

¹Gulnaz Tleuzhanova, ²Gulim Karimova, ¹Anna Palina

¹*E.A. Buketov Karaganda University, Karaganda, Kazakhstan.*

²*Astana International University, Astana, Kazakhstan.*

ASSESSING PROFESSIONAL FOREIGN LANGUAGE COMPETENCE AMONG STUDENTS OF LINGUISTIC AND NON-LINGUISTIC SPECIALTIES

Abstract: The article explores the development of professional foreign language competence in students of linguistic and non-linguistic specialties within the convergence of formal and non-formal education. This competence is relevant to training competitive specialists in a globalized and internationalized professional environment.

The study aims to examine the theoretical foundations and applied methods for developing this competence and determine its initial state among students. The tasks include analyzing current research, clarifying the concept of "professional foreign language competence," and assessing students' initial competence levels through a questionnaire. The analysis revealed that societal and educational processes are interconnected. A high-tech society requires convergence as a methodological basis for a new educational paradigm, while educational changes impact social processes. Successful development of professional foreign language competence requires integrating formal and non-formal learning within a convergent educational space. The research findings provide a foundation for developing scientific and methodological solutions for professional foreign language training through the integration of formal and non-formal higher education.

Key words: competence, professional foreign language competence, convergence, foreign language training, formal education, non-formal education, non-formal foreign language education.

Introduction.

Modern education is undergoing profound transformations driven by the development of digital technologies, globalization, and evolving labour market demands. In this context, the integration of formal and non-formal learning becomes particularly important, especially in the field of foreign language acquisition for both linguistic and non-linguistic specialties.

Knowledge of English and other foreign languages grants access to cutting-edge research, patents, and technological advancements, fosters a deeper understanding of technological processes, enhances interaction with technologies, and broadens opportunities for international cooperation and knowledge exchange.

In today's world, proficiency in foreign languages not only complements professional skills but is also a prerequisite for a successful career, innovative development, and productive intercultural communication. Therefore, the task of improving the quality of training specialists capable of using foreign languages in their professional activities becomes crucial for ensuring the competence and competitiveness of both individuals and society as a whole.

This scientific article is prepared as part of a study on the problem of developing professional foreign language competence, necessitated by several objective contradictions, including the following:

- on the one hand, the modern high-tech society demands that future specialists be capable of effectively conducting professional foreign language communication at a

high level and continuously improving their foreign language competencies throughout their lives in accordance with personal and professional needs;

- on the other hand, there is a lack of scientifically grounded models for teaching professionally oriented foreign languages within the convergence of formal and non-formal higher education, which would effectively develop the necessary competencies.

It is hypothesized that the low level of professional foreign language competence among students of both linguistic and non-linguistic specialties is associated with the insufficient integration of formal and non-formal education methods, and that enhancing this convergence within the educational process will contribute to a significant improvement in language proficiency relevant to professional contexts.

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.

Thus, the purpose of this research paper is to investigate the theoretical foundations and applied methods for developing professional foreign language competence of linguistic and non-linguistic specialties students and determine its initial state among students.

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

- 1) analyse relevant research and sources related to the topic;
- 2) define the concepts of "competence," "foreign language competence," and "professional foreign language competence";
- 3) assess students' initial levels of professional foreign language competence through a questionnaire.

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.

Literature review and defining

For a complete presentation of the concept of "professional foreign language competence" we will consider such concepts as "competence" and "foreign language competence" separately. Various authors and researchers have defined the concepts of "competence" and "foreign language competence" differently over the years. Here's a brief overview:

Hymes (1972) introduced the concept of "communicative competence", emphasizing that knowing a language involves more than grammatical knowledge – it includes the ability to use language appropriately in various social contexts.

Council of Europe (2001) defines foreign language competence based on proficiency levels (A1 to C2) and describes it as the ability to use a foreign language effectively and appropriately in real-life situations. It focuses on communication skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Savignon (2002) emphasized communicative competence in foreign language teaching, prioritizing interaction and real-life language use over pure grammatical accuracy.

Doganay, Gaipov, & Sadykbekov (2021) discuss the multifaceted nature of competence, emphasizing its integration of knowledge, skills, capacities, and attitudes. They highlight that competence encompasses various types, including epistemological, professional, communicative, intercultural, and intercultural communicative competence.

