



Investigating the Association Between University Teachers' Professional Autonomy and Their Innovation Performance

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Abstract. The purpose of this paper is to investigate both - theoretical and practical aspects in association between foreign language teachers' professional autonomy and their innovation performance under the current educational circumstances. The findings demonstrate that the development of innovative university teachers is possible in the framework of the autonomy-oriented approach that gets the teachers to be involved in intensive analysis and project activity, based on an analysis and a review of teachers' personal learning and professional experience in a wide range of educational context.

Keywords: *teacher's development, professional autonomy, creativity, innovation performance; autonomy-oriented approach, foreign language teaching.*

Introduction

Nowadays, due to the increasing speed of technological change and the transformation that technology has made in the way young people learn and understand (Redecker, 2008), a new innovation-oriented paradigm is progressing in the modern theory and practice of higher education in Russia. This paradigm is associated with the anthropocentric educational model and is characterized by the transformation of the whole educational

system into a subject-focused one which concentrates on self-realization, spiritual, moral, emotional and axiological development of an individual (Tareva, Galskova, 2013).

This new situation in higher education requires a new type of training which prioritizes proactive and creative human nature, ensures practice-based and personality-oriented implementation of new educational technology (Forzani, 2014), putting the emphasis on the interests of the students, considering their personal experience, inclinations, professional commitment, and fostering students' autonomy and readiness to engage in innovation.

In this context, teachers need to innovate constantly and teach in a creative way in order to provide a qualitative growth of the efficiency of the educational process and its results (Craft, 2005; *Teachers' Professional Learning and Growth*, 2016; Waters, 2009). The professional community is interested in innovation-oriented specialists with a creative mentality, a willingness to self-realization, and self-actualization. However, the problem of introducing innovation in ESP teaching is still under-investigated and is reported to pose many challenges that language teachers have to face in their teaching practice (Campion, 2016).

Innovative activity is known to involve actualization of a broad range of qualities and abilities, including goal-setting, decision and choice making, self-appraisal and critical reflection based on awareness of alternative options and their consequences (McGinity, 2015). According to our hypothesis, it is teachers' professional autonomy that ensures teachers' innovation performance, and, consequently, represents one of the most required teacher's characteristics in the current educational context.

In our previous studies, we demonstrated a lack of professional autonomy in | Russian university teachers of foreign language and claimed that it should be intentionally developed to enhance the process of English grammar teaching (Gavrilyuk, Lebedeva, Karelina, 2013). The present paper continues our effort to validate the concept of foreign language teachers' professional autonomy, emphasizing its potential as a prerequisite of innovation in foreign language teaching.

The review of the literature demonstrated that the idea of association between teachers' innovative work behavior and their autonomy is directly or indirectly expressed in a number of works (Chang et al., 2011; Gorozidis, & Papaioannou, 2014; Kopcha, Rieber, Walker, 2015; Marchenko, 2013; McGinity, 2015). But the details and possible implications of this idea under the current educational circumstances are still understudied.

Addressing this problem, the present study is aimed to investigate both theoretical and practical aspects of the association between foreign language teachers' professional autonomy and their innovation performance under the current educational circumstances.

Accordingly, the study objectives include:

- (1) analyzing the current literature on the issue of autonomy and innovation performance in education to reveal individual skills, abilities and attitudes, associated with the concepts of autonomy, and innovation in the educational context;

- (2) revealing the benefits teacher's professional autonomy has concerning teacher's innovation performance in particular aspects of language teaching and language teaching development;
- (3) investigating the potential of the autonomy-oriented approach as a possible theoretical framework for the introduction of innovations in foreign language teaching practice within the university educational environment;
- (4) investigating the practical aspects of teacher's autonomy as a phenomenon of an innovative educational system through applying the idea of teacher's autonomy to a specially developed system of personal and professional development for Russian university teachers of Medical English.

Questions of particular interest in this research are:

- How could the relation between university teachers' autonomy and their innovation performance be utilized under the current educational circumstances?
- Can a meaningful set of the autonomy-oriented approach principles be developed to guide the introduction of innovations within the university setting?

