



UDC [378.147:811]

DOI 10.35433/pedagogy.3(122).2025.10

FOSTERING SELF-DIRECTED ITALIAN AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING IN THE CONTEXT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

L. V. Babaievska*, T. O. Borovenska**, Yu. I. Laptinova***

The paper addresses the issue of facilitating out-of-class language learning through homework completion strategy instruction. Homework assignment is a paramount part of foreign language learning process in the context of higher education. However, a great number English and Italian learners at the Intermediate (B1) and Upper-Intermediate (B2) levels can not achieve better academic outcomes as they are unfamiliar with a range of techniques that can profoundly increase productive self-learning outside the classroom. Given these difficulties, instructing foreign language learners in the use of strategies for completing homework assignments could be beneficial for enhanced efficiency of their learning experience out-of-class. The study was conducted through reviewing research literature and qualitative data of questionnaires completed by Italian and English students with the objective of identifying learning strategies that guide them through the process of homework completion towards a desired outcome. The study has shown that the more cognitive manipulations students do with the homework material, the more efficient and effective learning is. So, to increase learners' command over a variety of strategies for homework completion, this paper suggests Homework Processing Strategy which learners can actively employ while learning a language independently. Homework Processing Strategy refers to transforming the homework content into the end product of their learning process that records deeper proficiency in understanding and using a language. This can be achieved through various techniques like self-questioning, filtering, highlighting, paraphrasing, visualizing and others, which constitute improved language performance at home. Homework Processing Strategy is designed not only to enhance homework performance but also equip Italian and English learners with self-study skills invaluable in foreign language acquisition. Moreover learners can transfer this strategy to new contexts for maximizing overall academic performance.

* Senior Lecturer

(Kharkiv I.P. Kotlyarevsky National University of Arts)
babayevskaya@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0003-1278-0086

** Senior Lecturer

(Kharkiv I.P. Kotlyarevsky National University of Arts)
borovenskaya28@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0001-8866-9312

*** Candidate of Philosophical Science (PhD in Philosophy), Senior Lecturer

(Kharkiv I.P. Kotlyarevsky National University of Arts)
sergay2004@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-4175-0858

Keywords: Italian and English language learning strategies, strategy instruction, self-directed learning, home assignment, foreign language learners, higher education.

СПРИЯННЯ САМОСТІЙНОМУ ВИВЧЕННЮ ІТАЛІЙСЬКОЇ ТА АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВ ЗДОБУВАЧАМИ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ

Л. В. Бабаєвська, Т. О. Боровенська, Ю. І. Лаптінова

У статті розглядається питання сприяння вивченню мови поза межами навчальної аудиторії через навчання стратегій виконання домашніх завдань. Домашні завдання є важливою частиною процесу вивчення іноземної мови в контексті вищої освіти. Однак багато тих, хто вивчає іноземні мови на середньому (B1) та вище середнього (B2) рівнях, не можуть досягти кращих академічних результатів, оскільки вони не знайомі з низкою засобів, які можуть суттєво підвищити продуктивне самостійне навчання. З огляду на ці труднощі, навчання студентів, використанню стратегій виконання домашніх завдань буде корисним для підвищення ефективності їхнього позааудиторного навчання. Дослідження було проведено шляхом огляду дослідницької літератури та якісних даних анкет, заповнених студентами італійської та англійської мов, з метою визначення стратегій навчання, які спрямовують здобувачів у процесі виконання домашніх завдань до бажаного результату. Дослідження показало, що чим більше когнітивних маніпуляцій учні виконують з домашнім завданням, тим ефективнішим та результативнішим є навчання. Отже, щоб покращити володіння здобувачами різноманітними практиками виконання домашніх завдань, стаття пропонує Стратегію Опрацювання Домашніх Завдань, яку можна активно використовувати під час самостійного вивчення мови. Стратегія Опрацювання Домашніх Завдань стосується перетворення змісту домашнього завдання на кінцевий продукт навчального процесу, який фіксує глибше володіння мовою. Цього можна досягти за допомогою різних технік, таких як самоопитування, фільтрація, виділення, перефразування, візуалізація та інші, які сприяють кращому засвоєнню навчального матеріалу. Стратегія Опрацювання Домашніх Завдань розроблена не лише для покращення виконання домашніх завдань, але й для забезпечення студентів навичками самостійного навчання, необхідними для вивчення іноземної мови. Крім того, здобувачі можуть застосовувати цю стратегію в нових контекстах для максимізації загальної академічної успішності.

