

УДК 378.1:339.9

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EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE LEVEL OF MASTERS IN THE FIELD OF FOREIGN ECONOMIC ACTIVITY AND METHODS OF ITS DEVELOPMENT

The research paper concerns the issue of the communicative competence level of masters in the field of foreign economic activity as a **key skill to face challenges of contemporary conditions of the global market**. The authors have made an assessment of both the general communicative competence and professionally-oriented foreign language communicative competence level of development. The findings of this analysis have revealed a low level of mastery of communicative means by respondents as well as mainly a minimum level of proficiency in professionally-oriented foreign language communication skills. Based on the study made, the authors have proposed various methods to develop and increase the level of the communicative competence of the masters in the field of foreign economic activity, which included different interactive training methods such as discussions, disputes, «brain storming», training in cooperation, business and situation-role games, case studies and others both in Ukrainian and English.

Key words: communicative competence, masters in the field of foreign economic activities, professionally-oriented foreign language communicative competence, training methods, evaluation, analysis.

Problem statement. The training of a professional in the field of foreign economic activity takes place throughout the entire period of his study at university, but particularly master's programs, which include the largest concentration of professional disciplines, provide the opportunity to acquire not only theoretical and practical knowledge of the chosen specialty but also create readiness for professional activities, which are very diverse in nature. The successful fulfillment of professional tasks is impossible today without knowledge and skills in the field of international processes and trends being guided by international treaties and conventions, which have a huge impact on the activity of the Ukrainian market in view of its integration into the global trading space. Therefore, the creation of professional competences, especially a more effective one, which facilitates the establishment and development of trade relations and more effective activity of both state and private enterprises in the foreign econom-

ic field, plays a significant role in this process and, as the analysis of international practice shows, becomes possible only through the application of effective training methods and technologies.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The importance of mastering organizational, managerial, and communicative skills of future specialists has been emphasized by many researchers (O. Dubaseniuk [4], M. Graaf [18], L. Kotlyarova [6], O. Pavlenko [12], V. Rybalka [15]). The question of the use of specific methods and technologies in the training of masters in the field of Customs assisting in professional competences development, in particular, communicative competence is discussed in detail in the scientific works of domestic scientists (O. Pavlenko [13], O. Triakina [16]).

The issue of training methods used in high school was considered in the works of many researchers (A. Khutorsky, V. Lozova, S. Vitvitskaya and others) [17; 8; 2], the structuring of their system was made on the basis of certain features (I. Lerner, V. Lozova) [8; 9] and their characteristics were generalized on the basis of the methodology of the holistic approach to activity (A. Khutorsky) [17].

Purpose of the article. Considering the increased demand for professionals able to cope with different challenges caused by greater scope of international trade and wider participation of Ukraine in foreign trade activities, it is reasonable to diagnose the level of creation of communicative competence and study the main methods and techniques that can be used to develop it as one of the key competences crucial for a specialist in foreign economic activity to effectively solve professional tasks.

Main material. The specifics of the national system of education of master's in the field of foreign economic activity is related to the development of professionally relevant knowledge and skills to analyze and systematize information, generalize, implement communicative functions, make strategic and managerial decisions. An analysis of the components of this system from the point of view of the acmeological approach [7] gave an opportunity to characterize the main provisions of the professional training of masters – future workers of the managerial level. In particular, they came to the conclusion that a student studying for master's degree in the field of foreign economic activity: 1) plays a key role in the process of his training; 2) strives for self-improvement, independence, self-control, self-realization; 3) masters a certain range of universal knowledge and certain experiences that can be used as an important element of his professional training; 4) tries to successfully apply the acquired knowledge and skills in professional activities.

The majority of researchers of the professional training of specialists (S. Batishev, O. Dubaseniuk, I. Zimnya) [1; 4; 5] shares the view that its content is regulated and specified by those competences that are expected as a result of professional training. The scientists strongly recommend to complement the list of such competences (or, more narrowly, a set of knowledge, skills and abilities) with communicative, organizational and psychosocial skills.

The data from the survey conducted in 2010 among 50 students of the Academy of Customs of Ukraine, who studied under master's programs, as well as the data of the content analysis of qualification characteristics of Customs managers [13] not only confirmed this approach to the creation of the content of the professional training of the specialists in the field of foreign economic activities, but also outlined new topical trends. Participants of the survey were asked to give an answer to the question «Which competencies should first of all be mastered by a professional in the field of foreign economic activities under modern conditions of international trade?»

The results of the survey showed that among the main requirements to the competences of specialists are the following: ability to interact at different levels of an organization, possessing various communication means (social skills); ability to process large amounts of information for a short time (including in foreign languages); ability to strategically think, analyze situations and make forecasts for the future; ability to make managerial decisions (organizational skills); ability to organize the work of a team, motivate and stimulate, ability to self-organization; ability to master modern information technologies.

