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DEVELOPMENT OF THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER'S PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE: MODERN CHALLENGES AND CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

The article deals with professional competence as a key foundation for preparation and ongoing development of foreign language teachers at university. Attention has been drawn to the increasing complexity of teaching responsibilities in the modern era and it is stressed on the necessity for higher education pedagogues to remain open to rapidly developing educational contexts, technological

innovations and various students' expectations. The authors consider the issue of a foreign language teacher's professional competence, including linguistic proficiency, pedagogical methodology, intercultural sensitivity, psychological awareness and digital literacy, which are essential for providing effective language education. Particular focus is placed on the difficulties educators face when striving to coordinate their professional development with contemporary international educational standards. These challenges include prioritizing of student-centered learning, promotion of communicative language use, advancement of inclusive teaching practices and the necessity of lifelong learning. The article discloses the specific competencies of modern university foreign language teachers, such as the integration of digital instruments in foreign language teaching, encouraging critical and intercultural thinking among students and the teachers' ability to create flexible and approachable content of their courses. The study highlights various ways to continued professional growth, including participation in international collaboration, initiatives of academic exchange, virtual learning environments and institutional programs of efficiency growth. The article also reaffirms the importance of structured, reflective and continuous professional development in ensuring high quality of foreign language teaching in a global academic landscape. The study contributes to the conversation on improving foreign language teachers' education and proposes the instruments and ways for building professional competence that are in line with the changing needs of modern university pedagogues and the challenges they face.

Keywords: continuous professional development, digital literacy, foreign language teacher, intercultural competence, pedagogical skills, professional competence.

INTRODUCTION

On the background of ongoing global changes in education and the intensification of academic mobility, the responsibilities of foreign language teachers in higher education have expanded significantly. Today, there is a constant change in approaches to teaching foreign languages all over the world. Teaching goals, content, methodology, procedures and methods of assessing students' achievements are undergoing transformations, affecting the process of teaching and learning foreign languages. In addition, globalization has become an integral process of modern society, and Ukraine is part of this process (Durdas, 2023, p. 86). Today's university teachers are expected to overstep the traditional role of knowledge transmitters; they are also enabling communication, act as agents of intercultural understanding and active participants in lifelong learning. As a result, the notion of professional competence has become increasingly significant, representing an integrative concept that combines the knowledge of the subject with the ability to implement innovative and student-centered methods of teaching a foreign language. There is a pressing need to reconceptualize the role of the modern foreign language teacher in the light of global expectations and challenges. It is necessary to highlight the fundamental elements of a foreign language teacher's professional competence, identify the challenges university teachers face, and outline successful strategies for ongoing professional growth.

The purpose of the article is to study professional competence of a modern foreign language teacher at university and to highlight the challenges university foreign language teachers face and possible ways of their continuous professional development.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Technological progress and its influence on education. In the contemporary world, emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, Big Data, cloud computing, blockchain, the Internet and 5G are leading society into a new era. In this context of numerous transformations, digitalization has become a major driving force for structural changes in educational sphere. As key agents in the learning process, foreign language teachers must cope with these evolving challenges and trends by enhancing their competencies according to the requirements of the digitalized educational era. The events of the pandemic have clearly shown that in the modern world there is a change of civilizations, a transition to a new level of civilizational development, caused by a technological breakthrough – digitalization, the sphere of big data and technologies based on them (Sysoieva, 2021, p. 25).

The rise of artificial intelligence has introduced a fresh perspective for foreign language teachers' professional growth at university, but, at the same time, it presents new and complex challenges for the teachers' continued development (Zhang, 2023, p. 421). Due to this, it is important to acknowledge that education is changing, and there is a growing need for a new kind of professional – someone who can adapt to modern innovations and skillfully use digital tools and platforms for effective distance learning (Shakiyeva et al., 2023, p. 1).

Professional development of university research and teaching staff is one of the strategic directions of reforming the higher education system in Ukraine, because without teachers whose professional level corresponds to modern trends in the development of higher education, teachers capable of working within the framework of a student-centered learning model, teachers-researchers focused on academic mobility and adherence to academic integrity, there is no hope for constructive changes in the national higher education system. Therefore, high requirements for the professional competencies of academic and teaching staff need reforming the system of their continuous professional development in order to raise the level of higher education teachers who are capable of responding to contemporary educational challenges (Bulvinska, 2018, p. 22).

