

# DISTANCE LEARNING AND DIGITAL TOOLS IMPLEMENTATION

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## PROFESSIONAL LEXICAL COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT IN BLENDED LEARNING

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### ABSTRACT

*The integration of Ukraine into the world community requires perfect mastery of foreign languages from future professionals. The number of hours allocated to studying a foreign language in institutions of higher education is insufficient for the formation of all types of foreign language competences, in particular, foreign language lexical competence. Possession of lexical competence is part of the system of development of speaking in a foreign language. That is why there is a need to improve the methods, means and technologies of foreign language learning. The purpose of the article is to reveal the role of the process of formation of students' foreign language lexical competence. To achieve the goal, a questionnaire was conducted among students of a language institution of higher education. The paper presents the data and analysis of the conducted survey. It was concluded that the combination of traditional teaching methods and innovative ones in the process of learning a foreign language makes it possible to intensify the independent activity of students, increases cognitive activity, and contributes to more effective vocabulary development in blended learning. Recommendations are given on facilitating students' mastery of lexical units in blended learning.*

**Keywords:** *foreign language competence; lexical competence; blended learning; language skills; higher education.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the period of technological development and increased international cooperation, the problem of effective learning of foreign languages is actualised. In almost all progressive fields of activity, knowledge of foreign languages is required to meet the needs of the enterprise regarding the exchange of experience, conclusion of contracts, expansion of sales spheres, translation of specialized literature, and business visits.

Therefore, it is very important to train specialists of various profiles who know languages not superficially, but at the level of independent users. Fluency in a foreign language depends on many factors (the ability to listen to speech, operate with grammatical material, correct pronunciation, etc.), but the vocabulary of the interlocutor most often plays the main role in communication. Thus, a primary element in learning foreign languages is the expansion of students' linguistic competence by introducing them to the richness of the lexical composition of the language being studied.

The problems of foreign language lexical competence development attracts scholars' attention. For example,

Lee (2003), Li (2013), Thornbury (2002), and Vassileva (2015) investigated ways and techniques of revealing the meanings of words by foreign students; Retamar & López-Pérez (2021), Sato & Tanaka (2017), Vedder & Benigno (2016) analysed the action of the lexical mechanism in various types of speech activity; Azamatovna et al. (2022), and Mei et al. (2009) substantiated the process of functional acquisition of vocabulary, taking into account the regularities of the generation of speech expressions; Deveci (2016), Martínez-Carrasco & Becerra (2020), and Shandra et al. (2022) defined the criteria and described the procedure for selecting lexical items for forming the necessary vocabulary.

Moreover, higher education digitalisation has impacted the ways of developing lexical competence, when digital tool have been implemented into educational environments, e.g., utilizing mobile applications (Horbatyuk et al., 2019), format of synchronous and asynchronous communication (Sotillo, 2016), digitalisation of writing (Mospan, 2023a), emergency of new language patterns in English language teaching online (Mospan, 2023b). However, the problem of systematization of various types of exercises for teaching terminological vocabulary especially to university students still needs further development and analysis.

It is worth mentioning, that Sysoieva & Mospan (2018) highlight the different approaches to the national (Ukrainian) and international concept of competence. There are two notions in the national discourse — 'competence' and 'competent performance'. "The 'competent performance' is personal and assessable characteristic of an individual, which is caused by the level and quality of education, experience and his personal qualities, ability to self-improvement and creative approach to his work" (Sysoieva & Mospan, 2018. p. 10). Lexical competence refers to "two different dimensions: referential and

inferential lexical knowledge” (Velasco, 2007, p. 51), or to “the ability to use semantically related words differently” (Sato & Tanaka, 2017, p.110).

Let us emphasize the fact that the students’ productive foreign language communication indicates the lexical minimum the students have mastered. The presence of lexical knowledge in students is evidenced by their understanding of the meaning of a new lexical unit in isolated form when listening and reading, as well as the ability to pronounce and write it according to the meaning in isolated form.

Note that vocabulary can be formed directly or indirectly. During direct study, students perform specially designed exercises and tasks for vocabulary development. Language exercises, forming students’ language skills of word change, form formation, construction, have a positive effect on the formation of language skills and the development of relevant skills.