Anderson, Baxter, & Culp (2018) outline criteria for foreign language communication skills formation, focusing on:

- Linguistic Competence: The level of foreign language knowledge, including grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.
- Cultural Sensitivity: The ability to understand and respect the cultural peculiarities of other speakers.
- Adaptability: The ability to adapt linguistic skills to different situations and audiences.
- Communication Efficiency: The ability to accurately and clearly express one's own opinions and understand others.

These contemporary perspectives underscore the evolving and multifaceted nature of both general and foreign language competence, highlighting the integration of various skills and knowledge areas essential for effective communication, especially in intercultural contexts.

Materials and research methods.

To assess the initial level of professional foreign language competence among students we have composed a questionnaire. The assessment will help determine the subsequent strategies of converging formal and non-formal education to be further implemented in the pedagogical process. The objective of this initiative is to develop the professional foreign language competence of students pursuing linguistic and non-linguistic specialties.

The survey was conducted among students enrolled in linguistic and non-linguistic specialties at Karaganda Buketov University and Astana International University. The survey garnered a total of 119 responses: 58 students comprised the experimental group, while 61 constituted the control group.

Our questionnaire consists of 30 statements, 10 of which are intended to measure each of the three components of professional foreign language competence, with four answer options. The questionnaire was uploaded to Google Forms. Each statement was scored from 1 to 4 points: 1 = completely disagree; 2 = rather disagree; 3 = rather agree; 4 = completely agree. The maximum attainable score was 40 points. The level of professional speech activity (low, medium, and high) was determined in accordance with the range of scores presented in Table 1.

Table 1 – Levels of professional foreign language competence

<i>Scores on a component</i>	<i>Levels</i>
10–19	low level
20–29	medium level
30–40	high level

A high level indicates full possession of the corresponding competence, while a low level indicates its absence, imperfection or instability.

Assessment of the level of students' professional foreign language competence includes determination of the effectiveness of pursuit of various types of professional foreign language activities, which are reflected in the curriculum, by the following components:

Motivational. Students' enthusiastic readiness to study a foreign language, to develop professional foreign language competence, reflection and self-assessment skills, skills of planning stages and activities for professional development and improvement of professional foreign language competence, aspiration to satisfy cognitive and communicative needs and increase the level of professional competence;

Praxiological. Specific conscious actions on realization of professional foreign language activity and development of necessary skills, on self-development and self-regulation, on mastering and replenishment of necessary means of nonverbal expression, on development of skills of operative decision-making in situations of professional context;

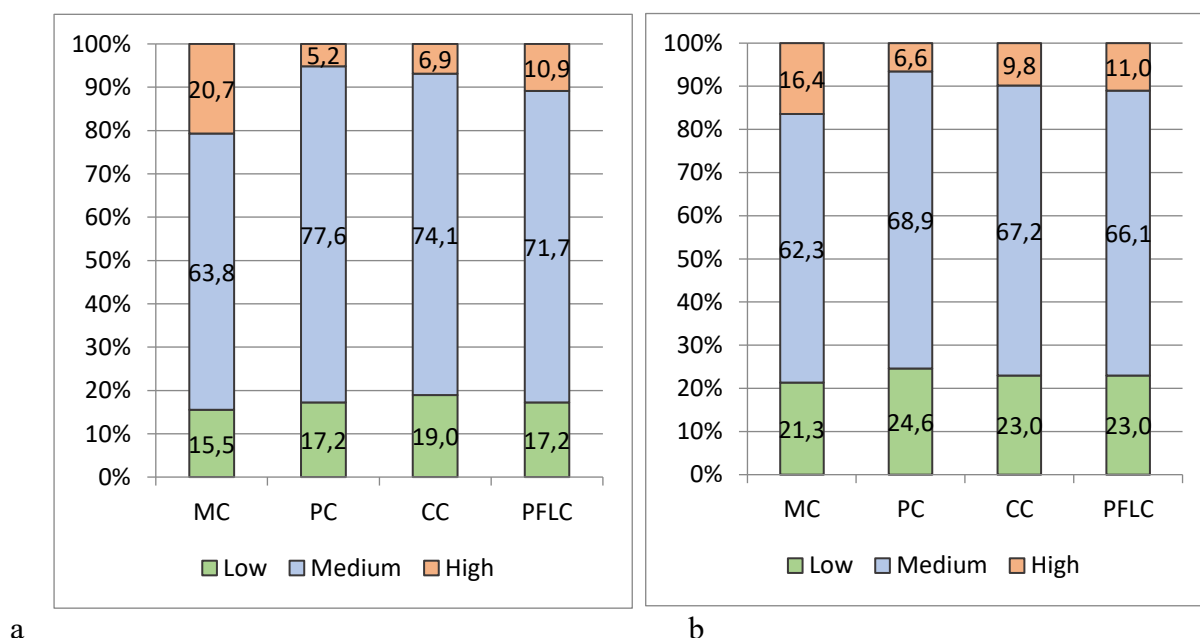
Cognitive. Mental and cognitive activity, acquisition of professionally significant competences necessary for professional foreign language activity, enrichment of professional foreign language terminology, mastering and replenishment of necessary means of verbal expression.

