

## Original Paper

# Conceptual Approaches to the Organization of Independent Work of Students in Higher Educational Institutions

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### Abstract

*The current article deals with conceptual approaches to the organization of independent work of students in the higher educational institutions. The notion of “Independent work” includes a type of learning activity which is performed by a student without direct contact with a teacher or a supervisor, managed by a teacher through special educational materials. The main objectives of independent work in terms of the practical acquisition of a foreign language are the achievement of an appropriate level of foreign language communicative competence and the preparation of graduates to conduct self-education work with a foreign language after graduation. There exist various viewpoints concerning the concept of individual work of students. According to some scholars, independent work of students is understood as planned scientific and educational work carried out on the instructions of the teacher under his methodological and scientific guidance. From the point of view of other scientists, independent work is an active creative work of a student, based on his ability to think independently, the ability to navigate in a new situation, to see problems himself, to pose new tasks and find approaches for solving them. Long-term analyses of literary sources and practical experiences allow us to conclude that in the organization of independent work of students, it is advisable to integratively apply the already well-known and proven methodologies (systemic, integrated, active, personality-oriented, competency-based, integrative-modular approaches) and modern educational strategies (the theory of educational activity, problem-situational learning, contextual learning, learning in collaboration, project training, continuing education of self-educational activities).*

### Keywords

*conceptual approach, systematic approach, personality-oriented approach, competency-based approach, independent work*

## 1. Introduction

Since Azerbaijan joined the Bologna process in 2005, radical changes have occurred in the system of higher education in Azerbaijan. Life experiences show that it is possible to integrate higher education in the European space only by following the basic provisions of the Bologna Declaration. These provisions are:

- transition to two-level higher education;
- Credit system application;
- increased control over the quality of education;
- mobility expansion;
- ensuring social orientation of education (lifelong education);
- ensuring the attractiveness of the European education system and so on.

Declaration signed by the president of Azerbaijan on May 22, 2009 states that a student's independent work is an independent work performed by the student independently and under the guidance of a teacher. The independent work of students at higher educational institutions includes:

- 1) extracurricular activities (independent work of the student and teacher's guidance);
- 2) participation in practice;
- 3) perform laboratory work;
- 4) preparation and defence of course work and projects;
- 5) preparation for exams and passing exams;
- 6) preparation and defense of the dissertation, master's thesis, as well as preparation for the final state exam and passing the exam (<https://www.edu.gov.az/en/page/299/2553>).

## 2. Methodology

The article is done by using comparative method, which is a technique for studying the development of languages or language items or techniques by comparing them to other languages or language items or techniques. Here, the problem concerning the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> year students who perform or do not perform independent work, is compared.

The other two methods used here are Quantitative and Qualitative Methods, which denoted the quantity and quality of the independent work done by the students.

All these methods are realized by holding auditorium (= instructor-led) experiment at Azerbaijan University of Languages.

## 3. Material Studied

Firstly, it is considered that there is need to clarify the term or the notion "independent work". What do we mean when we say independent work of students? According to Rodrigues, independence should be understood as one of the potential properties of a student that he already has, his ability to combine the new and the already studied (Rodrigues, 2014).

In psychology, the term “student autonomy” is considered as the ability of an individual to set his own goals and achieve them himself.

In didactics, “student autonomy” is looked through as the quality of the person, his high level of development.

“Independence” includes the complex of such personal qualities as the ability to organize their activities under any circumstances, set goals and perseverance in achieving them, cooperate with other people, use their previously acquired knowledge, and be responsible for the performance of their independent work.

Thus, independent work is a type of learning activity performed by a student without direct contact with a teacher or managed by a teacher through special educational materials; an indispensable compulsory part of the learning process, providing primarily individual work of students in accordance with the installation of a teacher or a textbook, a training program.

It should be noted that in the interpretation of the concept of “independent work of students” (IWS), not a single approach has been developed. There exist various points of view concerning the concept of individual work of students.

