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## CONTEMPORARY FOREIGN-LANGUAGE HIGHER EDUCATION: THE FORMATION OF PROFESSIONALLY-ORIENTED COMPETENCE

\*Muratova Zh.M.<sup>1</sup>, Parmanova A.B.<sup>2</sup>, Aitbay A.Zh.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>\*1,2,3</sup> KazUIRWL named after Ablai Khan, Almaty, Kazakhstan

**Abstract.** The article explores contemporary trends in foreign-language higher education with an emphasis on how professionally-oriented competence is formed. Mainly, the article considers the reasons for the shift to the competence-based approach in higher education, overviewing the tendencies which take place in contemporary competence formation. Different types of competence are considered parallelly, including communicative, sociocultural, search-research, basic etc. The aim of the research is to theoretically substantiate and practically develop a model to the formation of foreign-language professionally-oriented competence in higher education and classify the outcomes of competence formation in learners. Approaches to the formation of professionally-oriented competence are considered and reviewed. Based on that, a model of professionally-oriented competence formation process is synthesized. The model covers both the theoretical and practical component of the mentioned competence along with their methods, tools, and outcomes, and also the general results of developing this competence in learners. The methods of theoretical and critical analysis, synthesis, and modeling are utilized. The novelty of this research lies in the practical character of the proposed model. Hence, the research outcomes may be used in further analysis and in the educational process. The findings are also significant for advancing the theoretical framework of competence-based education and have practical implications for enhancing teaching strategies in Kazakhstan and beyond.

**Keywords:** foreign-language education, higher education, competence-based approach, professionally-oriented competence, intercultural communication, teaching technologies, innovation, didactics

### Introduction

The evolution of contemporary higher education is shaped by diverse factors and trends. Among these, the flourishing of the anthropocentric paradigm stands out as a major influence on the structure, methodology, and practices of higher education, particularly in foreign-language teaching. This paradigm emphasizes human cognition as central to knowledge systems, which fosters a *multidisciplinary* approach in education. Consequently, higher education has

become a multidimensional phenomenon that integrates diverse methods and competences.

Competences play a pivotal role in shaping the educational objectives for students, extending beyond mere skills to encompass a broad spectrum of capabilities essential for professional success. Professional-oriented competence, in particular, facilitates the practical application of specialized knowledge, enabling students to effectively address real-world challenges in their respective fields.

The anthropocentric paradigm, which emerged in the mid-20th century, shifted focus from abstract theories to the practical implications of human cognition. The rise of cognitivism and its integration with disciplines such as linguistics, psychology, and anthropology reinforced this shift. Cognitivism emphasizes that language reflects thought, necessitating teaching approaches that prioritize applicability over rote memorization. This paved the way for the competence-based approach in education.

Professional-oriented competence is integral to this framework, interacting with three other competences – *intercultural*, *basic*, and *identificatory* – to cultivate learners capable of addressing complex, interdisciplinary problems. These competences collectively promote the development of an individual mindset that adapts to dynamic professional environments.

In this article, we make an attempt to overview the existing approaches to this competence and through this create a model that covers its main characteristics and the ways of its application to the teaching process. To reach this aim, the article also delves into the reasons for the emergence of competence-based approach: mainly, the flourishing of anthropocentric paradigm and the requirements of a new, fully capitalistic world.

The world science stepped into the anthropocentric paradigm in the middle of the XX century, when such fields as anthropology, psychology, linguistics and culturology started to merge. The emergence of cognitivism marked the reconsideration of previously solid beliefs and scientific hypotheses, shifting the center of attention from abstract to real, from the world to a human being, from the reality to its representation in mind. The fact that humans and their worldview influence pretty much all the aspects of objective reality made this scientific paradigm truly remarkable in its sense of putting a human mind in the center of everything.

L. Peterson states that the main factor which marked the shift to a new paradigm was the introduction of the concept of *activity* as a part of the learning process [1]. Activity may be defined as a conscious attempt, an act of doing, the process which has a tangible result. These definitions contradict the initial idea of knowledge; if *knowing* is abstract, *doing* is concrete and solid. The notion of doing relates to the real world and sets a task that requires not only the knowledge as an idealized entity, but also a structured system of skills.

