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Independent study as a way of developing multilingual competence of the students who major in Philology

Abstract

The article deals with the theoretical basis for the implementation of the methodology of organizing independent study of the students of higher educational establishments (universities). It offers the action research examining the evidence of the peculiarities of the introduction of independent study in bachelor programmes of teacher education (the the teacher of the English language and literature, the specialist in multilingual education) the Faculty of the Foreign Philology and Fine Arts, Oles Honchar Dnipropetrovsk National University. The crucial role of independent study is justified by the didactic factors. The article shares experience of using independent study (self-study) to develop multilingual competence of the 1st-year students' of the English Philology Department. The results of research are practical, relevant, contain theoretical information and can be used for the further study of the problem.

Key words: *multilingual education, independent work, competence, teaching method? action research*

Introduction

At present the independent study of the students of higher educational establishments is an important didactic problem. Its solution will give us an opportunity to modernize the system of the modern specialist's preparation.

It is known that the level of professional competence of the specialist is measured by his ability to acquire new knowledge independently and to use it

in education and practical activity. Independent study (self-study), organized in an appropriate way, plays an important role in the development of the student's autonomy.

A lot of Ukrainian and foreign scholars (Yu. K. Babanskii, A. N. Leontiev, I. Ya. Lerner, N. F. Talyzina) devoted their works to the investigation of the student's independent study.

The topicality of our article is determined by the fact that the level of

the independent work completed is important in the process of multilingual education.

The Object of the research is the student's independent study.

The subject of the research is the methodology of the organization of the student's independent work in higher educational establishments in the context of multilingual education.

The aim of the article is to justify theoretically, to develop and to investigate experimentally the introduction of independent work of students in higher educational institutions.

The aim of the article determines its main objectives:

- to analyze the scientific research of independent study of the students of higher educational institutions in the context of multilingual education;

- to analyze the nature of the concept of "independent-study (independent work, self-study)" and to define its role in the organization of the educational process;

- to justify forms, types, and methods of the student's independent work;

- to develop a system of exercises and tasks that can be effectively used during independent work;

- to examine the positive and negative aspects of self-study using questionnaires, as well as an experimental independent work.

The main research methodology is general provisions for independent work of students; formation of speech competence, as well as psychological and pedagogical foundations of students' foreign language competence.

To reach these objectives, we used the following methods: the theoretical analysis of the literature on psychology, education and methodology and regulations on the problems of the study; modeling and design of the methodology system of the student's independent study in the English language. Besides, we used the empirical methods: observation, questioning, testing, the study of the university documentation, pedagogical experiment; methods of qualitative and quantitative analysis of the experimental data, the component analysis, the statistical analysis of the experimental results and the methodology of their interpretation.

Theory

The student' independent study as a form of teaching in higher school.

The changes taking place in modern society have led to a paradigm shift in education. This fact requires modernization of higher education, development of new models of Ukrainian higher school, new state educational standards. Thus, a modern model of training the student of higher school is

being formed. This model contains entirely new requirements for future specialist and answer the needs of the modern post-industrial society.

At present the basis and the specific optimization of learning process and educational activities is to change the content of the training and education of the student. The main points characteristic for the change in our education are not knowledge, but the ability to receive it; not memory, but thinking as a leading mental mechanism involved in the learning process; not passive diligence, but an active attitude to the educational process; not understanding, but critical self-directed participation in achieving learning outcomes; not individual, but group participation in solving problems and issues in educational activities, collective self-responsibility; not learning in the usual sense, but learning for personal, professional, and social growth (Chornenkii, 2006, p. 8).

Formation of modern specialist in the modernization of higher school is impossible without purposeful independent work. Today teaching process at the university should be aimed at training professionals who are able to apply this knowledge in practice and receive their own knowledge. Therefore, if we aim to improve the quality of education, the student's self-identity, the quality of training/teaching, we

have to be manage the process of students' during their independent study. Only self-study and monitoring its implementation promotes students' independent thinking, creative approach to solving educational and professional goals.

For these reasons, we believe that proper organization of the student's independent work is essential in solving the problems of education. The level of independent study determines whether the students will be able to improve their learning activities, or continue their self-education in the future, or feel the need to engage in lifelong learning (Chornenkii, 2006, p. 8).

