacher is a guide, but I prefer to make my own decisions."

C. Effective Teamwork and Mutual Respect:

Student 3 said that her teamwork experience was easy and positive, and they didn't have any major problems like some other students. She mentioned two important factors:

Mutual Respect: This means they respected each other's opinions, didn't dismiss others' ideas, and listened to each other.

Organized Decision-Making Method: As in other interviews, they used voting to resolve differences and reach a final decision, which allowed the work to proceed smoothly and in an organized manner.

"Each member accepts the opinions of others... We used voting to choose between ideas."

D. Frequent Interaction with Artificial Intelligence:

Regarding digital skills, **student number 3** demonstrated a good understanding of how to use technology correctly. She explained that when she received unsatisfactory results from the AI, she didn't accept them as they were. Instead, she employed a method called "**aniterative process**", meaning she would repeat, correct, and try again multiple times. How? She would modify and refine the instructions (prompts) she gave to the AI and try to clarify further to achieve a better result.

"I tried to give it more details and clearer instructions in order to receive the appropriate picture."

E. Emotional Response to Public Speaking:

The student said that when she first presented to a presentation, she felt scared and nervous (normal anxiety), but with: The project's organization and thorough preparation, this fear gradually transformed into: a sense of accomplishment (that she succeeded) and a feeling of comfort and self-confidence when speaking in front of an audience.

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"At first, I was scared... However, later I started to feel more comfortable and confident."

4.6.4. Analysis of Student 04:

The interview with student number 04 provided a deep and important understanding of how project-based learning (PBL) can change a student's view of teamwork and develop advanced thinking skills.

A. Developing Professional Teamwork and Conflict Resolution

The main theme here is how the student developed in their approach to group work and conflict resolution. Before, the student disliked working in a group and preferred working alone because: he wanted to be in control of the project (to manage everything) And he was afraid that their colleagues wouldn't participate effectively or help them. However, after participating in the project: he came to understand the value of group work better, his thinking changed, and he began to see that collaboration is important and he learned how to work with people and handle conflicts within the group in a mature way.

Assigning roles according to skills:

Within the group, they didn't work randomly, but rather divided tasks according to each person's abilities: those good at design worked on the design; those strong in research did the research; and those who were organized worked on the organization. In other words, everyone worked on what they were best at.

Adapting and managing emotions:

The group was very mature in dealing with problems, if a disagreement happened, they knew how to resolve it calmly, and if someone was stressed or under pressure, they helped them and changed the task to suit them better. There was no negative pressure; on the contrary, there was cooperation and understanding among them to complete the project successfully.

"Personally, I did not like teamwork before... but this experience was the first time I truly worked in a team and experienced real collaboration."

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B. Creativity and Success

Student 4 emphasized an important point in student learning which is that students should take initiative and not simply follow instructions. Although the teacher gave them a specific plan for creating a poster, the group didn't stop at what was required; they created an additional poster of their own and even added a handwritten biography book. In other words, they didn't just do the assignment; they added their own creativity and initiative.

"We followed the required structure, but at the same time, we tried to add our own creative touch and develop the project further than what was expected from us."

C. The Teacher's Role Has Changed: From Authority to Mentor

As far as **Student 4** confirmed that the teacher is no longer what he was in traditional language teaching: rather, he has become a guide and facilitator who provides support when needed. In this way, students can discover their creativity and develop their abilities.

"The teacher is not only someone who gives information, but someone who guides and supports students to explore their creativity."

4.7. Discussion of findings:

4.7.1. PBL and Speaking Skill Development

These results show that PBL activities increase students' oral participation in speaking English. This is because group work allows them to communicate with each other and discuss ideas in a natural way. This finding aligns with Masduqi et al. (2025, pp. 8-9), who stated that working in groups encourages communication and helps learners develop language skills through meaningful interaction and discussion.

These outcomes align with the study by Fauzi and Khalid (2025), who explain that Project-Based Learning (PBL) provides a comprehensive environment for students to develop their oral expression skills.

This improvement in linguistic accuracy (pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar) and increased self-confidence stems from the fact that when students prepare and deliver presentations, they

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engage in real-world practice and continuous interaction, which helps them develop both linguistically and psychologically.

The interview findings also supported these results. Student "01" explained that project work helped her improve vocabulary in context and become more confident during presentations. Similarly, Student "03" stated that although she initially felt nervous while speaking in front of others, she later became more comfortable and confident.

