

ON THE ISSUE OF IMPROVING THE LEVEL OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE
OF HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSES

*SOBRE A QUESTÃO DA MELHORIA DO NÍVEL DE COMPETÊNCIA COMUNICATIVA
DOS ESTUDANTES DO ENSINO SUPERIOR NAS AULAS DE LÍNGUAS
ESTRANGEIRAS*

*SOBRE LA CUESTIÓN DE LA MEJORA DEL NIVEL DE COMPETENCIA
COMUNICATIVA DE LOS ESTUDIANTES DE ENSEÑANZA SUPERIOR EN LAS
CLASES DE LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS*



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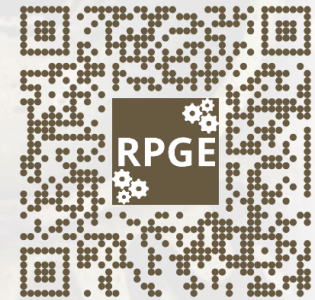
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ABSTRACT: The aim of the article is to analyze the methods of increasing the level of communicative competence of higher education applicants in foreign language classes. The research is based on the systematic method, comparative analysis, and abstraction, application of the dialectical method, forecasting. The results investigate the problem of communicative competence in modern teaching conditions (analysis of general principles and remarks). Separate attention is also paid to the issues of modern methods of increasing the level of communicative competence of higher education applicants in foreign language classes. The conclusions noted the effectiveness of online platforms (Futurelearn, Puzzle-English, Skyeng, Duolingo, Lingualeo and others) and the importance of thorough work in foreign language classes.

KEYWORDS: Online platforms. Communicative competence. Distance learning. Foreign languages.

RESUMO: *O objetivo do artigo é analisar os métodos de aumento do nível de competência comunicativa de estudantes do ensino superior em aulas de língua estrangeira. A pesquisa baseia-se no método sistemático, na análise comparativa, e na abstração, bem como na aplicação do método dialético e da previsão. Os resultados investigam o problema da competência comunicativa nas condições modernas de ensino (análise de princípios gerais e observações). É também dada especial atenção às questões dos métodos modernos de aumento do nível de competência comunicativa dos alunos do ensino superior nas aulas de línguas estrangeiras. As conclusões apontaram a eficácia das plataformas on-line (Futurelearn, Puzzle-English, Skyeng, Duolingo, Lingualeo e outras) e a importância de um trabalho minucioso nas aulas de línguas estrangeiras.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Plataformas on-line. Competência comunicativa. Ensino a distância. Línguas estrangeiras.*

RESUMEN: *El objetivo del artículo es analizar los métodos para aumentar el nivel de competencia comunicativa de los estudiantes de enseñanza superior en las clases de lenguas extranjeras. La investigación se basa en el método sistemático, el análisis comparativo y la abstracción, así como en la aplicación del método dialéctico y la predicción. Los resultados investigan el problema de la competencia comunicativa en las condiciones modernas de enseñanza (análisis de principios generales y observaciones). También se presta especial atención a las cuestiones de los métodos modernos para aumentar el nivel de competencia comunicativa de los estudiantes de enseñanza superior en las clases de lenguas extranjeras. Las conclusiones apuntan a la eficacia de las plataformas en línea (Futurelearn, Puzzle-English, Skyeng, Duolingo, Lingualeo y otras) y a la importancia del trabajo minucioso en las clases de lenguas extranjeras.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Plataformas en línea. Competencia comunicativa. Aprendizaje a distancia. Lenguas extranjeras.*

Introduction

In their professional activities, a modern specialist in any specialization becomes an active participant in communication. They transmit and receive information from various sources, establish contacts with other participants in the work or educational environment, build relationships through dialogue, and try to develop everyone's abilities to the maximum and ensure their emotional comfort during mutual communication. Thus, the development of communication competence is an urgent requirement for competitiveness in the labor market and the use of one's own advantages. Acquiring and developing the relevant competence includes not only the general mastery of grammatical structures of foreign languages, reproductive work on their study but also the development of live speech, taking into account modern digitalization, information technology, slang, special speech patterns, etc. The actualization of this problem requires more attention in view of the need to develop soft skills among higher education students. It is also necessary to take into account the need to change teaching paradigms, which should shift the emphasis in teaching from simple memorization of words, rules, and structures to creative mastery of spoken language, the ability to express one's thoughts correctly and the ability to communicate calmly and confidently.

