Learners' attitudes towards project works in enhancing English autonomous learning: A case study at Foreign Trade University - Ho Chi Minh City Campus

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted with the following objectives: (1) to investigate students' attitudes towards the use of project works to enhance their autonomous learning in an English speaking class; (2) to find out to what extent students believe that using project works can promote their autonomous learning; and (3) to figure out difficulties that learners have during the time they conduct Video making projects. The study population was 73 second-year students who took the course of English listening and speaking 2. An open-ended questionnaire and 25 semi-structured interviews were employed as research instruments for data collection. The result firstly shows that the students have positive attitudes towards the use of project works in English classes that may have enhanced their autonomous learning. Then, it reveals students' preference in having more project works to do in their English classes. Nonetheless, using project works' evaluation as one of criteria for course assessment is a controversial issue among these students. In addition, students' interest in utilizing information technology devices is remarked as one of the significant findings in this study. Furthermore, some difficulties when conducting projects are found including time constraints, teamwork conflicts, cultural differences and problems with technology. Because of students' positive attitudes towards Video making project in enhancing their autonomous learning, it is suggested that teachers should consider applying the projects in their language teaching.

Keywords: *autonomous learning, project-based learning, project works, students' attitude, video making project*

1. Introduction

The requirements of the 21st century have placed a renewed emphasis on enhancing students' autonomous learning experience. The learners need to know how to learn and think autonomously. Holec (1981, cited in Skai & Takagi, 2009) claims that students need to have the ability to take charge of their learning. Thus, it is believed that one of the key factors for students to be successful in this challenging society is their learning autonomy. They need to be active rather than passive and figure out the answers rather than to be told. However, fostering students' autonomous learning is not an easy issue. In fact, it is challenging to encourage students to be autonomous learners, especially in the countries which are strongly affected by Confucian heritage like Vietnam. Students from these countries are generally seen as ones who are typically passive, unwilling to ask questions or speak up in class and often based on memorizing rather than understanding knowledge delivered by teachers (Nguyen et al., 2005).

At Foreign Trade University - Ho Chi Minh Campus, students are no exception. The lack of autonomy in learning has been a serious problem among students. With the practical teaching experience and ambition to keep improving the recent teaching and learning situation in English language classrooms, the authors would apply Project-Based Learning (PBL) as a new method for motivating students to study English and encourage their autonomous lifelong learning.

The aim of this study is to investigate students' attitudes towards the use of project works as an instance of Project-Based Learning, which is a teaching method in enhancing their autonomous learning in English learning classes. The study expands to focus on students' belief in the effectiveness of project works in enhancing their autonomous learning. Then, the study figures out the learning difficulties that students have during the time of undertaking their learning projects as an instance of PBL method.

To achieve these goals, the authors focus on finding answers for the following research questions.

1. What are students' attitudes towards project works implementation in the English courses to enhance autonomous learning?

2. To what extent do students believe that the employment of project works affects their autonomous learning?

3. What are students' difficulties when doing project works?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Project Works (PW)

2.2.1. Definition of Project Work

Project work has been described literarily by Dewey (1938, cited in Thomas, 2010), Thomas (2010), Bell (2010) and others. Due to their different perspectives, there are various configurations of project definition.

Tracking back to the 19ᵗʰ century, Dewey (1938, cited in Thomas, 2010), who is considered as the father of Project-based Learning theory, says that a project work does not present topics as verbal formulations to be memorized, but brings conditions when pupils try their resourcefulness and ability to make right decisions and activities. He believes that thinking begins where obstacles are, which refers to the relationship between thinking and practice. This original idea of project work emphasizes the importance of his "learning by doing" theory.

Years later, Thomas (2010) develops Dewey's theory and provides a more detailed explanation. He claims that a project work is defined as complex tasks based on problems encountered by students, conducted during certain period of time and culminated in realistic products that might be in form of presentation, exhibition, publications and etc.… Bell's (2010) idea should not be left out when he claims that project work is student-centered method and driven by the need of creating an end-product.

2.1.2. Criteria for a project to be considered as an instance of Project-Based Learning (PBL)

In an attempt to clarify what Project-Based Learning is, some researchers try to describe the essential components of a project work and to emphasize on its uniqueness to be considered as an instance of Project-Based Learning. This study presents five criteria suggested by Thomas (2010), namely*, centrality, driving questions, constructive investigation, student-driven and realism*.

