

CURRENT PROBLEMS IN ORGANIZING INDEPENDENT LEARNING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSES

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Annotation

This article examines the current problems related to the organization of independent learning in English language classes in higher education institutions. The study highlights the increasing role of independent learning in the context of the credit-module system and learner-centered education. Particular attention is paid to the integration of independent learning into English language curricula, the distribution of classroom and independent study hours, the roles of teachers and students, the consistency of independent learning assignments, and the availability of assessment and self-assessment mechanisms. Based on a comparative analysis of English language curricula used in selected higher education institutions of Uzbekistan, the article identifies several methodological shortcomings, including weak content integration, lack of clearly defined teacher and student roles, insufficient task sequencing, absence of assessment criteria, and limited adaptability to students' real needs.

Keywords

independent learning, English language teaching, higher education, credit-module system, curriculum integration, learner autonomy, self-management, feedback, self-assessment, English for Economics, innovative approaches.

Introduction. By the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, as educational philosophies gradually shifted toward learner-centered education, independent learning became an official structural component that allowed students to design their own learning pathways. This meant that, in practice, the form of education taking place only during classroom interaction between the teacher and students was recognized as insufficient for deep mastery of educational content. As UNESCO emphasizes, education in the twenty-first century should be based on the principle of "learning to learn," that is, it should develop students' competencies for acquiring knowledge independently and applying it in practice. Later, with the introduction of the credit-module system in

higher education, particularly the 1:1 ratio – one hour of classroom instruction and one hour of independent learning – this form of learning became a way of quantitatively assessing independent study hours and including them in official curricula.

Literature review. Subsequently, supporters of advanced higher education promoted the view that students should work independently for more hours than they spend in practical classes with the teacher, and that this requirement should be reflected in curricula and syllabi []. By analyzing the reasons underlying these views, it becomes clear that they are grounded in certain pedagogical principles. These principles can be explained as follows.

First, the main task of the higher education system is not only to provide knowledge within a particular subject, but also to train mature specialists who are able to think independently and make decisions in their professional activity. From this perspective, the significant proportion of independent learning hours in higher education institutions is not accidental; rather, it is a logical and methodological requirement of the educational process.

Second, unlike at the general education level, in higher education the student is not regarded as a learner fully dependent on the teacher, but as an active subject of his or her own learning activity. In the process of independent learning, the student does not receive knowledge in a ready-made form, but acquires it through searching, analyzing, generalizing and applying it in practice. It is precisely this process that develops students' critical and logical thinking abilities.

Third, the large share of independent learning hours plays an important role in developing students' skills of self-learning and self-management. The student learns how to set goals, plan time effectively and evaluate the results of his or her learning activity. These skills are recognized as key competencies in the modern educational paradigm and cannot be fully developed within classroom lessons alone.

Fourth, independent learning creates opportunities for adapting to the modern requirements of the labor market. Today, a specialist is expected not only to rely on existing knowledge, but also to independently acquire new knowledge and continuously develop professional activity. In this respect, independent learning ensures students' readiness for lifelong learning.

Fifth, the large proportion of independent learning hours in higher education is also directly connected with preparing students for research activity. In the process of completing academic assignments such as essays, course papers and graduation qualification papers, students acquire skills in working with sources,

providing scientific argumentation and drawing analytical conclusions. This, in turn, contributes to the formation of their scientific thinking.

As a result of these views, today, if we observe the curricula of higher education institutions throughout the world, including local higher education institutions, it becomes evident that independent learning hours are several times greater than classroom hours.

Higher education institution	Practical hours	class Independent hours	learning Total
Tashkent State University of Economics	132 hours	168 hours	300 hours
Bukhara State University	108 hours	192 hours	300 hours
Gulistan State University	120 hours	180 hours	300 hours
Samarkand State University	120 hours	180 hours	300 hours
Jizzakh Polytechnic Institute	120 hours	180 hours	300 hours

Table 1. Ratio of annual practical classes and independent learning hours in higher education institutions

Analysis and results. At this point, it is necessary to clarify the concept of independent learning. Leading scholars in this field, including Thomas R., Sanders S., Doust J., Beller E. and Glasziou P., interpret independent learning as a process in which students participate as active subjects of their own learning activity; the educational content and curriculum guide their activity; the teacher provides methodological guidance; and students acquire knowledge individually or in cooperation with peers, while the learning process remains organized within the framework of the established core educational content [].