The conducted analysis makes it possible to state that the assimilation and replenishment of student vocabulary by performing special exercises is expedient, because lexical exercises are one of the forms of development of foreign language lexical competence. Let’s emphasize that during indirect vocabulary learning, the student focuses on another type of activity, for example, listening or reading, and at this time imperceptibly learns words. In our opinion, when forming lexical competence as a professional among students, more attention should be paid to the indirect way of mastering vocabulary. It is also important to teach the student strategies that will help him learn vocabulary in situations in which he encounters unfamiliar words or the meanings of words he knows.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The purpose of the article is to reveal the role of the foreign language lexical competence developing in blended learning.

- 1) characterize the peculiarities of the process of formation of students’ foreign language lexical competence.
- 2) to reveal existing problems in the process of forming foreign language lexical competence among students.
- 3) to single out the ways of possible improvement of the process of formation of foreign language lexical competence among students.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

General scientific methods are used to solve problems: method of analysis and synthesis (with the aim of revealing the conceptual and categorical research apparatus and scientific substantiation of the role of the process of forming foreign language lexical competence among students) and a survey method.

A questionnaire was conducted online among 2nd year students (63 respondents) of the Language Department in one university in Kyiv in October

2023. The survey was conducted anonymously. The survey aimed at revealing the number of lexical units learned and ways of mastering new vocabulary in blended learning. The lexical items that were taken into account correspond to the topics of the English language programme, designed for the 2nd year students of the language university, such as: medicine, science and technology, travel. Besides, the survey focuses on identifying the reasons for the decrease in students' desire to learn new vocabulary and to highlight the learning modes effective for acquiring new vocabulary during blended learning in higher education.

The use of this set of methods made it possible to obtain objective information about existing problems in the process of forming foreign language lexical competence among students.

## RESULTS

The existing educational programs of the English language for students make serious demands on the development of speaking skills of students, who must be able to conduct a conversation freely, using language richness, the guarantee of which is the use of a variety of vocabulary in general, phraseology and idiomatic expressions in particular. The modern English language is incredibly saturated with persistent phrases used to realize various communicative purposes: attracting attention, refuting or agreeing with the interlocutor, commenting on what was said, and thanking.

It is worth mentioning, that in the process of learning, students face the task of mastering the special vocabulary used in their professional field. Such a vocabulary largely consists of terms. Terms provide an accurate and concise description of a subject, process or phenomenon and name special concepts of a separate field of science, technology, etc. Each branch of knowledge has its own system of terms. The high level of communicative competence of future philologists and translators implies the need to master foreign language professional vocabulary (Thornbury, 2002).

*Table 1.*

### Range of lexical knowledge

Level	Characteristic
B2 (Upper-Intermediate)	Fluency in vocabulary on the most general topics and topics related to their field of activity, as well as the ability to vary the wording to avoid frequent repetitions, but lexical errors can cause uncertainty and miscommunication.
C1 (Advanced)	Fluency in a wide lexical repertoire, which allows you to overcome difficult places by paraphrasing; searches for expressions or alternative strategies are barely noticeable; free use of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms.

Lexical competence is formed in the process of communicative activity. The process of formation of communicative competence definitely includes the process of formation of communicative skills and abilities of all types

of speech activity. Lexical competence becomes one of the professional skills, on a par with phonetic and grammatical competence, as it is an integral component of all types of speech activity.

Quite illustrative are created and for the ability to control this knowledge determine the general features of the formation of lexical competence as a professional among students, characteristic of all levels of language proficiency (see *Table 1*).

Only two levels of formation of students' lexical competence are represented, since the work considers foreign language lexical competence as professional. Based on the above-mentioned characteristics, teachers face a task that requires enormous cognitive and communicative efforts to achieve the development of foreign language lexical competence adequate to the All-European Recommendations on language education. On the way to the formation of foreign language lexical competence among students at one of two levels, a number of difficulties arise, caused primarily by the motivational component on the part of student youth (see *Fig.1-2*).

