

Peculiarities of developing intercultural professional competence during distance learning

*Galina Nikolaevna Makhmutova**, *Liliia Finadovna Mursalimova*, *Ludmila Aleksandrovna Sergeeva*, and *Ludmila Konstantinovna Chicherina*

Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation, Department of Foreign Languages and Intercultural Communication, Moscow, Russia

Abstract. The acceleration of global changes taking place in various spheres of life of our society, changes in the structure of the labor market and qualification requirements of various professions suggest new approaches and assessment of the level of intercultural professional competence. A deductive method based on empirical generalizations was used for the study. The purpose of this research is to identify the place and role of intercultural competences, intercultural communication in general in the formation of professional competencies in the context of digital learning technologies use. The problem of relationship between applied teaching methods and sociocultural, as well as psycho-emotional factors is investigated. The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods for assessing company personnel: a personal questionnaire and a behavioral interview. The survey was used in groups of students of economic specialties studying German as a second foreign language. The theoretical and practical parts of the study showed that changes in the nature of human communication in modern conditions are irreversible and rapid, exerting a global impact on the culture and education of a person. Researchers are actively exploring dynamics and transformations of professional competencies, as well as methods for determining the levels of various types of competencies. The novelty of this study lies in raising the question of developing a methodology for testing the level of intercultural professional competence, taking into account factors of the impact of a digital environment on its formation.

Keywords: digital space, intercultural competence, professional competencies, qualifications, personal surveys

1 Introduction

The new reality or global changes that have been taking place in various spheres of our society for more than a decade have noticeably accelerated during the global crisis

*Corresponding author: galinamahmutova@mail.ru

associated with the 2020 pandemic, and, probably, further growth of the given pace should be expected.

A survey of working young Russian people regarding their perceptions of professional success showed orientation toward reputation and power is directly related to career success while orientation toward safety and family does not contribute to career growth [1]. However, in the mentality of Germans these values are the priority.

Many scholars in their publications analyze the process of socio-cultural changes and its impact on a worldview, in which strategies are reassessed [2]. Intercultural forecasting, i.e., consideration of the situation and its development, from the point of view of international processes, too, is becoming more and more important. This technology is interdisciplinary and has an integrative and stabilizing function.

The authors of the study further refer to the opinions of academic professionals, compare their conclusions in relation to priority areas of the development of intercultural competence, and also analyze the effectiveness of the digital context as one the conditions of its formation.

2 Materials and methods

The blurring of the boundaries between the habitual real and digital worlds is fundamentally changing our way of life and our professional field. The fourth industrial revolution brings new demands. The personnel of the future will have to work in a new reality. According to the research conducted by the internationally renowned company Deloitte, 65% of today's schoolchildren will work in professions that do not even exist at present. Today, when many specialists work from home, often in the framework of short-term international projects, we could draw the following conclusion. While teaching students at the university, it is possible to prepare them to work in a multinational team. According to German economists, the labor market today is focused on education. A contradiction arises between inequality of educational opportunities for an individual and requirements for the level of education [3].

Thus, a special responsibility for training personnel of the new format lies with institutions of higher education, many of which are not ready to respond to challenges of the digital revolution.

To understand the problem of developing professional competencies in new conditions, let us analyze a professional context in which they should be applied.

The modern labor market is characterized by fast-paced development. The qualifications structure of almost all professions contains such a requirement as digital competence. However, the question remains: what specific skills and knowledge a competitive specialist should have [4].

German scholars identify the following generalized professional competencies:

- ability to use digital technologies effectively,
- effective communication,
- ability to come up with new ideas and develop new concepts,
- ability to communicate with “smart” technology,
- self-education skills.

Let us consider in more detail the points of effective communication and self-education skills in the context of the formation of professional intercultural competence. It is this competence that can be developed in the course of teaching a foreign language.

Let us analyze the question of what function communicativeness performs in professional activity and what changes in the world of work affect communication flows

within and outside companies. Firstly, these are qualitative changes in relation to foreign communication requirements for employees. Secondly, these are quantitative changes associated with the need for a foreign language.

Here are examples of what skills employers seek in future specialists:

1. Methodological competence:
 - data processing;
 - ability to plan and make decisions;
 - development of learning abilities.
2. Social competences:
 - ability to act independently;
 - the ability to communicate;
 - maintain interaction.
3. Value position:
 - responsibility and initiative;
 - motivation;
 - stress resistance and openness.

