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**Topical Issues of Linguistics and Teaching Methods in Business and Professional Communication**

**DEVELOPING READINESS OF FL TEACHERS TO WORK ON EIEE OF IHL**

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***Abstract***

The present study investigates the major obstacles preventing foreign language teachers from effective use of electronic information educational environment (EIEE) at the institutes of higher learning (IHLs) in Russia with the view of developing learner autonomy. Having interviewed 60 respondents from three universities, the authors found out that these obstacles include: insufficient knowledge of information and communication technologies among foreign language professors; poor standards of material and technical resources available at universities; inadequate readiness of FL teachers to apply new information and communication technologies; insufficient level of FL teachers motivation to use innovative IT at work. The authors have worked out a number of pedagogical conditions that should be provided at IHL to overcome the above mentioned barriers: gradual development of FL teachers' readiness to use EIEE (IT competence acquisition on the basis of learning management systems (LMS); FL teachers activity stimulation to work in EIEE through creating modular courses); setting up EIEE in IHL which can translate all possibilities of e-learning into action including LMS, software and documentation. These pedagogical conditions have successfully been tested and implemented at RUDN University.

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**Keywords:** LMS, information and communication technologies, electronic information educational environment (EIEE), electronic resources.



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## 1. Introduction

This study has become a vital issue due to the challenges for the Russian educational policy in the 21st century: the need to adopt the paradigm of life-long learning as a result of the dynamic changes in every area of the Russian society, the new requirements for the graduates of the Institutes of Higher Learning (IHL) as individuals with high degree of autonomy.

At present, the Russian system of higher education comprises a variety of formats, contents and ideas to contribute to humanization of education. Institutes of higher learning take different approaches in an attempt to resolve the issue of humanization of education by changing their curricula, and creating more flexible systems and forms of education aimed at developing learner autonomy, which is considered to be a priority for today's graduates. In the rapidly changing world, the ability to find out and make efficient use of the relevant information is of the highest value with regard to achieving one's desired goals in professional interaction (Hřebáčková, 2019; Ivanova, 2019; Ponomarenko, 2017). This new emphasis stipulates the objectives and syllabi of the contemporary system of higher education: to educate an independent and autonomous learner able to accept responsibility for one's learning, work and life in an age of dynamic and changeable environment.

According to the Russian Federal Law on Education, the duty of the educator is to "develop learners' cognitive activity, independence, initiative, creativity", and "education is a result-oriented process of organizing the learners' activities to acquire knowledge, skills and competence, to gain experience in applying practical skills in everyday life and to build up learners' motivation to be involved in life-long learning".

Russia's Standards of Higher Education stipulate the development of the following competences of the graduates: the ability to find, sort out, interpret, analyze, synthesize and use of the information obtained; to set goals and assign tasks independently and to opt for the best possible solution; to develop a self-fulfillment path for life; time-management skills.

Hence, the primary objective of the system of higher education is to help the learner create motivation with a view of his/her becoming a more independent and autonomous personality capable of changing society and himself/herself from the perspective of humanism.

In the current conditions, however, the level of learner autonomy of the graduates of Russian IHLs is at odds with the above mentioned requirements. In this context, one of the most topical issues is the introduction of new teaching techniques and methods to the development of learner autonomy taking into account local mentality, customs, traditions and beliefs deeply rooted in the society, review of traditional and, to a certain extent, out-of-date approaches to the learning process, creation and implementation of electronic information and educational environment.

Nowadays, foreign languages play an increasingly important role within the framework of qualitative structural changes taking place in the system of higher education in Russia. Modern society urgently needs secondary linguistic personalities rather than graduates who merely speak a foreign language to some degree. Recently the process of globalization, better intercultural, economic and political cooperation has contributed to an increase in demand for translators of vocationally oriented texts. To meet the demand, nonlinguistic institutions of higher learning are also engaged in training of such interpreters and translators. Obviously, since ESP students have less time to learn a foreign language in the curriculum

compared to students of linguistic universities, they need to develop their autonomy and work persistently to become professionals in the field.

