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STUDENTS' LEARNING ABILITY AS THE BASIS FOR FUNCTIONING IN INFORMATION SOCIETY

UMIĘTNOŚĆ UCZENIA SIĘ STUDENTÓW PODSTAWĄ FUNKCJONOWANIA W SPOŁECZEŃSTWIE INFORMACYJNYM

Streszczenie: W dobie gwałtownych przemian cywilizacyjnych uczenie się jest stałym elementem życia każdego człowieka. Wiedza zdobyta w szkole szybko ulega dezaktualizacji. Umiejętność uczenia się jest podstawowym warunkiem funkcjonowania człowieka w społeczeństwie informacyjnym charakteryzującym się ekspresywnym przyrostem wiedzy.

W artykule podjęto próbę udzielenia odpowiedzi na następujące pytania: Czy studenci wiedzą jak się uczyć? Czy studenci umieją się uczyć? Czy studenci uważają, że są przygotowani do uczenia się? Jak studenci oceniają swoje umiejętności uczenia się?

Słowa kluczowe: umiejętność, umiejętność uczenia się, umiejętność uczenia się studentów, społeczeństwo informacyjne

Abstract. In the age of rapid civilization transformations, learning is a constant part of every human being's life. The knowledge acquired at school is rapidly becoming outdated. Learning ability is the basic condition for dealing with a fast growth of knowledge.

The article has attempted to provide answers to the following questions: Do students know how to learn? Can students learn? Do students think they are prepared for learning? How do students evaluate their abilities to learn?

Key words: ability, learning ability, student's learning abilities, information society

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Introduction

The term „information society” (jaho shakai), was created in the 60s of the XX century in Japan and it means a type of society being characterized by, among others, a huge amount of information flow, relation interactivity, the growth of global tendencies, post-modernistic culture. This is a society in which information is intensively used in economic, social, cultural and political life. In an information society the functions of knowledge change: it is characteristic to move from the cognitive function to the instrumental one; knowledge becomes a material and tool of creating new knowledge. Simultaneously, the following phenomena are characteristic features of modernity:

- systematic growth of knowledge;
- the changeability of knowledge and professional tasks;
- fast aging of knowledge [Furmanek, 2010].

The phenomena indicate the necessity of constant learning. To be able to do it, though, one has to be well prepared to it. Learning ability is the basic condition for dealing with a fast growth of knowledge.

The article has attempted to provide answers to the following questions: Do students know how to learn? Can students learn? Do students think they are prepared for learning? How do students evaluate their abilities to learn?

Learning ability

In literature the concept of *ability* is defined in many ways. Most frequently, it is defined as performing an action intentionally with a choice and application of methods, taking into consideration the right conditions and receiving appropriate results [Koczniewska-Zagórska & Nowacki & Wiatrowski, 1986]. The knowledge about the action does not simultaneously mean the ability to act. The condition which determines whether knowledge can be a guideline of an action is the ability to use the knowledge. By repeating abilities for a number of time, we achieve habits, which are understood as a perfectly mastered ability [Bereźnicki, 2004].

An ability to realize complex, well-organized models of behaviour in a smooth and flexible way, allowing to achieve a particular target or result refers to both motor activity as well as verbal or social one [Reber, 2000].

In pedagogic and psychological literature we encounter various divisions and classifications of abilities. Most frequently, abilities are divided into: intellectual and practical [Wiatrowski, 1994].

The intellectual abilities are used to solve purely theoretical situations. Their essence is usually operating with data, but also comparing objects and phenomena, formulating opinions, drawing opinions, solving problems, etc. Practical abilities are the abilities of influencing objects and changing the reality using appropriate tools [Goźlińska & Szlosek, 1997].

Organizational abilities which combine elements of intellectual and practical abilities are often distinguished. Typical and at the same time the most general intellectual abilities include: comparing objects and phenomena aiming at defining differences and similarities, abstracting, creating concepts, formulating opinions, drawing conclusions, proving and

checking. One can also mention planning, modelling, learning abilities as well as abilities to solve theoretical problems or creative abilities [Wiatrowski, 1985].

Among the basic abilities of a XXI century European, the basic one is indicated as independent learning ability. A justification for such a high evaluation of this ability is the accepted idea of continuous education and the basic competences of a member of a learning society. It is the learning society as only such a society can create conditions for further successful development of its members [Świrko-Pilipczuk, 2010]. The significance of learning abilities is underlined in many documents and reports of international organizations, e.g. the European Council, UNESCO or OECD.

The ability of planning, organizing and evaluating one's own learning consists of defining what to learn, why to learn and how to learn. Making right decisions is an important ability. A student should be aware of the aims and ways of learning and should feel responsible for his/her own learning¹.

According to Paul Lengrand (one of the co-creators of continuous education), students should be equipped first of all with learning ability as well as they should have a learning habit developed. Educational contents, forms and methods have to be adjusted to such a broad perspective of recognising learning [1995: 13]. In the realization of this task, the learner himself plays a highly significant role.