A great number of research papers have been devoted to the students' independent study (V. Biskup, Y. K. Babanskii, A. N. Leontiev, I. Ya. Lerner, A. M. Matyushkin, N. F. Talyzina, P. I. Pidkasystii, T. I. Shamova, G. I. Shchukin etc.).

Regulations on the organization of educational process in higher educational institution provide that the student's independent work should occupy no more than 1/3 and not less than 2/3 of the total amount of time spent on studying a particular discipline. This number of hours facilitates the development of cognitive activity, forms independence as a personality trait, the ability

to solve modern production problems creatively, the ability to make decisions. It is necessary at the present stage of radical change in economic relations in the country, the dynamics of modern science and technology, the growing role of the individual in public life and work. Today students' independent study have turned from a methodological problem into a public one (Chornenka, 2006, p. 10).

A significant increase in the number of hours for students' independent study requires a new approach and its management, including its organization, security, control, role and activities of the members of the learning process.

The problem of organization of the student's independent study is in the focus in higher school. To select the ways of its development conferences and seminars are held in almost every higher educational institution (Kazakov, 1990, p. 5).

Before studying the problem, it is necessary to give the definition of the term "independent study". V. A. Kazakov defines "independent study (self-study) as follows: The student's independent study is an active cognitive creative activity of the student that is inherent (at least, should be inherent) to any kind of training sessions. In a narrower sense, but the most common sense, the student's independent study is regarded as one of the

types of classes, specific feature of which is the teacher's absence during the time of the student's learning/training (as opposed to lectures, seminars and other activities with the teacher's presence) (Kazakov 1990, p. 5-6).

V.S. Yelagina notes that the university self-study is multifunctional. Working independently, students learn meaningful learning material deeply and profoundly, develop research skills and professional activities, the ability to work with educational and scientific literature, the ability to make responsible and constructive solutions in various critical situations (Yelagina, 2010, p. 116).

The organization of the student's independent study is carried out with reference to the didactic principles that reflect the direction of educational activities at the university. Considering the principle as the leading idea, recommendations, directing the activities of the teacher and the student to achieve these goals, we offer the following system of principles that contribute to the formation of students' skills of independent work. V. S. Yelagina classifies the principles as follows

1. The principle of unity of students' instructional (classroom) and independent (off-the-classroom) activities. The teaching in the classroom must enforce the obligatory

mandatory minimum of the independent work of all students and it has to be conducted under the teacher's supervision who can give advice in an appropriate time. For successful implementation of the independent study the teacher develops methodological guidelines and algorithms that ensure the successful completion of tasks and aims to develop students' independent study skills.

2. *The principle of individualization and differentiation*, which allows to take into account the cognitive capabilities, abilities and interests of students. The implementation of this principle involves the development of multi-level tasks, the need for which is explained by the fact that students have different intellectual abilities. Multilevel task should include a mandatory part that reflects the requirements of the standard of higher education. Students who master a subject successfully and cope with the tasks quickly should be offered individual tasks of high complexity. Such students should be invited to participate in research activities, working on different projects and consulting weaker students.

3. *The principle of professional orientation* that facilitates transferring of students' learning activities into professional teaching. The professional teaching orientation is characterized by personal qualities of the teacher. It is formed and

developed on the basis of interest in academic work and theoretical knowledge. It is reinforced by their own teaching experience, acquired by future teachers in the teaching practice at schools.

One of the ways and means of improving the professional interest of students is to solve educational problems at a high level of skill, fulfilling creative tasks, preparing reports, essays; setting and doing problem solving and situational tasks; students' work on social and educational projects of practical orientation.

4. *The principle of consciousness and creative activity of students*. The implementation of this principle in the organization of the student's independent work requires the student's conscious learning and techniques of mental activity, methods of self-study in the process of active cognitive activity.

5. The principle feasible complexity of tasks for independent work and timing their performance. This principle requires compliance with the degree of difficulty of tasks, content and scope of independently investigated material, the level of intellectual development of students, the results of their previous study (Yelagina, 2010, p. 117).

