

DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS INDEPENDENT WORK AT FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSES

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Abstract: this article is devoted to the improvement of high school students' cognitive independence; it highlights the issue of critical thinking development - the ability of students to analyze, evaluate, reflect their learning and cognitive activities, that contributes to the formation of student's independent working skills in learning a foreign language.

Keywords: independent work, reflection, student-centered learning, problem-solving approach.

Currently, more attention is paid to the independent work of students in the learning process, particularly in the teaching of foreign languages; it is determined by many factors. In the conditions of formation of a single legal, economic and information space it becomes necessary to have a constant personal development and ability to react adequately to changes in the world. Therefore, in today's dynamic ever-changing world it is not enough to have a certain amount of knowledge; an individual must be able to replenish own knowledge, to be open to self-education, to be able to solve scientific, social tasks, to think critically. Towards the entry of Kazakhstan into the world community, the country faces the task to ensure appropriate conditions for obtaining high-quality education.

The concept of foreign language education of the Republic of Kazakhstan stated the fact of accelerating the development of society, the empowerment of political and social choice, and therefore the special importance the formation of modern thinking in the young generation, namely, the ability to independently make responsible decisions and predict possible consequences, preparedness to self-improvement and self-development processes. This educational process involves greater independence training. The student becomes an active subject and the figure [1].

One of the most affordable and proven ways to improve the knowledge is through the activation of students work in the classroom as an appropriate organization of independent study. During this century, the organization of classes is diverting from a teacher-centered learning to a student-centered one.

The article is aimed at the thoughtful examination of the bibliography based on the matter, in order to have a broad view on the problem related to the development of the autonomy of students at foreign language classes always within the student-centered approach in education.

The traditional approach of teacher-centered class has shown its own limitations in the past in many pedagogical areas, specially engaging the students, making them feel motivated about their

own learning process. Engagement can be defined as the behavioral and emotional quality of a person's active involvement during a task [2], [3], [8].

In this specific area of motivating students to develop their own autonomy learning in the way they can feel engaged ahead, many scholars focus on the student-centered approach.

Speaking about the formation of students' independence, it is necessary to bear in mind two closely related tasks. The first of them is to develop students' autonomy in learning activities, teaching them to acquire self-knowledge, to shape their world; the second - to teach them to use their own existing knowledge in the discipline and practice.

Student-centered learning encompasses teaching methods shifting the focus of instruction from a teacher to a student. In original usage, student-centered learning aims to develop learner autonomy and independence by putting responsibility for the learning process on students [3], [4]. This approach is based on the constructivist philosophy in education. E. Von Glaserfeld, one of the representatives of this school, sustains that the motivation to learn is strongly dependent on the learner's confidence in his or her potential [5].

The scholars E. Deci and R. Ryan, who support constructivist education theory, analyzed two different approaches in learning. The first one based on the autonomy supporting role of a teacher, and the second one related to a highly controlled, authority-based way of teaching. In their research they conclude the vulnerability of the subject being controlled by this authority and for students the lack of autonomy development and engagement in the learning process [6].

After giving a small theoretical outlook in student-centered learning, it is necessary to study the ways through which this educational method could be implemented.

The most relevant question would be what actions implement the autonomy-supportive teachers. Some scholars advise, first of all, to differentiate the autonomy areas in which the support of a teacher is required, followed by the appropriate support strategies (Table 1). They also mention that the autonomy-centered teachers generally tend to have more engaged and motivated students in opposition with authority-based teachers [7].

Cognitive Autonomy Support	Procedural Autonomy Support	Cognitive Autonomy Support
Students are given opportunities to:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose group members • Choose evaluation procedure • Take responsibility of due dates for assignments • Participate in creating and implementing classroom rules • Choose seating arrangement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose materials to use in class projects • Choose the way to demonstrate competence • Display work in an individual manner • Discuss their wants • Handle materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss multiple approaches and strategies • Find multiple solutions to problems • Justify solutions in order to share experience • Be independent problem-solvers • Reconsider errors • Receive informational feedback

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulate goals and tasks according to their interests • Discuss ideas freely • Have teachers as listeners, not instructors
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Table 1 Strategies Associated with Different Features of Autonomy Support

In his research, J. Reeve accentuates the importance of engagement and motivation of students in the process of learning. The author also offers possible ways to create an engaging learning environment with the strategy called “4 Dimensions”, which mainly focuses on:

- nurturing inner motivational resources;
- relying on informational language;
- promotion of the education values;
- acknowledgment and acceptance of the negative affect as valid reaction to constrains.

