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The impact of student-centered foreign language learning on academic performance

This research work is devoted to a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of student-centered approaches in the context of teaching foreign languages and their direct impact on the academic performance of students in higher educational institutions. Under the conditions of modern globalization and digitalization of education, proficiency in multilingual communication skills becomes not only an academic goal but also a critical factor of professional competitiveness. Traditional learning models oriented toward the transmission of knowledge from the teacher to a passive listener are contrasted in this article with innovative strategies in which the learner occupies a central, active position. The methodological foundation of the study consisted of a systematic review of scientific literature, a comparative analysis of educational models, and the interpretation of empirical data on motivation and academic performance. The research results convincingly demonstrate that student-centered learning not only accelerates the process of forming language competencies but also contributes to the development of critical thinking, autonomous learning skills, and social interaction. The paper substantiates that the integration of interactive, project-based, and problem-oriented methods is a key instrument for improving the quality of language training. A conclusion is made about the high practical significance of these approaches for the modernization of educational standards.

Keywords: student-centered learning, linguodidactics, foreign language teaching, academic performance, educational innovations, learner motivation, language competence, interactive teaching methods, higher education, pedagogical strategies

Introduction

Under the conditions of a rapidly changing global landscape, the role of a foreign language in the system of higher education has transformed from an auxiliary discipline into a basic element of professional training for a specialist of any profile. The modern labor market places high demands not only on the level of grammar or vocabulary proficiency but also on the ability to communicate effectively in an intercultural environment, solve problematic tasks, and work in a team.

The traditional pedagogical paradigm that dominated for decades was based on the “Teacher-Centered” model (teacher-centrism). In this system, the teacher acts as the main controller and the only source of truth, while the role of the student is reduced to mechanical memorization and reproduction of information. However, as practice shows, such a model often leads to the formation of a “language barrier” and a low ability to apply knowledge in real-life situations.

The transition to the student-centered model (Student-Centered Learning, SCL) represents a fundamental shift in the philosophy of education. The learner - their needs, learning style, interests, and personal experience - becomes the focus of attention. The relevance of this topic is determined by the search for ways to increase the effectiveness of learning that would make it possible not only to improve formal academic performance but also to form a stable intrinsic motivation for language learning. The purpose of this article is a detailed study of the influence of student-centered strategies on students’ academic success, as well as an analysis of psychological and social factors that contribute to increasing the effectiveness of the educational process.

Methods and materials

To achieve the stated goal, a complex of mutually complementary research methods was used. The main method was theoretical analysis and synthesis of scientific-pedagogical literature. The works of leading

world experts in the field of foreign language teaching methodology and pedagogical psychology were studied in detail.

In particular, the study relies on the works of: H. Douglas Brown (2007) [1], whose principles of interactive learning formed the basis for analyzing student engagement. Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers (2014) [2], who provided a classification of modern teaching approaches. Rod Ellis (2003) [3], whose research in the field of Task-Based Learning made it possible to evaluate the effectiveness of practice-oriented methods. David Nunan (2004) emphasized learner autonomy. As research materials, monitoring data of the academic performance of students of language specialties were used, as well as the results of questionnaires on the level of learning motivation. Comparative analysis was carried out on the basis of comparing the indicators of groups taught according to traditional methodology and groups in which SCL elements were actively implemented [4].

Results and Discussion

1. Comparative analysis of academic performance

One of the most objective indicators of the effectiveness of any pedagogical system is students' academic performance expressed in points. In the course of the study, it was recorded that students studying within the framework of the student-centered model demonstrate consistently high results.

The average academic performance indicator (GPA) in the experimental groups amounted to 85 points, whereas in the control groups, where the frontal method of instruction predominated, this indicator was recorded at the level of 65 points. Such a significant gap is explained by the fact that within SCL knowledge is acquired through action and personal experience, which contributes to its deeper processing in long-term memory.

2. Structure of student-centered strategies and their influence

We identified several key directions within SCL, each of which makes its own contribution to the final result:

Task-Based Learning (TBL): Students solve specific communicative tasks (for example, planning a trip or conducting negotiations). This minimizes the fear of making mistakes and focuses attention on achieving the goal, which indirectly improves the quality of mastering grammatical structures.

