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Evaluation of the Sociocultural Competence on the Basis of the Platform Moodle According to the Competency-based Approach

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Abstract

The choice of criteria and methods of evaluation of the sociocultural competence is determined by the principles of the competency-based approach and the structure of this competence. In our opinion, it is not enough to use only sociocultural questionnaire. In addition to the cognitive criterion it is necessary to take into consideration motivational, behavioral, functional and technological criteria. We believe that the major tools of evaluation are the psychological tests and the method of the case-study. To evaluate the general level of the sociocultural competence it is indispensable to apply all the aforementioned criteria. It can be done via the platform Moodle.

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1. Introduction

The modern theory of language teaching is characterized by the transition from knowledge-based approach to the competency-based approach and development of e-learning. It results in the fact that the perception of the sociocultural competence is changing. Traditionally, the linguistic-cultural test is used to evaluate the level of the sociocultural competence. But it cannot provide the comprehensive evaluation the sociocultural competence due to complex structure of the latter that is not limited to the linguistic-cultural competence.

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It is necessary to define criteria to evaluate the level of the sociocultural competence on the basis of its structure, characteristics of the competence in general. It is essential to take into consideration the motivation and the values, the principles of the competency-based approach and the resources of the virtual learning environment.

First of all, we consider that it is necessary to understand the difference between the concepts of competence, competency and knowledge in Russian theory of teaching. This question is very important for our study because the choice of the knowledge-based or competency-based approach will determine the evaluation criteria and methods. According to the competency-based approach, the axiological aspects, values and personal experience of a student are considered to be the priority. According to this approach, the knowledge is not impersonal information memorized by the student. It is an inherent part of his/her personal experience, obtained in the course of learning activities. Competency and competence can be formed only in the course of activity. The main opposition between the competence and competency in Russian tradition could be compared with opposition between the language and discourse of F. de Saussure. In other words, competency is actualized competence.

I. A. Zimnyaya treats the competences in terms of the results of education. She defines the competence as an integral social, individual and behavioral phenomenon that includes motivation, values and cognitive component (Zimnyaya, 2006). I. A. Zimnyaya notes that this concept is too large. Her main objective was to define the concept and to determine the key competences and the volume of their components. According to I.A. Zimnyaya, the actualization of the competences attributes to them the following characteristics: a) willingness to actualize this competence (motivational aspect); b) command of the components of the competence (cognitive aspect); c) experience of actualization of the competence in various conventional and unconventional situations (behavioral aspect); d) attitude to the content of the competence (aspect of value and sense); e) emotional and volitional regulation of the process and results of the actualization of the competence. All these characteristics are important to design the evaluation criteria applicable to the sociocultural competence.

In the methodology of teaching foreign languages, the sociocultural competence is defined as the command of the national and cultural identity of the target-country and the ability to construct verbal and nonverbal behavior according to its peculiarities (Gal'skova, 2008). Sociocultural competence coincides with the second group of competences proposed by I. A. Zimnyaya. This group includes competences related to the social interaction and to the social sphere. It comprises the following competences:

- competences of social interaction with the society, community, friends, partners; conflicts and ways of their elimination; collaboration; tolerance, respect and acceptance of others (in terms of race, nationality, religion, status, role, gender); social mobility;
- communicative competences: speaking, writing; dialogue, monologue; text generation and perception; awareness and respect of traditions, rites; etiquette; cross-cultural communication; business correspondence; business language; communication in foreign languages, communicative tasks, impact on the recipient (Zimnyaya, 2008).

2. Formation of sociocultural competence on the basis of competency-based approach

2.1. Research objective.

The objective of this study is to define criteria and methods of evaluation of the level of sociocultural competence applicable in the virtual learning environment Moodle.

2.2. Methodology

In this study we used the method of comparative analysis, along with the observation and analysis of our teaching experience in the virtual learning environment Moodle.

2.3. Competency-based approach and criteria of sociocultural competence

We should underline that the choice of criteria of evaluation of the sociocultural competence is determined by the structure of this competence. In the previous paper, we studied different models of the sociocultural competence and

we revealed that the structure of this competence vary in works of different scientists and it is multi-aspect (Degil, Régnier, 2014). So, criteria will vary also in works of different scientists.

