
ПРОФЕСІЙНА ІНШОМОВНА ПІДГОТОВКА В ПРОЦЕСІ МІЖКУЛЬТУРНОЇ ІНТЕГРАЦІЇ

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ENCOURAGING LEARNERS' AUTONOMY: ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT IN LANGUAGE TEACHING / LEARNING

Technology advance and volumes of information that people come across make them learn during their whole life. They should be able to meet the requirements of the rapidly changing world. That puts lifelong learning on the agenda as it is a prerequisite for a sustainable future and professional success. Thus, it is understandable that people should be prepared for autonomous lifelong learning which is one of the essential tasks set for university education. Students should be prepared to acquire new knowledge and to develop their skills by themselves when their formal education is over. They should be able to assess their achievements by themselves, to monitor their progress, and evaluate outcomes. That is why alternative assessment is gaining momentum. The present article presents, as an example, one of the forms of alternative assessment, the language portfolio. The language portfolio is well known to Ukrainian teachers, but not widely employed in the learning / teaching process. It is unlikely to be well-known to students although it may become a tool to systematizes the process of mastering the foreign language and may help students reflect on their learning needs and goals, as well as assess their weaknesses and strengths.

Keywords: *alternative assessment, learner autonomy, life-long learning, language portfolio.*

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ЗАОХОЧЕННЯ САМОСТІЙНОСТІ СТУДЕНТІВ: АЛЬТЕРНАТИВНЕ ОЦІНЮВАННЯ У ВИКЛАДАННІ / НАВЧАННІ МОВИ

Науково-технічний прогрес і обсяги інформації, з якою стикаються люди, змушують їх навчатися протягом усього життя. Сучасна людина повинна відповідати вимогам світу, що швидко змінюється. Це ставить навчання протягом усього життя на порядок денний, оскільки це є передумова для сталого майбутнього та професійного успіху. Таким чином, зрозуміло, що люди повинні бути готові до автономного навчання впродовж життя, яке є одним із основних завдань, поставлених перед університетською освітою. Студенти повинні бути готові самостійно здобувати нові знання та розвивати свої навички після завершення формальної освіти. Вони повинні мати можливість самостійно оцінювати свої досягнення, контролювати свій прогрес і оцінювати результати. Тому альтернативне оцінювання набирає обертів. Ця стаття презентує, як приклад, одну із форм альтернативного оцінювання – мовне портфоліо. Мовне портфоліо добре відоме українським вчителям, але не дуже широко використовується в процесі навчання / викладання іноземної мови. Навряд чи воно добре відоме студентам, хоча може стати інструментом для систематизації процесу опанування мови й допомогти їм аналізувати навчальні потреби та цілі, а також оцінити свої слабкі та сильні сторони.

Ключові слова: *автономія учня, альтернативне оцінювання, навчання впродовж життя, мовне портфоліо.*

Topicality of the research. Nobody denies the role of foreign languages in the modern world. If in the past a foreign language was learned for no particular purposes, today it is mastered as a means of information exchange, a tool for cooperation, an instrument for mobility and intercultural communication. That is why the English language teaching / learning has undergone tremendous changes over the years, especially the last several decades. There have appeared new materials for mastering the language, new forms and methods of teaching, technological ways in terms of flexibility and mobility, etc. They are available to everyone, and they facilitate getting access to information (computer and web-mediated language learning / teaching), which increases in volume as a rolling snowball with every passing day.

The factors mentioned above have changed the underlying principles of teaching and learning, approaches to teaching culture, and the roles of teachers and learners in the process. "All over the world, the student-centered English language teachers seem to

have realized that gone are the days when teachers reigned their class with all monopoly where the students remained as passive” (Parab, 2015: 42). Moreover, technological development and the volume of information make people learn during their whole life to match a rapidly changing world. “The UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 enjoins countries to ‘promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’ (UN DESA, 2022). It thereby establishes lifelong learning (LLL) as central to a sustainable future. Transforming higher education institutions (HEIs) into lifelong learning institutions is key to realizing this goal. HEIs are in a unique position to promote sustainable societies through their expertise in knowledge production, skills development and academic exchange” (UNESCO, 2022:1).

