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LEARNER AUTONOMY: ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE OF CREATING A SET OF EXERCISES TO DEVELOP THE LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE OF FUTURE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS

*The article **aims at** considering the results of the experiment of creating a set of exercises to develop the essential linguistic skills within the framework of learner autonomy.*

Learner autonomy as a tendency of changing a student's attitude to the discipline studied, is aimed at building a new kind of a learner's identity capable of acquiring any necessary knowledge, making relevant choices, thus enhancing the formation of a future specialist's professional competence. This, in its turn, requires providing a set of proper learning materials to enhance autonomous learning. The article reveals a teacher's perspective on laying some groundwork in that direction.

*In accordance with the aim and tasks of the paper, the systemic approach to teaching foreign languages, as well as theoretical principles of learner autonomy and life-long learning, were selected as **the methodology of the study**.*

*This suggests taking effort in changing the common way of teaching foreign languages, involving more up-to-date authentic sources of language material, which demonstrates **the scientific novelty** of this paper.*

Within the new learner-centered paradigm, as well as the principle of life-long learning, an autonomous learner of a foreign language should be capable of selecting methods and techniques according to their preferences. However, it is hardly possible at the present point in foreign language education as most schools of foreign languages use outdated textbooks and teaching methods.

Learner autonomy as a self-directed process of learning can be implemented only with the help of language learning materials that are properly developed and tested for efficiency before being employed in a foreign language classroom. Besides, students will be able to select their learning strategies and change them if they are not suitable. With learners channeling the process of education, there should be a variety of tasks and sets of exercises available to choose from in order to implement learner autonomy.

*To draw **the conclusions**, it should be noted that the experience of creating a set of exercises showed the lack of up-to-date learning materials to acquire the target vocabulary or key grammar constructions stipulated in foreign language syllabi. This can be helped by combining various authentic sources (from dictionaries to podcasts) to practice the essential lexical and grammatical units.*

***Key words:** autonomous learning, foreign language acquisition, linguistic competence, set of exercises.*

Establishing the problem. *The topical value of the paper* lies in the current lack of a profound and vast set of exercises to practice the necessary lexical and grammatical units stipulated in a foreign language syllabus. In the process of changing the traditional teacher-centered paradigm for a learner-centered approach, teachers of foreign languages, as well as of other disciplines, should take effort to educate their students more about the available methods of teaching and knowledge acquisition by demonstrating to them in detail what exactly can be helpful in this or that learning situation. This will call for changing the common way of teaching foreign languages, involving more up-to-date authentic sources of language material.

Having browsed recent surveys and articles, we can state that a lot of foreign scientists have pointed out a need for updating language material (J. Flowerdew) and shifting towards new ways of practicing it (R. Oxford, H.H. Stern) in order to build strong lexical and grammatical skills. The researchers call for a variety of tasks in order to ensure diversity of ways of employing target vocabulary and grammar.

Thus, the aim of this article is to share some results of the experiment aimed at creating a set of exercises to develop essential linguistic skills within the framework of learner autonomy.

The methodology of the study included the systemic approach to teaching foreign languages, as well as theoretical principles of learner autonomy and life-long learning.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in an attempt to create a set of exercises trying to change the common way of teaching foreign languages by involving more up-to-date authentic sources of language material in order to boost students' linguistic competence, as well as their motivation.

The results of the study. Learner autonomy as a tendency of changing a student's attitude to the discipline studied, allows building a new kind of a learner's identity capable of acquiring any necessary knowledge, making relevant and independent choices about learning techniques, methods, type and scope of information, etc., thus enhancing the formation of a learner's professional competence. This, in its turn, requires quite an effort on teachers' part in order to provide different effective sets of proper learning materials to enhance autonomous learning and offer learners freedom of choice.

When talking about professional training of future linguists, we often focus on extra linguistic components of the foreign language competence, sometimes overlooking the core part of foreign language teaching which is linguistic competence.

Having reviewed some foreign language syllabi in different universities of Ukraine, we have come to the conclusion that we still teach with outdated textbooks lacking variety of tasks, which cannot prepare future specialists for the requirements of today's labor market. There is an urgent need for updating the material with new examples taken from current books, podcasts, TV-serials, songs, etc. This will allow combining the traditional and modern, thus boosting students' motivation, as well as teaching them to analyze the language material available for study all around them, to pay attention to songs, movies, audio or video podcasts, to take interest in examples and patterns of modern speech from authentic sources whenever they come across them.

As it becomes clear, somebody has to do that job and browse multitudinous sources in the hope of finding the right example of a target unit used in the context. Thus, teachers need to spend a sufficient amount of time looking for the necessary units in suitable contexts.

It should be noted, however, that in autonomous learning the teacher's role is to guide students rather than explain every single thing. Still, it is not yet clear how it works in ESL classrooms. Perhaps we should start with demonstrating what activities enhance acquisition of target vocabulary and essential grammar constructions stipulated in the syllabus for a particular year of study.

