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**THE ROLE OF INDEPENDENT LEARNING IN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN THE EPOCH  
OF DIGITALIZATION**

*Mamadaliyeva Nargiza Abdurasulovna*

*Doctorate student at Namangan state institute of foreign languages Uzbekistan*

*E-mail: [nrgzmmdlv@gmail.com](mailto:nrgzmmdlv@gmail.com)*

*Orcid: [0000-0003-2158-6656](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2158-6656) 890-740-46-86*

**Abstract:** In the context of increasing digitalization, the role of independent learning in foreign language education has become more significant than ever. This paper explores the pedagogical and psychological foundations of independent work among ESP (English for Specific Purposes) students, particularly within the framework of higher education. Drawing on the theories of P. I. Pidkasistiy, S. V. Akmanova, the study investigates how independent learning fosters self-concept development, motivation, autonomy, and interdisciplinary integration. Empirical data were gathered from a Google Forms survey involving first-year management students, analyzing their perceptions and usage of digital tools in independent English study. The findings indicate a strong preference for multimedia-supported learning (e.g., video lessons, interactive tests, mobile apps), and highlight the importance of essay writing and creative tasks in language acquisition. The study concludes that well-structured, ICT-integrated independent work enhances students’ professional competencies and prepares them for lifelong learning in a digital society.

**Keywords:** independent learning, ESP students, digitalization in education, self-concept, ICT in language learning, multimedia tools, higher education pedagogy, student motivation, autonomous learning, English for specific purposes

The upbringing and education of the current generation, born into the digital age, demands a fundamentally new pedagogical approach. Today’s learners often prioritize visual content and videos over reading and working with texts; their clip-thinking and multitasking abilities deserve particular attention. While the modern education system increasingly focuses on independent learning, students’ ability to manage this process autonomously requires specific competencies. The role of the teacher has shifted—from being the main source of knowledge to acting as a facilitator guiding the student’s independent search in the age of information. As such, educators must instill in students an awareness of their own responsibility in learning independently.

In the fields of pedagogy and methodology, the issue of organizing students’ self-directed learning has become even more relevant. With the growing diversity of independent learning types, their monitoring and evaluation have also become more complex. Higher education institutions often lack a comprehensive understanding of the essence of “independent learning.” This concept is multifaceted, encompassing psychological, physiological, organizational, and didactic aspects

It is important to distinguish between the concepts of “independent activity” and “independent learning” in pedagogy. These are not identical and should not be used interchangeably.

Independent learning, in its truest sense, promotes students’ autonomy. According to P. I. Pidkasistiy, independent work is not a method or form of instruction but a means of engaging students in independent activities. It represents a logical and psychological form of structuring such work.

The focus of this study is the independent learning practices of students in acquiring English as a foreign language. In our view, independent work is not synonymous with independent activity.

When organized properly, independent learning plays a significant role in successful language acquisition, offering psychological and pedagogical advantages.

The words “independence” and “independent” denote both a specific type of activity performed by an individual and a personality trait. Independence encompasses conscious intention, initiative, willpower, and voluntary action uninfluenced by external pressure.

An analysis of pedagogical and methodological literature shows that independent work has long been a central focus of educational research. Scholars such as K. D. Ushinskiy, T. J. Ilina, P. I. Pidkasistiy, and Yu. K. Babanskiy have addressed the issue in depth. Based on classroom observations, B. P. Yesipov emphasized that independent student tasks are carried out without the direct involvement of the teacher, although the teacher defines the assignment and sets the timeline. Students strive consciously to meet the objective, using both mental and physical efforts to express and demonstrate their capabilities.

Independent work encompasses a broad spectrum of student activities, both within and outside the classroom. The teacher may or may not play an organizational role in this process.

According to Yu. N. Tochilina, independent work is not only a type of activity but also a method and tool for teaching and learning.

In education, student independence is a key condition for activating cognitive processes. Given the rapidly evolving technology, increasing complexity of scientific knowledge, and changing modern demands, independent learning is essential in preparing students for professional competencies.

For bachelor’s degree students in ESP (English for Specific Purposes) programs, the curriculum explicitly allocates separate hours for classroom learning and independent study. Therefore, organizing and structuring independent work has become a vital and timely concern. Modern education aims to develop socially mobile and adaptable specialists through continuous professional development. Independent learning is increasingly becoming a core component of this process, enabling students to engage in lifelong learning, expand and refresh their knowledge, and apply it creatively in practice.

Although often viewed as similar, independent work, self-directed learning, and self-discipline share overlapping but distinct characteristics. These processes collectively form the foundation for personal development. Readiness for independent work is a crucial prerequisite for self-education, autonomy, and planning skills.