Firstly, it is centrality. It means that PBL projects are central, not peripheral to the curriculum. Therefore, projects in which students learn things that are outside the curriculum ("enrichment" projects) are not examples of Project-Based Learning, no matter how appealing or engaging they are. Thus, to be considered as a project work in Project-Based Learning, it should be the center of both teaching and learning process and not be out of curriculum.

The second criterion relates to driving questions which "drive" students to encounter (and struggle with) the central concepts and principles of a discipline. PBL projects may be built around thematic units or the intersection of topics from two or more disciplines, however, they should inspire students' curiosity to solve given problems.

Being a constructive investigation is another aspect of a Project-Based Learning project work. An investigation is a goal-directed process that involves inquiring, knowledge building, and resolution. Not all investigations which may be designs, decision-making, problem-finding, problem-solving, discovery, or model-building process are called PBL projects. Only those that involve the transformation and construction of knowledge such as new skill, new understanding on the parts of students are accepted (Bereiter & Scardamalia, cited in Thomas, 2010). Thomas (2010) also confirms that if the central activities of the project represent no difficulty to the students or can be carried out with the application of already-learned information or skills, the project is an exercise, not a PBL project work.

Another feature that should not be left is student-driven. To some significant degree, projects are not scripted by the teachers. Thus, teachers do not take predetermined paths and have predetermined outcomes. The role of students in learning process is emphasized and they become more responsible. To some extent, they will have more autonomy and responsibility towards their own learning.

The last but not least is criterion of realism. Projects are realistic, not school-like. Projects embody characteristics that give them a feeling of authenticity to students. These characteristics can include the topic, the tasks, the roles that students play, the context within which the work of the project is carried out, the collaborators who work with students on the projects, the products that are produced, the audience for the projects' products, or the criteria by which the products or performance is judged. PBL incorporates real-life challenges where the focus is on authentic (not simulated) problems or questions and where solutions have the potential to be implemented.

2.1.3. Types of Project work

The configurations of project work have been sorted out differently by language educators. Haine (1989) considers the ways that final production for a project is reported and suggests three types of project work: production projects, performance projects and organizational projects. Legutke & Thomas (1991) claim that there are five types according to the processing factors like data collection techniques and sources of information, namely research projects, text projects, correspondence projects, survey projects and encounter projects. Basing on the nature and sequencing of project-related activities, Stoller (1997) suggests three types of project: structured projects, unstructured projects and semi-structured projects. Among these classifications, the authors of the current study would choose the one suggested by Haine (1989) as guidelines for the project work implementation. The research group also gave the participants as students clear explanation of these types of project works.

The explanation for each type of project is presented as follows:

– ***Production projects:*** involving students creating bulletin boards, videos, poster sessions, radio programs, written reports, handbooks, travel itineraries, menus, letters, and brochures. This entails that the outcome of this type of projects is written production.

– ***Performance projects:*** leading to things such as debates, oral presentations, theatres, food fairs or fashion shows.

– ***Organizational projects:*** involving planning and forming a club or conversation table or partner program.

He also refers more in details the specific form of project works, which are shown in the following table:

TABLE 1: Types of projects according to the outcome

TYPES OF PROJECTS		
PRODUCTION	**ORGANISATIONAL**	**PERFORMANCE**
Video Radio Website Posters Magazines Newspapers Handbooks Brochures Lists	Partner programme Conversation table Literary afternoon Language Language club	Debates Oral presentations Drama Fashion shows Food fairs

2.1.4. Video Making as Instances of PBL in an English Speaking Class

There are a lot of options for teachers to choose suitable projects to apply in their teaching course which matches the requirements of the course outcome and students' characteristics. In this study, the authors chose to use the project, namely Video making because of the followings reasons:

For the Video making project, the authors decided to use it as an instance of PBL in the teaching course because of the benefits which it may bring up to the students. Patrick et al. (2008, p.68) strongly emphasize that student-produced video drama has always been an excellent English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning activity that requires learner's participation in a variety of ways. Specially, with the relatively recent advances in digital video technology and concomitant drop in cost of video hardware and editing software, drama has become an even more powerful teaching and learning method in the EFL classroom (Patrick et al. 2008, p.69). He also adds that "digital video recording, editing, and DVD authoring add to drama's allure, as easy viewing and distribution possibilities enable students to see their own second language-speaking persona and share it with others" (Patrick et al., 2008, p.69).