Professor's role in developing students' autonomy is quite significant. Indeed, professors have to be motivated, open-minded and focused on achieving the goal. They also have to be aware and make use of modern computer technologies and develop their competences in this field. New expectations for university teachers' performance and accountability make them face new challenges and build up new knowledge and skills. Besides, in all their teaching activities professors are supposed to be cable of independently elaborating their professional skills.

So, as teachers we need to encourage autonomy within the classroom, to help learners become independent so that they could deal with learning on their own, to equip them with the necessary strategies and skills to learn foreign languages autonomously, to let go and give students both the power and the control to learn in a more independent, autonomous fashion. In the modern world, it is a 21st century skill that they cannot afford to graduate the university without.

## **2. Problem Statement**

At the moment Western and Russian scholars have different views on the teacher's role and the educational institution in developing students' autonomy (Allwright, 1990; Anikina, 2011; Apanovich, 2003; Chernova et al., 2018; Chernova et al., 2019; Chernova et al., 2020a, 2020b; Little, 1991; Littlewood, 1999; Luksha, 2008; Nasonova, 2008 and others). For Western researchers being a fully autonomous student means taking responsibility for one's own learning, while the teacher or the IHL does not actively participate in the process. But to our mind, such an approach is unlikely to be viable in Russia, since it runs counter the mentality of the Russian people.

However, we totally agree with Nunan (2000), who contends that autonomy is not an all-or-nothing concept, that all learners could be trained to develop a degree of autonomy, but it is a gradual, piecemeal process, and we often only see the benefit of such a thing towards the end of the learning process.

So, in the process of building learner autonomy, we are to bear in mind that for centuries the subordination and teacher's authority have been the foundation of the Russian system of education. Thus, we consider that learner autonomy in Russia's IHL should be formed gradually and guided by the teacher taking into account all the requirements of formal education (Litvinov & Chernova, 2018).

As Aoki (2008) points out, not every learner is born with autonomy; therefore fostering autonomy in learners is the teacher's task.

In order to organize the process of developing the autonomy of learners (in our study – future translators in the field of professional communication), modern universities are to effectively use e-learning resources to attain the goals of electronic education, namely: to develop the student's personality, meet the needs of modern society taking into consideration IT development, globalization and mass communication; improve all levels of the educational process (Goloshumova & Chernova 2017).

At the moment in Russia it is necessary to create an EIEE (Gosudarev, 2016) at universities, which will help increase the efficiency of higher education on the basis of individualization and intensification to develop each student's ability to continue personal growth; make a wide range of opportunities for professional updating; create an environment to boost students' motivation; help adapt a positive attitude

toward the subjects they study and get prepared to live and work in the information society; foster skills of productive learning self-organization (Goloshumova & Chernova 2017).

The authors of the article fully share Little's (1995) point of view that we can't expect from teachers to develop autonomy in their students if they do not know what it means to be autonomous.

### **3. Research Questions**

Taking into account the fact that Russian professors at IHLs still fall behind their Western counterparts in the use of different LMSs in their work, along with a number of specific features of Russian educational system, its traditions and learning styles, the role of the teacher in this process, we have formulated the research questions as follows:

1. What are the barriers to the wider use of EIEE in Russian IHLs to develop learner autonomy?
2. What pedagogical conditions should be provided for teachers to make a more extensive application of EIEE?
3. What components make up teacher's readiness to work in EIEE and what are their characteristics?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

This research focuses on investigating the pedagogical conditions necessary to prepare FL teachers to make full use of EIEE at IHLs for the development of learner autonomy, along with the factors that influence this process, the challenges that teachers face, and components of the teacher's readiness to work in EIEE.

### **5. Research Methods**

The research used the data collected by the Departments of Foreign Languages of the Faculty of Economics and the Academy of Engineering at RUDN University, the Department of Foreign and Russian Philology of Moscow State University of Psychology and Education (MSUPE) and the Department of Foreign Languages of Moscow State Pedagogical University (MSPU). The dataset consisted of questionnaires which were answered by 60 FL teachers. Of the participants, 40 (66.7%) were professors at RUDN University where EIEE is being actively implemented and quite strongly supported analytically (Malyuga, 2016; Polyakova & Ivanova, 2014; Starostina, 2018). Besides, 10 respondents (16.6%) represented MSUPE and 10 (16.6%) were from MSPU. Five respondents (8.3%) were male and 54 (91.7%) were female. The majority of respondents (83.3%) are PhDs. All participants (100%) have been teaching foreign languages for more than five years.