Another important factor which has been influencing the area of teaching

(specifically higher education sphere) is the emergence and development of cognitivism. Starting with a conference in 1951, cognitive science soon became one of the leading fields in the anthropocentric paradigm. Understanding the mechanism of thought and later linking it to the language made it impossible to stick to the outdated norms of teaching – in particular, teaching a language. According to cognitivists (and also cognitive linguists), language is the embodiment of thought, so its separation and abstraction are not the most successful ways of studying and teaching it.

With mechanical learning technologies gone, there came a need to supply the educational field with new approaches, methods, and techniques which would ensure both the memorization and application of the obtained knowledge. This is when the competence-based approach came into existence. The word “competence” itself, first used by R. White in 1959, initially referred to the extent to which employees were able to fulfill practical tasks. With the flourishing of market economy, it became obvious that measuring the intelligence of potential employees was merely a waste of time if they were unable to utilize their respective knowledge in real-life situations. Capitalism, which was on the rise in the XX century, was leaving no room for intelligence-based, slow-paced work style. Instead, candidates with a higher degree of competence, with practical orientation and the ability to solve case studies became the center of attention.

Competence-based approach was then introduced to all the stages of teaching and specifically to higher education. For Kazakhstan, the shift to such approach was marked by its gradual development, the collapse of the USSR, the emergence and enhancement of independent education styles, and eventually by its inclusion in the Bologna process. In the State Program of Education for 2020-2025 of the Republic of Kazakhstan, it is stated that the aim of developing the educational system is to increase the global competitiveness of Kazakhstani learners and employees along with enhancing the role of science in all the spheres of citizens’ activity. This aim is closely connected to the development of the competence-based approach.

### **Methods and materials**

The method of *theoretical and critical analysis* was utilized when reviewing the works related to the competence-based approach and to the formation of the professional-oriented competence. The method of *synthesis* was applied to constructing the schemes of implementing various educational technologies into the process of forming the mentioned competence. Eventually, the method of *modeling* was used to try and create a representation of how the educational process maintains the creation and sustenance of the competences. In particular, the created model covers the two basic components of the competence – theoretical and practical – along with their elements and the ways of implementing them.

## Results and discussion

Competence-based approach is centered around the notion of competence, which can be defined in a variety of ways. Initially, during the first years of its implementation, the notion of competence described a set of skills necessary to transform the abstract knowledge and apply it to some real-life situations [2]. Though vague, the definition was used extensively to refer to how employees are able to solve problems and fulfill tasks. Studying the work patterns was important for the capitalistic system – another vast field, intercultural communication, emerged in the same years as a tool for working in a diversified company and forming strategic business alliances with the enterprises of other cultures. At the same time, the preliminary description of competence lacked certain aspects such as the cognitive, the personal, and the identificatory components.

Further definitions of competence are based on linguistic, psychological, sociological, and educational approaches.

1. In *psychology*, I.A. Zimnyaya defines competence as an integrative personal quality that combines knowledge, skills, abilities, and the motivation necessary for effective interaction in specific contexts [3].

2. In *linguistics*, N. Chomsky introduced the term “linguistic competence” to describe an individual’s inherent knowledge of the grammar and structure of their native language, distinguishing it from “performance,” which involves the actual use of language in communication [4].

3. In *teaching*, according to A.V. Hutorskoy, competence in the educational context refers to the ability of an individual to effectively apply acquired knowledge, skills, and attitudes in solving specific problems or performing tasks in both professional and everyday life [5].

4. In *sociology*, T. Yu. Bazarov defines competence as the readiness and ability of a person to perform social roles effectively, demonstrating responsibility, flexibility, and adaptability within a societal context [6].

5. In *business management*, L.M. Spencer and S.M. Spencer in their work on competency models define competence as a combination of underlying characteristics of an individual – such as motives, traits, skills, and knowledge – that are causally related to effective or superior performance in a job or role [7].

