



# The Role of Digitization and Independent Learning In Enhancing Professional Competencies

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47134/innovative.v3i3.120>

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Received: 07-07-2024

Accepted: 18-08-2024

Published: 29-09-2024



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**Abstract:** This article explores the impact of digitization on higher education in Uzbekistan, focusing on the comprehensive development of students through independent learning. Highlighting the significance of President PQ-1875's decision to improve foreign language education, the research examines the implementation of this initiative since 2013 and its effects on enhancing the professional competencies of language teachers. Through the establishment of specialized programs and educational frameworks, the study underscores the importance of fostering critical thinking, creativity, and socialization among students. The findings emphasize the role of interdisciplinary integrated independent learning, where students actively engage in their educational processes, supported by educators who guide and facilitate their learning journeys. The article outlines effective teaching strategies, assessment criteria aligned with international standards, and innovative educational technologies that encourage student autonomy and collaboration. By integrating various subjects and promoting creative approaches to problem-solving, the research advocates for a student-centered educational environment that prepares learners for complex real-world challenges. The conclusion stresses the necessity of organizing independent learning processes to cultivate students' professional competencies, fostering an educational landscape that aligns with their interests and enhances their critical and creative skills

**Keywords:** Digitization, Higher Education In Uzbekistan, Independent Learning, Foreign Language Education, Professional Competencies, Critical Thinking, Creativity, Socialization, Interdisciplinary Learning, Student-Centered Education, Educational Frameworks, Teaching Strategies, Assessment Criteria, Educational Technologies

## Introduction

The introduction should briefly place the study in a broad context and highlight why it is important. It should define the purpose of the work and its significance. The current state of the research field should be carefully reviewed and key publications cited. Please highlight controversial and diverging hypotheses when necessary. Finally, briefly mention the main aim of the work and highlight the principal conclusions. As far as possible, please keep the introduction comprehensible to scientists outside your particular field of research. APA style should be employed for citations and references. See the end of the document for further details on references.

In higher education institutions, the digitization of education requires a comprehensive development of the individual through all possibilities of the educational process, fostering independent working skills, socialization, and nurturing creative and critical thinking abilities. The decision of our First President, PQ-1875, regarding "Measures to Further Improve the System of Learning Foreign Languages" has been adopted, where one of the main directions outlined in the decision is to elevate the professional knowledge and skills of foreign language teachers. Since the implementation of this Program in Uzbekistan in 2013, it has become the subject of research to understand its impact and various aspects. An example of this is the scientific article by M.A. Yuldashev titled "Introduction of a New Mechanism for Improving the Professional Skills of Foreign Language Teachers in Uzbekistan."

## Methodology

In our research, specific tasks were carried out by professors and teachers of higher education institutions who conducted pedagogical trial work to ensure the execution of this decision, continuously improving students' capabilities in the independent learning process. It is noteworthy that a specific school has been created under the guidance of leading professors and teachers in higher education institutions to develop professional competence in students through independent learning.

Moreover, the primary peak of the demands for forming professional competence through independent learning among students of educational institutions is that the criteria for assessing the ability to learn languages have been developed in accordance with international standards. As a result, starting from 2013, the requirements for teaching English were improved, and textbooks began to be created according to international standards. Consequently, in accordance with the Decision No. 187 of the Cabinet of Ministers in 2017, amendments were made to the State Educational Standards, and it was determined that foreign language learning within the continuous education system of the Republic of Uzbekistan would be implemented at the following stages:

- Organizing the educational process at the educational institution based on scientifically grounded principles;
- Paying great attention to ensuring continuity among the resources provided to students;
- Focusing on the directions and components of the teaching technologies used in the educational process that encourage independent thinking and reflection in students;
  - a. Ensuring that each educational situation presents the student as a subject encouraging communication;
  - b. Mainly urging students to work on their own to identify their independent learning skills;
  - c. Implementing educational processes based on technologies directed towards organizing students' independent learning, fostering collaboration, thinking, and joint planning.

We believe that an essential feature of organizing interdisciplinary integrated independent learning in higher education institutions is that it is organized by the students themselves. Therefore, teachers provide practical assistance in planning, integrating subjects, and rationally distributing time. Identifying and analyzing commonalities across

subjects involves selecting two subjects from those taught and analyzing their integration. Generalizing independent learning tasks allows students to combine the independent learning assignments of the subjects they have chosen, applying their theoretical and practical knowledge in these tasks.

Creative approaches to independent learning are essential, where students determine the content, essence, connections of the independent learning area across integrated subjects, and relate concepts to new contexts. Students conduct scientific research on educational projects based on innovative ideas.

Applying knowledge and skills in atypical conditions is also vital; students use the knowledge acquired in their chosen subjects in new situations. There should be some commonality across subjects. Independent learning aims to cultivate students' creative working skills. If students are not taught to work creatively, they may become reliant on copying subject-related materials from various sources and struggle to express independent thoughts.

## Result and Discussion

Based on our research, the status of forming professional competence through independent learning in pedagogical studies is presented at the following levels regarding students' learning and engagement activities:

1. At the initial level of activity and independence in subjects, the teacher reminds students of previously mastered foundational knowledge, skills, and personal qualities. The teaching technology and methods explain the educational material, where students' motivation and interest are influenced not only by their desire to learn but also by the forms of organization in the educational process.
2. In higher education institutions, the exchange of experiences among participants in the educational process, namely, students, is organized to the level of professional competence formation. Here, all students grasp the educational materials from two subjects almost equally, and their interest in the subjects is consistently reinforced with positive emotions.