4.7.2. PBL and Learner Autonomy

These results can be explained by the constructivist approach, which states that learners construct their knowledge through interaction and are active in their learning. It also encourages independence while allowing learners to plan and evaluate their own learning, as confirmed by Song (2024).

This aligns with the principles of active learning, meaning the student is an active participant in the learning process, not just a passive recipient.

The interview data reinforced these findings. Student "01" explained that she became more independent and started trusting her own ideas instead of copying information. Student "02" also showed autonomy through self-evaluation and correcting mistakes without depending entirely on the teacher. In addition, Student 03 preferred making her own decisions, while Student "04" emphasized creativity and initiative during project work.

4.7.3. Collaboration and Group Interaction

The data indicate that Department of English students show strong organisational awareness by dividing activities depending on strengths, which is similar with Vygotsky's theory of peer assistance and scaffolding. This aligns with earlier research, demonstrating that structured collaboration improves learning results more than random groups. For the minority who rely on one student, this means that teachers should follow groups regularly to see if all students are participating; they should also make sure the tasks are divided equally between group members.

The data indicate that Department of English students feel that group work is a key factor in improving their communication skills. This shows that when students work together, they are

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forced to use the language to express their ideas, which helps them learn better than studying alone. In English department, this is very useful because many students find it difficult to speak English in front of the whole class, so they feel more comfortable talking to their peers in small groups.

According to the data, Department of English students believe group projects are very useful in developing their active listening skills. This shows that when students work in groups, they must listen carefully to their peers to understand different opinions and complete the task. In English department this is very important because students often focus more on speaking than listening; therefore, group work teaches them how to be patient and respect others' ideas.

The data show that Department of English students prefer using discussion and dialogue to resolve conflicts during group projects. This shows that students are developing a mature way of communication, although some still rely on the teacher to make decisions. This is similar to previous research which suggests that group work is not only about learning a language, but also about learning how to negotiate and solve problems.

The data indicate that Department of English students face several challenges during group work, mainly coordination with members, time management, and a lack of resources. These difficulties show that students need more than just language skills; they need help in organizing their roles and schedules. This is similar to previous research which suggests that successful collaboration requires careful planning and teacher guidance. According to Nunan (2013), collaborative and learner-centered activities encourage students to interact, exchange ideas, and become more active in their own learning process.

The interview findings further confirmed the importance of collaboration in project work. Student "01" described how voting created fairness and equal participation within the group. Student "02" explained that tasks were distributed according to each member's abilities, while Student "03" highlighted mutual respect and organized decision-making. Similarly, Student "04" stated that teamwork helped him understand the value of collaboration and conflict resolution.

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4.7.4. The Teacher's Role in PBL

The statistics show that Department of English students see their teacher as a facilitator, which supports Vygotsky's idea of providing guidance to help students become independent. This shows a shift from traditional teaching to a modern approach where students manage their own learning. This is similar with previous studies showing that teachers' support, rather than just lecturing, helps students develop better autonomy and responsibility.

The interview data also supported this idea. Student "01" explained that the teacher encouraged students to work independently instead of giving direct orders. Likewise, Student "03" described the teacher as a guide, while Student "04" viewed the teacher as a mentor who supports creativity and independent learning.

4.7.5. Psychological Development Through PBL

The data indicate that Department of English students find project work very helpful in overcoming psychological barriers, especially the fear of making mistakes. Particularly in English department, where many students feel shy or anxious about speaking English, project-based learning provides a safe environment to practice without pressure. This similar with previous studies show that when students do creative projects, they feel more confident and less stressed. Therefore, teachers should use projects to help students break their silence and improve their speaking fluency.

The interview findings confirmed these results. Student "03" explained that project work helped her overcome shyness and become more confident when speaking in front of others. Likewise, Student "01" stated that presentations helped her gain courage and improve her fluency during public speaking.

4.8. Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of the study was that some students did not answer certain open-ended questions in the questionnaire. For instance, **29%** of the participants did not justify their choices regarding reliance on self-learning versus teacher instructions, while one participant **4.2%** did not explain their opinion about whether projects achieved their goals in the Algerian educational

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system. This affected the qualitative analysis because the researcher was unable to fully understand the students' motivations, opinions, and underlying reasons behind their responses.

