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DEVELOPING FOREIGN LANGUAGE COMPETENCE OF FUTURE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION TEACHERS IN THE BENELUX COUNTRIES: GENERAL ASPECTS

Abstract. The issues of language ecology and language policy, alongside the rapid advancement of communication technologies across all sectors of society, have heightened the focus on the quality of human communication. In this context, the development of foreign language competence among future vocational education teachers in Ukraine has gained significant relevance, particularly in light of globalization, European integration processes and the challenges posed by wartime. Examining global experiences, especially those of the Benelux countries, is essential for identifying potential strategies to enhance the effectiveness of professional training for future teachers. Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg exemplify successful foreign language education through their strategies of multilingualism and multiculturalism. A key factor in their success is official multilingualism, which fosters environments where people can more effectively exchange information, cooperate and build relationships – crucial for successful functioning at both local and global levels. This article explores the strategies employed in these countries to develop foreign language competence among future vocational education teachers. These strategies primarily include implementing content- and language-integrated learning, offering professional development opportunities, leveraging modern technologies to improve language training effectiveness, promoting multilingualism and multiculturalism and collaborating with international partners. Adopting similar strategies could significantly enhance professional training programmes for future vocational education teachers in Ukraine, particularly in developing foreign language competence, aligning them with international standards and boosting the competitiveness of Ukrainian graduates in the international labour market. Future research should focus on studying the experiences of leading European countries regarding the integration of continuing professional development programmes for vocational education teachers in the face of global challenges.

Keywords: foreign language competence, foreign language education, vocational education, vocational education teacher, vocational education institution, the Benelux countries.
РОЗВИТОК ІНШОМОВНОЇ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТІ МАЙБУТНІХ ПЕДАГОГІВ ЗАКЛАДІВ ПРОФЕСІЙНОЇ ОСВІТИ У КРАЇНАХ БЕНІЛЮКСУ: ЗАГАЛЬНІ АСПЕКТИ

Анотація. Проблеми мовної екології та мовної політики, а також стрімкий розвиток комунікаційних технологій у всіх сферах суспільства, підвищують увагу до якості забезпечення людської комунікації. У цьому контексті проблема розвитку іншомовної компетентності майбутніх педагогів закладів професійної освіти в Україні набуває актуальності, особливо з огляду на глобалізаційні та євроінтеграційні процеси, а також виклики воєнного часу. Вивчення світового досвіду, зокрема країн Бенілюксу, є необхідним для пошуку можливих шляхів підвищення ефективності професійної підготовки майбутніх педагогів закладів професійної освіти. Бельгія, Нідерланди та Люксембург слугують прикладами успішної іншомовної освіти завдяки своїм стратегіям багатомовності та мультикультурності. Ключовим аспектом цього є офіційна багатомовність, адже вона створює умови, які дозволяють ефективніше обмінюватися інформацією, співпрацювати та розвивати взаємини, що є важливим для успішного функціонування як на локальному, так і на глобальному рівнях. У статті досліджено стратегії розвитку іншомовної компетентності майбутніх педагогів закладів професійної освіти у зазначених країнах. Здебільшого вони стосуються впровадження предметно-мовного інтегрованого навчання, надання можливостей для професійного розвитку, застосування сучасних технологій для підвищення ефективності мовної підготовки, сприяння багатомовності та мультикультурності, а також співпраця з міжнародними партнерами. Прийняття подібних стратегій може суттєво покращити програми професійної підготовки майбутніх педагогів закладів професійної освіти в Україні, зокрема у фокусі розвитку іншомовної компетентності, привести їх у відповідність з міжнародними стандартами та підвищити конкурентоспроможність українських фахівців на міжнародному ринку праці. Перспективи подальших досліджень полягають у вивченні досвіду провідних європейських країн щодо інтеграції програм безперервного професійного розвитку для педагогів закладів професійної освіти у умовах глобальних викликів.

Ключові слова: пенсійне відомство, механізми соціального захисту громадян, накопичувальні пенсійні фонди, соціальне страхування населення.

Problem statement. Foreign language competence is becoming increasingly essential in professional development of future vocational education teachers,
particularly in the context of enhancing Ukraine’s vocational education system. With globalization, the labour market has become more interconnected. Proficiency in foreign languages enables vocational education teachers to prepare students for career opportunities beyond their native country, thereby enhancing employability. Effective communication is crucial in most professions, and being multilingual allows teachers to foster an environment where students can interact with a broader range of clients, colleagues and stakeholders, leading to better professional relationships and customer satisfaction.

Understanding and appreciating different cultures through language learning helps build cultural competence. This is particularly valuable in sectors such as hospitality, tourism, healthcare and international business, where cross-cultural interactions are frequent. For businesses, having employees who speak multiple languages can open up new markets and improve transnational trade relations, contributing to economic growth. Additionally, language learning enhances cognitive abilities, including problem-solving, critical thinking and creativity, which are beneficial across all areas of vocational training.