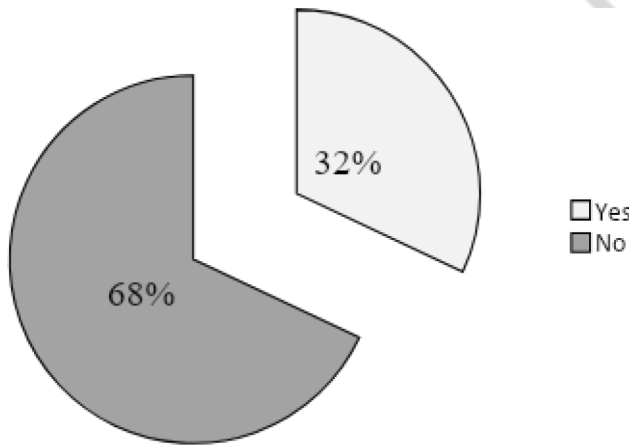


Fig. 1. Have you been monitoring changes in your vocabulary?

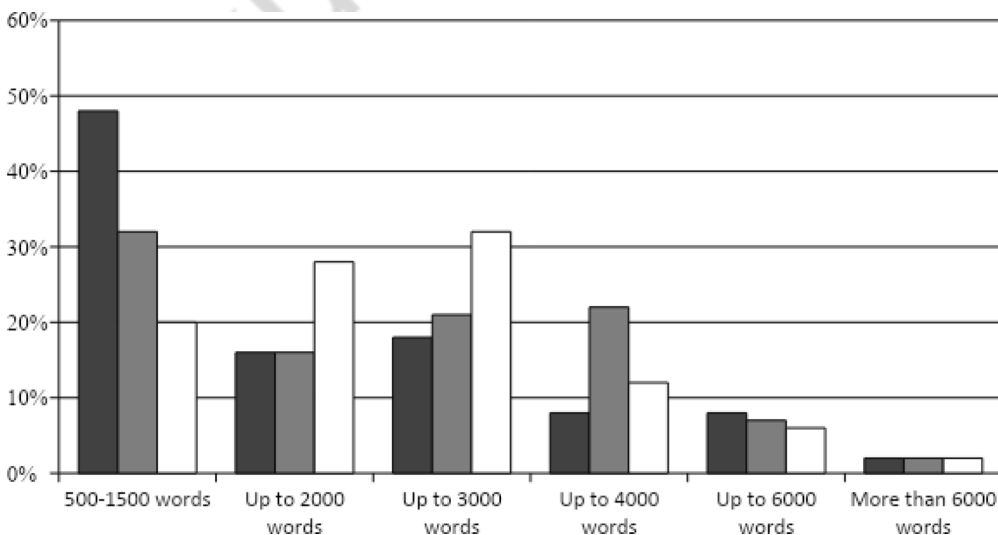


Fig. 2. The number of lexical items in the student's vocabulary for three periods

One of the main tasks of learning a foreign language is the formation of lexical competence in students, which involves not just teaching them to communicate in a foreign language, but also teaching them to think in it. Therefore, we can explain the answer of the respondents by the fact that the defined process is complex and difficult. Of course, for its successful implementation, the student must have a significant vocabulary, so that teachers can find the most effective ways and exercises to learn new words during each lesson.

The obtained statistical data tell us that the number of lexical units in the active vocabulary of students is decreasing. This is a modern problem that needs to be solved, because the acquisition of lexical skills by students of language majors should acquire a research and analytical character. There should be conscious work with the word, analysis of word-forming components of the contextual environment, analysis of lexical units from the point of view of their compatibility, implicit sociocultural information.

An important problem in this direction is the motivation of students to study foreign language vocabulary. In the motivational sphere of a person, there are motives of a different nature, which are of decisive importance for the purposeful increase in the effectiveness of learning a foreign language in general and mastering its vocabulary, in particular, internal motivation. The formation of internal motivation is also facilitated by the formulation of the goal of the controlled task: it is performed in order to be able to pronounce correctly in English the words that will be needed for conducting a conversation on the topic of the lesson.

The next part of the survey was an attempt to find out whether students learn foreign vocabulary independently, what methods, forms and techniques they use for this (see Fig. 3-4).