In the guidelines for organizing and monitoring students' independent learning within the credit-module system in higher education institutions, this concept is defined as a systematic activity aimed at forming theoretical knowledge, practical skills and competencies through the independent mastery of learning materials, the creative and independent completion of tasks of various levels of complexity, and the performance of practical assignments both inside and outside the classroom []. Based on this definition, it can be stated that in this process the learner takes initiative, masters learning materials and develops knowledge and skills independently. The teacher serves as a guide and consultant, while the learner becomes the main participant in his or her own learning activity.

The manual entitled *Integrating Independent Learning with the Curriculum*, developed by the CIEL Language Support Network, particularly emphasizes that the structure of the curriculum is an important factor in the successful or unsuccessful implementation of independent learning. The manual states that even if other key factors, such as educational policy, management, teacher development, student preparation and learning resources, are optimally provided, success may remain limited if the curriculum does not prioritize the development of independent learning and does not allocate time for it in the academic schedule [].

Therefore, the effectiveness of independent learning is primarily determined by the degree of its integration with the curriculum. In the absence of such integration, independent learning does not become a systematic process and is carried out only by students with a high level of intrinsic motivation []. For this reason, the following criteria are of particular importance in organizing and evaluating independent learning. These criteria were summarized on the basis of the curriculum design principles proposed in the CIEL Language Support Network manual *Integrating Independent Learning with the Curriculum*.

First, independent learning should be meaningfully aligned with the curriculum. Independent learning assignments should be directly connected with the language material studied in classroom lessons and should serve to consolidate and deepen it. Independent activity should not be regarded as a separate or secondary process, but as a logical continuation of the curriculum.

Second, specific time and space should be allocated for independent learning in the curriculum. It is important that independent learning hours be officially defined in the curriculum and that students be able to plan this activity. If no time is allocated for independent learning, students do not perceive it as a priority learning activity.

Third, the roles of the teacher and the student should be clearly defined. In the process of independent learning, the teacher should act not as a controller, but as a guide and consultant, while the student should participate as a responsible subject of his or her own learning process. Such interaction helps develop students' sense of ownership of their education.

Fourth, independent learning assignments should be goal-oriented and consistent. The tasks should be aimed at the gradual development of language competencies and should be organized according to a logical sequence and increasing level of complexity. This ensures continuity in students' development.

Fifth, assessment and self-assessment mechanisms should be available. The results of independent learning should be assessed according to clear criteria, and

students should have opportunities to analyze their own progress. The assessment process should function as a tool for encouraging independent learning.

Sixth, the system should be adaptable to students' needs and the educational context. Independent learning should not be organized on the basis of a universal manual alone, but should take into account the needs, opportunities and priorities of a specific educational environment. This increases the practical effectiveness of independent learning.

The above-mentioned criteria show that the success of independent learning depends not on separate methodological materials, but on its deep and systematic integration into the language curriculum. The integration of independent learning into the curriculum should not be limited only to the number of allocated hours; rather, it also requires the development of clear and detailed guidelines based on the criteria mentioned above. Based on this, it was considered appropriate to analyze the curricula currently used in selected higher education institutions in the field of Economics according to these criteria for organizing independent learning.

Criteria	TSUE	GulSU	BukhSU	SamSU	JizPI
Content alignment of independent learning with the curriculum	High level of integration. Independent learning assignments are aimed at supplementing and strengthening the topics covered in classroom lessons.	Low level of integration. Independent learning topics consist of random themes and are not organized according to a specific sequence.	Medium level of integration. Independent learning topics partially supplement classroom lessons; however, the assignments are not designed to consolidate the acquired knowledge.	Medium level of integration. Independent learning topics are not meaningfully aligned with practical classes. Practical classes are mainly focused on grammar, while independent learning topics include economic themes.	Low level of integration. The content of independent learning does not reinforce classroom lessons. The assignments are not aimed at deepening acquired knowledge and skills.
Allocation of specific time and space for independent learning in the curriculum	Independent learning hours are clearly defined. Within the credit-module system, independent learning	Independent learning hours are clearly defined. Within the credit-module system, independent	Independent learning hours are clearly defined. Within the credit-module system, independent	Independent learning hours are clearly defined. Within the credit-module system, independent learning	Independent learning hours are clearly defined. Within the credit-module system, independent

