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EXERCISES AS A METHOD OF ORGANIZING STUDENTS' INDEPENDENT WORK IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

The article examines exercises as a key method of organizing students' independent work in foreign language education. The study is based on the understanding of independent work as a purposeful form of learning activity that ensures the gradual development of students' linguistic knowledge, speech skills, and communicative competence. The interaction between the teacher, educational material, learning process, and students is considered as the core of instructional content, within which exercises function as both a method of teaching and a form of independent learning activity.

The paper analyzes models of interaction between teachers and students according to the degree of guidance, ranging from fully teacher-controlled activity to partially guided and fully independent learning. Particular attention is paid to the transition from direct to indirect teacher influence, which corresponds to the principles of systematicity and consistency in foreign language instruction. Independent work is viewed as a process in which students gradually acquire autonomy through solving learning tasks of increasing complexity.

Exercises are classified according to their function, level of difficulty, and degree of cognitive and communicative independence. The article discusses aspect (language), pre-communicative, and communicative exercises, as well as imitative, substitution, transformational, and reproductive exercises, which correspond to different stages of forming language and speech skills.

The study highlights the importance of task complexity and problem-solving difficulty in fostering students' cognitive activity and independence. It is argued that effective organization of independent work through exercises requires communicative orientation, gradual increase in learner autonomy, integration of linguistic and extralinguistic content, and systematic feedback. The article formulates key requirements for designing exercises aimed at organizing students' independent work in foreign language education.

Key words: *exercises, independent work, foreign language education, learning tasks, communicative competence, learner autonomy, teaching methods.*

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ВПРАВИ ЯК МЕТОД ОРГАНІЗАЦІЇ САМОСТІЙНОЇ РОБОТИ СТУДЕНТІВ З ІНОЗЕМНОЇ МОВИ

У статті розглянуто вправи як провідний метод організації самостійної роботи студентів у процесі навчання іноземної мови. Дослідження ґрунтується на розумінні самостійної роботи як цілеспрямованої форми навчальної діяльності, що забезпечує поетапне формування мовних знань, мовленнєвих навичок і комунікатив-

ної компетентності студентів. Взаємодія викладача, навчального матеріалу, процесу навчання та студентів розглядається як основа змісту навчання, в межах якої вправи функціонують одночасно як метод навчання і як форма самостійної діяльності.

Проаналізовано моделі взаємодії між викладачем і студентами залежно від ступеня керування навчальною діяльністю – від повністю керованої до частково керованої та повністю самостійної. Особливу увагу приділено переходу від безпосереднього до опосередкованого впливу викладача, що відповідає принципам систематичності й послідовності у навчанні іноземної мови. Самостійна робота розглядається як процес поступового формування автономії студентів у ході розв'язання навчальних задач з наростаючим рівнем складності.

У статті здійснено класифікацію вправ за їх функціями, рівнем складності та ступенем пізнавальної й комунікативної самостійності. Розглянуто аспекти (мовні), передмовленнєві та мовленнєві вправи, а також імітаційні, підстановочні, трансформаційні й репродуктивні вправи, що відповідають різним етапам формування мовленнєвих навичок.

Підкреслено значення складності завдань і проблемності навчальної діяльності для розвитку пізнавальної активності та самостійності студентів. Зроблено висновок, що ефективна організація самостійної роботи за допомогою вправ передбачає комунікативну спрямованість, поступове зростання автономії здобувачів освіти, інтеграцію лінгвістичного й екстралінгвістичного змісту та систематичний зворотний зв'язок.

Ключові слова: вправи, самостійна робота, навчання іноземної мови, навчальні задачі, комунікативна компетентність, автономія здобувачів освіти, методи навчання.

Introduction. Improving the quality of foreign language training of students at higher education institutions as future specialists in various fields remains an urgent pedagogical problem. One of the main ways to address this issue is the development of students' independence and creativity, enhancement of their independent work in foreign language learning, improvement of its methodological support, and the implementation of modern information and pedagogical technologies. In contemporary higher education, independent work is regarded not only as a form of learning activity but also as a key condition for developing learners' professional competence and lifelong learning skills.