It is worth noting that specialized knowledge is mentioned last. The involvement of social partners in the educational process and the conduct of combined training sessions covering most of the elements of activity could play a great role in the formation of criteria for assessing knowledge, including intercultural ones [5].

Thus, teaching a professional foreign language should be based on certain criteria of the level of intercultural professional communication, which will enable students to use the accumulated knowledge and skills in their future profession, and will allow them to adapt to the processes of transformation in the labor market.

Listening and rendering of texts containing professional terminology, discussion of texts and educational films [6], as well as the implementation of project tasks can be considered universal effective methods of teaching a business or professional foreign language. The application of these methods is based mainly on the independent work of students, especially when using distance and mixed forms of education.

The development of the communicative culture of students helps to determine the main ways of its improvement. Knowledge of foreign languages and national culture [7] of the target language is an important qualification requirement in the labor market today.

3 Results

In the practical part of our research, we used elements of existing qualitative and quantitative methods for assessing company personnel: a personality questionnaire and behavioral interview. Elements of well-known Questionnaire of Intercultural Readiness to Work Abroad (by M. Tucker), theoretical and practical developments by R.D. Lewis are used.

The table below contains summarized final data of a personal survey of 2nd year students in an economics major who study German as a second foreign language. The main groups of questions related to information about the countries of the target language are given, as well as a group of questions related to the mentality and intercultural experience of the respondents. The results are assessed as a percentage of correct answers to questions in terms of correct information or ideas about a foreign culture.

Table 1. Summarized data of 2nd year students' survey. Source: compiled by the authors.

Question Groups	Germany	Austria	Switzerland
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Economic and geographical realities, %	60	50	40
Cultural information, %	50	40	20
Perceptions of mentality, %	70	60	10
Business culture perception, %	50	50	20

The data obtained shows that to form the respondents' level of intercultural professional competence sufficient for their successful professional activity in new conditions, it is necessary to create its base during training for the profession in accordance with the developed assessment criteria. For different languages and business cultures, these criteria can differ significantly. It will be possible to accomplish this task using carefully selected questions for a survey, which will be carried out in two or more stages, followed by a comparative assessment of the results.

Next, the question of educational technologies used in new circumstances, and their role in the formation of professional intercultural competence, their role in the life of students is considered. The distance learning approach allows to increase the efficiency of educational processes due to a variety of practical activities, high dynamism associated with the flexibility of the choice of educational material and a variety of forms of educational and methodological support and dictate the need to make the educational process more intensive and individualized [8]. However, success largely depends on the technical component and personal capabilities of both students and teachers. In Russia, the first fundamental document was the Order of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation of 05/30/1997 No. 1050 "On conducting an experiment in the field of distance education". The order was issued to develop and improve methods of distance education and raising the educational level of the population [9]. The pandemic forced the switch to distance learning as early as March 2020.

In the digital space, all components of speech with its verbal and non-verbal factors are lost in the context of the physical and temporal disconnection of the communication participants [10]. This is mainly related to asynchronous online technologies. With synchronous computer communication students connect to the Internet in real time and use online chat and video conferencing [11]. It is characterized by a high level of interactivity. The success of distance learning largely depends on it: teachers – learners – learning environment [12]. It can be seen both as a process of communication and as a process of action or influence [13]. Also unexplored is the problem of value transformations in the context of lifelong learning in the digital space [14].

Let us turn to the results of our empirical research method, which is based on a survey of a certain number of respondents using questionnaires. 50 students (100%) took part in the survey, the purpose of which was to ascertain the students' attitude to learning in the new reality. We have selected the most interesting information from it.

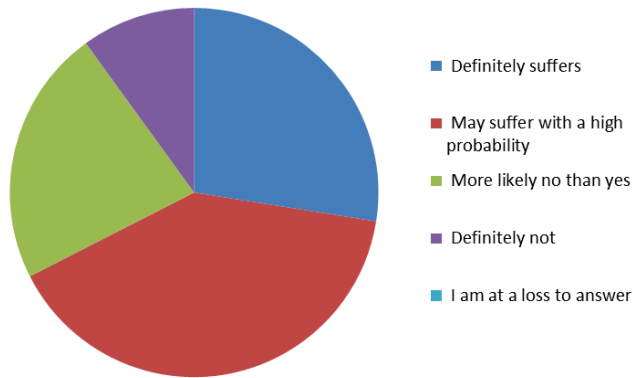


Fig. 1. Does psychological health suffer during distance studying? *Source:* compiled by the authors.