The organization of the study is as follows: the next section contains a literature review on the issue of autonomy and innovation performance in education. The relationship between these phenomena is discussed and specified through the example of a foreign language teacher. It is followed by the discussion of research design and methodology applied in this study and finally, the empirical research results are presented and interpretations of the findings are discussed.

Literature review

Originally philosophical category of "autonomy" is now commonly used in the current pedagogical context (Benson, 2011; Jiménez Raya, 2007; McGinity, 2015). This is due to the fact that the current system of higher education is undergoing a variety of progressive changes that require a high level of university teachers' independence, critical reflection, important decision and rational choice making based on their awareness of alternative options and their consequences.

There are a number of reasons why teacher's professional autonomy should be considered when we are talking about innovation in education.

First of all, it is critical to note that innovation is deeply interrelated with the concept of competence. To ensure training in an innovative way, modern teachers need the competences to "adapt to rapidly changing and ever-increasing technology innovations for teaching" (Kopcha, Rieber, & Walker, 2015). Among these generic (or key) competences, there is autonomy (*Key Competences*, 2007), that is reported as "the competence to develop as a self - determined, socially responsible and critically aware participant in

(and beyond) educational environments, within a vision of education as (inter)personal empowerment and social transformation” (Jiménez Raya, 2007, 33).

Autonomous teachers are described to have critical, evidence-based attitudes which will enable them to respond to students’ outcomes; collect and analyze “new evidence from inside and outside of the classroom”, maintain “professional dialogue in order to adapt their own practices” (*European Commission*, 2012, 23), adapt their knowledge and competences to new tasks and develop new skills and competences throughout the life cycle (*European Commission*, 2012; Rychen & Salganik, 2003).

Teachers’ autonomy is reported to be positively related with teachers’ capacity to set their own goals, make choices concerning one’s own teaching (Benson, 2011), engage in self-directed teaching, including detachment, critical reflection (Mann, 2005), decision-making and independent action (Little, 1995), and, consequently, with teachers’ efficacy (Rahimi & Riasati, 2015).

Our previous research allowed us to suggest that teachers’ autonomy is associated with their intrinsic motivation to professional achievement, their personal and professional self-development, internal locus of control, empowerment, responsibility, critical mindfulness, abilities to set goals, make decisions and choices (Gavrilyuk, 2015). Similar individual skills, abilities, and attitudes, including intrinsic motivation and empowerment, are emphasized in the current literature on the issue of innovation performance in education (Gorozidis & Papaioannou, 2014; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; May Yin, 2009).

Autonomy provides a teacher with an ability to organize a problem-centered activity in the classroom, conceptualize an innovative idea, develop it, implement, and reflect on the implementation. As a culmination point, autonomy allows transformation in teachers’ thinking style and focuses their attention on the meaningfulness of linguistic information they deal with through asking themselves questions about what to teach, how to teach and why. Accordingly, autonomous teacher is concerned about what should be changed, why and how to do it better. Based on a thorough understanding of the social and cultural context and fostering teachers’ constant professional development through mastering new skills and competences to deal with new challenges (Gavrilyuk, 2015), professional autonomy ensures teachers’ “going beyond the line of the institutional culture” (Marchenko, 2013) and their “innovative self-change”, which is regarded as a basis for every innovation in teaching (Tareva, 2013, 61).

From the psychological perspective, the idea of associating teachers’ autonomy with innovation draws on the assumption that autonomy represents the core of self-actualization (Maslow, 2011) and psychological constructivism, as the ability to create (Gabanska, 1995).

In the context of professional activity, innovative work behavior is reported to be positively related with employees’ job autonomy (De Spiegelaere et al., 2014; Burcharth, Knudsen, & Søndergaard, 2017). Significant positive relationships were reported between technical education teachers’ task autonomy and the degree of their innovation in

professional development (Chang et al., 2011), as well as between foreign language teachers' innovation and their level of professional autonomy (Compton, 2015; Ravikumar Abdul Ghani, & Aziah, 2015).

Underlying university teachers' innovative self-change and supporting their lifelong development, flexibility, and readiness to successfully deal with the challenges of the educational environment, autonomy is beneficial for successful implementation of a new innovation-oriented type of higher education.