Ключові слова: стратегії вивчення Італійської та Англійської мов; навчання стратегій; самостійне навчання; домашнє завдання; студенти, що вивчають іноземні мови; вища освіта.

Introduction of the issue. In recent years with the increasing emphasis on learner-centered instruction and the transition to distance learning, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, research on language learning strategies instruction has obtained greater attention in the field of professional training in higher education institutions. For students studying a foreign language, strategies are considered facilitators guiding them on the way to the language proficiency. Expertise in foreign language instruction shows that numerous language learners don't demonstrate a thoughtful, strategic approach to self-directed learning out-of-class. Students who are unfamiliar with possible strategies they can consciously select and apply to handle the assignment often

learn passively and ultimately fail in academic settings. Mastering homework completion strategies can be a game-changer for boosting productivity and efficiency in foreign language learning. For this reason, it is highly beneficial for teachers to integrate language learning strategy instruction into the content of their regular language class. Language educators and methodologists have for years tried to understand the diverse approaches language learners employ to enhance their self-learning experience, the complex cognitive, social, affective processes involved in processing language input, the effectiveness of learning strategy instruction implementation.

Current state of the issue. Recently, a number of European and domestic investigations have reinvigorated the field of self-directed learning strategies,

suggesting ways in which teachers can support learners in their efforts to be more proficient in language learning out-of-class. Anna Uhl Chamot, Professor Emerita at The George Washington University, in her article "Language learning strategy instruction: current issues and research" focuses on the evolution of research on language learning strategy intervention studies and reveals methods for identifying learners' strategies, methodological and practical issues in learning strategy instruction [2]. Andrew D. Cohen, Professor Emeritus at University of Minnesota, in his article "The learner's side of foreign language learning: where do styles, strategies, and tasks meet?" explores strategy choice, the fluidity and flexibility of learning strategies, providing theoretical insights on how strategic learning interacts with complex environments [4]. Rebecca L. Oxford, from University of Alabama at Birmingham, suggests the model of learning strategies, Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) or The Oxford Taxonomy, which classifies language learning strategies into six main categories: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social. These strategies are further divided into direct (memory, cognitive, compensation) and indirect (metacognitive, affective, social) strategies [10]. Over the years, a number of programmes have been designed with the aim of instructing students in the use of language learning strategies. Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) was one of the first strategy-based instruction programmes, developed by Chamot and O'Malley which explicitly teaches students how to use learning strategies (cognitive, metacognitive, and social/affective) to enhance their comprehension and retention of academic content and language [3]. Another well-known programme, the Strategies Based Instruction (SBI), conducted by the University of Minnesota, focuses on developing students' awareness and use of learning strategies, both cognitive and metacognitive, to enhance their language learning and overall academic