Results and discussion

The results of the questionnaire used to determine the initial level of professional foreign language competence are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Results of diagnosing the level of students' professional foreign language competence by components



a – CG; b – EG; components: MC – motivational component, PC – praxeological component, CC – cognitive component; PFLC – professional foreign language competence

As illustrated in the figure 1, the results of the diagnostic assessment of the level of professional foreign language competence formation revealed that the students in both the

control and experimental groups exhibited comparable levels in terms of their overall professional foreign language competence and its constituent components. It is noteworthy that a moderate proportion of students exhibited a high level of professional foreign language competence, ranging from 5.2% to 20.7% in the control group and from 6.6% to 16.4% in the experimental group, with an average of 10.9% and 11%, respectively. Of the three components of professional foreign language competence, a high level was demonstrated by a greater number of students in motivational component than in praxiological and cognitive components. This finding suggests that while students may possess the motivation to acquire the requisite professional foreign language competencies, they may face deficiencies in terms of knowledge and practical skills.

The proportion of students exhibiting a low level of professional foreign language components ranged from 15.5% to 19%, with an average of 17.2% among students in the control group and from 21.3% to 24.6%, with an average of 23% among students in the experimental group. The proportion of students in the control and experimental groups exhibiting a low level of motivational component is less than of the other two components, with 15.5% and 21.3% of students, respectively. This finding indicates a consistent pattern across categories: the level of knowledge and practical skills in professional foreign language activity is lower than the level of their motivational readiness to master the necessary competences and pursue professional foreign language activity.

Conversely, the predominant proportion of students demonstrated an average level of professional foreign language competence across all components, with an average of 71.7% of students in the control group and 66.1% of the experimental group. These results provide evidence that our hypothesis is confirmed, suggesting that to increase the number of students with a high level of proficiency in the studied competence, there is an urgent need to improve the quality of professional training through the introduction of convergence of formal and non-formal learning.

Implementation of convergence of formal and non-formal learning allows to enhance academic programs in higher (formal) education by complementing them programs and services from additional (non-formal) education. The advantages of convergence of formal and non-formal learning can be manifested in increasing the level of motivational, praxiological and cognitive components of professional foreign language competence, because it gives additional opportunities in accordance with the named components:

- in enhancing student engagement in the educational process by integrating real-life scenarios and individual student preferences, thereby expanding the range of educational trajectories and teaching methods available;
- in fostering critical, analytical, and creative thinking through independent research and experimental activities;
- in cultivating practical skills through the resolution of practical problems and execution of professionally-oriented projects.

Conclusion

In accordance with the purpose and objectives of the present study, we have conducted a comprehensive analysis of current scholarly literature and relevant sources pertaining to the development of professional foreign language competence. This involved the examination of theoretical frameworks and pedagogical models, as well as the clarification and operationalization of key concepts such as “competence,” “foreign language competence,” and, more specifically, “professional foreign language competence.” The term “competence” has been interpreted within the context of this research as a dynamic integration of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that enable effective performance in a professional context. “Foreign language competence,” in turn, encompasses the ability to communicate effectively

and appropriately in a foreign language across various communicative situations, while “professional foreign language competence” refers to the use of foreign language skills specifically in professional and occupational settings, with an emphasis on terminological accuracy, communicative strategies, and situational appropriateness.

