SHAPING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' AUTONOMY THROUGH ORGANIZING THEIR PROJECT WORK IN THE PROCESS OF TEACHING ENGLISH

E. L. Iarkova

Tyumen State University,
Volodarskogo str.6, 625003, Tyumen, Russia, e.l.yarkova@utmn.ru

In recent years there has been a growing interest in promoting learner autonomy in language education. This study aims to explore how organizing project work can enhance university students' autonomy in learning English. By examining the benefits and challenges of project work, this research seeks to provide insights into effective strategies for fostering learner autonomy. This study employs a mixed- method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data. The findings of this study will contribute to the existing literature on learner autonomy and project work. This research can also inform curriculum design and assessment practices, ultimately improving the quality of English teaching at the university level.

Keywords: learner autonomy; project work; effective strategies, curriculum design.

ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ АВТОНОМНОСТИ СТУДЕНТОВ ВУЗА ПОСТРЕДСТВОМ ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ ИХ ПРОЕКТНОЙ РАБОТЫ В ПРОЦЕССЕ ОБУЧЕНИЯ АНГЛИЙСКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ

Е. Л. Яркова

Тюменский государственный университет,
ул.Володарского,6, 625003, Тюмень, Россия, e.l.yarkova@utmn.ru

В последние годы растет интерес к развитию автономности учащихся в языковом образовании. Целью данного исследования является изучение того, как организация проектной работы может повысить самостоятельность студентов в изучении английского языка. Изучая преимущества и проблемы проектной работы, данное исследование стремится дать представление об эффективных стратегиях развития автономности учащихся. В работе использован смешанный метод, сочетающий качественные и количественные данные. Результаты данного исследования внесут вклад в существующую литературу по автономии учащихся и работе над проектами. Кроме того, результаты исследования могут быть использованы при разработке учебных программ и в практике оценивания, что в конечном итоге позволит повысить качество преподавания английского языка в университетах.

Ключевые слова: автономия учащихся; проектная работа; эффективные стратегии, разработка учебных программ.

Under the conditions of transforming the higher education system in Russia, Tyumen State University (UT) has been introducing a new educational model «2+2», according to this model students are required to choose their major after completing two years of studies. The first two years are focused on expanding the learners' world view, developing critical thinking and enhancing their ability to make independent decisions. During this time, students also complete the general education core program and acquire universal cultural competencies in areas such as self-management, communication, digital literacy, data analysis, and design. They are encouraged to create their own individual educational paths based on their interests and future professional goals.

Yesterday' high school graduates are not ready to make the right choice for their future professional direction in an uncertain labor market and take responsibility for their further education. In order to successfully realize their full potential and achieve their learning goals, students must be taught to be active, self-motivated, initiative — driven, decisive and determined.

All first-year UT trainees are required to study at least one foreign language as part of their core curriculum, which includes a significant amount of mandatory self-study. This requirements aims to enhance the integration of students' learning materials, develop their cognitive abilities and foster their readiness and motivation for self-education. In order to make their self-study more effective, students should strive to attain a sufficient level of autonomy. This will enable them to adapt their educational trajectory and tailor their activities to align with their academic goals.

According to H. Holec, who first defined autonomy in language education, it is the ability to take responsibility for one's learning in relation to all aspects of this activity. This includes setting goals, determining the content and sequence, choosing the methods and techniques used, managing the process of mastery, and evaluating the result obtained [1, p. 3].

Following M. A. Lobach, we will consider the concept of autonomy as a dynamic process of foreign language acquisition. In this process students plan their learning outcomes based on their goals, needs and interests. They also utilize various technologies and strategies to achieve desired results. Moreover, they take control of the competence formation in different types of speech activities and evaluate their own performance. To monitor their progress in communication skills improvement they apply self-control tools [2, p. 5].

The purpose of this article is to summarize the experience of organizing independent project work to foster autonomy among first-year core program students at UT in the process of learning English.

The problem is that many first-year university students do not have well-developed self-study skills after finishing high school. Consequently, they often struggle to organize their own learning process without explicit instruction and additional motivation from their teachers. Research has shown that students

lack self-discipline, self-organization, ability and desire to independently plan their activities. There is a low level of motivation to utilize additional learning resources, new technologies, as well as unwillingness to think critically and engage in creative tasks that require more time and effort. Instead, they find it easier to stay in the comfort zone by relying on pre-existing articles and abstracts rather than conducting their own research.

How can teachers support their learners to activate their self-study and shape autonomy skills in the process of learning English? In our opinion, the use of project methodology can lead to achieving goals much more efficiently. According to E. S. Polat, the project method is based on developing students' cognitive power, the ability to acquire knowledge independently, the skills to navigate in the information environment and the talent for critical thinking [3, p. 31].

Project work is a compulsory part of the Core English program at UT, it is the requirement that everyone must meet to take the test and receive certification at the end of the course. The curriculum includes one project assignment per semester. The students are expected to conduct their research outside of regular class time and present their final project products in a creative manner.

In order to effectively organize self-study activities in the process of teaching English, the teacher uses the electronic application Microsoft Teams. Study groups are created within the application to facilitate collaboration with students. Additionally, a bank of learning resources is compiled along with various types of class and homework assignments. The technical capabilities of the electronic platform enable the teacher to categorize materials into separate channels. Furthermore, the teacher oversees the self-study process by conducting both individual and group consultations, both in-person in the classroom and online through the Project Work channel.

To foster students' autonomy it is not sufficient to merely assign independent work and provide instructions on conducting project research. To truly cultivate this skill, it is essential to nurture and develop certain qualities within the student's personality: responsibility and obligation to fulfill the received task by a certain deadline including reporting on the work done to fellow students; self-regulation through the fulfillment of the planned work schedule; analysis of one's own educational and cognitive activity through reflection.