performance [5]. The book "Language learning strategies and individual learner characteristics: situating strategy use in diverse contexts", written by a team of well-known experts and promising scholars explores the relationships among self-regulated language learning strategies, students' individual characteristics, and the diverse contexts in which learning occurs [6]. Posokhova A. and Verbytska K. from Lviv State University of Internal Affairs in their article "Innovative learning strategies in modern pedagogy" describe main innovative learning strategies in modern pedagogy that are widely used and successfully recommended themselves in the process of studying not only in Ukraine, but also in the countries of European Union [11]. Babii L. and Datskiv O. from Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University in their article "Active learning strategies in CLIL courses" offer the implementation of active learning strategies that make students active participants in the context of Content and Language Integrated Learning [1]. Olendr T. and Tsar I. from Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University in their article «The essence of learning strategies and approaches to their classification» provide their understanding of the essence and classification of learning strategies (cognitive, metacognitive, affective and communicative) contributing to the formation of individual type of learning and the ability to construct self-responsibility [9]. Reshytko A., Samoilova Y., Dovhopolova H., lectures at the Department of Humanities, Sumy branch of Kharkiv National University of Internal Affairs in their article "Strategies of learning foreign languages future lawyers" propose linguistic, communicative, integrative creative strategies for bachelors of non-language higher education, which correlate with the competencies they contribute to [12]. Nedashkivska T., Yarynovska K. from Zhytomyr Ivan Franko State University in their article "Innovation in teaching Polish to students of philology" present an

overview of foreign language learning activities that can help competently reorganise the educational process and contribute to the effective mastery of Polish by students of higher education institutions [8].

Having analyzed the works of European and Domestic foreign language acquisition researchers, we came to the conclusion that the most effective language learning strategies include: immersion, consistent practice, setting realistic goals, utilizing a variety of resources (apps), spaced repetition, retrieval practice, and collaboration. These methods are designed to empower learners to actively manage their own learning process through enhancing their ability to acquire, store, retrieve, and apply language material.

Outline of unresolved issues brought up in the article. Though numerous descriptive studies have addressed the goal of categorizing the range and type of learning strategies utilised by language learners, the issue of cognitive strategies that learners employ to effectively complete homework in foreign language still remain insufficiently explored. To address this gap, the authors of the paper, Italian and English language teachers from Kharkiv I.P. Kotliarevskyi National University of Arts have been asking foreign language learners at different levels of language proficiency about their own approaches in tackling language tasks assigned to be completed at home. Findings of learners' personal self-reflections on their own learning experience outside of class time have indicated that both English and Italian foreign language learners often choose ineffective methods of reviewing class material at home as they do not possess the necessary skills, awareness, and confidence for effective self-directed learning. So, we conduct this research with the aim to optimize the process of out-of-class self-directed learning through the use of home task completion strategy. The scientific novelty of the study is in the authors' constructivist approach to language learning instruction that focuses on developing learners' capacity to self-study through instructing them how to

complete home assignments more effectively.

Aim of the research. The main purpose of the research is to identify foreign language learning strategy for completing home assignment that facilitate self-directed learning in academic settings.

Research methods. To get inside the unobservable mental "self-learning" of the foreign language learners and find out what works best, this study reviewed research literature on foreign language learning and analysed a large number of self-reports, conducted by language users at Kharkiv I.P. Kotliarevskyi National University of Arts.

Results and discussion. Homework assignment is crucial for maximizing learning efficiency and language performance in the context of higher education. By completing assignments, students can improve their learning capabilities in various areas like reading, writing, listening, speaking and solidify their understanding of grammar and vocabulary learned in class. Excellent homework is not about completing a large number of tasks or even about completing it successfully, but rather about the quality and depth of understanding demonstrated in the completed work. The efficiency of homework is affected by active cognitive investment into the content of language material. When students make mental effort to process a task, they actively build their own more profound and lasting understanding of the language. This process of actively processing information leads to better comprehension and retention. Teachers are there to develop learners' capacity to process the material in a way that allows them to accomplish home tasks in a meaningful way, increase depth of understanding and achieve desired learning outcomes. For navigating complex learning experience and amplifying the effectiveness of homework performance, we suggest *Homework Processing Strategy* that can be applied to different types of tasks related to specific language areas like grammar, vocabulary, listening, writing, speaking. This strategy can cater to broad category of foreign

language learners with various learning styles, motivation, and proficiency levels. In language learning, *Homework Processing Strategy* refers to a complex interplay of techniques used by learners to complete home assignment, leading to a new, enriched level of relationship with the material, more «advanced» mode of comprehension and application of the starting material. The end product of the homework completion process is actively constructed by learners through cognitive and metacognitive activities, which make the material more appealing, more applicable to learners' daily lives and more relatable to their learning capabilities. *Homework Processing Strategy* covers a broad spectrum of techniques, which ensure the tasks are completed effectively. Below is a more detailed look at them.

