

## WAYS OF IMPROVING FOREIGN LANGUAGE COMMUNICATION DURING STUDENTS' PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

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### Summary

The article examines the issue of developing foreign language communicative competence of students as the primary goal of language learning in the context of professional training of future specialists. It is argued that the most relevant cognitive-linguistic, operational-linguistic and communicative competences for professionally oriented foreign language learning are the ones which enable the use of language as a means of obtaining professionally significant information through reading and participating in oral and written professional communication.

The views of domestic and foreign scholars regarding the definition of foreign language communicative competence and its component structure are analyzed. All components of foreign language communicative competence are interrelated and interdependent, forming a complex, holistic, systematic, and structured entity.

The process of foreign language learning should be aimed at the gradual cultivation of foreign language communicative competence components, using the most effective teaching forms, methods and tools. The forms, methods and tools for conducting productive classes are highlighted as those focused on activating cognitive activity, developing foreign language communicative competence, overcoming language, speech and socio-cultural communication difficulties.

Attention is drawn to the expediency of using innovative teaching methods such as role-playing games, discussions, project-based methods, quests, as they are person-centered and create conditions for the enhancement of students' creative thinking and provide a good opportunity to acquire and apply foreign language knowledge due to the emergence of internal motivation. The research results in the context of future specialists' motivation to master foreign language communication skills and abilities are presented.

**Key words:** communicative approach, knowledge, skills, abilities, foreign language communicative competence.

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### 1. Introduction

Foreign language training in higher education institutions should be aimed not only at mastering knowledge, skills and abilities, but, more importantly, at promoting the development of professional competence of future specialists. A crucial component of professional competence is foreign language communicative competence. Therefore, the formation of students' foreign language communicative competence so that they are capable of engaging in real foreign language communication at a level sufficient for professional activity should be considered as the main goal of foreign language learning.

*Competence* is defined as "good awareness of something; a scope of powers of any person" (*Yaremenko, Slipushko, 2006: 874*), while *competent* is explained as: "1) having

sufficient knowledge in a particular field; well-informed about something; clever; 2) having certain authority" (Yaremenko, Slipushko, 2006: 874). Taking into account the above interpretations, one can conclude that competence is a norm indicating the ability and willingness to use knowledge, skills, abilities and experience to solve practical and theoretical tasks, while competency, on the other hand, is an assessment of the degree of presence or absence of this norm, a qualitative characteristic of a person that allows them to make judgments and decisions during professional activity. Competency is the basis of activity. One can become competent by mastering certain competencies and implementing them in a specific activity. According to the Law of Ukraine "On Higher Education", competence is defined as a person's ability to successfully socialize, study, and conduct professional activities, which arises on the basis of a dynamic combination of knowledge, abilities, skills, ways of thinking, views, values, and other personal qualities. A competent person should not only understand the essence of the problem, but also be able to practically solve it. One of the results of the educational process is the acquisition of a number of competencies necessary for professional activity, social adaptation, and personal development.

For professionally oriented foreign language learning, the most relevant are cognitive-linguistic, operational-linguistic and communicative competences, which allow using the language as a means of obtaining professionally significant information while reading and participating in oral and written professional communication. The sociability of a specialist, their openness to communication and enrichment in the process of interpersonal interaction are indirect manifestations of competency. The formation of foreign language communicative competence requires an optimal combination of both the communicative approach and the competence-based approach. The communicative approach focuses on the communicative orientation of education, where language is used as a means of communication in real life situations. The competence-based approach is aimed at free communication in various forms and on different topics, the ability to use vocabulary and grammar as well as to build utterances in accordance with communicative tasks in typical and non-standard situations. Both approaches complement each other, contributing to the comprehensive enhancement of foreign language skills and abilities.

