IMPROVING THE METHODOLOGY OF STUDENTS' INDEPENDENT LEARNING IN THE COURSE "ACADEMIC SKILLS AND PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE" ON THE BASIS OF A COMPARATIVE APPROACH

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Abstract. The article presents a methodology for organizing students' independent learning in the course "Academic Skills and Professional Competence" in which comparison of national and foreign experience is the leading learning activity. The methodology ensures the alignment "academic skill — comparative task — professional competence", moves students step by step from comparison against given criteria to adapting a chosen solution to a professional situation, and assesses the results through five criteria and twelve indicators using rubrics for comparative tables, case solutions, mini-research and reflective essays.

Keywords: independent learning, comparative approach, academic skills, professional competence, task progression, constructive alignment, assessment rubric.

Introduction

The transition of Uzbek universities to the credit-module system has changed the status of students' independent work. The Concept for the Development of the Higher Education System of Uzbekistan until 2030 calls for a gradual move from education focused on theoretical knowledge to education focused on practical skills [1]. Within the European credit framework, credits express the total workload a student needs to achieve the expected learning outcomes, and independent study is a full part of that workload [2]. Independent learning therefore has to be planned as carefully as classroom teaching.

International research offers several frameworks for this planning. B.Zimmerman describes self-regulated learning as a cycle of forethought, performance and self-reflection [3]. E.Panadero's comparison of six models shows that they converge on metacognitive monitoring and motivation as the core of successful learning [4]. D.R.Garrison's model of self-directed learning combines self-management, self-monitoring and motivation [5], and later empirical work has supported links among these three dimensions [6]. J.Biggs's principle of constructive alignment requires that learning outcomes, learning activities and assessment be aligned with one another [7; 8].

Comparative education provides a second line of thinking. M.Bray, B.Adamson and M.Mason show that systems, curricula, pedagogical innovations and ways of learning can all serve as units of comparison [9]. D.Phillips and K.Ochs warn that borrowed practices work only after they pass through implementation and internalisation in a new context [10]. In Uzbek studies, the pedagogical factors that shape students' independent learning have been described [11], yet comparison is rarely treated as a learning activity performed by the students themselves. The aim of this paper is to present a methodology for independent learning in the course "Academic Skills and Professional Competence" in which comparison is the leading activity, together with a system for assessing its results.

Methods

The research was carried out in the teaching of the course "Academic Skills and Professional Competence". At the theoretical stage, the course curriculum and the literature on self-regulated learning, self-directed learning and comparative education were analysed. Learning outcomes, independent tasks and assessment tools were then checked for alignment in line with Biggs's

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framework [7]. Modelling was used to build the task progression and the assessment system. At the empirical stage, pedagogical observation was combined with a content analysis of student products (comparative tables, case solutions, mini-research reports and reflective essays) and expert discussion with course instructors. The recommendations were applied at Bukhara State Technical University within the ECAMPUZ project (ERASMUS-EDU-2022-CBHE) and at Alisher Navoi Tashkent State University of Uzbek Language and Literature within an Erasmus+ KA107 mobility project carried out with Humboldt University of Berlin. Since the present paper concentrates on the methodological design, the results are reported qualitatively.

Results

The first result is the alignment chain "academic skill — comparative task — professional competence". Each academic skill named in the course outcomes (searching for sources, analysing, comparing, evaluating, academic writing) is linked to a comparative task that practises it, and each task produces evidence of a specific professional competence. This removes a frequent weakness of independent work, where tasks are chosen by topic and are only loosely connected to the expected outcomes.

The second result is a four-level progression of comparative tasks. As shown in Table 1, the students' autonomy increases from level to level, while the teacher's guidance shifts from giving criteria to commenting on the students' own choices.

Table 1

Progression of comparative tasks in independent learning

Level	Student activity	Academic skill developed	Product assessed
1. Comparison against given criteria	Compares national and foreign practice using criteria provided by the teacher	Source search, structuring information	Comparative table
2. Self-defined criteria	Formulates and justifies own comparison criteria	Analysis, critical reading	Comparative table with rationale
3. Evaluation of alternatives	Weighs several solutions and selects one with evidence	Argumentation, evaluation	Case solution, mini-research
4. Adaptation to a professional situation	Adapts the chosen solution to national and professional conditions, reflects on the result	Academic writing, reflection	Mini-research, reflective essay

Source: developed by the author on the basis of [3; 7; 10].

Table 1 indicates that the progression mirrors the cyclical logic of self-regulation [3]: at the lower levels the teacher carries much of the planning, while at levels three and four planning, monitoring and reflection move to the student. The fourth level adds what self-regulation models do not require explicitly, namely adaptation of a foreign solution to the national context, a step drawn from research on educational borrowing [10].

