

Methodology for Using the Google Classroom Platform in Organizing Students' Independent Learning

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Abstract: The article examines a methodology for organizing students' independent learning in higher education institutions through the use of the Google Classroom platform. The author analyzes the platform's technical capabilities for creating an interactive learning environment, including developing online courses, administering tests, and integrating Google services. Particular attention is given to fulfilling the tasks set out in the Concept for the Development of the Higher Education System of the Republic of Uzbekistan up to 2030. The study substantiates the advantages of digitalizing independent work, such as systematizing learning materials, ensuring transparency of the assessment system, and developing students' digital competencies.

Keywords: Google Classroom, independent learning, digitalization of education, higher education, distance learning technologies, e-learning, teaching methodology, virtual learning environment.

Introduction: The Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PF-5847 dated 08.10.2019 defines the following tasks: "to increase the share of hours allocated to independent learning; to develop students' ability for independent study, critical and creative thinking, systematic analysis, and entrepreneurial skills; to introduce methodologies and technologies aimed at strengthening competencies in the educational process; to orient the learning process toward forming practical skills; and, in this regard, to widely implement advanced pedagogical technologies, curricula, and instructional-methodological materials based on international educational standards into the educational process."

What is Google Classroom?

Google Classroom, or Google Class, is an Internet service for online education. It enables users to create courses, conduct webinars, and assess students. Essentially, Google has combined several tools within a single service.

To access this platform, you need to visit <https://classroom.google.com/>. Naturally, you log in

using your own account.

Initially it was called Google Classroom; now it is simply called "Class," although the link has remained as "Classroom." Why is it needed? In this article, we will try to describe the goals and technologies of Google Class, how students' independent work can be organized on this platform, what activities we are carrying out in this field, and our own reflections.

"Independent activity serves to form the knowledge, skills, and competencies specified in the curriculum of a particular subject and required to be mastered by the student; it is carried out in the classroom or outside the classroom based on the teacher's consultation and recommendations. Depending on the characteristics of the subject, assignments are developed according to the types of independent work."

Accordingly, in fact, Google Class contains a very deep philosophy. This philosophy is connected with stopping the practice of merely "monitoring" students and instead beginning to collaborate with them. In other words, we imagine the existing learning process as a system of their activities.

Even the assignments in Google Class are, in essence, about students' activity—how they express themselves. For example, within national values, we gain the opportunity for students to voice opinions and comments. That is, we can provide them with information about what turns out how and why.

And so far, we have not found a tool that is more technological and convenient than Google Class, although various tools exist for this topic. Nevertheless, it is very important for us to be able to explain to each student—and also to a group of students—how we view their work. Their collaboration is of great importance for a teacher.

Their uniting into groups and teams develops competencies for working in a team. Therefore, the Google Class platform provides great support in this regard.

"Google Classroom is a classroom designed for schools that can be added for Google Apps education users. Google provides a free edition of Google Apps for educational institutions, and Google Classroom supports installation by turning Google applications for students and teachers into a communication suite. Providing schools with email accounts and document storage is one thing. Students and teachers need much more than that. Classes have assignments, announcements, and reminders."

There is another aspect—indeed, there are many aspects—but one of them is especially important. If, for example, we have students who study from home, or groups of students who do not attend school for a short period due to quarantine, Google Class is very convenient for organizing distance work with them and organizing teachers' collaborative work. That is, we can work together within a single course.

In a way, the philosophy is very simple. On the other hand, it may not fully correspond to what we learned in higher education. What did we learn in higher education? We became accustomed to the idea that we must somehow force or encourage students to study.

In short, Google Class can provide opportunities that we cannot always provide to a student in a classroom:

- Google Class is based on students' freedom to learn;
- it gently cultivates that freedom together with

the teacher;

- it eliminates certain forms of coercion in education;
- it makes it possible to abolish punishment for uncompleted tasks;
- it creates conditions for students to work independently;
- completed assignments and tasks are stored on the platform in electronic form.

As pedagogical experience shows, tightening teaching and upbringing, increasing obligations, and strengthening control over students may produce the opposite effect rather than a positive one. For some reason, not enough attention is paid to this. Therefore, Google Class is designed to place responsibility on learners, but not to "select" or filter them. Sometimes we behave as if we need it more than anyone else.