Teaching foreign language vocabulary remains a relevant problem because vocabulary is an important aspect of language: the ability to communicate in a foreign language very much depends on how well the vocabulary skills of a person, especially a philologist, have been formed. Only with a good command of a language is it possible to fully and successfully implement a communicative task in a foreign cultural environment. Training future philologists is quite specific and requires a more careful approach to acquiring target vocabulary in order to form solid lexical skills, or lexical competence which can be defined as «the ability of a person to correctly formulate his or her utterances and understanding of the speech of others, based on the complex and dynamic interaction of relevant skills, knowledge and lexical awareness» [11, 215].

The issue of the effective teaching of a foreign language, vocabulary in particular, has always been acute, but nowadays resource specialists and guidance counselors need to bring syllabi and teaching materials in line with modern labor market requirements, which adds to the relevance of our research and calls for a change in tasks and activities to practice key phrases and structures more effectively.

When studying lexical units, students should strive for full understanding of each common word or phrase that involves understanding the word in oral and written representation, being able to recollect it whenever necessary, use it in its correct meaning, in correct grammatical structures and appropriate situations, pronounce it accurately, combining and spelling it correctly, knowing its positive or negative connotations» [12, 21]. According to J. Decarrico [3], mastering vocabulary is central to mastering a language, regardless of whether that language is first or second in a student's arsenal. The shortage of vocabulary will later prove to be fatal in a learner's ability to express clearly.

The main purpose of teaching a lexical component of a foreign language is to form students' lexical competence, which is part of the linguistic and, accordingly, foreign language communicative competence [4]. In order to achieve the aforementioned goal, students need to master a certain number of words, constant phrases and phrases together with the skills to use them in all kinds of productive (writing, speaking) and receptive (reading, listening) speech activities [11].

In our pedagogical experiment, we used the active vocabulary of the first lesson from the textbook «Practical English Course», edited by V. D. Arakin, for the second-year students as the target lexical material for testing and mastering. The subjects of our experimental work were the third-year students learning English as the second foreign language. We studied their ability to work with the new target vocabulary stipulated in the syllabus.

Before starting the work on target vocabulary acquisition, we offered our students a test, whose results helped us identify the problems with our subjects' vocabulary scope and types of exercises that needed elaboration. Let us dwell on the types of tasks present in the test.

1) Definition exercises. We suggested that students match the words in the target vocabulary of the lesson and supply their interpretation (definitions) in a foreign language. With the help of these exercises, we intended to test their knowledge of the meaning of phrasal verbs available on the list of key words in Lesson 1.

2) The participants of the experiment were asked to find a proper part in order to form a phrasal verb corresponding to the content of the sentence.

3) Substitution exercises. The exercises we chose were similar to those of the second group described above. We included them because the verb phrases used in the second exercise group were less familiar to the participants in our experiment; while the phrasal verbs from the third group were more familiar to students, considering the syllabi of the previous years, they were also included in the active vocabulary of the lesson chosen.

4) Exercises for the development of word-forming conjecture. With this type of exercises, we wanted to test how proficient our students were in English word formation. The participants of our experiment were asked to fill in the gap in the sentences with a correct part of speech to be derived from a given base form. To achieve

this, students were to have knowledge of the rules of word formation, including the use of the most common prefixes, suffixes, and endings.

The results of the test performed in the experimental and control groups showed the overall average success rate of the students coping with the available exercises in the experimental (52.81%) and control (58.5%) groups. As we can see, the level of lexical knowledge of philology students for the selected block of the textbook was approximately the same, i.e. the groups were homogeneous, which provided adequate conditions for conducting pre-experimental testing.

Before proceeding to the task of creating a set of exercises, we also analyzed the types of activities in modern authentic textbooks published by Oxford and Cambridge universities to develop a set of effective tasks to enhance students' lexical competence.

In order to semantize the key vocabulary, we chose three methods, which seemed most relevant to us: 1) semantization by means of using synonyms and antonyms, 2) semantization by means of using word formation rules, 3) translation from Ukrainian into English.

The method of semantization was chosen with regards to whether the word belonged to productive or receptive vocabulary (active or passive minimum), the stage of learning and language proficiency of students, qualitative signs of the word, the level of difficulty of mastering a lexical unit in terms of correlation of the word meanings in the native and foreign tongues, its lexical and grammatical valence, etc. Semantization by means of using synonyms and antonyms involves the use of rules and ways of word formation familiar to students. The difficulty of this method is that the language rarely has full synonyms, due to the history of the language and the sources of borrowing words. However, the perspective of enhancing students' socio-linguistic and socio-cultural competence seems worth the trouble of employing this method. Lastly, semantization by means of using known word-formation methods (such as, suffix-prefix, conversion and word derivation) allows establishing stronger paradigmatic connections for this lexical unit, as well as creating links to the words already learned in this category. This type is more commonly used in the senior years of learning a foreign language, providing further training of the word in a variety of contexts. This method provokes students to search for the word under study in mono- or bilingual dictionaries, dictionaries of synonyms, etc. thus contributing to the ability to work independently.

