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THE ROLE AND EFFECTIVE FORMS OF INDEPENDENT STUDY IN DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES OF FUTURE THEATRE SPECIALISTS

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Abstract. *The article examines the role of independent study in developing the professional competencies of students in higher theatre education on a theoretical and analytical basis. It argues that in acting, directing and stage speech, professional mastery is formed not by classroom sessions alone but by the student's consistent, purposeful and self-monitored activity outside them. Drawing on self-regulated learning theory and the competence-based approach, the study identifies the structure of a theatre specialist's professional competence, shows the functions of independent study in developing each of its components, and systematises effective forms of independent study together with ways of assessing them. The findings can be used in designing curricula for theatre arts programmes and in developing independent study assignments.*

Keywords: independent study, professional competence, theatre arts, acting skills, self-regulation, reflection, portfolio.

Introduction

Modern higher education requires graduates not only to acquire a body of knowledge and skills but also to apply them independently in new and uncertain professional situations. This requirement lies at the heart of the competence-based approach, in which competence rests not on separate pieces of knowledge or individual skills but on a person's readiness for professional activity and capacity to carry it out independently [7; 8]. For this reason, independent study should be regarded not as an appendix to classroom instruction but as one of the principal mechanisms through which competence is formed.

In theatre education the issue is especially pressing. Because the person is the main instrument of an actor, director or stage speech teacher, self-improvement cannot be confined to the limited hours supervised by a teacher; it is no coincidence that K.S. Stanislavski regarded the actor's work on himself as an indispensable condition of mastery [10]. The intensive creative rhythm of theatre training adds to this: rehearsals, performances and creative tours require students to plan their time independently, assess their own work and show creative initiative. The expansion of the digital environment, including video recordings, online archives and broadcast performances, has substantially widened the possibilities for independent work, yet ways of using these possibilities effectively have not been sufficiently systematised.

The link between independent study and professional competence has been studied in Uzbek-language pedagogical research across various areas of higher education [9]. Significant results have also been obtained in neighbouring performing arts: in music education, independent study has been substantiated as a means of developing the professional qualities of future teachers [5]; the learning strategies of

conservatoire students have been analysed in cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social categories [4]; and in dance students, the abilities of self-activation, planning, monitoring and evaluation have been found to affect autonomous learning ability positively [6]. However, in the specific context of training theatre specialists, the content, forms and control methods of independent study have not been described as a coherent system. This article seeks to fill that gap by substantiating the role of independent study in forming professional competencies of future theatre specialists and by identifying its effective forms. The analysis rests on the theoretical premise that professional competence forms more steadily when independent study is organised not as an optional extra but as an activity that is goal-directed, whose course is monitored and whose results are analysed.

Materials and Methods.

The study is theoretical and analytical in nature and is based on the analysis and synthesis of scholarly literature, comparative analysis and the systemic-functional approach. Publications in Uzbek, Russian and English on independent study, self-regulated learning and professional competence (works from 2002–2025 and classical sources) were selected for study according to the criteria of closeness to the topic and scholarly vetting. Experience of independent study in the performing arts closest to theatre education, namely music performance and dance, was compared with theatre education. The components of professional competence and the types of activity that form them were considered as an interrelated system.

The theoretical basis comprised B. Zimmerman's self-regulated learning cycle, that is, the phases of forethought, performance and self-observation, and self-judgement and reflection [1]; H. Holec's concept of learner autonomy [2]; and interpretations of the competence-based approach in Russian and Uzbek pedagogy [7; 8; 9]. The study does not include empirical experimental results; this is stated as a limitation in the Discussion section.

Results

The analysis of the literature and of the content of stage training showed that a theatre specialist's professional competence can be viewed as a system of five interrelated components. At its centre is performance competence, that is, the ability to work on a role, act on stage and create a character. This ability will not fully manifest itself on stage unless it rests on stage speech and movement competence, namely voice, diction, and body and movement culture. Performance, in turn, is enriched by analytical-dramaturgical competence, the capacity to analyse a play and a production, to understand period and style, and to justify a directorial concept. The development of these three components depends on creative-reflective competence, that is, the ability to assess one's own performance, accept critical feedback and keep searching. Finally, since theatre is a collective art, communicative-collaborative competence, which covers communication with partners, the director and the audience and work in a team, is also an integral part of professional preparation.

