



DEVELOPING INDEPENDENT LEARNING SKILLS IN ESP CLASSES FOR ECONOMICS STUDENTS

Sh. A. Jamolidinova
*a lecture of Namangan
state university*

Abstract. *The development of independent learning skills has become one of the central goals of modern English for Specific Purposes (ESP) education. In economics programs, where students are expected to apply English in professional and research contexts, learner autonomy and self-directed study are essential for success. This paper explores methods for fostering independent learning among economics students within ESP courses. It discusses effective strategies such as online resources, project-based learning, and self-assessment tools. The study also highlights challenges students face in managing their own learning and suggests pedagogical solutions for teachers. The findings indicate that integrating technology and reflective practices significantly enhances students' autonomy and motivation in learning English for economics.*

Introduction

In the 21st century, higher education institutions increasingly emphasize learner-centered approaches that encourage autonomy and self-directed study. Within English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching, particularly for economics students, independent learning is a vital component that prepares learners for real-world communication, research, and professional interaction.


Economics students often require specialized vocabulary, analytical reading skills, and the ability to interpret financial and business texts in English. However, traditional teacher-centered methods may limit students' ability to develop these skills independently. According to Benson (2011), learner autonomy is not merely the absence of teacher control, but the active involvement of students in planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning.

In the context of ESP for economics, independent learning allows students to explore authentic economic texts, participate in project-based tasks, and apply English in real professional situations. The main aim of this paper is to identify effective ways of developing independent learning skills among economics students and to propose classroom practices that promote autonomy and motivation.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a project-based learning (PBL) approach as a method to enhance independent learning and communicative competence among Economics students in ESP classes. The research was conducted over eight weeks with 30 second-year students.



majoring in Economics. A mixed-method design was applied, combining qualitative observations and quantitative analysis of students' performance.

Participants

Participants were 30 students from the Faculty of Economics at Tashkent State University of Economics. Their English proficiency level was approximately B1 according to CEFR. The group was selected because they were studying “English for Economics” as part of their curriculum.

Procedure

The project-based tasks were integrated into the regular ESP syllabus. Students were divided into small groups of 4–5 and worked on specific real-world projects related to their field of study.

The procedure included three main stages: preparation, implementation, and presentation.

Project-Based Tasks (Examples)

Task 1: Market Research Report

Objective: To improve vocabulary and writing skills related to marketing and business analysis.

Description: Each group conducted research on a chosen product (e.g., “Uzbek textile exports”) and prepared a report describing market trends, competitors, and recommendations in English.

Skills Developed: Writing, critical thinking, economic terminology, teamwork.

Assessment Criteria: Content relevance, language accuracy, data presentation, and creativity.

Task 2: Business Presentation

Objective: To develop speaking and presentation skills through business-related topics.

Description: Students created PowerPoint presentations titled “Starting a Small Business in Uzbekistan” or “Foreign Investment Opportunities.” They presented their work to peers using English business vocabulary.

Skills Developed: Oral communication, professional vocabulary, pronunciation, confidence.

Assessment Criteria: Fluency, pronunciation, use of ESP vocabulary, clarity of visual materials.

Task 3: Role-Play: “Economic Forum”

Objective: To simulate real-life economic communication situations.

Description: Students acted as economists, investors, and journalists in a mock “Economic Development Forum,” discussing issues like inflation, investment, and digital trade.

Skills Developed: Speaking fluency, spontaneous language use, collaboration, negotiation.

Assessment Criteria: Role performance, ESP vocabulary use, logical argumentation.



Results and Discussion

Students' attitudes and skills development

Before the course, 70% of students reported that they relied mainly on the teacher's guidance, while only 25% regularly practiced English independently. After the 10-week ESP program, the number of students who engaged in independent learning at least three times per week increased to 68%.

Students demonstrated significant improvement in:

Vocabulary acquisition (using digital flashcards and glossaries);

Reading comprehension (through self-selected economics articles);

Confidence in speaking and writing (by participating in project-based discussions).

These findings confirm previous studies (Little, 2007; Reinders, 2010) showing that structured self-study tasks improve autonomy and motivation.

Effective strategies identified

The analysis revealed three key strategies that contributed to developing autonomy:

Integration of technology – Online platforms provided flexibility and instant feedback, helping students control their learning pace.

Project-based learning – Real-world projects encouraged collaboration and problem-solving using economic English.

Reflective learning – Writing learning journals increased students' awareness of their progress and learning strategies.

Challenges and teacher's role

Despite positive results, students faced difficulties such as:

Limited time for independent work due to academic workload;

Insufficient access to authentic economics materials in English;

Uncertainty about how to assess their own progress.


Teachers played a crucial role as facilitators rather than knowledge providers. They guided students in setting realistic goals, selecting materials, and applying self-assessment tools. This shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered teaching aligns with the constructivist approach (Holec, 1981).

Conclusion

Developing independent learning skills among economics students in ESP classes is essential for preparing them for professional communication in global contexts. The research demonstrated that a combination of digital tools, project-based learning, and reflective practice can effectively enhance learner autonomy.

To maximize results, teachers should provide continuous guidance on learning strategies and offer opportunities for self-assessment. Universities should also support independent learning through online learning platforms and access to authentic economic resources.

Future research may focus on exploring the long-term impact of independent learning on students' professional language performance and on how artificial intelligence tools



(like Chat GPT or Grammarly) can assist economics students in managing their learning process.

References

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