In fact, it is a tool that makes it possible to understand at any moment who is responsible for the current work. This is very important. It does not allow you to record whether students are present in class, because it is not an electronic gradebook. On the platform, the teacher strives to be sufficiently transparent. This, in turn, creates conditions for students to develop interest in learning and engage in creative work.

As teachers, it is important what we are doing and why we need it. So where does work in Google Class begin? Everyone who works in it must have a Google account; that is, having a Google email address is sufficient. In other words, they need a login and password on the gmail.com site. If we have that, we can enter Google Class, create courses, work with students, and so on. If we do not have it but our institution uses a system such as G Suite for Education, then everything is fine. In fact, we will still have Google accounts.

However, without a Google account we cannot manage this. We know that in some places in Uzbekistan there are certain difficulties related to accessing Google. We know that these difficulties can sometimes be systemic, but we also know that they can be overcome, because, as far as I know, there are no legal prohibitions on using gmail.com and all Google services.

There are, however, age restrictions, and they are important. In fact, many people do not know that Google accounts can also be created for students under

the age of 13.

“Age requirements in different countries. In countries not listed, the minimum age to manage a Google Account is considered to be 13.”

At the moment we are working with students within the framework of G Suite for Education at a higher education institution. Therefore, we do not have problems related to students’ age restrictions. But if you want to start working independently and you want the students you work with to connect to Google and have accounts there, students can do this independently starting from the age of 13.

If your children are not yet 13, they will need their parents’ help. In order not to waste time in this presentation, I have included links to more detailed descriptions, because parents can open accounts for their children under the age of 13. A lengthy explanation is not necessary here.

Of course, using G Suite accounts is the most convenient option, because they provide many additional features. The links in the presentation are not active here, of course, but when you receive the presentation, those links will be included there. That is, I will not demonstrate it now, but believe me, they will be available. They were created specifically so that you can study everything without rushing. We do not have much time now, so we will move forward. So, let us assume the accounts have been created.

We open our email. Then, in the email interface, we click the nine dots at the top (“Google Apps”). It looks like a square made up of nine dots (Figure 1).

Sometimes it may appear as three dots and everything will look very large, but usually it is nine dots. There you need to find the square called “Class.” Previously it was called “Classroom,” which can still be seen in the website name below.

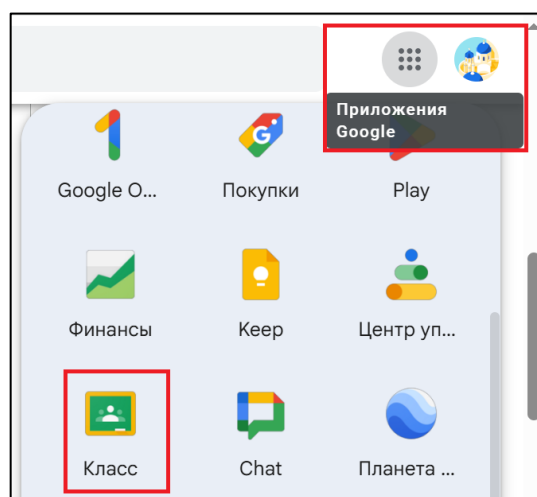


Figure 1. List of Google Apps

Another way to access this platform is to type the link <https://classroom.google.com/> into the address bar of the Google Chrome browser. In fact, this option is available both to those who want to do everything with their own hands at the same time and to all students as well, because they too will become teachers in the future.

If students are in a practical class, they can log in to this platform at that very moment. In addition, as an extra tool, if you have a mobile app, you can also access it through the mobile application. If you wish—because it is not absolutely necessary. It can be done later; there is no rush. We do this so that you, as a teacher, can feel yourself in the role of a learner. The same applies to students in the class.

“Google Classroom truly enables users to move to paperless work, improve collaboration among the student community, provide various instructions for students, save time, save paper, and create a flipped classroom model. Google Classroom is a useful tool when teachers or students are outside the learning process, because they can continue teaching and continue missed lessons.”