6. In *education theory*, A.A. Verbitsky highlights competence as a dynamic and systemic ability to successfully perform professional tasks [8].

S.S. Kunanbayeva, on the other hand, views competence as “a complex of knowledge, abilities, skills, and flexible thinking” [9].

Overviewing the definitions provided above, we can note the following components of competence:

1. *Knowledge* – the abstract cumulation of information related to a certain field.

2. *Skills* – the traits necessary to complete a certain real-life task.

3. *Motivation* – the necessity which dictates fulfilling the task, both inner and outer kinds.

4. *Self-perception* – the way an individual views and estimates their own ability to operate in a certain scientific, technological, and professional field.

There have been numerous studies related to how competences are – and must be – formed in the educational field. Let us dwell on a few.

E. Klimkovich examines the role of professionally oriented foreign language competence in the education of IT specialists. The study highlights the importance of integrating foreign language skills into the professional preparation of students in technical universities, emphasizing that such competence is critical for effective professional communication in globalized and technologically advanced environments [10].

D.T. Adyrbekov, Zh.D. Duisenbekova and L.B. Abdulina address the critical issue of defining and understanding the concept of professional competence among foreign language teachers [11]. It explores how new educational standards and reforms demand enhanced professional skills from educators. The authors emphasize that professional competence is an essential indicator of teacher quality and readiness to solve both subject-specific and pedagogical challenges.

D.M. Dzhusubalieva and U. Adilzhanova explore methods for developing search-research competence in prospective foreign language teachers with the aid of digital technologies [12]. The theoretical part of the study highlights the importance of this competence as one of the core skills for teachers and its significance for professional growth. Search-research competence enables teachers to effectively locate, process, and apply information relevant to their field, especially in the digital era.

The practical component of the article presents the results of an experimental study conducted with second-year students at a language university. The experiment involved activities like internet-based research, online interviews, and collaborative projects, which were designed to develop digital literacy and research skills. The study revealed that digital tools and online platforms significantly enhanced students' abilities to gather and analyze information efficiently.

E.F. Gerfanova, D.B. Shayakhmetova, and Ye.M. Nemtchinova explore a framework for evaluating foreign language (FL) textbooks based on cognitive and linguocultural approaches [13]. This, in turn, is also the assessment of how these textbooks aid in forming the intercultural competence of learners.

The analysis framework includes:

- Assessing activities for promoting both lower-order (e.g., memorization) and higher-order (e.g., synthesis, evaluation) cognitive skills.
- Using visual-cognitive tools like diagrams and mind maps to foster understanding and creativity.
- Ensuring a balance between “surface” culture (e.g., clothes, food, traditions) and “deep” culture (e.g., values) in the content.
- Evaluating linguocultural elements through material-factual (e.g., artifacts), axiological (e.g., values), and speech-behavioral (e.g., norms) dimensions.

K.T. Zhaiykbay and T.A. Kulgildinova dwell on the development of a pragma-professional communicative competence system specifically tailored for IT students in foreign language education [14]. This competence integrates professional, functional, linguistic, and communicative skills necessary for effective professional interaction in IT fields.

The authors propose a methodology based on various principles, such as differentiated teaching and functional-situational conditioning, to create exercises aimed at enhancing professional communication skills in IT-related contexts. The exercises include types such as communicative-conceptual, analytical-predictive, situational-conditional, and situational-modeling.

It is believed that current Kazakhstani education system operates within the process of forming four essential competences of learners:

- 1) *Intercultural-communicative.*
- 2) *Professional-basic.*
- 3) *Professional-oriented.*
- 4) *Professional-identificatory.*

As S.S. Kunanbayeva believes, professional competence can be described as a combination of the following:

1. Mastery and the possession of skills and the life experience that helps perform tasks and solve problems.
2. The sophisticated individual resource which provides an opportunity to interact effectively within a group and face to face and in the scope of certain areas.
3. Motivation to perform high-quality work in the professional field, and valuing the profession.
4. Education level that suits the requirements and aids in solving certain cognitive problems and defines the personal position.
5. The degree to which a person is ready to perform in the given specialized field.
6. Personal psychological qualities which ensure mastery and self-confidence.
7. Professionalism – a complex category which unites the knowledge and skills necessary for working in the given field [15].

