

Continuity as an Important Component of Lifelong Learning (On the Example of Foreign Language)

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Abstract

The paper aims to determine the significance of lifelong learning in teaching a foreign language (English). The authors analyzed and reviewed digital and other sources to determine topicality of the problem. Lifelong learning concept covers all aspects of education, embracing everything in it: learning opportunities at all ages, all levels in various contexts, the possibility of in-depth work, retraining and learning new skills, that is anything helping a person to become involved in work experience schemes or social work, to become competitive in the labor market. Longitudinal study enabled to speak about lifelong learning as an important component of continuity. It was proved that students who studied English during five years were better prepared for proceeding to master degree program than the control group as they possessed high level of language proficiency. Their skills and knowledge were examined on the basis of three parameters of horizontal continuity: single conceptual and categorical apparatus, common themes and ideas and common educational technologies.

Keywords: higher education, lifelong learning, foreign language, horizontal continuity, spiral continuity.

1. Introduction

Globalization has had a significant influence on the formation of new competencies that meet the needs of higher school. New socio-economic conditions require new approaches to education and impose increased requirements on university graduates. Learning to learn, problem solving, decision-making, critical thinking and anticipatory learning - these are only a few of the core skills and competencies necessary to compete in the labor market. Among main issues of Prague Communiqué (2001) is involvement of higher education institutions and students; enhancement of the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area – we have identified the most important for us - promotion of lifelong learning and putting it forward as priority. Objectives of study are the following: 1) to identify effective conditions for the implementation of interdisciplinary connections within the continuous second language learning of students to enable individuals to cope with the demands of the rapidly changing workplace; 2) to investigate the possibility of probabilistic forecasting of learning outcomes for students and undergraduates (master's students) based on horizontal continuity as an important part of the process of learning foreign language lifelong; 3) to promote the development of professionally directed English learning programs in the system of learning throughout life.

2. Literature Review

It is absolutely true that "Every individual must be in a position to keep learning throughout his life". This idea of "lifelong education which became the keystone of the learning society" belongs to C. Medel-Añonuevo, Toshio Ohsako and Werner Mauch (2001, p.2). They emphasized that "the lifelong concept covers all aspects of education, embracing everything in it". (C. Medel-Añonuevo, Ohsako T. and Mauch W., 2001). We fully agree with the statement of C. Medel-Añonuevo, Toshio Ohsako and Werner Mauch (2001).

If to look at recent history, it should be noted that lifelong learning formally came into existence in 1970 and the term lifelong education was used instead of lifelong learning (Iqbal M.J., 2009). Besides, as M.J.Iqbal (2009) stated, this idea became global in its nature because it is never too late for learning. And what is the most important is that M.J.Iqbal (2009) characterizes it as an attitude of openness to new ideas, decisions, skills and behaviours. He stresses that one is provided with learning opportunities at all ages, all levels in various contexts (M. J. Iqbal, 2009)

We can't but agree with point of view of Richard G. Bagnall (2000) who put forward it back in the nineties of the last

century, that retraining and learning new skills would enable individuals to cope with the demands of the rapidly changing workplace. Moreover this idea is still relevant nowadays (Bagnall R., 2000). The latter accurately describes today's lifestyle.

In accordance with the Russian education system the teachers of higher school do everything possible to train future well-educated professionals. Over time, improving skills and knowledge constantly, a person grows, develops and achieves one's goals. Later on, the individual becomes a professional. A professional is someone who works hard on oneself, one's abilities and as a result achieves much. To perform this task, one must take an interest in everything new. It is the interest that may become the first step to knowledge. Moreover, a professional is the one who knows the job perfectly and in full, which means that a person has passed from the ground up to the very top, continuously improving one's knowledge.

