

## **STUDENTS' INDEPENDENT WORK: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS**

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Students' independent work is an essential component in the development of language disciplines and in the further development of professional skills. The article discusses the problems arising from the inability of students to work independently and the difficulties they face in the course of organizing their autonomous work. The effectiveness of the students' independent work largely depends on the awareness of their own responsibility and the need for constant self-control. In this context, special importance is attached to the organization and structuring of this work, students' understanding of goals and objectives, the choice of adequate strategies, types, forms and methods of learning, the comparison of achieved and desired results. Effective organization of independent work pursues the solution of many tasks, and the author considers it necessary to create a special course at the initial stage of training, so that students can develop all the necessary competencies.

Key words: students' independent work, external motivation, skills and competencies, self-training.

## **САМОСТОЯТЕЛЬНАЯ РАБОТА СТУДЕНТОВ: ПРОБЛЕМЫ И РЕШЕНИЯ**

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Самостоятельная работа студента является необходимым компонентом в освоении языковых учебных дисциплин и в дальнейшем развитии профессиональных навыков. В статье рассматриваются проблемы, возникающие вследствие неумения студентов работать самостоятельно и трудности, с которыми они сталкиваются в ходе организации своей автономной работы. Эффективность самостоятельной работы студента во многом зависит от осознания меры собственной ответственности и необходимости постоянного самоконтроля. Особая важность в этом контексте придается организации и структурированию студентом этой работы, осмыслению целей и задач, выбору адекватных стратегий, видов, форм и методов обучения, сопоставлению достигнутых и желаемых результатов. Эффективная организация самостоятельной работы преследует решение многих задач, и автор считает необходимым создание специального курса на начальном этапе обучения с тем, чтобы студенты могли развивать все необходимые компетенции.

Ключевые слова: самостоятельная работа студентов, внешняя мотивация, навыки и компетенции, самообучение.

The modern world is characterized by a high rate of updating and change, which, in its turn, requires from people flexibility, mobility, and adaptability to new conditions, that may enable them to work with different sources of information and improve their professional level. Students can acquire these soft skills in the process of learning. There is no doubt that this goal is unattainable without well-organized independent work of students, which is the kind of work that forms the basis for education at an institution of higher education. Professor Zagvyazinsky V.I. believed that independent work "forms the readiness for self-education, creates the basis for ongoing education," and gives the opportunity "to be a mindful and active citizen and creator".

According to cognitive psychology, the most effective is a learner-centered type of learning. No external influences, instructions, directives and preaching can supersede independent human activity or compare with it in efficiency. No matter how qualified the teacher might be, students must do the main work related to mastering knowledge on their own. The ability to work independently is a professionally oriented and essential skill for future specialists. In this regard, during professional language training, the effective organization of students' independent work pursues the following tasks: mastering the contents of the discipline to be studied independently; further analysis of the information and expanding of the knowledge gained at lectures, seminars and practical classes; instilling students with the skills of independent learning, and research work; developing the need for self-education.

Teaching practice shows that in recent years, a significant number of students who have gained enough score to be enrolled in a university, show poor results in the process of further studying of language disciplines. This is, in all probability, due to the methods, goals and objectives of teaching different from those used in a comprehensive school; and, as a result, university students need to acquire other skills of independent work. When working independently, students may encounter a number of difficulties, such as:

1) **an increase in the volume and complexity of independent work.** Since many students are not skilled enough to work independently and cannot work out a certain algorithm for this kind of work, plan it and stick to this plan, the volume of the recommended independent work appears to be excessive toil for them.

2) **a weakening of external motivation** caused by the lack of everyday in-class assessment of knowledge (with intermediate testing only once per month). At university, forms of control differ from those applied at a secondary school, and therefore are unusual for students. In addition to the results/scoring of the current testing, the rating system of knowledge assessment consists of a number of factors, including some that are not evaluated by the mark: *attendance, deadlines, home preparation, class participation*. As a result, this system is mistakenly perceived by many students as less rigid and, therefore, less motivating.

University students should constantly master new forms of creative independent work in language learning. However, over the recent years there has been observed a trend that while performing the methodologically proven tasks, it is at the stage of independent preparation that students are increasingly faced with great, and often insurmountable, difficulties. The types of tasks and activities that cause students the greatest difficulties are as follows:

— Creative projects within the framework of speech communication. During the year, students are supposed to prepare about 4-6 mandatory projects on any chosen topic of the course and present them in class; the projects are assessed with a mark, which is an additional incentive to thorough work. The project methodology is integrated into the educational process and is one of the forms of in-class and out-of-class work. Preparation for the project involves the ability to work with literature (reference books, dictionaries, library catalogues, the Internet), the ability to find, highlight, analyze and structure the information found, so as to present it in an accessible and interesting form for the audience. The project as a mini-study within the frames of a certain topic with subsequent summaries and a personal conclusion is an important stage in the study of practice-oriented language disciplines and in preparation for subsequent scientific research, such as written course papers and theses. However, as of late, not many students have demonstrated the ability to carry out the preparatory work independently, to collect and thoroughly process the material. Due to the lack of habit of systematic and comprehensive independent work, we increasingly are faced with a situation when students massively make use of copy-pasted ready-made presentations found in and downloaded from the Internet.