The Benelux region, comprising Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, presents a unique context for foreign language competence due to its multilingual and multicultural landscape. Belgium is a trilingual country with Dutch, French and German as official languages, necessitating proficiency in multiple languages for effective communication and integration. The Netherlands has a high level of English proficiency among its population, in addition to Dutch being the primary language. Other languages such as German and French are also commonly taught. Luxembourg is known for its trilingual education system, with Luxembourgish, French and German as official languages, and English is also widely spoken and taught [1].

For Ukraine, adopting similar multilingual and multicultural strategies in vocational education can provide significant benefits. By fostering foreign language competence among future vocational education teachers, Ukraine can enhance its vocational training programmes, making them more competitive and aligned with international standards. This will not only improve the employability of Ukrainian graduates in the global labour market but also attract international business and tourism, contributing to the country’s economic growth. Moreover, it will prepare Ukrainian students to navigate and thrive in a multicultural and multilingual world, thereby broadening their horizons and opportunities.

**Review of recent research and publications.** Foreign language education for future vocational education teachers intersects language education, vocational training and multilingualism. Schecter & Cummins emphasize strategies supporting ESL students through school-based language policies and teacher preparation [2]. Sierens & Avermaet advocate bilingual models for enriching learning and preserving diversity among educational elites and immigrant children [3]. Vandenbussche discusses the impact of internationalization on Flemish education,
promoting language policies enhancing mother tongue and English proficiency [4]. Nuffic highlights the value of international experience for global career readiness through curriculum internationalization [5]. Pace advocates practical, job-specific language learning to integrate professional knowledge with language skills effectively [6]. Wildeman et al. present a Professional Development Program (PDP) enhancing teachers’ subject-specific language awareness and teaching practices, emphasizing teachers’ pivotal role in addressing students’ language learning needs [7].

McGroarty delineates the essential competencies for bilingual vocational instructors, synthesizing expert opinion and available empirical research [8]. The article offers an overview of the context and student demographics of bilingual vocational training programmes, followed by a comprehensive examination of instructor competencies derived from research in second language acquisition, sociolinguistics, technical education and vocational psychology. Key competency areas identified encompass a) understanding language knowledge and learning processes; b) proficiency in a specific occupational domain and effective teaching methodologies for limited-English-proficient students; c) awareness of vocational trends and cultural considerations impacting current and future job prospects. Despite its publication date, McGroarty’s work remains relevant as foundational insights into the essential competencies required by bilingual vocational instructors [8].

Despite extensive research on various aspects of foreign language training for teachers and students, the challenge of developing foreign language skills among vocational education teachers, especially in the Benelux countries, remains open for discussion. Relevant research methods such as theoretical analysis, deduction, induction, systematization and generalization were employed to address the problem in question and suggest effective ways of solving it in European, as well as Ukrainian scientific discourse.

Accordingly, the article aims to analyze the effective strategies of foreign language education for future vocational teachers in the Benelux countries and propose recommendations for enhancing foreign language competence of future vocational education teachers in Ukraine.

Results. To begin with, it is crucial to highlight the importance of foreign language competence in vocational education. Vocational education prepares individuals for specific careers or trades by emphasizing practical skills and knowledge applicable in real-world contexts. In this context, foreign language competence enhances graduates’ employability by enabling effective communication with international colleagues, clients and partners. Additionally, it fosters cultural awareness and adaptability, qualities increasingly valued in today’s global labour market [9].

Each of the Benelux countries has developed robust frameworks for integrating foreign language education into vocational training, tailored to their unique educational systems and linguistic landscapes.
Belgium’s vocational education system is notable for its accommodation of linguistic diversity across its regions, Flemish-speaking Flanders, French-speaking Wallonia and the bilingual Brussels-Capital Region. Vocational teachers undergo specialized language training aligned with their regional linguistic context. For instance, in Flanders, Dutch (Flemish) is emphasized, while French is predominant in Wallonia and Brussels. This tailored approach ensures that teachers can effectively communicate with students and industry partners in their respective linguistic regions [10; 11].

In the Netherlands, vocational education places a strong emphasis on developing practical language skills essential for specific industries and global interactions. English, recognized as a key language for international business, is integrated into vocational curricula alongside Dutch. This dual-language approach prepares vocational teachers to engage confidently in globalized work environments, fostering their ability to navigate multicultural interactions and meet international employability demands [12].

Luxembourg, renowned for its multilingual environment, emphasizes language education within vocational training to facilitate effective communication within its diverse workforce and international business community. Vocational teachers in Luxembourg are encouraged to develop proficiency in multiple languages, including Luxembourgish, French, German and English. This multilingual competence not only enhances teachers’ ability to instruct and interact with students from varied linguistic backgrounds but also prepares them to participate actively in Luxembourg’s dynamic international business sector [13].