It is autonomy that inspires teachers' natural curiosity and creativity, prepares them to face the modern challenges of higher education, to completely rethink traditional study goals and teaching strategies in order to provide an optimal challenge for students. Moreover, autonomy makes university teachers capable to develop new skills and competences, to engage in autonomous lifelong learning, and to act in an innovative way in a rapidly changing pedagogical context.

From this perspective, introducing innovations in education in general and in a foreign language classroom in particular is reported to require the autonomy-oriented approach to teaching and teachers' personal and professional development (Aviram, 2000). The literature review results allowed us to claim that the autonomy-oriented approach makes both teachers and students involved into an intensive innovative activity through analyzing and reviewing their personal learning and professional experience as well as a wide educational context.

Starting from the ideas outlined above, we tried to reveal the benefits teacher's professional autonomy has concerning particular aspects of foreign language teaching. Specifically, autonomy-oriented language training implies the extension of the language teaching content both qualitatively and quantitatively. It must be reliable, relevant and functional and fit in the cultural and professional learning context (Dudeny & Hockly, 2007). It means that a foreign language teacher *should* be ready for continuous personal and professional development through learning of new technology, information search and constant evaluation of the content and quality of the professional information in the foreign language.

In the context of teaching ESP teacher's professional autonomy will ensure interdisciplinarity and the focus on the *profession which are* important conditions for creativity and innovation in *language training*. Autonomous teachers are reported to be able to promote autonomy in students (Sinclair et al., 2000). This can be done through getting students involved into discovery-based learning, which implies exploring new learning contexts, testing their own ideas and creating knowledge (Brown, 2000; Han, 2014).

Different learners are reported to have different learning styles (Hatami, 2013), which affect the learners' preferences and approaches to studies as well as the choice of learning strategies. Taking into account each student's personality and providing more learner-centered activities through choosing relevant forms, tools and strategies for effective language teaching, an autonomous teacher makes the process of foreign language learning

interesting and creative. Teacher's professional autonomy is able to intensify interaction and ensure a successful intercultural communication in the classroom through the creation of a special self-actualization and autonomy-supportive environment where the teacher takes on the role of a facilitator, cooperater, counsellor, mediator, inspiring supporter, who stimulates students' empowerment and creativity (Han, 2014; Fallah & Gholami, 2014). In its turn, the development of teachers' professional autonomy requires a special training, necessary for acquiring new skills and implementing innovative and creative techniques and methods (Ellis & Barr, 2008; Esquivel, 1995).

Applying the ideas outlined above to the foreign language teaching practice at a medical university and based on the literature analysis, in Figure 1 we specified the core characteristics of the autonomy-oriented approach that form the basis for innovative and creative teaching practices compared to the traditional approach to teaching Medical English.

Analyzing the presented characteristics of the autonomy-oriented type of teaching in the innovative educational context allowed us to assume that this type of teaching facilitates the introduction of innovations in the university educational environment. In view of the multiple challenges facing the implementation of innovations in modern higher education, we tried to specify the principles of the autonomy-oriented teaching that could act as facilitating factors while introducing innovations in the university educational environment.

Among these principles, there is a principle of critical awareness and self-reflection, which means that every teacher's innovative activity should be based on critical analysis of the given means, methods and strategies in education with the aim to identify the most appropriate ones for a certain situation. This principle emphasizes a meaningful re-evaluation of one's personal experience as the basis for improvements in the management of innovations. There is also a principle of complexness in innovation management, which means that every innovation should involve creation, introduction, application, and distribution of pedagogical novelties at the level of aims, management strategies and techniques. The principle of self-change in innovation implies that the teachers understand the necessity of innovative self-change as a prerequisite of innovation in their teaching practice. The principle of personal involvement in the innovation processes is based on the teacher's perception of educational problems as personally valuable issues. This principle also means using teachers' personal and professional experience as an important resource allowing teachers to innovate and presupposes fostering teachers' intrinsic motivation through the promotion of confidence, persistence, and risk-taking. The principle of self-realization in the innovation processes implies teachers' considering the innovative activity as an effective means for their personal and professional self-development. Teachers' acting according to the principle of problematization of the educational process and readiness to face challenges prevents their conventional behavior and following the stereotypes through readiness to identify the problem and deal with

non-standard tasks in new situations. Following this principle also involves an increase in the usage of problem and project-based learning in the classroom (Zhou, 2012). Another principle is the interdisciplinary character of innovations. Autonomous teachers could increase the use of interdisciplinary learning through stimulating students to discover new ideas at the intersection of fields. Finally, following the idea of contextually grounded approaches to pedagogic innovation, as emphasized by Carless (2011) and Wedell (2009), the practical focus of innovations should be emphasized.