Along with the positive aspects, one should point to contradictions which are important for national system of professional training which include: 1) contradiction between actual needs of Russian economy and production and requirements set by the state and society to students receiving undergraduate degrees; 2) contradiction between quick development of the country's industry and inability of the country and higher vocational schools to react well-timed to these challenges when selecting and structuring syllabus, as well as when selecting pedagogical technologies; 3) contradiction between application of foreign practices in training and current environment in Russia (Baklashova T., 2014)

As for the USA, the educated person comprises, according to D.Denby (1997), a sense of what a human being is and is capable of - in spiritual and ethical dimension. He also notes the fact that you should keep in mind what a civil society ideally can be and what a citizen is and what his or her duties and obligations are and what the society's obligations are to its citizens. That is the traditional view as D.Denby (1997) believes. We absolutely agree with this point of view and think that for our students the main duty is to study, to expand their knowledge and gain practical skills in accordance with the selected profession in order to be ready for lifelong learning that corresponds to the society's demands. (D.Denby.1997)

Report to U N E S C O of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, known as 'Delors Report', proposes an integrated vision of education in the frames of the lifelong learning paradigms. The concept of learning throughout life thus emerges as a core one in the twenty-first century. Moreover, this concept is based on the four pillars of learning. These pillars are: to be, to know, to do, and to live together. "Learning to know" means the symbiosis of broad general education and the possibility of in-depth work in a selected number of subjects that lays the foundations for learning throughout life. In addition, "Learning to do" presupposes the acquisition of a competence that enables a person to deal with a variety of situations where students have the opportunity to develop their abilities by becoming involved in work experience schemes or social work while they are still in education. (Delors J. et al. (1996).

All of the above leads to the conclusion that the lifelong learning concept covers all aspects of education, embracing everything in it: learning opportunities at all ages, all levels in various contexts, the possibility of in-depth work, retraining and learning new skills such as problem solving, decision-making, critical thinking and various competencies - anything that helps a person to become involved in work experience schemes or social work, to become competitive in the labor market.

To our discussion, we would like to quote the words of Albert Einstein, Physicist and Nobel Laureate, "Learning is not a product of schooling but the lifelong attempt to acquire it" (Gurteen D., 2015).

However, the problem or concept of lifelong learning can be viewed from a slightly different angle. Analyses of multiple scholar's points of views concerning the lifelong learning problem (Jarman R., Mcaleese L. & Mcconnell B.,1997, Jon D. Miller.) show that it involves three primary kinds of activities: formal courses leading to degrees at various levels (associate, baccalaureate, graduate, and professional); courses and workshops that lead to certificates, and other recognition within professions and occupations; informal learning and skill acquisition that may advance individual's abilities and the opportunities granted students for independent out-of-class learning science. (Jon D. Miller. 2013; Jarman R., Mcaleese L. & Mcconnell B. (1997)

The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) deals with the problems of international research, training, information as far as non-formal education, adult and lifelong learning are concerned. UIL makes a special contribution in improving the quality of learning for all in all regions of the world.

Among the priorities of Berlin Communiqué (2003) there is one that is also the cornerstone of Russian higher education system - development of quality assurance at institutional, national level.

What was the most important for us in the priorities of the adopted documents of London Communiqué (2007) is the diversification of funding and opening to new types of learners. It is this position of London Communiqué that confirms the validity of our conclusions regarding the necessity of setting up of professionally directed English learning programs in the system of learning throughout life.

According to the priority themes of the 2007-2009 which were stated by Meeting of Ministers in Leuven (2009) in April, lifelong learning was still on the agenda. The necessity to bring learning opportunities closer to learner was stressed in this document.

Based on the foregoing, we can interpret the concept of lifelong education in Russia as some kinds of activities: formal courses or official education leading to degrees at various levels; courses and workshops that lead to other recognition within professions; and expansion of some kinds of knowledge; unofficial (public) learning and skill acquisition which do not lead to degrees or diplomas, but they are highly enriching and build individual's skills and capacities; and initiative learning leading to development of aesthetical values, physical abilities or communication skills. We can expand the understanding of this phenomenon as the quality of learning for all in all regions of the world and development of quality assurance at institutional, national level.

Table 1. Types of education in Russia

Official	Unofficial (public)	Initiative
Secondary schools	Professional associations	Clubs
Colleges	Learning circles	Museums
Vocational and technical institutions	Volunteer organizations	Interest (hobby) circles
Higher education institutions (Universities, Academies, Institutes)	Extracurricular work	Play teams
Additional vocational programs	Personal development programs	
Professional development and retraining programs		

3. Discussion

Being foreign language teachers of the Russian university, we realize that teaching of this subject requires consistency and continuity in its content and methods. The study of a foreign language presupposes the formation of motivation that enables the students to develop abilities to become involved into the ongoing process of improving their knowledge and skills and finally the competences while they are still in education. This long process of learning a foreign language is based on the principle of continuity of training in the frames of the concept of lifelong education.