It is noted that the formation of professional competences is just as important as the formation of intercultural-communicative competence. While the latter ensures an individual's prosperity in the multicultural world, the former aids in creating a strategy of existing within the scope of market economy. After graduating, the future employee needs to demonstrate all the given competences in order to fit in the requirements of the market economy and the world which has gone through the fourth industrial revolution. As S.S. Kunanbayeva states, a better substitute of teaching is training – the notion which encompasses both the personal motivation and the outer influence aspects [15].



So, forming the professional-oriented competence takes place through certain steps and includes certain components. Generally speaking, those components may be broken down into the abstract and concrete – knowledge and skills, the opportunity and the ability, the theoretical and the practical. The theoretical aspect of forming the given competence encompasses the information provided for the students, ensuring the memorization and enhancement of that information, and various modes of working with specific, profession-related data. The practical aspect deals with the realization of the skills the students have acquired, and it involves working within the scope of the didactic basis which includes the following technologies: *project, creative-constructive, practical-analytical, and digital*.

Utilizing project technology in forming the mentioned competence is a successful way of achieving the selected goals within the limited period of time. A project itself is a task that is highly creative. Within the scope of KazUIRWL named after Ablai khan, the given technology is carried out using the following steps.

Stage 1. The themes of the projects are distributed, and the learners get the general idea of what they will be researching.

Stage 2. Identifying the problem, the object and subject, and defining the methods or the strategy of implementing the project.

Stage 3. Working with the theoretical data in order to get the methodological background of what the theme narrates about.

Stage 4. Working with the practical data, conducting empirical research, and corroborating the initial hypothesis.

Stage 5. Conclusions and presentations.

This preliminary scheme might omit specific steps required for projects in different fields, yet it describes the general idea of how a project work needs to be carried out in accordance with the competence-based approach. For instance, the students of the Bachelor degree might be asked to make a project work on the ecology of the country, which involves the realization of such skills as critical thinking, empirical research, induction, analytic thinking, generalization, abstraction, and synthesizing. At the same time, the learners of a Master's degree can be given a task which is slightly more complex – identifying the reasons behind “blending” languages in a multicultural community. Taking Kazakhstan as an example and following the proposed scheme, the postgraduate learners might present a project which helps them realize their skills of real-life problem solving, decision making, modeling, abstraction and generalization, synthesizing, deduction and induction, etc. Practical orientation of the given projects helps integrate the findings in the professional activity of the graduate and postgraduate learners.

Creative-constructive technology refers to developing the skills of synthesis and is aimed at creating certain methods, ways, strategies, and principles of solving a real-life problem. In the field of education, it encompasses the development of

such components as analytical thinking, practical and deliberative thinking, and the orientation to success. For instance, the following task, given to the students of the Bachelor degree, is quite thought-provoking and aids in forming the mentioned competence:

*Create a scheme of how the language changes relate to the cultural changes*

Taken from the field of linguoculturology, the task relates to the formation of intercultural-communicative competence as well, though its practical orientation is closer to the professional-oriented competence. Now, to fulfill the given task, the learners are likely to undergo the following work stages:

1. Collecting data.
2. Operating the data in such a way that it reflects the changes indicated in the topic.
3. Synthesizing different models of how language changes and cultural changes might influence each other.
4. Creating the given scheme.

Practical-analytical technology refers to solving real-life problems, using different styles of conflict management, the skills of team work, and other such interpersonal components of the professional competence. Case studies, conflict situations, and critical incidents are good examples of how this technology is being implemented in the university. For example, Master degree students are offered to solve the case of *how the methods of linguistic research might be used in Google database*.

To fulfill the given task, the learners need to approach the topic critically, judging it properly and offering the ways and strategies which might be used in this case. Thinking in a complex way and considering all the possibilities, taking into account the developmental strategies of the entire world are among the welcomed modes of solving the problem.