## 2. Review of Recent Research and Publications

Ukrainian and foreign scholars reveal the concept of foreign language communicative competence in different ways. Kohut I.V. believes that foreign language communicative competence is the ability and desire to engage in foreign language communication with a native speaker. Podoliak M.V. considers foreign language communicative competence as the ability and readiness of the subject of professional activity to communicate. Courtney B. Cazden expresses the opinion that communicative competence is a set of knowledge, abilities and skills necessary for understanding other people's programs of speech behavior and generating one's own that correspond to communication situations. It is formed during the interaction of a person with the social environment, in the process of obtaining socio-communicative experience.

It should be noted that among scholars there is a viewpoint regarding the need to distinguish between the concepts of foreign language communicative competence and foreign language communicative competency (Volkova, Pantelieieva, Matthew Kanwit, Megan Solon, Voronina, Malieieva). The researchers see the term *competence* as having a practical orientation, implying *knowing how* rather than *knowing what*, while competency is interpreted as a personal quality of an individual. It is claimed that competency is always a manifestation of

competence. Bokoch T. assumes that competency characterizes a person holistically, whereas competence reflects certain practical skills and abilities.

Significantly, researchers recognize diversity in the component structure of foreign language communicative competence. This is certainly related to the complexity and multifaceted nature of the communication process. However, the vast majority of proposed models include the following five components: linguistic, speech, sociocultural, discourse and strategic competences.

*Linguistic competence* covers knowledge of phonetics, vocabulary and professional terminology, spelling, grammar and the corresponding skills, which should be automatic, flexible, and stable. The linguistic component of foreign language communicative competence refers to the ability to understand and produce an endless number of linguistically meaningful expressions, using acquired linguistic signs and the rules of their combination (*Widdowson, 2003*).

*Speech competence* includes four types of speech activities: listening, speaking, reading and writing, which facilitate both productive and receptive use of a foreign language. Listening competence refers to the ability to understand and interpret a foreign language through listening information that is conveyed verbally through speech. Speaking competence encompasses both dialogue and monologue and features the ability to discern these types of speech with further reproduction and discussion of what have been heard. Reading competence is the ability to read and understand printed texts. Writing competence pertains to the ability to express oneself in writing within a defined topic (*Butenko, 2004*).

Speech competence is the ability to communicate appropriately and effectively in a foreign language in various life situations expressing one's thoughts, desires, intentions, requests and understanding the speech of other communication participants.

Thus, it can be confidently stated that equating linguistic competence with speech competence is not correct. Linguistic competence is related to the system of language signs, while speech competence is the way of using this system of signs. Linguistic competence is perceived as a prerequisite for the development of speech competence, which contains a combination of linguistic and speech knowledge.

*Sociocultural competence* is a set of knowledge about the cultural features of the country whose language is studied, including traditions, norms of behavior and etiquette, as well as the ability to appropriately apply such knowledge in the process of communication, while remaining a carrier of another culture. Sociocultural competence encompasses sociolinguistic competence, which is based on the knowledge and skills necessary for the effective use of language in a social context, taking into account the norms of politeness, linguistic markers of social relations and expressions of folk wisdom (*Batsevyeh, 2004*). The formation of sociocultural competence occurs in the context of culture dialogue and contributes to the achievement of intercultural understanding among people.

*Discursive competence* is related to the appropriate choice of linguistic means depending on the type of utterance, communication situation and communicative tasks to ensure that the speech is logical and information-rich. The discursive component of foreign language communicative competence is considered as the ability to generate discourse, in other words, to implement and interpret the forms and meanings of words for creating texts, mastering the skills of organizing linguistic material into a coherent text, as well as using lexical and stylistic means of cohesion. (*Drozdova, Rudnitska 2021:54*). Thus, a person with a high level of discursive competence knows well how to effectively use connections (pronouns, conjunctions, adverbs and other grammatical tools), correctly express thoughts in the text, and indicate the relationship between different ideas in communicative models.