We will first show the teacher how it works using slides, and then, at the end, if time remains, we will demonstrate the screen directly. Thus, there are two ways to join a class. The first is via a course code, and the second is by adding a student account to the course. It should be noted that time must be allocated so that students understand how to join the class. This is a point

that every student must understand, because if for some reason they do not understand it, they will not understand what to do at all.

On both the website and the mobile app, Google

Classroom has a convenient “plus” button for creating a course, where we can either join a class or create our own course. Once again, we draw your attention to this. This is a subtle point, but it is important.

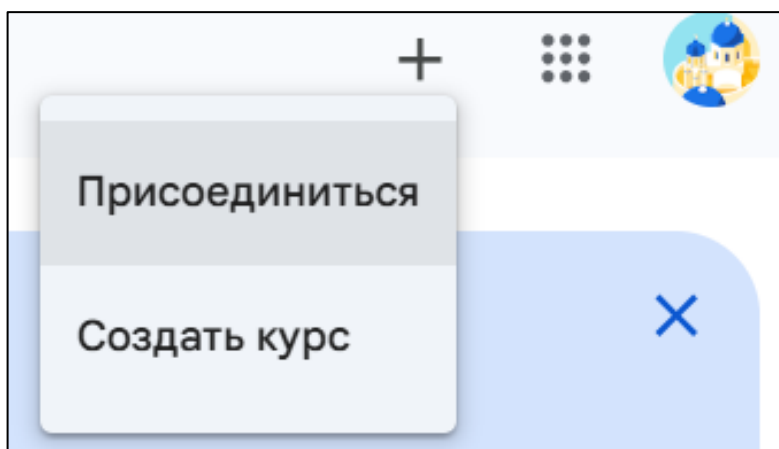


Figure 2. Joining a course or creating a new course.

According to Google, there is a Q&A available via a link specifically on this issue—about the use of free G Suite for Education accounts in educational institutions. This

is important to them, and when you create courses, they warn you every time (Figure 3). Of course, you are not working at a school, and you would not take the risk of using what you do for your students.

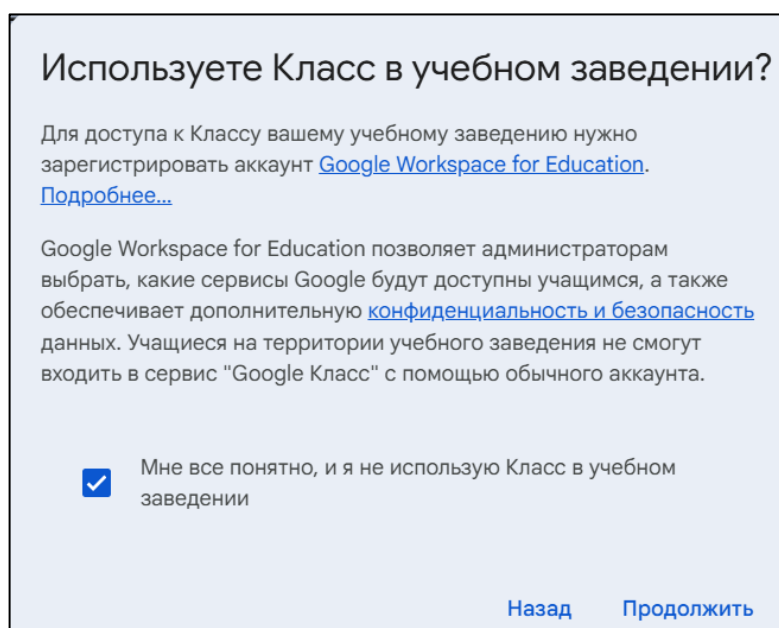


Figure 3. Platform warning message.

In fact, there is nothing to be afraid of here, but obtaining a G Suite for Education account is sometimes much easier than working with individual accounts. Nevertheless, using individual accounts is not prohibited either. So, we create a course.

We create the course as follows: we enter the course name—this is the only mandatory field. Today we are

not indicating the subject sections, and you, dear teachers, are indicating the classroom.

The platform warns us so that, when we create this course, we clearly understand that we are truly responsible for it. Of course, I give myself that accountability. Then we click the “Create” button located in the lower-right corner.