Each of these components requires repetition, analysis and self-testing that take time, and therefore independent study performs four interrelated functions in theatre education. First, it extends practice: speech technique, movement exercises and études are repeated outside timetabled hours, which serves to consolidate and

automate skills. Second, it individualises learning, since students can build an individual direction suited to their own strengths and weaknesses. Third, by developing planning, monitoring and evaluation skills, it increases students' autonomy and responsibility in line with the self-regulated learning cycle [1; 6]. Fourth, it forms professional reflection: through video analysis and keeping a diary, students learn to see their own performance from the outside, which is particularly important given that continuous improvement of mastery is a defining requirement of the profession [3; 4].

Based on the relationship between the components of competence and the functions of independent study, forms suited to each component and methods of controlling their results were identified (Table 1).

Table 1. Forms of independent study and assessment methods corresponding to the components of professional competence

Component of competence	Effective forms of independent study	Form of control and assessment
Performance	Independent études on a role; character diary; video recording and analysis of one's own practice	Étude showing; self-assessment sheet based on video analysis
Stage speech and movement	Schedule of daily speech and voice exercises; work on poetic and prose passages; set of movement exercises	Periodic listening and showing; criteria-based assessment
Analytical-dramaturgical	Written analysis of plays and productions; reviewing archival and broadcast performances; comparative analysis assignments	Analytical essay; oral defence
Creative-reflective	Reflective diary; creative portfolio; written feedback on one's own performance	Portfolio defence; reflection criteria
Communicative-collaborative	Group mini-projects; peer feedback; independent staging on the student stage	Project presentation; peer assessment

The table shows that in the components related to performance and speech the leading form is repeated practice observed through video, whereas in the analytical and reflective components written and portfolio-based forms predominate. The communicative-collaborative component, being collective by nature, is not limited to individual exercises even in independent study and requires joint work with peers.

The analysis showed that the effectiveness of independent study depends not only on the forms themselves but also on the conditions in which it is organised. Assignments should have clear goals and be directed at a specific competence, and students should be given an individual direction and freedom of choice. When the teacher acts as a guide rather than a supervisor, the student's intrinsic motivation is preserved, while transparent criteria-based assessment and regular feedback build the skill of self-assessment. The purposeful use of digital resources and the linking of independent study results with stage practice, such as an étude showing or a student

production, are also important conditions, because this link keeps independent work from becoming detached from classroom and rehearsal processes.

Discussion

The results are logically consistent with studies in music and dance. Research with conservatoire students has identified metacognitive and social strategies as an important factor in professional growth [4], and in dance, self-planning, monitoring and evaluation have been found to affect autonomous learning ability significantly and positively [6]. These conclusions confirm that in theatre education, too, the effectiveness of independent work depends on the coherence of goal setting, process monitoring and analysis of results. At the same time, theatre education differs from music and dance: because performance is collective, the communicative-collaborative component occupies a leading place in independent study as well, so that, alongside individual exercises, independent group work with peers (preparing études, mutual analysis) must be built into the system.

If independent study is not organised systematically, there is a risk that it will turn into formal assignments such as essays or copied texts; this has also been noted in Uzbek-language research [9]. In theatre the risk is higher still, because the main part of mastery is manifested not in writing but in physical and creative activity, and controlling it requires non-written means, namely video, showings and portfolios. A limitation of the study is that the article is theoretical and analytical in nature and its conclusions have not been tested empirically. In the future, the effectiveness of these conclusions should be determined by forming experimental and control groups, conducting initial and final surveys of independent study skills, assessing competence levels against criteria (showings, portfolios, expert evaluation) and comparing the results statistically.

Conclusion

The study showed that in training future theatre specialists, independent study is a necessary and system-forming part of developing professional competencies. A theatre specialist’s professional competence was interpreted as a system consisting of performance, stage speech and movement, analytical-dramaturgical, creative-reflective and communicative-collaborative components, and independent study was shown to perform the functions of extending practice, individualising learning, developing autonomy and forming reflection. Forms and assessment methods suited to each component were identified, together with the pedagogical conditions that determine their effectiveness.

In practical terms, the results make it possible to distribute independent study hours in curricula by components of competence, to introduce a personal creative portfolio for every student, to use criteria sheets and peer feedback in assessment, and to rethink the teacher’s role in the direction of mentoring.

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