
The research of autonomous learning aptitude of students of economic specialities

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Abstract: The article deals with the concept of autonomous learning in the context of teaching students majoring in economics and a study of the readiness of higher education students for autonomous learning was conducted. It is determined that autonomy means the ability to be responsible for a productive learning and provides an opportunity to choose materials, resources, learning strategies, taking into account students' individual needs and opportunities, while predicting personal control over the content, process and results of studying. A survey on the readiness of students for the autonomous learning in the process of studying selective disciplines showed the students' low ability to plan their own learning activities and almost complete lack of ability to adapt to the changes of a learning context. At the same time, a high percentage of students who can form their own learning goals and evaluate the results of their own learning was identified. The survey also demonstrated the respondents' high willingness to identify their own weaknesses in their learning process and the average level of motivation for own studying. It is generally known that motivation is considered as an important factor in the development of autonomous learning. It is noted that internal and external motivation can affect the end result of learning. It is concluded that the formation of the competence of autonomous learning is one of the priority tasks of higher education, since it meets the needs of the society in specialists capable to autonomously acquire knowledge, skills and abilities, adapt to constantly changing professional conditions.

Keywords: aptitude, autonomy, levels of autonomy, learning process, technologies, higher education, motivation, autonomy formation.

1. Introduction

The problem of "autonomy" in the sphere of higher education in Ukraine has gained an important meaning due to the tendencies connected with modern educational changes which are closely linked to the process of globalization, integration into international academic area, where the importance of self-education is constantly growing, which requires independent, individual and flexible work from both teachers and students.

2. Object and subject of research

Qualified professionals with higher economic education play a special role in the modern world. The aforementioned specialists are intended to make innovations in the economic sphere, which, after all, transform, refine the whole structure of our lives in general. Professional training of economic specialists in the conditions of innovative economic development is an urgent issue. Over the last period, attempts to investigate problems related to the training of economic specialists have been made.

3. Target of research

The aim of the article is to analyze the autonomous learning aptitude of students of economic specialities in higher educational establishments in Ukraine.

4. Literature analysis

In order to understand the question of “autonomy” aptitude we need to spot the light on “autonomy” itself. This phenomenon is the aim of research done by well-known international scientists such as J. Dewey, H. Holec [1], Ph. Benson, P. Voller, J. Little, D. Nunan). The most general definition describes “autonomy” as the ability to take responsibility for one’s own learning [1, 2, 3, 4]. The term “autonomy” itself is complex. Some sources relate its origin with the field of politics and philosophy. For example, according to Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy (Blackburn S., 2016) “autonomy” is the capacity of self-government. Moreover, as Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics (McLean I. and McMillan A., 2009) states “autonomy” is a self-government that can be applied both to an individual person and to a group or an institution [5, 6].

There are two other notions that come close to the “autonomy” phenomenon. They are “self-instruction” and “independent learning”. L. Graham (1992) holds the view that self-instruction involves the use of self-statements to direct or self-regulate behavior, while Ph. Candy (1991) defines independent learning as a process, a method and a philosophy of education in which a student acquires knowledge by his or her own efforts and develops the ability for inquiry and critical evaluation. As a result, these terms must be interpreted with caution because the slight difference between autonomy and independent learning can be observed [7].

Some scholars connect the notion “autonomy” exclusively with organizational sphere of higher educational establishment. This phenomenon is also important and crucial for a successful management of an institution, but it is not the aim of this paper.

5. Research methods

It is crucial for our experiment to state that one of the ways of autonomous learning realization is by means of selective disciplines. According to the general definition, selective disciplines, or individual educational trajectory of learning, is an individual way of realizing the personal potential of the applicant of education, which is formed taking into account his/her abilities, interests, needs, motivation, opportunities and experience, which is based on the choice of education, subjects of educational activity and their proposed educational programs, disciplines and their level of complexity, methods and means of teaching [8].

Further attempts to study the origin of the concept of selective disciplines send us to the works of Karl Rogers, American psychologist and the main developer of psychotherapy oriented on the personality, who emphasizes that the student is actively involved in the formation of his/her own way of learning [9].

Ukrainian higher educational establishments have been applying the practice of selective disciplines since 2014. It was then that the Law of Ukraine "On Higher Education" came into force,

which allows Ukrainian students to choose about one fourth of subjects from the educational curriculum [10]. In this regard, we tried to find out the level of autonomous learning aptitude of future economists while choosing their selective disciplines. The experiment was made on the basis of the University of Customs and Finance (Dnipro, Ukraine) among the first year course students and third year course students (Faculty of Economics). The questionnaire, which was adapted from the one made by O. Los and N. Hahina, 2021, consisted of 12 questions with the following possible answers: “yes”, “no”, “perhaps”, “difficult to answer” and “never”. The aim of the questionnaire was to identify the conscious ability of the students for autonomous learning and comprised questions about the planning of students’ own learning activity, the formation of students’ own learning goals, the content of selective disciplines, the desire to work and get results, choose additional educational materials, students’ motivation for learning and self-estimation connected with educational process. [11].