¹ During the conference in Berne in 1996 the list of abilities, which Europeans should gain at school in order to function effectively and work in the society, was provided. The competences include: Planning, organizing and evaluating one's own learning; Successful communication in different situations; Effective cooperation in a team; Solving problems in a creative way; Computer literacy.

“It would be unproductive to encourage everyone to study, develop himself/herself, to give a shape to this, which is merely outlined or unfinished in him/her, unless he/she has got available means which would lead to the completion of this task. Such means are partially gained from the outside, thanks to different components of the surroundings. However, what is the most important, one needs to find inside himself/herself. He/she is the main subject of his/her own development not only due to the reason that the help provided from outside can be only of an indirect or fragmented nature. He/she passes the major part of his/her life path making use only of his own resources. Nobody can feel, think or realize himself/herself for him/her”. [Świrko-Pilipczuk, 2010 quoting Legrand, 1995].

From such a perspective, the basic human activity is independent learning to the greatest extend.

A similar importance of independence is noticed by R.H. Dave, who adopts a concept that *“.... continuous education should fulfil three basic conditions: create an possibility for education for everybody, develop and use education motivation, lead to educability.* Educability, being an implication of continuous education for school curricula assumes that the basic value and one of the four significant general aims of education is the preparation to independent learning, independent studying, self-education. Educability means: *both the development of basic skills necessary for independent learning as well as the possibility of swapping roles between a teacher and student – which allows the student to direct not only his/her own learning, but also team work, the teacher, on the other hand, may become a member of self-educating team.”* [Świrko-Pilipczuk 2010, quoting Pólturzycki 2003].

The European Union Official Journal, attachment: "Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – a European Reference Framework"² lists the learning ability among eight key competences, which is defined as an ability of consequent and persistent learning and the right organization of this process, both individually and in groups. This ability enables people to use previous experiences in learning as well as experiences resulting from life situations. Motivation and believing in one's abilities are important factors in developing this competence.

Learning ability includes the awareness of one's own learning process and needs in this respect, identification of available possibilities and ability to overcome obstacles in order to succeed in learning. This ability demands from a person knowledge and understanding of one's favoured learning strategies, strong and weak sides of one's own abilities and qualifications, as well as an ability to search for possibilities of educating and training as well as available help and support. Learning ability requires first of all to acquire basic abilities of reading, writing, counting and an ability in the range of Information and Communication Technologies necessary for further learning. On the basis of these skills one can access new knowledge and abilities as well as gain, process and acquire them. It requires effective management of one's own learning models, in particular, persistence in learning, concentration during longer periods, as well as critical reflexion on the aims of learning. People should be able to devote time for independent learning, being characterized by self-discipline, but also on working together within the learning process, benefit for the group diversity and share the acquired knowledge and skills. They should be able to organize their own

learning process, evaluate their work and if there is a need they should be able to search for advice, information and support.

According to Cz. Plewka, one can learn to learn, however, it needs to be done continuously, wisely, using all what we already know about learning to learn and searching for this what we do not know yet. Learning how to learn is the kind of activity which we need to implement independently [Plewka, 2010].

Developing an ability to learn, getting to know and mastering rules of organizing intellectual work as well as using effective methods of acquiring knowledge is also called the learning technique. It includes conscious and independent planning as well as organizing of intellectual work and improving the basic methods of acquiring information and developing abilities, such as: observation, taking advantage of announcements, teacher's utterances as well as utterances of other participants of the educational process, using a course-book and other didactic materials as well as training measures, modern transmission of verbal information, images and activities or showing movement on the screen. A different group of abilities includes ways of recording information in the form of notes, schemes, drawings or a tape, photo or film recoding. Correct understanding of known information or abilities connected with rational selection, synthesis or own understanding and an appropriate recognition of acquired issues is also of vital importance.

Together with developing abilities of acquiring and understanding information, ways of using the acquired knowledge, in the form which is appropriate for the future professional activity, social and cultural life, as

well as didactic situations in the educational process, such as: synthesis, repetition or checking or checking forms need to be developed.

This rule is a basis for introducing students into self-education and the successful realization of continuous education depends on it.

Student' learning abilities

The dynamics of the transformation of the contemporary world forces one to constantly update his/her knowledge and develop abilities. In the era of fast civilizational transformations a human being needs to learn faster and differently. Thanks to an appropriate method of learning he can deal with the increasing complexity of the world as well as the dynamics of its changes. At present times, learning is the man's basic tool in adaptation to the changing living conditions [Kwiatkowska, 2000]. The necessity of constant learning is entered into a human life.

Learning requires maturity. When a man learns, he/she constantly makes decisions: what in in which order to learn, what to consider to be the most important and how to distinguish the most important parts from the whole teaching material. At the primary school level and even secondary school level, the majority of such decisions is made by the teacher, who passes the knowledge to the pupil and the pupil learns under the direction of the teacher. His activity is at the level of an activity directed by current instructions or directed by tasks. It is necessary to move to independence and creativity.

