

The Russian Language Portfolio as an Effective Technology in Foreign Language Lifelong Learning

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Abstract

A successful learner in the modern society should be able to integrate knowledge from different sources, educate and self-educate throughout the life in order to be competitive in an increasingly globalized labor market. The Language Portfolio technology offers new possibilities for supporting students' self-directed language learning. The article aims to study the effectiveness of using the Russian Language Portfolio technology in promoting students' independent language learning. The leading approach to the study of this problem is competence-based approach as it corresponds to the understanding of the fundamental purposes of education formulated in UNESCO documents. The author gives the definition of the term "self-education", offers the Instructions section to the structure of the Russian Language Portfolio, defines invariant requirements to it, reveals difficulties on the creation the Russian Language Portfolio and singles out three basic groups of students' self-educational skills and abilities. The materials of the article may be useful for the teachers and lecturers to design courses on "Theory and methods of foreign language teaching", "Technologies of foreign language teaching", "Theory of foreign language teaching".

Keywords: Language Portfolio technology, language learning, the Bologna Process, self-educational skills, lifelong learning

1. Introduction

One of the main tasks of Russian higher education is to prepare youth for independent improvement of their knowledge, create aspiration and readiness for continuous self-educational activity and equip them with necessary skills. A successful learner in the modern society should be able to integrate knowledge from different sources, educate and self-educate throughout the life in order to be competitive in an increasingly globalized labor market. Today the process of acquiring knowledge is important but not the final result (knowledge can obsolete, modify). We need to teach students to learn independently, get necessary knowledge, be able to draw conclusions, think critically and solve the arising problems. It is also necessary to teach them to adapt in life situations and make their own decisions.

Russian accession to the global educational space actualized the problem of interaction between the national educational systems with the world educational systems. Russian integration into the Bologna Process promotes the acknowledgment of Russian diplomas and helps Russian universities achieve equal status with universities worldwide. Russia's acceptance of the Bologna Process and the formation of a unified Higher Education Area have set new challenges for the modern higher school. Schools are now responsible for helping future specialists to prepare to solve specific professional tasks, to effectively realize professional activities, and to be responsible for professional results. The implementation of these tasks is impossible without the development of students' self-education in the contexts of globalization and the integration of education (Sagitova, 2014).

The globalization of society, the individual's need to quickly adapt to a constantly changing multicultural world reinforces teachers' interest in the process of students' lifelong learning, including foreign language learning. One of the most important tasks of Russian higher education is to provide the conscious activities of students in studying foreign languages and to create an effective motivation for it. The need to actively involve students in the learning process and to encourage independence in the foreign languages learning situation is of paramount importance. Social, economic and cultural transformations in Russia significantly affect the expansion of the functions of a foreign language as an academic subject. Effective language acquisition involves first of all, the ability

independently, through the whole life to work on language learning, maintain and improve their knowledge and skills to develop their communicative and information culture. So we need to make the transition to productive educational technologies that are focused on the student's independent language learning activities. This determines the promising directions of language education. One of the most suitable technologies that offer new possibilities for supporting self-directed language learning, from our point of view, is language portfolio that provides tools for evaluating the learning processes and outcomes.

1.1 Literature Review

The works of R.G. Brockett and R. Hiemstra (1991), P.C. Candy (1991), Ch. Hayes (1998), M. Knowles (1975), H.B. Long (1992), M. Moore (1984), A.M. Tough (1989) are dedicated to the problem of self-education.

In modern psychological and pedagogical literature the use of modern technologies in the training of future specialists are represented in the works of V.I. Zagvyazinsky (2007), G.V. Mukhametzyanova (2008), N.D. Nikandrov (1992), M.V. Klarin (1989), R.G. Sakhieva (2015).

The place and role of portfolio technology in the system of the higher education are presented in the works of N.D. Galskova (2000), E.S. Polat (2002), A.S. Prutchenkova (2005).

The numbers of foreign researchers have devoted their work to the problem of portfolio: J.E. Jones (1994), M. Kimball (2002), D. Little (2002), P. Lenz (2004).

2. Methodological Framework

2.1 Objectives of the Research

The study aimed to answer the following questions: 1) Does the technology of Language Portfolio provide students with concrete opportunities to exercise greater autonomy in their language learning, really help students to develop their ability to self-educate and to learn across the lifespan? 2) Does the technology of Language Portfolio help students to develop their learning strategies to plan, monitor and reflect on their learning? 3) Does the technology of Language Portfolio help students to understand more about language learning and language as a linguistic system and develop their communication skills on their own?