Figure 4. Course creation window.

Based on experience, determine what kinds of courses should be organized in higher education or outside the formal educational process. We started by creating courses on small topics. In many respects, this turned out to be ineffective, because once students got used to it and understood what it was, the topic ended and we had to create another course. We created another course, and it resulted in some confusion. In general, it is logically more appropriate to create courses around a larger instructional theme. In higher education, however, I have almost abandoned this approach. At present, all of our courses are created for the entire academic year, and then we gradually reorganize them

according to the stages of education.

Accordingly, there is also an option to work with a single group. If we have home-based or distance learning, we can create several subjects there and connect several teachers, but the group is only one—for example, if it is the only child studying at home. For instance, the Google Classroom code created to collect and assess independent assignments for the subject “Computer Graphics and Web Design” is as follows: uj3oy6p3.

After a course is created, the course page (window) appears (Figure 5). In the teacher interface, the sections Stream, Classwork, People, and Grades are displayed.

Figure 5. Course window.

This platform is very user-friendly and creates favorable conditions for running a course effectively. At the same time, the Google Classroom interface is designed to be simple and easy to understand. You can also access Google Classroom via a mobile application, which is another convenience. The purpose is to ensure that

students who do not have a computer can still join the course and use it.

Course participants can exchange opinions and feedback on the subject and topics. To enable this, the course instructor should open “Stream settings” and activate the option “Students can post and comment.”

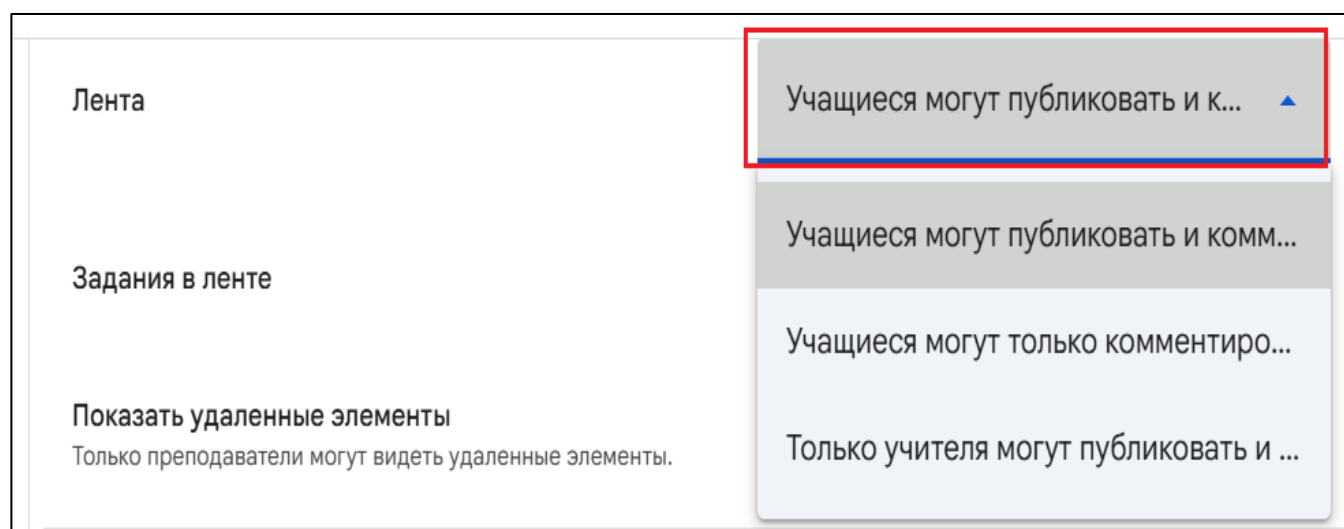


Figure 6. Posting feedback and comments.

Thus, communicating with students, providing feedback, assigning tasks, and grading are all carried out within the course.

After the course is created, how do we involve students and teachers—i.e., add them to the course? Here, it is also possible to add or invite several teachers to one

course, which creates conditions for teamwork. To invite instructors to the course, go to the “People” section and click the person-with-plus icon located to the right of “Teachers” (Figure 7). In the invitation window, enter the teacher’s email address. Then click “Invite.”

