

## The Development of Professional Foreign Language Competence for ESP Students: Case of Kazakh National Agrarian University Students

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### ABSTRACT

The relevance of this paper is determined by the needs of modern society for qualified specialists who will fulfill professional tasks in a foreign language society at various intercultural levels. The purpose of the research is studying the development of professional foreign language competence for ESP Students. The methodology of the research is based on doing literature review of the relevance topic and make case study of Kazakh National Agrarian University. The results shows that since agriculture is one of the main vital sectors of Kazakhstan's national economy there is a need to develop professional foreign language competence of Agrarian University students which could be implemented by stages, approaches and by considering the content of foreign language education. Therefore, according to the intensive processes of the higher education reformation, the development of the students' professional competence occupies a leading position. Nowadays it is necessary to train future specialists to act professionally due to the demands of ever changing social and cultural environment.

### KEYWORDS

Foreign languages, ESP Students, Kazakhstan, Professional education

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## Introduction

Socio-political events in the early 1990s, the disintegration of the former Soviet Union had great impact on Foreign Language Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Since gaining its state independence, Kazakhstan has been establishing ties in various areas with other countries which led to the development of social, cultural, economic including academic contacts with foreign countries around the world. In the conditions of formation of a single educational space in the framework of the Bologna process led to overview the

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approaches for training non-English majoring students to develop their foreign language communicative competence.

The twenty-first century is characterized by mobility, ever-increasing flow of information and co-operation between countries in the field of economics, culture and education. "New competences and skills are necessary to understand and evaluate the developments, and it is a way towards higher effectiveness" (Fulans, 1999). In these conditions specialists' professional competence is becoming more and more important and special attention should be paid to employees' academic skills, communication, language competence, innovations, imagination, creativity, critical thinking, problem solving skills, ability to evaluate the situation and make a decision, positive attitude, openness to changes, responsibility, integration, partnership, co-operation and teamwork and lifelong learning (Blūma, 2001; McLaughlin, 1992; Rifkins, 2004), which are essential components of professional competence. Growing demands to employees' professionalism set new requirements to education, stressing "co-existence, respect to personality, dialogue, mutual creative activity" (Alijevs, 2005).

In this context the practical knowledge of a foreign language becomes relevant for future specialists not only as a language of international communication, but also as a source for professional and personal development. According to the requirements of Higher Education Standards in Kazakhstan a skilled professional is defined as a person who has knowledge in his/her field of profession and knowledge of a foreign language.

That is, besides the knowledge in their field of profession the graduates (students) should know a foreign language at that level which will allow them to be successful and mobile and work in a highly competitive local and world markets. Therefore, a specialist with a set of competences formed via mastering the English language will facilitate Kazakhstan's integration into the global market economy.

Agrarian sector as one of the main vital sectors of Kazakhstan's national economy Kazakhstan's agrarian integration into the global market trade also highlighted the significance of foreign language. So there is a need to develop professional foreign language competence of Agrarian University students to be able to communicate with the other professionals in the field at various intercultural levels

### Literature Review

Kazakhstan's active participation in international economic processes, the expansion of business contacts and partnerships with foreign companies put forward specific requirements for training students in agrarian economics. In this context foreign language literacy has become as an economic category.

Y.I. Passov (2007) states that the foreign language integrating with technical sciences and material production develops into a direct productive force. This results in developing ESP students certain competencies that would correspond to the requirement of educational standards. It seems that students' professional foreign language competence formation requires a change in the content, forms and methods of language training at university.

The professional foreign language competence is widely analyzed and considered both in local and foreign methodical literature (Stuart, 1989;

Khaleeva, 1990; Hutmacher, 1996; Markova, 1996; Stamgalieva, 1999; Birman, et al., 2000; Kulibaeva, 2002; Verbitskii, 2003; Zimnyaya, 2003; Anderson, 2004; Tatur, 2004; Brouwer, 2005; Kunanbayeva, 2010). Despite the considerable study of theoretical and practical aspects of language training of foreign and local scholars as the questions of formation the professional foreign language competence of future specialists in agrarian economics requires special attention and individual research study. Therefore, it puts forward the question about a search for new approaches and methods of formation the professional foreign language competence at University.