In addition, there is another reason that comes from students' situation. It is easy to observe that most of the students participating in the authors' classes had used digital video cameras more than other social interaction services such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, but few of them had attempted to make a movie or short video in English as kind of interaction.

Therefore, using Video making project is expected to increase students' learning motivation and improve their speaking skill components such as pronunciation, intercultural awareness and identifying formation, and as foremost, students can improve their autonomous learning.

2.1.5. The implementation procedure of Project Works

The basic phases found in most projects include selecting a topic, making plans, researching, developing products, and sharing results with others (Wrigley, 1998). Each

type of projects will go with different ways of constructing stages. In this paper, the authors aim to apply semi-structured projects, thus, the ten-step project type suggested by Stoller (2002) as cited in Phan (2015) will be used. According to Stoller (2002), these 10 steps present a way to maximize the potential use of project work. In detail, the tasks of both learners and instructors are explained as following:

Step I: Students and instructor agree on a theme for the project

In this step, the instructor gives students an opportunity to shape the project and develop some sense of shared perspective and commitment. Students also brainstorm issues that might be featured in their projects.

Step II: Students and instructor determine the final outcome

After finishing the first step, students and their instructor need to consider the nature of the project, its objectives, the most appropriate means to culminate them. Then, the most important thing is that they need to decide the final outcome of their projects.

Step III: Students and instructor structure the project

As Stoller (1997) mentions, after students have determined the starting and ending points of the project, they need to structure the "body" of the project. Questions that students should consider are as follows: what information is needed in completing the project, How can the information be obtained (e.g., a library search, interviews, letters, faxes, e-mail, webs, field trip…), How will the information, once gathered, be compiled and analyzed, What role does each student play in the evolution of the project (i.e., Who does what?), What timeline will students follow to get from the starting point to the ending point. These questions need to be analyzed carefully in this step so that learners can continue with the step 4.

Step IV: Instructor prepares students for the language demands of information gathering

Step 4 is the period that the instructor needs to give a hand for students through consultation or lesson on language demanded during their project conduction. If, for example, students are going to collect information by means of interviewing, the instructor might plan exercises on question formation, introduce conversational gambits, and set aside time for role-plays to provide feedback on pronunciation. Or, in other case, when their topic focuses on special language area like tourism, then, the teacher needs to support them with basic language demand.

Step V: Students gather information

Students, having practiced the language, skills, and strategies needed to gather information, are now ready to collect information and organize it so that others on their team can make sense of it. However, they need to keep their timeline and collect suitable information.

Step VI: Instructor prepares students for the language demands of compiling analyzing data

After successfully gathering information, students are then confronted with the challenges of organizing and synthesizing information that may have been collected from different sources and by different individuals. The instructor can prepare students with the demands of the compilation and analysis stage by setting up sessions in which students organize sets of materials, and then evaluate, analyze, and interpret them with an eye towards determining which are most appropriate for the supporters and opponents of the given proposition.

Step VII: Students compile and analyze information

With the assistance of a variety of organizational techniques (including graphic organizers), students compile and analyze information to identify data that are particularly relevant to the project. Student teams evaluate the value of the collected data, discarding some, because of their inappropriacy for the project, and keep the rest. Students determine which information represents primary "evidence" for the supporters and opponents of their proposition.

Step VIII: Instructor prepares students for the language demands of the culminating activity

At this point in the development of the project, instructors can bring in language improvement activities to help students succeed in the presentation of their final products. This might entail practicing oral presentation skills and receiving feedback on voice projection, pronunciation, organization of ideas, and eye contact. It may involve editing and revising written reports, letters, or bulletin board display texts.

Step IX: Students present final product

Students are now ready to present the final outcome of their projects

Step X: Students evaluate the project

Although students and instructors, alike, often view the presentation of the final product as the very last stage in the project work process, it is worthwhile to ask students to reflect on the experience as the last and final step. Students can reflect on the language that they mastered to complete the project, the content that they learned about the targeted theme.

To summarize, those ten steps suggested by Stoller (2002) are incredible for both teachers and students when conducting project works to achieve their targets. The given explanation for each step helps students visualize the essential requirements that they need to fulfill for different stages before reaching the end product of project works.