We define the following two main directions of development of the lifelong education process– continuity and renovation. Continuity suggests that lifelong education encompasses the vertical (spiral) learning process for many years time and in doing so creates a new motivational background of the person and offers all kinds of opportunities as a continuous transition from one grade to another. Renovation suggests that lifelong education encompasses the horizontal learning process and refers to the creation of other alternative structures, approaches, patterns, methods and contents of lifelong education on the basis of positive past experience, taken from all the best and current. Theodore J. Kowalski (1988) pointed out that horizontal organization makes the curriculum relevant to other learning activities, to life as an adult, to society, work roles. With adults, horizontal organization of curricular content is extremely important (Jon D. Miller, 2013). Spiral learning process is based on the theory of Spiral Dynamics (Don Beck and Chris Cowan, 1996). Spiral Dynamics is a dynamic model of human development, it reveals the hidden codes that shape human nature. Don Beck and Chris Cowan synthesize such changes as increasing cultural diversity, new social responsibility initiatives. (Beck, Don and Cowan, Chris (2005).

These ideas are connected with the concept of the spiral curriculum (Bruner J., 1960), the latter involves information that is organized as complex ideas which can be taught at a simplified level, later on these ideas can be repeated at more complex levels. Therefore subjects can be studied gradually with increasing difficulty - from simple to complex (hence the spiral analogy).

This notion underpins the idea of the spiral curriculum – ‘A curriculum as it develops should revisit these basic ideas repeatedly, building upon them until the student has grasped the full formal apparatus that goes with them’ (Bruner, J., 1960).

The horizontal learning process has been successful at fostering relationships across various levels of interconnected subjects. These relationships help to distribute and unite knowledge, build capacities, and strengthen development outcomes. It is a replicable system of exchanges and coordination that empowers students by enabling knowledge-sharing through a dynamic network of subjects and teaching techniques interconnection.

Spiral continuity while learning foreign language is implemented in the following directions:

- from understanding simple grammar structures to deep understanding and practical application of complex grammatical phenomena in communication;

- from describing events using a limited range of words and expressions to explaining events using extended special vocabulary from scientific texts of professional orientation;
- from increasing the minimum lexical language of specialty to explaining more complex phenomena in terms of accepted scientific ideas connected with future profession;
- from simple statements on the same topic to the free flow of speech in accordance with the proposed situation, and then to the free discussion.

Horizontal continuity is implemented on the basis of the knowledge transfer from one domain to another (the application of knowledge and skills in a new environment). Years of experience show that nominating intellectual problems of interdisciplinary character to students intensifies mental activity (memory, thinking, emotional and volitional processes, development of imagination and speech) significantly. Indicator of cognitive independence of students in solving interdisciplinary problems is the possession of knowledge and ways of its transfer to the mental activity. In order to enhance the role of interdisciplinary connections in the development of the intellectual interests of the students it is necessary to identify learning problems in interdisciplinary content, gradually increase the volume and breadth of those links, systematically use them to constantly train students in the application of knowledge and methods of action of related subjects. From the above and based on many years of experience we have come to the conclusion that the overlapping (horizontal) continuity as important component in solving interdisciplinary problems must be carried out in the three vectors: single conceptual and categorical apparatus, common themes and ideas and common educational technologies. Single conceptual and categorical apparatus in its turn may be organized in the following groups: social categories, terms and concepts, profile, professionally-designed and narrowly specialized. General ideas are formed on the basis of interdisciplinary themes and ideas in accordance with the curriculum. Educational technology also develop successively in the process of learning a foreign language: the ability to ask and answer questions, identify the main ideas of the text, a plan to the text and its "phasing" to prepare for the summary, rendering basic content of the text, writing annotations to the article, an essay, abstract, preparing presentations, participating in debates, etc.

4. Results

The main objective of our experiment was to investigate the possibility of probabilistic forecasting of learning outcomes for students and undergraduates (master's students) based on horizontal continuity as an important part of the process of learning foreign language lifelong. Longitudinal study was conducted over five years in order to provide the prompt correction of deviations in the process of professional language skills formation of students and undergraduates (master's students) over a given period of time. In addition, it should be noted that in our university horizontal continuity is supported by the inclusion of a number of students - future master's students - in learning a foreign language in an additional program, providing them with new opportunities for expanding professional language competence. In such conditions it becomes possible to achieve a high level of business English proficiency over 2 - 3 years.

