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## THE ROOTS OF INDEPENDENT STUDY IN THE USA

### ABSTRACT

*This article presents the results of scientific-pedagogical research, which consisting in identifying of roots of independent study development in the USA in from the early 1900s to the moment of its extensive implementation in academic programs in the 1950s. The author began to investigate the independent study with aid of heuristic approach which allowed making a comprehensive analysis of the American experience in the field of self-learning systems of education. This allowed the author to come to the conclusion of the origination of the independent study in the USA. It is confirmed by scientific works published by Princeton University professor aimed to solve the issue of the ill-determination of the term 'independent study' which was falsely related to such terms as 'project work', 'self-learning', 'self-education' etc. We have distinguished the most appropriate definition for 'independent study' and distinguished its peculiarities distinct from other terms. One of the key tasks of our research was to explore the ways of implementation of independent study in the educational process of higher educational establishments and we have found the most fitting cases of its introduction which ranged from personal mentor work of the professors to help self-directed and self-motivated students to obtain skills and abilities to work independently over the material send by Universities teaching stuff by mail with feed-back to the broadcasting of the educational material of certain modules using radio stations which were in University disposal. The features of these techniques we observe nowadays in the use of the PCs in educational purposes for instance in the distance study implanted in academic plans of certain Universities in Ukraine. Our research is appointed to facilitate independent study introduction in Ukrainian educational system through investigation of its origination and development.*

**Keywords:** *independent study, academic plan, distance-study, self-motivation, high technologies.*

### INTRODUCTION

After conducted analysis of the scientific works of American researchers devoted to independent study (IS) of the students we were astonished by the amount of papers on the topic from 1921 to the 1950s which indicates on the significance of self-directed work provided by the students during their education. Nowadays "IS" is the integral part of education in every University worldwide.

There was more modern investigation conducted in 2013 by the staff of center of international expertise of Cambridge University which involved 1089 participants among professors from every corner of the globe (Cambridge Assessment International Education, 2014), which proved that nearly 96% responders believe in self-directed work as the most important personality trait of students to achieve academic progress. Other helpful skills of



the students include critical thinking, capability to analyze different information sources, self-provided researches.

We have to admit considerable amount of changes in the understanding of the “IS” and the ways of its organization. The term “IS” (independent study) is derived from the consideration that more gifted students must have more freedom of courses choice aimed at satisfaction of their wants as well as the possibility to work over the material independently. E. Henderson states that courses with inserted elements of “IS” are originated in 1923 from Princeton University and spread through American colleges firstly and schools a bit after.

#### **THE AIM OF THE STUDY**

We expect to facilitate the introduction of the “IS” in Ukrainian educational system through the research work of existing American experience. We figured out undoubtedly the origination of “IS” from the USA which directed us to the roots of independent study development.

#### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS**

We have combined certain research methods to achieve more comprehensive and precise results; we united secondary data analysis method with heuristic one, when we have examined the scientific publications of American authors from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We accentuated particularly on the works of the developers of “IS” methods as the object of our research while the “distance education” presents especial interest for us as the way of implementation of “IS” in the higher education

Our particular interest was preferred to E. Henderson who defined the term “IS” comprehensively and precisely, to R. Robinson who was the pioneer in the field of “IS” development and the one who had the authority and will to introduce “IS” in the education. H. Lowry was the professors who highlighted the motivation as the part of the “IS”. Famous scientists P. Dressel and M. Thompson accentuated the possibility to learn everywhere and at any time thanks to possibilities given by “IS”. C. Coren gave us the clue to understanding of interrelations between the “IS” providing at the University and the abilities to solve professional problems after graduation. Thanks to the studies of C. Kesten we obtained the possibility to differ the “IS” from any other related kind of self-education. P. Knight provided us with the main advantages of “IS” regarding to the academic plans. M. Moore made the great proposal to provide “IS” by means of e-learning along with mailing. Ch. Wedemeyer introduced “distance learning” in the education of Universities in the USA, which is essential for modern situation in Ukrainian educational system.