6. Research results

The questions were created not to measure the level of students’ autonomy. The main idea of the questionnaire was to identify the aptitude for autonomous learning of selective disciplines, where the level of students’ autonomy and motivation, undoubtedly, reaches the highest point. The questions were arranged in such a way that it would start at the easiest level of aptitude, for example, having idea about the content of the discipline and ending with more important notions to study, such as interconnection between the material, motivation and possible changes in the curriculum.

The analysis of the results obtained help us to state that students do not comprehend the autonomy aptitude in the same way. See the results in the fig. 1.

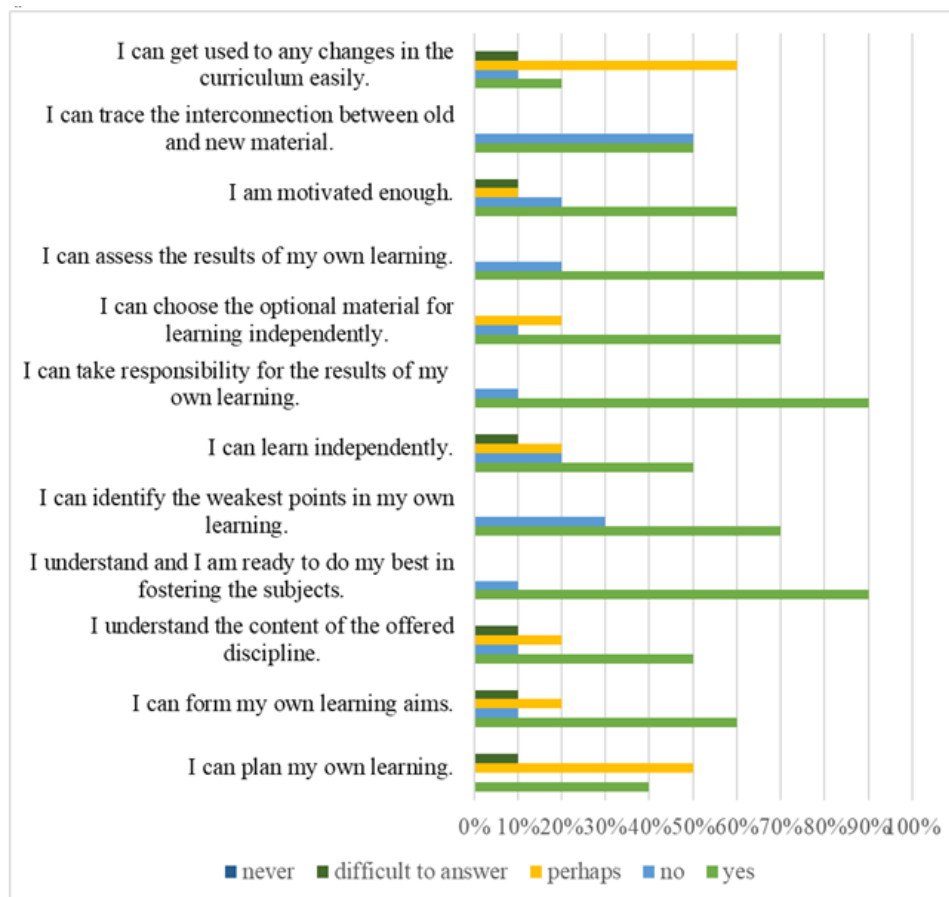


Fig. 1. Results of the questionnaire

So, the answers to question number one show that only 40% of respondents believe to be sure about their own learning planning. At the same time for 50% of students it is difficult to answer the question that may mean that either they have never thought about it before or they are just not able to outline the main features of educational activity.

The second question, which asks about learning aims, has more diverse range of answers. It is important to note that the answers of about 10% of the students were “no”. On the one hand, it is only one tenth of the total number and may be not so crucial, but, on the other hand, even the presence of these 10% show there are still people who simply cannot identify their own learning aims or even are not sure in their choice of profession. More than a half of positive answers (60%) assure us and give a kind of hope that yet we have students who have already decided on the aims of own learning and are ready to reach the goals in their education.

Before we can comment on the third question, it is highly recommended to highlight some key aspects of selective disciplines, as question number three is about the content of the selective disciplines. As is stated earlier, selective disciplines are a part of educational program of any higher educational establishment in Ukraine. It proves to be a sign of a student-centered approach in Ukrainian system that directly leads to the autonomous learning. So, the results obtained show that 50% of respondents are able to understand the content, 20% - hesitate and 20% do not know the answer to this question. For our research, it is interesting to mention that 10% of participants answered in the negative form that proves the lack of the awareness about modern skills necessary for independent learning and uncertainty of the students in their own learning. The next questions indicate rather high level of aptitude in the area of identifying weak sides and the preparation for learning. For example, in question number three “I understand and I am ready to do my best in mastering the subjects” only 10% of respondents replied in the negative form. In question number four about identifying the weak points of own learning students’ answers showed 90% of “yes” answers.