He also confronts a low structured learning environment against a high structured one and crosses it with different levels of autonomy, then classifies the results in the certain styles, such as permissive, demanding and inconsistent, autonomy-supportive and controlling ones (Table 2) [8].

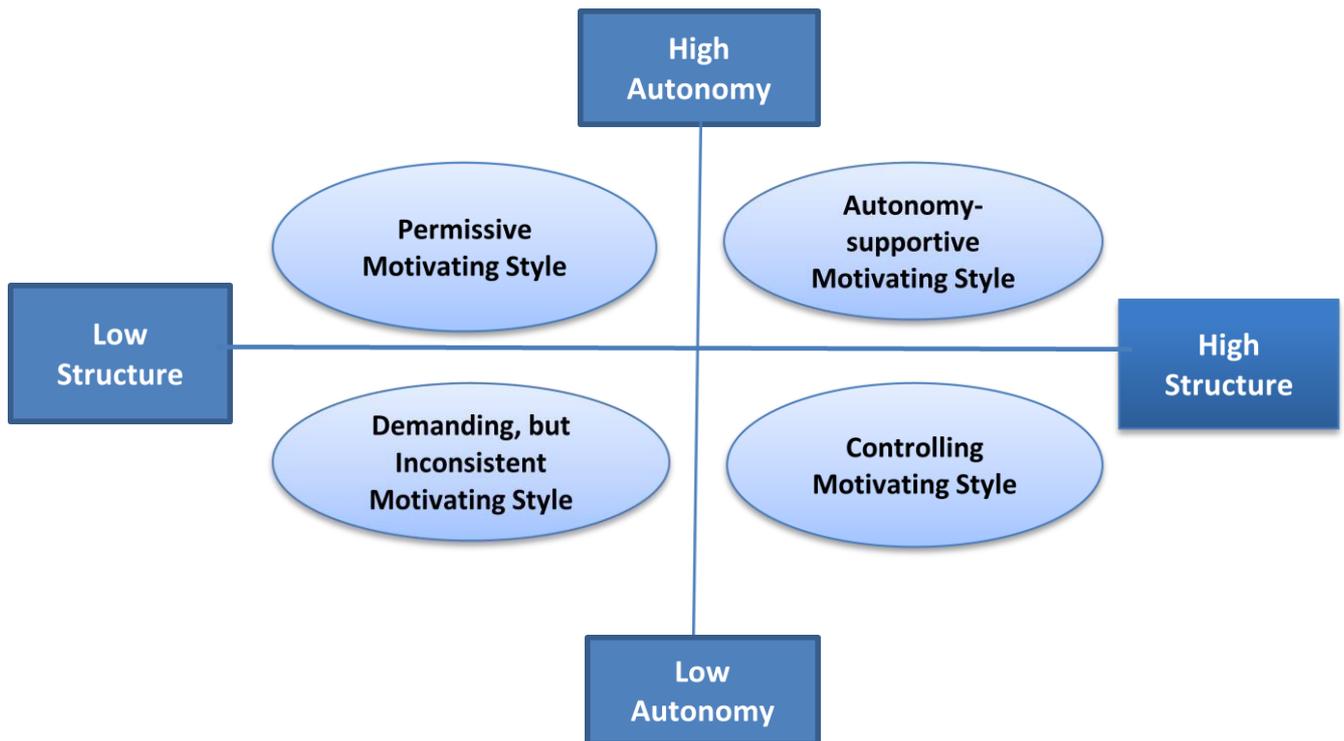


Table 2 Strategy “4 Dimensions”

An interesting approach to the matter was offered by R. Jackson, the author addresses the tools that are available to the teacher for engaging students in a student-centered learning process. The author comes to the following conclusion:

- teachers should not rush a learning process and hope to engage students quickly;
- giving the students small risks and rewards is beneficial to develop risk tolerance;

- teachers should not overprotect, control or manipulate students;
- motivation must be leading and its noncompliance should be prevented;
- it is important to bound learning motivation with emotional side of students[9].

Talking about the autonomy of students and use of learner-centered approach, other scholars conclude that:

- teachers tend to be positively disposed to use more autonomous approach;
- there is a certain confusion in literature for this topic in particular, as the teachers usually do not reference a process of seeking equality between a teacher and a student;
- the “learning to learn” approach (psychological approach) is the most supported by teachers;
- there is a significant gap between what is desirable and what is feasible in how the students can participate in the class decision making process;
- there is a considerable gap in the autonomy desirable and feasible for students as well;
- every teacher has own perception of autonomy, therefore there is no single method or approach to the teaching process;
- the majority of teachers believe that they have already promoted autonomy and do not need to implement any additional methods in their class [10].