Psychological research suggests that knowledge acquired through active inquiry tends to be retained longer than that received passively from a teacher. This is because students activate intellectual, emotional, and volitional faculties during independent learning. When over-explained by instructors, students may become passive and disengaged, assuming they already understand the material. This results in poor retention and a lack of meaningful learning. Allowing students to find answers independently fosters deeper understanding and skill development—particularly if they are prepared in advance for this type of learning.

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Historically, independent work primarily meant engaging students in out-of-class tasks. Today, it is seen as essential for maintaining competence throughout university and beyond. It allows students to personalize their learning by choosing preferred resources and formats, increasing responsibility and improving comprehension.

Independent work not only enhances students’ erudition and worldview but also prepares them for future careers. It develops self-directed learning habits, research abilities, and analytical thinking—particularly in time management, reflective thought, and systematic knowledge acquisition.

Independent learning fosters the development of the self-concept, broadens interdisciplinary connections, and reinforces newly acquired knowledge. It encourages students to independently address professional and creative challenges within their academic field. The activation of Carl Rogers’ self-concept theory, particularly in its positive form, contributes significantly to enhancing the key competencies involved in autonomous learning. This supports the student in building knowledge specific to their future profession.

Independent learning is a systematic, goal-oriented, and autonomous activity. It involves not only the search for knowledge but also its assimilation and creative application. Based on major psychological theories, S. V. Akmanova (2004) divides independent learning into four key components:

1. Motivational Components – These reflect the student’s inner drive and inspiration, including goal-orientation, cognitive engagement, readiness to learn, and internal motivation to study.
2. Volitional Components – These determine the strength of will in students, such as persistence, self-discipline, independence, orderliness, and resilience.
3. Cognitive Components – These refer to knowledge about how to self-regulate, structure learning, and apply educational theories effectively.
4. Operational Components – These focus on the development of essential skills for independent learning, including:
  - Planning: time management, self-organization
  - Communication Skills: information gathering, working with books and ICT tools, systematizing data
  - Scientific Inquiry Skills: analysis, synthesis, abstract thinking, generalization, and specification

According to Yu. N. Tochilina and S. V. Akmanova, students’ preparedness for their future profession is largely shaped by their engagement in independent study starting from the first year of university. Through continuous development, students advance these competencies to a higher level with each academic term.

When evaluating the advantages of independent work in foreign language education, one key question arises: Can independent work be truly effective in a subject like foreign languages, which is inherently based on collaboration and interaction?

Undoubtedly, speaking is a communicative act that requires interaction with a partner—be it a teacher or a fellow student. However, this interaction must be supported by independent preparation, especially for speaking practice, where students apply specific techniques autonomously. Such preparation enhances performance in collaborative and interactive contexts.

Originally, independent work was confined to homework tasks. Later, it became integral to reinforcement and assessment phases. Today, in the era of digitalization and knowledge transformation, independent learning is embedded in all stages of language learning.

Independent work in language learning includes key components such as familiarizing with language material and practicing it through exercises. Textbooks remain primary sources of input, along with supplementary materials provided by instructors. Exercises focusing on vocabulary and grammar in textbooks are crucial for students’ independent development.

However, digitalization has transformed how didactic principles are applied. ICT tools not only support existing strategies but also introduce new forms of learning. Digital platforms now offer structured learning materials, online courses, and flexible lessons. Social media is also being integrated into educational environments. As a result, language study today increasingly involves digital tools—starting with the use of electronic dictionaries to acquire new vocabulary.

In conclusion, the effectiveness of independent learning in English language instruction depends largely on personalized approaches. When students engage in self-directed activities, they become active agents of the educational process, developing key competencies required for success in the job market—particularly communicative, compensatory, and sociocultural skills.

Independent tasks are designed not merely to reinforce knowledge but to broaden thinking and develop reflective, critical learners. As students complete independent assignments, they deepen their understanding, display autonomy, and cultivate the traits of qualified specialists.

Independent learning fosters not only intellectual development but also the discovery of students’ individual strengths. Creative assignments play a vital role in deepening knowledge and enhancing personal initiative.

Two main formats of independent learning are applied in the educational process:

- Active formats: include individual consultations, summarizing materials, preparing reports, testing, and feedback.
- Interactive formats: include preparing and delivering presentations, participating in competitions, attending language Olympiads, conducting case analysis, and implementing project-based tasks.

Evaluation of independent work can take oral form (discussion, explanation, Q&A) or written form (essays, summaries, articles, control tests, etc.).

Special attention should be given to essay writing, as it develops creativity, structured thinking, and written expression. Essays allow instructors to assess students on a wide range of cognitive skills—processing, comparing, classifying, generalizing, and forming judgments about specific events or topics.

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While educators value the role of independent work, students’ own attitudes are equally important. This study confirms that students appreciate and benefit from structured, multimedia-supported, and ICT-integrated independent learning, especially when it is aligned with their personal interests and future careers.

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