TRADITIONAL TEACHING		AUTONOMY-ORIENTED TEACHING
Theorized syllabus	↔	Practice-oriented syllabus Content reflecting both modern medical and foreign language teaching practices
Overview of some language phenomena	↔	Emphasis on profession, interdisciplinarity, and on students' ability to apply new knowledge to their actual contexts of learning
Non-problematic, non-diversified content Providing basic knowledge	↔	Content construction on the basis of interdisciplinary problems topical in the in the broad context of a medical profession
Emphasis on quantitative equipment of students with new learning techniques	↔	Emphasis on both qualitative innovational self-development of learners and their creativity
Use of old (or new) methods that may be not relevant for the students and may not relate to their specific demands	↔	Relevant content, reflecting actual challenges faced by students in their learning (professional) activity
Emphasis on transmission of information to the audience	↔	Emphasis on students' involvement into the educational process, their active participation in making sense of a new practice using their own metacognitive skills to create their multi-dimensional awareness of the educational context Teacher functioning as a facilitator Provided opportunity for experiential, collaborative learning
Beaming down of a generic course content Adherence to a fixed curriculum	↔	Provided opportunity to select what students would like to learn Critical review and use of students' personal experience
Token approach to teaching	↔	Teaching as a stimulus for students' lifelong personal and professional development Provided opportunities for students to coach one another and work together to analyse new learning techniques
Summative evaluation of students by teachers	↔	Multi-dimensional evaluation (fostering self-evaluation and peer-evaluation practices)

Fig. 1. Innovative potential of the autonomy-oriented teaching of Medical English

Applying the described principles and the theory of the autonomy-oriented education to the issue of teacher development, we specified the changes that should guide the implementation of the autonomy-oriented teaching, promoting teachers' innovative and creative activity as part of the system of teachers' personal and professional development (see Figure 2).










TRADITIONAL APPROACH		AUTONOMY-ORIENTED APPROACH
Focus on formal training courses organization		Focus on informal personal and professional teacher development Training courses as a stimulus for teachers' lifelong development
Emphasis on quantitative equipment of teachers with new methods of teaching.		Emphasis on both qualitative innovative self-development of teachers and their creativity Practice-oriented training Content reflecting both modern medical and foreign language teaching practices Emphasis on teachers' ability to apply new knowledge to their actual contexts of teaching
Theorized syllabus		Emphasis on students' involvement into the educational process, their active participation in making sense of a new practice using their own metacognitive skills to create their multi-dimensional awareness of the educational context Provided opportunities for teachers to coach one another and work together to analyze new teaching techniques
Emphasis on transmission of information to the audience		Emphasis on interdisciplinarity, on a practical use of a foreign language in a medical profession
Overview of some language phenomena		Cooperative development of course content with due consideration of regional necessities and opportunities to make the course grounded in a particular teachers' practice. Provided opportunity to select what teachers would like to learn from a variety of research-based ideas about improving students' learning
Beaming down of a generic course content		Critical review of teachers' personal experience Exchange of experience Learning is experiential, collaborative, and connected to students
Learning of generalized experience of other specialists		Multi-dimensional evaluation (fostering self-evaluation, peer-evaluation and learner-evaluation practices) Relevant content, reflecting actual challenges faced by teachers in their professional activity
Summative evaluation of student teachers by trainers Review of new methods that may be not relevant for the participants and may not relate to their specific demands		Content construction on the basis of interdisciplinary problems not only topical in the framework of the institution's educational environment but in the broad context of a medical profession
Non-problematic, non-diversified content Providing basic knowledge about a teaching methodology		

Fig. 2. Characteristics of the traditional and the autonomy-oriented approach to foreign language teacher development (evidence from a medical university)

Research methodology and design

The study used a descriptive research design. Most of the data were obtained through a literature review and analysis of the results of selected studies. To justify the benefits of professional autonomy for modern teachers, we performed the content-analysis of both national and international educational documents.