According to some scholars (Ujik, 1981; Smirnova, 2014), independent work of students is understood as planned scientific and educational work carried out on the instructions of the teacher under his methodological and scientific guidance. Famous scientist-teacher P.I. Pidkasisty considers independent work as a variety of types of training, production and research tasks, performed under the guidance of a teacher in order to assimilate various knowledge, acquisitions skills, experience of creative activity and development of systems of behavior (Pidkasistiy, 1978).

From the point of view of Golovko (Golovko, 1998), independent work is an active creative work of a student, based on his ability to think independently, the ability to navigate in a new situation, to see problems himself, to pose new tasks and find approaches to solving them. As it is obvious, in some definitions the leading role in organizing independent work belongs to the teacher, on the contrary, in others, it belongs to the student. We believe that these approaches do not contradict each other, but reflect the characteristics of the organization of students’ independent work on different stages of study at the university or other higher educational institutions.

The main objectives of independent work in terms of the practical acquisition of a foreign language are the achievement of an appropriate level of foreign language communicative competence and the preparation of graduates to conduct self-education work with a foreign language after graduation.

Analysis of literary sources and practical experiences allow us to come to a conclusion that with designing a conceptual model of the organization and implementation of independent work of students at a university or in higher educational institutions, it is advisable to integratively apply the already well-known and proven methodologies (systemic, integrated, active, personality-oriented, competency-based, integrative-modular approaches) and modern educational strategies (the theory of educational activity, problem-situational learning, contextual learning, learning in collaboration, project

training, continuing education of self-educational activities).

1. The systematic approach allows us to consider the independent work of students as a system complex, which is the educational process in the educational environment.
2. The activity approach provides the subjective position of the student, updates the need for its transition from the position of a passive consumer of information to the position of an independent active participant in the learning process, contributes to the study and description of educational independent activity in its relationship with educational activity.
3. A personality-oriented approach justifies the need to organize independent work of students from the perspective of subjects of the educational process, united for joint problem solving and complicity in activities that are able to realize their potential, to show creative individuality in interaction; emphasizes personality aspects independent activity: professional self-determination and self-realization of students.
4. Competency-based approach determines the technology of formation of a competent person, capable of further education and self-education, focuses on the development of relevant general cultural and professional competencies in the process of independent educational activity
5. The integrative-modular approach involves the implementation of interdisciplinary communications, the integration of classroom and extracurricular independent work, allows you to implement the ideas of modular organization of the educational process, its integration in the system of preparing students for self-educational activities.

The core of the conceptual model of the organization of independent work of students in a university or a higher education institution is a set of ideas about the possibilities of educational independent activity of students in the learning process, patterns and principles corresponding to them, as well as optimal pedagogical conditions.

Since our main research in this article is focused on the organization of independent study of English language students, we will focus our students on their independent work, the specifics of their organization, the achievements of the Bologna process, and their strengths. As it is known, foreign languages are taught approximately in all universities of Azerbaijan. At each of these universities, students are given different kinds of individual work. The choice of the individual work mainly depends on the character and goals of the discipline that is taught. For instance, in the teaching the communicative grammar of the English language the main attention is given to the improvement of students' grammar knowledge through writing skills. In oral speech practice lessons students' speaking, listening as well as reading skills are mainly focused on.

Ahmedov (Ahmedov, 1978) dealing with the independent work of students points that teachers' main duty is not only to teach but also to teach to learn. The conceptual approach to the organization of independent work of students at universities or in higher institutions requires to transform the student from the passive object of education to the active subject of knowledge. Thus, a modern student must be able to formulate a scientific problem, to find ways to solve it, to determine the result(s) and to

prove its (their) validity. Thus, the ready-to-transfer technology of knowledge should be replaced by technology to enable learners to acquire knowledge independently. Increasing student autonomy in the learning process enhances individual learning opportunities by considering the wider use of interactive methods in the acquisition of knowledge, the development of students' creative abilities, their needs, and abilities. Here we are talking about increasing the independent work of students in the learning process. Essentially, the organization of independent work in higher education serves to enhance students' independent learning activities. The analysis of the curriculum shows that the number of hours of classroom study at the universities or in higher educational institutions is gradually decreasing, and accordingly, the amount of theoretical knowledge given is reduced. The number of classroom hours in schools is also low. The goal here is to prevent students from overloading in classroom activities and to facilitate students' independent learning (Mahmudova, 2010).