The above task has been set for education institutions to make personal development to take place even when formal education is over. When personal development and progress stop, people are expelled from their profession. Then it is quite logical that there arises the question of learner’s autonomy in the process of lifelong learning which students should be prepared for. They should be ready to monitor their development and to assess their success by themselves. Thus, alternative assessment has been put on the agenda.

Literature review. The era of traditional methodology based on the teacher’s “monopoly” of teaching is over. Students should be ready to acquire new knowledge and to develop their skills by themselves. In terms of learning languages, it should be remarked that when students reach the level of independent users (B1 and higher), they are able to continue mastering the language by themselves. In this case, they should be able to assess their achievements by themselves, to monitor their progress, and evaluate outcomes. That is why alternative assessment, which is **the article is devoted to**, gains momentum. Students become subjects of the teaching / learning process. That motivates students, makes them autonomous and prepares for lifelong learning.

Students may exercise their responsibility for their learning success practicing self-assessment, keeping portfolios or logbooks, reflecting on, monitoring, and documenting the process of their learning.

It happens that traditionally assessment that focuses on the progress in learning / teaching has been connected with teachers. There is a huge number of research papers devoted to different types, kinds, forms, and formats of assessment which are applied by teachers to gather particular kinds of information about their students’ language abilities (Brown, 2004; Computers, 2022; Cabral et al., 2007; Cohen, 1994; New Directions, 2011; Polit, 1990; Weir, 1988). To assess the language, teachers choose assessment tools, which are appropriate for their needs and a particular language education context. As a rule, assessment is carried out in the format of tests which allow to make decisions concerning the particular education process: its students, assessment purposes and consequences. As Norris summarizes, “at the language program level, for example, we use tests to admit and place students into appropriate courses, determine the extent to which course objectives are being achieved, evaluate teacher performance, and reflect on the effectiveness of syllabus design and pedagogy” (Norris, 2001:42). Thus, it seems to be justified to say, after Samantha Grainger, that “assessment and evaluation are crucial cogs in the wheel of the education system” (*Foreword* to New Directions, 2011:6).

However, there are lots of teachers and students, for example, in Ukraine, who, despite the proclaimed learner-centered approach, practice teacher-centeredness with a responsible, knowledgeable, but authoritative and strict teacher. The same about assessment which has been regarded as a teacher’s prerogative, with teachers mostly focusing, sometimes overcritically, on students’ performance, not on their success, that may not motivate or encourage them. On the other hand, “the benefits of focusing on successes and achievements are manifold. Such a focus can build rapport between teachers and students, help students develop positive self-esteem, make learning pleasant, and, finally, lead to greater effort and success” (Fengying, 2003:38). This is just what alternative assessment is about and is based on.

Alternative assessment may be regarded as something opposite to the traditional one. It is not opposite. It complements the traditional assessment, does not diminish its role or intends to replace it. It is carried out continuously, by teachers or learners by themselves, in the classroom or out of it. It focuses on individual student involvement, creativity, and progress. With the help of alternative assessment, language learners can monitor their success in mastering the language and make judgments about their progress in developing knowledge and skills, without being afraid of making errors and mistakes.

As a rule, alternative assessment is implemented in the form of diaries, journals, reading logs, portfolios, self-evaluation questionnaires, teacher observations, performance and task-based tasks such as group projects, role-plays, case studies, work samples when students complete real-life tasks (letters, essays, articles) in the target language, etc. Alternative assessment which is also called “everyday assessment” pays attention to “what students can do with the language, rather than what they are able to produce or recall.” It is described as performance, authentic, informal, and situated (Huerta-Macias, 1995). It does not compare students with one another, but focuses on their growth over time, their success, and strengths rather than weaknesses. “We [teachers] do not make learners autonomous at a stroke by telling them that they are in charge of their learning; they gradually become autonomous by developing and exercising the reflective skills of planning, monitoring and evaluating their learning” (Little et al., 2011:18), with reflection being the essence of alternative assessment.

Discussion. The present article focuses on one of the forms of alternative assessment, the language portfolio. As researchers remark, the language portfolio “is in the front of alternative assessment approaches” (Coombe, 2004:18). The language portfolio is a document in which language learners can collect the evidence of their achievements and success in language learning, record and reflect on their progress and intercultural experiences. It is an important tool which systematizes the process of mastering the language and helps students think about their needs, goals, weaknesses, and strengths in language learning, making it more personalized (Ibid., 20).