The organization of independent study requires availability of teaching methodological documents, consultations of

other teachers, teachers' monitoring the results of learning, skills acquisition, in the possess of the student's independent study.

Following the didactic aim we can differentiate four types of the independent study.

1st type. Formation of students' abilities to determine the external terms of what is required of them, on the basis of their algorithm and references to this activity contained in the statement of the problem. The cognitive activity of students is the recognition of objects in the field of knowledge by repeated perceptions of the information about them or their action.

Homework, work with the textbook, lecture notes are most often used as independent work of this type. Common feature of the independent study of the first type is that all of the desired data, and the way of the task presentation must be done directly in the task or in the relevant instructions.

2nd type. Formation of knowledge that allows to solve typical tasks. The cognitive activity of students is pure and partial reconstruction of reproduction, transformation of the structure and content of educational information assimilated earlier, involving the need for analysis of the description of the object, different ways to complete the task, choosing the most correct one or consistent

definition logically consecutive methods of solution.

The examples of the independent work of this type include certain stages labs and workshops, the typical course projects, as well as specially prepared homework with the requirements of algorithmic nature. The peculiar feature of the works of this group is that it is necessary to inform the idea, the principle of solution and to nominate students to the requirement to develop this idea in principle or method (methods) with respect to these conditions.

3rd type. Formation of students' knowledge that is the basis of solving non-typical tasks. Students' cognitive activity in solving such problems lies in the accumulation and display of the external terms of new experience for them on the basis of previously learned formalized practices (actions for known algorithm) by transferring the knowledge, skills and abilities. The tasks of this type suggest searching the formulation and implementation of ideas of solution that always goes beyond previous formal experience and requires the student variation of the problem and educational information acquired earlier, review them from a different angle. The independent study of the third type should require the analysis of unfamiliar learning situations and generate new information subjectively. Course papers and

projects are typical of this type of the independent study.

4rd type. Providing conditions for creative work. Cognitive activity of the students in doing this work is in deep penetration into the essence of the object, establishing new connections and relationships that are necessary to find new, previously unknown principles, ideas, generate new information. This type of independent study is done with the help of the task of scientific research character, including course papers and projects.

Development of students' multilingual speech competence.

The problem of training of a future teaching, a specialist in multilingual education includes the concept of speech competence. It is now one of the leading basic characteristics of personality, one of the most important manifestations of his/her integrity and self-sufficiency.

It is well known that learning foreign languages is an essential part of modern life. Today there is a great demand for specialists with good knowledge of English.

One of the most difficult and important problems in teaching methodology is the development of students' speech and language competence. The main aim of

learning a foreign language is the ability to use it as a means of communication.

The problem of linguistic competence is relevant and it is discussed by scientific community. The theoretical discussions on psychological content and a clear differentiation of terms "linguistic competence", "linguistic skills", "speech competence", "speech skills" demonstrate the relevance of this problem and emphasize the importance of the complex knowledge about the language and principles of the statements structure in the structure of speech organization of the subject. In many studies, these concepts are not differentiated, and even taken as identical and interchangeable. As L. O. Kalmykova states, the issues of language competence were not the subject of special analysis in many of the authors. In fact, they merged with issues of speech and language learning (Kalmykova, 2008, p. 183). These factors demonstrate the need to identify the psychological content of speech and language competence.

In our opinion, the main problem in the study of language/speech competence is the fact that the concepts studied in psychology, linguistics, psycholinguistics, philosophy of language, linguistic didactics. Depending on the scientific paradigm and specific problems of partial studies, the content of the concept differs to a great

extend. Thus, the philosophy of language explains the notion of linguistic competence – “the man’s before-understanding of the world” (J. Habermas, 1995), in terms of psychology it refers to the content of cognitive competence - as the ability to program statements. Yu. D. Apresian (1995) defines the ability to produce and perceive speech statements as he elements of language mastering. And M. O. Orap refers the ability to the language competence (Orap, 2009, p. 83).

In our understanding “linguistic competence” is achieving a certain level of the language orthographic, phonetic, lexical and grammatical aspects of the language and the ability to use language tools for building properly formulated statements. Speech competence is formed in various types of speech activities which are carried out both in oral and written form.