Less than 30 % of respondents noted that while studying from home they do not feel more satisfied with the results, the same percentage of respondents was at a loss to answer, only 15% noted positive sides in studying from home, 5 % answered: rather yes than no. Both students and teachers talk about difficulties associated with distance learning. Free time in the distance learning format has increased, due to the fact that it is not spent on commuting to the place of work/study.

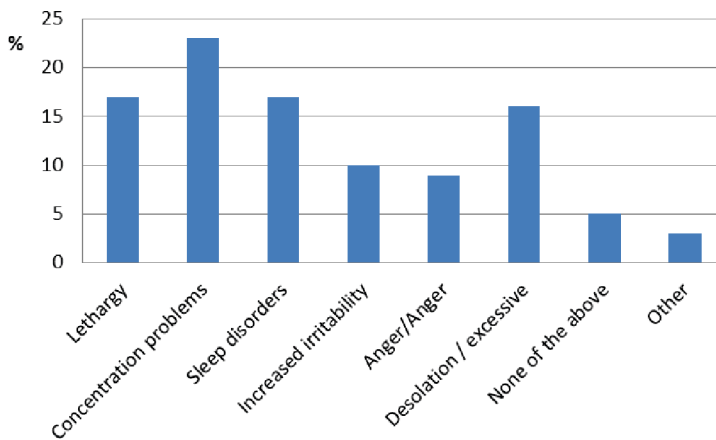


Fig. 2. After switching to distance learning, you began to feel. *Source:* compiled by the authors.

17 % reported lethargy after switching to distance learning, 23 % had problems concentrating. Home environment distracts from classes. 17 % had problems related to sleep disturbance, 11 % noted increased irritability.

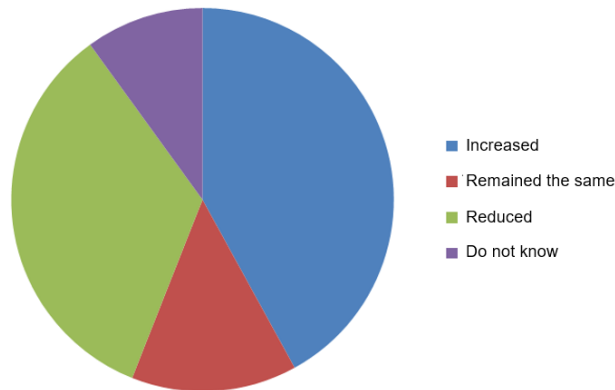


Fig. 3. How has your free time changed? *Source:* compiled by the authors.

26 % of respondents agreed that distance learning mode lengthens the actual working day, 13.33 % supported the shift of working hours to night, 13 % had problems with the coordination of study time, 9 % gave a different answer to this question or found it difficult to reply.

4 Discussion

The results of the study showed that despite the increase in the amount of free time, students experience problems associated with an increase in the working day and psychological overload. The disadvantages of distance education are the psychological lack of student training, an increase in workday span, and the lack of adherence to a daily schedule.

Russian researchers N.A. Chernyshova and Romanova O.A. argue their studies in Moscow schools have shown a positive effect of a frequent use of electronic resources for educational purposes [15]. In their opinion, risks of academic failure are reduced, and academic results of students are increased. Is this statement true in the context of the formation of intercultural professional competence? We do not yet have an answer to this question. On the one hand, working with big volumes of information is possible. On the other hand, the quality of its acquisition decreases. Consequently, the learners cannot analyze the data obtained. We also concluded that the following questions remain open: what are the “universal” components of intercultural competence and the criteria of its assessment, how can the basic level of professional intercultural competence be assessed and to what extent does it depend on mentality and general professional competencies?

5 Conclusion

Thus, our study has shown the issue of the development of intercultural professional competence in future specialists, along with their possession of professional skills corresponding to time, plays a decisive role in their portfolio. Intercultural forecasting, selection of professionally significant data, social partnership as a learning process, activity of students themselves are basic elements of the general architecture of a profession.

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