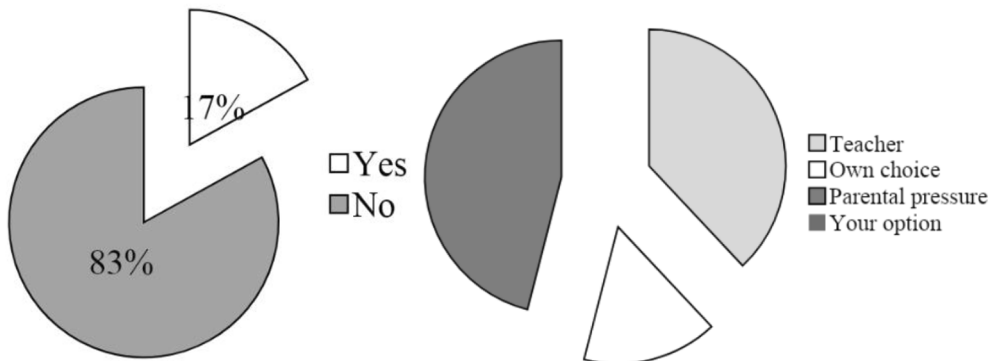


Fig. 3-4. Self-study of lexical items

Vast and strong at the beginning, over time the motivation goes away, leaving the student face to face with an unfulfilled dream. For many, learning English stops where serious difficulties begin and confidence disappears that it is even possible to improve the level of the English language. In the process of disappearing motivation, laziness appears. Most of the students prefer to sleep; they are too busy during the day, and closer to the evening they just want to rest. Being lazy

is normal, but in order to stay motivated to learn English, you need to learn how to harmoniously weave English into your routine. The survey demonstrated only two effective incentives for students to proactively expand their vocabulary, express the same thought in oral or written speech in different ways, and saturate their own written products with words and appropriate terms.

The choice of tools for teaching students lexical material and lexical competence development depend on lots of factors, e.g., the age group, the purpose and task of studying the material, the level of formation of the group, individual characteristics of students, etc. The last important stage on the way to the formation of foreign language competences among students is the verification and control of the acquired knowledge for the development of further learning strategies. Control of the level of formation of lexical competence occurs through oral and written communication processes, listening or reading, because lexical units are needed for the development of speech competences. Among the criterion evaluations, it is appropriate to single out the correct understanding of the lexical material, the correct use of it in the context, both in oral and written forms.

The final stage of the survey was an attempt to identify methods, forms and for the formation of foreign language lexical competence among students of language institutions of higher education (see Fig. 5).

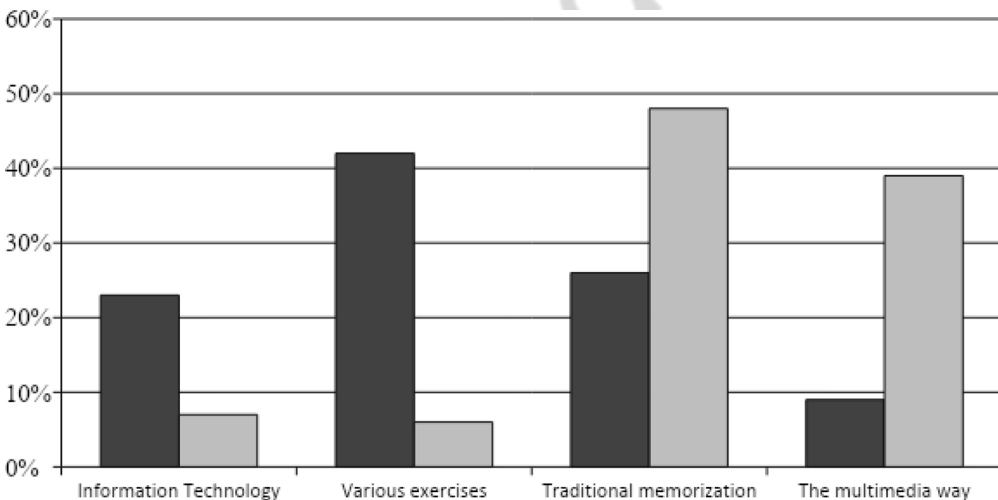


Fig. 5. Ways of learning new lexical items

The analysis of the results of the survey of students of the institution of higher education, as well as the analysis of textbooks, proved that the content of the educational material of modern textbooks does not contribute to the process of increasing the motivation of students to learn new lexical items. In addition, the lexical units presented in the textbooks are not sufficiently worked out in the exercises, in addition to the presentation in the text; in addition, controversial issues arise in the interpretation of meanings that confuse students. Tasks for working out new lexical units are given

from reproductive to creative; the proposed project work involves extensive use of language and communication with it during the discussion, preparation and presentation of the project. However, the main drawback from the student's side is the number of new words that arise in connection with the development of technologies, the study of which requires modern approaches.