The questionnaire of the dataset is drawn up by Grabko (2015) and modified by the authors in accordance with the aim of the study. All questionnaire items were presented in Russian and used a three-point scale.

## 6. Findings

After analyzing the questionnaires, the authors came to the conclusion that in Russian IHLs the following factors can be of no small concern to a wider implementation of EIEE:

- 1) Limited (incomplete) preliminary knowledge of IT possessed by foreign language teachers;
- 2) Insufficient provision of material and technical resources for FL teachers;
- 3) Inadequate preparedness level of FL teachers to apply new information and communication technologies in the teaching process;
- 4) Insufficient FL teachers' motivation to use new information and communication technologies in their work.

Some of the respondents (8.3%) noted that they don't have enough time to develop a course in EIEE because of a heavy load of paper work.

FL teachers' preparedness to use new information and communication technologies is a goal-oriented continuous process to acquire new professional knowledge and skills in applying IT technologies (including e-learning), constantly developing EIEE of IHLs in accordance with the aim of building professional competencies of FL teachers to boost their readiness to implement IT.

Within the scope of this research at RUDN University we proved the following pedagogical conditions are to be provided in IHLs for FL teachers to make a more extensive use of EIEE: 1) gradual development of FL teachers' readiness to use EIEE (development of basic ICT – competence on the basis of LMS; development of readiness of FL teachers to work in EIEE through their modular courses); 2) establishing EIEE in IHLs which can translate all possibilities of e-learning, including LMS, software and documentation into action. Setting up EIEE in IHLs must be based on the following principles: 1) adherence to the international trends of e-learning development; 2) EIEE should be open (it will allow any university departments to integrate their educational and learning activities into general system of education); 3) availability of fast and easy access to university e-learning resources; 4) compliance with the IHL requirements for the quality of education; 5) financial and material resource saving; 6) respecting right of authorship.

FL teachers' readiness to work in EIEE involves integrative professional and personal characteristics, including the need to work in EIEE to enhance teaching process, motivation for self-education in information and communication technologies and EIEE; knowledge and skills necessary to apply information and communication technologies.

According to V.I. Baidenko, I.A. Zimnyaya and A.V. Khutorskoy (as cited in Grabko, 2015), FL teachers' readiness to work in EIEE consists of the following components: motivational, cognitive, and technological ones. There are three levels of their IT competence: high, medium, and low. The process of developing teachers' readiness to work in EIEE means a qualitative transition from a low to higher level.

It's worth noticing that in RUDN University both pedagogical conditions have been met, namely free courses for FL teachers and constant support of the technical staff, along with the annual contests for the best course in LMS MOODLE, which contributed to an upgrade in results. Almost 100% of academic staff can effectively use EIEE at the moment.

## 7. Conclusion

The present study has investigated several factors that can become a barrier on the way of FL teachers' wider use of EIEE in Russian IHLs for the development of learner autonomy. The results indicate that those include: FL teacher's limited preliminary knowledge of information and communication technologies; insufficient provision of material and technical resources for FL teachers; inadequate preparedness level of FL teachers to apply new information and communication technologies in the teaching process; low motivation of FL teachers to use new information and communication technologies in their work.

The authors developed a hypothesis and theoretically proved that the following pedagogical conditions can significantly change the current situation for the better: gradual development of FL teachers' readiness to use EIEE (development of basic IT-competence on the basis of LMS; development of readiness of FL teachers to work in EIEE via their modular courses); 2) setting up EIEE in IHL which can translate all possibilities of e-learning, including LMS, software and documentation into action.

The implementation of the proposed pedagogical conditions at RUDN University resulted in a drastic rise in the level of FL teachers' readiness to work in EIEE.

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