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WAYS OF INTENSIFYING STUDENTS' INDEPENDENT LEARNING IN THE PROCESS OF MASTERING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Abstract. The article is devoted to the organisation of students' independent work in higher education in the process of learning a foreign language. Students' independent work is identified as a key factor in the formation of self-education skills and the ability to learn throughout life. In the course of the study, three independent but interrelated parties involved in the process of self-learning of students were identified: student(s)-teacher-information technologies. It is defined that properly organized independent work of students allows them to process large amounts of information, in particular, to work with authentic foreign language sources in the process of mastering foreign language competence. It is proved that the prerequisites for high-quality independent work can and should be formed in the process of classroom work, which in its turn distinguishes a separate function of classroom teaching: preparation for independent work of students. It is stated that students' independent work cannot be separated from

classroom work, since it is in the classroom that the teacher uses pedagogical tools to influence the student in order to increase his or her level of confidence and encourage independence. It is emphasised that the task of face-to-face learning is to form basic knowledge and skills, as well as the necessary potential for independent work of the student in future, while having independent learning. The course "Foreign Language for Professional Purposes" chosen for the study is the basic course in learning a foreign language (English) for students of the Vinnytsia Institute of Trade and Economics of the State University of Trade and Economics, therefore, it has been chosen for our study. Based on the results of a preliminary survey of students, we tested the latest technology for organizing students' independent work called "Puzzles", which accumulates and presents information on English-speaking countries in various fields. Moreover, the areas of work can be selected from a list or suggested by the student and included in the list. Thus, independent work can coincide with the realisation of students' wishes and interests, which in its turn became a driving emotional factor in student motivation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement. Recent years, in particular the COVID pandemic and the war against Ukraine, have brought irreversible changes to our lives, including the education system. Online learning has become a common and integral part of the educational process. The active introduction of online learning has changed the degree of student involvement in the learning process, shifting it towards a more independent role for students. It is gradually becoming clear that the effectiveness and success of education in general depend on the student's ability to work independently. Therefore, special attention should be paid to the student's independent work, determining the functional load and the role of the teacher in it, tools for its effective implementation and ways to activate and increase students' motivation for self-education and independent learning.

In the context of teaching a foreign language, there is a current trend of reducing the number of working hours in the classroom and gradually increasing the number of hours allocated for students' independent work. This is also due to the need to be prepared for lifelong self-education in the face of ever-increasing amounts of information, access to ready-made knowledge and rapid innovation in all areas of life. This raises the question of how to organize students' independent learning correctly and effectively while mastering a foreign language. As a matter of fact, independent learning is the type of work that requires high motivation, the ability to accumulate internal reserves in order to search for the necessary information independently and obtain the planned result. In addition, it should be kept in mind that independent learning in a foreign language is difficult precisely as the information search must be carried out in a foreign language. The last is considered to be different and harder than in the native language.

A prerequisite for effective independent learning is independence as a formed character trait that manifests itself in special behaviour: the ability to take initiative, overcome obstacles and solve problems, self-confidence and the ability to do things separately, without the help of others [1, p. 523].

2. Analysis of recent research and publications. Many researchers have devoted their scientific research to the problem of students' independent learning activities. Among them are F. Nyman [2] (studied the role of self-regulated learning and its influence on student motivation), E. Maclellan and R. Soden [3] (researched the significance of knowledge in learning), G. Nuthall [4] (relating classroom teaching to student learning), M. Pedler, S. Hudson and T. Yeigh [5] (studied the teachers' role in student engagement), and others. Such scholars as H. Stern, G. Decay, A. Okey, P. Discalo, G. Ehrlich, Y. Liutvieva, L. Savytska and others have narrowed the scope of their research and studied students' independent learning in foreign language studies. Each of them made a different contribution to the formation of the system of students' independent learning while mastering a foreign language. For example, H. Stern investigated how to stimulate students' independent learning with the help of authentic foreign sources such as books, films and music. G. Deckay studied independent foreign language learning in the context of language intervention.

