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STUDENT-CENTERED APPROACH IN TEACHING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE FOR PROFESSIONAL PURPOSES

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Abstract

The article discusses the role of a student-centered approach used in the educational process and highlights the characteristic features of this approach used in professionally oriented teaching of foreign languages. The aim of the study is to find out whether a student-centered approach may be used as a tool of pedagogical management and if this approach can be used for achieving better results in autonomous work. The relevance of the study is determined by the necessity to use new approaches for motivating students and monitoring individual learning activities in the process of autonomous work in the digital educational environment. The results of the study have proven that the use of a student-centered approach may be instrumental in the process of teaching and learning, especially in distance learning. It gives language learners an opportunity to collaborate with their teacher and their fellow students, which results in changes in the relationship between teachers and students whereby the personal interests of students and their professional goals are taken into consideration. Moreover, students get better understanding of the instructions concerning language study, cope with their tasks in a more efficient way, and become more enthusiastic language learners.

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Keywords: E-learning, distance learning, student-centered approach.



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1. Introduction

Nowadays, we can witness many new tendencies in teaching foreign languages. Distance learning has become very popular and it is widely used all over the world. As a result, there are new forms of teacher-students interaction (Ark, 2016; Chikileva, 2018; Hirsch-Pasek et al., 2015; Klimova et al., 2017; Kucirkova et al., 2017). It is obvious that educational process is hardly possible without digital technologies and new approaches to teaching. Special attention is given to implementation of a student-centered approach (Baeten et al., 2010). The use of student-centered learning environment in education has recently greatly increased. Instructional preferences of teachers and students for learning environments are investigated and two approaches are singled out: 1) a deep approach, 2) a surface approach (Baeten et al., 2016). It presents interest to find out how these preferences are related to approaches to teaching and learning. There are two types of factors in stimulating the usage of the first approach in learner-centered environments: encouraging and discouraging students' perceptions of learning (Baeten et al., 2010). It is known that students can choose various approaches to learning foreign languages. If teachers are oriented towards students and change their conceptions, students use a deep approach. Moreover, a deep approach is used when students are satisfied with the course quality. It means they are satisfied with appropriateness of workload and assessment, teaching and clarity of goals. Students who are agreeable and emotionally stable mostly use a deep approach. Such students are extravert, conscientious and open to experience. More than that, students will use a deep approach more often if they are intrinsically motivated, self-confident, self-efficacious and are interested in methods that are more efficient for learning and understanding (Baeten et al., 2016). According to research, most students choose cooperative learning, and they are positive about teacher guidance. The types of instruction that students choose depend on their attitude to the process of learning. If students are interested in cooperative learning, they choose a deep approach. If students are passive learners and prefer to have teacher's guidance, they use a surface approach (Baeten et al., 2016).

There is evidence that digital technologies are widely used for motivating students, for making teaching more productive, for making learning more exciting and efficient (Bouck et al., 2016; Chikileva, 2019; Ebbeck et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2014; Kalugina & Tarasevich, 2018; Koper, 2014; Papadakis & Kalogiannakis, 2017). Autonomous work plays a great role in teaching foreign languages for professional purposes. The main reason for using modern technologies in students' autonomous work is to achieve the quality in learning and teaching. There is a search for new ways to modernize education. The modern system of education includes the following factors: humanization, fundamentalism, the use of competence-based and student-centered approaches. The use of the student-centered approach was introduced with the aim of further developing the methodology of the Bologna process. The change in the focus of training was determined by the need to upgrade curricula and use different styles of training, which undoubtedly would contribute to the intensification of the educational process.

It seems relevant to consider some features of a student-centered approach used for teaching a foreign language for professional purposes. When a student-centered approach is applied, the organization of the educational process changes. The educational activity becomes more practice-oriented, students can take part in the selection of the educational material, while in traditional pedagogy a teacher is the main organizer of the educational process. The following characteristic features of student-centered teaching can be distinguished:

- changes in the relationship between teachers and students: responsibility for training is shared, teacher are facilitators, training becomes the subject of agreements;
- transfer of emphasis from what is taught to what is being studied;
- taking into account students experience, learning styles and learning needs;
- development of critical thinking and the use of reflection;
- the use of an interdisciplinary approach with the aim of developing skills and competencies;
- having feedback and expressing interest in the final outcomes;
- development of blended models for lifelong learning.

It should be added that creativity and innovation play a great role in educational process (Papadakis, 2016). Researchers have pointed out the factors that determine students' satisfaction with the quality of higher education (Strielkowski et al., 2017). Special attention is given to increasing of efficiency of interaction between teachers and students (Gabdulchakov et al., 2018).