2.2 Theoretical and Methodological Basis of the Study

We based our study on the following research methods: theoretical – the analysis of national and foreign philosophical, pedagogical, methodical literature on a problem; study and generalization of innovative pedagogical experience; empirical - research, analysis and synthesis of pedagogical experience; observation, interviews with teachers and students. The leading approach to the study of this problem is competence based-approach. Competence-based approach corresponds to the understanding of the fundamental purposes of education formulated in UNESCO documents: to teach to gain knowledge (to learn to learn); to teach to work and earn money (the doctrine for work); to teach to live (the doctrine for life); to teach to live together (the doctrine for joint life). Competence-based approach focuses on the result of education, and as a result is considered not the amount of learned information but the ability of a person to act in different problematic situations and find an appropriate solution.

2.3 The Basis of the Research

The 4th year students of the Pedagogical Education of Teacher Training program (Bachelor of Education) and the students of International Relations Department of the Institute of the International Relations, History and Oriental Studies at Kazan Federal University were involved in designing the Russian Language Portfolio.

3. Results

3.1 The Role of Self-Education in Students' Lifelong Learning

A successful learner in the modern society should be able to integrate knowledge from different sources, educate and self-educate throughout the life in order to be competitive in an increasingly globalized labor market. A well-known Russian researcher N.A. Rubakin underlined: "Never stop your self-educational work and do not forget that no matter how much you may have learned, no matter how much you may know, the knowledge and education don't have neither borders, nor limits" (Rubakin, 1914).

The essence of self-education is regarded from different perspectives. According to Moore (1984) self-education is the extent to which in the teaching-learning relationship, it is the learner rather than the teacher who determines the goals, the learning procedures and resources, and the evaluation decisions of the learning program. Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) consider that self-directed learning activities cannot be divorced from the social context in which they occur because the social context provides the arena in which the activity of self-direction

is played out. They call for more attention to the way in which global and cross-cultural factors frame this activity. Alan Tough describes this process as self-teaching. In such circumstances, learners assumed responsibility for planning and directing their course of study (Tough, 1989). The American writer Charles Hayes holds the idea that people should take control of their own learning and adopt self-directed inquiry as a lifelong priority. He emphasizes that when people fail to take control of their education, they fail to take control of their lives (Hayes, 1998). Huey B. Long (1992) in turn believes that successful, self-directed learners can be described by two psychological attributes. The first, personality traits, is associated with personality: self-confidence, inner directed, achievement motivated. The second psychological attribute Huey B. Long relates to cognition. Assuming the individual has a moderate allocation of the identified personality attributes, at least six kinds of cognitive skills appear to be particularly important in successful self-directed learning. They are as follows: goal setting skills; processing skills; other cognitive skills; some competence or aptitude in the topic or a closely related area; decision making skills; self-awareness. M. Knowles (1975) put forward three immediate reasons for self-directed learning. First he argued that people who take the initiative in learning (proactive learners) learn more things, and learn better, than do people who sit at the teachers' feet passively waiting to be taught (reactive learners). He underlined that they enter into learning more purposefully and with greater motivation, tend to retain and make use of what they learn better and longer than do the reactive learners. A second reason is that self-directed learning is more in tune with natural processes of psychological development. An essential aspect of maturing is developing the ability to take increasing responsibility for our own lives - to become increasingly self-directed. A third immediate reason is that many of the new developments in education put a heavy responsibility on the learners to take a good deal of initiative in their own learning (Knowles, 1975).

Analysis of modern Russian pedagogical literature allowed us to identify several approaches to the concept of self-education: self-education in the context of lifelong learning theory; self-education in the theories and concepts of personnel training and professional development; self-education in sociological research; self-education in the context of pedagogical and social psychology (Sagitova, 2011). Having analyzed different definitions of the term "self-education" in Russian and foreign pedagogical references and encyclopedias it can be summarized as a purposeful cognitive activity, managed by the learner himself/herself and aimed at achieving certain personal and socially significant educational goals (Sagitova, 2014). It should be pointed that the role of students' self-education has become stronger since the realization in the Russian higher educational system the main provisions of the Bologna Process, which have led the transition from educational paradigm to self-educational paradigm. Today in the Russian system of higher education there is the process of establishing a multi-level (three-cycle) system by the formula "bachelor-master-doctorate". The Dublin Descriptors offer generic statements of typical expectations of achievements and abilities associated with awards that represent the end of each of a (Bologna) cycle or level. Thus from 1st cycle (Bachelors) to 2nd cycle (Masters) to 3rd cycle (Doctorates) there are differences or "step changes" between the respective Dublin descriptors. The process emphasizes that in bachelor degree programs there has to be a balance between special knowledge and general skills, with the emphasis on autonomous study, which will allow students to develop learning skills that are necessary for optimal self-education. In magistracy programs students must have learning skills that allow them to study autonomously (Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks, 2005).