Eventually, within the scope of forming a learner's professional-oriented competence, digital technologies are utilized. While these do not necessarily involve problem-solving or decision-making, they sure help in considering the world as a whole and working with various types of media.

Digital technologies that help develop the professional-oriented competence might be roughly divided into two extended categories: the tools which help the teacher (various teaching sources, slide show generators, Grammarly and such, and database sets) and the tools which help the learner (mostly, AI-based tools). ChatGPT, for instance, is believed to fall into both the categories. Utilizing AI ethically is one of the most crucial aspects of today's education process. Including the digital component into the model of professionally-oriented paradigm align

The following model summarizes the above-mentioned data and provides an overview of how the professional-oriented competence is realized and developed within the scope of higher education.





Figure 1 – The model of professionally-oriented competence, synthesized on the basis of theoretical review

Let us dwell on some individual parts of this scheme. As it illustrates, we divided the general essence of the professional-oriented competence into two main components: theoretical and practical. For each component, we provided the essence, methods and tools, and outcomes. Other than that, the model also includes some intermediary processes which take place when it is being formed – immersive techniques (case studies and real life simulations such as the model UN project) and reflective practices (self-assessment) along with the enhanced outcomes.

Below are some close-up views of the individual components of the competence scheme.

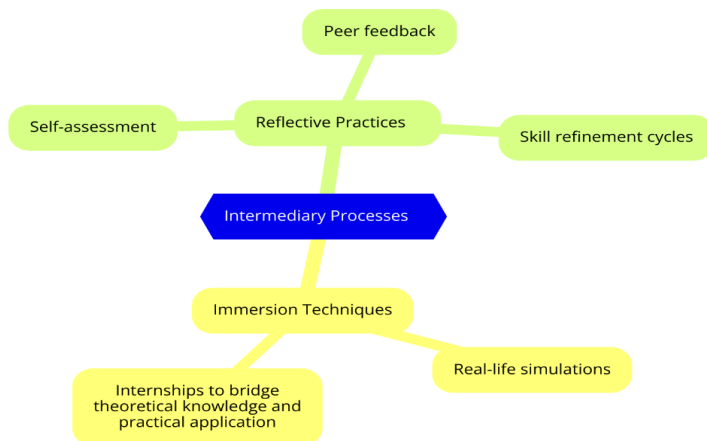


Figure 2 – Intermediary processes within the professionally-oriented competence formation process

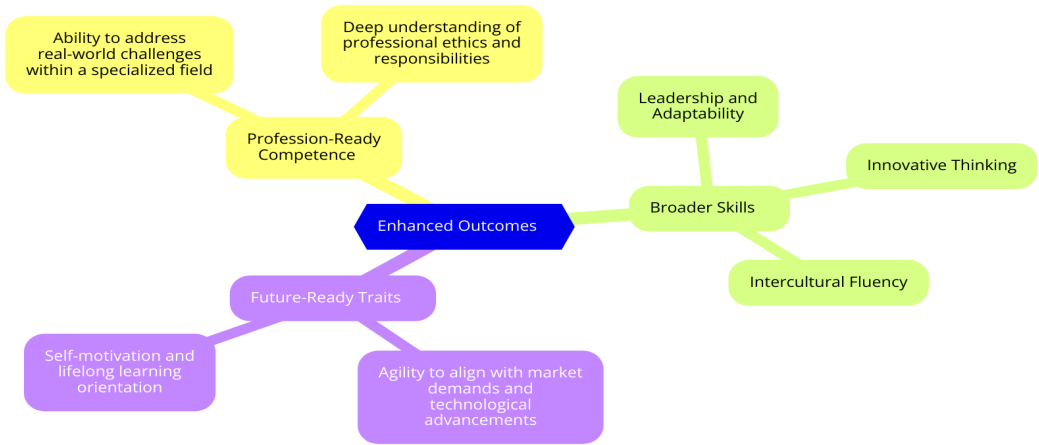


Figure 3 – The outcomes of professionally-oriented competence formation in learners

