

PROJECT-BASED LEARNING FOR DEVELOPING INTEGRATED SKILLS IN A2 LEARNERS

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Abstract: Project-based learning (PBL) has been promoted as an instructional approach that fosters meaningful learning, collaboration, and integration of multiple language skills. This paper investigates how PBL can be designed and implemented specifically to develop integrated skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) in English learners at the CEFR A2 level. Using a systematic review and thematic synthesis of empirical and theoretical literature (2000–2024), the study summarizes PBL principles, examines evidence of effectiveness for language learning, and identifies design features and assessment strategies that optimize learning for A2 pupils. Findings indicate that well-scaffolded PBL units—characterized by clear driving questions, staged scaffolding, multimodal tasks, explicit language focus, and formative assessment—support integrated skill growth and learner motivation. However, the strength of the evidence base for A2-specific outcomes remains emerging and uneven: many studies report positive attitudinal and communicative gains, while robust long-term, CEFR-aligned outcome data are limited. The paper concludes with practical unit designs tailored to A2 classrooms, recommended teacher roles, assessment rubrics, and directions for longitudinal and controlled research.

Keywords: project-based learning, project-based language learning, A2 learners, CEFR, integrated skills, scaffolding, assessment

Introduction

Language teaching at the A2 (elementary/basic user) level of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) requires that learners develop facility with routine vocabulary and functional language across listening, speaking, reading and writing in everyday contexts. The CEFR descriptors emphasize the ability to understand short, simple texts and conversations and to produce brief, coherent messages about familiar topics (Council of Europe, CEFR Companion Volume). Achieving these outcomes benefits from instruction that links receptive and productive skills in meaningful contexts rather than treating each skill in strict isolation.

Project-based learning (PBL) — an instructional approach in which students investigate authentic, often complex questions or problems over an extended period and produce a public, tangible product — has been associated with increased learner engagement, deeper cognitive processing, collaboration, and the integrated use of

knowledge and skills [1]; [2]. In language education, PBL (sometimes labeled project-based language learning or PBL) is argued to create natural opportunities for integrated skill practice: for example, projects that require researching local issues (reading/listening), interviewing stakeholders (listening/speaking), producing a brochure or podcast (writing/speaking), and presenting findings (speaking/listening) inherently combine skills in authentic communicative acts [3]; [4].

Despite conceptual alignment between PBL and integrated skills development, empirical evidence specifically addressing A2 learners is somewhat sparse and heterogeneous. Reviews and meta-analyses show generally positive effects of PBL on achievement, motivation, and higher-order skills in a variety of educational domains, but many language-focused studies vary in design, duration, and assessment measures [1]; [5]. Therefore, practitioners need evidence-informed guidance for designing PBL units that are developmentally appropriate for A2 learners (i.e., manageable linguistic demands, high levels of support, multimodal input, and scaffolded output opportunities). This paper synthesizes current knowledge and translates it into practical models and assessment guidance for A2 classrooms.

Methods

This study used a systematic literature search and thematic synthesis to gather empirical studies, theoretical expositions, meta-analyses and practitioner frameworks relevant to PBL in language learning, with an emphasis on integrated skill outcomes and elementary/CEFR A2 learners. Searches were performed in Scopus, ERIC, Google Scholar and Web of Science for publications from 2000 through 2024, using keywords and phrases such as “project-based learning”, “project-based language learning”, “project framework ESL”, “integrated skills”, “A2 CEFR”, and combinations thereof. Inclusion criteria prioritized (1) publications addressing PBL in language or ESL/EFL contexts, (2) studies that reported outcomes involving two or more language skills or explicit statements about integrated skills, and (3) studies or reviews that provided sufficient methodological detail. Exclusion criteria removed studies focused solely on higher-level learners without relevance to elementary/low-intermediate learners or those lacking empirical or conceptual rigor.

The final sample comprised empirical studies (quasi-experimental, mixed-methods, qualitative classroom studies), influential conceptual papers [2]; [1]; [4], and recent meta-analyses and reviews on PBL effectiveness in education and language learning [5]; [6]. Thematic synthesis proceeded iteratively: coded themes included (a) theoretical underpinnings of PBL, (b) task and product types used in language projects, (c) scaffolding and language support strategies, (d) evidence of integrated skills gains, (e) assessment approaches, and (f) teacher roles and implementation challenges. Where possible, evidence and design suggestions were mapped onto CEFR A2 descriptors to ensure practical relevance.

Results

The synthesis produced converging findings across four interrelated areas: (1) design principles of language-oriented PBL; (2) PBL activities and project types suited to A2 learners; (3) evidence of integrated skill gains and affective outcomes; and (4) assessment and teacher mediation strategies that enable measurable skill development.

1) Design principles for language-oriented PBL

Core PBL design features consistently emphasized in the literature include: a motivating driving question or relevant problem; an extended timeframe to permit iterative drafts and practice; an authentic public product for a real or simulated audience; collaborative work structures; and explicit reflection and metacognitive components [1]; [2]. In language classes, these elements must be combined with explicit language scaffolding: pre-task vocabulary and phrase instruction, modeled input, controlled practice phases, and staged release of autonomy so A2 learners can participate successfully without being overwhelmed by language demands. Beckett & Slater's Project Framework particularly stresses linking language goals with project tasks and making language learning objectives visible to students during project activity. Stoller [3] highlights that project work enables integration of content, skills, and strategy training when teachers plan for strategy instruction and visual supports.