The third result is the assessment system for students' independent learning activity (Figure 1). It specifies five criteria (motivational-goal, cognitive-academic, comparative-analytical, reflective-evaluative and professional-competence) through twelve indicators.

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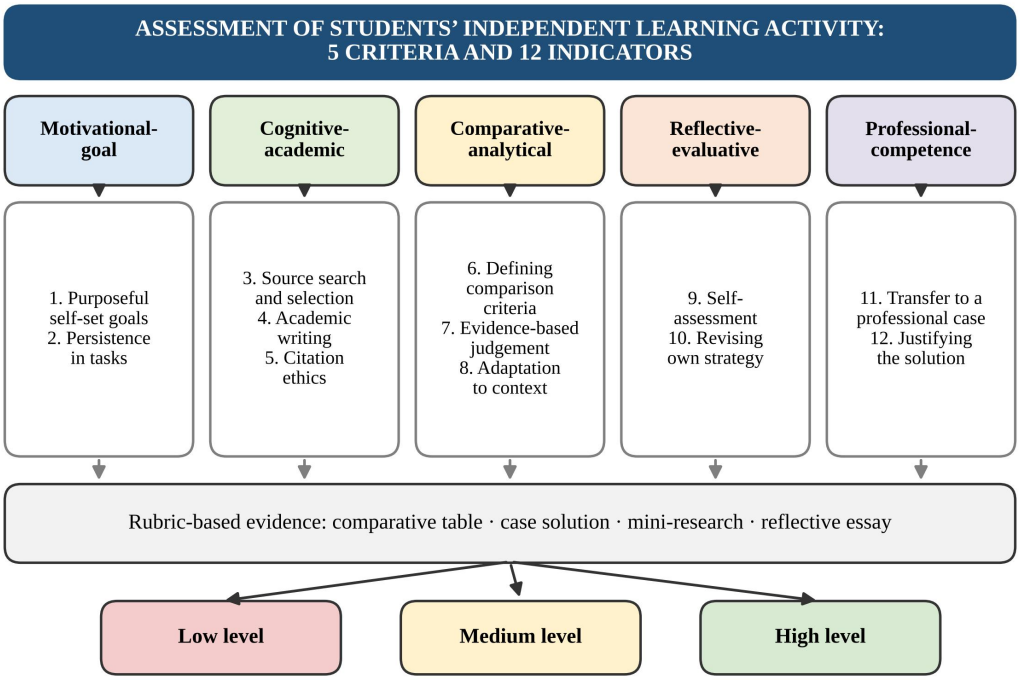


Figure 1. System for assessing students' independent learning activity (developed by the author)

As Figure 1 shows, evidence for the indicators comes from four types of student products, each scored with an analytic rubric. A comparative table is judged mainly on the comparative-analytical indicators, a case solution on evidence-based judgement and transfer, a mini-research report on cognitive-academic indicators, and a reflective essay on self-assessment and revision of strategy. Combining the rubric scores places a student at a low, medium or high level. The level then works as a diagnostic signal: a student at the low level continues with tasks of levels one and two and receives more structured support, whereas a student at the high level moves to tasks of level four.

Pedagogical observation during implementation suggested qualitative changes. Students' comparative tables moved from listing facts toward drawing justified conclusions. In reflective essays, students more often explained why they had chosen a particular criterion and what they would change next time. Instructors noted that rubrics made their feedback more specific and shorter to write.

Discussion

The findings agree with the view that independent learning develops when students take over planning, monitoring and reflection step by step [3; 4]. They also support Garrison's position that self-management and self-monitoring need to be developed together [5]: in the proposed progression, choosing criteria (management) and checking one's own conclusions (monitoring) appear in the same task. The methodology differs from general self-regulation models in that it specifies the content of independent work. Comparison provides this content, and constructive alignment keeps it connected to the course outcomes [7; 8].

The emphasis on adaptation is the most important point of difference. Comparative education research shows that practices copied without regard to context rarely take root [9; 10]. Making adaptation a required step of the student's own work turns this research insight into a learning outcome. The study has limitations: it is based on one course and reports qualitative observations. Quantitative evidence from the pedagogical experiment will be presented separately, and the twelve indicators need further validation across other disciplines.

Conclusion

The methodology of independent learning in the course "Academic Skills and Professional Competence" has been improved in three directions. First, the alignment "academic skill —

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comparative task — professional competence" links every independent task to a course outcome. Second, comparative tasks become progressively more demanding, from comparison against given criteria to defining criteria independently, evaluating alternatives and adapting the chosen solution to a professional situation. Third, an assessment system of five criteria and twelve indicators, applied through rubrics for comparative tables, case solutions, mini-research and reflective essays, distinguishes low, medium and high levels of independent learning activity and guides the choice of the next task. Instructors of similar courses are recommended to plan independent work as a sequence of comparative tasks and to share the assessment rubrics with students before the tasks begin.

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