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**ISSUES OF FORMATION OF PROFESSIONAL FOREIGN LANGUAGE
COMPETENCE OF STUDENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF CONVERGENCE OF
FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION**

Abstract. This article considers the peculiarities of the formation of students' professional foreign language competence in the conditions of convergence of formal and non-formal education. The necessity of integration of formal and non-formal education in foreign language education is substantiated. The role and significance of formal education provided by educational institutions and non-formal education carried out outside educational institutions in the formation of students' professional foreign language competence is analyzed. Special attention is paid to the interaction of these two forms of education and their influence on the development of students' linguistic and communicative skills. One of the main objectives of the study is to identify the educational needs of students in the conditions of formation of their professional foreign language competence. As a result of the study, the authors made conclusions that the majority of students consider it appropriate to integrate formal and non-formal education, as it will allow them to master additional competencies and increase their motivation for learning. Thus, in conclusion, the authors of the article summarise the results of the study and draw conclusions about the significance of the interaction between formal and non-formal education for the formation and improvement of students' professional foreign language competence.

Keywords: foreign language competence, formal education, non-formal education, professional foreign language competence, convergence, competence, higher education.

Introduction

Education plays an essential role in the development of people, providing them with the knowledge and skills to successfully adapt in the modern world. However, the question of which is more effective - formal or non-formal education - has always been and continues to be an issue. Rather than focusing on their differences, it is time to understand and recognize the importance of the convergence of formal and non-formal education. In general, the issues of integration of formal and non-formal education in the course of professional foreign language training in higher education is one of the pressing topics of modern pedagogy. The relevance of this problem is associated with the need to improve the training of specialists in the era of a new scientific and technological paradigm, characterized by interdisciplinarity, and convergence of different spheres of life and production.

In an era of a new scientific and technological paradigm characterized by unprecedented speed of innovation and globalization, effective foreign language training is becoming an integral part of professional development. Proficiency in English and other languages provides direct access to the latest research, patents, and technological innovations, allows for deeper immersion in the technological process, improves interaction with technology, enhances opportunities for international cooperation and knowledge exchange, and contributes to the development of professional competence and personal growth. Foreign language training in modern realities is not just a supplement to professional skills, but also a necessary condition for a successful career, innovative development, and effective intercultural interaction,

therefore, the issues of improving the training of specialists who speak foreign languages for professional communication become critical to ensure competence and competitiveness of both the individual and society as a whole.

This scientific article is carried out within the framework of research of the problem of improvement of continuous professional foreign language training, caused by the presence of a number of objectively existing contradictions, among which there are:

- on the one hand, the need of modern society in training of university graduates with the willingness and ability to independently develop and continuously improve foreign-language competencies in accordance with the needs of personal and professional spheres;

- on the other hand, a lack of scientifically grounded models of teaching professionally oriented foreign language in the conditions of convergence of formal and informal higher education, realizing the development of demanded competencies.

The hypothesis of the research is as follows:

- if scientific and methodological foundations of professional foreign language training are realized in the conditions of convergence of formal and non-formal higher education, providing hybrid, convergent educational environment, the convergence of pedagogical concepts of traditional and innovative developmental teaching and education, integration of formal and non-formal educational results, it will ensure the readiness of university graduates to independently develop and continuously improve foreign language competencies in accordance with their needs.

In order to develop scientific and methodological foundations for the realization of professional foreign language training in the conditions of convergence of formal and non-formal higher education, it is necessary, first of all, to clarify the concept of "non-formal foreign language education", to identify the possibility of convergence of formal and non-formal education in foreign language training of students, which is the task of this article.

The purpose of this research paper is to investigate the possibility of convergence of formal and non-formal education in the conditions of professional training of foreign language specialists.

In order to achieve this goal, the following objectives were set:

- 1) analyze relevant research and sources related to the topic;
- 2) define the concepts of "competence", "foreign language competence", and "professional foreign language competence".

The study has shown that processes in society and education are interrelated: The development of post-industrial society requires convergence as the basis of a new pedagogical paradigm, and changes in education affect social development. To improve foreign language training of future specialists, it is necessary to combine formal and informal learning in the environment of convergent education.

