



## DEVELOPING PROJECT-BASED LEARNING MODELS TO FOSTER AUTONOMOUS LEARNING IN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS STUDYING ENGLISH

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### Abstract

This study focuses on constructing project-based learning models to facilitate autonomous learning among high school students studying English. Autonomy in learning is a crucial aspect of students' academic development. By integrating project-based learning methods with the English language, this research aims to create engaging and meaningful learning models that help students develop self-management skills, foster creative thinking, and enhance their English communication abilities. We explored how project-based learning models can be designed and implemented to provide opportunities for students to engage in real-world projects and produce English-language products, presentations, or works. This approach allows students to practice English in real-life contexts, thereby improving their communication and language usage skills. Drawing on the examination of fundamental aspects related to self-directed learning capabilities, objectives, and characteristics of the 2018 General Education Program and the specific high school English curriculum in Vietnam, we have identified key logical dimensions. The results of this research served as a foundation for the development of teaching methods and project-based learning models to support high school students in their autonomous learning of English. This may open up new learning opportunities and equip students with the necessary skills for the future in an increasingly globalized world.



## XÂY DỰNG CÁC MÔ HÌNH HỌC TẬP DỰ ÁN TRONG VIỆC HỖ TRỢ TÍNH TỰ CHỦ HỌC TẬP CHO HỌC SINH TRUNG HỌC PHỔ THÔNG HỌC TIẾNG ANH

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### Thông tin bài viết

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### Từ khóa

*tự chủ học tập, học tập dự án,  
mô hình, kết quả.*

### Tóm tắt

Đề tài này tập trung vào việc xây dựng các mô hình học tập dự án nhằm tạo điều kiện thuận lợi cho sự tự chủ học tập của học sinh trung học phổ thông trong môn tiếng Anh. Sự tự chủ trong việc học tập là một khía cạnh quan trọng trong quá trình phát triển năng lực học tập của học sinh. Bằng cách kết hợp phương pháp học tập dự án và Tiếng Anh, nghiên cứu này nhằm tạo ra các mô hình học tập thú vị và ý nghĩa, giúp học sinh phát triển kỹ năng tự quản lý, tư duy sáng tạo, và khả năng giao tiếp bằng Tiếng Anh. Chúng ta sẽ xem xét cách mô hình học tập dự án có thể được thiết kế và triển khai để tạo cơ hội cho học sinh tham gia vào các dự án thực tế và tạo ra sản phẩm, bài thuyết trình hoặc tác phẩm bằng Tiếng Anh. Bằng cách này, học sinh sẽ có cơ hội thực hành tiếng Anh trong ngữ cảnh thực tế, từ đó nâng cao khả năng giao tiếp và sử dụng ngôn ngữ. Dựa trên việc nghiên cứu một số vấn đề cơ bản về năng lực tự học, mục tiêu, và đặc điểm của Chương trình Giáo dục phổ thông 2018 tổng quan và chương trình môn Tiếng Anh khối THPT ở Việt Nam cụ thể, chúng ta đã xác định các khía cạnh lí luận quan trọng. Kết quả từ nghiên cứu này sẽ giúp cung cấp một cơ sở cho việc phát triển phương pháp giảng dạy và mô hình học tập dự án trong việc hỗ trợ học sinh trung học phổ thông trong việc tự chủ học tập tiếng Anh. Điều này có thể mang lại những cơ hội học tập mới mẻ và giúp học sinh trang bị cho họ kỹ năng cần thiết cho tương lai trong một thế giới ngày càng toàn cầu hóa.

### 1. Introduction

In the context of global integration, the English language plays a pivotal role, yet many Vietnamese students lack proficiency due to insufficient self-study (Ha, 2007). Learner autonomy become a critical aspect of language education, enriching the learning process

and empowering learners (Camillerigrima, 2007; Palfreyman, 2003). Autonomy allows students to self-manage their learning, set goals, and monitor progress (Holec, 1981), and it has been widely embraced in the field of education since the 1980s, offering numerous benefits in the learning process. Learner autonomy

empowers students to become more proficient through self-learning, self-navigation, self-access, and self-regulation (Dickinson, 1995). Benson (2006) defines learner autonomy as the readiness and capability of learners to take responsibility for their learning with guidance from teachers.