Conclusion

Analysis of the questionnaire and interview results confirmed that project-based learning (PBL) greatly helps in developing the independence of students learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Student appreciated the idea of becoming more self-reliant in their learning, and at the same time, they saw the teacher as a mentor and facilitator, not just someone who gives orders. However, some difficulties remained, such as: Coordination within groups and time management. Also, the results also showed that using artificial intelligence tools was beneficial, as it helped students: Improve their linguistic accuracy and develop creative solutions and ideas for problems. Ultimately, the study demonstrated that working in a collaborative and structured environment empowers students to take responsibility for their own learning. The study also suggests that projects, if implemented thoughtfully, can transform students from passive recipients of information into independent learners who guide their own learning

General Conclusion

GENERAL CONCLUSION

General conclusion

In the context of contemporary language education, there has been an increasing shift toward learner-centered approaches that promote autonomy and active engagement in the learning process. Among these approaches, Project-Based Learning (PBL) has gained significant attention as an effective pedagogical strategy that encourages learners to take responsibility for their own learning while actively using the target language in meaningful contexts.

The present study investigated the role of Project-Based Learning in developing learner autonomy in EFL classrooms at the University of Ghardaia. It aimed to explore how PBL can influence students' ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning, as well as their engagement, motivation, and independence in English language learning.

To achieve these objectives, the study addressed several research questions focusing on students' perceptions of learner autonomy, their experiences with PBL, and the extent to which PBL contributes to the development of autonomous learning skills. Corresponding hypotheses were formulated to predict a positive relationship between the use of PBL and the enhancement of learner autonomy.

The research was divided into four main chapters. The first three chapters provided the theoretical framework, discussing key concepts such as Project-Based Learning, learner autonomy, and their relevance in EFL contexts, along with previous studies supporting the relationship between them. The fourth chapter presented the practical part, including the research methodology, participants, data collection tools (questionnaire and interviews), and data analysis.

The findings of the study revealed that students generally hold positive attitudes toward Project-Based Learning and recognize its benefits in improving their engagement and responsibility in learning English. The results also indicated that PBL contributes to the development of learner autonomy by encouraging students to take initiative, work collaboratively, manage tasks, and reflect on their learning process. However, some challenges were identified, such as limited experience with PBL activities and dependence on traditional teacher-centered instruction.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Overall, the results confirmed that Project-Based Learning plays a significant role in fostering learner autonomy in EFL classrooms by creating an interactive and meaningful learning environment. Therefore, it is recommended that educators integrate PBL more frequently into English language teaching practices and provide students with opportunities to develop independent learning skills. Such implementation can lead to more motivated, responsible, and autonomous language learners.

Recommendation and suggestion

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be suggested for Algerian EFL classrooms and future educational practices.

First, Algerian educational institutions are encouraged to integrate Project-Based Learning (PBL) into English language teaching, since the findings revealed that PBL not only improves students' speaking skills, but also enhances learner autonomy and active participation in the learning process.

Second, EFL teachers should move beyond focusing solely on grammatical knowledge and give more importance to communication, collaboration, and the use of technological tools through meaningful classroom projects. Such practices can help students develop both linguistic and practical skills needed for their future academic and professional lives.

In addition, despite some students being more accustomed to traditional teaching methods, this study demonstrated that PBL helps learners overcome fear and anxiety related to speaking English. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to create supportive and interactive learning environments that motivate students to express themselves confidently.

Moreover, collaborative work and teamwork activities should be promoted in EFL classrooms because they strengthen students' self-confidence, improve social interaction, and develop important digital skills.

Finally, teachers are advised to adopt collaborative assessment, reflection, and self-assessment practices, as they encourage students to become more engaged and responsible for their own learning. These strategies also foster better communication and cooperation between students and teachers, leading to a more supportive learning environment.

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APPENDIX

Appendices**Appendix "01"****Students' Questionnaire**

Dear Students,

This questionnaire is designed to collect data for a Master's dissertation entitled: "The Role of Project-Based Learning in Developing Learner Autonomy in the EFL Classroom." It aims to explore how project work enhances learner autonomy, with a particular focus on listening and speaking skills at the Department of Literature and Languages at the University of Ghardaïa.

Your responses will be kept strictly confidential and will be used solely for research purposes. Please tick (✓) the proprietary answer or write your response when necessary.