During the lesson, after ensuring that students sufficiently master the subject material, teachers begin integrating independent learning into the subjects. In integrated independent learning across subjects, foundational knowledge at the level of creative activity and independence is generated through problematic situations, providing various complex questions and tasks that guide them to find new solutions independently.

At this stage, activities are carried out in accordance with the requirements of modern educational technologies and methods. To activate independent learning, the educator must:

- Identify the initial preparedness level of students;
- Improve the educational material through problematic situations, learning problems, or tasks;
- Separate educational tasks into various levels when developing problematic situations in independent learning;

- Require logical coherence in presenting the selected educational subject material systematically.

It is particularly important to note that the independent learning process is a two-way process requiring the active participation of both the teacher and the student. If the teacher strives for success in the independent learning process, they must certainly implement strategies to activate and motivate students.

Attention should be given to preparing textbooks and study guides in higher education institutions in accordance with world standards while also considering national characteristics. This is crucial, as the primary source for students engaging in independent learning is textbooks and study guides. When independent learning in higher education institutions is conducted under the guidance of an educator, students receive assignments and recommendations directly from the educator. The educator monitors independent learning and guides students in the right direction in cases of incorrect execution, fulfilling a managerial function. Additionally, students not only receive guidance from the educator during the independent learning process but also learn from one another.

Through interdisciplinary integrated independent learning, the formation of students' professional competence allows them to independently generalize, compare, draw conclusions, evaluate, analyze, and timely resolve problematic situations. Thus, it provides opportunities to address non-standard tasks and solve problems and issues that may arise in professional activities under complex conditions.

The effective implementation of independent learning is emphasized by our country's researcher D. Tojiboeva, who discusses the use of educational technologies and methods such as "dialogue," "Venn diagrams," "clusters," "pin boards," "debates," "classification tables," "inserts," "Why?", "I know, I want to know, I have learned" tables, "T-tables," and "fishbone diagrams," as well as graphic organizers and tools.

In the learning process, students require the teacher to carry out the following preparatory work for independent learning:

- Designing the educational environment and preparing educational-methodical resources for the generalities of the subjects;
- Updating the curriculum for organizing integrated independent learning from selected subjects within the designated time frames, incorporating independent learning tasks and preparing sample tasks related to independent learning;
- Revealing students' knowledge and skills in their professional competence, enhancing their qualifications and skills;
- Considering the generalities of subjects while students carry out independent learning tasks.

In organizing independent learning for students in higher education institutions, it is appropriate to pay significant attention to the structure of the content of educational materials, as well as to the methodological support. The educator explains to students from the first lesson the allocated hours for the subject, types of independent work, methods and forms of assessment, criteria for evaluating results, and the importance and necessity of

independent learning. In independent learning, students' complete tasks given by the educator without the educator's participation.

In our experience at higher education institutions, we aimed to utilize the following forms of integration, considering the characteristics of integrating specific subjects and each student's level of mastery and abilities:

- Achieving independent learning through generalizing topics from the selected subjects with the help of educational literature;
- Preparing for sessions by connecting independent learning to professional competence, considering the generalities of specialized subjects;
- Writing and preparing presentation materials that cover the most pressing issues of the selected subjects for integrated independent learning;
- Applying theoretical and practical knowledge and skills within the framework of the selected subjects to shape professional competence;
- Identifying solutions to existing problems in the practical field of students' educational activities, as well as constructing a chain of problematic situations;
- Creating models and examples of the chosen inter-subject object within the framework of integrated independent learning.

The independent work component includes tasks that require students to pay particular attention, such as writing course work and final qualification work. Given the interdisciplinary characteristics of integrated independent learning, it is appropriate to use other forms in organizing independent learning. Familiarizing students with the best literature addressing relevant issues in the independent learning process of integrated subjects, as well as organizing meetings with leading scholars, plays an essential role.

Integrated interdisciplinary independent learning allows students to explore subjects that better reflect their preferences and interests. It is beneficial for those who have interdisciplinary interests or who are still uncertain about which scientific discipline to specialize in. This type of independent learning helps students combine the knowledge and skills provided from two subjects into a privileged level, enabling broader education, learning, and evaluation methods that allow them to select subjects that endorse and shape their preferred educational needs and styles. By shaping the professional competence of students through independent learning, higher educational goals are reflected, and educational environments that support their scientific aspirations and efforts are created. By enhancing creativity, intellectual, and problem-solving skills, integrated interdisciplinary independent learning provides extensive and diverse education that is stimulating and satisfying for students.

In conclusion, to enhance students' professional competence through independent learning, the integrated interdisciplinary independent learning process should be organized so that students actively acquire scientific knowledge and methods for practical application, thereby fostering creativity, initiative, independence, thinking, and speech development in their educational activities.

## Conclusion

Based on current analyses, it can be said that higher education institutions must develop students' professional competencies through independent learning. This involves providing theoretical and practical knowledge on forming and activating independent learning activities within interdisciplinary processes, aiming to cultivate skills and competencies in future specialists, expand their capabilities, and enhance their independent learning activities.

The forms of organizing students' independent work in higher education institutions are implemented in various ways, and we have realized that establishing a work routine for organizing independent learning, as seen in advanced foreign practices, is of great importance. However, when discussing the universality of a specific approach to organizing education, particularly in pedagogical institutions with a focus on English language specialties, it has been demonstrated that students' educational traditions and the relevance of foreign practices in learning directions are crucial.

Analyzing the status of forming professional competencies through independent learning reveals that cultivating creative, independent-thinking students is one of today's pressing issues. To address these challenges, it is essential to create an educational framework that reflects high goals for developing students' professional competencies through independent learning, supporting scientific aspects and aspirations, while also preparing students according to global standards and, most importantly, without forgetting national identity.

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