To make educational process more efficient, e-learning is used nowadays, and innovative technologies are implemented to integrate theory and practice (Anyushenkova et al., 2019; Chikileva, 2019; Melnichuk & Osipova, 2017; Mohamed & Lakulu, 2017). It is of great importance for students to be able to apply the acquired competencies and skills in their future professional activities.

There is no doubt that student-centered instruction requires the use of new approaches to teaching and learning. When a student-centered approach is used in teaching a foreign language for professional purposes, the acquisition of knowledge is not considered to be the main goal. Characteristic features of this approach are the following: the use of active teaching methods; increasing responsibility for learning outcomes and a reflexive approach not only on the part of the teacher, but also on the part of students; a new type of relations between a teacher and students. Language learners have an opportunity to select material for autonomous study using electronic educational platforms.

2. Problem Statement

Providing language learners with learning strategies may be more important nowadays than make them learn some knowledge. As a result, the role of a teacher in such a learning environment is changing. A teacher is supposed to become a tutor, a facilitator or a guide who is ready to help students, to show them where and how to access knowledge, how to adapt and adopt it. Much attention is given to providing skills and raising awareness for language learning strategies. It will be beneficial for students, as they will have to cope with a great amount of information in their professional activities. When a student-centered approach is applied in the process of language learning, the educational process changes. It presents certain interest to find out students' attitude to these changes.

3. Research Questions

Students were asked to express their opinions about the following statements: 1) I need motivation for autonomous work; 2) I need teacher's instructions and reminders; 3) I appreciate if a teacher is in a regular contact with me monitoring my progress.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to determine the role of a student-centered approach used as a pedagogical management tool for motivating students to learn a foreign language in digital educational environment in a more productive way. The study has the following tasks:

- determine students' appreciation of their teacher's guidance and support;
- find out the attitude of language learners to their teacher's reminders and instructions;
- find out if students' motivation remains the same or changes when teachers use new approaches;
- determine further perspectives of using a student-centered approach in language study.

The hypothesis was as follows: students become more motivated to achieve better results in language study when their teacher uses a student-centered approach in teaching a foreign language; a student-centered approach may be used as a pedagogical management tool; language learners need their teacher monitoring in order to achieve better results in autonomous study.

5. Research Methods

For the purpose of achieving the goal of the study, we used such methods as a survey with Likert scale, the survey data analysis and semantic interpretation of data, assessment of personalized learning integration in the process of language study, evaluation of educational outcomes, systematization and categorization of facts and concepts.

The survey was prepared for the second-year students who studied English for professional purposes. The survey was anonymous. The total number of surveyed students was 126. They voluntarily agreed to participate in the survey. The respondents were students majoring in HR, Management and Economics. Students were to use the Likert scale for expressing their opinion: 1) fully agree 2) agree 3) neutral 4) disagree 5) strongly disagree. There were two stages in the research. First, the aim and objectives of the research were defined, a hypothesis was developed, and methods of the study were chosen. The second stage included data analysis, systematization of the results and drawing conclusions.

Data collection included quantitative techniques. The quantitative approach implied responses to the statements via a paper-based questionnaire. The respondents were supposed to express their points of view.

6. Findings

The student-centered approach is one of the basic approaches, according to which there is a change from teaching to learning. Teaching is considered to be delivering of knowledge, and learning implies active participation of students. Considering the results of the study, it can be mentioned that language learning will be more efficient if a teacher uses a student-centered approach, regularly monitors learners' autonomous work, informs students about the results of monitoring, encourages them to work regularly and to manage their time properly. As a result, the majority of students become more enthusiastic language learners, achieve better results and make progress more rapidly. Teachers of foreign languages can use online forums for contacts with their students. Learning through online forums may be used for improving students' writing skills. It should be noted that online forums can be used in language learning for improving

students' writing and communication skills. The teacher's instructions are helpful for the majority of students, mostly for those who are not able to manage their time properly and need reminders about deadlines. Obviously, it helps students to learn more successfully in electronic educational environment. Students become more motivated to achieve better results in language study. Moreover, students' teamwork plays a great role in the integration of individual learning efforts. Teachers control all the stages of learners' individual activities in digital educational environment.