1: Gender

☐ Female

☐ Male

2: Age:

☐ 18-20

☐ 21-23

☐ 24 or above

3: How long have you been learning English?

☐ 1 _ 4 years

☐ 5 _ 7 years

☐ 8 _ 12 years

4: Have you ever worked on a project before?

☐ Yes

☐ No

5: Project activities encourage me to speak English more than traditional lessons.

☐ Strongly agree

☐ Agree

☐ Neutral

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

6: Group project work improves my ability to learn independently and make my own decisions.

☐ Strongly agree

☐ Agree

☐ Neutral

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

7: During a project, do you rely more on:

☐ The teacher's instructions

☐ Your research and group efforts

Please justify your answer

8: Preparing for a project presentation helps me improve my (you can choose more than one):

☐ Oral fluency

- ☐ Pronunciation
- ☐ Vocabulary and grammar
- ☐ Self-confidence when speaking

9: How do you characterize your contribution and participation in a team setting?

- ☐ Very active
- ☐ Active
- ☐ Passive

10: How do you usually divide responsibilities within your group?

- ☐ Based on each member's strengths and skills
- ☐ Randomly, without a specific plan
- ☐ One person does most of the work

11: In your opinion, does working in groups help you communicate better with your peers?

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

12: Group projects helped me develop active listening:

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes

☐ Rarely

☐ Never

13: When doing projects , the teacher acts more as a facilitator than a lecturer.

☐ Strongly agree

☐ Agree

☐ Neutral

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

14: Which psychological barriers has project work helped you overcome during speaking?

☐ Fear of making mistakes

☐ Shyness

☐ Low self-confidence

☐ Lack of motivation

15: What was the biggest difficulty you faced during collaboration?

☐ Lack of resources

☐ Time management

☐ Difficulty in coordinating with group members

☐ Financial costs

16: How do you usually resolve conflicts or disagreements during a project?

☐ Through discussion

☐ By following the teacher's decision

☐ Others.....

: 1717: Do you think projects have achieved their goals in the Algerian education system?

Please explain your answer.

Thank you for your time and cooperation!

Appendix"02"

Student'sInterview

Dear Students,

You are kindly asked to answer the following questions which are going to be a part of my research

How did project-based learning change your way of learning

Did PBL help you become more autonomous or independent? How?

How was your experience working in a group?

How did your group organize the work and distribute roles?

Did you face any conflicts or disagreements? How did you solve them?

How did PBL help you improve your English skills?

Did the project help you improve your speaking skills or confidence?

How did you learn vocabulary during the project?

What role did technology or AI tools play in your project?

How did you use Artificial Intelligence during the project?

Did the project help you develop critical thinking or problem-solving Skills?

How would you describe the teacher's role during the project?

What difficulties did you face during the project?

What did you learn from this experience personally and academically?

ملخص البحث

تستكشف هذه الدراسة دور التعلم القائم على المشاريع في تعزيز استقلالية المتعلمين من طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية ككلغة أجنبية في جامعة غرداية. فبينما تحدد الأساليب التقليدية التي تركز على المعلم غالباً ما تستقلالية الطلاب ومشاركتهم الفعالة، يبرز التعلم القائم على المشاريع كنهج فعال يركز على المتعلم ويشجعهم على التعاون والتفكير النقدي والإبداع. وباستخدام تصميم وصفي منهجي بحثية مختلطة، أجرى الباحثون خلال استبيان توزعت على طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية ومقابلات شبه منظمة معهم. وتظهر النتائج أن الطلاب عمومًا لديهم مواقف إيجابية تجاه التعلم القائم على المشاريع، مدركين دورهم المهم في تعزيز الاستقلالية والعمل الجماعي. هاتان التواصلا المشاركة الصفية. كما تشير النتائج إلى أن التعلم القائم على المشاريع يحفز المتعلمين على المشاركة الفعالة في عملية التعلم ويساعد على تحمل مسؤولية تعلمهم. ومع ذلك، فقد تم تحديد بعض التحديات مثل إدارة الوقت والتنسيق بين أعضاء المجموعة. توصي الدراسة بمجال مزيد من الأنشطة القائمة على المشاريع في صقل اللغة الإنجليزية ككلغة أجنبية لتعزيز استقلالية المتعلمين وخلق بيئة تعليمية أكثر تفاعلية وتتمحور حول الطالب.