The dominant and organizing role of the teacher in managing the independent work of students does not exclude activity of the student. Without this, one of the most important principles of the process of teaching a foreign language will be violated - its communicative orientation with the pedagogy of cooperation, in which the teacher and the student are equal communication partners. Forms of independent work can be varied. For example, the "translation bureau", contests for the best translation, research work on word formation, etc. can be aimed at the in-depth development of reading and translation techniques of professionally oriented texts (Ujik, 1981).

Great opportunities for managing students' independent work are exercises that develop the ability to operate with unknown vocabulary. Work can go in two directions: training to determine the meanings of previously unexplored words based on guesswork in context and knowledge of word formation rules, as well as a bilingual dictionary. The development of skills in working with a bilingual dictionary (general, polytechnic, special) should take place in the system - with a clear gradation of exercises provided for performance in the audience under the guidance of a teacher, independently in the audience and outside it. To be able to use the dictionary, it is necessary, first, to know the alphabet, the principle of the arrangement of words in the dictionary and the designation of abbreviations. Students must be able to translate derivatives and complex words, phraseological units, or phrases, and must learn to choose among many meanings of one word that is suitable in meaning. All of this must be taught sequentially, so the development of these skills is included as the goal of training in calendar-thematic and lesson plans. Students should be taught to use other aids - various encyclopedias (for example, to clarify unfamiliar concepts, acquaintance with biographies of foreign writers, scientists, politicians in home reading, etc.) (Mahmudova, 2005).

The following sequence of vocabulary training is proposed:

1. At the installation lesson, the teacher acquaints students with the types of dictionaries and their structure, with a dictionary entry, tables, abbreviations, etc.
2. At each next lesson, a series of preparatory exercises for the development of vocabulary skills is conducted (exercises in arranging words in alphabetical order, in naming the initial form of a word, in

determining part of speech, etc.).

3. Work under the guidance of a teacher passes gradually into independent work of students with a dictionary. During independent work in the classroom, students perform exercises aimed at developing vocabulary skills. The final stage is the performance of extracurricular tasks: home reading, translation of polytechnic and professionally directed texts.

#### **4. Discussions**

So, the tasks for independent work on the discipline "Foreign Language", as its types, can be divided into two large groups. The object of first group is extralinguistic information, subject to semantic processing and interpretation; the object of the second group of tasks are language tools used in the process of communicative activity.

1. The first group includes the task of extracting information aimed at the semantic processing of information.

2. The second group includes the tasks of generalization and systematization of linguistic phenomena, among which there are aspect (linguistic) and speech exercises with pre-verbal exercises as a transitional form. Systematization is thought in terms of orientation on the assimilation of logically interrelated facts of the language, on the understanding of grammatical phenomena within and the content of the communicative task. In our opinion, the fulfillment of the tasks of both groups contributes to development of independence and cognitive activity of students, if students have a clear idea of the goals of performing a particular task, are interested in the results and process of learning activities.

According to Smirnova types of exercises can serve as a basis for classifying the types of independent work in a foreign language. The basis for their differentiation is the didactic (methodical) task (Smirnova, 2014).

#### **5. Results**

So, the results of the investigation on the independent work of students are as follows:

1. The purpose of the informational exercises is the extraction and primary processing and primary consolidation of new knowledge.
2. Training exercises contribute to the development of language and speech skills.
3. Speech exercises are aimed at the formation of speech skills.
4. Combined exercises form knowledge and skills.