In the 90s there appeared the first European language portfolios the idea of which was developed by researchers within the project of the Council of Europe. The CE recommended to initiate a pilot project to consider possible forms and functions of the European Language Portfolio and then develop it (the Council of Europe’s modern languages project *Language learning for European citizenship*, 1989–96). The project resulted in the publication of *European Language Portfolio (ELP): principles and guidelines* (CCC, 2000a), a number of national portfolios for learners of different age groups validated / accredited by the Council of Europe (CCC, 2000b:27-30), and the ELP templates which are downloadable from the CE site (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio>). Language learners as well as teachers, involved in the project, consider the innovation important, useful, and motivating.

An exemplary language portfolio consists of 3 components: a language passport, a language biography, and a dossier. The *language passport* summarises the learner's linguistic identity, presents their learning language history, assessment of their current language proficiency, and formal language qualifications. The *language biography* sets language learning targets, monitor progress, records and reflects on language learning achievements and intercultural experiences. It may contain titles of books, articles, films, etc. read or seen by the owner, presentations at conferences made in the target language, anecdotal cases (written reflection on translation or interpretation experiences, encounters with English speakers, etc.). The *dossier* is used to store achievements – written or recorded tasks successfully completed by the language learner. It contains papers, articles, letters, reviews written or recorded by the portfolio owners, certificates and diplomas if the portfolio owner has been awarded any, which confirm the owner's language qualifications – levels of language proficiency.

The portfolio makes “the language learning process more transparent to the owner, and fosters the development of learner autonomy” (CCC, 2000a: 7). It engages the owner in self-assessment, making it possible to set goals in language learning, monitor and then reflect on the language learning experience with the help of self-assessment grids – ‘can do’ statements (see, for example, Little, 2001). Depending on the initial proficiency level, students can choose (by themselves or with the help of teachers) from six levels for five communicative activities (Listening, Reading, Spoken Interaction, Spoken Production, and Writing) which are recognizable across Europe and in the world thanks to the CEFR (CEFR 2001, CEFR 2017). *Can-do* statements may be implemented into the portfolio in different ways (see CCC 2000a, 2000b), for example, it may take the form of a table with the following columns (adapted from Yahelska, 2004):

Skills I want to gain; When I plan to gain the skill; How I plan to gain the skill; Stages of fulfillment; Gaining of the skill.

Or another example for B2 level Listening:

Listening B2	My objective	When I plan to gain the skill and how	Tick if the skill is gained
I can understand in detail what is said to me in standard spoken language even in a noisy environment			

Ticking the achieved skill is intrinsically motivating for language learners and makes them understand that they really exercise authority over the process of mastering the language. It gives them evidence that they CAN do it. More than that, the Portfolio gives the owner the opportunity to share their success with others, their parents, friends, teachers, potential employers, etc. However, the language portfolio format is not a prescriptive one. It is not an imposed straight jacket. It may be tailored to meet the needs of individual learners or learner groups.

Thus, the most important language portfolio characteristics are students' autonomy in planning, setting the learning goals, and selecting the artifacts, reflection and self-assessment which make students responsible for their progress, growth, and success which are monitored over time.

The language portfolio idea was supported by the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science, and some Ukrainian universities and schools have already introduced them into their educational process (Ministerstvo, 2016). There have appeared research articles devoted to the problem (Aristova, 2013; Lunina, 2019) and developed language portfolios (Yahelska, 2004). Unfortunately, this useful initiative has not become popular, recommended to and by English teachers and widely used by students.

Conclusion. It seems the language portfolio should be paid more attention to. If the idea is known to teachers and discussed by them, the major part of students is not aware of it though it may successfully complement formal teacher-centered assessment, stimulate students' satisfaction and motivation, making their progress visible, raising their awareness of their achievements and success. Language portfolio encourages students' autonomy as well as develops study skills such as ability to understand their individuality, to set goals, to plan, to organize the activity, to take responsibility, to reflect on, and self-assess. The European Language Portfolio puts learning into a wider European context and facilitates mobility of students and professionals (Little *et al.*, 2011:16).

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