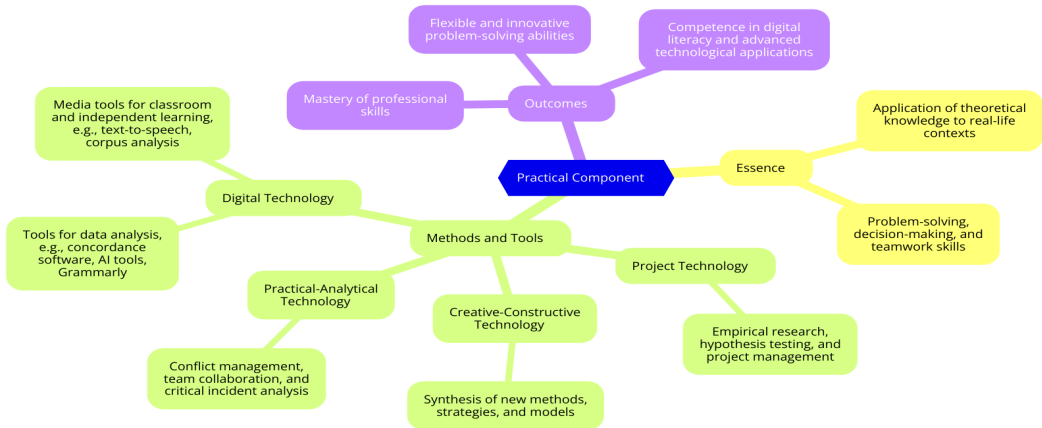


Figure 4 – The practical component

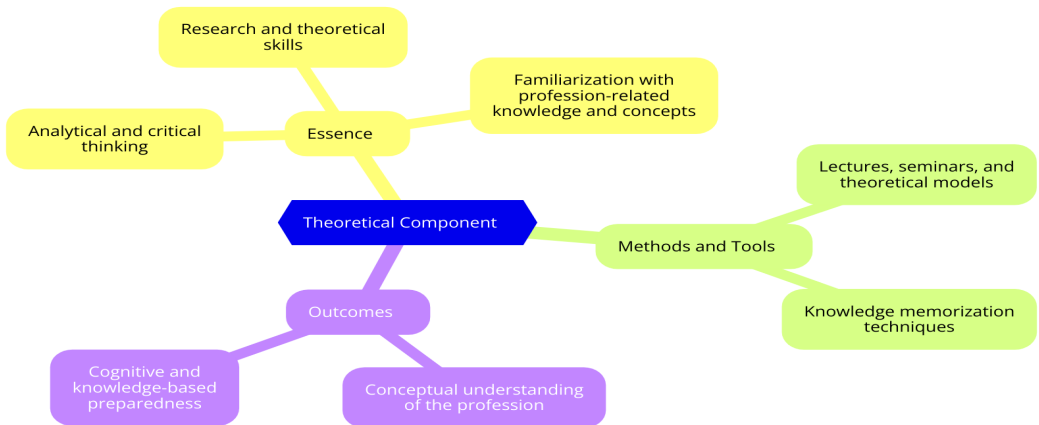


Figure 5 –The theoretical component

## Conclusion

The modern system of foreign language education is considered as a unity of organizational and technological characteristics aimed at achieving orderliness and consistency in the field of education with socio-economic conditions that reveal cause-and-effect relationships that determine the goals of most parameters of education management.

The modern system of foreign language education must anticipate the pace and strategy of the socio-economic state, correspond to the characteristics of national development and the needs of society, be flexible and open to innovation and the accelerated pace of development of the country.

Consequently, innovative dimensions in foreign language education, based on a competence-based approach and modern technologies, correspond to the general concept of the educational standard adopted in most developed countries. The direction of Kazakhstan's graduate and postgraduate foreign language education into the integrated global intercultural space is focused on the system of competences and the design of educational content and systems for monitoring its quality in terms of updating its content and methodology.