#### **RESULTS**

The main statement after E. Henderson on the term “IS” grounds on its interconnection with two technical approaches (Elson, 2017). The first approach based on the education at the institution of higher education itself and the second one on the outdoor work of the students. But the author emphasizes on the difficulties concerned with differentiation of these two technics due to their synchronized development regarding to the changes and innovations in the education which took place in the 1960-70s in the USA (Keller’s plan 1968 and Keller-Sherman plan 1974). These two plans have reduced total volume of class hours and increased the significance of outdoor work of the student thus emphasizing the personalization of education.

Swarthmore’s program introduced in 1922 united first and senior courses (Galinova, 2005). It included seminars as the main component which was made of several interconnected disciplines or branches of disciplines combined in the course. For instance,



we have scanned the course of English which included the traits of such disciplines as English literature, modern history, philosophy etc.; social disciplines were inserted in social science, history, philosophy, political science, economics and so on; physics was combined with mathematics and astronomy. This program accentuated on the importance of providing “IS” in close cooperation with faculty professors. Requirements were inscribed in the student’s curriculum at the very beginning of the education. Lectures attendance was on freewill, examination was carried out by unacquainted examiner.

Important event in the field of “IS” has taken place in 1925 when it was implemented “Independent Study Plan” (ISP) in Stanford University under the guidance of the faculty-board. It was optional at the beginning but it became integral for some faculties at the end of the academic year (1924–1925). “ISP” was adopted by pedagogics, English language, German and Roman languages, history, mining and metallurgical engineering, philosophy, physics, political science faculties while the other departments have joined the “ISP” later.

Until the early 1920s the lecture was the only major form of the in-institution study of most American Universities including Stanford University. Lectures and laboratory works were carried out for first and second year students, seminars and self-guided laboratory works were conducted for third and fourth year students. The 1920s brought huge amount of changes in the study programs of Stanford University, when administration of the institution initiated the union of the lectures with “debating societies” (Chaszar, 2018). As a rule, the lectures were given once a week by professors when “debating societies” took place twice a week and were guided by professors’ assistants (graduates of the University). After the employee of the University – E. Robinson, who was the professor of Stanford University history, the amount of lectures has decreased from 90 in 1924 to 60 in 1925 academic year. Moreover, there existed such technics of education as consulting (advising). These changes were appointed on the responsibility transfer of gifted students advising to the departments.

In 1928 was elected the head of the Stanford-board E. Robinson who lead it until 1945. “ISP” implementation is related to his name undoubtedly. This plan was designed for gifted and ambitious students to provide them with possibility to learn training material individually instead of in-institution educational work. Such kind of “IS” required more efforts either from the student as from the professor. Students got rid of the obligation to attend classes getting possibility to provide “IS” instead under the guidance of the professor who was interested in new educational technics as well as in the educational achievements of the students.

“ISP” ran for 20 years and its advantages became evident, they are:

- 1) professors gained the possibility to operate within the small groups of students.
- 2) the educational work with gifted students brought satisfaction to professors.
- 3) the students were stimulated to go beyond their horizons.
- 4) the creativity and independency of students’ thinking were encouraged.
- 5) the students received additional information in the field they were interested in

(Mitchell, 1958).

The most effectiveness of this plan was reached not only in the field of social studies and English literature but also in the branch of laboratory practice which demanded individual teaching.

In 1944 the graduate of the Worcester college, Oxford, H. Lowry came to profess from Princeton University back to his native college, it has influenced the development of



“IS” in higher education. The first innovation made by H. Lowry after he has been elected as president of the college was the development and introduction of the “Independent study program” into the education process of first four courses, it was shortened from “Independent study” to “IS” (Oliver, Hodges, & O’Donnell, 2003). After this program, first year students had opportunity to choose particular topic of the research, ran this research at the laboratory or library and they were obliged to take part in the weekly conferences with their paper works on the topic guided by professors (3–4 times). Senior students conducted senior thesis – resembles Ukrainian “Master’s work”, under the strict guidance of the professors. Both programs have been followed by the exams on the particular subjects. H. Lowry noted that: “Independent study is made not only for intellectual elites. Any man or woman – is a potential candidate for reward. The students will be the owners of their education after the independent study program” while “Independent study program is like a creative experience or adventure in the field of self-discipline and self-actualization which in turn becomes the first such experience in their lives”.

