

Abstract

This dissertation explores the efficacy of the *learner autonomy* (LA) principles implemented in secondary technical school EFL classes through *project-based units* incorporated into the conventional four-year language curriculum (2011-2015). This integrated approach remains uncommon in a Czech secondary technical school, even though it suggests a teaching model that enhances ELA and increases *communicative competence* and *motivation* among learners. A mixed-method design based on longitudinal four-cycle *action research* and *quasi-experiment* approaches was selected (1) to examine the changes in *self-regulation* and *academic achievement* development over time; (2) to investigate the efficacy of autonomous projects systematically applied within the assigned *treatment group* (TG), and (3) to compare the results of the *treatment* and *control* groups as to their *self-regulation* and *academic achievement* development. For the quantitative strand, a structured Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ-A) and a series of academic tests were administered which were consequently analysed through null hypothesis statistical testing (NHST). The instruments employed within the *quasi-experiment* were focused on the following two major questions: (1) whether there was correlation between *self-regulation* and *academic achievement* scores; (2) whether there was statistically significant change in learner *self-regulation* and *motivation* development and *academic results* within the TG and CG as well as between them. With regard to the qualitative strand, participant observations obtained from the teacher's diary, student reflections and artefacts were collected and analysed during the longitudinal four-cycle *action research*. Inductive thematic analysis with eliciting common patterns and emergent themes from the participant and my own reflections was employed.

The overall findings of the quantitative research strand revealed that positive correlation between *self-regulation* and *academic scores* was identified only within *intrinsic* SR (2014), which indicates crucial importance of its development in EFL classes. The results of inferential statistics revealed significant increase in *intrinsic motivation* within the TG, whereas no significant change of this variable was revealed within the CG. With regard to the academic entry and didactic tests, both groups improved their scores over time. Nevertheless, the Graduation Examination results showed that there was a statistically significant difference in the oral part in favour of the TG. With regard to the qualitative strand, the following emergent themes were elicited during the *action research*: (1) enhanced *learner autonomy*, (2) improved *language awareness* and *communicative competence*, (3) enhanced *self-efficacy*, and (4) increased *intrinsic motivation*. Thus, *learner autonomy* principles implemented via projects proved to be effective especially in terms of *communicative competence* development, autonomous *self-regulation* and *intrinsic motivation* development.

Key words: learner autonomy; self-regulation types; metacognition; metacognitive strategies; project-based units; action research; learner-centred approach; language awareness; learner empowerment; knowledge construction; facilitator; self-efficacy; intrinsic motivation.