

AUTODIDACTIC ENGLISH FOR INTENDING EFL TEACHERS: A COURSEBOOK STRUCTURE

N. Sergeeva, A. Guzeva

Abstract. The article deals with the problem of structuring a coursebook on English for intending EFL teachers at teacher training universities. Considering the main requirements for their professionally-oriented training in Russia, self-directed language learning readiness is analyzed on the basis of scientific literature on the problem. As one of the possible solutions of the problem the authors of the article suggest using an autodidactic approach to teaching English and share their positive experience in applying it to practice at the Institute of Foreign Languages of Ural State Pedagogical University. The autodidactic approach is based on intersubject coordination, tutoring, individually oriented assessment and heuristic principles and presupposes the realization of three subsequent stages: learning, self-directed learning, and peer-teaching. The application of the autodidactic principles and the stages of the approach finds reflection in the structure of the coursebook on English “Autodidactic English for Intending EFL Teachers” which is given in detail in the article. The coursebook structure is modular, the three basic modules being “Autodidactic Awareness” (which assists students at the stage of learning), “Brush up Your Study Skills” (at the stage of self-directed EFL learning) and “Teach and Learn” (at the stage of peer-teaching). The main modules are supplemented by “Language Portfolio” and “Assess Your Self-Directed Learning Readiness” modules which help both the teacher and students to plan their interaction and assess the results of their work. The research results prove that it is possible to effectively form students’ self-directed EFL learning readiness by means of increasing their methodological awareness in the field of teaching foreign languages and applying their knowledge and skills to the process of self-directed learning both within and beyond the classroom environment.

Keywords: self-directed learning; peer-teaching; self-directed learning readiness; autodidactic approach; teacher training; coursebook structure.

Introduction

What is autodidactic English?

The Federal State Educational Standards for higher education in the field of teacher training in Russia outline basic requirements that identify a teacher as a professional. Among them professionally-oriented self-directed learning readiness is specially emphasized [1]. The given readiness presupposes a number of characteristics listed in the standards in terms of knowledge, abilities and skills - all drawn on the basis of the competence approach to teaching and learning at a higher educational establishment, pedagogical universities included.

Further investigation of the problem revealed a more detailed picture of the requirement. Thus, the analysis of scientific literature on psychology,

theory of education and methods of teaching a foreign language showed that professionally-oriented self-directed learning readiness shall include the following suggestions: a) a person is ready to act only when there is the need and the situation to act accordingly [2]; b) the familiarity with the situation and the previous experience create the feeling of success that moves a person ahead [3]; c) readiness is integrative by nature - it regulates a person's needs, motives, desires, interests, abilities, skills, will and touches upon one's values when fulfilling actions according to the plan and aim set [4]. This integration lays the foundation for a person's professional subjectivity (i.e. the ability to be the agent of one's own action) and independence [5] that leads to the necessity to constantly develop oneself through self-directed, professionally required training. This fact can be described in terms of "autodidacticism".

Apparently the word "autodidactic" originated from the Greek prefix "autos" and the root "didaktikós" meaning "self" and "apt at teaching" correspondingly [6]. The interconnection between the notions of "autodidact, autodidactic, autodidacticism" and "self-directed learning" seems to be evident, though not that clear as to the degree of a student's independence at acquiring knowledge and skills in the chosen field of study. The former presupposes the complete absence of formally organized learning process under the guidance of a teacher [7] whereas the latter is often considered its indispensable part [8]. Being quite common in the field of EFL teaching and learning, the third view, however, claims that students may show different degrees of their dependence on the teacher at this or that stage of language acquisition since the nature of any language as a subject is as such that they have to learn how to work at it independently if they want to be fluent and professional [9, 10].

The cited idea allows us to think over an autodidactic course of English and suggest an autodidactic approach to EFL teaching and learning at pedagogical universities.

What sets intending EFL teachers apart from other students studying a foreign language in higher educational establishments?

First and foremost, they are future teachers of English and are given professional training at teaching the language to different age-range of students. Why not make them have systematic practice in teaching English to themselves (i.e. self-directed learning) and groupmates (i.e. peer-teaching)? Secondly, they have enough time for it. For example, the current curriculum at Ural State Pedagogical University gives intending teachers of English 1,874 academic hours to study the practical course of a foreign language only. This number of academic hours exceeds that of other students getting vocational training in different professional fields by 7-8 times. Thirdly, in addition to speaking, listening, reading, writing as part of a practical course of a foreign language, would-be EFL teachers are thoroughly trained in pho-

netics, lexicology, grammar, stylistics, general linguistics, pedagogy, psychology, methodology etc.