1) *Self-questioning*. Instruct learners to generate their own questions about the homework material to assess comprehension, clarify any confusing points. Self-questioning encourages learners to actively seek answers before, during and after completing assignment, initiating the process of finding information. A deliberate and conscious effort to find information or solutions forces students to think more deeply about the material, evaluate different perspectives, activate prior knowledge, identify gaps in their knowledge, form their own interpretations. This leads to a stronger connection to their learning and better comprehension, making it easier to retrieve the information at a later date. This effective metacognitive technique helps learners become more strategic in their approach to learning, leading to improved academic outcomes;

2) *Filtering out*. Instruct learners to monitor the content of the homework and its impact on their affective state. This technique involves strategically selecting materials that are both comprehensible and manageable, while minimizing or blocking overcomplicated tasks (unfamiliar, overly complex vocabulary, irrelevant topics) leading to frustration and decreased motivation. By strategically filtering out overly challenging, irrelevant or

inappropriate types of tasks that can hinder assignment completion, learners can thoughtfully focus their efforts on homework completion without being overwhelmed.

Making learning content customized, replacing or modifying the task, to be comprehensible, relevant and adjustable to learners' interests, needs and learning styles can lower a psychological barrier, offering students greater control over their learning [7]. This technique significantly boosts learning efficiency as it creates a more enjoyable experience, leading to greater success in achieving language learning goals;

3) *Highlighting*. Instruct students to extract key information from the learning content (text, audio, video), identifying key vocabulary and important concepts while doing homework. By actively choosing what to highlight, learners engage in deeper cognitive processing (encoding the information in memory), which can lead to better retention and later application of the learned material. Highlighting (like note-taking, creating graphic organizer, summarizing, marking key points, annotating, underlining) helps learners focus on key information, filter out less relevant information and prevents overwhelming the learner with too many details. By actively generating concise summaries of long tasks, learners are more likely to remember and retain the information later. It's a strategy that encourages learners to process the content of the home material more deeply, improving their ability to remember and apply what they have learned;

4) *Paraphrasing*. Instruct students to restate the meaning of something written or spoken using different words and sentence structures while maintaining the original meaning. Searching the alternative ways to express the same idea in different ways expands and strengthens vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure and improve fluency. This technique forces learners to grasp the core idea of the original text, evaluate and synthesize the language material, and then present it in a clear and concise manner, tailoring their language to different contexts. Avoiding directly copying

from source materials, simplifying language for less proficient listeners or formalize language in academic settings, as a true indicator of genuine comprehension, improves overall communicative competence by making communication more effective and natural;

5) *Visualizing*. Instruct students to use visual tools like diagrams, charts, images, screenshots, mind maps to grasp the core concepts of the task, represent relationships between grammar concepts, organize vocabulary related to a specific topic, make connections between words and their meanings, bridge the gap between the abstract and the concrete. Visual aids can clarify the meaning of words and phrases, integrate new information with previously learnt, making it more memorable and easier to recall. They are often processed more deeply and creates stronger memory traces, leading to better long-term retention of language information;

6) *Thinking aloud*. Instruct learners to verbalize their thoughts, predictions, questions, and connections while interacting with the language material. Thinking-aloud encourages learners to reflect on their thinking processes, making them more aware of their strengths and weaknesses in language learning. By articulating their thoughts while reading, listening, or writing, learners can see how they approach language tasks, identify areas of difficulty and confusion, make predictions, monitor their understanding and practice appropriate strategies to overcome challenges, leading to better comprehension of language tasks;