2.2. Autonomous learning

2.2.1. Definition of Autonomous learning

The first definition that has pioneered in defining autonomy or autonomous learning is

by Holec (1981). He emphasizes that autonomy is the capacity of taking charge of one's own learning (1981, p.3). Then he explains more by saying that "take charge of one's learning is to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning" (1981, p.3). This definition may be understood that students themselves need to have ability and determination in terms of their objectives, learning content, the pace of learning, learning methods and techniques, monitoring their own learning process and evaluating their outcomes.

On the other hand, Little (1991) follows another direction when he privileges the cognitive processes that connected to autonomous learning. Before giving his definition, he assures that autonomy is not self-instruction or learning without a teacher. Then, he defines autonomy as a capacity of detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. It presupposes, but also entails, that the learner will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process and content of his learning. The capacity for autonomy will be displayed both in the way the learner learns and in the way he or she transfers what has been learned to wider contexts *(Little 1991).*

In this definition, Little (1991) brings to light the capacity of reflection, of internal awareness of how the learning process develops for each individual. This may lead to the change in students' attitude toward learning. One more important aspect highlighted by Little is his recognition on the importance of the teacher's role in helping the learners become more autonomous. It assures that teachers play an important role in enhancing their students to be autonomous.

To sum up, there comes to an assumption that autonomous learning is a complicated process. It takes place when learners are aware of their learning responsibility, they need to take charge of their learning, can collaborate with peers, adopt more metacognitive strategies such as organizing materials; carrying out the tasks; choosing criteria for evaluation (Thanasoulas, 2000). Aminatun & Oktaviani (2019) also hold the same view that learners with autonomous learning ability will be able to find out their learning needs, set their learning goals, find appropriate ways of learning, monitor and evaluate their learning progress.

2.2.2. Incorporating autonomous learning in the language classroom through project works

The important role of learner autonomy towards their learning process is undeniable. As Nada (2015) states in his paper that autonomous learning is so valuable because it is not only developing students learning, but also helps them to become interactively motivated learners, as motivation is one of the most important factors that create the situations where learners can learn effectively. For the decades, researchers have conducted various studies to find out different approaches in an attempt to discover how autonomous learning may be enhanced. To achieve these purposes, DeLong (2009) suggests that teachers, firstly, should help their students assess their learning types to

determine what their needs are or where they need help in determining what is missing and where they need to focus their attention in developing their abilities to become autonomous learners. Then, teachers guide students to set up their goals or objectives to form personal values hierarchy, which reflects their preferences to become an autonomous leaner.

Therefore, in this current study, the authors would combine the suggested concepts by DeLong (2009) and Wanchid & Wattanasin (2015) to discuss autonomous learning. Accordingly, students can become autonomous learners under conditions that they are responsible for their studies, learn how to learn by doing, discover new information by themselves, learn how to cooperate with others and be independent. Project-Based Learning with Project works as an instance of a new teaching method in the 21st century as it offers considerable benefits to the students especially in terms of teamwork and learning autonomy (Wanchid & Wattanasin, 2015). Project-based learning is carried out in different language instructions to develop EFL learners' language progress and learning (Le & Tien, 2021).

In other words, autonomous learning plays a crucial role in students' learning process. It places them in the center of focus, in which they are expected to be responsible for any stages of their learning. During that process, especially, in language learning, attitude is the core element that helps to build autonomous learning. According to Qi Shujun & Li Qian (2006), positive attitude is regarded as crucial to the success of the development of autonomous learning. Thus, to help students improve their learning autonomy, it is essential to take a look at the attitude factor, which is discussed in the following parts.

2.3. Learner attitude and their role in language learning

2.3.1. Definition of attitude

The term "attitude" is abroad concept and it has received much attention from various scholars. Baker (1988) provides the general definition of the term "attitudes" when he describes as follows:

– Attitudes are cognitive (i.e. are capable of being thought about) and affective (i.e. have feelings and emotions attached to them)

– Attitudes are dimensional rather than bipolar – they vary in degree of favorability or unfavorability.

– Attitudes predispose a person to act in a certain way, but the relationship between attitudes and actions is not a strong one.

Attitudes are learnt, not inherited or genetically endowed.