The researcher investigated how learners can use their mother tongue to facilitate foreign language learning. In his turn, A. Okey was a researcher who studied the effectiveness of independent learning in the context of studying English as a foreign language, searching for specific strategies and methods to intensify it. P. Discalo explored the possibilities of using computer technology in foreign language studies, in particular in the context of students' independent learning. G. Ehrlich focused his research on understanding how students can learn English independently in higher education.

The purpose of the article. The purpose of the article is to determine the pedagogical conditions for the effective organization of students' independent learning in the process of mastering a foreign language.

Theoretical basis of the study. Independent work of students in higher education is the type of activity of students that involves maximum student involvement and minimum teacher involvement. Independent learning is often linked to other approaches to learning such as personalization, student-centered learning, self-regulated learning and ownership of learning. Discussion of independent learning often arises in the context of important issues such as student-teacher roles and relationships, and the role of information and communications technology (ICT) in learning [6]. Independent learning is considered to be one of the cornerstones of higher education yet it is poorly understood by students and is seen by politicians as a poor substitute for face to face teaching [7]. Clearer guidance, clearer tasks and in-course support are among the students' recommendations for enhancing independent learning. However, the most powerful influence on their independent learning was the support, collaboration and advice of other (more experienced) students.

Student's independent learning is a way of self-study, the main purpose of which is to develop skills of active self-education throughout life. According to the vast majority of researchers, a prerequisite for effective independent study is a certain set of personal qualities. Thus, S. Hadi and F. Farida emphasise that independent learning embodies learning activities that depend to a greater extent on the influence of one's abilities, choice and responsibility in learning [8].

At the same time, successful independent learning depends on several external and internal factors. External factors involve the creation of a strong relationship between teachers and students and the establishment of an enabling environment with information and communication technologies as an important element. Internal factors are the skills that individual students have to acquire. These include cognitive skills such as focusing on memory, attention and problem-solving, metacognitive skills associated with an understanding of how learning occurs, and affective skills related to feelings and emotions [6].

The key aspects of students' independent learning include the following:

1) Self-motivation. Self-motivated students are guided by their intrinsic motivation to learn, see and know how to set their own goals and look for ways to achieve them effectively;

2) Goal-setting. Self-motivated students can set clear and achievable learning goals that define the direction and form the motivation for further work;

3) Self-direction. Self-directed students control their learning process by creating their study plans and schedules. They decide for themselves what they want to learn, how they will learn and when;

4) Time management. Good time management is crucial for self-directed learning, enabling you to allocate sufficient time to your learning activities while balancing your studies with other jobs and responsibilities;

5) Resourcefulness. Resourceful learners are active in finding and using a variety of learning resources, including books, online courses, videos, mentors, etc. They actively seek for information and support when needed;

6) Critical thinking. These students often engage in problem solving, critically analysing information, making decisions and applying their knowledge to real-life situations;

7) Hard-working. Independent learning can be a difficult process, especially at the beginning, and may lead to failures and even negative results. However, such a trait as hard working builds endurance and resilience, helps to adapt to existing and future challenges and thus continue your learning journey;

8) Reflection. Reflection is considered to be a necessary element of independent learning, which allows one to summarise his progress and determine the effectiveness of learning, as well as identify ways to optimise the learning process;

9) Feedback. The consequence of any independent learning is the search for feedback from peers, mentors or teachers to improve one's skills, knowledge and abilities.

Thus, independent learning is a multifaceted and valuable skill, especially in today's fast-paced world that requires continuous learning and adaptation. Self-learning can be adapted to different areas of life, including formal education, professional development and personal growth. It gives people the opportunity to take responsibility for their learning and achieve the desired results

This way there are certain benefits of independent learning for students to be singled out: improved academic performance, increased motivation and confidence, greater student awareness of their limitations and their ability to manage them, enabling teachers to provide differentiated tasks for students by countering alienation [6].

In particular, the same benefits can be reviewed within foreign language studies. According to Y. Liutvieva, students' independent work in the course of learning a foreign language accumulates two related tasks. The first of them is to develop students' autonomy in learning activities, to teach them independent learning, to form their own world; the second is to teach them to use their own existing knowledge in the discipline and practice [9]. Independent learning is a process in which people take responsibility for their learning and development rather than relying on a formal learning institution or teacher to guide them. It involves self-motivated and self-directed learning activities where individuals actively seek and acquire knowledge, skills and competencies on their own.