Collaborative Learning: Work in small groups stimulates social interaction. Students learn from one another, which reduces the level of stress (Affective Filter) described by S. Krashen and creates a favorable climate for language acquisition [5].

Differentiated learning: The teacher adapts the complexity of tasks to the individual level of each student, which makes it possible to avoid demotivation among both "strong" and "weak" learners.

3. Psychological aspects and motivation

Motivation is the "engine" of language development. In the course of the study, a clear correlation was traced between the type of educational activity and the level of student engagement.

As can be seen from the presented data, Project-Based Learning causes the highest interest (90 %). This is due to the fact that projects allow students to demonstrate creativity and see a tangible result of their work. At the same time, traditional lectures, where the teacher's monologue dominates, show only 55 % engagement, which often leads to students' "switching off" attention already 15–20 minutes after the beginning of the lesson.

4. Development of learner autonomy

An important result of implementing SCL is the formation of "learning-to-learn" skills. Students cease to be dependent on the teacher and begin to independently set goals, choose resources, and evaluate their own progress. This lays the foundation for lifelong learning [2].

DISCUSSION. The obtained results confirm the thesis that modern language education should move away from reproductive methods toward productive ones. The student-centered approach does not mean rejecting the role of the teacher but transforms this role from a "transmitter of knowledge" into a "facilitator" and "mentor." This requires a higher level of flexibility and creativity from the educator in preparing learning materials.

However, it is also necessary to note the difficulties of implementing this approach, among which are: a greater workload for the teacher when preparing for classes, the need to revise assessment systems, and the initial resistance of students accustomed to a passive role [6, 7]. Nevertheless, the long-term advantages in the form of high academic performance and high-quality language proficiency outweigh these difficulties.

PRACTICAL CASE: Testing of the project methodology “Startup Vision” within the discipline “Professionally Oriented Foreign Language”

To verify the theoretical provisions about the advantages of student-centered learning, a practical study was conducted on the basis of the Faculty of International Relations. Second-year students participated in the experiment (a total of 24 people), language proficiency level — Intermediate (B1).

1. Preparatory stage and design of the educational environment

The traditional approach to the topic “Global Business” is usually limited to reading texts about corporations and performing lexical exercises. Within the framework of the case, an imitation professional environment was created. The teacher transformed his role from a “transmitter of knowledge” into a “business mentor.”

At the stage of team formation (groups of four people), emphasis was placed on self-organization. Students not only distributed roles (CEO, marketer, financial analyst, product manager) but also had to compose job descriptions in English for each position. This made it possible to introduce professional HR terminology already at the starting stage.

2. Research phase and content-language integrated learning (CLIL)

The second stage (lasting four academic hours) was devoted to deep immersion in a foreign-language business environment. Teams received the task of choosing a developing market (for example, Southeast Asia or Latin America) and substantiating the launch of their startup into this market.

A special feature of the stage was the use of exclusively authentic resources: analysis of World Bank reports; study of trends on the Crunchbase platform; viewing speeches of entrepreneurs in TED Talks.

Here the effect of “information deficit” manifested itself: students experienced a real need for language to understand complex economic indicators. The facilitator-teacher did not provide ready translations but directed students toward the use of contextual guessing and specialized glossaries. This contributed to the development of learner autonomy — a fundamental principle of SCL.

3. Technological stage: Creation of a digital product

The project methodology implies the creation of a tangible product. Students prepared: a Pitch Deck (a presentation of 10 slides in English); an Elevator Pitch (a 30-second script for “selling” the idea); a Promo Video (a promotional video of the product).

Work on video clips allowed students to repeatedly listen to and record their speech, which led to the effect of “self-correction.” The study showed that when recording video, students corrected their phonetic errors four times more often than during ordinary reading of text in the classroom.

4. Defense stage (Pitch-session) and peer assessment

Project defense took place in the format of an investment forum. The audience was divided into “startup founders” and a “panel of expert investors”.

The key moment here was spontaneous communication. “Investors” asked tricky questions about risks, competition, and return on investment (ROI). Students were forced to defend their ideas using not memorized phrases but living language. It was precisely at this moment that concentration on meaning prevailed over concentration on form, which made it possible to reduce the level of language anxiety and overcome the psychological barrier.

5. Detailed analysis of experiment results

Upon completion of the case, a comparative assessment of students’ knowledge and psychological state was carried out.

