

INDIVIDUAL LEARNING ROUTES AS AN EFFECTIVE TECHNOLOGY TO REACH BETTER OUTPUT IN TRAINING LAWYERS-TO-BE

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Abstract

Individual approach to teaching and learning is widely used in the contemporary education. This approach assumes the differentiation of the learning materials, content and learning technologies according to the students' learning objectives. It should take into consideration the fact that the output of professional training can be different.

The National Standards of Higher Education in the Russian Federation imply that a specialist-to be either a bachelor or a master must have certain competencies. These competencies are mandatory for each graduate of all educational levels at Universities. On the other hand, the current educational environment gives a great variety of opportunities to continue the formal education: the programs of academic and learning mobility, the ability to get dual diplomas, to reach a higher proficiency level in the foreign languages in accordance with European scale of proficiency levels, to get an international certificate of foreign language proficiency etc. Apparently, to reach the personal goals a student should study more and have his/her program of the development that will include additional tasks and assignments. The implementation of individual subprograms in learning foreign languages as well as the realization of such lingua didactic technologies as professional language portfolio, students' module rating, the elements of asynchronization of the educational process can help the students.

The current research is aimed to describe the practical experience of the authors in the development and implementation of the students' individual routes in learning foreign languages (English and German) for specific purposes. The efficacy of the approach was proved by the results of the experiment and the survey held among the students of the Law Institute, RUDN University.

Keywords: individual learning routes, the diversity of individual educational goals, autonomous learning, and foreign languages for specific purposes.

1 INTRODUCTION

The topicality of the issue is connected with the importance of training not only competent and competitive, but also mobile experts in the domain of law that should be capable of professional communication in a multilingual academic and professional environment. As the students have diverse purposes in their professional development they are concentrated on various branches in law and consequently are interested in different aspects of learning foreign languages.

The results of the survey held among the students of Law Institute of the RUDN University (Peoples' Friendship University of Russia) identified the following purposes:

- To get a master and then a Phd degree and as a result to be realized in academic environment;
- To match the educational and professional standards in the framework of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (The European Qualifications..., 2008) and be ready for professional mobility in Europe and around the world, and to prove their competitiveness in the international labour market;
- To participate in a programme of dual diplomas i.e. to be a student of RUDN University and at the same time continue their education in one of the foreign Universities that are the academic partners of the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia;
- To receive grants from international foundations and companies for further learning activity and research;
- To confirm the level of foreign language proficiency and pass the international exams certifying the level achieved in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (Common European Framework...,2001) etc.(see the detailed information in Section 2 Methodology)

All these individual intentions are realized together with the general purposes determined by the State Educational program for legal specialities. Apparently, it effects the scope of the materials for learning, the content of the learning materials and the time limits necessary for studying and making the tasks. In practice it means that the learning activities can be divided into two parts. The main part is devoted to studying the core materials of the state standard curriculum for training specialists for legal setting (legal German and English) and learning activity of less time depends on the individual plans, initiatives and purposes of the students. To study the common element of learning foreign languages all students use the same course books but when the individual programme is touched upon the supplementary materials in all speech activities are used. They include various tasks, audio and video recordings, texts for reading etc.

The individual approach to learning is also realized with the help of language portfolio for lawyers, modular system of the educational process with the elements of asynchronization when students can do their tasks with individual rate and instead of the work in the whole students group the individual learning activity or the work in mini groups is used

2 METHODOLOGY

The selection of ways and technologies of learning foreign languages at a non-linguistic higher education institution is determined by the State Educational Standards, students' professional interests (e.g. legal English, German, French etc.) and by their individual intentions mentioned above. In this case, the instructor should provide the learners with the supplementary materials matching his/her individual educational interests. A student can study the supplementary materials in a linear way that is in a regular sequence when one assignment is done after the completion of another or selectively, when some part of the materials of the thematic modules can be excluded depending on the initial level of the students' training and their individual requests.

The development and implementation of individual educational routes is correlated with the forms of learning activity, the ways of materials presentation, the methods of assessment and evaluation.

To specify the individual plans of the students in learning foreign languages and to prepare the specific educational routes, regular surveys are held at the end of first semester and then at the end of each learning year. Such surveys help the instructors to compare and monitor the interests of the same students and the changes of their interests from year to year, on the one hand, and to relate the materials and technologies used in educational practice with the students' learning purposes, on the other hand.