Improving the quality of a foreign language teacher's work is widely seen as one of the most important ways to raise the overall standard of education. Because of this, quality of teaching has become a key focus at all educational levels, both locally and internationally. To support this, teachers are encouraged to regularly take part in professional development. These ongoing learning opportunities help guide teachers in their careers, support their personal and professional growth, and, simultaneously, strengthen their sense of identity. As a result, teachers become more independent, confident and effective in their work (Yang, 2021, p. 3).

Rethinking the modern foreign language teacher in the age of innovations. The educational landscape in the era of artificial intelligence is becoming progressively more intelligent and integrated. Both educators and students increasingly rely on digital tools, including smartphones and educational applications, for enhancement and supporting the teaching process. The virtual nature of modern education allows surpassing traditional boundaries of time and space in learning, giving rise to a flexible, interactive and collaborative learning settings. This concept focuses on building intelligent environments that provides students with the access to educational content anytime, anywhere and through any digital device, which reinforces a student-centered approach. Within such environments, quality interaction and communication between educators and learners is improved, enabling continuous and context-aware learning experiences without restrictions in time or space (Zhang, 2023, p. 421).

Considering the possibilities for professional growth, researcher from Colombia, H. Buitrago-García (2024, p. 2), stresses on the use of mobile devices in teaching a foreign language. The researcher admits that, although smartphones are widely used by students, many teachers are still not ready to incorporate them into their teaching practices due to the lack of training and the absence of clear policy guidance for mobile learning application. As multipurpose and portable tools, smartphones play a crucial role in mobile learning by enabling users to access, create, share and record materials from practically any location where the Internet is available. These devices support ongoing, interactive, practical, creative and accessible learning opportunities, contributing significantly to language acquisition and educational process.

In this context, the concept of the learning environment gains momentum. According to the Polish researcher, A. Szplit (2021), "... the learning environment organizes the condition in which humans learn. Academic life provides a variety of learning experiences, from structured, formal courses and scholarships to less structured, peer-to-peer, informal or self-directed learning" (p. 110). The researcher emphasizes that the learning environment manifests in diverse formats, ranging from formal settings such as academic conferences and university lectures to informal, collegial dialogues focused on recent discoveries and academic improvements (Szplit, 2021, p. 110).

According to the researchers from China, J. Liu, & K. Ni (2021), in today's digital age, foreign language teachers should aim to create a classroom environment that is relaxed, respectful and open, so that teaching could become more effective and students, as a result, could learn better.

At the same time, both practical and clear knowledge require teachers to follow the latest developments and use the advantages of computers and the Internet to teach students well. Combining the Internet with foreign language teaching at universities has helped to improve foreign language teaching. As online tools become more common, teachers' development is increasingly linked to the Internet. This connection is a natural and necessary step for modern teaching.

Additionally, scientific work and teaching can support and enhance one another in a mutually beneficial way. On the one hand, teaching ideas can lead to scientific publications and motivate research; on the other hand, research findings can improve teaching practices. Interviews highlight many examples where teaching experiences shape teachers' interests and stimulate their academic growth (Szplit, 2021, p. 111).

Besides, German researcher F. Giurastante (2024) emphasizes the importance of foreign language teachers' motivation and their needs for professional development. She states that it is essential to understand what drives teachers, as teachers play a key role in improving the quality of education.

On the other hand, in the context of professional growth, Chinese researchers, Q. Wen and H. Zhang (2020), stress on the importance of building professional learning communities of foreign language teachers in higher education for their professional development at higher education institutions. They describe a conceptual model for developing a new professional learning community, having "four constitutive elements (participants, objectives, mediators, and mechanism)", as well as their interrelations.

It is necessary to note that during the last thirty years, professional learning communities have spread rapidly in different countries and contexts, proving their potential to increase teachers' professional learning and giving the space for discovering factors influencing teachers' sustained participation and the process of their building at an early stage (Wang & Zou, 2023).

The idea of professional teachers' communities ("Communities of Practice") is supported by the researchers from Yemen: W. R Ali Bin-Hady, N. Ahmed Busabaa, & L. Abdulrahman Hasan Abdullah (2024).