Literature review. The issues of organizing and managing students' independent work have been widely discussed in pedagogical research. Significant contributions to the theoretical foundations of independent learning were made by K. Babenko, H. Hnitetska, L. Zhuravska, V. Kozakov, T. Loboda, V. Khrypun, I. Shymko, and others. The problems of organizing students' independent work specifically in foreign language instruction were further developed in the studies of N. Zhuravska, S. Zaskalieta, L. Onuchak, and other scholars.

However, despite the considerable number of studies devoted to independent work, special attention should be paid to exercises as a systematic and purposeful method of organizing students' independent activity in foreign language education in particular, the relationship between different types of exercises, levels of learner autonomy, and the gradual transition from teacher-controlled to independent learning.

In this context, exercises play a crucial role in foreign language instruction, as they serve not only as a means of practicing linguistic material but also as the main method of organizing independent work,

in which the student becomes an active initiator of knowledge acquisition, while the teacher performs the functions of organizer, coordinator, and facilitator of learning. The present article is **aimed** at addressing this gap by substantiating the role of exercises in organizing students' independent work in foreign language education and defining their methodological potential for developing learner autonomy and communicative competence.

Discussion and the Research Results. The task of the teacher is to maintain students' professional interest through the content, forms, and methods of their independent activity, directly or indirectly providing them with professionally oriented information.

The structure «teacher – learning material – learning process – students» constitutes the basis of the joint activity that forms the content of instruction. As I. Mazaikina notes, the content of instruction can be regarded as «a complex dialectical means consisting of the interaction between material organized in a certain way (the content of the academic subject) and the process of teaching it» (Мазайкіна, 2016). Given that the content of an academic discipline is determined by the selection, organization, and structure of learning material and by the types of exercises, while the content of the process comprises the system of interaction between the teacher and students, the product of learning is the formation of foreign-language knowledge, skills, and abilities. On this basis, we shall analyze these components of the content of the academic disciplines «Foreign Language» and «Foreign Language for Professional Purposes».

The organization of independent work in the process of language practice presupposes both direct and indirect influence of the teacher. If at the initial

stage the teacher acts as a source of information, later he or she becomes an organizer and coordinator of communication. Such logic corresponds to the principle of systematicity and continuity in learning. Taking into account the specificity of a foreign language as a subject, the psychological characteristics of its acquisition as a means of communication, and the nature of managing students' activity, the most typical models of interaction between the student, the teacher, and the subject of study are distinguished.

Let us identify the following models:

- direct (immediate) and fully teacher-controlled learning activity of the student;
- fully indirectly controlled activity;
- partially indirectly controlled activity;
- fully independent activity, that is, activity not controlled by the teacher or the learning material, carried out by a student or students within a specific process of acquiring knowledge, skills, and abilities on the basis of independent intellectual and speech activity – communication (Демченко, 2006; Буряк, 2001).

Independence and activity are manifested in this communication, as well as in students' interaction with one another in the process of independent cognitive activity. Therefore, it is possible to use different communication structures to distinguish forms of independent work in the process of communication-as-learning: pair, group, collective, and individually isolated forms. Such a classification is consistent with the principle of combining collective, group, and individual forms of organizing instruction (Жуковський, 2016: 142).

It is precisely these forms of learning-as-communication that correspond to the practical aim of foreign language teaching as the leading one, within which special attention is paid to the development of oral speech and to the teaching methods that follow from this focus.

We believe that all methods of organizing independent work can be divided into two groups depending on the type of activity involved: practical, drill-based activity and exploratory activity. This division also corresponds to the degree of independence manifested in the performance of these types of activity. The relative weight of these methods varies depending on the stage, content, and objectives of instruction.

Among the practical methods of organizing independent work in a foreign language, exercises occupy a special place.