In the pursuit of creating student-centered learning environments, teachers are increasingly adopting project-based learning. This approach provides a robust solution to develop language proficiency while creating an experiential and engaging learning environment. Project-based learning meets the needs of both teachers and students, enhancing English language teaching effectiveness. It notably emphasizes the development of skills, active participation, and inspiration (Thuan, 2018). Project-based learning is an effective method for promoting student engagement by providing real-life lessons and practical applications. Collaboration and active participation are vital aspects of project-based learning, reflecting the interaction within the language learning process. Focusing on tangible outcomes in project-based learning ensures that the learning process is meaningful and relevant to reality. In the context of learning English, project-based learning improves language skills and encourages student autonomy. This holistic development of language proficiency contributes to comprehensive English language learning for students. A recent study aimed to investigate students' perspectives on enhancing autonomy through project-based learning and its impact on promoting self-directed learning in the context of learning English.

## 2. Research methods

The research employed observation with note-taking and surveys to gather data and identify the project-based learning models commonly used by students. The guidance of teachers played a role in providing specific task instructions and guidance for students, while the students themselves, especially within student groups, support each other in self-directed learning, exploration, and creativity. They applied various forms of project-based learning to create evidence products and develop English language skills independently.

## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1. Theoretical Foundation

#### 3.1.1. Concepts of Learner Autonomy and Enhancing Autonomy in High School Students' Learning

The concept of learner autonomy is widely discussed in the field of education and various aspects of social life. According to Little (1991), learner autonomy involves the psychological engagement of learners in the learning process, including careful reflection, choice, and independent action. Benson (2001) emphasizes the self-regulation of one's own learning process, focusing on "control" rather than "dependence" or "responsibility." In the context of applied linguistics and English language teaching, learner autonomy has been recognized as a crucial part of effective language instruction (Cherrington, 2000). It is closely related to lifelong learning in an ever-changing world. However, students often face challenges in developing confidence in their self-directed learning, especially when setting goals and making decisions without full support (Le, Nguyen, and Duong, 2022).

This current research views learner autonomy as an ability in which learners actively engage in goal setting, decision-making, and self-evaluation. This enables them to become independent and self-directed in their learning, fostering a lifelong learning mindset and critical thinking skills.

#### 3.1.2. Significance of Enhancing Autonomy in High School Students through Project-Based Learning

Learner autonomy brings significant advantages to language education. Firstly, it promotes the self-automation of learners, allowing them to set goals and manage their learning process effectively. Secondly, learner autonomy fosters creativity and critical thinking in students, improving their learning performance. Finally, it provides an excellent opportunity to enhance English language communication skills, as students often need to use English in real-life situations and practical applications.

Learner autonomy is also flexible and caters to the individual needs of each student. It allows students to proceed at their own pace and choose learning methods that suit them, making the learning process personalized and more enjoyable.

#### 3.1.3. Factors Influencing Learner Autonomy

**Subjective Factors:** Psychological aspects, including self-confidence, positive thinking, and passion, play a crucial role in learner autonomy.

Learning habits and study strategies can influence learners' ability to self-direct their learning (Chen, 2015; Zaqiri, 2015; Tran and Vuong, 2023).

**Objective Factors:** According to Alzubi (2021) and Tran and Le (2022), the role of teachers in supporting and creating conditions for learner autonomy is significant. Learning tasks can either stimulate motivation or diminish it. The learning environment, including peer interactions and study materials, also has a considerable impact.

### 3.1.4. Project-Based Learning and Its Benefits

Project-based learning (PBL) is an educational method that allows students to self-design, plan, and execute an extended project leading to a public, shared product or presentation, such as a product, publication, or presentation. This aligns with task-based teaching methods, providing opportunities for students to independently carry out their tasks in their unique way. The most critical distinction of PBL lies in understanding the concept of a "project." In this context, a project encourages students to actively perform tasks based on their own plans, ideas, and creativity.