Shall the structure of a coursebook on English for intending EFL teachers be different from the 'traditional' set of structures?

We won't say 'shall' though it *can* be different considering the above mentioned many-sided professional and language training. The structure of a coursebook on English in this case may provide the basis for students' integrating knowledge and skills from two subject areas - Practical Course of English and Methods of Teaching - to apply them to the processes of self-directed language learning and peer-teaching. The latter gives them the possibility to try their hand at teaching within the classroom environment, being still students, not teachers.

The structure of the coursebook in question shall be flexible, i.e. modular, since it shall cater for students' individual needs and interests in the field of language learning, their different degree of dependence upon the teacher's guidance in accordance with their prior knowledge, language level in speaking, listening, reading and writing, and a set of language learning techniques they have at their fingertips. The latter, no doubt, will be constantly growing as well as their level of independence and responsibility for the results achieved and progress made.

For this purpose such a modular structure of the coursebook shall contain practice-oriented methodology-centered didactic materials on how to work at lexical, grammar and phonetic skills and improve one's speech habits in speaking, listening, reading and writing. In other words, these materials shall help intending EFL teachers to understand and know the why, what and how of self-directed - autodidactic - language learning.

Problem Statement

It is possible to effectively facilitate language learning of future EFL teachers by means of making them apply their methodological awareness of language teaching to the process of self-directed learning both within and beyond the classroom with the help of a specially structured course and a coursebook.

Research Questions

What approach to a foreign language teaching and learning proves to be effective when working with intending EFL teachers?

What are the restrictions of the chosen approach: the course of study, students' language level, and class organization?

What are the basic principles to be taken into account when designing a coursebook on English for intending EFL teachers?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current research is to theoretically prove the applicability of an autodidactic approach to a foreign language teaching at pedagogical universities and develop the corresponding structure of a coursebook on English most suited for intending EFL teachers.

Research Methods

Different theoretical and empirical methods were used to carry out this research. On the theoretical level they are the analysis of normative documents in higher education and scientific literature on the research problem in question; experience synthesis of pedagogical activity of higher educational establishments; systematization of research work results, modeling method. On the empirical level they are practices-search work; direct observation; testing; questionnaires, methods of mathematical statistics.

Subject (cases)

The research involved 183 participants aged 18-22, all being students of the Institute of Foreign Languages (English Department) of Ural State Pedagogical University, Yekaterinburg, Russia.

Procedure

The three subsequent stages of the research were carried out in 2015-2019.

The theoretical analysis (2015-2016) of normative documents in higher education and scientific literature on the research problem laid the foundation for the theoretical basis of the research. As a result a structure-functional model of an autodidactic approach was developed.

The practices-search work (2017-2019) was organized at the English Department of the Institute of Foreign Languages in Ural State Pedagogical University, Yekaterinburg, Russia, and included direct observation and preliminary testing of students' self-directed EFL readiness. Then followed the experimental training itself which led to further testing and direct observation of the skills formed as well as to the development of a coursebook entitled "Autodidactic English for Intending EFL Teachers".

The result analysis (2019) was realized by means of methods of mathematical statistics to make the obtained results valid and reliable.

Findings

The autodidactic approach as a proposed approach to EFL teaching and learning at pedagogical universities

Considering the above mentioned peculiarities of training future EFL teachers, we suggest applying an autodidactic approach to their professional training in foreign language habits and skills.

The autodidactic approach to a foreign language teaching and learning is an approach based on the integrative studying of a core subject (Practical Course of English) and methods of teaching which is aimed at the formation of students' self-directed EFL learning readiness.

This self-directed EFL learning readiness is based on students' ability to use a system of study skills and knowledge in the field of learning a foreign language to cope with individual difficulties in language acquisition and then share their own positive experience when teaching and peer-teaching. Thus, it is the given readiness that makes a student an autodidact to a greater or lesser extent. And it is this readiness that gives the name to the approach and the corresponding coursebook.

The methodological basis of the autodidactic approach can be traced to the student-centered and activity approach by I.A. Zimnaya [11], the integrative-differentiative approach by A.V. Gvozdeva [12] and the contextual approach by A.A. Verbitsky [13].

The restrictions of the developed autodidactic approach

First and foremost, the autodidactic approach is designed for intending EFL teachers at pedagogical universities, though we do not say that it cannot be modified and used for teaching English and other foreign languages to different categories of students.

Secondly, the preferable language level is B1 (or higher) since it gives students certain independence and confidence in using the language to satisfy individual needs and interests by means of self-directed learning. However, we admit that the approach may suit less proficient students under the proper guidance of a teacher.