E. Henderson noted that in the 1950-60s “independent work was the small part of the academic load and was compared to projects (project work). At this particular time, the term “IS” became the indication of the separation of students from the professors when the student received instructional material from the professor and worked over this material individually receiving minimal assistance. But, as we know, in the 1950s-60s the “IS” was regarded as an aid to intensify educational process at the Universities.

Next decade was marked by extensive use of more elaborated and ambitious plans of “IS” in the USA by certain Universities. According to which considerable part of the course had to be worked out individually by the student or under the guidance of the personal tutor. The book of American scientists P. Dressel and M. Thompson “Individual study” made great contribution in the field of the development and organization of “IS” they emphasized that: “attempts and efforts of the students to acquire certain competences individually reveals in possibility to provide education at any moment” (Dressel, & Thompson, 2003).

C. Koren (1974) made the analysis of Thompson’s investigation and came to conclusion that they termed “dependent study” as educational process under total guidance and management of the professors. They made the hypothesis that “IS” is available only for gifted students; it is high-costed and requires lot of time. The scientists have proposed two new characteristics for “IS”, they are:

- 1) “IS” is autonomous;
- 2) “IS” is self-directed.

We agree with that statement and accentuate the interrelations between the ability to find the ways to run the research along with to solve scientific problems and to employ this ability in professional life.

P. Dressel generalized the comparison of 253 education institutions providing “IS” and concluded the next:

- 1) 70 % stated that their “IS” has never been evaluated properly;
- 2) 82 % noted that “IS” consumed time has never been taken in account.

P. Dressel and M. Thompson noted that the main problem of “IS” implementation in the educational process is in the conservatism of the institution. The self-directed education meets the same obstacles on its way of progress. The statement of the authors that: “average students must also have the possibility for independent study” evoked opposition from the Universities teaching staff in the USA, but they were optimistic about



the development of the “IS” and marked out the “IS” as: “an integral experience which every student must obtain”.

We must admit that P. Dressel and M. Thompson accentuated on the consideration of the “IS” as: “the technique of intensification of the education instead of method of students’ independency development” in the early 1970s in the USA. Also they stated that: “the main aim of the study is in the development and stimulation of the independent, self-directed personalities, it becomes possible only after implementation of “IS” in the educational process” and we agree on this assertion.

C. Kesten (1987) is the researcher who stated that there are too much terms for “IS” in the literature which are synonymous, they are:

1. Autonomous learning
2. Independent study
3. Self-directed learning
4. Student initiated learning
5. Project orientation
6. Teaching for thinking
7. Self-instruction
8. Life-long learning.

The existence of enormous number of synonyms for “IS” is confusing and evoke misunderstanding in the determination of the “IS”, he proposed such determination: “Independent study – is the learning under professor’s moderation when the students study to make their own decisions to fulfill their own needs in the education”. But this is actual only for the independent, responsible, self-directed, self-motivated students who are voluntary and efficiently use available resources to make the actions on their education.

The scientist criticized the traditional technics concerning “IS”. He noted that: “Independent study – is not a set of competences which the student must possess before graduation and then use in professional life but also a constant process of development which depends on the needs, previous knowledge, personal traits, skills and inclinations of the person”. We agree on his statement that: “IS” is not the same as “Individualized instruction”. “Individualized instruction” differs from “IS” by its controlled character which is expressed in the aim of study defined by the professor and its accomplishment under professor’s supervision”. Such technics does not provide the development neither of independent thinking nor actions. After C. Kesten, the independency in learning does not force the students to work individually. In this case, it is foreseen by the author the independency of the student as that trait which allows them to define their own needs and abilities while they must also know when and where they might need guidance. The main peculiarity of the “IS” is student-aimed character when professors act as guides, mentors, facilitators. C. Kesten also was in contrary with the statement that only gifted students may provide self-learning, he associated “IS” with the students’ orientation to learning, their motivation and responsibility.