— Reading literary works, followed by writing essays. This type of work is an important stage in the training of linguists. In order to do independent work in this direction, students need a sufficiently high level of foreign language proficiency to be able to read the text in the original and discuss it later in class, they need an aptitude to critical thinking and reasoning, and the ability to correctly express their thoughts in writing. Unfortunately, students do not always cope with the task. Increasingly, they are experiencing insurmountable difficulties in perceiving an authentic literary text due to the extreme limitations of their personal vocabulary and, as a result, they have to work a lot with the dictionary. As a result, it takes students significantly more time to master the material provided for in the curriculum. As a way out from this situation, students familiarize themselves with the contents of the material by reading the adapted or even translated version, which does not contribute to an adequate perception of the author's idea, vocabulary expansion and to other methodological tasks related to professional growth.

Unfortunately, students are often unable to express their opinion about what they have read, to correlate the events described in the work with other historical or political events, with the social and cultural realities of other countries, or with personal experience. Group discussion in class can be extremely difficult due to the lack of skills of working with the text other than a literal retelling, and a low level of background knowledge and general erudition badly impedes the development of such skills.

— A prepared monologue. When preparing this type of task, the deficiency of independent work skills is especially visible. In students' performance, a "prepared monologue" often consists of reading aloud of a previously unread and, therefore, unintelligible text, usually copied from the Internet and not necessarily corresponding to a given topic. On top of that, students can deliver such a monologue without first checking the meaning and pronunciation of new, incomprehensible words, without structuring the message logically, without separating the main information from the secondary. Nor do they take into account the actual time needed to deliver the information to the

audience, or whether the audience can handle the level of lexical and syntactic complexity of the wording when perceived by ear, or what can be offered to listeners as reference points or visual tools to facilitate this comprehension. With such an approach and sloppy attitude, the intrinsically high methodological value of such tasks is reduced almost to nil.

In addition to the above, serious problems have to be overcome when preparing 1) creative written tasks (e.g. essays); 2) interpretation and translation tasks; 3) analysis of grammatical phenomena (which requires the knowledge of linguistic terminology and metalanguage); 4) organization of work in pairs and groups.

Thus, the main difficulty lies in the fact that the active use of creative tasks, serious and painstaking work with the dictionary, a high level of complexity of the material and the pace of its learning in a higher school are designed based on the assumption that students already have some skills and competencies under their belt. In practice, however, it often turns out that such skills are not formed sufficiently enough to assimilate educational material. As a result, a significant part of classroom time is dedicated to the acquisition and formation of skills for independent, classroom and research work, rather than to their further development. Such a contradiction, undoubtedly has an adverse impact on the quality and efficiency of these types of tasks, leads to lagging behind the curriculum, mediocre average academic performance, and to a decrease in motivation.

The shortage of study time and the insufficient level of students' language competence can be an obstacle to the implementation of the social order for training of modern specialists capable of accomplishing concrete tasks, and of independent solution of problems, including self-training in mastering a foreign language. That is why, in addition to teaching specific knowledge, it is worth implementing the idea of teaching ways how to quickly and effectively assimilate it, and how to learn to acquire it independently. For these purposes, the university curriculum or the block of professional educational programmes can be supplied with a course of mastering the techniques of independent work based on the "Learn to learn" principle, and set on the following tasks:

- Familiarization of students with various stages and methods of independent work, types of tasks, requirements for registering the findings, etc. (e.g., principles and methods of selection of literature, its analysis, bibliography; descriptions of research results in a form of theses, reports, presentations, creative projects, and other).

- Training in independent work planning.

- Familiarization with various additional data sources and new information and communication technologies.

- Stimulation of internal motivation for independent learning.

In case of introduction of such a special course during the first year of study, the acquired skills would help to ensure that students effectively develop all the necessary competencies in the process of studying special disciplines, as well as in the course of organizing their research work within the framework of bachelor's training in senior years.

Summing up, it should be noted that the quality of training of a future specialist, the one who will be in demand and will boast of having the potential for further professional growth, largely depends on their ability to work and develop independently, as well as on the effectiveness of the organization of students' independent work at university.