Some scientists choose criteria that are related to the characteristics proposed by I. A. Zimnyaya. Thus, S. V. Pakhotina determines the level of the sociocultural competence according to motivational, cognitive, functional and behavioral criteria (Pakhotina, 2014). Three criteria correspond to the components of the sociocultural competence according to its structure: cognitive, functional and behavioral components. As for the choice of the motivational criteria, S. V. Pakhotina explains that it is necessary to take into consideration the motivation of students because the motivation is essential characteristic of the activity. The scientist uses the questionnaire of I. V. Soykina in order to determine the motivation and values of students. The sociocultural questionnaire is used to evaluate the sociocultural knowledge. The observation and the method of expert judgements are used to evaluate the ability to choose the proper line of verbal and nonverbal behavior and ability to employ the communicative strategy appropriate for the target culture. Psychological tests are used to evaluate the level of empathy, flexibility, lack of rigidity in judgements.

This point of view on the formation of the sociocultural competence is similar to the principles of the competency-based approach because the criterion of motivation is equally significant to the cognitive criterion. But there appears the question of the applicability of the sociocultural questionnaire for evaluation of the sociocultural knowledge. One of the characteristics of the competency-based approach is an unconventional attitude to the construction of knowledge. The knowledge is not memorized information. It has personalized meaning for the student. The use of the sociocultural questionnaire begs the questions: who will determine the volume and the content of the sociocultural knowledge? how to choose the proper lexical units? In the case of the questionnaire proposed by S. V. Pakhotina, it seems to be constructed on the basis of the knowledge-based approach.

In the works of other scientists the sociocultural competence is represented differently. Thus, N. M. Belyakova studies the issue of formation of the sociocultural competence on the Internet. She suggests to distinguish between 4 components in the structure of this competence (Belyakova, 2008), such as: linguistic component (command of language and discourse material), social component (mastery of sociocultural knowledge and skills), psychological component (adequate interpretation of the manifestations of foreign culture), technological component (ability to communicate with the use of the information technologies, in particular the Internet).

Starting from the structure of the sociocultural competence, N. M. Belyakova proposes the following requirements to the level of this competence:

- 1) linguistic competence – knowledge of standards of language behavior in multicultural and intercultural interactions; ability to practice sociocultural scripts using the adequate lexical units;
- 2) linguistic-cultural competence – knowledge of culturally relevant information and of lexical units and grammatical structures; background knowledge of vocabulary and culture-specific vocabulary; ability to choose culturally significant lexical units according to the content of statement both in the target and in native language; ability to recognize culturally significant language units;
- 3) socio-linguistic competence – knowledge of types of sociocultural lacunas; knowledge of the stereotypes of verbal behavior in different communities of the target country; ability to reveal the sociolinguistic component in language units;
- 4) generic-cultural competence – awareness of the universal values; ability to understand the attitude to the universal values in different national communities;
- 5) cultural competence – awareness of the ethnic, national and cultural identity of the native speakers of the target-culture;
- 6) psychological competence – knowledge of the stereotypes of verbal and nonverbal behavior of native speakers in the target culture; ability to use the appropriate tactics of behavior depending on the stereotypes of communication; ability to be tolerant to the manifestations of foreign culture (lack of stereotypes in the interpretation of the cultural facts);
- 7) technological competence – a) knowledge necessary to work on the Internet: of the software used on the Internet, search engines and catalogues, forms of Internet communication such as e-mail, chats, asynchronous communication, synchronous communication, virtual worlds, websites and webpages; b) abilities necessary to

work on the Internet: abilities to search information for studies (to use software and different forms of Internet communication, to use search engines and catalogues, to find necessary information, to save information and to use it for study); comparative abilities (to interpret information critically, to compare culturally significant information of foreign country to the native one); evaluative abilities (evaluate virtual resource).

The analysis of the structure of the sociocultural competence proposed by N. M. Belyakova shows that the content of all the components of this competence is formulated as “knowledge” or “ability”. In other words, the cognitive criterion dominates. However, the important contribution of this approach consists in detailed description of the components of the sociocultural competence that provides guidelines for selecting the didactical content (not only lexical units and grammatical structures, culture-specific vocabulary but also background vocabulary, culturally significant lexical units, knowledge of stereotypes of verbal and nonverbal behavior of native speakers, etc.).

In order to determine criteria and methods of evaluation of the sociocultural competence in Moodle we have made an attempt to compare criteria proposed by I. A. Zimnyaya, S. V. Pakhotina and N. M. Belyakova. All these criteria could be represented in Table.