Complementing this perspective, the researcher from Uzbekistan, N. Atashikova (2019), stresses on the importance of a professional component in the competence structure of a foreign language teacher, based on the analysis of the conditions of a teacher's activity. The professional component of a foreign language teacher includes several key dimensions: proficiency in the target language; expertise in teaching methods; understanding of cultural contexts; skills in organizing and managing the learning process; the ability to reflect on one's own practice and engage in ongoing professional growth. Thus, instead of just accepting the conditions they work in, foreign language teachers could use them to grow and improve. This means they can take part in training, work with colleagues and follow the school curriculum. Using digital tools and learning online helps make lessons more interesting and up to date. Teachers are also encouraged to try blended learning and check the efficiency of the available tools. It is important to include real cultural materials, meet the needs of different students, and teach about other cultures. Teachers should also take care of students' emotional health, manage the classroom well and take care of students' well-being. To keep improving, they could regularly reflect on their work, set goals and learn from mentors or by mentoring others. In particular, researchers from Kazakhstan, A. Shakiyeva, A. Zhorabekova, Z. Abilkhairova, T. Yessimgaliyeva and A. Makulbek (2023), have outlined several key ways to develop the professional competences of foreign language teachers in the context of distance learning:

- *Mastering digital tools:* foreign language teachers should be able to effectively use digital platforms and online resources, such as Moodle, Canvas, Zoom, Skype, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams and web forums. Integrating methods like the "flipped classroom," where students watch lessons at home and apply their knowledge in class, can increase learning efficiency.
- *Planning and managing the learning process:* Teachers need to understand how to plan, organize and carry out lessons in line with educational standards, using various distance learning models and teaching methods, and understanding the theory behind language education.

- Language Skills Development: Training should focus on vocabulary and grammar, all types of language activities (speaking, listening, reading, writing), pronunciation, using language in context, and teaching techniques to support meaningful communication.
- **Building communication skills**: This includes fostering speech production in online learning environments, developing critical thinking, analyzing information, and gaining sociocultural and intercultural communication skills.
- *Creating teaching materials*: Teachers should be equipped to design their own methodological systems and learning materials appropriate for distance education.
- *Continuous professional training*: Education programs should include advanced courses, special modules, and scientific-methodological seminars aimed at building the skills needed for distance language teaching (Shakiyeva et al., 2023, p. 2–3).

Such approach ensures that foreign language teachers are well-prepared for the demands of modern, digital learning environments (Shakiyeva et al., 2023, p. 2–3).

We suggest considering several ways to stay engaged in lifelong learning and develop creatively as a foreign language teacher. They include *professional development; trying new teaching methods; using technology; collaborating with other teachers; forming a creative classroom; keeping a creative mindset* (Durdas et al., 2025, p. 63).

Thus, a teacher's personality grows and develops through their professional work and is influenced by many factors. Personal qualities strongly impact how they teach and what results they achieve. Knowing what motivates them is essential for becoming a better professional (Lynova & Bulvinska, 2020, p. 16). Continuing professional development is an ongoing process that helps teachers grow by connecting their actions with their thoughts and feelings. Teachers take part in continuing professional development in different ways – sometimes by choice, sometimes because it's required. The more motivated they are to join these activities, the more they can grow both professionally and personally (Yang, 2021, p. 1).

There is one more important aspect which is necessary to highlight: in today's globalized world, where it is possible to connect more easily – even in remote areas – foreign language teachers have access to diverse sources for professional growth (Komorowska & Krajka, 2024, p. 40). They have access to a vast array of resources and shared experiences from educators around the world. However, it is essential to critically assess the reliability and accuracy of these sources. To boost their own creativity, teachers should continuously seek out innovative approaches, try different teaching methods and cultivate a curious, open-minded attitude toward learning and experimentation (Durdas et al., 2025, p. 63). At the same time, university teachers of foreign languages often face some common problems: using new technology; lack of materials; different students' levels; low students' motivation; too many responsibilities; difficulties with finding time to improve; feeling tired or stressed due to heavy workload, little help and high expectations, which can cause stress or even burnout.

Thus, one of the areas of professional development of a scientific and pedagogical worker is the development of the various roles that he performs in the educational process, that is, the development of the qualities of a facilitator, coach, moderator and tutor (Bulvinska, 2018, p. 24).

As digital technologies rapidly transform education, the role of foreign language teachers is also changing. Artificial intelligence, mobile learning and constant online access are not only changing how languages are taught but also reshaping the meaning of a modern educator. Modern foreign language teachers need more than just language skills and teaching methods – they must also be creative, open to new ideas and willing to reflect on their teaching practices. Professional growth in the digital age should be comprehensive. It involves learning to use digital tools, staying open to new ideas, creating engaging and inclusive classrooms and cooperation with other teachers in professional communities. At the same time, personal qualities like flexibility, motivation and emotional strength are also important for ongoing professional development. In Ukraine, where higher education is being reformed to match European standards, there is a growing need for updated systems to support teachers. Without qualified, innovative and self-aware educators, it will

be hard to build a strong and future-oriented education system. That's why the professional development of foreign language teachers should be seen as a continuous and meaningful process.