*Strategic competence* involves the development of the ability to use verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to compensate for linguistic challenges or other difficulties in communication, for example, if it is necessary to strengthen the rhetorical effect of a speech message. The strategic component aims to relieve tension in case of insufficient foreign language means of obtaining and transmitting information, stimulate self-improvement through interaction, and promote accurate self-assessment. The strategic component is often termed as compensatory in academic publications.

The development of strategic competence involves acquiring the ability to use both verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to overcome linguistic challenges and effectively convey the intended message. These strategies can help compensate for a lack of language proficiency and enhance the persuasive impact of spoken communication. The strategic component aims to alleviate communication barriers, encourages self-improvement through interaction, and promotes accurate self-assessment. In academic literature, this strategic element is often termed as compensatory.

All the components of foreign language communicative competence are interrelated and interdependent, forming a complex, holistic, systematic and structured entity. Learning a foreign language should be directed towards gradually cultivating foreign language communicative competence components, using the most potent teaching forms, methods and tools.

### 3. Presenting the Main Material

Foreign language communicative competence is essential for students undergoing professional training. It encompasses linguistic knowledge, speech skills and abilities which are vital for successful communication in a professional setting, and also facilitate personal development and growth. The personal experience suggests that motivation plays a significant role in the development of foreign language communicative competence. Motivation stimulates interest in educational activities, and the activity is always tied to the motive that generates it. The motive explains the nature of particular speech acts, while the communicative intention indicates the communicative goal of the interlocutors. There are two types of motivation: external and internal. External motivation is influenced by society and a person's relationship to the world around them, while internal motivation is mainly driven by the educational activities themselves. When a person enjoys a foreign language and desires to communicate, it's an example of internal motivation. Extrinsic motivation focuses on achieving a specific learning outcome, while the learning process itself is important for intrinsic motivation. External motivation is characterized by the amount of work done, while internal motivation is characterized by quality. Experts in the area of communication define motivation as: 1) a set of processes that encourage activity (*Halytska, 2005:45*), 2) a psychological process that turns external influence into internal motivation (*Kohut, 2022:107*), 3) a set of motivations that cause activity (*Courtney B. Cazden, 2017:38*). Accordingly, motivation is the guiding force behind a person's behavior and determines their ability to fulfill specific needs.

A survey was conducted with 100 higher education students using questionnaires. The results showed that 49% of the respondents possess a strong motivation to learn a foreign language, recognizing its significance for professional development. Therefore, the development of foreign language communicative competence should be considered a top priority. In order to effectively develop foreign language communicative competence during language learning, the following factors should be taken into consideration:

- spheres of communicative activity as well as topics and situations of foreign language communication within the defined spheres;
- means of communication including commonly used vocabulary and professional terminology, grammatical forms and constructions, and language clichés;
- texts of diverse content, genre, and style, which contain information of a socio-cultural, linguistic, regional, and professional nature;
- skills of understanding and using language material in all types of speech activity;
- oral and written foreign language communication skills necessary for effective implementation of professional tasks.

The formation of foreign language communicative competence occurs in the process of using both traditional and modern teaching methods. Traditional teaching methods usually include the grammar-translation method, the direct/direct method and the audio-lingual/audio-visual method. However, researchers have observed a significant drawback of traditional teaching methods in their focus on reproductive thinking, which does not contribute to the development of professional skills and abilities. Therefore, it is recommended to apply innovative teaching methods, such as role-playing games, discussions, project-based method, quests, since they create opportunities for the improvement of creative thinking of future specialists and are aimed at cultivating a range of professional competencies, particularly foreign language communicative competence, to adequately use a foreign language in specific communication situations. Foreign language learning, which takes place in the classroom environment, is organized, directed and supervised by the teacher, who utilizes methods and forms of conducting classes that activate the cognitive activity of higher education students and encourage them to communicate.