In the book written by famous author P. Knight “Guidance of independent study” (Knight, 1996) we found the comprehensive analysis of the status of the “IS” in the higher education along with abilities required for students to provide “IS”. The conclusion made by the author is quite precise and we agree on his statements that: “The development of individual study becomes disaggregated when there is no understanding of the notion “Independency in learning”. He deducted the advantages of the transition of certain modules in the field of “IS” such as:



- 1) economy of tutor's time;
- 2) facilitation of distance learning.

To develop skills of "IS" students require the guidance of qualified professor who realizes the personality and needs of self-learning student and what skills he expects to obtain after graduation. The author rethinks the part of the professor, accentuates on the significance of the defining objectives, structure of "IS" its planning and support. After his words: "independency – is the aim to be taught and learned".

M. Moore (1973) was the associated professor of the adult education department at the Wisconsin University who gave the following definition for "IS": "it is an education system when the student is autonomous, separated from the professor in time and space while contact with him occurs by the means of printed papers, e-sources etc. not related to the direct communication with professor". The "IS" is a system of education and self-directed work which consists of three subsystems:

- 1) student;
- 2) professor;
- 3) technics of communication.

American professor from Wisconsin University Ch. Wedemeyer (Moore, 1987), who is considered as the "father" of distance learning made the great contribution in the "IS" development. He was keen of modern technologies appliance in the field of education along with the idea of "open education" he conducted experiments at the Wisconsin University in the 1970s. He was the head of International Council for Correspondence Education at the Wisconsin University and the first who named "distance learning" as the branch of academic learning. Nowadays his ideas are actual according to extensive use of distance learning as the highest technics of education and "IS" organization worldwide, while Ch. Wedemeyer foreseen the occurrence of e-learning.

At the beginning of the 1930<sup>th</sup> Ch. Wedemeyer utilized Wisconsin University radio station to broadcast English language lessons for self-education of the auditory. Acting as the head of International Council for Correspondence Education at the Wisconsin University (1954-1964) he in cooperation with University graduates has developed the series of projects, devoted to theory and sociology learning by the self-learning students.

He published the report in 1957: "Spreading among the people", where he described his program of correspondence education at Wisconsin University which was designed for three groups of students, different in age and needs. The first group included courses for correspondence learning of pupils from high schools. The second group courses were designed for colleges. The third group was composed of correspondent learners who desired to continue their education after graduation. The courses were composed considering needs appropriate to the age, education degree and purposes of learning of the students. The main idea of this report was that: "Correspondence education was in a fact the personal tutoring conducted by the mail". Without regard to the age, purpose of learning or degree of the education of the student this technic aided adaptation to individual needs and distinctions.

#### CONCLUSIONS

There was a large amount of papers devoted to the issue of the "IS" in past century published by American researchers which must be carefully examined by modern Ukrainian scientists in the course of the introduction of "IS" in academic process of our Universities. We have distinguished the main peculiarities of "IS" which differ it from any other individual educational activity and they are in the students motivated by their own



needs and appointed on their own results guided by professors within the bounds of the learning course.

The prospects for further development could be seen in the research of existing scientific publications of fathers of "IS" and distance learning. There exists not only the successful experience of implementation of "IS" in the education which must be examined and used to solve our contemporary challenges but also the mistakes already being made in its introduction which we must avoid to make benefit educational system of Ukraine. We should base the implementation of "IS" in the Ukrainian education system on the existing experience of the foreign education due to the presence of large amounts of works devoted to "IS" studied from different points of view. 100 years ago "IS" was run into the education in Universities, colleges and schools USA and our actual task is to use their experience of its introduction amending the mistakes which they made and to smooth obstacles they met.

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