Literature review

Ahnagari and Zamanian (2014) characterized the peculiarities of intercultural competence development. The researchers presented an analysis of different perspectives on the transformation of intercultural competence in English as a foreign language classroom. Narke (2021) characterized the main strategies for improving communicative competence. Namaziandost *et al.* (2020) analyzed the problem of introducing a flipped learning model through the prism of implementing English as foreign language listening (EFL). At the same time, Bahlai *et al.* (2019) investigated the key aspects of intercultural communicative competence development, which, according to the authors, is a key element of foreign language learning, increases the need to adapt forms and methods of teaching to increase students' multicultural awareness. Kostyrya *et al.* (2022) believe that intercultural communication skills are an international tool for developing English-language communicative competencies. The peculiarities of organizing communicative learning are studied in Ezhil Mary and Nirmala (2012). According to Halian *et al.* (2020), communicative competence is almost the main one in the training of future teachers of a foreign language and literature. The digital conditions for

the implementation of communication skills have been characterized in a number of works. Abd-Rabo and Hashaikeh (2021) believe that the digital transformation revolution has influenced the change of many social institutions.

Aims

The purpose of the article is to analyze the methods of improving the level of communicative competence of higher education students in foreign language classes. To solve this task, it is proposed to consider the importance of communicative competence in the modern educational process, as well as to consider in detail the peculiarities of mastering it in practice, during the training sessions.

Materials and methods

The study is based on a systematic method that allowed us to analyze the improvement of communicative competence using innovative principles of organization as components of comprehensive training from the information, pedagogical and social points of view. The article also used the methods of comparative analysis and abstraction to describe the main aspects of the organization of distance learning space, taking as an example modern method of conducting lectures and practical foreign language classes. The application of the dialectical research method allowed us to consider communicative competence as something that is constantly transforming and developing. Such methodology was used by Järvis; Tambovceva and Virovere (2021). In addition, the prospects and directions of development of ways to improve communicative competence in the process of training higher education students in foreign language classes were investigated with the help of forecasting.

Results and discussion

Communication competence in modern learning environments: general principles and remarks

Distance learning of foreign languages is becoming increasingly popular among those who want to learn another language but do not have the opportunity or desire to attend classroom lessons. This teaching method allows students to learn a language at a distance using information communication technologies and the Internet. According to researchers, distance

learning in foreign languages is the process of learning a foreign language via the Internet, video conferencing, special learning platforms, and other electronic means of communication (ABD-RABO; HASHAIKEH, 2021).

One of the main advantages of distance learning in foreign languages is that it allows students to study anywhere and anytime, which is especially useful for those who have limited access to language courses in their city or country. Distance learning of foreign languages can be varied, from self-study on special websites to virtual classes with a teacher, which are conducted using a webcam and other electronic means of communication. Most online courses have special interactive exercises and assignments, which allows students to get feedback on their work and correct mistakes (JÄRVIS; TAMBOVCEVA; VIROVERE, 2021). Distance learning of foreign languages can also be more accessible to students with different levels of knowledge. They can choose courses at different levels from beginner to advanced, as well as depending on their needs and interests. However, there are also some disadvantages. One of them is that higher education students may feel a lack of interaction with other students and teachers. Therefore, communication skills, which are too important in the modern world to be neglected, may be at risk.

Communication competence is a complete set of communication and organizational skills, including self-expression, the ability to argue one's own point of view, and the ability to ask questions - the highest level of communication competence (PODGÓRECKI; ROPSKI, 2015). Empathy (the ability to understand the inner world of others), self-control, verbal and non-verbal culture of communication are indicators of the level of interpersonal interaction. The change that is currently taking place in the context of distance learning is a challenge not only for students of higher education institutions but also for teachers. Academic staff need much more time to improve their skills, master new teaching methods and technologies and implement them in the learning process and ensure systematic and effective interactivity of the learning process. Distance learning requires more time than face-to-face training. At the state level, this should help motivate academic staff and higher education students, and lead to a modification of their academic schedule. The specific characteristics of distance learning, such as the objectivity of communication, prolonged time in front of a monitor, and immersion in a virtual environment, require students and teachers to be self-motivated to learn and self-disciplined.

To create communicative competence in higher education students in foreign language classes, it is proposed to introduce certain methods of using interactive technologies as

innovative methods of professional development of future specialists. The formation of methods of interactive technologies of education provision is focused on innovative means and their active implementation in the university system. This corresponds to the priority areas of harmonization of the Ukrainian educational system with the requirements of leading educational systems, i.e., the use of innovative methods correlates with modern social demands and the needs of future professionals (HALIAN *et al.*, 2020). In turn, they are also based on the principles of free choice, personal freedom, and trust in educational subjects, which is also associated with the awareness of one's own responsibility for the choice made and taking into account the specifics of educational processes.

The innovative orientation of educational processes aims to create qualitative and quantitative changes in the activities of learning subjects, which leads to ensuring that the goals, objectives, and overall content of education meet the current requirements and needs of future specialists, developing their skills of professional and social mobility, creating opportunities for quality cooperation using foreign languages, introducing the latest scientific achievements into pedagogical practice, which will also contribute to ensuring quality foreign language competence.

