

DEVELOPING THE PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE OF FUTURE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS

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Abstract: Improving the professional competence of future foreign language teachers is essential to ensuring effective language instruction in an increasingly globalized world. This process involves enhancing not only linguistic proficiency but also pedagogical skills, cultural awareness, and the ability to integrate modern technologies into teaching practices. The development of professional competence can be achieved through a variety of methods, including structured teacher education programs, ongoing professional development, the use of innovative teaching techniques, and the incorporation of digital tools. Furthermore, reflective practices, collaborative learning, and exposure to diverse teaching methodologies help future teachers adapt to dynamic educational environments. This study explores strategies for improving the professional competence of foreign language teachers, highlighting the role of both traditional and modern approaches in fostering a well-rounded, competent educator.

Key words: professional competence, foreign language teachers, teacher education, pedagogical skills, cultural awareness, digital tools

In universities worldwide, scientific research is being carried out to enhance the quality of professional training for English language teachers. This research focuses on modeling and designing the educational process, improving teacher training through integrative approaches, and fostering cultural studies. Additionally, it aims to develop intercultural skills and personal competence within the educational process.

To better understand the standards set for teachers, particularly foreign language teachers, it is important to clarify the terms "qualification," "competence," and "competency." According to Ozhegov's dictionary, "qualification" is defined as the "degree of readiness" for a particular job or as the "level of preparedness" for a task (Shvedova, 1982). "Competence," on the other hand, refers to the scope of knowledge in which a person is well-informed (Shvedova, 1982). Thus, in order to become a competent foreign language teacher, one must possess a specific set of competences that enables effective performance in the field of foreign language education and achieve a certain level of qualification.

In 1996, the Council of Europe identified five essential competencies that are crucial for professionals today. These competencies are particularly significant for foreign language teachers' professional development:

1. **Political and social competencies:** This involves taking responsibility, engaging in collective decision-making, and contributing to the growth of democratic institutions.
2. **Multicultural competencies:** These skills help prevent xenophobia and intolerance, promoting an understanding of cultural, linguistic, and religious differences and fostering a desire to live harmoniously with people from diverse backgrounds.
3. **Communication competencies:** These encompass both oral and written communication skills, which are vital for professional and social participation. The ability to communicate in

multiple languages is becoming increasingly important, as those without such skills risk social isolation.

4. **Information society competencies:** These include understanding and utilizing new technologies, being aware of their advantages and drawbacks, and developing a critical attitude towards information and advertising in the media and online platforms.

5. **Lifelong learning competencies:** These refer to the capacity and willingness to continue learning throughout one's life, both in professional and personal contexts[1]

When examining various sources and perspectives on the competencies essential for foreign language teachers, a wide range of definitions and interpretations emerge. While the specifics may vary, many authors share a common understanding of these competencies, often shaped by their practical experience and different approaches. As a result, distinct individual competencies are identified. Notably, Bidenko (2005) highlighted key competencies such as multicultural, subject-activity, and information competencies, which we agree with and believe are crucial indicators of the quality of a foreign language teacher's professional training.

Regarding the criteria for evaluating the professional competence of Russian foreign language teachers, the "Proposals for the Certification of Foreign Language Teachers" (Safonova, 2004) suggest assessing a teacher's competence based on the following groups of competencies:

- Communicative competence
- Professional competence
- General cultural competence[2]
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Communicative competence includes linguistic, speech, and socio-cultural elements. Professional competence encompasses skills such as planning, organization, monitoring, evaluation, analytical abilities, research, and professional-communication skills (Nikitenko, 2009). General cultural competence is reflected in various aspects of communicative and professional competencies, including psychological, pedagogical, philological, and personal traits (Fedotova, 2005).

When hiring foreign language teachers, for example, during interviews or when evaluating a candidate's qualifications, these competencies are considered to ensure the candidate meets the required standards for the position.