The theoretical part of professional-oriented competence is focused on familiarization with the methodology of branch science, research apparatus, and an updated system of concepts and categories.

The practical subject-technical part of the competence is focused on the content of the didactic basis and advanced teaching technologies, through the use of technologies such as design, creative-construction, practical-analytical and digital. In this way, an adequate level of professionally significant competencies is formed. The reflexive-corrective component includes technologies of self-assessment, self-development, self-management, and improvement of skills through a system of pragmatic and professional tasks. Modern information technologies and an integrated approach are implemented through the educational program of graduate and postgraduate education for the organization of classroom and independent work of students.

The relevance and features of the competence-based approach in foreign language education, regardless of specific ideas and interpretations, are associated with the Kazakhstani characteristics of intercultural communication, immersion in a special cultural and educational context, and entering the world stage of employment and learning. These factors require the implementation and development of the competence-based approach which guarantees the achievement of real-life goals and the preparation of a competitive, professional, capable generation which suits the requirements of the fourth industrial revolution.

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### ҚАЗІРГІ ЗАМАНҒЫ ШЕТ ТІЛДІ ЖОҒАРЫ БІЛІМ: КӘСІБИ- БАҒЫТТАЛҒАН ҚҰЗЫРЕТТІЛІКТІ ҚАЛЫПТАСТЫРУ

\*Муратова Ж.М.<sup>1</sup>, Парманова А.Б.<sup>2</sup>, Айтбай А.Ж.<sup>3</sup>

\*<sup>1,2,3</sup> Абылай хан атындағы ҚазХҚжӘТУ, Алматы, Қазақстан

**Андатпа.** Мақалада шетел тілдері бойынша жоғары білім беру саласындағы заманауи үрдістер кәсіби бағытталған құзыреттілікті қалыптастыруға баса назар аудара отырып қарастырылады. Негізінен, мақалада жоғары білім беруде құзыреттілікке негізделген тәсілге көшу себептері қарастырылады және қазіргі құзыреттілікті қалыптастыру үдерісіндегі үрдістерге шолу жасалады. Құзыреттіліктің әртүрлі түрлері, соның ішінде коммуникативтік, әлеуметтік-мәдени, іздену-зерттеу, базалық және т.б. қатар зерттеледі. Зерттеудің мақсаты жоғары білім беру саласында шет тілді кәсіби-бағдарланған құзыреттілікті қалыптастыру моделін теориялық негіздеу және практикалық әзірлеу және білім алушыларда құзыреттілікті қалыптастыру нәтижелерін жіктеу болып табылады. Мақалада кәсіби-бағдарланған құзыреттілікті қалыптастыру тәсілдері зерттеледі және талданады. Осы негізде кәсіби бағытталған құзыреттілікті қалыптастыру үдерісінің моделі синтезделеді. Бұл модель аталған құзыреттіліктің теориялық және практикалық компоненттерін, олардың әдістері мен құралдарын, сондай-ақ нәтиже мен осы құзыреттілікті оқушыларда дамытудағы жалпы жетістіктерді қамтиды. Зерттеуде теориялық және сыни талдау, синтез және модельдеу әдістері қолданылады. Зерттеудің жаңашылдығы ұсынылған модельдің практикалық сипатында. Осылайша, зерттеу нәтижелері әрі қарай талдауға және білім беру үдерісінде пайдалануға жарамды. Сондай-ақ зерттеу қорытындылары құзыреттілікке негізделген білім берудің теориялық базасын тереңдету үшін маңызды және Қазақстан мен одан тыс жерлерде оқыту әдістемесін жетілдіруге практикалық пайдасын тигізеді.