The relevance and importance of teacher's professional autonomy were demonstrated from the perspective of autonomy-oriented (Aviram, 2000), competence-based and context-based approaches (Verbitsky, 2012). The core ideas of the study were determined considering philosophical and psychological theories of internal freedom, personal autonomy and self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2006) as well as pedagogical ideas of lifelong learning, student-centred approach, "transformational pedagogy" and constructivist-based teaching within the framework of the personality-centred educational paradigm (Aviram, 2000; Dagar & Yadav, 2016; Mayer, 2009; O'Hara, 2003; Rogers, 1983; Temiz, 2013).

Applying the ideas outlined above to the foreign language teaching practice at a medical university and based on the literature review, we tried to reveal the benefits of teacher's professional autonomy has concerning particular aspects of language teaching and language teaching development as well as the core principles of the autonomy-oriented approach that should guide the introduction of innovations in the university educational environment.

It is known that both innovative teaching and increasing teachers' autonomy require teachers' "systematic engagement in professional learning throughout their careers" (*European Commission*, 2012, 36). Accordingly, the practical aspects of teacher's autonomy as a phenomenon of an innovative educational system have been investigated through applying the idea of teacher's autonomy to a specially developed system of personal and professional development for Russian university teachers of Medical English. The system was implemented at Professor V. F. Voyno-Yasenetsky Krasnoyarsk State Medical University (KrasSMU) in 2013–2018.

The core principles of the autonomy-oriented approach were followed within the above-mentioned system of personal and professional development implementation in order to make it foster university teachers' innovative and creative activity through the use of self-determination, personal challenge, and personal development technologies.

A total of twenty foreign language teachers between 25 and 60 years of age from the Department of Latin and Foreign Languages of KrasSMU with varying degrees of experience were invited to participate in the study on a voluntary basis. The teachers were assured that the data collected would only be used for the purpose of the study. The study participants were divided into two groups. The two groups did not show any significant differences in mean age and gender or in degrees of the teachers' experience

and levels of their educational background. The study group participants (10 persons) were invited to become members of the Linguistic Center of KrasSMU.

To make the Linguistic Center members achieve more recognition in the university community and beyond, we got them involved in a series of innovative projects. Depending on their interests and expertise, the members of the Linguistic Center were asked to choose one or more activities from a range of creative and innovative activities that included:

- various forms of curriculum development;
- implementation of distance learning foreign language courses;
- organization of different types of cultural events for both domestic and international medical students;
- organization of different types of beyond the classroom education for medical students;
- organization of student language contests;
- designing linguistic aspects of educational networking with foreign universities;
- consulting medical students / faculty in terms of academic writing / giving presentations;
- providing linguistic support for university international events.

To address the study objectives, we developed a complex of materials for foreign language teachers' personal and professional development. These materials included: a problem book that contained a range of problematic professional situations supplemented with preliminary motivational questions and questions for self-reflection, a complex of reference materials, guidelines for the development of professional autonomy and materials for self-assessment that enabled teachers to track their development dynamics and allowed for teachers' autonomous learning activity. The described materials were used both as a component of specially organized training sessions (Markovina, Gavrilyuk, & McFarland, 2017) and in the context of teachers' self-development activity.

To enhance the Linguistic Center members' personal and professional development, a collaborative platform was created on the KrasSMU website that facilitated the exchange of ideas and resources between foreign language teachers.

To foster the study group participants' connections with other educators several interuniversity round-table discussions and conferences were organized on the most problematic aspects of foreign language teacher professional activity, including teacher's professional development within the context of recent educational reforms, teacher's and learners' autonomy, teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), internationalization of education, and teaching intercultural communication skills. Most of these events involved the participation of foreign specialists in linguistics, education, and medicine.

The control group subjects did not have additional load caused by participation in specially organized training sessions, creative and innovative activities or using the

complex of materials for teachers' personal and professional development. However, they were involved in all traditional aspects of the university teachers' work (including training of students, educational, methodological, and research activities).