In our work we adhere to the following model.

1. Preparation.

During the introductory consultation with students we determine their needs and interests, their familiarity with the project methodology and whether they are ready to carry out group or individual projects. Some examples of questions in the questionnaire include: Have you ever completed an individual or a group project? Have you ever completed a project in English? If so, what area was it and what was the name of the project? On average, how many hours per week do you think, you could dedicate to a single group project?

2. Familiarization with project methodology.

The teacher introduces students to the basics of project research methodology including its elements and stages. The teacher also emphasizes the principle of autonomy, which promotes «student voice and choice».

3. Self-determination.

In order to cultivate the skill of autonomy, students are granted the freedom to select their topic, determine the type of project (individual or group; social, creative, research or professionally-oriented), choose their team members for group projects, decide on research methods and determine the form of the final product. During this stage, it is crucial to teach students to independently choose a topic, identify the problem and formulate a research question.

The teacher initiates the thinking activity of students by organizing brainstorming sessions. By offering a variety of ideas and discussing different topics for future projects, students learn to think independently and consider problems that truly worry and concern them. They fill in the table by answering the following questions: What is the issue or overall topic that interests you? What is the specific research question you want to investigate?

What is the problem that is worth investigating? Is this an actual problem or an assumed problem? Does this problem have social significance? How is it related to you personally? What might be your proposal for addressing this problem? Participants in the sessions discuss their ideas and suggestions with both classmates and the instructor. After preliminary discussion of class problems, students are expected to independently read additional articles on topics, that interest them on the Internet.

Students self-define and share their posts in the Project Work channel on the Microsoft Teams platform. They are organized into project teams based on their personal and academic interests. Each student or group creates a common GOOGLE document that can be accessed by the instructor and all team members for collaborative editing. The instructor motivates students to keep it regularly and comments on the students' work, encouraging them to express their point of view.

4. Setting Goals and Objectives.

When students engage in project work, they should have a clear understanding of why they are doing it and its practical significance for their personal development, especially in improving their English language proficiency. It is important to distinguish between the goals that students define in relation to the content of their research activity, the disclosure of the project topic, the development of specific skills related to creating a specific project product and the language goals aimed at improving their foreign language skills.

5. Writing and Using Content and Language Objectives.

The teacher can provide additional learning resources and students can independently study the materials and formulate their goals and objectives both in Russian and English. It is vital for students to consciously embrace their

goals. They should write down the goals and objectives of the project in their diary to fully comprehend their responsibility in achieving them.

5. *Formulation of the research question.*

Equally important is ensuring that the research question meets the SMART criteria: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time bound. When students have a clear understanding of these criteria, they will be able to independently navigate the process of developing a project assignment.

To begin, students should indentify the specific topic and problem, that their research will focus on. They should also determine the specific criteria, that can be used to measure the results of the research. Additionally, students should assess whether it is possible to collect both quantitative and qualitative data using specific research methods and available scientific sources related to their project topic. It is also crucial to consider whether they posses the necessary competencies to solve the problem. Furthermore, students should evaluate the topicality of the problem in society and determine, if its solution is relevant to them. Lastly, students must assess whether the project assignment is feasible within the specified timeframe.

6. *Planning Project Research Work.*

Autonomous students are distinguished by their ability to consciously plan and regulate their learning activities. The teacher advises students to create a step-by-step plan for their project work. To do this, it is recommended to use a diary such as a GOOGLE document with a planner template chosen by the students.

When planning their project work for the week, students create a calendar of planned activities and estimate the amount of work involved. They take responsibility for completing specific assignments by the scheduled deadline. At the end of the week the teacher rewards students with their reward points for their completed project work. Students have the flexibility to use various planning techniques and different planner templates

In addition, the class and individual consultations explore different time management strategies. The instructor also encourages students to find interesting learning resources on the Internet related to time management. Students are introduced to various techniques have the opportunity to test them out. During the planning consultation, they share their experiences and discuss the best practices of applying different techniques.

7. *Reflection.*

Autonomous learners can monitor their own learning by analyzing the process of project work and drawing conclusions from the analysis. Reflection helps them work on their mistakes and move forward. For this purpose, students are asked to fill out the Weekly Progress Survey and the Group Dynamics Survey, The questions in these surveys are formulated according to the Gibbs model. What happened during the week: What were you doing? What results have you achieved? Please write about the contribution of every member of your project

team and mention your names. What were you thinking and feeling? Can you provide specific examples of both positive and negative experiences? Do you require the teacher's support and advice?

8. Self-monitoring and self-assessment.

Self-evaluation and mutual evaluation of students by each other are also mandatory elements of project defense. Students fill out GOOGLE forms electronically or publish a public post in the Project Work channel on the Microsft platform according to the given criteria. Peer assessment allows students to share their opinion on the quality of project implementation, including the novelty of the proposed ideas and their practical feasibility. By noting the advantages and disadvantages of project presentations, students can select the best works in various categories, such as : language skills, best digital product, most original idea, promotion of the university, best realization of the idea and audience recognition. After the voting process, the best works are recommended for participation in the HIVE: Having Ideas & Voices Expressed project festival. All students are eligible to apply for the festival.

In conclusion, it can be said that the autonomy of first-year students of UT is developed through the process of organizing independent work on project-research activities within the Core English language learning program. Through this program students acquire the skills of learning autonomy, enabling them to consciously plan and regulate their learning actions. They also learn to employ various cognitive strategies; to establish connections between new and existing and existing knowledge; monitor their own learning process; analyze their thoughts and learning activities, draw conclusions from the analysis and restructure Ultimately, this helps students design their own individual and educational trajectory

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