**Тірек сөздер:** шет тілді білім, жоғары білім, құзыреттілік, кәсіби-бағытталған құзыреттілік, мәдениетаралық-коммуникативті құзыреттілік, білім беру технологиясы, инновативті қатысым, дидактикалық базис

## СОВРЕМЕННОЕ ИНОЯЗЫЧНОЕ ВЫСШЕЕ ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ: ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНО-ОРИЕНТИРОВАННОЙ КОМПЕТЕНЦИИ

\*Муратова Ж.М.<sup>1</sup>, Парманова А.Б.<sup>2</sup>, Айтбай А.Ж.<sup>3</sup>

\*<sup>1,2,3</sup>КазУМОиМЯ имени Абылай хана, Алматы, Казахстан

**Аннотация.** В статье исследуются современные тенденции в области высшего образования по иностранным языкам с акцентом на формирование профессионально-ориентированной компетенции. Основное внимание уделяется причинам перехода к компетентностному подходу в высшем образовании, а также обзору тенденций, связанных с процессом формирования компетенций в современных условиях. Сравнительно рассматриваются различные виды компетенций, включая коммуникативную, социокультурную, поисково-исследовательскую, базовую и другие. Целью исследования является теоретическое обоснование и практическая разработка модели формирования иноязычной профессионально-ориентированной компетенции в области высшего образования и классификация результатов формирования компетенции у обучающихся. В статье изучаются и анализируются подходы к формированию профессионально-ориентированной компетенции. На основе проведенного анализа синтезируется модель процесса формирования профессионально-ориентированной компетенции. Эта модель охватывает как теоретический, так и практический компонент упомянутой компетенции, а также включает методы, инструменты и результаты, связанные с её развитием, и общие итоги формирования данной компетенции у обучающихся. Применяются методы теоретического и критического анализа, синтеза и моделирования. Новизна исследования заключается в практическом характере предложенной модели. Таким образом, результаты исследования могут быть использованы как в дальнейшем анализе, так и в образовательном процессе. Выводы исследования также имеют значение для углубления теоретической базы компетентностного образования и обладают практической ценностью для совершенствования методик преподавания в Казахстане и за его пределами.

**Ключевые слова:** иноязычное образование, высшее образование, компетенция, профессионально-ориентированная компетенция, межкультурно-коммуникативная компетенция, технология преподавания, инновационный подход, дидактический базис

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***Information about the authors:***

Muratova Zhanerke Muratkyzy – MA, senior teacher, KazUIRWL named after Ablai Khan, Almaty, Kazakhstan, e-mail: muratova.zhanerke.94@mail.ru

Parmanova Aizhan Bakhtiyarkyzy – MA, teacher, KazUIRWL named after Ablai Khan, Almaty, Kazakhstan, e-mail: aizhan\_0520@mail.ru

Aitbay Akbota Zhaksylykkyzy – MA, teacher, KazUIRWL named after Ablai Khan, Almaty, Kazakhstan, e-mail: a.aitbay@mail.ru

***Авторлар туралы мәлімет:***

Муратова Жанерке Муратқызы – педагогика ғылымдарының магистрі, аға оқытушы, Абылай хан атындағы ҚазХҚжӘТУ, Алматы, Қазақстан, e-mail: muratova.zhanerke.94@mail.ru

Парманова Айжан Бахтиярқызы – педагогика ғылымдарының магистрі, оқытушы, Абылай хан атындағы ҚазХҚжӘТУ, Алматы, Қазақстан, e-mail: aizhan\_0520@mail.ru

Айтбай Ақбота Жақсылыққызы – педагогика ғылымдарының магистрі, оқытушы, Абылай хан атындағы ҚазХҚжӘТУ, Алматы, Қазақстан, e-mail: a.aitbay@mail.ru

***Информация об авторах:***

Муратова Жанерке Муратовна – магистр педагогических наук, старший преподаватель, КазУМОиМЯ имени Абылай хана, Алматы, Казахстан, e-mail: muratova.zhanerke.94@mail.ru

Парманова Айжан Бахтияровна – магистр педагогических наук, преподаватель, КазУМОиМЯ имени Абылай хана, Алматы, Казахстан, e-mail: aizhan\_0520@mail.ru

Айтбай Ақбота Жаксылыккызы – магистр педагогических наук, преподаватель, КазУМОиМЯ имени Абылай хана, Алматы, Казахстан, e-mail: a.aitbay@mail.ru