In this study, researchers asked students to complete a specific project, creating a small magazine. They had

the freedom to choose the topic, team members, and design elements according to their preferences (Sutomo et al., 2021).

### 3.2. Research Issues

The participants in this study consist of 50 Grade 11 students following the new curriculum at various high schools in Nghe An province, Vinh city, Vietnam. These students have varying levels of English proficiency and have been attending an additional English language class. They were divided into groups to self-monitor and engage in project-based learning, designing projects and creating project products. On average, they have participated in three English periods per week at the high school, where they received comprehensive instruction on specific lesson content. The textbook used for these students is "Global Success 11," designed with ten engaging topics to encourage creativity and enhance their English language skills.

### 3.3. Results

#### 3.3.1. Effectiveness of Project-Based Learning in Promoting Learner Autonomy

**Table 2.1. Results of Project-Based Learning on the Development of Learner Autonomy: Student Feedback**

Content	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Enhancing Autonomy with Project-Based Learning	50	2.0	4.0	3.35	0.612
Developing Self-Learning Skills through Projects	50	2.0	4.0	3.18	0.527
Creating Conditions for Students to Self-Manage the Learning Process through Projects	50	2.0	4.0	3.28	0.601
Developing Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills with Project-Based Learning	50	2.0	4.0	3.40	0.561
Promoting Collaboration and Communication Skills through Project-Based Learning	50	2.0	4.0	3.25	0.541
Encouraging Creativity and Innovation through Project-Based Learning	50	2.0	4.0	3.42	0.641
Building Time Management and Planning Skills through Projects	50	1.0	4.0	3.05	0.652
Reinforcing Research and Knowledge Understanding through Project-Based Learning	50	2.0	4.0	3.20	0.595
Promoting Lifelong Learning Attitudes through Project-Based Learning	50	2.0	4.0	3.32	0.601

The study used a survey and interviews to assess the impact of project-based learning on the development of students' autonomy and self-directed learning in the language learning process. The data indicated that students had a positive response to project-based learning, with higher scores in areas such as critical thinking, teamwork, creativity, information processing, and lifelong learning attitudes. However, overall improvement in students' autonomy seemed limited, possibly because they had fewer opportunities to engage in independent work and decision-making within the project-based learning curriculum. Students acknowledged the benefits of project-based learning for self-regulation and learning responsibility, but reported relatively modest changes in their overall autonomy.

The study also suggested that developing learning autonomy takes time and may require additional interventions to change established learning habits and mindsets.

3.3.2. *Useful Project-Based Learning Models*

During the research process, students produced a wide range of learning products through project-based learning. These products were the result of their self-directed learning, exploration, creativity, design, and activities under the guidance and direction of the teacher. As a result, they made significant progress in self-learning and overall English language skills. Table 2.2 presented some project-based learning models used by students and categorizes them into specific project model groups as follows.

**Table 2.2. Language Learning Project Models**

<b>Project Type</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Presentation Project</b>	Plan and deliver a presentation on a specific topic using the target language to develop speaking and presentation skills.
<b>Writing Project</b>	Write essays, newsletters, opinion letters, or stories based on a specific topic or issue to develop writing skills and grammar.
<b>Research Project</b>	Research a language-related topic or issue and write a research report or conduct a language experiment to explore language phenomena.
<b>Broadcast Project</b>	Create news broadcasts, online radio shows, or podcasts on a specific language topic to develop speaking and listening skills, as well as confidence in language use.
<b>Video Project</b>	Create video presentations on a topic or story using the target language to stimulate creativity and develop presentation skills.
<b>Social Interaction Project</b>	Engage in social activities such as speeches, discussions, or role-playing using the target language to develop communication skills and social participation.
<b>Creative Project</b>	Participate in creative activities such as writing poetry, composing music, creating artwork, or designing decorations using language to promote creativity.
<b>Drama Project</b>	Perform a drama performance or short play using the target language to develop acting skills and language use in a dramatic context.
<b>Game Project</b>	Create language-related games or language puzzle games to make learning enjoyable.
<b>Cultural Project</b>	Explore and discuss various cultural and language aspects of a specific nation or country to gain a deeper understanding of language and culture.