Specifically, strategies for developing foreign language competence among vocational education teachers in the Benelux countries are the following:

- **Curriculum Integration and Synergy**: Effective integration of language education with vocational training is pivotal in enhancing future vocational teachers’ language competence. Curricula are meticulously designed to integrate language learning with technical skills, ensuring that they acquire practical language competencies relevant to their professional contexts. This integrated approach not only enhances linguistic proficiency but also promotes interdisciplinary learning and holistic skill development among future vocational teachers.

- **Immersive Learning Environments**: Language immersion programmes are instrumental in developing future vocational teachers’ language skills by exposing them to authentic language contexts. Such programmes may include study abroad opportunities, international internships or simulated environments that replicate real-world language challenges. These immersive experiences enhance language fluency, cultural understanding and professional adaptability, equipping future vocational teachers to excel in diverse and competitive global workplaces.

- **Professional Development and Support**: Continuing professional development plays a crucial role in enhancing future vocational teachers’ language competence throughout their careers. Training programmes, workshops and seminars...
provide opportunities for teachers to enhance their language skills, stay updated with current linguistic trends and incorporate innovative teaching methodologies into their practice. Support networks and mentoring programmes further facilitate ongoing learning and skill enhancement among vocational educators.

**Technological Integration:** The integration of technology-enhanced language learning tools and platforms offers flexible and accessible opportunities for future vocational teachers to develop and maintain their language proficiency. Virtual classrooms, online resources and interactive applications cater to diverse learning styles, promoting self-paced learning and collaborative engagement among teachers. Technological integration not only enhances the accessibility of language learning resources but also fosters interactive and engaging learning experiences [14].

Despite the successes observed in the Benelux countries, several challenges persist in developing foreign language competence among future vocational education teachers: a) limited funding and resources may constrain the expansion and sustainability of language education programmes within vocational institutions; b) adapting teaching methods to effectively integrate language learning with vocational training requires ongoing pedagogical innovation and professional development for teachers; c) managing linguistic diversity among students and teachers necessitates tailored approaches to meet the diverse linguistic needs within vocational education settings [9].

Thus, the experience of the Benelux countries in developing foreign language competence among future vocational education teachers exemplifies proactive approaches to preparing individuals for success in a globalized world. By integrating foreign language education effectively into vocational training, leveraging immersive learning experiences, supporting continuing professional development and embracing technological advancements, these countries have set a commendable precedent. As other nations, including Ukraine, seek to enhance their vocational education systems, they can draw valuable insights and strategies from the Benelux experience to foster linguistic competence and prepare their workforce for the challenges and opportunities of the global labour market.

**Conclusions.** Accordingly, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance foreign language competence of future vocational education teachers in Ukraine:

1. **Curriculum Integration and Synergy:**
   Recommendation: It is important to develop vocational curricula that integrate language learning with technical skills. Designing courses that simultaneously teach professional and linguistic competencies is relevant and practical.
   Implementation: It is crucial to collaborate with industry experts to create specialized language modules tailored to the needs of different vocational fields.

2. **Immersive Learning Environments:**
   Recommendation: It is imperative to establish language immersion programmes to provide authentic language exposure. These could include study abroad opportunities, international internships or simulation-based training.
Implementation: It is vital to partner with international institutions and organizations to facilitate exchange programmes and internships that immerse future teachers in a foreign language environment.

3. Professional Development and Support:
Recommendation: It is necessary to invest in continuing professional development for vocational education teachers and offer regular training programmes, workshops and seminars focused on enhancing language skills and adopting innovative teaching methods.

Implementation: It is of utmost importance to create support networks and mentoring programmes that encourage ongoing language learning and professional growth among vocational teachers.

4. Technological Integration:
Recommendation: It is critical to facilitate technology-enhanced language learning tools to provide flexible and accessible language education, as well as use virtual classrooms, online resources and interactive applications to support self-paced and collaborative learning.

Implementation: It is relevant to develop and maintain digital platforms that offer a wide range of language learning resources, ensuring that they are user-friendly and accessible to all teachers.

5. Managing Linguistic Diversity:
Recommendation: It is indispensable to develop tailored approaches to manage linguistic diversity within vocational education settings, as well as recognize and address the varying language proficiency levels and cultural backgrounds of students.

Implementation: It is paramount to implement differentiated instruction strategies and provide additional support for teachers and students who may need it, ensuring an inclusive and effective learning environment.

By adopting these recommendations, Ukraine can enhance foreign language competence of future vocational education teachers, aligning vocational training programmes with international standards and improving the employability of graduates in the global labour market. Drawing insights from the Benelux countries, Ukraine can foster a multilingual and culturally competent workforce, ready to navigate and succeed in an interconnected world.

Further research should focus on exploring the experience of leading European countries in integrating continuing professional development programmes for vocational education teachers, especially in light of the ongoing global challenges.

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