Considering the peculiarity of a foreign language class, which is the focus on the cultural aspect of studying as well as language learning, the authors N. Tanyeli and S. Kuter, come to three main conclusions: first, most students have a positive attitude about learning English specifically, which is crucial for developing the autonomy in a class. Secondly, the study shows that students tend to see themselves as not autonomous enough in the English classes and expect some sort of control from teachers or require their support. Thirdly, the study suggests that teachers do not perceive students as autonomous learners of the target language, being English in this case [11].

Now, another highly important matter for our study is the way students perceive the autonomy in a class and the learner-centered approach in teaching.

The students seem to still expect their teachers to teach them everything, to lecture them on all lesson contents, to do and correct every task or exercise in class and on the blackboard (collective correction). It is not easy to prove them that they should change and adapt to the modern trends in language teaching in general and in the teaching of English in particular.

The author made an analysis, as a teacher himself, of the reactions of students for a more autonomous, student-centered approach, using as a base for this study 4 different experiences while using this approach.

In every one these 4 experiences, the author asked the students to make a feedback by putting notes from 1 (strongly disapproves) to 5 (strongly approves) to assess the class.

The first experiment shows the following results where the autonomous approach was applied, in a class of 330 students during 2008-2009:

Items	Corresponding scores
1- assessment of the teaching materials	3.34/5
2-assessment of the quality of the tasks	3.19/5
3- assessment of the teacher's openness	4.02/5
4- assessment of the teacher's methodology	2.90/5
5- assessment of the pedagogic support	3.14/5
6- assessment of the efficiency of the teacher's support for concept understanding	2.98/5
7- general satisfaction	3.24/5

As we see, the students show a strong disapproval and resistance towards this method.

The second experiment, took place in 2013-2014, shows even stronger disapproval of the students:

Items	Corresponding scores
1- assessment of the teaching materials	2.68/5
2-assessment of the quality of the tasks	2.72/5
3- assessment of the teacher's openness	3.44/5
4- assessment of the teacher's methodology	2.01/5
5- assessment of the pedagogic support	2.21/5
6- assessment of the efficiency of the teacher's support for concept understanding	2.42/5
7- general satisfaction	2.76/5

However, the results of graduate students (Master degree) were positive:

Items	Corresponding scores
1- assessment of the teaching materials	4.10
2-assessment of the quality of the tasks	4.04
3- assessment of the teacher's openness	4.80
4- assessment of the teacher's methodology	4.50
5- assessment of the pedagogic support	4.19
6- assessment of the efficiency of the teacher's support for concept understanding	4.05
7- general satisfaction	4.09

The author sustains that motivation and engagement of the students, positively or negatively, deeply affected the results shown [12]. This demonstrates that students in the given case themselves were not willing to accept autonomous learning. Nevertheless, the willingness to engage in any activity is generated by the same activity in the course of its implementation, and depends on the formulation of the goals and objectives of its content. In this process, problem-solving methods, techniques and technologies used in the performance of independent work play a very important part. In carrying out independent work students need to set problem-solving cognitive tasks, it is in the process of finding the solutions that new knowledge is achieved and improved.

The main task of learning a foreign language is for students to acquire a communicative competence, allowing them to use a foreign language on a professional level and for the purposes of self-education. The communicative competence refers to the ability of students to be familiar with

the language patterns used in specific areas, situations, conditions and objectives of the communication. Related tasks of learning a foreign language at the present stage are the formation of independent working skills within the profession and the development of the creative potential of students.

Considering the specificity and uniqueness of a foreign language as a subject involving both language and culture training, we can assume that the problem-solving activities with a focus on the culture of the studied language contribute to the practical mastery of a foreign language as the means of communication, improve the efficiency of the process of foreign language teaching and the achievement of higher results.

Having analyzed the use of problem-solving technology as a means of organization of independent work of students, we conclude that the independent work, meeting requirements of modern society, as well as providing a student-centered nature of learning a foreign language, benefits to:

- making the learning process creative, focused on solving the problems;
- encouraging students' development of reflective abilities;
- improvement of independent cognitive activity of students in the study of a foreign language, to determine the most effective ways to improve their knowledge;
- developing students' thinking and analytical skills.

The use of the problem-solving activities for development of student autonomy creates conditions for increasing motivation and quality of foreign language mastery and continuous independent language education, which is reasoned by the fact that within such activity students take responsibility for their own success in learning.

In conclusion, we summarize that the improvement of independent work of students in the context of the use of the problem-solving approach to the foreign language teaching and learning process creates the best opportunity for the development of language skills, critical thinking of pupils; their self-improvement and self-assertion.

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