– Attitudes tend to persist but they can be modified by experience

Differing from Baker (1988), Montano and Kasprzyk (2008, p.71) give a more inclusive explanation based on the theory of planned behavior:

Attitude is determined by the individual's beliefs about outcomes or attributes of performing the behavior (behavioral beliefs), weighted by the evaluation of those outcomes or attributes. Thus, a person who holds strong beliefs that positively valued outcomes will result from performing the behavior will have a positive attitude towards the behavior. Conversely, a person who holds strong beliefs that negatively valued outcomes will result from the behavior will have a negative attitude."

This definition reveals the belief that performing a task will result in mainly positive outcomes results in taking a favorable attitude towards the task. Accordingly, this concept plays an important role in helping educators find out suitable teaching method for their students.

Obviously, all the definitions have something in common so as the authors come up with one general understanding that the attitude has a close correlation with belief. If learners have positive belief about what they are doing, they will committee their willingness to achieve their goal. Accordingly, their learning autonomy is increased (Shujun & Qian, 2006).

2.3.2. The importance of attitudes in language learning

According to Montano and Kasprzyk's (2008), it is obvious that the crucial role of attitude is undeniable. Attitudes, once formed, can shape the way students think, understand, feel, and behave. In other words, it is believed that attitude shapes all decisions and actions. "Attitudes and beliefs are a subset of a group of constructs that name, define, and describe the structure and content of mental states that are thought to drive a person's actions" (Richardson, 1996, p. 102, as cited in Rimm-Kaufman & Sawyer, 2004). Reid (2003) emphasizes, "Attitudes are important for students because they cannot be neatly separated from study". Visser (2008) also says that attitude is considered as an essential factor influencing language performance.

Thus, the evaluation of students' attitudes may provide new insights into the way these attitudes may hinder or facilitate learning. Brown & Rodgers (2002) note that teachers should recognize that all students possess positive and negative attitudes in varying degrees, and adds that the negative attitudes can be changed by thoughtfully instructional methods, such as using materials and activities that help students achieve an understanding. In the case of this study, implementing Project-Based Learning is a new teaching and learning method. Hence, the researchers need to figure out if their attitude to this approach is positive or negative to maximize their learning outcomes.

3. Research methods

This study was conducted in order to investigate students' attitudes towards the use of project works to enhance their autonomous learning in English speaking classes to find out to what extent students believe that using project works can promote their autonomous learning, and to figure out difficulties that learners have during the time they

conduct their projects. The convenience sampling was chosen to collect the data because it is often used in social sciences and education where it is convenient to use pre-existing groups, such as students. Convenience sampling is also a non-probability sampling method where units are selected for inclusion in the sample because they are the easiest for the researcher to access. Furthermore, convenience sampling could be a good fit for researchers to get an idea of people's attitudes and opinions towards an issue or to generate hypotheses that can be tested in greater depth in future research (Nikolopoulou, 2022). Therefore, seventy-three second-year students who took the courses of English Listening and Speaking 2 were invited to participate in this study. To gather necessary data, the researchers used an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interview.

3.1. Attitude questionnaire

In details, there were three main parts in the questionnaire as follows:

Part A was to find out the participants' demographic information, part B was to identify students' attitudes towards Project works implementation towards enhancing their autonomous learning and part C was to investigate their difficulties while doing Project works. In part A, the participants provided their personal information such as name, gender and age. Part B has 35 items that were divided into three sections: Section I to investigate students' attitude towards the project works implication, section II to investigate students' attitudes towards their learning autonomy and section III to identify students' attitude towards teamwork. The fulfill questionnaire can be accessed in appendix 1A for English version and appendix 1B for Vietnamese version. The summary of the questions in the questionnaire was presented in table 1.

TABLE 1. The summary of questionnaire

Parts		Purposes	Categories	Questions
A		Learners' demographic information	Learners' demographic information	
B	**I**	Students' attitudes toward the project works implication	PW enables students' to use their creativity	Q1
			PW affects on students' motivation	Q4,Q5,Q1, Q2,Q14
			PW makes English learning more interesting	Q8
			PW improves students' computer and English skills	Q6, Q7, Q10
			Students' opinion on using PW as a part of Speaking course	Q3, Q5, Q9, Q11, Q13
	II	Students' attitudes on autonomous learning	PW enhances autonomous learning	Q15, Q16, Q17, Q18, Q20
			Students' dependence on their teachers	Q24, Q25, Q26, Q27
	III	Students' attitudes on 'team work'	Students' cooperation as a team	Q28, Q29. Q30, Q31, Q32, Q33, Q34, Q35
C		Open question	Students' difficulties while doing PW	

For more information, the questionnaire was first designed in English originally. To avoid comprehension difficulties that learner might encounter when being given the English version, the questionnaire was translated into Vietnamese, the respondents' native language.