Table 1. Comparative analysis of the criteria defined by various scientists

I. A. Zimnyaya (competence in general)	S. V. Pakhotina (sociocultural competence)	N. M. Belyakova (sociocultural competence in Internet)
Motivational aspect	Motivational criterion	
Cognitive aspect	Cognitive criterion	Cognitive criterion
	Functional criterion	Psychological criterion and Sociolinguistic criterion
Behavioral aspect	Behavioral criterion	Psychological criterion
Values and meanings		
Emotional and volitional		Technological criterion

We can see in this table that the criteria proposed by the scientists partially coincide. We will proceed to the detailed analysis of the content of these criteria. The cognitive criterion is represented in papers of all these scientists. However, it is more detailed and specified in the study of N. M. Belyakova that in the paper of S. V. Pakhotina. In order to evaluate the level of the sociocultural competence S. V. Pakhotina proposes the sociocultural questionnaire that evaluates: a) knowledge of sociocultural specifics and realities of the target culture (linguistic-cultural competence in the classification of N. M. Belyakova), b) standards and rules of interpersonal interactions; national mentality; beliefs, judgments, customs and traditions (cultural and generic-cultural competence in the classification of N. M. Belyakova), c) models of language behavior (sociolinguistic competence in the classification of N. M. Belyakova), d) behavior, communicative strategies and tactics (psychological competence).

As for the motivational criterion, N.M. Belyakova did not study it, but I. A. Zimnyaya and S. V. Pakhotina considered it to be very important. I.A. Zimnyaya treats this criterion as willingness to actualize the competence. It is due to the motivation that the knowledge acquires personal value. Due to the motivation students assimilate knowledge that becomes a part of their personal experience. We believe that it is crucial to use the motivational criterion for the evaluation of the level of the sociocultural competence. We consider that it is necessary to design the psychological questionnaire (like questionnaire used by S. V. Pakhotina) in order to determine the motivation and values of the students.

The behavioral criterion is represented in the works of I. A. Zimnyaya and S. V. Pakhotina. I. A. Zimnyaya determines this criterion as the experience of actualization of the competence in various conventional and unconventional situations. S. V. Pakhotina gives more specific definition with regard to the sociocultural competence. In her opinion, this criterion reflects the level of empathy, flexibility and lack of rigidity in judgements. We would like to emphasize that exactly this criterion is very important for the formation of the sociocultural competence within the framework of the dialogue of cultures. We can find this criterion in the study of N. M. Belyakova when she writes about the psychological competence. One of the components of the psychological competence is the ability to be tolerant to the manifestations of other cultures. But “empathy” is larger than “tolerance”. In addition, in language teaching theory in Russia, psychological tests and questionnaires are not used largely, in particular the tests aimed at determination of the level of the empathy and flexibility in judgements. For example, Eysenck Personality Inventory or tests proposed by E. I. Rogov). We believe that it is reasonable to adapt these psychological practices and to use these tests for evaluation of the level of the sociocultural competence. In our opinion, the behavioral criterion and the cognitive one are equally important.

Concerning the functional criterion, it could be assumed that it is detailed in the paper of S. V. Pakhotina and partially coincides with the psychological criterion (communicative tactics and strategies), partially with the sociolinguistic criterion (different registers of communication) proposed by N. M. Belyakova. N. M. Belyakova proposes to evaluate the ability to choose the adequate tactics of behavior depending on the stereotypes of communication. S. V. Pakhotina suggests a number of abilities in addition to the aforementioned ones, such as: ability to search and to select sociocultural information, to recognize cultural-specific and linguistic-cultural information, to analyze and to compare facts about the native culture and the target culture, to comment on their similarities and differences, to define one’s line of behavior in different conditions and situations of communication. In other words, this criterion is applied to evaluate the abilities to operate the knowledge and to behave in different situations of communication. S. V. Pakhotina proposes to use the methods of observation and of expert judgements. In the case of e-learning in the virtual learning environment, we think that it is better to use the method of case-study. It will consist in studying and discussion of different communicative situations of everyday life, such as in café, in shop, at university, etc.

As for the technological criteria, in our opinion, it is well presented in the study of N. M. Belyakova. We will definitely use this criterion to evaluate the level of the sociocultural competence in the virtual learning environment Moodle.