To empirically assess the initial level of professional foreign language competence among university students, we conducted a diagnostic study using a structured questionnaire. The assessment encompassed cognitive, operational, and motivational components of competence, allowing for a multidimensional understanding of students’ preparedness for professional communication in a foreign language. The empirical data obtained revealed that formal education alone does not suffice to ensure the development of high-level professional foreign language competence. The findings indicated that only a moderate proportion of respondents achieved high scores in the overall assessment: specifically, 10.9% of students in the control group and 11% in the experimental group demonstrated a high level of professional foreign language competence.

A more detailed analysis of the individual components of competence revealed that the motivational component yielded comparatively higher scores. This suggests that while students display a strong desire and positive attitude toward acquiring professional foreign language skills, their actual performance in terms of linguistic knowledge and applied communicative skills remains limited. Such discrepancies point to potential gaps in curriculum design, teaching methodology, and opportunities for practical language application.

These findings underscore the necessity of rethinking current educational strategies and embracing a more holistic approach to foreign language instruction. In particular, they highlight the importance of integrating non-formal educational practices such as project-based learning, language immersion, internships, workshops, and extracurricular language programs, into the formal educational framework. Non-formal education, characterized by its flexibility, learner-centered approach, and focus on real-world application, provides a valuable supplement to traditional academic instruction and can significantly enhance students’ professional readiness.

Therefore, our subsequent research efforts will focus on the theoretical development and empirical validation of a pedagogical model that facilitates the convergence of formal and non-formal education. This model is aimed at fostering the systematic development of professional foreign language competence among students in both linguistic and non-linguistic specialties. By bridging the gap between classroom instruction and real-world language use, such a model holds the potential to more effectively prepare students for the communicative demands of the modern professional environment.

Funding Information:

The article was prepared within the framework of scientific project № AR19678268, "Scientific and methodological foundations of the implementation of professional foreign language training in the conditions of convergence of formal and non-formal higher education," under the grant funding of the Committee of Science of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Conflict of Interest Statement

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

Author contributions

Gulim Karimova: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Writing-Original draft preparation. Gulnaz Tleuzhanova: Reviewing and Editing. Anna Palina: Data curation, Writing-Original draft, Writing-Reviewing, and Editing.

References

- Anderson, R., Baxter, G., & Culp, P. (2018). *Developing Effective Communication Skills in Foreign Language Education*.
- Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Cambridge University Press.
- Doganay, Y., Gaipov, D. & Sadykbekov, K. (2021). The Concept of Competence in Foreign Language Teaching for Intercultural Communication. *Eurasian Journal of Higher Education*, 2(2), 39-46.
- Gaipov, D. & Sadykbekov, K. (2021). The Concept of Competence in Foreign Language Teaching for Intercultural Communication. *Eurasian Journal of Higher Education*, 2, 39-46.
- Hymes, D. (1972). On Communicative Competence. In J.B. Pride & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics* (pp. 269-293). Penguin.
- Mikhailov, A. A., & Vorobyev, O. V. (2013). On the essence of the concept of project competence of future technology teachers. Polythematic network electronic scientific journal of Kuban State Agrarian University, 89, 1426-1435.
- Nasikhanova, A. Z., & Davydova, L. N. (2013). To the question of the essence of the concept of "foreign language competence. *Humanities Studies*, 2(46), 29-38.
- Savignon, S. J. (Ed.). (2002). *Interpreting Communicative Language Teaching: Contexts and Concerns in Teacher Education*. Yale University Press.
- Sergeeva, N. N., & Bushmanova, Y. A. (2011). Professional-oriented foreign language communicative competence of a student of a technical university. *Kazan Science*, 8, 241-242.

Information about authors

Tleuzhanova Gulnaz- candidate of pedagogical sciences, associate professor, dean of the faculty of foreign languages, Buketov Karaganda University, Kazakhstan, e-mail: tleushanova@inbox.ru., ORCID 0000-0003-2302-1595

Karimova Gulim - PhD, Deputy Director for Scientific and Educational Work at the Pedagogical Institute of Astana International University, e-mail: gulim_3105@mail.ru, ORCID 0000-0002-7113-4159 (**corresponding author**)

Palina Anna – PhD, assistant professor at the Department of Theory and Methods of Foreign Language Teaching, Buketov Karaganda University, e-mail: antossik_anna@mail.ru, ORCID 0000-0002-1993-3965