The Concept of Development of Higher Education and Science in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2023 - 2029, approved by the Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 28 March 2023 № 248 notes the following: "Lifelong learning, which has become a topical trend in recent decades, increases the competitiveness of people through the development of intelligence, structured thinking, the ability to adapt and self-organise, expanding the circle of acquaintances, opportunities and ideas about the world, improving psychological health (CDHES, 2023). For example, in such developed countries as New Zealand and Finland, the participation of adults (16-65 years old) in non-formal education is 67 percent and 65 percent respectively. In Kazakhstan, this indicator is 17 percent (women 20 percent, men 13.85 percent). This is almost three times less than the OECD average (47 percent)". Consequently, there is a need to integrate formal and non-formal education, as the active economic activity of a person has increased from 25-30 to 50-60 years of age. Such a length of working career cannot be built on one basic education in the conditions of constant

changes in the labor market, as it will inevitably lead to a decrease in the competitiveness of citizens (CDHES, 2023).

Historically, formal education received in schools and universities was seen as the only correct path in the educational system. However, dramatic changes in the world economy and technology have affected the requirements for professional training. Non-formal education, which is based on independent study and acquisition of knowledge outside educational institutions, has become more and more appreciated and demanded in the modern world (Korshunov et al., 2023).

It is important to realise that formal and non-formal education have their advantages and limitations. Formal education provides a systematic structure for the study of core subjects and the development of analytical thinking. It provides a foundation for a general outlook and the ability to learn at more advanced levels. In addition, formal education provides certification and recognition of learning achievements, which is important for employment and career advancement.

On the other hand, non-formal education allows flexibility in the choice of topics to suit the interests and needs of each individual. It provides space for self-realization and creative thinking. Non-formal education also fosters self-awareness and self-discipline. Moreover, non-formal education often makes it easier to adapt to changes in the educational and professional environment (Kicherova et al., 2023).

Convergence of formal and non-formal education becomes not only a logical continuation of their cooperation but also a necessity for successful and profound knowledge and skills. In foreign language education this integration is especially important because as practice shows, the competencies received only in the framework of traditional education are not enough for mastering professional foreign language competence in full. In the conditions of convergence of formal and non-formal education students get the opportunity to use the best of both worlds. Both forms of education complement each other and play an important role in ensuring the formation of all aspects of professional foreign language competence. We believe that ultimately, the convergence of formal and non-formal education will create a more flexible and effective system that promotes communication, analytical thinking, and creativity, which is the most important factor for the successful formation of students' professional foreign language competence.

Materials and research methods

For a complete presentation of the concept of "professional foreign language competence" we will consider such concepts as "competence" and "foreign language competence" separately.

The dimension approach views education as a value from different perspectives: cultural, social, economic and personal. Education as a value facilitates the transmission of cultural heritage and cultural interaction, contributes to the formation of civil society and the reduction of social inequalities, drives economic growth, improves the quality of the labour force and promotes innovation and development, supports personal and professional growth, skills development and self-determination. Education as a system is characterised by taking into account the various components and the interrelationships between them, including the different levels of educational organisations, the different formats of education, and the social, political and economic environment in which it operates. Education is also a holistic pedagogical process, including target, content, activity and result components, providing education, training and development in accordance with social and personal needs. As a separate aspect, the output side of education can be studied and its cognitive, emotional, social and vocational outcomes can be assessed, such as the knowledge, skills and abilities that students acquire; outcomes related to personal development, self-esteem, motivation and

emotional stability; social outcomes reflecting students' ability to interact with others, adapt to different environments and participate in community life; vocational outcomes in achieving career goals and success in the world of work; and social outcomes related to the achievement of career goals.

Mikhailov et al. (2013) define competence as "a predetermined norm that is the expected result of learning in each specific subject". Khutorskoy (2010) believes that competence is "a range of issues in which a person is well-informed, has knowledge and experience. Faleeva and Nurzhanova (2016) link competence "with the ability to cognitive activity and the ability to communicate with foreign linguoculture and cognise it".

According to these definitions of the concept "competence" we observe that competence is a person's ability, which he/she masters as a result of his/her activity to new knowledge and skills. Based on research of Nasikhanova and Davydova (2013) foreign language competence is "a specific type of activity, the content of which is the exchange of information between members of different language communities to achieve mutual understanding and interaction; the ability to understand and produce an unlimited number of linguistically correct sentences with the help of learnt language rules and rules of their connection".