All the study participants were asked to fill in their Portfolio, adding every professional achievement to the list of their personal achievements on the university website.

Analysis of the system implementation outcomes based both on the university rating system data and the results of the survey among foreign language teachers- members of the Linguistic Center and open discussions with other university teachers of Medical English, have become an important source of information.

Empirical research results

The literature review allowed us to argue that innovative type of teacher development requires the creation of a complex system of teachers' autonomy development within the university educational environment. This system should involve various components, providing organizational, methodical, psychological, and resource support of teachers' innovation performance.

To support our theoretical ideas by evidence from practice, the system of foreign language teachers' personal and professional development was implemented among the study group of ten foreign language teachers from the Department of Latin and Foreign Languages of KrasSMU. Implementation of this novel type of teacher development system required a complete rethink of traditional teacher development goals and strategies in order to foster teachers' innovative and creative activity. The system was aimed at the promotion of foreign language teachers' personal and professional development by means of their involvement into the process of solution of case problems and creative tasks designed on the basis of the autonomy-oriented approach to the organization of teachers' personal and professional development.

The objectives of the system included:

- providing teachers with the opportunity to perform self-analysis and self-assessment of their professional activity in order to reveal their personal and professional potential;
- developing teachers' analytical and critical thinking skills as well as their skills of making choice in the context of uncertainty or incomplete information;
- promoting the "positive" types of motivation in teachers including motivation for success achievement in professional activity and for autonomous professional activity;
- offering teachers various opportunities for their professional autonomy realization in different sorts of professional activity;

- stimulating teachers' collaboration and collective action both inside the university educational environment and outside of it and their involvement in various innovative practices;
- providing teachers with special guidelines for their professional autonomy development.

Specially organized training sessions with the participation of specialists from different Russian and foreign universities allowed us to stimulate the Linguistic Center members' self-development activity. A collaborative platform was created on the website of KrasSMU to facilitate the exchange of ideas and resources between foreign language teachers.

A series of interuniversity round-table discussions and conferences allowed the members of a study group to share ideas with one another as well as to expand their collaborative networks and the range of resources they could use in their professional activity. The Linguistic Center members reported that their work with Portfolio allowed them to get ownership of their own personal and professional development. Their personal learning networks expanded.

Providing various challenges for the study group participants through their involvement into a series of innovative projects, we put them into fruitful environments where teachers had to act autonomously through planning, making responsible decisions and choices. As a result, they reported feeling ready for more senior, challenging and responsible roles and work in difficult innovative scenarios involving team leadership and risk acceptance.

Taken together, the results of the system implementation (based both on the university rating system data, the results of the survey among the study participants and open discussions with university teachers of Medical English) allowed us to prove our theoretical ideas concerning the role of teachers' professional autonomy in teachers' innovative potential development.

Specifically, it was revealed that professional autonomy allows foreign language teachers to stay competent in the field of new methods of training, as well as to develop a critical consciousness and media literacy while dealing with social media and new communication technology. Our results suggest that autonomous teachers do not simply use digital video in teaching foreign language; they understand how it can be best utilized to teach different students.

In teaching written communication autonomous teachers focus on the aspects that are the most relevant for modern medical students, such as the features of e-mail correspondence and the requirements for the preparation of research papers in foreign medical journals.

In developing reading skills, autonomous teachers pay special attention to the structure and strategy of working with a wide range of professional texts in the foreign language, including search strategies in electronic scientific databases.

As for oral communication, it is professional autonomy that allows the teachers to choose the most required skills to be developed (i.e., presentational skills with the focus on mastering presentation language, discussing scientific issues in a multicultural and multilingual audience, etc.).

Our overall findings suggest the following:

1. The most individual skills, abilities, and attitudes that autonomous foreign language teachers are reported to have, are beneficial for their innovation performance in different aspects of language teaching and language teaching development. Specifically, as our research results demonstrate, teachers' professional autonomy allows them to stay current in their fields, to think and act as proactive, reflective professionals who take ownership of their own professional development and go beyond the patterns and stereotypes. Autonomous teachers can successfully develop and implement innovations in their teaching, choosing the right methods for particular educational contexts and understanding how students learn efficiently to promote optimal learning within autonomy-oriented informational-educational environment. Such autonomy-oriented informational-educational environment comprises intellectual, cultural, methodological, technological resources and communication technology tools, providing access to a wide range of educational resources and allowing for creative and innovative teaching.