**Methodology**

In order to develop the professional foreign language competence for Agrarian University students the competence-based approach can be revealed. First of all, according to the modern paradigm of educational process it is important to point out the role of competence-based approach in developing professional foreign language competence. As S.S. Kunanbayeva (2010) stresses the competence-based approach is a means for achieving a new level of quality within a new model of education.

The traditional system of knowledge-based approach no longer adequately fulfils the task and cannot demonstrate or measure the level of educational quality. The transference of traditional knowledge-based education onto the competence-based one is the demand of modern society. In contrast to knowledge, competence involves not only the possession of information but also the possibility of employment of that knowledge. Competence-based education provides with high qualitative results, appropriate to the demands of a society which would be a pre-selected composition of certain competencies.

The following table presented by A.V. Gurianova (2010) illustrates the education paradigm proposals and studies:

**Table 1.** Education paradigm proposals and studies

Basis for comparison	The educational process within the traditional paradigm of education (XX century)	The educational process in the framework of modern updated paradigm of education (XXI century)
Educational goal	Transmission / acquisition of theoretical amount of ZUNs (knowledge, ability, skills) constitute the content of education	Orientation to the practical component of educational content providing succeed in life activity (competence)
The basic formula of education result	“I know What”	“I know How”
The peculiarities of educational process	Reproductive	Productive
The role of a teacher and a student	Teacher-centered	Student-centered
The dominant component of the process	Control	Practice and independent work
Assessment	Statistical methods for assessing the educational achievements	Complex evaluation of academic achievements (portfolio - a product of creative learning)



Emphasizing the practical value of competence approach, W. Hutmacher (1996) stresses that the results of education is not to know *what*, as well as to know *how*. In this line, S.S. Kunanbayeva (2010) states that competence-based approach puts forward for the first place not the student's awareness but his/her ability to solve problems in cognition and explanation of reality phenomena. The nature of competence is such that it is not just a product of learning, but is rather a consequence of self-development, self-organization and personal experience of an individual. Therefore, competence emerges as a complex synthesis of cognitive, subject-practical and personal experience, it cannot be formed by giving the learner a task, it must pass through a series of situations close to reality that claim him/her more competent actions, assessments and reflection.

### Results and Discussion

Going back to the word 'competence', it is considered by a lot of scientists even from early times Aristotle described it as possibilities of the human condition, denoted by the Greek 'atere' – 'the force that developed and improved to such an extent that it has become a feature of personality'. Although according to Merriam-Webster dictionary, the first allusion of the term 'competence' refers to 1605. In the educational area the concept 'competence' gained its spread only in the 60-70s of the XXth century. In modern scientific literature there are different approaches to the definition of 'competence' as well as a list of key (general, professional) competencies which students should possess.

The term 'competence' means the ability to effectively use their personal capacities in the course of professional activity, readiness to perform their professional activities in constantly changing real world. In a broad term, competence is a willingness to perform certain professional functions. Developing competence is defined as a continuous process of acquisition and consolidation of skills needed for performance in one or more life domains at the journeyman-level or above (Sternberg, 2007). As noted by U.G. Tatur (2004), "The real level of competence formation can be judged only when a student (graduate) starts to work as an independent professional".

S.S. Kunanbayeva (2013) defines the concept 'competence' as a complex set of characteristics which unite the intellectual and skill-based parts of education and which determine the formation of educational content. This brings into question the viability of uniting the terms *kompetentnost'* and *kompetentsia* in a sense of their having a relationship of potential whole (the final learning outcome of education) and a realized individual part (the development of individual competencies during professional training).

As far as the formation of professional foreign language competence should be realized through professional activities, it is important to point out the context-based education. The idea of the professional-based education has been termed as the theory of context-based education. A.A. Verbitskii (2003) defines the context as a system of inner and outer condition and behavior of a person in a particular situation. Due to the context, a person knows what to expect and he/she may interpret it consciously. Before doing something he/she collects all the necessary contextual information which lets easily accept the present knowing what to expect from the future.