3.2 The European Language Portfolio

One of the educational technologies that are focused on the students' independent language learning in a unified educational integration is the Language Portfolio technology. The portfolio technology is a system of educational and cognitive receptions which allow solving this or that problem as a result of independent actions of students and obligatory presentations of results of their work (Hurst, Wilson, & Cramer, 1998). We regard portfolio as a pedagogical technology that promotes the formation of a students' need for self-education and create the conditions for their self-educational activity (Sagitova, 2011). The portfolio technology is directed on fixing of positive individual dynamics in student's development.

Use of a Language Portfolio reflects the general tendency shift in language education from "language teaching" (when student is taught) to "language learning" (when student learns independently). The European Language Portfolio is connected with the Common European Framework (CEF, 2001) as a pedagogical language learning and reporting instrument. It allows students to maintain a record of their language learning experience, both formal and informal. According to the Principles and Guidelines accepted by the Educational Committee of the Council of Europe, the European Language Portfolio is a tool to promote learner autonomy (Council of Europe, 2006). The Council of Europe introduced the European Language Portfolio as a means of helping language learners to keep: track of their language learning as it happens – set learning targets, monitor their progress, and regularly assess the results of their learning; record their language learning achievements and their experience of

using other languages and encountering other cultures. In this way the European Language Portfolio helps students to develop their language learning and intercultural skills, facilitates educational and vocational mobility, encourages lifelong learning of languages, and contributes to the promotion of democratic citizenship in Europe. The main aims of the European Language Portfolio are: to help learners give shape and coherence to their experience of learning and using languages other than their first language; to motivate learners by acknowledging their efforts to extend and diversify their language skills at all levels; to provide a record of the linguistic and cultural skills they have acquired (Council of Europe, 2006).

Basically there are two types of portfolios in language learning: the process-oriented learning portfolios, which include various kinds of process-related materials: action plans, learning logs, drafts of work, comments by the teacher and peers, student reflections, submitted assignments, evaluation criteria and checklists to evaluate progress with regard to explicit learning objectives. And the product-oriented reporting portfolios used to document language learning outcomes for a variety of purposes: for giving marks in schools or institutions; for applying to a higher education institution; or for the purpose of documenting language skills when applying for a job (Kohonen, 1999). The European Language Portfolio is a personal document that has three parts: a language passport where the language learner can summarize his/her linguistic and cultural identity, language qualifications, experience of using different languages and contacts with different cultures; a language biography which helps the learner to set learning targets, to record and reflect on language learning and on intercultural experiences and regularly assess progress and a dossier, where the learner can keep samples of his/her work in the language(s) he/she has learnt or is learning.

3.3 The Russian Language Portfolio

The 4th year students of the Pedagogical Education of Teacher Training program (Bachelor of Education) and the students of International Relations Department of the Institute of the International Relations, History and Oriental Studies at Kazan Federal University were involved in designing Russian Language Portfolio. But at the first stage they were introduced with the structure of the European Language Portfolio which consists of three parts: the language passport, the language biography and the dossier (it was described in the part 3.2).

The Russian language portfolio is also connected with the Common European Framework. Its main task is to train students the ability to learn foreign language on the principle of autonomy throughout life, objectively to estimate the level of proficiency in language skills and be able to present yourself to future employer. We have added one more section to the structure of the Russian Language Portfolio and now it consists of the following parts: the Language Passport, the Language Biography, the Dossier and the Instructions.