Thirdly, class organization and its stages shall reflect the basic cycle of the autodidactic approach, i.e. "LEARNING - SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING - PEER-TEACHING". At the LEARNING stage students' language learning shall intermingle with a teacher's methodological input on how language teaching and learning work according to the following organization scheme: engaging - the 1st methodological input (presentation) - language learning - the 2nd methodological input (copying with individual difficulties) - language learning - the 3d methodological input (reflection and setting objectives for out-of-class self-directed language learning). At the

SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING stage students work on their own out-of-class according to individual objectives set under the guidance of their teacher. The organization scheme involves the steps: identifying individual difficulties in language learning - setting objectives - finding the necessary material - selecting methods and techniques for training - training itself - reflection and evaluation. At the PEER-TEACHING stage students are given an opportunity to apply their knowledge and skills of self-directed EFL learning to practice of professionally oriented activity - teaching, i.e. peer-teaching in fact. This kind of interaction with their groupmates shall be considered a student's methodological output (compared to the teacher's methodological input at the learning stage) since students share their independent experience of language learning in mini-groups, i.e. to 3-4 other students.

The basic autodidactic principles and their application for the development of a coursebook structure for intending EFL teachers

Autodidactic English is an autodidactic course of English based on the autodidactic approach to EFL teaching and learning at pedagogical universities. Autodidacticism in our case implements the idea of learning by teaching: "First teach yourself to study a language then you will teach others".

The basic autodidactic principles (intersubject coordination, heuristic, individually oriented assessment, tutoring) of the approach and its stages (learning, self-directed learning, peer-teaching) find their reflection in the structure of the coursebook that supplements the course of study itself. Thus, the structure of the coursebook "Autodidactic English for Intending EFL Teachers" consists of three main units (or modules): Autodidactic Awareness, Brush up Your Study Skills, Teach and Learn; and two additional modules: Language Portfolio and Assess Your Readiness for Self-Directed Language Learning. The three main modules directly correspond to the three stages of the autodidactic approach reflecting different modes of "teacher-student" or "student-student" interaction within and beyond the classroom environment. A closer look at their content reveals the following peculiarities.

First of all, students are supposed to get the basic part of their AUTODIDACTIC AWARENESS through methodological input under the guidance of their teacher at the LEARNING stage. The corresponding module of the coursebook contains a number of exercises for self-control and, most important, an autodidactic awareness chart where all language aspects (Vocabulary, Grammar, Phonetics) and speech activities (speaking, listening, reading, writing, translation) are listed like this (see Table 1).

As it is seen from Table 1, students' language learning is accompanied by their acquisition of methods of teaching. The two subject areas are coordinated by the principle of intersubject coordination, so intending EFL teachers have a possibility to consult the necessary part of the coursebook when working at this or that language aspect or speech habit in accordance

with individual needs and interests. All theoretical material is presented in the second module “Brush up Your Study Skills” and is given either in the form of tips or exercises presented in an inductive form, for example:

Exercise 1. Please, think over the following issues:

1) *Studying English you’ve already noticed that there’re two different English words to denote one and the same word in Russian «словарь». What are these words? What is the difference in their use?*

2) *When a teacher asks you to write out useful words from a text or a book for extensive reading how do you understand the word “useful” here?*

3) *Do we use all the words that we know when talking or writing to someone?*

4) *Have you noticed that you can recognize and understand many more words when reading a book or listening to someone than you actually use yourself? Why does it happen?*

Table 1

An example of the lexical part of the first module “Autodidactic Awareness”

Topics	Contents	References
Selection of Vocabulary	The notion of Active and Passive Vocabulary Criteria to select active vocabulary Criteria to select passive vocabulary	p. 12 p. 15 p. 16
Semantic Representation	The notion of Semantic Representation Different techniques of semantic representation – implying or not implying translation	p. 19 p. 21
Memorizing Lexis	The notion of Mnemonics Mnemonic techniques	p. 25 p. 26
Practice Activities	Types of vocabulary exercises	p. 29
Testing Vocabulary Skills	Types of test tasks Criteria for testing vocabulary skills Types of mistakes and techniques to correct them	p. 33 p. 34 p. 37

It is only after group or pair discussion that students are given a summary on the points in question, like this (see Table 2).