3.2. Interview

After gathering data from questionnaire, the authors employed the second followup instrument, namely interviewing, to get in-depth information. Deductive analyses would be used to point to key themes essential to the research. Together with the items in questionnaire version, the interview content used in the current paper was also adapted from Wanchid & Wattanasin (2015), comprised three questions which adhered to the questionnaires.

1. What are your thoughts and feelings in general towards doing the projects for an English Course at Foreign Trade University – Ho Chi Minh Campus?

2. Do you think that you can be more autonomous in learning while studying via doing projects?

3. What were the difficulties you had while doing the projects?

The interviews were conducted at the end of the course to get in-depth data. These interviews were recorded under an agreement of interviewees with the language used is English. Twenty-five interviews were conducted randomly among the students taught by the researchers. According to Dworkin (2012), the minimum sample size required to reach saturation and redundancy in grounded theory studies that use in-depth interviews should be 25–30 participants. This number is considered adequate for publications in journals because it (1) may allow for thorough examination of the characteristics that address the research questions and to distinguish conceptual categories of interest, (2) maximizes the possibility that enough data have been collected to clarify relationships between conceptual categories and identify variation in processes, and (3) maximizes the chances that negative cases and hypothetical negative cases have been explored in the data.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Research question 1: What are the students' attitudes towards project works implementation in the English course to enhance autonomous learning?

To make it easy and comprehensive for presenting results of the given question, the authors divide them into specific issues: the use of Project Works (PW) to enforce students' creativity; the use of PW to increase learning motivation; the use of PW to improve learning skills; students' opinion towards the effect of PW on English speaking lessons as well as their agreement in using PW as an important activity in their learning courses.

The reasons for the above divisions based on Brophy (2004's recommendations of using Project Works. The scholars believe that learning autonomy happens when students see

themselves increase their creativity, learning motivation, learning skills as well as their desire to use PW as a vital learning activity in their classes. This subsection aims at summarizing the paramount results which implicit the answer for research question 1.

All the information is presented in the following table.

TABLE 2. Students' attitudes towards the use of Project Works in English speaking classes

Statements	Mean
The use of Project Works to enforce students' creativity	3.8
Students' opinions about the use of Project Works to increase their learning motivation	3.73
Students' opinions about the use of Project Works in English Speaking classes	3.9
Students' opinions about the use of Project Works improve their learning skills	3.8
Learners' willingness on using Project Works as a part of English speaking course	3.55

As shown in the table 2, the mean in the research ranges from 3.5 to 3.9. The mean scores for all mentioned statements are at quite high evaluation which implicates that participants had positive attitudes towards using PW in their English speaking class. Usually a majority of students believe that PW implementation helps enforce their creativity (M=3.8) and increase their motivation (M= 3.9). It is undeniable that PW engages them to join English classes actively (M=3.9).

In addition, with mean score of M= 3.8, the respondents express their support to the PW implementation in improving their learning skills such as English listening, English speaking and computer skills.

Nonetheless, their priority of recommendation goes for the improvement of listening and speaking skills due to the opportunities to communicate with English native speakers. As being indicated in the preceding table, while students consider the effect of PW implementation on their creativity, their motivation and learning skills with a high evaluation of mean score, their willingness to use PW as a part of English speaking course gets lower mean score. In details, many students hesitate to use PW evaluation as a mean of assessment to reduce the ratio of midterm.

It was also confirmed in the interviews that respondents express their positive attitudes towards the use of Project Works as a beneficial activity in their lessons because they believe that it is an appropriate way of learning. Many of them even want to have more projects to do in English teaching and learning. Nonetheless, using PW evaluation to be one of the criteria for assessment needs further consideration.

4.2. Question 2: To what extent do students believe that the employment of project works affects their autonomous learning?

Table 3 presents a summary of results from collected data to give an answer for research question 2.