In order to find out how students evaluate their learning abilities a research was conducted in May 2017 using questionnaires, which were filled in by 108 first year full-time MA female students.

Below there is an analysis of selected questions and answers.

To the question, *what sources of information students use in order to prepare to tests and exams*, they listed: their own notes taken during classes or notes belonging to a different person (53,7 % of the respondents), Internet (37 %), literature (books and periodicals) provided by the person conducting classes (5,6 %), they do not prepare at all (3,7 %). To the question, *what sources of information the student use in order to prepare project works*, the student most frequently listed Internet (49 %), Internet and literature (44,4 %), only literature provided by the person conducting classes (6,6 %). Students' responses are not a great surprise, students first of all use the sources that they know the best. New technologies are an everyday activity for them, something that accompanies them in life since birth. Being brought up in the world of common information, they are used to getting information from the Internet. This is where they search for information while preparing for exams or classes. Students less and less take notes of information provided by teachers.

To the question, *what forms of classes suit the students best*, they listed workshop classes on the first place (44,5 %), the second place – tutorials (40,7 %) and on the last place – lecture (14,8 %). While justifying their choice, the students wrote that they prefer doing something, learning actively, not passively.

In order to find out how students evaluate their learning abilities, the students were supposed to confirm or deny the following statements in the questionnaire:

1. *I am systematic.*
2. *I start learning only when I have to.*
3. *It happens that I study something without understanding it.*
4. *I lose valuable minutes on getting ready to work*
5. *I have my own way for learning what needs to be learned.*
6. *While learning I always search for little objects (a pencil, dictionary. etc), which always get lost somewhere.*
7. *While studying a course-book, I sometimes use auxiliary sources from my own initiative in order to explore the content better.*
8. *While writing a paper, I limit myself to a mechanical presentation of the content of the book I have read.*
9. *I have a feeling that I waste a lot of time which I could spend on learning or working*
10. *Even if I have learned the material well, I usually have a problem with transmitting it (orally or in writing).*
11. *When I leave house I take something to read or revise while commuting, queuing, etc.*
12. *I read the notes taken during classes just before a test or exam. .*
13. *I use my own system of revising material, adjusted to the rules governing memory.*

Positive answers to questions: 1,5,7,11,13 indicate the possession of abilities in the field of independent learning.

Although the majority of students responded positively to the questions, a detailed analysis of the received results shows that many of the students are chaotic in their actions.

The respondents are not systematic (table 1), they start learning just before a test or exam (88,9 %). They have a problem with an appropriate organization of learning conditions. 58,3 % of the respondents admitted that they lose valuable minutes on getting ready to work and 75,9 % of them feel that they lose a lot of time, which they could use for learning or working. While learning 37 % of the respondents always look for something, e.g. a dictionary or a pencil.

Table 1:

The content of the question		Number of responses	%
I start learning only when I have to.	yes	78	88,9
	no	30	11,1
I lose valuable minutes on getting ready to work	yes	67	58,3
	no	41	41,7
While learning I always search for little objects (a pencil, dictionary. etc), which always get lost somewhere.	yes	74	37,0
	no	34	63,0
I have a feeling that I waste a lot of time which I	yes	82	75,9

could spend on learning or working	no	24	24,1
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The students did not evaluate the ability to communicate the learned material too well (table 2). 36,1 % of them admitted that even after they have learned the material well, they still have a problem with communicating it. Students do not read notes taken during classes straight away, but before a test or exam. Only 54,6 % of the respondents use some kind of system of revising the material, adjusted to the laws governing the memory.

The content of the question		Number of responses	%
Even if I have learned the material well, I usually have a problem with transmitting it (orally or in writing)	yes	36	33,3
	no	72	63,9
I read the notes taken during classes just before a test or exam.	yes	82	75,9
	no	26	24,1
I use my own system of revising material, adjusted to the rules governing memory.	yes	59	54,6
	no	49	45,4

The results of the conducted researches indicate that there is a necessity to pay more attention to students' learning abilities, as it is not

fully developed. An academic teacher performs a great role in this process; he/she can help students by applying methods of work which would engage students to think independently, assign works requiring a preparation and presentation of issues using different sources of information using foreign literature at the same time.

Conclusions

The necessity of continuous learning results from new requirements, which are a consequence of the transformation of the industrial society into the knowledge society, in which intellectual competences have a great importance. According to W. Kojs – studying gives possibilities “of shaping and developing such knowledge and such abilities, thanks to which the mind can develop in the course of all life learning: this is the creation of such knowledge and such abilities, thanks to which it will be able to acquire, process and create new knowledge and new abilities” [Kojs, 2012].

Although the students possess some abilities as far as independent learning is concerned, these abilities can be still improved. The task of academic teachers is to create appropriate conditions for it by using methods of work demanding greater independence and activity of students, encouraging and recommending to update knowledge. Students should learn to use generally available sources of information, process and use them appropriately.

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