

COMPETENCIES IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: The article discusses the role of communicative language teaching, student-centered learning, technology integration, and reflective teaching practices in improving educational quality. It also explains various forms of professional development, including workshops, online courses, peer observation, conferences, and self-study. Furthermore, the paper identifies challenges faced by teachers in professional growth, such as lack of time, limited resources, and resistance to change.

Keywords: foreign language teaching, teacher competencies, professional development, communicative competence, pedagogical competence, digital competence, language education.

Introduction

In the modern world, foreign language education has become one of the most important components of the educational process. Globalization, technological development, international cooperation, and intercultural communication have increased the demand for effective foreign language teaching. As a result, teachers are expected not only to possess strong language knowledge but also to demonstrate a wide range of professional competencies that help learners develop communication skills, critical thinking, and cultural awareness.

Due to globalization, technological advancement, and intercultural interaction, the role of foreign language teachers has significantly expanded. A teacher is no longer only a transmitter of knowledge but also a facilitator, mentor, motivator, and organizer of the learning process. Therefore, the issue of developing professional competencies in foreign language teaching has gained particular importance.

Teacher competencies refer to the combination of knowledge, practical skills, personal qualities, and professional attitudes necessary for effective teaching. In foreign language education, these competencies include linguistic competence, methodological competence, communicative competence, intercultural awareness, classroom management skills, assessment literacy, and digital competence. Possessing these competencies enables teachers to create an engaging learning environment and meet the diverse needs of students. Along with competencies, teacher professional development plays a crucial role in maintaining and improving teaching quality. Professional development is a continuous process through which teachers update their pedagogical knowledge, master innovative teaching methods, integrate educational technologies, and reflect on their own

practice. Workshops, seminars, action research, peer observation, and self-directed learning are among the common forms of professional growth. The relevance of this topic is determined by the growing demands placed on foreign language teachers in the 21st century. Educational institutions expect teachers to be flexible, creative, technologically literate, and capable of adapting to constantly changing educational standards. Thus, investigating teacher competencies and professional development contributes to improving the effectiveness of foreign language education.

1. Competencies in Teaching Foreign Languages

Linguistic Competence

Linguistic competence is one of the most fundamental competencies required in foreign language teaching. It refers to a teacher's knowledge and mastery of the language system, including grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling, sentence structure, and language usage. Since foreign language teachers act as linguistic models for learners, they must demonstrate a high level of language accuracy and fluency in both spoken and written communication. A teacher with strong linguistic competence can explain language rules clearly, answer students' questions confidently, and provide meaningful examples during lessons. Such teachers help learners develop correct language habits and avoid common mistakes. In addition, linguistic competence allows teachers to adapt their language according to students' proficiency levels and classroom situations. Foreign language teachers should continuously improve the following aspects of linguistic competence:

Grammar Knowledge: Teachers must understand grammatical structures deeply in order to explain them effectively. They should know how grammar functions in real communication rather than teaching rules in isolation. For example, teachers should be able to explain the differences between tenses, modal verbs, passive voice, conditionals, and other complex grammatical structures using practical examples.

Vocabulary Mastery: Vocabulary is essential for communication. Teachers should possess a wide range of vocabulary and know how words are used in different contexts. They must also teach pronunciation, collocations, synonyms, antonyms, idioms, and phrasal verbs to help students communicate naturally.

Pronunciation and Phonetics: Correct pronunciation is important for effective communication. Teachers should be familiar with phonetic symbols, stress patterns, intonation, rhythm, and connected speech. Good pronunciation models help students improve listening comprehension and speaking skills.

Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing Skills

Foreign language teachers should demonstrate strong proficiency in all four language skills. They should be able to communicate fluently, understand authentic materials, read academic texts, and write clearly and accurately.

Language Use in Context

Linguistic competence also includes the ability to use language appropriately in different social and professional situations. Teachers should understand formal and informal language, academic language, and conversational expressions. Continuous practice and exposure to authentic

language materials are necessary for maintaining linguistic competence. Teachers can improve their language proficiency by reading books and articles, watching educational videos, participating in language courses, communicating with native speakers, and using digital learning resources. Without strong linguistic competence, teachers may struggle to explain language concepts effectively, correct student errors accurately, or maintain students' confidence in the learning process. Therefore, linguistic competence forms the foundation of successful foreign language teaching.