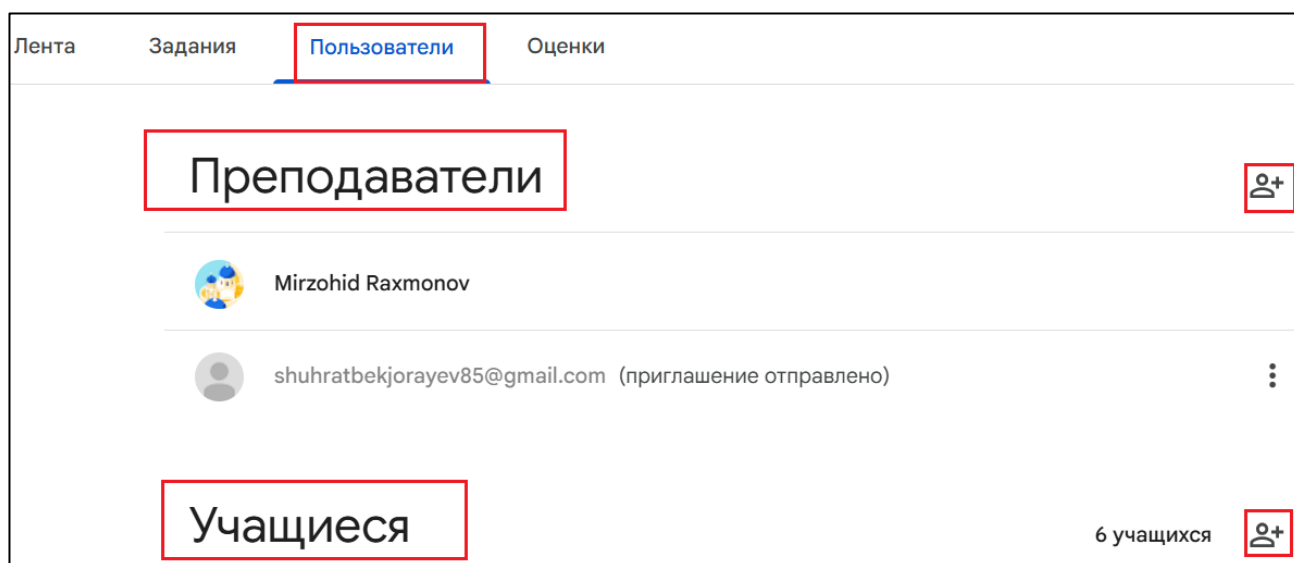


Figure 7. Adding teachers and students to a course.

As described above, to add or involve students in the course, we use the “Students” section.

The purpose of adding teachers is to invite collaboration in teaching the subject, conduct various research activities, and exchange opinions and feedback—providing many opportunities. At the same time, it creates a pedagogical space for jointly discussing the assignments given to students and applying different methods to improve students’ level of knowledge.

One of the main functions of a course is assigning tasks

to course participants. Therefore, if you want to communicate with a student, you need to give them an assignment. For the initial assignments, it is important to choose simpler tasks that are easy to complete within the subject. The goal is for students to learn how to work in Google Classroom and how to submit completed assignments to the course.

To assign a task, go to the “Classwork” section. There, click the “Create” button.

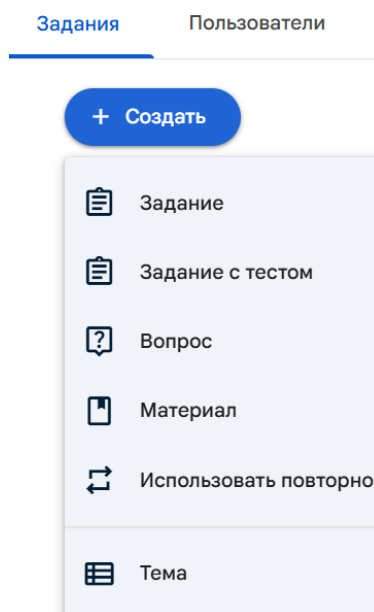


Figure 8. Classwork section for assigning tasks

Assignments can be created in different types: "Assignment," "Quiz assignment," "Question," "Material," "Reuse post," and "Topic" (Figure 8). Any of these can be selected to create a task. When assigning

a task, it is possible to set a due date and choose not to accept submissions after the deadline. If this option is enabled and a submission date is specified (Figure 9), late work may be restricted.