CONCLUSIONS

Due to the continuous global changes in education and the increase of academic mobility, foreign language teachers' responsibilities have increased. A constant change in approaches to teaching foreign languages can be observed all over the world, and teachers are expected to overstep their traditional teaching role. They must cope with evolving challenges and modern trends by enhancing their competencies in line with the requirements of the digitalized educational era. The rise of artificial intelligence presents both a perspective for foreign language teachers' professional growth and new and complex challenges. Due to the changes in education, there is a growing need for a new kind of professional who is able to adapt to modern innovations and use digital tools and platforms for effective teaching and learning. Modern learning environment demonstrates diverse formats – formal and informal, and foreign language teachers should aim to create a classroom environment that is relaxed, respectful and open to make teaching more effective. Professional learning communities, which recently have spread rapidly, can encourage foreign language teachers in their professional development and giving the space for discovering factors influencing teachers' sustained participation. Thus, foreign language teachers should strive in developing their professional component: proficiency in the target language; expertise in teaching methods; understanding of cultural contexts; organizing and managing skills; the ability to reflect on one's own practice and engage in ongoing professional growth.

Prospects for Further Research. In the light of this study, one important area that needs deeper exploration is the *emotional resilience and well-being* of foreign language teachers. Due to the growth of their responsibilities and expectations in the modern world, it is necessary to conduct on preventing burnout, managing stress and supporting teachers' emotional health.

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РОЗВИТОК ПРОФЕСІЙНОЇ КОМПЕТЕНТОСТІ ВИКЛАДАЧА ІНОЗЕМНОЇ МОВИ: СУЧАСНІ ВИКЛИКИ ТА БЕЗПЕРЕРВНЕ ПРОФЕСІЙНЕ ЗРОСТАННЯ

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У статті розглядається професійна компетентність як ключова основа підготовки та безперервного розвитку викладачів іноземних мов в університеті. Звернено увагу на зростаючу складність викладацької діяльності в сучасну епоху та підкреслено необхідність для науковопедагогічних працівників бути чутливими до стрімких змін в освітніх підходах, технологічних інновацій та різноманітних очікувань студентів. Розглянуто аспекти професійної компетентності, які охоплюють мовну компетентність, педагогічну методологію, міжкультурну компетентність, психологічну обізнаність і цифрову грамотність – кожен з яких розглядається як критично важливий для ефективного викладання іноземних мов. Охарактеризовано труднощі, з якими стикаються викладачі під час спроб узгодити свій професійний розвиток із сучасними міжнародними освітніми парадигмами. Серед них – труднощі з використанням нових технологій; брак матеріалів; різні рівні володіння іноземною мовою серед студентів; низька мотивація студентів; завелика кількість обов'язків; труднощі з пошуком часу для самовдосконалення: відчуття втоми або стресу через велике робоче навантаження, недостатня кількість допомоги та високі очікування, що можуть спричинити стрес або навіть вигорання. У статті також окреслено конкретні компетентності, які наразі є необхідними для викладачів іноземних мов в університеті, зокрема: інтеграція цифрових інструментів у процес навчання, розвиток критичного й міжкультурного мислення в студентів, а також здатність проєктувати гнучкий і адаптивний навчальний контент. Дослідження охоплює різні шляхи сталого професійного зростання, серед яких участь у семінарах, вебінарах та конференціях з викладання мов та креативних методів; реєстрація на онлайн-курси з таких тем, як використання драматургії в освіті, розповідь історій, гейміфікація та цифрові інструменти для викладання мов; співпраця з іншими вчителями: долучення до спільнот викладачів або онлайнфорумів для обміну творчими ідеями та досвідом; формування креативної аудиторії: використання музики, мистецтва та руху для створення занять, що залучають різні органи чуття; заохочення студентів до роботи над проєктами, що передбачають реальні життєві завдання та вимагають творчого мислення тощо. У статті акцентовано на важливості структурованого, рефлексивного та безперервного професійного розвитку для забезпечення якості викладання іноземних мов у глобалізованому академічному середовищі. У підсумку стаття розширює дискусію щодо вдосконалення освіти викладачів іноземних мов та формування професійної компетентності, що відповідає змінним потребам сучасного глобалізованого світу.

Ключові слова: безперервний професійний розвиток, викладач іноземної мови, міжкультурна компетентність, педагогічні навички, професійна компетентність, цифрова грамотність.