In our opinion, communicative competence, which includes possession of interpersonal communication technology, flexibility in communication, accessibility, expressiveness and persuasiveness in presenting own views, realization of a democratic style of communication, management of communicative situations, high level of written and oral speech, mastering skills of foreign-language professionally-oriented communicative competence, should be continually trained through different teaching means in the framework of master's program in the field of foreign economic activity.

During our study we tried to evaluate the level of communicative competence development of students studying for master's degree in foreign economic activities from the University of Customs and

Finance, Higher Educational Establishment of Ukraine “Poltava University of Economics and Trade” and the State Research Institute of Customs. Thus, the first selection consisted of students of the control group amounted to 70 people (CG); the second selection included the students of the first experimental group amounted to 85 people (EG₁); the third selection comprised students of the second experimental group amounted to 75 people (EG₂). The communicative competence was diagnosed on two levels: the level of the general communicative competence and the level of professionally-oriented foreign language communicative competence. In particular, communicative skills were diagnosed using A. Batarshchuk’s methodology «Assessment of communicative and organizational inclinations» (questions concerning communicative skills), methods for identifying the need for communication by Y. Orlov [11], a test-questionnaire for evaluation level of communicability as well as observation of communicative behavior of students while performing group tasks simulating future professional activity.

In the generalized form the obtained results are presented in table 1.

Table 1

Output data of the general communicative competence development

Group of respondents	Level of development					
	High		Average		Low	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
CG	8	11,43	22	31,43	40	57,14
EG ₁	13	15,30	28	32,94	44	51,76
EG ₂	9	12,00	24	32,00	42	56,00

The quantitative indicators in the table indicate the low level of mastery of communicative means by the students of the two experimental and control groups, the inability to apply business communication techniques, manage their behavior and mood in the process of interaction, be an active participant and observer of the communication process. The results of the diagnosis also show an inadequate level of interpersonal communication culture, incapability to make links with an interlocutor. A significant number of respondents revealed an average level of communicative skills (31,43%, 32,94% and 32% respectively). The communicative behavior of respondents is characterized by an inability to coordinate behavior, establish emotionally positive contact with an interlocutor, lack of skills to listen to an interlocutor.

The rest of the respondents do not have communicative skills at all, as evidenced mainly by low indicators (57,14%, 51,76% and 56%) of the control and two experimental groups, respectively.

Therefore, only 8 students (11,43%) of the control group, 13 (15,3%) of the first experimental group and 9 (12%) of the second experimental group showed a high level of the general communicative competence development.

The professionally-oriented foreign language communicative competence was diagnosed with the help of a set of tasks developed by the authors and connected with understanding professional texts, mastering professional vocabulary, performing oral communication and writing creative works on professional subjects. The ability to understand reading, speak in oral and written form, understand an interlocutor was assessed. The obtained results are presented in table 2.

Table 2

Output data of the professionally-oriented foreign language communicative competence development

Group of respondents	Level of development					
	High		Average		Low	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
CG	11	15,71	21	30,00	38	54,29
EG ₁	14	16,47	29	34,12	42	49,41
EG ₂	12	16,00	23	30,67	40	53,33

As can be seen, the indicators of the professionally-oriented foreign language communicative competence are somewhat better than the previous ones. A high level showed 15,71% of the respondents, 16,47% of the first experimental group and 16% of the second experimental group. Thus, students with a high level of this competence development are able to understand complicated texts with numerous professional terms, fluently communicate in English within any professional topics, creatively approach to writing professional tasks, almost unmistakably use grammatical and lexical constructions of the English language.

However, about half of the respondents of the two experimental and control groups revealed a generally low level of proficiency in professionally-oriented foreign language communication skills (49,41%, 53,33% and 54,29% respectively). These students demonstrated inability to use professional English vocabulary in solving practical problems in oral and written form.

The results of the abovementioned analysis have necessitated the search of the most effective training methods and techniques to improve the level of the communicative competence of masters in foreign economic activity. In the process of selection of such methods and technologies attention was paid to the development of students' motivation, which is achieved through the interaction of students with both group mates and teachers on the principles of cooperation and co-creation. The study of the achievements of scientists [10; 14] confirmed that it is possible to reach by using interactive learning methods such as dialogical-debatable (discussions, disputes, «brain storming», training in cooperation); gaming (business, situation-role games); case studies, student presentations, training projects, solving professional tasks that can be implemented through different forms of learning. In our opinion, these methods contribute to the development of the ability to express own thoughts and views, compare them with the ideas of opponents, persuade other interlocutors.

