Foreign Language Teachers’ Competency and Competence in Using Information and Communication Technologies

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Abstract

This paper addresses the issue of foreign language teachers’ ICT competence development. The authors (a) state the importance of the problem; (b) define the terms “ICT competence” and “ICT competency” of foreign language teachers; (c) suggest components and content of ICT competency of foreign language teachers; (d) develop criteria, indicators, and levels of ICT competence of foreign language teachers.

Keywords: ICT competence; ICT competency; informational competence; foreign language teachers

1. Introduction

1.1. Importance

Nowadays computerization is one of the dominant trends in the development of the modern society. The rapid development and spread of Internet technologies in Russia has been reflected in state education policy. The informatization of education has become one of the priorities in the modernization of the Russian educational system, and is aimed at developing a methodology, technologies, methods and organizational forms of education to improve the educational system’s control mechanisms in today’s informational society (Robert, 2010; Robert, Panukova, Kuznetsov, & Kravtsova, 2008; Sysoyev, 2012, 2013). Over the past 5-10 years such Federal programs as

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Electronic Russia, Computerization of rural schools and Computer in every school were implemented in Russia. Their aim was the computerization of general secondary, special and higher education, in particular the creation of an information and education environment where pupils and students could intensively use information and communication technologies (ICT) in the educational process.

However, the lack of competence of high school teachers in using the entire didactic potential of modern ICT hinders the process of informatization of education in general, and the intensification of teaching specific subjects in particular. It should be noted that at present in the pedagogical literature the properties and methodological didactic functions of many common Internet technologies are described (blogs, wikis, podcasts, concordances, educational Internet resources, Internet reference resources, etc.) (Khutorskoy, 2002; Evstigneev, 2012; Sysoyev, 2012). Depending on the discipline, the specific set of ICT and the extent of their use in the educational process may vary. It is necessary to consider the use of specific ICT techniques exclusively within specific subjects, as the same tool can be used to develop different skills and competences and in different forms, depending on the learning objectives (within a particular subject).

Foreign language learning is one of the required subjects in all curricula (for a bachelor's degree). One of the main goals of foreign language teaching in higher education is to develop students’ foreign language communicative competence in all its manifold components (linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, sociocultural, strategic), needed for students to communicate in social and professional areas. That is why the use of ICT in foreign language learning will be focused on the development of verbal skills (reading, speaking, writing, listening), language skills (vocabulary, phonetics, grammar) and the formation of socio-cultural and intercultural competences, and the ICT competence of foreign language teachers is the ability to use the entire arsenal of ICT in learning foreign language aspects and kinds of verbal activity (Evstigneev, 2012; Sysoyev, 2013).

1.2. Definitions

The key concepts in this paper are the terms “competence” and “competency”. According to A.V. Khutorskoy (2002) by competency we mean “a set of interrelated personality traits (motivation, knowledge, skills, ways of working), defined with respect to a particular range of subjects and processes necessary for high-quality and productive activities in relation to them”. Competence is “a possession of a certain competency by a qualified person, including his personal attitude to it and to the subject of activity”. In other words, competence is the level(s) of formation of competency as a theoretical construct.

By the ICT competency of a foreign language teacher we understand a construct consisting of theoretical knowledge of modern information and communication technologies and practical skills to create and use Web-based educational resources, Web 2.0 social networks and other ICT in the process of the development of students’ language and verbal skills in learning language and culture of the target country (Evstigneev, 2011; Sysoyev & Evstigneev, 2011).

2. Foreign Language Teachers’ ICT competency and competence

In recent years there are a number of studies in which scholars revealed the methodological potential of Internet educational resources and social services and online services of the new generation of Web 2.0 in the development of language skills and verbal abilities of students to develop their intercultural and foreign language communicative competences. Taking into account the results of these studies, foreign language teachers’ ICT competency includes the knowledge and ability to do the following:

- provide students with the basics of information security during Internet project implementation (Sysoyev, 2011);
- search and select Internet resources in a foreign language for academic purposes (Sysoyev and Evstigneev, 2010);
- evaluate information obtained from the Internet for teaching purposes (Sysoyev and Evstigneev, 2010);
- create five types of author’s educational Internet resources (in a foreign language and about L2 culture) (Hotlist, Multimedia Scrapbook, Subject Sampler, Treasure Hunt, WebQuest) and use them in the educational process (Sysoyev and Evstigneev, 2010);
• use the types of synchronous and asynchronous Internet communication in learning a foreign language and culture of the target language (e-mail, web forum, chat, ICQ, Skype, etc.);
• use Web 2.0 technologies in learning a foreign language and L2 culture (blogs, wikis, podcasts, bookmarks, etc.) (Sysoyev, 2012, 2013; Sysoyev, & Evstigneev, 2010);
• use concordances in the development of grammatical and lexical skills of speech (Sysoyev, 2010; Sysoyev, & Kokoreva, 2013);
• use reference and information resources of the Internet to develop verbal skills and the formation of socio-cultural and intercultural competences;
• use online tests to monitor students’ performance and self-control;
• organize interaction between the participants of the educational process by ICT (Sysoyev, 2013).

The specific use of these components of foreign language teacher's ICT competency lies in knowledge and ability to form certain language skills and develop students' verbal skills on the basis of a certain technology. In particular, the ability to use blogs in teaching can be a universal skill, which is a part of specialists’ ICT competency in various disciplines. However, the ability to develop specific writing skills based on a particular type of blogs is already a hallmark of foreign language teachers’ ICT competency.