Table 2

An example of inductively summarized information

Active Vocabulary	Passive Vocabulary
for speaking and writing	for listening and reading
<i>Criteria to select:</i>	
Words shall <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be stylistically neutral • be frequently used • collocate with many other words • belong to the topics you study • have high semantic value • have wordformation value 	Words can <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • belong to different stylistic layers • be synonymous to the ones you know • be polysemantic • be highly modern

The second main module of the coursebook - BRUSH UP YOUR STUDY SKILLS - accompanies students' work at the SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING stage. Here special stress is laid upon the analysis of their prior language learning experience, moreover, time and again intending EFL teachers are stimulated to draw parallels between methodologically alike areas (e.g. reading and listening; speaking and writing; types of grammar and vocabulary exercises, and testing techniques) on the basis of newly-acquired knowledge about language learning methods and techniques, for example:

Exercise 35. Relying on your personal experience of studying English for years, brainstorm all the possible exercises that can be used for developing grammar skills. Please, make a mind map to graphically fix your ideas.

1) *Can you reveal any logical sequence in which it is better to organize the training of grammar skills with the help of the above-mentioned exercises?*

2) *Recall the preferable sequence of lexical exercises (p. 29). Do you find any methodological similarities between lexical and grammar exercises?*

The above mentioned examples prove the realization of the heuristic principle of the autodidactic approach. This principle makes students' constantly move ahead despite the fact that some language or methodological material may not have been acquired by them at once at a good level. The content of the autodidactic approach is spiral: we come back to the material studied and employ it for solving new communicative tasks. In addition to it, the principle of individually oriented assessment allows students' to monitor their individual progress in learning the language, their individual difficulties and achievements, and the efforts spent on achieving the result. The principle is realized with the help of a LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO as a supplementary module of the coursebook "Autodidactic English for Intending EFL Teachers".

Thirdly, at the PEER-TEACHING stage students are encouraged to use the didactic materials of the TEACH AND LEARN module which contain mind maps, algorithms and schemes and serve as reminders of the basic steps one should follow when organizing a language learning process, for example (see Table 3). It is here where the principle of tutoring finds its realization and, in fact, it undergoes double actualization. On the one hand, it stimulates intending EFL teachers to learn the language by actually teaching it to their groupmates in mini-groups; on the other hand, the teacher acts as a tutor to every student and helps to discern individual difficulties in language learning. Moreover, students are specially taught some basic techniques to discern and correct language mistakes.

Finally, all intending EFL teachers shall address the supplementary module ASSESS YOUR READINESS FOR SELF-DIRECTED LANGUAGE LEARNING to evaluate their overall results of autodidactic English learning. The diagnostic materials here are compiled on the basis of the tasks

from a TKT course [14] and a Tech-Pack Collection [15]. Thus, autodidactic English organized on the basis of the autodidactic approach and reflected in the corresponding structure of the course book is proved to encourage students' self-directed language learning readiness.

Table 3

An example of an algorithm for students

Controlled Activities
focus on accuracy, i.e. recognizing and differentiating the form of the grammatical structure and its meaning
↓
Guided Activities
focus on gradual shift from accuracy to fluency, i.e. using the grammatical structure in typical phrases and situations
↓
Free Activities
focus on fluency, i.e. using the grammatical structures in situations of (or close to) real-life communication

Conclusion

The practices-search work shows that it is possible to effectively facilitate language learning of intending EFL teachers by means of making them apply their methodological awareness of language teaching to the process of self-directed learning both within and beyond the classroom with the help of a specially structured course and a coursebook. The obtained results run as follows.

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the self-directed EFL learning readiness level of 183 intending EFL teachers at Ural State Pedagogical University revealed its positive dynamics. As for quantitative changes, the readiness increased in 78% of the students and ranged from 21 to 34%. Insignificant changes in readiness (from 7 to 14%) were registered in the rest of the study group. As for qualitative changes, students are able to better: 1) select the language material appropriate for study in accordance with their language difficulties and those of their groupmates at both self-directed learning stage and peer-teaching stage of the autodidactic approach; 2) organize the selected material following the rules of basis methods of teaching and learning techniques; 3) discern and correct mistakes in the speech of others and, as a result, in their own speech following basic mistake-correction techniques; 4) assess the quality of their own language work and that of others relying on the criteria given in their language portfolios.

Thus, the autodidactic English structure of the coursebook facilitates autodidactic "knowledge-skills" coordination and its application to solving practice-oriented communicative tasks on a regular basis. It is applicable within and beyond the English classroom environment and is most suited for intending EFL teachers.

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Information about the authors:

Sergeeva N. – D.Sc. (Education), Professor, Head of the Department of Professional-Oriented Language Education at the Ural State Pedagogical University (Ekaterinburg, Russia). E-mail: snatalia2016@mail.ru

Guzeva A. – Assistant of the Department of English Philology and Comparative Linguistics, Ural State Pedagogical University (Yekaterinburg, Russia). E-mail: anna.guzeva2012@mail.ru

Received 29 September 2018