The program "Translator for professional communication" is aimed at creating professional foreign language competence of students, and it is based on the compatibility of its content with basic education provided by the university. Requirements applicable to students are typical for the university departments of foreign languages. Since learning of this program is not mandatory for students, the training set is performed according to trainees' desire and choice (preference) (Galishnikova E., 2014).

Two groups were organized to observe and study the change dynamics in the improvement of the quality level of language skills based on the three parameters of horizontal continuity implementation (single conceptual and categorical apparatus, common themes and ideas and common educational technologies.) The first (control) group contained students (22 people) motivated to proceed to a master's degree, but they were trained according to the regular program. The second group (experimental) includes the students (15 people) motivated to enroll in a master's degree program and at the same time they were undertaking the additional language program within parameters of horizontal continuity.

The level of mastering single conceptual and categorical apparatus was determined through the test of how much the vocabulary of students increased. The test showed that by the end of the experiment the control group had the minimum vocabulary necessary for operating in the simple business situations, while the experimental group was noted for its expansion of lexis, conversational formulas and speech patterns in different situations. As for common themes and ideas as a parameter of horizontal continuity, it should be pointed out that ideas and themes studied while learning English in the first group were expressed at intermediate level, while the second group had a more in-depth understanding and wider means of expressing the ideas concerning business, economy and management. As for educational technologies, the control group was able to ask and answer questions, identify the main ideas of the text, to make a plan to the text and its "phasing" to prepare for the summary, to render basic content of the text. While doing the

latter tasks easily, the experimental group made a really good progress in more complicated tasks such as writing annotations to the article, writing essays on different topics, writing abstracts, preparing presentations, participating in debates. Thus, by the end of the experiment in the first group the number of students having high level of language proficiency made 65%, while in the second group it reached 80-95%. Figure 1 shows the percentage level of language proficiency in the control and experimental groups. This proves the efficiency of continuity in learning English as a foreign language.

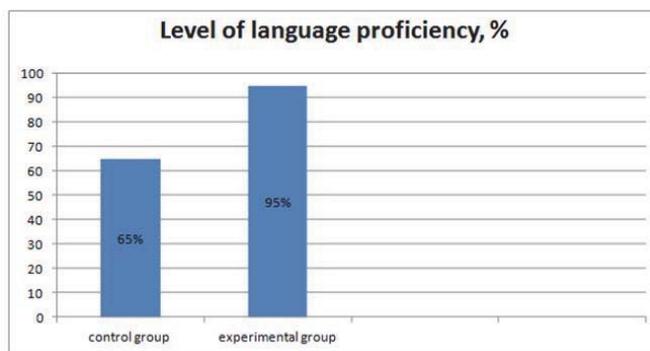


Fig.1. Level of language proficiency

5. Methodology

Along with electronic library documents and other scientific sources we conducted longitudinal study, questionnaire research and testing.

Electronic library documents and other scientific sources were used as effective means for collecting data. This process resulted in choosing key tools for conducting tests and administering questionnaires. In-depth analysis of the psychological and pedagogical literature, according to objectives of the study, includes systematization, classification and comparison. Analysis of the sources is an important step in the pedagogical research process, allowing to distinguish between facts, opinions, and assumptions. Classification method uses a set of features to characterize objects under study since a well-defined and grouped classes are easier to understand than raw data. With regard to longitudinal method used in the experiment, it involves studying the same group of individuals over an extended period of time and collected data may be gathered repeatedly throughout the length of the study which is particularly important for researchers to look at changes over time.

6. Conclusion

The study conducted with the use of variative techniques proves a significant role of promotion of lifelong learning while studying foreign language. The authors interpret the concept of lifelong education as some kinds of activities: formal courses or official education; courses and workshops; unofficial (public) learning and initiative learning. The two main directions of development of the lifelong education process– defined in the article as continuity and renovation - are realized into the practice through the horizontal learning process and the spiral curriculum. The conducted pilot study proved the change dynamics in the improvement of the quality level of language skills of students and undergraduates (master's students) over a given period of time based on the three parameters of horizontal continuity implementation: single conceptual and categorical apparatus, common themes and ideas and common educational technologies.

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