A.A. Verbitskii (2003) states that context-based education is generally defined as an educational process oriented on the professional training of students which is realized by systematic usage of professional context. A professionally-oriented training based on the needs of students dictated by the peculiarities of the future career or domain requires its study. In relation to professionally oriented foreign language education, modeling of situations of future professional communication leads to the development of cognitive effort and creative potential of a specialist. A.A. Verbitskii (2003) formulates the basics for contextual approach of teaching which simulated the future professional occupation of students during the educational process at university.

A.A. Verbitskii (2003) identifies three basic forms in contextual learning that are closely related to each other. The academic activities, for example informative lectures, *kvaziprofessional* activities as business games and educational - professional activities, where student does real research and practical tasks, all of them are referred to the basic forms. Also various interim forms that provide transition from one basic form to another are identified. These interim forms include problem lectures, seminar-discussions, group practical disciplines, analyses of specific situations, special courses and etc. (Verbitskii, 2003).

Context-based teaching is one of the active types of teaching method. According to A.M. Smolkin (1991), it is a capability of achieving a range of complex tasks which involve:

- to intensify the learning and communicative activity of students;
- to stimulate students' interest by the creative approach towards teaching;
- to allow students to gain experience of creativity and value within the context of future professional activity;
- not only to obtain knowledge but also to develop interest in work-related issues;
- to develop a comprehensive approach towards professional activity;
- to lead to the collective theoretical and practical work, to develop skills relating to co-operation and communication, to develop skills of individual and collective resolution of problems, to develop social and professional values.

Besides the abovementioned approaches in developing professional foreign language competence, the content of foreign language education should be taken into account. A.A. Verbitskii (1991) introduces the concept subject and social content of future professional activity as one of the ways to deepen the professional competency of students' training at university. Whereas S.S. Kunanbayeva (2013) considers the content of foreign language education in two aspects: subject and processual. Subject content considers thematic-textual units in communicative spheres and communicative topics. The characteristic feature of the subject content is a cognitive-linguocultural complex (CLC). complex, communicative spheres, thematic-textual units and situations that enable student to feel himself/herself in two linguocultural spaces.

The processual aspect consists of communicative tasks, exercises and problems, collection of typical situations, case-studies, creative essays and etc. which is provided by the co-called *communicative complex* (CC). The *communicative complex* deals with the differentiation of intercultural



communication according to communicative spheres and communicative situations. Therefore the organizational basis of the subject aspect of the content is allocated under communicative spheres. In accordance to I.I. Khaleeva (1990) communication being a feature of everyday life should be organized in 4 communicative spheres and they are as follows:

- Professional-productive;
- Social-domestic;
- Social-cultural;
- Social-political.

Each sphere is characterized by the category of existence and consciousness and refers to various sociocultural unicity. Communication sphere as a socio-communicative derivation factor identifies the formation of language use sphere. Thus, speech communication separates into four main spheres.

In accordance to this classification students are taught agricultural economics area in the professional-productive sphere.

S.S. Kunanbayeva (2013) identifies three main stages within a context-based of educational program:

- the preparatory stage of context-based communication;
- the stage of modeling the typical communicative situations;
- the stage of professional communication.

Each stage is divided into three sub-stages which start from the easiest one as familiarization of the subject content and different types of models of communicative situations into the complicated stage as the development of context-based communicative skills.

Every stage introduces various types of exercises that leads to the professional communication and develops a set of professional intercultural competences. The preparatory stage of the familiarization with all the meta-units relating to the content theme are organized through a reading texts which provide information about professional area. D.N. Kulibaeva (2002) emphasizes that the basic training unit, which reflects subject-social content of a future professional activity can be selected a foreign language text or thematically organized text units as a training material for *contextual education*. The content of a professional education can reflect a number of topics and, accordingly, the *thematic-textual units* (TTU). Text as a nuclear facility of communication act is a holistic language education, endowed with the ideological and semantic significance, structural perfection and communicative oriented in the language-speech.