The innovative orientation of the educational process is formed through specific forms in which the goal, objectives, principles, and methods of education are realized. Various forms of organization of the educational process allow to fully utilize their potential and to choose appropriate forms taking into account their advantages and disadvantages (BAHLAI *et al.*, 2019). We believe that the formation of the innovative orientation of the educational process in the course of professional training of higher education is carried out in certain forms:

1. Democratic forms of interaction between participants in the educational process involve equal participation of educational subjects at all stages of the formation of foreign language communicative competence. These forms are realized in the way of personality-oriented learning based on the individual abilities of each student to learn other languages.

2. Interactive forms are recognized by the modern theory of education as the most effective for achieving educational goals, in particular for the development of students' foreign language competence during professional training in higher education. They are based on the direct active interaction of students during classroom and extracurricular activities. These forms contribute to the activation of foreign language knowledge, skills, and abilities, and the formation of foreign language communication competencies.

Many methods include a communicative approach to teaching to some extent because the realization of oral communication is unthinkable without understanding the interlocutor's language since in the process of language communication everyone acts both as a speaker and a listener. Modern researchers note that the process of acquiring communication skills can be summarized as follows: 1. reproduction of sounds and sound patterns; 2. use of emphasis in words and sentences, ability to apply correct intonation patterns and rhythms; 3. correct selection of appropriate words and sentences depending on the situation, problem, topic, social situation, audience, etc. 4. Expressing own thoughts in a logical sequence; 4. Using language as a means of expressing own thoughts, attitudes, values, and judgments. 5. The ability to communicate and conduct a conversation in a cursory manner and with few pauses (EZHIL MARY; NIRMALA, 2012). When developing communication skills in higher education students, two types of speaking can be used: dialogic and monologic. The dialogic form should be given great importance because it involves two or more participants in the communicative learning process. At the same time, it should be noted that dialogic speech refers to the communicative functions of language it implies the desire of the interlocutors to hear and understand each other, the ability to express their own emotions, agreement or disagreement with the communicator, and the skill of asking a properly formulated question. However, for the successful realization of dialogic communication, the key requirement is knowledge of the learning material (we are talking about basic vocabulary, speech patterns, grammar, etc.). On the other hand, the monologue type of speaking is formed from such categories (units) as a sentence and a logically connected text. Thus, the “subject/object” type of communication is realized. Often, the monologue type is understood as a presentation, report, message, paraphrase of a text, etc. Such questions as “Tell your friend”, “Ask a question”, “Let's discuss this problem” contribute to the development of both dialogic and monologic types of speech (ARAUJO PORTUGAL, 2021). In addition, such methods as discussion, role-playing, brainstorming, interviews, the problem method, description of thematic images, and the project method (individual or collective) also contribute to stimulating the development of students' communication skills. These methods can be called classical for the development of speaking. However, the use of modern information and communication technologies also contributes to the development of communication skills.

In addition, we believe that interactive learning is primarily a dialogic type of learning, in which interaction between the teacher and the student, as well as students with each other, is realized. Here, students play the role of active participants in the educational process, and the

teacher directs their activities, creates a comfortable working atmosphere, stimulates the development of critical and creative abilities, cognitive activity, and independence. Interaction can also fit well into distance learning, which is carried out through educational platforms and services that give people from all over the world the opportunity to study at a convenient time in a convenient place, to improve their skills (AHNAGARI; ZAMANIAN, 2014). Such educational platforms as Futurelearn, Puzzle-English Skyeng, and various YouTube channels help to learn new words, repeat complex structures, watch them in live communication, etc. At the same time, the Duolingo platform also facilitates independent learning of foreign languages. This app is suitable for beginners who want to understand the basic lexical and grammatical structure of a language. However, tasks for Intermediate and Advanced levels are also available. The educational website Lingualo is fully dedicated to learning English. The learning process is based on a game model. A site with video lessons called engVid for learning foreign languages, divided by topic, the site promotes the development of speaking through special vocabulary, audio, and video tasks. The unique Memrise platform facilitates foreign language learning through the use of special card systems. Users can create educational content themselves. TED is a remote organization dedicated to motivational lectures in English. It is suitable for users with existing knowledge of the language who want to improve their listening and speaking skills. Tandem is a messenger that facilitates foreign language learning. The resource was created for enthusiasts who want to learn a language through communication with other people and share their knowledge of their native language. We believe that the Tandem platform contributes to the development of communication skills, socialization of the individual, and the formation of a digital culture of communication. Therefore, modern online technologies help in learning a foreign language, as students have the opportunity to listen to native speakers and train their listening skills, perform various interactive tasks, practice grammar rules, and read various works of art.