Language competence involves not only learning but also cognitive conditions for learning. A precondition for mastering language skills is the presence of certain common knowledge. The concept of internal representational structure is central to modern cognitive psychology (L M. Vekker, W. Naysser, R. Solso, I. Hoffman). It suggests the need to develop cognitive processes as a precondition for the development of the language ability. Only knowledge of the

language does not specify the level of language competence. The scholars note that a necessary condition of the language skills “appropriation” is their level of cognitive processing, which depends on cognitive competence (R. P. Milbrud, T. O. Pirozhenko), the logical literacy (K. L. Krutii). A child during his/her speech development takes possession of something larger than a specific set of phrases and rules. It takes possession of knowledge that allows it to go beyond the specific set of sentences known to her. The content of this knowledge is the ability of the child to analyse phrases and sentences, their synthesis, separation and synthesis of the essential features of each new phrases and sentences with a new set of words (Orap, 2009, p. 87).

At foreign language lessons we should strive for the students’ formation of all kinds of speech, lexical and grammatical, listening, speaking, reading and writing. To achieve this, the teacher and his/her students need to listen to authentic texts in different formats (with a common understanding of extracting specific information with full knowledge); to read authentic texts professionally orientated, to translate texts of different styles, abstracts, advertisements, articles resumes writing, application dialogs based on professional situations, fill out forms, write essays; prepare for an interview to talk about

themselves and their preferences, summarize and retell the text, create lexical database, meet new vocabulary, translate articles perform grammar exercises etc.

Besides, we should offer students a variety of exercises that allow us to express our thoughts coherently and appropriately, to make appropriate communicative expression in speech and writing, using necessary language means in accordance with the purpose and content of speech communication conditions. We must strive to make sense of language, develop analytical and creative skills both at the level of content and the level of linguistic resources that are very closely related. The student has a speech competence if he has an idea about the system that is studied and can use this system in practice.

The main goal of foreign language teaching in higher educational institutions is to form the students' communicative competence, which is the basis for communication skills, formed on the basis of language skills. The development of communicative competence depends on socio-cultural and sociolinguistic knowledge and skills that ensure individual entry in another society and contribute to its socialization in his/her new community. Historically, virtually all inhabitants of our country are bilinguals, they know both

Ukrainian and Russian. The only difference is in the level of knowledge of these languages. At schools, students have the opportunity to learn two or more foreign languages. Thus, one could argue that the language of education in Ukraine is a typical phenomenon of plurilingualism or multilingualism. As it is defined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, multilingualism is knowledge of a number of languages and the coexistence of different languages within a single community.

The independent study occupies the most important place in the study of foreign languages. Independent study/work is the work done without the direct interference of the teacher. But the tasks are selected by the teacher. Students do the tasks at a specially provided time, and they consciously seek to achieve the goals, using their efforts and expressing in some form mental or physical result (or both together). It should be noted that independent work can be an effective way of students' attaining deep and strong knowledge and means of forming their activity.

An important task of the teacher of higher educational institution is the right organization of independent study, providing conditions of its successful course that provides not only basic, scientific, but also

appropriate pedagogical training, pedagogical skills to activate the cognitive power of students in the learning process.

Methodology and Findings

The action research to explore and pilot the principles of independent study has been carried out at the Department of English Philology, the Faculty of Ukrainian and Foreign Philology and the Fine Arts, Oles Honchar Dnipropetrovsk National University among the first-year students who major in “Philology (English)”. 22 students were selected. The action research was aimed at getting an effective strategy to improve the involvement of independent work in the training of English teachers, specialists in multilingual education.

We conducted an experiment in the form of a questionnaire. The aim of our study is to determine the advantages and disadvantages of independent work of philological direction according to the questionnaire results of the students of philology. Besides, the aim of our experiment is to identify efficient authentic textbooks used in the learning process, their role in motivating students for further education and changing attitudes to work independently as uninteresting, but obligatory routine activities. In addition, our objectives are to develop skills of writing and speaking, recognition, activation and to enlarge students’

vocabulary, to provide students with cross-cultural information, to obtain skills to work off-the-classroom, to develop cognitive interest during the independent work.