3. The results of comparative analysis and their discussion

Thus, we analyzed the criteria for the evaluation of the level of the sociocultural competence, developed by Pakhotina, Belyakova and Zimnyaya. On the basis of this analysis we have selected the criteria that could be applied in the virtual learning environment Moodle and proposed a set of methods of evaluation. The criteria and the methods of their evaluation are outlined in the Table 2:

Table 2. Evaluation criteria and methods of evaluation

Evaluation criteria of the sociocultural competence in the virtual learning environment Moodle	Methods of evaluation
Cognitive criterion	Sociocultural questionnaire
Motivational criterion	Psychological questionnaire (motivation, values)
Behavioral criterion	Questionnaires (empathy, flexibility, non-categoricity)
Functional criterion	Method of case study
Technological criterion	Auto-evaluation, tests

It should be noted that we use the motivational and behavioral criteria in the same meaning as S. V. Pakhotina. To evaluate the level of technological abilities, we propose to use the tests along with the students' self-evaluation. The students' self-evaluation is to determine their abilities to search, to compare, to evaluate information on the Internet and in the virtual learning environment Moodle.

As for cognitive criterion, we think that in the design of the sociocultural questionnaire it is very important to take into consideration the complex structure of the sociocultural competence and to combine the competency-based approach and knowledge-based approach. According to L. V. Mikhaleva and E. M. Kuznetsova who cited E. A. Yamburg, it is necessary to harmonize these approaches (Mikhaleva, Kuznetsova, 2012). It is essential to propose new methods of formation of the sociocultural competence in the virtual learning environment Moodle that differ from the methods used within the knowledge-based approach. It should be based on the principles of the competency-based approach harmonized with the knowledge-based approach.

In the framework of the traditional organization of educational process in classroom the competency-based approach can be realized by using the active methods, for example, the project method (Minakova, 2013). The e-learning and in particular the platform Moodle offers to students a wider range of possibilities to construct their knowledge according to the principles of the competency-based approach. It should be noted that, in our opinion, it could be achieved in case the students have a sufficient level of language competence, starting from the level B1 (according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). At the initial stages of learning language, the knowledge-based approach dominates but does not exclude the competency-based approach. Generally, 3-year students have the level of language competence B1-B2. They have already assimilated some aspects of the sociocultural knowledge. So the role of the knowledge-based approach could be reduced.

The virtual learning environment Moodle dispose of activities like Wiki and Glossary. Using these activities students can build their sociocultural knowledge themselves. They can search for culturally significant lexical units, units related to the background knowledge, cultural-specific vocabulary, select lexical units, describe or/and depict them, add pictures and videos. The activities Chat and Forum allow to organize interactive session. It is the way to learn to respect each other, not to be rigid, to be flexible, to respect the opinion of the others. The aim of the teacher is to organize this constructive communication. Language teaching theory accumulated a rich experience of organization of debates and discussions that could be used in Moodle.

In our opinion such an approach allows not only transmit knowledge as it was in the traditional methods but also it could help students to understand better the peculiarities of the intercultural communication, to identify the culturally-significant units, sociocultural specific traits of the target country, to eliminate stereotypes, etc. It encourages students to learn to define the sociocultural components in lexical and language units. It stimulates the sensibility to the speakers of the target-language.

Moreover, there is the issue of the relations between different components of the sociocultural competence and the level of the competence in general. In fact, student can speak very fluently target-language but have very intolerant point of view and rigid judgements on the target country. Could we say that his/her level of the sociocultural competence is high? Another case is possible: student is very strong in the informative technology of communication but he has some psychological barrier in communication. Or, for example, a student knows well the cultural peculiarities of the target country because he watches a lot of films, visited many times the country, but he does not speak the target-language. Does this student have a high level of the sociocultural competence in general? In our opinion, the answer to this question could be the following one: it is necessary to evaluate the sociocultural competence taking into account all the criteria.

4. Conclusions

Thus, on the basis of comparative analysis, along with the observation and analysis of our teaching experience in the virtual learning environment Moodle we propose the following criteria to evaluate the sociocultural competence in the virtual learning environment Moodle: cognitive, motivational, behavioral, functional, technological.

As for the motivational and behavioral criteria, we share the opinion of S. V. Pakhotina that it is necessary to use the questionnaires and psychological tests in language courses in order to evaluate motivation, flexibility, non-rigidity and empathy. Moodle allows to integrate all these questionnaires in an on-line course and to test students at the beginning and at the end of the course in order to evaluate changes.

Concerning the cognitive criteria, we believe the competency-based approach to be the priority in the course of design of the sociocultural questionnaire. And we can design the questionnaire on the basis of the lexical units that was selected and presented by students during their learning activities in the virtual learning environment Moodle.

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