2) Project types and examples suited to A2 learners

The literature and classroom reports point to several project archetypes that are well suited to A2 learners because they provide strong scaffolding, clear, narrow goals, and tangible linguistic routines:

- Class or school brochure / postcard project (students gather short texts, photos, and simple descriptions; reading → writing → speaking for presentations).
- Interview/Survey and infographic (students prepare and conduct short interviews, collate results, produce a simple infographic; listening → speaking → reading → writing).
- Recipe or how-to video (stepwise instructions support sequencing language; repeated practice builds speaking and listening fluency).
- Local community map / guide (fieldwork or virtual research yields vocabulary and formulaic language for directions and descriptions).

These projects emphasize manageable micro-tasks, predictable language chunks, and multimodal outputs (visual + oral + written), enabling integrated skill practice while keeping linguistic complexity within A2 capacities. Case reports emphasize the importance of using graphic organizers, sentence starters, and model texts to bridge receptive input and productive output.

3) Evidence for integrated-skill gains and learner outcomes

Empirical studies and meta-analyses suggest that PBL can yield positive effects on student achievement, motivation, and higher-order skills across educational levels

[5]; [6]. In language contexts, classroom studies frequently report gains in communicative competence, learner engagement, willingness to communicate, and integrated task performance, though effect sizes and measurement methods vary [4]; [3]. For lower-level learners, studies that carefully scaffold tasks report improvements in functional speaking and pragmatic interaction, enhanced reading-for-meaning strategies, and higher quality written products when projects include process writing cycles (planning, drafting, feedback, revision). However, rigorous randomized controlled trials and long-term CEFR-aligned outcomes for strictly A2 cohorts remain limited; many studies use mixed samples or report attitudinal rather than long-term proficiency gains. Thus, while the weight of evidence supports PBL's pedagogical promise for integrated skills, claims about absolute gains at A2 should be made cautiously pending more targeted research.

4) Assessment approaches and teacher roles

Effective assessment in PBL integrates formative and summative measures that reflect both process and product. Rubrics tied to task-based performance, portfolios collecting multimodal artifacts, teacher observational checklists for collaborative skills, and peer/self-assessment instruments are commonly recommended. Aligning rubric criteria with CEFR descriptors for A2 (e.g., ability to handle short, routine communicative tasks) helps make outcomes interpretable and reportable (Council of Europe, CEFR Companion Volume). Teachers are advised to time explicit language instruction and corrective feedback within project cycles (e.g., mini-lessons focused on target lexical sets before interviewing tasks), to model required texts, and to orchestrate peer feedback sessions so that language learning remains foregrounded alongside project management. Successful implementations report that teacher professional development in PBL design and assessment is a critical enabling factor.

Discussion

The synthesis shows that PBL inherently supports integrated-skill development because authentic projects create communicative needs that require learners to combine listening, speaking, reading and writing in purposeful ways. For A2 learners, who are still developing automaticity with frequent lexical and grammatical items, the key to success is careful task design that minimizes extraneous cognitive load while maximizing opportunities for repeated, scaffolded output in meaningful contexts. In practice this means: narrow, concrete driving questions; staged sub-tasks with clear language targets; frequent short cycles of feedback and rehearsal; model texts and sentence scaffolds; multimodal inputs; and assessments aligned to CEFR A2 descriptors.

Pedagogically, Beckett & Slater's Project Framework provides a practical template to make the language goals explicit and to integrate content and skills, while Stoller's recommendations emphasize strategy instruction and visual supports that are

useful for lower-level learners. Meta-analytic evidence [5] supports the conclusion that PBL tends to improve learning outcomes and affective indicators compared with traditional instruction, but heterogeneity in study designs requires cautious interpretation for A2 contexts. Consequently, teachers should adopt an evidence-informed but contextually adapted approach: pilot short, well-scaffolded PBL units; collect formative data on integrated skill use; iterate on materials; and, where possible, document learning outcomes with CEFR-aligned rubrics to contribute data to the research base.

Equity and resource considerations also matter: high-quality PBL can require more teacher preparation time, access to multimodal tools, and sustained teacher professional development. The Internationals Network and other practitioner organizations argue for teacher supports, cooperative planning time, and adaptable project designs so that PBL is inclusive of multilingual and low-resource classrooms [7]. Low-tech project alternatives (paper-based posters, face-to-face interviews, radio-style recordings made on simple devices) can preserve PBL's communicative advantages while remaining feasible in constrained settings.

Conclusion

Project-based learning offers a compelling pedagogical framework to develop integrated language skills in A2 learners because projects create authentic communicative demands that naturally require the combined use of listening, speaking, reading and writing. When projects are carefully designed with explicit language objectives, staged scaffolding, multimodal inputs, and formative assessment aligned to CEFR descriptors, A2 learners can achieve measurable gains in functional communicative competence and motivation. Leading practitioner frameworks and foundational PBL literature provide practical guidance on how to structure projects; contemporary reviews and meta-analyses indicate promising but variable evidence for positive outcomes across contexts.

However, the current literature also highlights important gaps that should inform both practice and research. First, relatively few studies isolate CEFR A2 learners in rigorous, longitudinal designs; much existing evidence mixes proficiency levels or emphasizes short-term attitudinal measures rather than durable CEFR-aligned skill gains. Second, while many classroom reports document immediate improvements in engagement and task performance, the long-term transfer of project-learned language to new communicative situations requires stronger empirical confirmation. Third, equitable implementation demands attention to teacher professional development and locally feasible resource models. To address these gaps, future research should include controlled longitudinal studies with CEFR-specified cohorts, systematic measurement of integrated skill outcomes (including delayed post-tests), and comparative studies testing variations in scaffold intensity and multimodal

supports. Practitioners are encouraged to pilot well-scaffolded PBL units, use CEFR-based rubrics to document outcomes, and share evaluated unit plans to build a cumulative, context-sensitive evidence base.

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