Taking all the abovementioned into account, we developed a set of exercises that includes 6 exercise groups, each of which involves active lexical units from the first lesson: 1) definition exercises; 2) equivalent translation exercises; 3) substitution exercises; 4) exercises to develop word-forming conjecture; 5) exercises to develop contextual conjecture; 6) native language translation exercises using target word combinations. Online English dictionaries, such as Oxford and Longman, were used to compile these exercises [5; 6]. We searched for the necessary word in their banks of examples to ensure the authenticity of the language material selected as the basis of all the exercises in our set.

The choice of exercise types was based on the data obtained from the test paper; that is, after reviewing the results we chose those types of exercises that the participants had some difficulty with. Exercises for the development of contextual conjecture are very useful as they contribute to the expansion of a student's semantic field by teaching the differences in the meanings of synonyms. We have also added transformational exercises using active lexical units to improve their acquisition with multiple cases to use them in. This type of exercises allows philology students to remember and use the lexical material from the lexical minimum of a certain lesson in the given textbook. After reading a sentence, a student is supposed to find the best-suited equivalent of the lexical unit (word or phrase) from the key lexical minimum. In this way, students' attention is repeatedly focused on the vocabulary to be learned.

Thus, in the course of our study, we received practical confirmation of the effectiveness of using the developed set of lexical exercises in the formation of students' lexical skills. At the end of our experiment the students of both groups were given a test with the same kinds of tasks and evaluation criteria as the pre-experimental test paper. Its results showed that after the same period of time, the level of formation of the selected lexical skills in the experimental group increased by 25.3%, while the control group demonstrated an only a 12% increase. The data obtained allow us to conclude that using the set of exercises developed by us is beneficial and enhances explaining and practicing the key vocabulary which students are supposed to master in every lesson of the given textbook.

To draw the **conclusions**, it should be noted that the experience of creating a set of exercises showed the lack of up-to-date learning materials to acquire the target vocabulary or key grammar constructions stipulated in syllabi for schools of foreign languages. This can be helped by combining various authentic sources (from dictionaries to podcasts) to practice the essential lexical and grammatical units. As the experiment clearly showed, the percentage of knowledge acquisition has grown and the students became better motivated to not only learn the target lexical and grammatical units, but also follow the activities suggested and investigate the authentic language material further on their own.

The problem of guidance in autonomous learning may be the topic of our further investigation.

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НАВЧАЛЬНА АВТОНОМІЯ СТУДЕНТА:
З ДОСВІДУ РОЗРОБКИ КОМПЛЕКСУ ВПРАВ ДЛЯ РОЗВИТКУ ЛІНГВІСТИЧНОЇ КОМПЕТЕНЦІЇ
МАЙБУТНІХ ВИКЛАДАЧІВ ІНОЗЕМНИХ МОВ

Мета статті – описати результати експерименту, присвяченого вивченню ефективності розробленого комплексу вправ для формування лінгвістичної компетенції студентів 3-го курсу, які опановують англійську мову як другу спеціальність у межах поняття навчальної автономії. Навчальна автономія як тенденція до зміни ставлення студента до дисципліни, орієнтована на створення нового типу особистості студента, здатної набувати необхідних знань самостійно, робити відповідний вибір, тим самим посилюючи формування власної професійної компетентності. Це, у свою чергу, вимагає створення набору навчальних матеріалів для самостійного навчання. У статті розкривається погляд викладача на закладання деяких основ автономного навчання.

У відповідності до мети і завдань, **методологічною базою** цього дослідження було обрано системний підхід до навчання іноземної мови, а також принципи навчальної автономії і навчання протягом життя.

Наукова новизна цієї роботи полягає в обґрунтуванні необхідності зміни усталеного підходу до викладання іноземних мов, орієнтованого на активність і відповідальність викладача, на такий, що стимулює автономну роботу студентів і потребує використання більш сучасних автентичних джерел мовного матеріалу. У межах нової студенто-центрованої парадигми освіти, а також у відповідності до принципів навчання протягом життя, наголошується на важливості формування у студентів факультетів іноземних мов здатності до відбору методів і способів вивчення мов, оскільки це дозволяє їм самостійно управляти процесом учіння: планувати свої дії, систематизувати набуті знання, оцінювати результати тощо.

Висновки. Навчальна автономія як самокерований процес може бути втілена лише за наявності сучасних автентичних навчальних матеріалів, які належним чином упорядковані та верифіковані перед їх використанням. Окрім того, студенти мають бути в змозі обирати підручники і релевантні методи навчання, включаючи різноманітні комплекси вправ і навчальних матеріалів. У результаті проведеного експерименту виявилося, що наразі бракує сучасних навчальних матеріалів для засвоєння активного лексичного та граматичного мінімумів, визначених у робочих програмах з англійської мови. Створення сучасних автентичних навчальних матеріалів для автономного навчання і є завданням науковців у найближчому майбутньому.

Ключові слова: автономне навчання, активний словник, засвоєння іноземної мови, комплекс вправ, лінгвістична компетенція.

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