In foreign language learning, a large number of exercises are used to develop automatization in the use of language material and to foster the development of

speech skills. Without exercises, teaching turns into talk about a foreign language, into a purely scholastic activity, the main content of which is the decoding of language forms and their translation (Котова, 2015: 77). All exercises are divided into aspect-based (language) and communicative (speech) ones. Pre-communicative exercises serve as a transitional form.

We consider it possible to view exercises both as methods and as types of independent work in foreign language learning, drawing on G. Skurativska's interpretation (Скुरатівська, 2002), who understands the term «exercise» as encompassing various types of learning activity.

Relying on the view that independent work is a means of instruction which, in each specific situation, corresponds to a specific didactic aim and task, and which forms in the learner (at each stage of movement from ignorance to knowledge) the necessary scope and level of knowledge, skills, and abilities for solving a certain class of cognitive tasks and for the corresponding progression from lower to higher levels of mental activity, it may be argued that different levels of independence correlate with different aims and content of tasks of various types, in the course of performing which diverse cognitive problems are solved (Буряк, 2013).

The functions of learning exercises within educational activity, the ways of solving them, and their degree of complexity and difficulty form the basis of the typology of learning tasks (Буряк, 2001). According to function, cognitive, communicative, communicative-cognitive, and control-evaluative exercises are distinguished. In cognitive exercises, language serves as the object of learning and cognition, whereas in communicative and communicative-cognitive exercises it functions both as a means of communication and as a means of cognition.

In the process of independent work, students must solve tasks that differ in terms of the way they are solved. Algorithmic exercises are distinguished, which are solved by students on the basis of known solution algorithms (receptive-reproductive). There are also two variants of search tasks which are algorithmic in essence but are solved by students using known algorithms for searching for a solution or heuristic search techniques (reproductive-productive). Heuristic tasks, non-algorithmic in nature, are solved through the use of heuristic methods (productive).

Researchers propose the following exercises for the formation of speech skills, which he divides, according to the mode of performance, into four types: imitative, substitution, transformational, and reproductive. This classification corresponds to the stages of forming speech skills (grammatical and

lexical), as well as to the degree of students' cognitive activity and independence (Сідун, 2017; Скуратівська, 2002).

According to the degree of complexity, fully specified and partially specified exercises are distinguished; in the formulation of the latter, the method and means of solution known to students may not be indicated. The complexity of learning tasks is determined by whether the components not specified in the task formulation are known to students; at the same time, each task contains only one difficulty.

The level at which independence is manifested is determined by the complexity of the types of independent tasks. Increasing the complexity of performed actions is combined with an intensification of independence. The more complex the task, the higher the level of independence manifested in its performance and the more complex the type of independent work. This is explained by the fact that the subject of cognitive activity in any form of learning work is not the source of knowledge nor the didactic purpose of independent work, but the task included in one or another type of independent work (Kopzhasarova, 2016), which constitutes the «genetic cell», the core of any independent work (Tanyili, 2013: 30).

With the gradual increase in the complexity of tasks and problems solved by students, independence of cognitive activity is formed, as well as independence as a personality trait. In our view, the absence of difficulty may hinder the development of independence. Complication should occur through the simultaneous increasing complexity of both the procedural and the logical-content aspects of activity.

In the process of independent foreign language learning, in our view, a range of cognitive and practical tasks should be addressed, namely: orientation-situational tasks, which foster students' ability to make independent and well-reasoned decisions in complex educational and professionally simulated situations; logical tasks, which require performing specific operations with concepts and categories and develop future specialists' ability to think critically, argue, persuade, and defend scientifically grounded positions; constructive tasks, aimed at developing students' skills in logically structuring and organizing learning material; and graphic tasks, which ensure the ability to present and convey ideas through sketches, diagrams, tables, charts, and other visual forms.

Accordingly, exercises for independent work in the discipline Foreign Language can be divided into two generalized groups. The object of the first group is extralinguistic information that requires semantic processing and interpretation, while the object of the

second group is linguistic means used in the process of communicative activity. The first group includes tasks focused on obtaining, comprehending, and creatively processing information, such as compiling annotations, summaries, abstracts, schemes, and other forms of analytical or creative transformation of content. The second group comprises tasks aimed at generalization and systematization of linguistic phenomena. Systematization is understood as orientation toward mastering logically interconnected language facts and comprehending grammatical phenomena within and according to the content of a communicative task.

