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**Project-based learning in the NCEA context: the  
benefits and constraints of cross-curricular  
implementation of project-based learning in  
New Zealand secondary schools.**

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## Abstract

Project-based learning (PBL) has been described as a future-focused learning strategy that helps to address the challenge of equipping young people with 21<sup>st</sup> century capabilities needed for a rapidly changing future. However, PBL is not commonly utilised at the senior National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) level, even though this is a crucial time for learners to prepare for a world beyond school. This thesis examines how New Zealand secondary schools could implement cross-curricular PBL in the NCEA context, what benefits and constraints there may be from a teacher and student perspective, and whether there are differences in perspectives regarding PBL in students with different levels of motivation.

The research design utilised a mixed method, multiple case study approach, where both quantitative and qualitative data was collected from three case study schools who currently use PBL at the NCEA level. Both teacher and student perspectives were gathered by an online survey in phase one of the study, followed by purposeful sampling of participants in phase two to further explore their perspectives using a semi-structured individual or focus group interview.

The research findings indicate that PBL can be successfully implemented in the NCEA context, provided key design features are in place. These include developing a strong PBL design framework, ensuring that projects have authentic purpose beyond the classroom, and fostering connections with community partners. There are clear potential benefits in engaging senior students in opportunities to participate in projects. Engagement in learning can be increased, 21<sup>st</sup> century capabilities developed, and self-regulated learning dispositions promoted. Student motivation is influenced by their ability to self-manage and they need specific pedagogical experiences that targets the development and utilisation of self-directed learning capabilities. PBL in the NCEA context is not without its challenges. These include school structural issues, the ability for schools to develop a learner-centred culture, teacher capability to project manage, and difficulties in aligning current NCEA standards with projects.

This study concludes by suggesting that schools should consider implementing PBL in the NCEA context, as part of a future-focused education orientation, as potentially there are considerable benefits to be gained.



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