Thus, analysing the above opinions, we understand foreign language competence as a person's ability to understand and speak in a foreign language environment. Kobeleva (2010) believes that professional foreign language competence of a specialist depends on the development of his/her general professional competence, as the formation of foreign language competence includes both the development of foreign language communicative and professional competences.

Foreign language communicative competence is understood as "a set of knowledge about native and foreign cultures, skills and abilities to understand and adequately use professional vocabulary in speech, to correctly apply knowledge about the culture of native speakers in professionally oriented communication situations and the ability to effectively participate in professional intercultural interaction with foreign colleagues". Aitov (2007) connects foreign-language communicative competence with readiness and ability of a future specialist who does not study a foreign language at the linguistic faculty to apply the acquired knowledge to carry out foreign-language intercultural communication.

Results and discussion

In general, based on the above definitions, we can say that professional foreign language competence is the knowledge, skills and abilities of a future specialist, providing him/her with foreign language competence.

Having analysed the above-mentioned studies in the field of convergence, and distinguishing the notions of formal and non-formal education, we came to the conclusion that the conditions of convergence of formal and non-formal education are such conditions under which the above-mentioned formations are combined in order to obtain an effective result in education. In our case, in the formation of professional foreign language competence.

In order to identify the educational needs of target groups in the context of convergence of formal and non-formal higher education, we conducted a survey in the format of questionnaires. The survey questions related to students' knowledge about formal and non-formal education, their attitudes towards these types of education and their educational needs in the context of convergence of formal and non-formal education, for example:

1. How do you think formal higher education differs from non-formal higher education? (This question aims to explore students' understanding of the structural differences and implications for learning.)

2. In your opinion, what is the merit of non-formal education? (Respondents can express the value they find in flexibility, practical applications, or personalized learning experiences associated with non-formal education.)

3. What do you perceive as the disadvantage of formal education in teaching a foreign language? (This question invites reflection on potential limitations, such as rigidity in curriculum or lack of real-world practice.)

3. What do you know about formal education? (Understanding students' baseline knowledge helps gauge their familiarity with formal educational systems.)

4. Do you believe that formal education alone is sufficient for mastering a foreign language? (This question seeks to determine students' views on the adequacy of formal education compared to other learning modalities.)

5. Do you attend foreign language courses outside of your formal education? (This helps assess engagement with non-formal learning opportunities and the commitment to language acquisition.)

6. What teaching methods do you think are the most effective in teaching a foreign language? (Responses can highlight preferences for methods such as immersive learning, communicative approaches, or technology-enhanced instruction.)

7. Does formal education require additional knowledge and skills to be effective? (This question encourages students to consider the role of supplementary knowledge in enhancing their formal education experience.)

8. How would you evaluate the quality of the language classes conducted in your formal education? (Insights gained from this question can reveal students' satisfaction levels and perceptions of teaching effectiveness.)

9. How would you prefer to learn a foreign language? (This open-ended question allows respondents to express their ideal learning conditions, potentially incorporating elements from both formal and non-formal education.)

Through this survey, we aim to gather comprehensive data that will inform the development of curricula and instructional strategies that effectively merge formal and non-formal educational practices, ultimately enhancing the professional foreign language competence of students.

The data collected will allow us to:

1) Tailor Educational Programs: By analyzing student feedback, we can design curricula that incorporate best practices from both formal and non-formal education, ensuring a more engaging and relevant learning experience.

2) Enhance Practical Application: Insights from the survey can guide the integration of real-world scenarios and hands-on activities into formal language instruction, fostering practical language skills that are crucial for professional settings.

3) Promote Lifelong Learning: Understanding students' attitudes towards non-formal education will help us create pathways for continuous learning, encouraging students to pursue additional language courses or workshops that complement their formal studies.

4) Identify Effective Teaching Methods: By exploring students' preferences for teaching methods, we can implement innovative instructional strategies, such as blended learning, project-based learning, or collaborative activities, that cater to diverse learning styles.

5) Facilitate Interdisciplinary Approaches: The survey results may reveal opportunities for integrating foreign language instruction with other fields of study, enhancing students' ability to use language skills in various professional contexts.