TABLE 3. Students' attitudes towards autonomous learning

Statements	Mean
Students' attitudes to their learning responsibility	3.9
Students' attitudes to their practical learning	3.79
Students' attitudes to their ability in self-discovering new information	3.85
Students' attitudes to their self-evaluation ability	3.8
Students' attitudes to their independence on teachers	3.6
Students' attitudes to teamwork	3.91

As being illustrated in Table 3, the majority of participants express their positive responses towards the use of PWs in their English classes because this method brings up many benefits for them. The highest evaluation is on students' attitudes towards teamwork with the mean score of M=3.91.

During the interviews, the respondents strongly believe that the aspects of teamwork sprung from cooperating with others as a team to exchange knowledge, work together and can make decision to solve problem. Furthermore, they can know their English ability from their friends' suggestions while carrying the projects. The findings spark an idea that students favor to study and cooperate with friends as members in groups.

Then, the second position in students' evaluation is on learning responsibility (M=3.9), in self-discovering ability (M=3.85), self-evaluation (M=3.8) and to practical learning (M=3.79). The third rank of evaluation falls on students' opinion about their independence on teachers (M=3.6). As being stated by Wanchid & Wattanasin (2015), if students' autonomy is one side of a coin, students' independence on teachers can be compared to the other side. With the score at M=3.6, students seem to still need support from their teachers because they believe that teachers' advice is necessary. Lecturers can work as facilitators in students' project works.

Along with the result drawn from questionnaire data, the results from the interviews indicate that the use of Project Works helps students to be autonomous learners because these PWs increase their learning responsibility, self-discovery, self-evaluation, independence from teachers, team spirit and practical application via learning by doing.

4.3. Question 3: *What are students' difficulties when doing project works?*

In the last part of the questionnaire, the authors asked students to list out their difficulties that they encountered when doing project works. Among 73 usable questionnaires, there were four that cannot be counted in this part because the respondents gave vague answers that say "I have no idea" instead of giving specific ones. For the rest 69 respondents, their answers were various, which mentioned many types of difficulties or challenges during the project works. There are four main categories as time constraints, teamwork conflicts, cultural differences and technology problems.
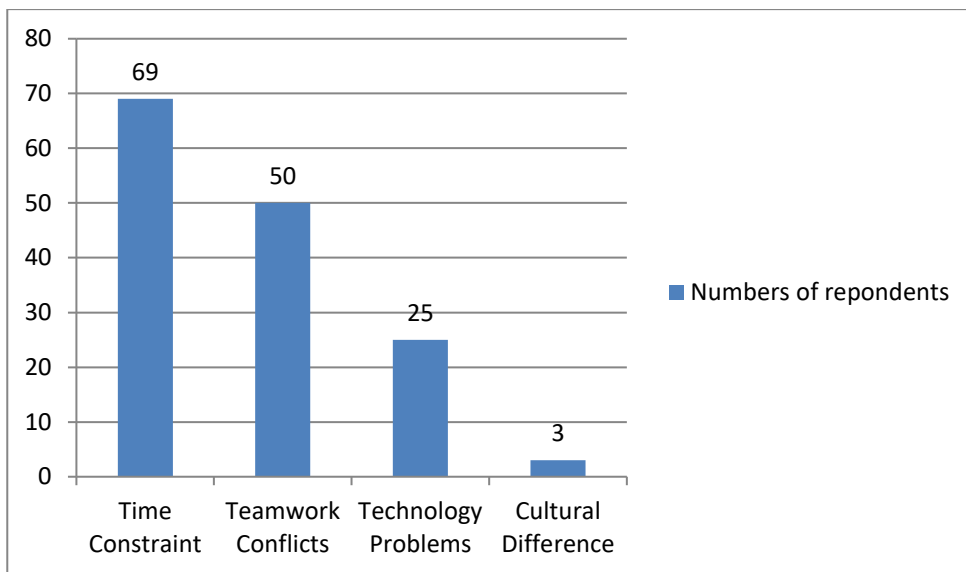
Figure 1. Students' difficulties with Project Works

As can be seen from the Figure 1, time management is the most challenge that was mentioned with in the most frequency. All of the 69 respondents stated that they got trouble in managing time for the PWs. Then, teamwork conflict is also the difficulty that students ranked in the second position that caused them in problematic situations. The participants reported that they had to work in groups with different characteristics from group members. Each of them individually proposed their own ideas and approached for the given projects. Therefore, they had to negotiate or even debate to choose one idea for the whole group to develop. This situation sometimes became more serious because of some dominant participants over some who were really passive. Moreover, it helps students/learners strengthen their skills of argumentation or debates in English language learning, especially their Speaking.