A phenomenon that often occurs among teenagers, both students and college students, is that they are not able to be independent in learning. This is due to some negative habits, such as studying only before exams, truancy, cheating, and looking for leaked exam questions. The existence of this phenomenon causes mental disorders that will continue when entering further education. Self-study independence is needed in the higher education system because it will help individuals to learn actively [10].

In his turn, E. Von Glaserfeld argues that the basis of independence is the motivation to learn, which is highly dependent on the student's confidence in his/her potential [11]. The latter, in our opinion, can only be a consistent and acquired result of face-to-face work with a teacher. Therefore, the prerequisites for high-quality independent work can be formed in the process of classroom work; in other words, classroom learning is a preparation for the student's independent work, making the latter feasible for him/her and forming the potential necessary for its implementation.

Independent work of students cannot be separated from classroom work, because it is in the classroom that the teacher uses various pedagogical tools to influence the student in order to increase his or her level of confidence and encourage independence. There are scientifically sound reasons to differentiate the spheres of student independence: at the initial stages, teachers' support is required, and later only appropriate support strategies are needed. There is a prevailing opinion among scientists that focusing on independent teachers have more engaged and motivated students, but the risks may include the possibility of opposition to the teacher based on authority. In our opinion, such a problem can be avoided by changing the roles in students' independent work: the function of the teacher should be shifted from an active assistant to an observer of the process of implementing independent work tasks [12].

The key point in independent learning was the shift of responsibility for the learning process from the teacher to the student. This involved students acquiring an understanding of their learning, being motivated to learn and collaborating with teachers to structure their learning environment. They found a consensus in the literature that independent learning did not merely involve students

working alone; teachers have a key part to play in enabling and supporting independent learning through, for example, structuring group work [6].

Some researchers insist that information and communication technologies are necessary elements in the independent learning of students as they offer opportunities for the easy assessment and measurement of self-directed learning, increase the speed of access of information, and provide a medium for interaction between learners as well as between learners and their teachers [13]. Thus, teachers should plan classroom activities to encourage creativity and diversity of responses such as offering students the opportunity to present their work in different ways, including video, written and oral presentations

A number of different models for providing independent learning in terms of processes of self-regulation were researched. As a rule, there are four phases for students to complete including: planning, self-monitoring, controlling the volume, tempo, direction of the work and its evaluation. Evaluation included students' feelings of pleasure or otherwise.

At the last stage of independent work, the function of the teacher can be seen as an opportunity to control the effectiveness of the work done by students. Among the ways to control the progress of students' independent work there are the following:

1) initial testing of students' knowledge and skills at the beginning;

2) continuous monitoring, i.e. regular tracking of the process of independent work;

3) intermediate check after completion of each stage;

4) self-control, which is carried out by the student in the course of independent work;

5) final examination of the results of independent work in the form of a report, round tables, presentations, etc. depending on the type of independent work chosen initially.

In this context, according to R. Jackson, a certain reward for success should be a mandatory tool in the system of control over the process of students' independent work. Students' independent work should be a positive experience, thus, the following advice may be appropriate:

1) the teacher should not rush the learning process and hope for quick engagement and results;

2) students should feel certain risks to which they should be tolerant and stress-resistant;

3) no manipulation of students or excessive control by the teacher;

4) motivation is the driving force of independent work, so its absence or insufficiency should be prevented by the teacher, and at this point, F. Nyman recommends linking the motivation for independent self-study with the emotional side of students [2].

To our mind, the "reward for success" consists of the corresponding notes according to the rating system, and it can be realised both in the total number of points for all the work done and in separate points for each stage of independent work. A separate highest "reward" may be instant admission to the exam or automatic assessment.