It should be noted that distance or remote learning has become very popular recently. There are various reasons for that: it saves time and financial costs, increases the transparency of assessment and provides opportunities for using student-centered approach. While shifting from a teacher-centered approach to a student-centered approach, it is of great importance to create such learning environment where language learners can participate in communication, get experience and use reflection. The main goal in shifting toward a more student-centered approach is to motivate students to be enthusiastic language learners using individual learning routes. Such terms as *individualized learning* and *personalized learning* are widely used nowadays for representing the learning process that is student oriented. Much attention is given to the learners' abilities, experience and interests. The goal of a personalized learning environment (PLE) is giving opportunities to language learners to realize their potential, to take into consideration their ambitions and needs. Personalized learning has changed the role of students from consumers to co-producers and collaborators. Personalized learning engages students in the process of learning, giving them new learning experience. Language learners can choose their own rate of learning, and they are responsible for proper time management. More than that, they can select learning activities. PLE is considered to be a new concept in designing and developing online learning. It is focused on individual learners, resources and tools. PLE is supposed to improve the effectiveness of learning. PLE is such an environment in which individuals should manage their learning process and are responsible for it. The approach of personalized learning can be used to encourage students to study and it has a great potential to meet educational needs. Learners are given certain freedom to choose the content they like from electronic platforms, instruction becomes more student centered. As a result, it is of great importance for language learners to make the right choice. There is a great variety of individual educational routes in PLE. When learners know their goals and work hard, they can realize them in a better way. Language learners using PLE are motivated, get better marks and can manage their time properly; they become more creative and responsible.

According to the survey, the biggest part of the students who used a personalized learning environment needed motivation for autonomous study. The respondents gave the following answers. Full consent (40 %) and consent (23 %) expressed 63 % of the respondents. A smaller number of students took a neutral position (20 %). According to the results of the survey, 17 % of students disagreed. Language learners whose motivation increased were more numerous (63%) than the students, who took a neutral position concerning this issue (20 %). The number of students who expressed agreement with the first statement was more numerous (63%) compared with those who expressed disagreement (11 %) and expressed absolute disagreement (6%). The hypothesis that students become more motivated and achieve better results in autonomous language study as a consequence of implementation of a student-centered approach has been confirmed.

The results of using a student-centered approach within the context of teaching a foreign language for professional purposes are good: their achievement in the third term was somewhat better than it was in the second term. It presents certain interest to take into consideration the level of students' satisfaction. It is obvious that satisfaction with quality of teaching increased due to the implementation of a student-centered approach. In response to the statement "Autonomous work with teacher's regular monitoring was more productive", the response in the third term was 4.5 compared with 4.0 in the second term. Despite the significantly increased level of team-based activities in the third term, there was not any notable difference in students' evaluation of this activity. Students were separated from each other, as it was distance learning, so it was new experience for them to be a member of a virtual team. The qualitative evidence seems to be of particular significance. There was considerably better qualitative feedback from students in the third term. There were such comments, "A student-centered approach is very useful and it helps me to use my skills in a more productive way. Team work helps me to understand other students' opinions and approaches". The rest of the comments made by the students allow us to come to the following conclusion:

- team work helps students to understand various points of view;
- students start doing autonomous work at a regular basis if the teacher constantly monitors their progress;
- language learners become more confident and enthusiastic.
- the use of innovative technologies and authentic teaching materials make lessons more interesting;
- skills of working in a teamwork may be useful for students in their future workplace.

Using teaching approaches that encourage students' active participation in autonomous work and in teamwork seems to be effective in terms of student motivation and satisfaction. From the teaching perspective, the orientation of teaching methods toward a student-centered approach has proved to be rewarding. However, some issues require further consideration and critical reflection. The student-centered teaching model regards students as active learners without detailed explanation what *an active learner* means. Students can take part in their own learning and in autonomous work in various ways, but these ways are not necessarily active, therefore it presents certain interest to define what active learning implies. Language teachers should be reflective about their conception of activeness in the process of facilitating autonomous learning. The experience discussed above suggests that while an emphasis on being student-centered provided the orienting focus for the subject, its learning value appeared to be in the way it was integrated with teaching practice. In this sense, content for autonomous work was a tool by which language learners could enlarge their knowledge and develop their skills and competences.

7. Conclusion

Taking into consideration the results of the study, it should be noted that a student-centered approach can be widely implemented in teaching foreign languages for professional purposes. Using a student-centered approach in an appropriate individual learning environment requires understanding students' learning styles and preferences, their educational needs. Undoubtedly, nowadays teachers of foreign

languages are also facilitators who have to monitor the process of autonomous work and encourage students to do their tasks regularly. It is obvious that teachers should consider students' abilities and individual qualities as they influence their learning process. Teacher's tasks include motivating and monitoring their students, developing their skills and competences as well as evaluating students' progress in a transparent way. Previously the acquisition of knowledge was considered to be one of the main educational goals. Now it is important to increase students' responsibility for learning outcomes, therefore a reflexive approach may be used not only on the part of the teacher, but also on the part of students. Moreover, implementation of a student-centered approach contributes greatly to students' performance and to the increase of students' interest in language acquisition.

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