Furthermore, another effective method to upgrade the level of masters' communicative competence is a dialogue between students and teachers, which has the following forms: question to the audience, commentary, pedagogical advance, «transfer of discussion to activity» (effective in the event of a deadlock in a discussion), «transfer of authority» (a teacher is supposedly detached from participating in the resolution of the situation and conveys his powers to one of the leaders or group outsiders in order to update their potential opportunities), «change of key categories» (implies a teacher's ability to transform into a person who is not tempted, surprised at information heard, an interested listener), «intentional error» (a teacher purposefully makes a mistake that should intensify a discussion, provoke an additional interest, force students to seek new arguments to prove their correctness) etc. [3, pp. 66-75]. To our mind, the use of the above mentioned methods of optimizing dialogical communication not only provides higher level of communicative competence, but also promotes a deep awareness of students about issues related to various aspects of their professional activity.

We also consider a dispute and its types to be effective methods of developing the communicative competence. This includes a «round table» (a conversation involving 5-6 students who share their thoughts both with each other and with the audience); an expert panel meeting («panel discussion» involving 4-6 students with an appointed chairperson, who initially discuss a problem with each other, then offer their position in the form of a message or report to the audience); a forum (discussion in which an «expert group» exchanges views with «audience»); a symposium (discussion in which the participants make reports offering their own opinion, then answer the questions of the audience); debates (discussions based on performances presented by two rival teams, after which the teams respond to questions, listen to objections to their positions etc.); court hearing (discussion simulating a trial) [ibid., p. 75]. It is advisable to implement these teaching methods under the principle «from simple to complex», taking into account the content of the educational material, the level of knowledge of students and their motivation to master the issues of professional activity.

In addition, translation of authentic English texts, compiling vocabulary of professional terms, searching for complementary materials in a foreign language, discussing situations in professional English with the use of different grammatical and lexical constructions, modeling of professional situations through role-playing and business games contributed to both the development of professional knowledge and skills and the improvement of professionally-oriented foreign language communicative competence.

Conclusions and further research directions. In conclusion we should highlight that the contemporary stage of foreign trade relations demand from a professional in foreign economic activities high level of communicative competence, which includes possession of an interpersonal communication technique, flexibility in communication, accessibility, expressiveness and persuasiveness in presenting own views, realization of a democratic style of communication, management of communicative situations, high level of written and spoken language skills, mastering skills of foreign-language professionally-oriented communicative competence. All these skills can be acquired, in our opinion, by means of effective training methods and techniques implemented through modeling professional situations, where masters can cooperate resolving professional tasks.

Further research in this field could be dedicated to designing an e-learning platform with visual materials for discussions, interactive dialogues both in Ukrainian and English as well as forums allowing communication between students studying for master's degree in foreign economic activity and professionals working in public agencies or private companies.

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Дослідженню питання рівня розвитку комунікативної компетентності магістрів у галузі зовнішньоекономічної діяльності як ключового уміння для вирішення проблем, що існують в сучасних умовах світового ринку. Автори зробили оцінку рівня розвитку як загальної комунікативної компетентності, так і професійно орієнтованої іншомовної комунікативної компетентності в магістрів у галузі зовнішньоекономічної діяльності. Результати цього аналізу виявили низький рівень володіння комунікативними засобами в респондентів, а також головним чином мінімальний рівень розвитку професійно орієнтованих іншомовних вмінь. На підставі проведеного дослідження автори запропонували низку методів розвитку та підвищення рівня комунікативної компетентності магістрів у галузі зовнішньоекономічної діяльності, зокрема інтерактивні методи навчання, такі як обговорення, дебати, «мозкова атака», навчання у співпраці, ділові та ситуаційно-рольові ігри, тематичні дослідження тощо, як українською, так і англійською мовами.

Ключові слова: комунікативна компетентність, магістри у галузі зовнішньоекономічної діяльності, професійно орієнтована іншомовна комунікативна компетентність, методи навчання, оцінка, аналіз.

Исследована проблема уровня развития коммуникативной компетентности магистров в области внешнеэкономической деятельности как ключевого умения для решения проблем, существующих в современных условиях глобального рынка. Авторы провели оценку степени владения магистрами как общей коммуникативной компетентностью, так и профессионально ориентированной коммуникативной компетентностью в иностранном языке. Результаты этого анализа выявили низкий уровень владения респондентами коммуникативными средствами, а также в основном минимальный уровень владения профессионально ориентированными навыками общения на иностранных языках. Основываясь на проведенном исследовании, авторы предложили различные методы развития и повышения уровня коммуникативной компетентности магистров в области внешнеэкономической деятельности, в частности интерактивные методы обучения, такие как дискуссии, дебаты, «мозговой штурм», обучение в сотрудничестве, деловые и ситуационно-ролевые игры, тематические исследования и другие, как на английском, так и на украинском языках.

Ключевые слова: коммуникативная компетентность, магистры в области внешнеэкономической деятельности, профессионально ориентированная коммуникативная компетентность в иностранном языке, методы обучения, оценка, анализ.

Одержано 7.11.2017.