When observing students' activities in the classroom and group activities outside the classroom, the students demonstrated their level of project choice for their products. Projects were diversified in the form of products created and presented by the students themselves. However, each type of project was favored differently by the students. Table 2.3 illustrates the students' preference and usage for each type of project-based learning model.

**Table 2.3. Favorability of Various Project-Based Learning Types Impacting Self-Directed Learning Competence**

Project Type	Number of Students Preferring	Average Value	Standard Deviation
Presentation Project	46	0.92	0.27
Video Project	43	0.86	0.35
Writing Project	40	0.80	0.40
Research Project	42	0.84	0.37
Broadcast Project	38	0.76	0.43
Social Interaction Project	45	0.90	0.31
Drama Project	36	0.72	0.45
Game Project	40	0.80	0.40
Cultural Project	41	0.82	0.39

*3.3.3. Some Suggestions to Enhance Student’s Self-Directed Learning Abilities for Students, Teachers, and Peers*

**For Students:**

**Choose Familiar Topics:** Students should start by selecting a topic that is familiar or related to their interests. This will automatically pique their interest and motivate them to conduct independent research.

**Create Personal Plans:** Students need to learn how to plan their projects. They can make to-do lists, set deadlines, and track their progress using calendars or time management apps.

**Explore Diverse Resources:** Encourage students to seek diverse sources of information, including books, websites, videos, and online lectures. They should also learn to evaluate the reliability of these sources.

**Develop Questioning Skills:** Encourage students to ask questions and seek answers through research. This helps them develop self-learning and information analysis skills.

**Engage in Daily Communication:** Students should practice using the target language in their daily lives. This includes writing journals, sending emails, participating in online discussions, or even talking to friends and family about their projects.

**Self-Assessment and Goal Setting:** They should assess their progress, identify strengths and weaknesses, and set specific learning goals for improvement.

**Collaborate with Peers:** Students can form study groups or engage in online discussions with classmates to share knowledge and exchange ideas.

**For Teachers:**

**Topic Selection Guidance:** Teachers can provide a list of project topics or allow students to choose project topics based on their interests.

**Plan Creation Support:** Teachers can guide students in creating project plans by providing schedule templates or instructional materials.

**Provide Resource Materials:** Teachers can assign relevant resource materials or provide a list of potential resource materials.

**Grammar and Vocabulary Support:** Teachers can conduct lessons on grammar and vocabulary related to the project topic.

**Implement Diverse Assessments:** To ensure self-directed learning, teachers can employ diverse assessments such as essays, discussions, or presentations.

**For Peers:**

**Share Experiences:** Students can share their experiences and knowledge through discussions, study groups, or online forums.

**Mutual Support:** Students can assist each other in finding resource materials, problem-solving, and providing constructive feedback.

**Discussions and Debates:** Promote discussions and debates on project topics to explore various perspectives.

**Collaboration in Groups:** Students can collaborate in groups to complete different parts of a project or assist each other in planning and execution.

**Share Learning Materials:** They can share study materials, books, or useful English language resources they discover.

#### 4. Conclusion

Current research reports indicate that project-based learning has a positive impact on language development and student autonomy. Students are increasingly favoring the use of project-based learning models, enjoying independent exploration and creativity in their learning products. The use of project-based learning has significantly increased and yielded positive results in language learning and self-management skills. To harness the full potential of project-based learning, students should clearly define their language learning goals, align them with personal interests, and seek guidance when necessary. They should also be prepared to face challenges and practice effective time management and self-assessment.

For teachers, creating a supportive learning environment by encouraging curiosity, exploration, and a willingness to take risks is crucial. Allowing students to choose project topics, providing guidance and appropriate resource materials, fostering collaboration, offering constructive feedback, and recognizing students' achievements are essential elements. Using suitable forms and project models that align with the context, lessons, and students' interests can significantly enhance their self-directed learning and passion for learning the English language.

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