The Language Passport section provides an overview of students' proficiency in different languages at a given point of time, evaluated according to the skills and the levels of proficiency in the Common European Framework. Here students record formal qualifications, language competences and significant language and intercultural experiences. This part of language portfolio includes information on partial and specific competence (e.g. spoken language skills, or specific content areas). The Language Biography section facilitates the students' involvement in planning, reflecting upon and assessing their learning process and progress. It encourages learners to state what they can do in each language and to include information on linguistic and cultural experiences gained in and outside formal educational contexts. It is also organized to promote plurilingualism, i.e. the development of an underlying unified competence in a number of languages. Here we include a list of assessment of language skills in relation to global descriptors for self-assessment, teacher assessment. The Dossier offers students the opportunity to select materials to document and illustrate achievements or experiences recorded in the Language Passport or Biography. In this part students are invited to select samples of their own work to show growth and learning over time. Each selected work is usually accompanied by a brief commentary and analysis, identifying its positive and negative sides (Sagitova, 2014).

The Instructions section includes recommendations about the development of students' academic skills (improving reading speed; abilities to organize the work; scheme of writing essays, personal and business letter, resumes; tips on preparing for a job interview, etc.). The main function of these recommendations is the development students' self-educational skills. Self-educational skills allow students to organize rationally their educational activity (for example, to work individually, to check, correct the work); to be prepared in educational process and actively to participate in it (for example, to make a plan, to take notes); to choose their own ways of achievement of the planned purpose in a certain sequence and volume (for example, to use individual methods and techniques of acquiring of learning material). The recommendations on foreign language learning are analyzed and discussed by students together with teachers and also supplemented with new methods or techniques the use of which in the lesson promotes successful language acquisition.

The invariant requirements to the content and design of the Russian Language Portfolio are as follows: availability of creative cover design, reflecting the personality and interests of the students; accuracy/carefulness of performance; logic structure of the material; creative design of materials; facts that reflect the students' understanding of the material; materials reflecting the creative abilities of the students; materials reflecting the development of the students (Sagitova, 2011).

All parts of the portfolio are interrelated and complement each other: the students collect works in the dossier, analyze them in the language biography and the results of the achievements are recorded in the language passport. However, the functions of all sections of the portfolio are slightly different from each other. The Language Biography section first of all bears pedagogical function – supports students from the first steps of independent language learning. The Language Passport section carries out documenting function – to inform about the language level of the portfolio owner. The Dossier section fulfills both functions: the students can review, analyze their success in the field of language learning, plan future activities and also can show their capabilities, progress and achievements in language learning. We believe that language portfolio can help students to manage their own learning, to support learning how to learn, and thus to foster the development of lifelong learning skills.

4. Discussions

While working on the creation the Russian Language Portfolio students faced with such difficulties as inability to make resume in a foreign language and to determine the level of his/her language proficiency by type of speech activity; difficulties in describing the facts and experiences of intercultural communication in a foreign language, formalism in the designing of the portfolio, collecting only official documents in the portfolio, considering the portfolio only as the possibility of "cumulative assessment of student achievements", lack of unified criteria for evaluating its content(Sagitova, 2014).

We are convinced that using the Language Portfolio technology makes students language learning more transparent, develops reflection and the opportunity of self-esteem and self-control, and helps to take responsibility for language learning which generally promotes new possibilities for supporting self-directed language learning.

5. Conclusion

Using the technology of Language Portfolio in foreign language learning students are able to demonstrate self-educational skills and abilities which can be formed into three basic groups. The first group includes skills and abilities of independent language learning activity organization: ability to identify language learning needs and goals, define appropriate tasks according to self-education activities and draw up a program (plan) of self-education; choose the appropriate language learning materials, methods and techniques of self-education; carry out self-control and self-esteem. The second group contains skills and abilities of getting information from different sources: ability to search, analyze, select, organize, process information; use reference materials of different types, catalogs in libraries, compile bibliographic records and lists; read professional terms. The third group consists of skills and abilities related with cognitive activity: ability to define logical, chronological sequence of facts; reproduce information, make comparison, analysis, synthesis, summarizing, and classification; carry out interdisciplinary communication and systematize them; integrate knowledge.

Thus the Language Portfolio performs a powerful pedagogical function in encouraging further language study, learner autonomy and the development of self-education. We are convinced that the Language Portfolio technology can effectively prepare students for further self-education and lifelong language learning and help them be competitive in an increasingly globalized labor market.

6. Recommendations

The results and conclusions of the article extend the study of the theory, methods and techniques in foreign language learning and teaching. The materials of this study can be used by teaches and the lecturers to design special lecture courses on the organization of self-education of university students. Materials can also be used in lecture courses on "Theory and methods of foreign language teaching", "Technologies of foreign language teaching", "Theory of foreign language teaching".

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