Criteria	TSUE	GulSU	BukhSU	SamSU	JizPI
	constitutes an important part of the course workload.	learning constitutes an important part of the course workload.	learning constitutes an important part of the course workload.	constitutes an important part of the course workload.	learning constitutes an important part of the course workload.
Clear definition of teacher and student roles	No explanation or guideline is provided regarding the roles of the teacher and the student.	No explanation or guideline is provided regarding the roles of the teacher and the student.	No explanation or guideline is provided regarding the roles of the teacher and the student.	No explanation or guideline is provided regarding the roles of the teacher and the student.	No explanation or guideline is provided regarding the roles of the teacher and the student.
Goal orientation and consistency of independent learning assignments	Independent learning assignments include tasks of different complexity. However, the objectives of the tasks are not stated, and they are not presented in a consistent sequence.	Independent learning topics are provided, but assignments intended for independent learning are not included.	Independent learning assignments are presented in a general form. However, their objectives are not indicated, and they are not organized according to consistency or logical sequence.	Independent learning assignments are not provided.	Independent learning assignments are presented as a general list, but their objectives are not explained. They do not have a consistent sequence.
Availability of assessment and self-assessment mechanisms	Assessment mechanisms aimed at independent learning are completely absent.	Assessment mechanisms aimed at independent learning are completely absent.	Assessment mechanisms aimed at independent learning are completely absent.	Assessment mechanisms aimed at independent learning are completely absent.	Assessment mechanisms aimed at independent learning are completely absent.
Adaptability to students' needs and educational context	The content of independent learning corresponds to students' real needs and language level.	The content of independent learning corresponds to students' language level but does not	The content of independent learning corresponds to students' language level, but it does not	The content of independent learning corresponds to students' language level, but does not	The content of independent learning does not correspond to students' language level or real needs.

Criteria	TSUE	GulSU	BukhSU	SamSU	JizPI
	Optional assignments are provided.	meet their real needs. No optional assignments are provided.	meet their real needs. Optional assignments are not available.	reflect their real needs. No optional assignments are provided.	No optional assignments are provided.

Table 2. Comparative Analysis of the Integration of Independent Learning into the Curriculum in Higher Education Institutions

The comparative analysis presented in Table 2.2.2 shows that, although independent learning hours are officially allocated in all selected higher education institutions, the methodological organization of this process remains insufficiently developed. In particular, the analysis reveals that independent learning is often formally included in the curriculum, but its content, objectives, assessment mechanisms and role distribution are not clearly defined. This creates a methodological gap between the declared importance of independent learning and its actual implementation in English language education.

In most cases, independent learning tasks are either not sufficiently connected with classroom activities or are presented in a general and unsystematic form. This weakens the continuity of language learning and limits the possibility of using independent learning as a tool for developing students' communicative competence, professional vocabulary, critical thinking and self-management skills. Moreover, the absence of clearly defined teacher and student roles prevents the formation of an effective pedagogical partnership in which the teacher acts as a facilitator and the student as an active and responsible learner.

Another significant problem is the lack of assessment and self-assessment mechanisms. If independent learning outcomes are not assessed according to clear criteria, students may perceive this activity as a formal requirement rather than as an essential part of their learning process. The absence of self-assessment tools also limits students' ability to reflect on their own progress, identify weaknesses and plan further learning strategies. This, in turn, negatively affects learner autonomy and motivation.

The findings also indicate that independent learning is not always adapted to students' real needs, language levels and professional contexts. In particular, for students majoring in Economics, independent learning tasks should be linked with professional communication, economic terminology, business situations, problem-solving and analytical activities in English. Without such adaptation, independent learning fails to contribute fully to students' future professional competence.

Conclusion. The analysis of English language curricula used in selected higher education institutions demonstrates that independent learning is formally present in all examined programs. Nevertheless, several methodological problems remain unresolved. These include insufficient content alignment with classroom lessons, unclear teacher and student roles, lack of goal-oriented and sequenced tasks, absence of assessment and self-assessment mechanisms, and limited adaptation to students' real needs and professional contexts. Therefore, independent learning in English language teaching should be organized as a systematic, purposeful and diagnostically measurable process. It is necessary to develop independent learning assignments that are directly connected with classroom topics, gradually increase in complexity, reflect students' professional needs, and include opportunities for reflection, feedback and self-assessment. In this regard, digital platforms such as HEMIS, Moodle, Google Classroom and other learning management systems can be used not only for uploading assignments, but also for organizing interaction, providing feedback, monitoring progress and supporting students' reflective learning.