6) Support Institutional Development: The findings will also inform institutional policies and practices regarding curriculum design and pedagogical approaches, ensuring that educational offerings remain aligned with current industry demands and student needs.

Ultimately, the goal is to enhance the professional foreign language competence of students, equipping them with the skills and confidence needed to thrive in a globalized world. By bridging the gap between formal and non-formal education, we can create a more holistic and adaptable educational framework that prepares students for success in their future careers.

Taking as a basis some answers of the conducted questionnaire, we present the results of our research. The answers to the questions concerning the study of educational needs of target groups in the conditions of convergence of formal and non-formal education were distributed as follows (Table 1).

Table 1

Question: "How would you like to learn a foreign language?"

№	Response	%
1	in formal education settings	29,5
2	in non-formal education settings	18,2
3	in formal and non-formal education settings	52,3

The high percentage of choice of foreign language learning option in the conditions of convergence of formal and non-formal education, allows us to conclude that students understand the advantages of convergence of formal and non-formal education and are interested in this form of learning, 29.5% of respondents chose traditional formal education, and 18.2% of respondents chose the option of learning a foreign language in non-formal education.

To the question "Does formal education require additional knowledge and skills? " the answers of respondents were distributed as follows (Table 2).

Table 2

Question: "Does formal education require the receipt of additional knowledge and skills?"

№	Response	%
1	yes, it does	70,5
2	no, it doesn't	13,6
3	difficult to answer	15,9

The analysis of answers has shown that the overwhelming majority of survey participants are not fully satisfied with the quality of formal education and feel the need to obtain additional skills and knowledge. This indicates that formal education is not enough for current students to master the necessary competences, which actualises the subject of our research.

To the question "What is the dignity of non-formal education" the answers of the survey participants were distributed as follows (Table 3).

Table 3*Question: "What is the merit of non-formal education?"*

№	Response	%
1	less time-consuming and less financially costly	13,6
2	work opportunity	45,5
3	the effectiveness of training in relation to voluntary attendance in the classroom	40,9

From the percentages of answers to this question, we see that students consider it advisable to integrate traditional formal education with non-formal education, because on the one hand it will give them the opportunity to combine their studies with other spheres of their lives, and on the other hand it will affect the effectiveness of learning due to voluntary attendance of classes.

Conclusion

Summarizing the findings above, it can be concluded that students strongly favor the integration of traditional formal education with non-formal education. This combination, as expressed by the respondents, is perceived to enhance the efficiency of their learning experiences, facilitate the development of additional skills and abilities, and allow for a more seamless integration of their studies with other aspects of their lives.

A significant portion of survey participants (70.5%) indicated that they believe formal education alone is insufficient for cultivating the comprehensive professional foreign language competencies required in today's global environment. This sentiment highlights the need for a more adaptive educational framework that recognizes the limitations of traditional teaching methods in addressing the diverse needs of learners.

Consequently, it is crucial to establish a robust system that effectively integrates formal and non-formal education. This can be achieved by developing flexible and innovative educational programs that empower students to select both formal and non-formal modules and courses tailored to their interests and career aspirations. Such a system could include:

1. **Modular Course Offerings:** Allowing students to mix and match courses from various disciplines and educational formats, enabling them to create a personalized learning path.
2. **Collaborative Learning Environments:** Encouraging partnerships between educational institutions and community organizations to provide real-world learning opportunities that complement classroom instruction.
3. **Recognition of Non-Formal Learning:** Implementing systems to formally acknowledge skills and competencies gained through non-formal education, thus enhancing the value of these experiences in the eyes of employers.
4. **Use of Technology:** Leveraging digital platforms to deliver non-formal education, such as online workshops, webinars, and interactive language practice, thereby making learning more accessible and engaging.
5. **Continuous Feedback Mechanisms:** Establishing channels for ongoing feedback from students regarding their educational experiences, which can inform continuous improvements to both formal and non-formal programs.

By fostering this integrative approach, educational institutions can better equip students with the necessary language skills and competencies, ultimately preparing them to navigate the complexities of the global job market and succeed in their professional endeavors. This

commitment to enhancing educational effectiveness will not only benefit students but also contribute to a more skilled and adaptable workforce.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest regarding the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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