II. Communicative Competence

Communicative competence is the ability to use language effectively and appropriately in real-life situations. In modern foreign language teaching, communication is considered the central goal of language learning. Students are expected not only to know grammatical rules and vocabulary but also to use the language confidently for interaction, discussion, problem-solving, and expressing ideas. The concept of communicative competence became highly influential with the development of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). According to this approach, successful language learning occurs when learners actively use the language in meaningful situations. Therefore, foreign language teachers must create opportunities for authentic communication inside and outside the classroom. Communicative competence includes several important components: Grammatical competence refers to knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence formation. It enables learners to produce correct and understandable sentences.

Sociolinguistic competence involves understanding how language changes according to social situations, relationships, culture, and context. Learners should know how to speak formally with teachers or employers and informally with friends or classmates.

Discourse competence is the ability to organize ideas coherently in spoken and written communication. Students should learn how to connect sentences logically, maintain conversations, and structure paragraphs effectively.

Strategic competence refers to the ability to overcome communication difficulties using different strategies. For example, learners may use gestures, synonyms, paraphrasing, or clarification questions when they do not know certain vocabulary.

Foreign language teachers play an essential role in developing students' communicative competence. They should create classroom environments where learners feel comfortable speaking and interacting without fear of making mistakes. Authentic materials are also important for communicative teaching. Teachers can use videos, podcasts, songs, newspapers, social media content, and dialogues from real-life situations. These materials expose students to natural language use and improve listening and speaking abilities. Another important aspect of communicative competence is fluency development. Teachers should encourage students to express ideas freely even if they make minor grammatical mistakes. Excessive correction during communication may reduce learners' confidence and motivation.

In addition, communicative competence promotes critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity. Students learn not only the language itself but also how to negotiate meaning, share opinions, solve problems, and interact with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Modern technology has also enhanced communicative language teaching. Online discussions, virtual exchanges, language learning applications, and video conferencing tools provide students with opportunities to communicate with native speakers and international learners. Overall, communicative competence is one of the most important goals of foreign language education. Teachers who successfully develop students' communicative abilities help them become confident language users capable of functioning effectively in academic, professional, and social contexts.

3 Pedagogical Competence

Pedagogical competence involves the ability to organize and manage the teaching-learning process effectively. Teachers should know how to plan lessons, select suitable teaching methods, assess student performance, and maintain classroom discipline.

4 Intercultural Competence

Language and culture are closely connected. Foreign language teaching is not limited to grammar and vocabulary; it also involves understanding cultural values, traditions, behaviors, and communication styles.

5 Digital Competence

Technology has transformed the field of education. Today's foreign language teachers are expected to integrate digital tools and online resources into the learning process.

6 Assessment Competence

Assessment competence refers to the ability to evaluate students' progress and provide constructive feedback.

7 Psychological and Emotional Competence

Teaching is not only an academic activity but also a social and emotional process. Teachers interact with students who have different personalities, learning styles, motivations, and emotional needs.

III. Teacher Professional Development

Teacher professional development refers to the continuous process of improving teachers' knowledge, skills, and teaching practices throughout their careers.

Forms of Professional Development

- Workshops and seminars
- Conferences
- Online courses and webinars
- Peer observation
- Self-study and research
- Professional learning communities

Reflective Teaching Practice Reflective practice is an essential element of professional development. Reflective teachers analyze their own teaching methods, identify strengths and weaknesses, and make improvements.

The Role of Technology in Professional Development Technology has expanded opportunities for teacher learning and collaboration.

Challenges in Professional Development. Some challenges include lack of time, limited financial resources, resistance to change, and insufficient institutional support.

The Relationship Between Competence and Professional Development

Teacher competencies and professional development are closely interconnected. Professional development helps teachers improve existing competencies and acquire new ones.

Modern Trends in Foreign Language Teaching

- Student-centered learning
- Communicative Language Teaching
- Task-Based Learning
- Blended Learning
- Inclusive Education

Conclusion

Competencies in teaching foreign languages play a vital role in ensuring effective language education. Modern foreign language teachers must possess linguistic, communicative, pedagogical, intercultural, digital, assessment, and psychological competencies. At the same time, teacher professional development is essential for maintaining and improving teaching quality.

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