Modern methods of improving the level of communicative competence of higher education students in foreign language classes

In general, based on the observation of students' performance, we can identify several ways to improve the level of communicative competence in foreign language classes:

1. Active practice of spoken language: The best way to improve communicative competence is to practice speaking skills. During classes, the teacher can organize various exercises where students have the opportunity to communicate with each other in the foreign

language (NARKE, 2021). This will help to improve pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary skills, as well as develop listening comprehension skills.

When teaching a foreign language in a scientific field, special attention should be paid to the method that can be conditionally called “peer-to-peer”. For example, it means allowing students to independently offer and conduct a class, training, or seminar in a foreign language on the topic of research for junior students of the same specialty during a foreign language class. If a student has done an internship, they can also prepare presentation materials to share their own experience of such training with others.

2. Reading and listening. During classes, students may be offered reading and listening materials in a foreign language (NAMAZIANDOST *et al.*, 2020). This will help to develop listening comprehension skills and expand vocabulary.

Listening can be active or passive. Active listening means that a person directs his or her attention to the speech and makes efforts to understand it, for example, by emphasizing important words or repeating phrases. Passive listening occurs when a person listens to the speech without focusing on it. Listening can be done in a variety of contexts, such as language teaching, conversations with native speakers, listening to music, videos, or radio programs. In any context, listening helps to develop listening comprehension skills and improve language proficiency. Reading can also take advantage of the benefits of reading - it can be passive (the student reads the text thoughtfully alone) or active (primarily involving organizing a discussion on a predetermined topic).

3. Use of Internet resources. The Internet has many resources for improving communicative competence. Students can be encouraged to use various applications and programs for learning foreign languages (MARTINEZ-NUÑEZ; BORRAS-GENE; FIDALGO-BLANCO, 2016), watch video and audio materials, communicate with native speakers through special platforms such as iTalki or Tandem. This will help to improve speaking skills and familiarize yourself with a variety of language material.

When choosing authentic video materials for learning a foreign language, it is important to take into account several factors: students' level of knowledge, the complexity of the material, the ratio of sound and visual information in the episodes, the relevance of the visual material to the topic of the lesson and didactic tasks, the relevance of the topic to the needs and interests of students, the length of the fragment, the availability of subtitles, and the educational purpose (KOSTYRYA *et al.*, 2022). Audio and video materials not only help to learn a language but also reflect the speech and culture of a particular nation, which makes them effective for

learning a new language. However, the effectiveness of using these materials depends on the teacher's prior preparation and proper organization of work. The teacher can offer to watch a short part of the movie, several pre-selected episodes according to the learning objective, or the whole movie.

4. Regular attendance. Regular class attendance will help students maintain constant contact with the language environment they are studying (HORDIICHUK *et al.*, 2022). The teacher can also evaluate the progress of higher education students and provide individualized advice on how to improve their speaking skills.

5. Work on your own mistakes. Students can improve their level of communicative competence by working on their mistakes (KHARITONENKO, 2022). They can record their speech, listen to it, and analyze their mistakes to avoid them in the future.

It is also important to remember that improving communication competence takes time and hard work. Regularly doing exercises and attending classes will help students improve their level of speaking and language comprehension (HAIDABRUS, 2022). Modern innovative approaches to teaching foreign languages require special attention to the organization of the classroom space for action and communication (VASYLYSHYNA, 2020). Modeling practical classes and lectures in an interactive format requires proper computer and software for foreign language classrooms, access to the Internet for teachers and students, as well as the availability of multimedia equipment (multimedia video projector, touch board, computer, etc.). The lingua franca room, which allows for both group and individual work, provides teachers with great opportunities to prepare and conduct classes and monitor students' knowledge. In addition to testing and checking knowledge, the lingua franca room allows teachers to evaluate students' language achievements, such as pronunciation and fluency, which are important aspects in the process of learning foreign languages.

Conclusions

The innovative direction of the modern educational process is based on certain forms of the learning organization. In modern conditions, democratic forms of interaction between participants in the educational process are especially relevant, aimed at equal participation of educational subjects at all stages of the formation of foreign language communicative competence. Equally important are interactive forms based on the direct active interaction of higher education students during classroom and extracurricular activities.

Online platforms are particularly effective for developing communicative competence. Futurelearn, Puzzle-English, Skyeng, and YouTube channels help you learn new words, repeat complex structures, and watch them in live communication. The Duolingo platform is also a convenient application for self-study of foreign languages, in particular for beginners who want to understand the basic lexical and grammatical structure of a language. The educational website Lingualeo is entirely dedicated to learning English and uses a game-based learning model. The engVid offers video lessons on various topics, promoting speaking skills through special vocabulary, audio, and video tasks. The unique Memrise platform helps to learn a foreign language using a special card system.

In general, several ways to improve communicative competence in foreign language classes are most relevant. First, we are talking about strengthening the practice of speaking, reading, and listening, using Internet resources, mandatory and regular attendance at classes, and active work on mistakes to avoid them in the future.

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