We share the opinion that motivation depends on the emotional component of students [2; 14; 15]. The solution to the latter is related to interest, which determines the variability and selectivity of types of independent work. In other words, the teacher should create conditions under which a student or a group of students will be able to choose one or another type of independent work from the proposed ones. A separate option in this context may even be to allow students to come up with the type and content of independent work they would like to do. According to our personal pedagogical experience, students' opinions and suggestions yield fruitful results, and increase interest and motivation.

3. Results of the study. In the process of organising students' independent work at the Vinnytsia Institute of Trade and Economics of the State University of Trade and Economics in the course of studying the discipline "Foreign Language for Professional Purposes", one of the students' wishes for independent work in a foreign language was the following: students decided to choose one of the English-speaking countries (the United States of America) and, having divided into pairs, decided to prepare a report on one of the areas related to the chosen country. Thus, among the "preferred areas" were "Kitchen of America", "The History of American Dollar", "Music Trends in the USA", "Famous Modern People in America", "Recent American Inventions", etc. Moreover,

students also chose the topics of their reports independently, according to their interests and preferences.

According to the students' ideas, the information they found was to be presented on small posters with relevant photos, which served as a kind of hint during the final report. Such a technology for presenting independent work was proposed to be called "Puzzles" (Fig. 1), as each report was like a piece of a puzzle in a bigger "picture" of a particular English-speaking country. At the end of the report, we received a collection of posters that represented the summary information for the chosen country. According to the curriculum, independent work was carried out at the end of each semester during the two years of studying a foreign language at the higher education institution. Thus, students had the opportunity to choose four English-speaking countries, preparing information on each as a separate type of independent work.
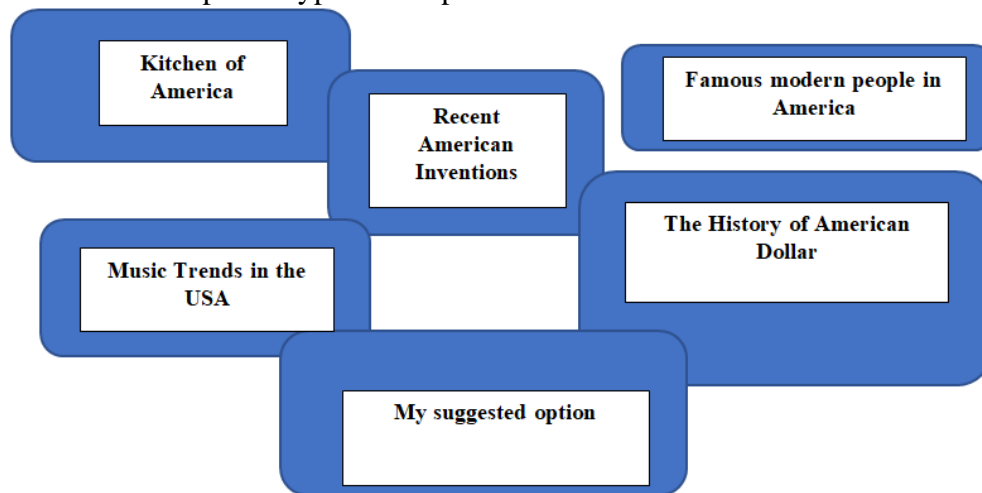
Fig. 1. Presentation of the technology "Puzzles" on the topic "United States of America"

Figure 1 shows the final result of students' independent work, which represents the summary information on the selected English-speaking country. It is worth noting that most topics are chosen from the list suggested by the teacher, but there is a separate option "My suggested option", which allows students to choose the area of study and their subtopic in the context of the general topic of the United States of America.

The possibility of variability in students' independent work necessarily involves options to choose from, offered by the teacher. Among the possible options are the following:

a) group tasks (either for small groups of students or for the whole subgroup or group);

b) independent work in pairs;

c) individual independent work.

Group types of independent work in the process of learning a foreign language include staging a dialogue (involving 3-4 students), staging a part of an English-language book (subgroup or the whole group), filming own movie in English, etc.

Activities of student independent work in pairs include singing a song in a foreign language together, conducting an English-language city tour, staging a telephone conversation, conducting interviews etc.