To solve this aim, we conducted a survey of the first-year students of language and literature who study the course “Philology (English)”.

The questionnaire included the following questions:

1. What textbooks are used for foreign language teaching?
2. What kinds of tasks are you offered for self-study?
3. Do you perform exercises for learning grammar material?
4. Do you like doing exercises for learning lexical material?
5. Do you have any difficulties dealing with authentic learning sources (books, texts, audio recordings)?
6. What are the difficulties encountered during the execution of independent work?
7. What, in your opinion, are the disadvantages of self-study?
8. Where do you see the benefits of organizing the independent work?
9. How did teachers test your independent work?
10. Are you satisfied with the assessment of self-study?

The main types of tasks were the following: tests, different grammar exercises, essays and reports writing, rendering of articles, writing of essays, compositions, summaries, analysis of the texts read, making projects, preparation of answers to questions (oral and written), learning vocabulary, oral themes and rules.

The question “Do you like doing exercises for learning grammar material?” was answered “No” by 8 students, “Yes” – by 9 and “Do not know” – by 5.

The next question was “Do you like doing exercises for learning lexical material?” The results were as follows: “No” – 12, “Yes” – 7, “Do not know” - 3.

Students explained that sometimes exercises and tasks for learning vocabulary require memorizing a large amounts of new vocabulary. Sometimes students are not able to learn the required number of lexical items in a set time.

The question “Do you have any difficulties dealing with authentic teaching materials (books, texts, audio recordings)?” was responded “No” - by 11 students, “Yes” - by 5 and “Sometimes” - by 6.

The sixth question “What difficulties did you have during the execution of independent work?” was answered by students’ as follows: the lack of time to fulfill the task due to the intensity of the learning

process; the amount of exercises and tasks is always too large and independent study is not always possible; difficulty to find information; thorny subjects, a small number of the right books and literature. The following comments are important for teachers: “I do not understand the task to work independently”, “I do not understand the requirements to the independent work” and a lot of comments of this kind. Therefore, developing and preparing tasks for independent study for the first-year students teachers need to outline the requirements and tasks more clearly.

The seventh question about the limitations of independent work was answered by half the respondents that there were no limitations. But they outlined some problems in the organization of the independent study. These are a large amount of tasks; absence of explanation how to perform the task; little time for independent work. As you can see, most of the problems are not in the organization of the independent work, but in students’ self organization who cannot plan time for studying and independent work. We consider that the problems are connected with the adaptation of first-year students.

The students answered the next question “Where do you see the benefits of organizing the independent work?”

differently. Students identified some positive aspects in such a form of learning as independent study. According to students, its main advantage is the possibility to get extra points. Also, the students indicated that performing independent work, they get accustomed to self-organization; develop their creative thinking and memory. Independent study provides an opportunity to gain new skills or improve the acquired ones.

Teachers control the independent study in written and oral forms and with the help of tests.

Recently, tests have become the primary method of testing students' knowledge. On the one hand, the pedagogical effectiveness of the test is that it allows you to make control within a short time and quickly process the results. The test can cover all sections of the curriculum, provide full testing of students. On the other hand, we are losing the culture of language (written or oral) that is not checked by using tests. The problem becomes especially urgent when we deal with studying foreign languages. Most students do not think logically any longer, they cannot express their thoughts etc. There is a lack of validity because traditional testing allows to "dig" the student's knowledge much deeper. Students often indicate that the tests sometimes confuse them. After all, when we present several answers, the student should be

very attentive to grasp their meanings. Sometimes it happens that even one single word has a deep meaning that changes the whole meaning of the sentence, and students do not notice it.

The last question "Are you satisfied with the evaluation of independent work?" was answered positively by most respondents. Explaining their assessment, students reported that they were satisfied with their scores as their work was evaluated adequately.

Thus, the results of the questionnaire of the students who study language and literature show the following advantages in the organization of the independent work of philological direction:

- additional points;
- the possibility to acquire new knowledge, develop habits and skills;
- the fixation of the knowledge received;
- opening of their own creative capabilities;
- enriching professionally-oriented knowledge, abilities and skills.