2. The autonomy-oriented approach can be regarded as a relevant theoretical framework for the introduction of innovations in foreign language teaching practice within the current educational context. The developed principles and the theory of the autonomy-oriented approach allowed us to specify:

- the core characteristics of the autonomy-oriented approach that form the basis for innovative and creative teaching practices compared to the traditional approach to teaching Medical English;
- the changes that should guide the implementation of the autonomy-oriented teaching, promoting teachers' innovative and creative activity within the framework of the system of teachers' personal and professional development.

3. Applying the idea of teacher's autonomy to a specially developed system of personal and professional development for Russian university teachers of Medical English, we demonstrated the practical implications of the existing relation between university teachers' autonomy and their innovation performance under the current educational circumstances and proved the benefits of utilizing a set of the autonomy-oriented approach principles that made the teachers' involved into intensive analytical and project activity, based on analyzing and reviewing both a wide educational context and their personal learning and professional experience.

Therefore, the results of this part of our research, even though based on a very modest sample size of Russian teachers of Medical English, supported our hypothesis that innovation and creativity in foreign language teaching can be promoted by teacher's professional autonomy.

Discussion

It is crucial to understand that educational innovation is not about generating creative ideas and using new technology. Technology is just a tool that a teacher should use to promote students' creative thinking, innovative skills development and individualization in foreign language training based on a clear identification of students' learning needs. It is teacher's professional autonomy that contributes to the development of teacher's readiness for effective use of ICT and the teacher's ability to critically assess the language teaching content and the possibilities existing in the information - educational environment.

Many researchers associated readiness for professional autonomy with the rational behavior of the individual. This allows us to make the assumption that an autonomous teacher is able to prevent a situation of "thoughtless samples copying" and to provide a rational approach to the introduction of innovations. In particular, this approach can prevent a massive, not always rational use of tests as a form of control in foreign language teaching through the teacher's critical awareness of their applicability taking into account national and cultural identity and specific context.

The benefits teachers' professional autonomy has been concerning innovations become more evident in the light of the idea about the useful distinction between primary innovations (changes to teaching materials or pedagogy) and secondary innovations (organizational changes which provide support for primary innovations), proposed by N. Markee (1997). Providing a rational approach to the introduction of innovations, professional autonomy will allow teachers to focus on both primary and secondary innovations, therefore ensuring success in implementing change.

In Russia today there is a serious problem of the so-called "falsification and simulation of education", which is reported as an imitation of reforms, imitation of development management. "Administrators pretend to direct the modernization; teachers pretend to upgrade research, educational process, etc." (Yefimov, 2012, 19), although often undertaken innovations "are reduced to the appearance of additional regulations, records, without affecting the actual quality of learning outcomes" (ibid, 20).

A similar threat, coming from educational reforms, is reported by foreign authors (Giroux, 1988; Hodgson, 2012; Lubienski, 2003; McGinity, 2015). In particular, Giroux states that tension from educational reforms makes the teachers work in a situation of "contradiction between being theoretically or ideologically correct and pedagogically wrong" (Giroux, 1997, 160).

Following the author's intention to defend teachers as transformative intellectuals and free professionals, we claim that it is autonomy that allows teachers to overcome this contradiction and not to reduce teaching to training. As an integrative component of teachers' autonomy, teachers' critical perception of the educational context allows for rethinking and reforming "the traditions and conditions that have prevented teachers

from assuming their full potential as active, reflective scholars and practitioners” (Giroux, 1988, 126).

Teachers’ professional autonomy can foster their innovation performance through allowing the teachers to stay current in their fields, to take ownership of their own professional development, to perceive themselves and act not as trainers, but as free educational professionals. From this perspective, continuing the effort to emphasize teachers’ autonomy whose developing potential has been proved in a number of studies (Hyunghim & Reeve, 2016; Wermke & Höstfält, 2014), we consider it to be a critical tool that can transform the way teachers are perceived in the 21st century, ensuring innovative development of university teaching practice development.