7) *Making connections*. Instruct learners to relate the language material to a personal experience, feeling, prior knowledge, other real-world events. Anchoring the new material to existing knowledge helps in understanding and remembering it, making learning more memorable, and relatable. When learners see the relevance of the language to their own lives and interests, they are more likely to be motivated to learn and use it. When learners connect new words, phrases, or grammar structures to their previously learnt information they will

understand the meaning of new language elements more deeply and have a broader perspective on the language and its applications. This strategy promotes engagement while completing homework and, in turn, a deeper understanding of the material, transforming passive learning into an immersive experience;

8) *Retrieving*. Instruct learners to recall information from memory by using memory tricks like mnemonics, chunking, visual aids to access information from long-term memory and return it to conscious awareness. Retrieval practice of consciously bringing information to mind is a powerful learning strategy that strengthens memory, improves long-term retention, helps learners monitor their own learning. Each time a learner actively retrieves information, neural connections becomes stronger and more resistant to forgetting. Strategically scheduling reviews at increasing intervals reveals what information a learner has successfully stored in memory and what areas still require further attention. Repeated retrieval can lead to a more profound understanding of the language, going beyond simple recall of facts. Different types of retrieval practice that significantly improves long-term retention of new vocabulary and grammar include: reviewing, rehearsing, repeating, rereading, reciting, spaced repetition, self-explanation, summarizing, recall-based activities like short answer questions, fill-in-the-blanks, and "brain dumps", as well as recognition-based activities such as multiple choice, true/false, and matching exercises, flashcards, quizzes, and writing prompts;

9) *Breaking down*. Instruct learners to divide the home assignment into a series of logical, digestible chunks and allocate specific time slots for different parts of the assignment. This could involve breaking down reading into chapters, vocabulary into thematic sets, writing into paragraphs, or learning a specific number of words. By focusing on smaller objectives and isolating specific elements like grammar rules, vocabulary, or pronunciation learners can process

information more effectively, experience a sense of accomplishment and avoid feeling overwhelmed and discouraged. Achieving mastery over smaller, defined areas can boost confidence and motivation, which can be particularly helpful for overcoming challenges;

10) *Teaching others*. Instruct learners to explain language tasks to others. Explaining the content of homework in different ways requires a deeper level of understanding than simply passively absorbing information. It forces students to think of new ways to provide information that promotes better memory and recall. Tutoring their peers on grammar rules and vocabulary can motivate learners to study more diligently, seek a more thorough understanding of the material, reveal areas where the learner's own understanding is incomplete or flawed, allowing them to address those gaps and improve their overall knowledge. Students who teach a topic tend to demonstrate a deeper understanding and retention of the material compared to those who only study it. This technique not only reinforces the learner's understanding but also builds communication skills, patience, empathy, and the ability to motivate others.

By incorporating these techniques into their language self-learning routine, learners can complete the assignment to the best of their capacity and build good self-study habits that can help them in future academic endeavors.

Conclusions and research perspectives. The findings of literature review on foreign language learning strategies and descriptive studies of

homework completion strategies reported by language users have revealed that *Homework Processing Strategy* can be a highly effective way for completing homework assignments, as it forces learners to actively process language content through different techniques like self-questioning, filtering, highlighting, paraphrasing, visualizing, thinking aloud, making connections, retrieving, breaking down, teaching others. When students process the homework content through these techniques, they are progressing through different levels of understanding of language task, from basic, initial comprehension to more complex application and distinguished mastery. Language processing leads to a better mode of understanding and retention and more successful and productive self-learning experience. Instructing learners in *Homework Processing Strategy*, which learners can actively apply out-of-class, educator can guide them through the process of homework completion to a more efficient, less overwhelming learning experience and equip them with self-study skills necessary in language acquisition.

Based on the findings of this study, further research on the effectiveness of explicit versus integrated instruction on the language learning in out-of-class context, the transfer of strategies to new tasks, the development of detailed criteria for evaluating performance at different levels of understanding can reveal valuable insights into instructional approaches contributing to the areas of foreign language teaching and learning.

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Received: August 14, 2025

Accepted: September 09, 2025