The next one that was named by 25 students has problems in technology, which related to Video making projects. In the project, students were asked to have interviews with foreigners who speak English then record and edit under a form of video file. About half of students stated that they had never used software to edit video files before, thus, they got difficulties in finding a suitable one then learned how to apply it into their learning. The last difficulty was just brought up by 3 participants. Nevertheless, these students claimed that they got trouble with cultural differences when they had interviews with foreigners. They met some people who were not approachable because they felt bothered.

In a nutshell, time constraints, teamwork conflicts, problems in technology, and cultural differences are the main difficulties that the participants encountered when they conducted their project works. The interviews also re-confirmed the findings of the questionnaires, and helped the research groups have a better understanding of the issue.

5. Recommendations

The findings of this study would lead to some implications and recommendations, which are presented as follows:

5.1. Recommendations to students

First and foremost, students should be aware of their roles in learning process. Thus, they themselves should make use of any opportunities to practice and improve their English speaking skill. For certain, they need to be autonomous to find out learning information instead of waiting for being "fed" with knowledge by their teachers. These students should seriously think about their learning process, should be active rather than passive. Especially, when they study with Project-Based Learning method, getting trouble with time arrangement, with group conflict or adapting new technology software is obviously unavoidable. Thus, learners need to be responsible and flexible to improve their critical thinking and problem solving skills to get over possible difficulties. As doing such things, surely, these ones become autonomous learners.

5.2. Recommendations to English teachers

The authors have investigated and recognized the effectiveness as well as the positive attitudes of students for Project-Based Learning (PBL) approach. Hence, the research group highly recommends this teaching and learning method to other lecturers. The approach can be beneficial to both experienced and novice teachers in terms of teaching strategy to motivate students' autonomous learning. Additionally, the authors suggest some recommendations when using Project Works as instances of PBL as follow.

At first, to maximize the positive effect that Project works may have on students, teachers are advised to cooperate with each other to design more projects which are suitable with students' language level.

Then, when applying PBL method, teachers should be aware of students' characteristics when asking them to form groups to do project works. The result from research question 2 reveals that team work is the issue that gets the highest concern from students. Thus, it is suggested that teachers should consider students' characteristics when assigning them into groups.

Furthermore, these teachers need to consider their roles in instructing students to do project works. They should play role as facilitators to guide the necessary steps for students instead of being dominant in the classroom. As a consequence, they can create student-centered learning environment that inspires students to think and learn autonomously.

One more notice that should not be left out is teachers' consideration of the validity and reliability of Project Works' evaluation. As being mentioned above, students expressed their worries about how to use Project Works' evaluation in their course assessment in an appropriate way. Therefore, it may be suggested that teachers can use this type of

evaluation when grading students or measuring learners' performance, nonetheless, they need to set standards for their requirements of making projects.

Finally, the number of projects used in a course need considering. Even though, the participants in this study express their desire to have more projects to do, too many projects in a training course may cause stressful situation because of time constraint.

All in all, designing projects for students to achieve their best outcomes, teachers had better have consideration on many factors such as teaching content, learners' language frequency level, learning characteristics and time management so that they can design suitable projects for their students/ learners.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, Project Work has been proved as an effective teaching method to enhance students' autonomous learning. It is beneficial if the institutions, teachers and students can collaborate to each other to maximize the benefits that this method brings up. Foreign Trade University students as respondents in this study show their positive attitudes towards Project Works. This way of English language learning helps them enhance their independence in their studies, promote their collaboration among group members, contribute to improving the team work, team building, and developing their critical thinking in debates or argumentation.

Therefore, the students involved in the research love to have more chances to carry out their project works in English language learning. Nevertheless, there are many challenges for the students when dealing with their projects such as time constraints, cultural differences, group conflicts (interest conflicts, ideas conflicts,..), …So both students and teachers should recognize the benefits and challenges of Project Works to be well-prepared when applying this method of teaching and learning to be able to maximize the learning outcomes and enhance the English language teaching and learning successfully.

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