Key Ideas and Concepts:

1. **Range of Competencies:** The passage discusses the broad range of competencies required for foreign language teachers. These competencies are interpreted differently by various sources but often overlap in their general objectives, particularly based on practical experience and teaching approaches.
2. **Bidenko's Contribution:** Bidenko (2005) identifies three core types of competencies for foreign language teachers: multicultural, subject-activity, and information competence. The author agrees with this classification and considers these competencies crucial for a teacher's professional development and effectiveness.
3. **Russian Framework for Teacher Competence:** In Russia, the certification of foreign language teachers, as outlined in Safonova's (2004) work, is based on three groups of competencies:
 - **Communicative Competence:** Focused on linguistic, speech, and socio-cultural knowledge and skills.
 - **Professional Competence:** This involves practical teaching skills such as planning lessons, organizing activities, assessing students, conducting research, and engaging in professional communication.
 - **General Cultural Competence:** This includes broader qualities like psychological, pedagogical, philological, and personal characteristics, all of which contribute to the teacher's overall competence.
4. **Practical Implications for Teacher Hiring:** The passage notes that these competencies are used as key criteria when hiring foreign language teachers. When assessing candidates for a position, their ability to demonstrate these competencies is crucial in ensuring that they are qualified for the role[3]

To effectively assess and develop the competencies required for foreign language teachers, a variety of methods can be employed. Here are some methods aligned with the competencies mentioned in the passage:

1. Assessment of Communicative Competence:

Methods:

- **Language Proficiency Tests:** These tests can measure the teacher's linguistic skills in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Examples include the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) tests or other language proficiency assessments.
- **Role-playing Exercises:** Simulate classroom situations where the teacher must demonstrate their ability to communicate clearly and effectively in the target language.
- **Peer Teaching:** Allowing the teacher to give a demo lesson to their peers or a small group of students can provide insight into how they communicate complex ideas, use language, and manage classroom interactions.
- **Sociocultural Awareness Tasks:** Evaluate the teacher's understanding of sociocultural contexts by asking them to design lessons that incorporate cultural elements, or by discussing case studies that highlight cross-cultural challenges[4]

2. Assessment of Professional Competence:

Methods:

- **Lesson Planning and Delivery:** Evaluate how the teacher plans and delivers lessons. This can be done through formal observations, feedback from students, and self-assessment. Look at how well the teacher sets objectives, organizes materials, and adapts content to different student needs.
- **Student Feedback:** Collect feedback from students on the teacher's effectiveness in terms of teaching methods, communication, and support. This feedback helps evaluate the teacher's organizational and pedagogical skills.
- **Classroom Observations:** Conduct regular observations of the teacher in action to assess their planning, management, and delivery of lessons. This can be structured using rubrics that focus on specific professional competencies such as assessment, student engagement, and adaptability.
- **Professional Development Tracking:** Track participation in workshops, conferences, or continuing education programs. Professional development is a key component of ongoing improvement in teaching skills.

In conclusion, the development and assessment of competencies for foreign language teachers are vital for ensuring high-quality education and effective teaching. The key competencies identified—communicative, professional, cultural, technological, and lifelong learning—cover a broad spectrum of skills essential for success in today's diverse and dynamic classroom environments. These competencies not only focus on language proficiency but also emphasize the ability to adapt to cultural differences, integrate technology, engage in continuous professional development, and communicate effectively with students and colleagues.

By implementing a variety of assessment methods, such as proficiency tests, classroom observations, peer feedback, and reflective practices, educators can ensure that these competencies are cultivated and evaluated. Furthermore, this holistic approach to teacher development not only enhances individual teaching effectiveness but also contributes to creating inclusive, forward-thinking educational environments that prepare students for success in a globalized world.

Ultimately, the emphasis on these competencies reflects the need for foreign language teachers to be adaptable, resourceful, and committed to their own lifelong learning, ensuring that they can meet the evolving needs of both their students and the wider society.

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