When discussing innovative teaching methods, it's important to consider the use of social and everyday role-playing games for developing foreign language communication skills within social and everyday settings. In addition, professionally-oriented role-playing games are aimed at honing professional communication skills in a foreign language by simulating real-life situations. In these games, participants act as if they are engaged in authentic communication scenarios (Volkova, 2015). Preparation for role-playing games involves various exercises to overcome linguistic, speech, and socio-cultural communication challenges, and to encourage logical and meaningful statements. Working in pairs at this stage facilitates a gradual transition from controlled activity to role-playing.

Another commonly used method of learning a foreign language is through discussion, where participants talk about proposed problems or issues. During the discussion, students express their ideas, ask questions, agree or disagree with others, and develop a joint decision. This activity promotes reflective thinking and encourages communication participants to show initiative. To conduct a discussion effectively, careful preparation is required. The topic should encourage cognitive activity, generate a variety of points of view, and create an emotional atmosphere for fruitful communication. The use of discussion elements is suitable for every practical foreign language lesson. For instance, when reviewing homework or reinforcing the learned material, it's important to have a thorough discussion about the outcomes. This approach gradually leads to a desire to engage in communication with others or a perceived motive for communication (Mosii, 2015). This intention is then expressed in a linguistic form, using specific language means, which play a crucial role in embodying the intention. Modern didactics emphasizes the educational value of discussion, as it brings about a comprehensive understanding of the problem being discussed.

The foreign language teaching methodology pays great attention to the creative activity of higher education students. In this context, it is worth mentioning the project-based method,

which is personally-oriented and helps develop their creative abilities and research skills. It also provides a good opportunity to acquire and apply foreign language knowledge through the expression of internal motivation.

The project-based method relies on the idea that the core of a project is its practical focus on achieving a specific result by using theoretical knowledge to solve significant problems. This result can be observed, understood, and applied in real-life situations. The project method adapts the learning process to individual students, allowing them to plan, organize, and control their activities independently. Engaging in project work enhances skills such as analysis, synthesis, and decision-making in different scenarios, as well as the ability to search for and study information essential for task completion. It also improves students' proficiency in presenting and substantiating their viewpoints in front of an audience. Effective professional communication requires knowledge and the ability to use the vocabulary and grammar of a foreign language, which the project method helps develop. Additionally, it places significant emphasis on the textual material specific to the field of study, forming the basis for creating coherent written or spoken messages with overarching generalizations and conclusions.

In the modern information society, web quest technology is widely used to stimulate the educational and cognitive activities of higher education students. A web quest is a challenging task with game elements that requires the use of various information sources, including Internet resources, to thoroughly research a problem and form a conclusion using language tools. It's important to consider that the problem should not exceed the foreign language capabilities of the students. Web quests are highly effective for self-improvement and self-realization, as they promote personal responsibility and interpersonal relations, and allow for an individual approach that encourages self-expression (Rybak, Moroz, Kyrdan, 2020:117). At the same time, the teacher's role as a coordinator with a high level of subject-specific, methodical, informational and communication competences, is evolving. Quest technology creates the necessary language environment, encourages communication in a foreign language, develops all types of speech skills, and helps to foster professional communication abilities.

The methods for learning a foreign language mentioned above follow a communicative-oriented approach. This approach focuses on developing foreign language communicative competence and socio-cultural awareness through speech during the educational process. To effectively learn a foreign language and develop communicative competence, authentic sources are essential since authenticity ensures that the content and language tools used in the learning process naturally resemble those utilized by native speakers.

#### 4. Conclusions

Therefore, speaking a foreign language is a significant element of professional competence. A student needs to achieve a high level of proficiency in a foreign language in order to use it successfully in their future professional activity, thereby overcoming communication barriers. This is the primary goal of learning a foreign language in a higher educational institution, covering the development and enhancement of foreign language communicative competence which is essential for shaping a secondary language personality.

With the acquired language and speech knowledge, abilities, and skills, a person will be able to navigate real-life situations successfully by choosing appropriate communicative behaviors, provided they possess the necessary level of foreign language communicative competence.

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