Students see the following disadvantages in the independent study:

- too large amount of independent work and a small amount of time allotted to perform it;
- tasks for independent study are formulated unclearly;

- the tasks for independent work are very complex;

- the lack of literature available.

The results of the action research are worthy of attention of foreign languages teachers. The teachers require a complex approach, because the problems are connected not only with the organization of independent work of the language teachers, but also on the students' ability to work with scientific literature, to distribute time for learning etc.

After the questionnaire we conducted independent work, which included different types of exercises to check the level of students' knowledge of the topic "Introducing yourself". Most tasks were to be completed in a written form. Students had only one week to fulfill the tasks. Independent study included the tasks on grammar, vocabulary and home reading.

After checking the works completed, we can note the following results: "excellent" - 8 students (34.4 %), "good" - 12 students (54.5 %), "satisfactory" - 2 students (9.1 %), "unsatisfactory" (0%).

Conclusions and Discussion

The organization of the students' independent work determines the results of the acquisition of knowledge, students' habits and skills and the level of the students' independence. The teacher's actions direct

students to the organization and management of the effective implementation of an active, self-conscious and effective cognitive activity that promotes the right kind of selected supervision. During the organization of the students' independent work on the basis of the subject "the major foreign language (English)" we must change the student's role in the learning process, turning him/her into an active subject, and the transition to a democratic style of educational management, where the personality of the teacher acts as a stimulus to the formation of the student's interest in knowledge.

Numerous works devoted to the problems of multilingualism and multilingual education indicate that the issue of multilingual education is very important in today's world.

The analysis of the theoretical literature on the issue of multilingual education, suggests that the importance of multilingual education as a means of obtaining specific professional knowledge and as a component of deep language education is primarily determined by general global trend towards European integration in economic, cultural, and political developments. In the field of education, this trend makes the desire for integration of subject knowledge, orientation of knowledge to the holistic world view. Multilingual

education provides students with the access to information in various subject areas, obtaining of new information according to individual needs, access to lifelong learning, which in its turn gives them more chances to compete in the global and European markets.

In training a specialist in multilingual education the independent study of students plays an important role, so in this paper we investigate the effectiveness of independent work towards preparing first-year students who major in “Philology (English)” in Oles Honchar Dnipropetrovsk National University.

The action research was to conduct a questionnaire to identify the main features of the organization of the independent work. With the help of the questionnaire we learned that not all aspects of self-study are positive. In general, students do well in independent work, but there are often difficulties caused by improper organization of both the teachers and the students themselves. The main disadvantages are the misallocation of time for doing the tasks, excessive number of tasks, as well as unclear formulation of the objectives.

A future teacher of several foreign languages has to master multilingual communicative competence, which involves his/her ability to use foreign and native languages alternatively in their everyday lives and careers. This means that students do not

perceive these languages as clearly defined mental blocks, but they form communicative competence, within which all language skills and experience are part of the language in which they intertwine and interact. Thus, the formation of multilingual competence should take place in conjunction with their mother tongue and other foreign languages.

Multilingual competence allows us to consider it not only as an alternative way of learning, but also as a way to master specialized knowledge, introduction to the world culture and values of social and communicative abilities of the individual. Involvement of authentic sources will positively influence the better mastering of a foreign language, and provide students with valuable information about the history and traditions of the country, which we study. It will help to understand the modern lifestyle of people, and therefore develop not only multilingual but also intercultural competence.

The activation of students' independent will help them develop creativity, observation, the logical thinking of students; instill a culture of mental and physical labor, learn to work independently, seek to achieve this goal; form professional future professionals while studying at the university. It will help improve in their chosen profession continuously.

The results of our action research can be used during the educational process while studying the discipline “The major foreign language (English)” in higher school. These results will be effective under the following pedagogical conditions: constant increase in students’ autonomy by including tasks of high complexity into the process of teaching; the teacher’s control in appropriate time, the gradual training of the needs and skills of

self-control; the variety of forms and methods of work.

The value of multilingualism as a social and cultural phenomenon of modern society is really remarkable. That is why, it is vital to continue to investigate the issue of implementation of techniques of independent study, containing multilingual component, in frame curriculum of in higher educational institutions.

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