In a separate group, you can select exercises for the control of knowledge and the level of development of skills. In the process of independent work, students must perform tasks that differ in the way they are solved and the difficulties in accomplishing which various cognitive, communicative, communicative-cognitive and control-evaluative tasks are solved, in which language is the object of a scientist knowledge, and a means of communication and cognition (Garunov and Pidkasistiy, 1978).

Since the main goal of independent work of students is to form, in the process of independent cognitive activity, autonomy as personality traits, it is valuable for our analysis of the classification of independent work is the following typology:

- 1) reproducing independent work on the model.
- 2) reconstructively variable.
- 3) partially-search, or heuristic.
- 4) research (Garunov & Pidkasistiy, 1978).

Thus, the management of students' independent work should be aimed at creating their need to study a foreign language. At the same time, skills and practical knowledge of the language are acquired, which provides the possibility of subsequent independent work with special literature.

But how does the performance of this individual work affect students' foreign language proficiency. To determine this, an auditorium (= instructor-led) experiment was conducted among the first and second year students of Pedagogical faculty of Azerbaijan University of Languages.

The results of the auditorium (= instructor-led) experiment of the first year students of Pedagogical faculty of AUL.

**Table 1a. I Year Students' Experiment**

#	Parameters	I Year - Group # 104a (16 students) the students are not given independent work (before experiment)	I Year - Group # 103b (16 students) the students are given independent work (after experiment)
1.	Motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic)	10%	21%
2.	The use of ICT	12%	29%
3.	Reading and comprehension	16%	31%
4.	Speaking	9%	28%
5.	Writing	15%	29%
6.	Listening	25%	39%

The results of the auditorium (= instructor-led) experiment of second year students of Pedagogical faculty of AUL.

**Table 1b. II Year Students' Experiment**

#	Parameters	II Year - Group # 108a (14 students)	II Year - Group 107b (14 students)
		the students are not given independent work (before experiment)	the students are given independent work (after experiment)
1.	Motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic)	27%	41%
2.	The use of ICT	27%	38%
3.	Reading and comprehension	29%	41%
4.	Speaking	29%	39%
5.	Writing	31%	42%
6.	Listening	41%	49%

Let's compare the results of the auditorium (= instructor-led) experiment of I Year and II Year students of Pedagogical faculty of AUL.

**Table 2. Comparison of I and II year Students' Experiment**

#	Parameters	I and II Year (before experiment)	I and II Year (after experiment)
1.	Motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic)	18.5%	30.5%
2.	The use of ICT	19.5%	33.5%
3.	Reading and comprehension	22,5%	36 %
4.	Speaking	24.5%	33.5%
5.	Writing	23%	35.5%
6.	Listening	33%	44%

So, after the experiment, it became evident that the indicators of some parameters among the students went up by some percentages. (See the table above for comparison).

As seen from the above given table, after performing independent work the percentage of students' language proficiency on different criteria is higher and this proves the fact that independent work plays an important role in students' mastering foreign languages.

## 6. Conclusion

So, the main objectives of independent work in terms of the practical acquisition of a foreign language are the achievement of an appropriate level of foreign language communicative competence and preparation graduates to conduct self-education work with a foreign language after graduation. The core of the conceptual model of the organization of independent work of students in a university is a set of ideas about the possibilities of educational independent activity of students in the learning process, patterns and principles corresponding to them, as well as optimal pedagogical conditions. At present



there exist different approaches to the organization of independent work of students. Even though they have their own goals, they serve to activate the learning process, to provide students with all opportunities of language acquisition. By using independent work, the ready-to-transfer technology of knowledge is replaced by technology to enable learners to acquire knowledge independently. Increasing student autonomy in the learning process enhances individual learning opportunities by considering the wider use of interactive methods in the acquisition of knowledge, the development of students' creative abilities, their needs, and abilities. Thus, at the present stage of the modernization of the higher education system, scientists offer a variety of techniques aimed at the diverse development of a specialist. Despite the multiplicity and sometimes inconsistency of these techniques, most of them are similar in one thing - independent work of a student is a means of implementing the main educational program and has a developing and educative function.

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