Individual types of independent work include reciting a piece of prose, poetry, or humour in a foreign language; preparing an interesting presentation, report, or retelling an English-language book, etc.

In the course of independent work, it is mandatory for the teacher to check preliminarily the type, content and volume of information found. At further stages, the role of the teacher shifts to that of an advisor, helping to improve the "rough draft" of the students' independent work in terms of additional information, correcting possible shortcomings and errors. Students are given several hours in the classroom to present the results of their independent work, usually it is supposed to happen in the end of every semester.

4. Conclusions and Prospects for Further Research. Students' independent work is an integral element of the educational process, which has a number of tasks and prerequisites. Thus, the study identified three independent but interrelated parties involved in the process of students' independent learning: student(s)-teacher-information technology. Time and work in the classroom with a teacher aims at preparing students for choosing the fields and topics of interest and independent information search in a foreign language in the future. That is why face-to-face cooperation should be focused on building sufficient potential for students' independent work. In the course of performing independent tasks, the function of the teacher should be shifted from an active assistant to an observer, friend, and advisor. There is also an urgent need for a properly built system of progress estimation. The system of monitoring the progress of students' independent work should include a certain reward for success, which is updated into points according to the rating system, the possibility of getting instant admission to an exam or even an automatic grade instead of taking an exam in a foreign language. The motivation of students to work independently is based on their interest, which can be facilitated by the variety of types of independent work offered by the teacher, as well as the types of work suggested initially by the students. We see the prospects for further research in the development of interesting technologies aimed at independent foreign language learning.

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ШЛЯХИ ОПТИМІЗАЦІЇ САМОСТІЙНОЇ РОБОТИ СТУДЕНТІВ В ПРОЦЕСІ ОВОЛОДІННЯ ІНОЗЕМНОЮ МОВОЮ У ВИЩІЙ ШКОЛІ

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Анотація. Стаття присвячена організації самостійної роботи студентів у вищих навчальних закладах у процесі вивчення іноземної мови. Самостійна робота студентів визначена як ключовий фактор формування навичок самоосвіти та вміння вчитися впродовж життя. У ході дослідження було виділено три незалежні, але взаємопов'язані сторони, що беруть участь у процесі самостійного навчання студентів: студент(и)-викладач-інформаційні технології. Визначено, що правильно організована самостійна робота студентів дозволяє їм опрацьовувати великі обсяги інформації, зокрема, працювати з автентичними іншомовними джерелами в процесі оволодіння іншомовною компетентністю. Доведено, що передумови для якісної самостійної роботи можуть і повинні бути сформовані в процесі аудиторної роботи, що, у свою чергу, виокремлює окрему функцію аудиторного викладання: підготовка до самостійної роботи студентів. Констатовано, що самостійну роботу студентів не можна відокремлювати від аудиторної роботи, оскільки саме в аудиторії викладач використовує педагогічні інструменти впливу на студента з метою підвищення рівня його впевненості в собі та заохочення до самостійності. В контексті наукового дослідження наголошено, що завданням очного навчання є формування базових знань і навичок, мотиваційної складової, а також необхідного потенціалу для ефективної реалізації самостійної роботи студента на іноземній мові в майбутньому. Обраний для дослідження курс «Іноземна мова за професійним спрямуванням» є базовим у вивченні іноземної мови (англійської) для студентів Вінницького торговельно-економічного інституту Державного торговельно-економічного університету, тому саме його було обрано для нашого дослідження. За результатами попереднього опитування студентів ми апробували новітню технологію організації самостійної роботи студентів «Пазли», яка акумулює та представляє інформацію про англомовні країни в різних галузях. Особливістю запропонованого підходу є те, що напрямки роботи можуть бути як обраними зі списку, представленого викладачем, так і запропонованими власне студентами й включеними до переліку завдань. Таким чином, самостійна робота може співпадати з реалізацією побажань та інтересів студентів, що, в свою чергу, стає рушійним емоційним фактором мотивації студентів.

Ключові слова: самостійна робота студентів; навички самоосвіти; вища освіта; аудиторна робота; мотивація; інформаційний пошук; автентичні джерела інформації.

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