It should be noted that ICT competency is not static, but a dynamic construct that is in constant progress under the influence of technical progress and the development of methods of foreign language teaching. Components of a foreign language teacher’s ICT competency proposed in this paper, with the development of ICT will inevitably undergo objective changes, and proceed to the next level of educational opportunities.

By the foreign language teacher’s ICT competence we mean the ability to use Web-based educational resources, Web 2.0 social networks and other information and communication technologies in order to create the language skills and to develop students’ verbal abilities in learning foreign language and culture.

Structurally, the foreign language teacher’s ICT competence includes the following five interrelated components: value-motivational, cognitive, operational, communicative and reflective components. The value-motivational component involves awareness of the importance and necessity of using ICT in teaching, taking the initiative in the use of ICT to achieve educational and professional goals, self-improvement in the use of new ICT while learning a foreign language. The cognitive component is characterized by the presence of certain knowledge of how to use a range of modern ICT in learning a foreign language and culture of the target language. The operational component is determined by the implementation of knowledge into practice in foreign language teaching. The communicative component involves the ability of the teacher to share their knowledge and skills, and to discuss with colleagues the experience of using ICT in foreign language teaching. The meaning of the reflective component is the ability of the teacher for self-awareness of his/her ICT use activities in the educational process for continuous improvement of innovative methods (Evstigneev, 2011, 2012).

The problem of measuring the ICT competence of a teacher is related to the question of defining criteria-attributes on which adequate assessment can be made in this type of ownership competence. In the academic literature, there are requirements for the allocation and justification of criteria: 1) the criteria should reflect the basic laws of identity formation and dynamics of ICT competence, and 2) using the criteria should be established between all the components of the system studied (ICT competence structure), 3) the criteria should be revealed through a collection of qualitative features - indicators with which to judge a greater or lesser degree of this criterion, and 4) the need for definitions of indicators and levels of their display, 5) the system must meet the criteria of sufficiency condition for correctly fixing qualitative certainty state ICT competence of the teacher (ICT competence levels).

The criteria and indicators of formation of foreign language teacher's ICT competence, based on the components of ICT competence, are presented in Table 1 (Evstigneev, 2011).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ICT component</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value-motivational</td>
<td>Teacher’s awareness of needs and interest and motivation formation to use ICT in their professional activities</td>
<td>Awareness of the importance of using ICT in foreign language teaching</td>
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<td>Activity in the use of ICT in foreign language teaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Theoretical knowledge of the use of ICT in foreign language teaching</td>
<td>Representations of modern ICT</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formation of theoretical knowledge of the use of ICT in foreign language teaching</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Operational</td>
<td>Ability to choose and use modern ICT in teaching</td>
<td>Use of modern ICTs to achieve professional goals</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Organization of foreign language teaching through ICT</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Creativity in solving professional activities through ICT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicative</td>
<td>Professional activity in receiving and disseminating among a teacher’s colleagues the existing knowledge and experience in the use of ICT in foreign language teaching</td>
<td>Study experience of colleagues in the use of ICT in foreign language teaching (self-education)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Participation in the discussion and dissemination of methodological building their own experience of foreign language teaching through ICT with colleagues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflexive</td>
<td>Evaluation and self-evaluation</td>
<td>Implementation teacher self-ownership methods of using ICT in foreign language teaching</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Implementation of teacher assessing the effectiveness of the methodology of foreign language teaching through ICT in a particular class</td>
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</table>

Due to the fact that competence is a tier category defining a specialist’s ownership of the relevant competency, including his/her personal attitude to it and an activity, a foreign language teacher’s ICT competence levels can be distinguished. It should be emphasized that in psychological and pedagogical literature according to the allocation of competence levels, researchers traditionally divide competence into three levels: low, medium and high. However, the division of possible qualitative characteristics of the personality into three groups, in many cases simply do not provide an adequate picture of competence formation. In particular, experts who have some skills refer to the lowest level of competence formation, along with those who do not have any knowledge in this area. Therefore, we can identify not three but five levels of a foreign language teacher’s ICT competence formation that clearly show the qualitative stage of the development of a foreign language teacher’s professional competence in the field of ICT.

In order to verify the effectiveness of the proposed components of the foreign language teacher’s ICT competence an experimental 72-hour continuing professional development course for in-service teachers was conducted. The experiment took place at Sholokhov Moscow State University for Humanities, Derzhavin Tambov State University and National Research Tomsk State University. Upon completion, the majority of teachers developed ICT competence levels of 4-5 on a five-point scale. The results indicate that the formation of a foreign language teacher’s ICT competence enables the following:

- to use well-known and widely-spread Internet technologies in practice, thereby improving students’ motivation to learn a foreign language;
- to show a significant amount of material studied in extracurricular form that seems relevant in reducing foreign language teaching hours;
- to put into teaching practice a technology of “cooperative learning”;
- to develop the students’ skills of independent learning through ICT activities, necessary for self-education throughout life;
- to teach students a foreign language on individual ICT-based trajectories, depending on their interests, needs and abilities.

3. Conclusion

In this paper we addressed the issue of foreign language teachers’ ICT competence development. We (a) stated the importance of the problem; (b) defined the terms “ICT competence” and “ICT competency” of foreign language teachers; (c) suggested components and content of ICT competency of foreign language teachers; (d) developed criteria, indicators, and levels of ICT competence of foreign language teachers.
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