In our opinion, the completion of tasks from both groups contributes to the development of students' autonomy and cognitive activity, provided that learners have a clear understanding of the objectives of each task and demonstrate interest both in the learning process and its outcomes.

Thus, independent foreign language learning in higher education institutions is implemented with diverse didactic objectives and under various organizational conditions. Within this framework, educational tasks of different types and levels of complexity can be addressed, and a variety of exercises can be applied, the selection of which is determined by the purpose of independent work. This approach correlates with the views of Ukrainian scholars (in particular, O. Bihych and N. Borysko), who consider the exercise to be a universal didactic tool capable of adapting to specific learning objectives, stages of speech skills formation, and levels of learner autonomy. In particular, H. Skurativska defines an exercise as a type of learning activity implemented in accordance with a defined didactic goal, while O. Bihych, N. Borysko, and S. Nikolaieva emphasize its system-forming role in the development of foreign language communicative competence. Yu. Zotov highlights the necessity of selecting exercises in accordance with the nature of learning tasks and their level of complexity, which is consistent with the idea of variability in the goals and conditions of independent foreign language learning (Бігич, 2013; Скуратівська, 2002).

The analysis of the objectives of organizing independent work in higher education institutions, as well as the goals and principles of foreign language learning and the types of tasks designed for independent work, enabled us to formulate a set of requirements for exercises intended for independent foreign language learning at higher education institutions. These requirements include:

– communicative orientation, which implies adherence to the principles of speech-and-cognitive

activity, individualization of learning, functional use of language means, situationality, informativeness, and novelty of learning material, as well as focusing exercises on real or professionally simulated communicative situations;

- stimulation of students' professional motivation, taking into account their individual characteristics and level of language proficiency, which is achieved through the selection of tasks differentiated by degree of difficulty and aimed at enhancing cognitive interest and awareness of the practical value of foreign language competence for future professional activity;

- an integrative approach, which ensures the interconnected development of professional, linguistic, communicative, and sociocultural competences and contributes to holistic acquisition of language material within its professional and cultural context of use;

- consideration of the stages of speech skills and abilities formation, as well as the types of exercises in terms of their complexity, level of intellectual activity, and mode of performance, thus ensuring consistency, continuity, and gradual increase in learning difficulty;

- regular and systematic monitoring of task performance, which provides timely feedback, enables correction of learning outcomes, and fosters students' responsibility and self-reflection in the process of independent work.

Conclusions. The conducted analysis allows us to conclude that independent work in foreign language education at higher education institutions constitutes a multidimensional pedagogical phenomenon determined by the interaction of didactic goals, the content of learning, and the degree of students' autonomy. Within this framework, exercises function

as a system-forming component that ensures the coherence of learning objectives, methods, and outcomes.

It has been established that the level of students' independence directly correlates with the complexity of learning tasks and the nature of exercises used. An increase in task complexity leads to a qualitative transformation of independent activity, progressing from reproductive and algorithmic actions to productive and heuristic forms of cognitive and communicative activity. This progression provides the methodological basis for a gradual transition from teacher-controlled to fully independent learning.

The typology of exercises based on their functions, modes of performance, and degree of intellectual activity makes it possible to organize independent work in accordance with the stages of speech skills formation. The differentiation of exercises into those aimed at processing extralinguistic information and those focused on systematizing linguistic means ensures balanced development of analytical thinking, language awareness, and communicative competence.

The formulated requirements for exercises (communicative orientation, professional motivation, integrative character, consideration of stages of skill formation, and systematic feedback) define the methodological conditions under which independent work becomes an effective means of developing learner autonomy in foreign language education.

Further research perspectives are associated with the empirical validation of the proposed classifications and requirements, the development of diagnostic tools for assessing levels of independence, and the adaptation of exercise systems to digital learning environments and specific professional domains.

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