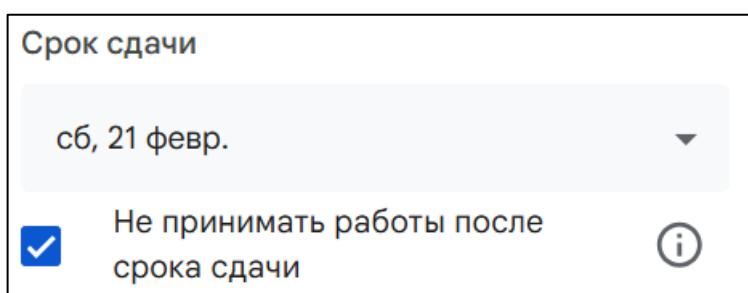


Figure 9. Setting an assignment due date

If the teacher wishes, they can create an assignment without a topic, without a submission deadline, and without a grade. This is usually done at the beginning of the course until students learn how to work in the course environment.

Google Classroom offers a standard 100-point grading system. If necessary, you can create your own grading criteria. To do this, click "+ Rubric" and then select "Create rubric" from the list (Figure 10).

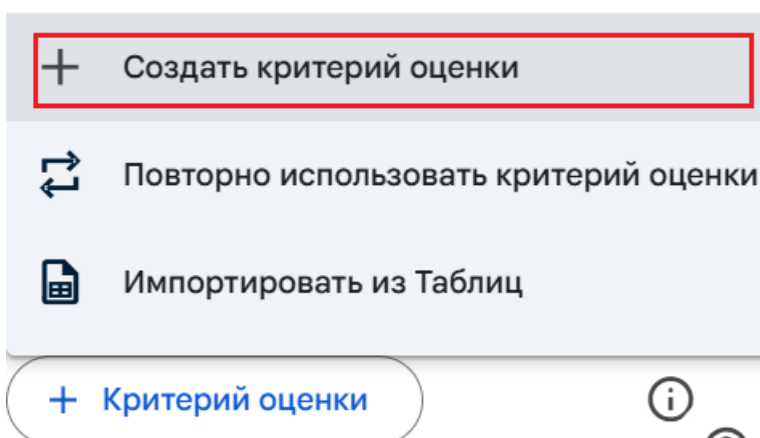


Figure 10. Creating assessment criteria

When creating an assessment rubric, the points are distributed across criteria and a description is provided

for each performance level (Figure 11).

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Количество баллов (обя... 25	Количество баллов (обя... 20	Количество баллов (обя... 15	Количество баллов (обя... 10
Название уровня Alo	Название уровня Yaxshi	Название уровня O'rta	Название уровня Qoniqsiz

Figure 11. Creating assessment criteria.

In the higher education system, it is possible to develop separate assessment criteria for current assessment, midterm assessment, and final assessment, and apply them within the course.

"Although Google Classroom is a platform with broad capabilities, it is not free from a number of shortcomings: Google Classroom does not provide an option to organize webinars with students (learners). A teacher can use YouTube or Google Hangouts features that allow conducting online meetings with students;

The open version of Google Classroom does not include an electronic gradebook. This feature is available for corporate users of Google Classroom;

There are limitations for course authors who use personal accounts: the number of participants in a course cannot exceed 250, and up to 100 participants can be added per day. Despite the shortcomings noted above, Google Classroom also has its own distinctive advantages, which make it possible to fully use this online platform in secondary schools as well as in higher education institutions."

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that organizing such distance courses enables students to arrange independent work within the subject, store completed work in digital format in Google Classroom, assess independent work, and access many other conveniences. At the same time, by creating a virtual space for students and teachers, it becomes possible to establish friendly interaction between them. While completing assignments related to independent work, students gradually acquire knowledge and skills such as understanding the distance course environment and

completing tasks in a digital format.

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