The sixth question, about individual learning, displays that 50% of respondents are ready to preform it, whereas 20% are not. It reflects the necessity to develop autonomous work more deeply. 20% consider it possible to study independently.

The majority of “yes” answer (90%) to the question number seven about taking responsibilities is really impressive, but contradicts the rest of answers, which may be explained by the fact that the students are not ready for the “autonomy” as a concept and interpret it as a single case in the process of learning. The explanation of the next question (question number seven – “I can take responsibility for the results of my own learning”) requires some additional information. Here, it is essential to indicate the role of a teacher in the process of students’ learning. The role of a teacher is considered to be a controversial moment regarding learning “autonomy”. When applying the traditional form of learning, it is the teacher who provides knowledge, sets goals and tasks of learning, organizes a reflection on the work performed by students. The concept of autonomy involves the same actions, but from the student him/herself. It should be noted that the teacher's participation is not reduced to zero. As stated by S. Yan, a Chinese researcher, the teacher can act in an occasional role in autonomous training as [12]:

1) an organizer - the role of the teacher is characterized by the organization of educational activity;

2) a facilitator - the teacher acts as an assistant (psychosocial and technical support). Psychosocial support involves the creation of positive motivation in students, and technical support is aimed at helping planning learning, assessing the activities of reading and obtaining knowledge;

3) a consultant is an example of successful communication between the teacher and the student. The results help us understand that students still need teachers support in their learning process, for example, choosing additional material.

The received results to the question number nine are really interesting for our research. The analysis of the feedback to the question number nine was rather predictable and expected (“yes” – 80%) due to the development and accessibility of digital technologies. The great number of online

platforms, websites and apps (free and paid ones) with the possibility of immediate evaluation of students' results or, in case of full answer, the opportunity to get the assessment into your email, makes the process of self-checking interesting, funny, entertaining, i.e. students are more involved in the learning process. Here we can give the example of some resources that are used by teachers and students: educational games (e.g. "Pandemic", "Fake News", "Backpack", "Trivia Time"); interactive quizzes (e.g. "Kahoot", "Quizlet", "ClassDojo", "Edmodo"); virtual game universes (e.g., "Minecraft Edu", "Second Life", "Hytale"); gamified learning management systems (e.g. "Classcraft", "Lingua Attack", "Socrative", "DyKnow") [13].

One more fact should be stated about motivation. Autonomy and motivation were studied and investigated from different points of view and practices, in order to establish their ontological and epistemological principles and to explain their interdependence. Since pedagogical practices are of great interest to teachers and students, studying independence and motivation concerns both [14]. Only 60% of participants responded positively to the question about motivation, despite the fact that 90% showed their readiness to do their best in learning. 20% are not motivated at all plus 10% found it difficult to answer and 10% said "perhaps".

Figures depicting results for the next question (#11) were divided into two categories: 50% of respondents said "yes" and 50% answers were "perhaps" that means rather little number of students being able to trace the difference between "old" and "new" educational material. And the last question of the questionnaire about the changes in the curriculum was really disputable. 20% showed their readiness to get accustomed to any changes, while 10% are not ready at all, 60% are not sure yet and for 10% it is difficult to decide. It should be pointed here that such "readiness" to follow any changes is of primary importance now as it is a part of meta-skills. According to the general definition they are the crucial characteristics of modern society and lead to life-long learning that helps prepare people for future change [15]. In highlighting these skills, it is compulsory to mention that one of the peculiar features of metaskills are the flexibility and the ability to get accustomed to fast-appearing changes. That is why the results show a low level of metaskills among students.

7. Prospects for further research development

The question of learning autonomy is really important in modern society and contemporary educational process. As a constituent part of metaskills this phenomenon needs further research and analysis because it touches all spheres of educational process and requires thorough investigation due to the variety of components and areas of implementation in academic environment.

8. Conclusions

To sum up, we can state that gaining autonomous learning competence by the students should become one of the priority tasks in the higher education system because it meets the need of society in specialists who can independently and effectively acquire the necessary knowledge and master the necessary skills and abilities, adapt to constantly changing conditions of academic and professional environment. Educational autonomy involves the presence of high levels of motivation, confidence in students' capabilities, freedom of choice of educational disciplines, additional resources, methods, strategies proposed by a teacher, responsible attitude to the learning process and learning results. The results of the questionnaire show that the percentage of learning aptitude for autonomous learning of the students interviewed is not clearly high or low. Some answers indicate awareness and autonomy readiness, for example, the possibility of evaluating the results of own learning. On the other hand, the issue of adaptation to the inevitable changes or building own learning activity is at a fairly low level.

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