The questionnaire includes the following questions, some of them are open ended, the others are of multiple-choice technique:

1. Would you like to have an individual plan of learning a foreign language? (Yes/No)
2. What is your goal of learning a foreign language for specific purposes in accordance with the individual plan?
 - To pass an exam and get an international certificate of proficiency in a foreign language at the level (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1);

- To study at a foreign university (one or two semesters) in the framework of Bologna process;
- To participate in dual diploma programs;
- To get a scholarship of a foreign foundation to deepen language and professional knowledge and enhance the appropriate skills;
- To get a grant for research abroad;
- To be employed in a law firm operating in the international labour market;
- To participate in international projects and conferences in the chosen area of higher education;
- Other reasons (please specify).

3. What is the correlation of classroom and out-of-class work when you study a foreign language:

- Only within the framework of classroom work;
- More often classroom than out-of-class work;
- Classroom and regular out-of-class work;
- Classroom and out-of-class work 3–4 times a week;
- Classroom and out-of-class work 1-2 times a week (when doing homework);
- Out-of-class work is more effective than classroom
- Other options (please specify)

4. What type of language activity do you pay more attention to:

- Reading
- Letter
- Listening
- Speaking
- Language and cultural mediation (this option has been included in the questionnaire recently after European Union started to consider language and cultural mediation as a specific language activity);

5. What sources would you use if a problem occurs when learning a foreign language:

- A university instructor;
- A former school teacher
- A tutor
- A fellow student
- An internet source.

The survey showed that 95% of the respondents have their individual goals studying the foreign languages; in many cases, the students mentioned more than one purpose. The most popular option was to be employed in a law firm operating in the international labour market (92%); 80% are interested in the participation in international projects and conferences on legal issues (81%). Half of the respondents (52%) have an intention to continue their professional and language education abroad. About 42% of the students are going to get a diploma of a foreign University and to pass an international exam certifying the proficiency level (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1) in a foreign language. The least number of respondents (22%) are going to get a research grant.

The diversity of individual goals proves the fact that the first and maybe the main distinction in learning is in the selection of course books. Besides the mandatory course books e.g. on legal English (Brown G. D, Rice S., *Professional English in Use: Law*, Cambridge University Press, 2007; Haigh R., *Legal English*, Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2018 etc.) additional course books and other materials should be incorporated in learning foreign languages at University. The selection of these materials will depend on the students' goals in learning foreign languages. Apparently, such course books will be of primary importance:

- Advanced Legal English and other training materials by TOLES (Test of Legal English Skills) programme

(<https://www.toleslegal.com>);

- McCarthy M., O'Dell F. *Academic Vocabulary in Use*, Cambridge University Press, 2008;
- Course books and on line resources on various English tests published by Cambridge University etc.

An English instructor can select some extracts of these course books for studying or suggest that the students should study the materials independently under the instructor's supervision.

However, the survey findings showed that only 10% of all respondents are ready to read the foreign information essential for their studies and in this way to develop their reading skills. 8% are involved in independent writing activity. 11% of the respondents practise speaking in a foreign language out of class and the least number of the students (6%) listen to the special programmes in a foreign language. During the semester, students can work independently 3-4 times a week and during the holidays, only 22% of those being interviewed have an intention to work regularly developing various skills in a foreign language. Moreover, 86% of all students seek the support and feedback from a university instructor and do not want to surf the net for searching the sources for self development.

These data should be taken into consideration when the tasks and materials are prepared for the students individual activity. To motivate the students' independent work, a set of tasks and assignments matching their individual purposes should be made and compiled by the instructor. Special assessment and evaluation materials should be developed as well. Various activities with on line resources should also stimulate independent work of the students.

Apparently, as the students have different purposes in learning the outcome of their learning foreign languages is also different. Some students prepare and try to pass international language exams; others participate in international conferences and projects. The results of such activity are quite evident i.e. either the certificates proving the level of foreign language proficiency or the conference participation and speakers certificates. The other goals have extended results and may be viewed on completion of studying.

3 CONCLUSION

The contemporary higher education should be mainly student centred. It means the use of learning materials and the implementation of educational technologies that would satisfy the students' needs and intentions in studying. The student-centred approach should be realized on the basis of the authentic course books published and various on line resources. Various assessment and evaluation tasks should be followed.

The realization of individual learning routes technology into practice implies the use of language portfolio technology for lawyers-to-be, contemporary ICT for searching the information and taking on line test. The individual learning routes technology is closely connected with the CLIL approach and consequently the students enhance their awareness of the professional information.

The individual learning routes technology makes effect on the instructor's role in managing the learning process.

The practical experience showed that the efficiency of studying a foreign language for specific purposes depends on the students' abilities to determine their own professional purposes for the period of learning at higher education institution and including the life long period.

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