Only in a form of a text, language serves as a means of cognition, social interaction and communication between people. Through the TTUs the main intercultural communicative purposes are realized, the content of which is provided by the subject content of professional-based educational programs. A.T. Chaklikova (2014) echoes S.S. Kunanbayeva's (2013) stating that CLC is an integrated unit of content and academic process. The component composition of CLC includes:

- TTU presented in the communication sphere represents the content of education level.

— A set of speech themes and sub-themes of communication realizes each sphere.

— According to the theme of communication, typical situations can be fulfilled.

Based on this method, the following teaching activities have been developed to enhance students' professional foreign language communicative competence. The professional-productive sphere of communication could be realized on a theme 'Business agricultural economics'. This theme could be fulfilled in sub-themes as "Introduction to the Business Economics" and "Development of agricultural economics in Kazakhstan". According to the abovementioned 3 stages, on the first stage students could do the following tasks:

- Answer the questions;
- Read the text about Business Economics;
- Listen to the text, emphasize the polite requests and represent their opinion;
- Put in order the dialogue and etc.

On the second stage of modeling the typical communicative situations students read the models of dialogues and make their own ones using situations. For example, situation 1: Role-play meeting. A group is divided into two. One subgroup students are the representatives of Kazakhstan and the second subgroup students are the representatives of foreign country. Discuss about the collaboration on growing vegetables in a greenhouse between two parties. Each subgroup should talk about their achievements and come to one decision.

Situation 2: An argumentation discourse. Discussion on a topic: "decline in demand of food products: its reasons, how to solve this problem".

On the third stage of professional communication students would be able to solve some problems, analyze and express their point of view on situations. For instance, project work on a theme: How to improve the agricultural production in rural areas? Point out the relevance and prove it.

Hence, it is worth noting that the situations would bring closer the learning process to the real future professional field of students and motivate them to solve some communicative tasks. Considering the insufficient number of hours allocated to the discipline of 'Foreign Language' and separation of foreign language education from the professional training at non-English majoring universities, these two aspects of content may have great impact on Agrarian University students.

In this paper the approaches as competence-based and context-based approaches were mentioned in order to develop the professional foreign language competence for Agrarian University students. The content of foreign language education was taken into account in which the gradual development of competence was described. The implementation and application of three main stages within a context-based educational program would lead students to communicate in their professional sphere. Because of expansion of international contacts in agriculture and industry, the professional communicative competence in foreign language would enable future Agrarian specialists to be in great demand as well as in their country and abroad

## Conclusion



Construction of the knowledge is based upon an individual's personal experience and social context, and it occurs in mutual co-operation between students and the educator. This co-operation is student-centred and it observes students' interests and needs, promotes students' motivation, develops their abilities, as well as observes students' wish to study and work creatively, thus developing their competence.

In language learning the aim of the studies and the corresponding teaching-learning methods and teaching aids that have been chosen in co-operation between the students and the educator enable the students to attain the aim of the studies. The educator helps the students to improve their ESP competence, to develop the skill to use a language in different versatile socio-cultural contexts; at the same time the educator is learning from the students acquiring knowledge in a specific professional field.

The created English language curriculum corresponds to the theoretical conceptions of needs analysis, curriculum and syllabus theories and to the requirements and recommendations of the EU. It shows the path from an idea to reality how to reach the importance of foreign languages in the studies at the same time not increasing the time spent for language courses. The designed curriculum motivates students to learn a language, as language competence is vital to study specialty courses. Thus language learning becomes a means of acquiring students' profession; the language becomes an important component of tourism students' professional competence.

The students' ESP competence development model, which is based on the students and the educator's mutual co-operation and which includes continuous needs analysis of the students and the industry's needs in the course of studies, enables understanding the students' wishes and learning styles, forming a micro-climate in the group, creating a favourable study environment, and forming continuous feedback, which, in its turn, helps selecting the most appropriate teaching aids and teaching-learning methods, as a result helping the students to develop their ESP competence and the educators to improve their professional activity. It is suitable for the development of tourism students' ESP competence as it observes the industry's specific features. The model improves the students' learning in order to develop their ESP competence.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors

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