However, the results of this research, based on a very modest sample size of Russian teachers of Medical English, cannot simply be generalized to other contexts. Therefore, more research is required with larger sample sizes for building a better understanding of the association between teachers’ autonomy and innovation performance. It is also important to investigate the ways to reveal and take into account the level of university teachers’ professional autonomy to ensure successful implementation of a new innovation-oriented type of education.

Conclusions

Our overall findings, based on the literature review results and the results of the practical part of the research, allowed us to prove our theoretical ideas concerning the role of teachers’ professional autonomy in teachers’ innovative potential development.

First, the results of the study suggest that to make higher medical education more responsive to the changes taking place in the medical community, it is critical to completely rethink traditional study goals and strategies.

Second, in the context of education, it is teachers’ autonomy that advances fostering innovation and creativity from being an abstract goal. It is teachers’ autonomy that ensures the teachers’ clear vision, awareness and understanding of creative and innovative processes, transformation from external to internal locus of control, and promotes teachers’ responsibility for educational results. Following the ideas presented in this paper, we consider an autonomous foreign language teacher to be a key figure ensuring innovation and creativity in foreign language teaching and learning.

Third, innovative university teachers’ development is possible as part of the autonomy-oriented approach that makes the teachers’ involved into intensive analytical and project activity, based on analyzing and reviewing teachers’ personal learning and professional experience in a wide educational context. The research results allowed us to specify a set of principles of the autonomy-oriented approach to implementation in foreign language teaching.

Outlining the ways to use the autonomy-oriented approach to foster innovative and creative teaching skills in foreign language teachers, the study can provide the basis for utilizing this approach in other educational contexts.

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Universiteto dėstytojų profesinio savarankiškumo ir naujovių diegimo sąsajų tyrinėjimas

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Santrauka

Šio straipsnio tikslas – ištirti tiek teorinius, tiek praktinius aspektus, susijusius su užsienio kalbos dėstytojų profesiniu savarankiškumu ir naujovių diegimo veiksmingumu dabartinėmis švietimo sąlygomis.

Tyrime pagrindinis dėmesys skiriamas universiteto dėstytojų savarankiškumo, kaip bendrosios kompetencijos psichologiniu ir pedagoginiu aspektu, svarbai. Profesinis savarankiškumas leidžia dėstytojams dalyvauti inovatyviuose procesuose, atsisakant šablonų ir stereotipų, keičiant savo mąstymo būdus ir veikiant kaip iniciatyviems ir reflektuojantiems profesionalams, kurie prisiima atsakomybę už savo profesinį tobulėjimą ir atsakomybę už mokymo rezultatus.

Pasitelkiant užsienio kalbos dėstytojo pavyzdį, straipsnyje nagrinėjamos inovatyvios universiteto dėstytojų savarankiškumo galimybės. Jos pristatomos remiantis tyrimo apžvalga, teorija, dabartine mokymo praktika profesoriaus V. F. Voino-Yasenetsky Krasnojarsko valstybiniame medicinos universitete ir empiriniais tyrimo rezultatais.

Gauti rezultatai atskleidžia, kad inovatyvus universiteto dėstytojo tobulėjimas įmanomas į savarankišką požiūrį orientuotoje aplinkoje, įtraukiančioje dėstytojus į intensyvią analitinę ir projektinę veiklą, grįstą dėstytojo asmeninio mokymosi ir profesinės patirties analize bei peržiūra plačiame švietimo kontekste.

Taikydami į savarankiškumą orientuotą mokymo teoriją dėstytojų tobulėjimui spręsti, mes išsamiai apibūdinome pokyčius, kuriais reiktų vadovautis įgyvendinant savarankišką mokymą bei skatinant inovatyvią ir kūrybinę veiklą dėstytojų asmeninio ir profesinio tobulėjimo sistemos struktūroje.

Esminiai žodžiai: *dėstytojo tobulėjimas, profesinis savarankiškumas, kūrybiškumas; inovacijų diegimo veiksmingumas, į savarankiškumą orientuotas požiūris, užsienio kalbos mokymas.*

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