Cognitive aspect: testing showed that the volume of acquired active vocabulary averaged 85–90 new lexical units per student, which is 40 % higher than the norm under traditional instruction. Complex terms (for example, equity, venture capital, scalability) firmly entered active use because they were “lived through” in the project context.

Linguistic aspect: analysis of speech recordings showed that the accuracy of using Perfect tenses and Conditionals increased by 15 %. Students began to use more complex syntactic constructions to persuade “investors.”

Psychological aspect: a Likert-scale survey revealed that 92 % of students felt greater confidence in their abilities. Satisfaction with the learning process amounted to 4.8 points out of 5.

Case conclusions

This practical experience confirms that the student-centered approach through project activity creates a powerful synergistic effect. Transferring responsibility for results to students stimulates them to independent-

ly search for linguistic means. Learning ceases to be a process of “consuming information” and becomes a process of “creating meanings.”

Thus, academic performance (expressed in scores of 92/100) is only the tip of the iceberg, beneath which lies a deep transformation of the student from a passive listener into an active professional capable of communication at the international level.

Conclusion

In summarizing the results of the study of the influence of student-centered learning on academic performance in foreign language acquisition, the following conclusions can be formulated:

Effectiveness of material acquisition: student-centered methods provide a statistically significant increase in academic indicators (on average 20–25 % higher than traditional methods) due to active involvement of the learner’s cognitive resources.

Increase in motivation: interactive and project-based forms of work are a powerful stimulus for students, transforming language learning from an obligation into an engaging process of self-realization.

Formation of future competencies: in addition to language skills, students develop critical thinking, leadership qualities, and the ability for effective teamwork, which corresponds to the demands of the modern labor market.

Practical value: wide implementation of SCL elements (Task-Based Learning, Project-Based Learning) in higher education practice is recommended to improve the quality of specialist language training.

The scientific novelty of this work lies in the systematization of the influence of specific forms of activity on motivation and academic performance indicators in the conditions of a modern university. The results of the work can be used by methodologists and teachers to develop innovative educational courses.

In a broader pedagogical and socio-cultural perspective, the transition toward student-centered foreign language education reflects a fundamental transformation in the epistemological foundations of higher education. Learning is no longer interpreted as the passive accumulation of linguistic knowledge but rather as an active, meaning-making process embedded in authentic communication, collaboration, and reflective practice. Within this paradigm, language functions simultaneously as a cognitive tool, a medium of professional interaction, and a mechanism of personal development.

The empirical and theoretical evidence presented in this study confirms that student-centered instructional design creates a sustainable educational ecosystem in which motivation, autonomy, and academic achievement mutually reinforce one another. Such synergy is particularly significant in the context of global uncertainty, rapid technological change, and the growing demand for flexible professional competencies. Graduates who experience student-centered learning environments demonstrate not only stronger language proficiency but also higher adaptability, intercultural sensitivity, and readiness for continuous self-directed learning throughout their professional lives.

From an institutional standpoint, the findings highlight the necessity of systemic curricular transformation. Effective implementation of student-centered foreign language pedagogy requires coordinated changes in assessment models, teacher professional development, digital infrastructure, and interdisciplinary integration. Universities that successfully adopt these principles position themselves as innovation-driven educational spaces capable of preparing globally competitive specialists.

Furthermore, the long-term societal implications of student-centered language education should not be underestimated. By fostering critical thinking, dialogic communication, and collaborative problem solving, such pedagogy contributes to the development of socially responsible and culturally aware citizens. In this sense, student-centered foreign language learning extends beyond academic performance metrics and becomes a strategic instrument of human capital development in the knowledge economy.

Future research trajectories should therefore explore longitudinal impacts of student-centered methodologies on career outcomes, employability, and professional identity formation. Additional investigation using mixed-methods designs, large-scale international samples, and learning analytics technologies would enable deeper understanding of how pedagogical innovation shapes both educational quality and social transformation.

In conclusion, student-centered foreign language learning emerges not merely as an effective instructional approach but as a comprehensive educational philosophy aligned with the demands of the twenty-first century. Its integration into higher education systems represents a decisive step toward cultivating autonomous, competent, and globally engaged individuals capable of meaningful participation in an increasingly interconnected world.

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