The formation of lexical competence requires special efforts from both the teacher during the organization of classes and the student during independent work. Currently, students are unmotivated and unenthusiastic about memorizing new lexical units of everyday use, learning their contextual meaning, features of use.

## DISCUSSION

Researchers conditionally distinguish certain stages of the formation of foreign language lexical competence, under which they consider the process of forming the ability of students to solve communicative tasks aimed at the practical use of foreign language vocabulary in communicative activities, based on the acquired knowledge, skills and abilities. The formation of lexical competence begins with the presentation and semanticisation of new vocabulary. In this way, students get an idea of the sound and graphic image of a lexical unit, connections between a foreign word and its meaning are formed. Students acquire the skills of identifying lexical units in the proposed communicative situations.

At the second stage of the formation of lexical competence, it is necessary to form the skills of using the studied lexical units and to establish strong connections between the lexical units and their meaning. At this stage, attention should be paid to various exercises to consolidate the primary skills of using the studied vocabulary in a given communicative context. A characteristic feature of the next stage of the formation of lexical competence is the acquisition of theoretical knowledge about the lexical system of the language being studied. This is where the formation of skills to establish the features of the form, structure and meaning of a word takes place. At this stage, strong verbal-semantic connections are created.

At the last stage, the development of the ability to use lexical units to solve various communicative tasks is envisaged. For this, students should be able to use previously learned speech means and their speech experience. This level of competence is related to the performance of practical actions with foreign language vocabulary and is aimed at solving various communicative tasks in accordance with the conditions of communication, assuming the use of the necessary knowledge, speech skills and abilities. The formation of foreign language lexical competence is one of the important directions of improving the quality of communicative professional training of students.

The lexical component is a component of expressive and receptive types of speech activity. It can be claimed that students have mastered the lexical



material of professional orientation when they can use it in various situations of professional interaction. Achieving a high level of development of lexical competence is manifested in the fact that the student easily uses a fairly large vocabulary in both direct and indirect communication.

The formation of lexical competence is ensured by a special lexical strategy, which has two aspects. The first is related to the organization and memorization of lexical material on the basis of special techniques based on taking into account the peculiarities of students' cognitive activity. The second aspect of the strategy ensures the assimilation of the lexical units themselves, semantic information about them, practising practical actions with the word at different levels of complexity, developing skills in the combined use of lexical units in the most diverse situations of language communication. Lexical strategy and its aspects represent a combination of intellectual techniques and efforts used by the student to understand, remember and use knowledge about the lexical system of the language. A system of techniques for memorizing and assimilating lexical information, a system of lexically oriented exercises make up the technological basis for the implementation of the strategy and its aspects.

We consider it necessary to give examples of the types of exercises that can be used in English language classes. In particular, to master new lexical units: find correspondences in the columns; try to guess the meaning of the highlighted phrases; explain the meaning of the sentence. At the level of application, or so-called real practice, it is advisable to use the following types of exercises: read and translate the dialogue; explain the meaning of the selected vocabulary; write your own dialogue using the specified phraseology; read the dialogue according to the roles. At the same stage, the goal of which is the independent use of linguistic material in all types of speech activity, it is advisable to use such exercises as: pair up and comment on; match the dates and events and comment on them; look at the picture and imagine; find out more information about; compose a dialogue with the following words.

## CONCLUSIONS

Today, there are practically unlimited opportunities for learning a foreign language. Those wishing to master the language can choose their own schools, courses, study platforms, teachers, levels and textbooks. Independent language learning has become more accessible than ever, but the demand for it is decreasing, which is related to the motivation of students.

We consider it necessary to provide some recommendations to increase students' motivation in the process of forming lexical competence. Increasing motivation to learn foreign vocabulary is possible if you don't turn learning into a boring routine: constantly set a goal for students; in the group, healthy competition with other students, which should be organized by the teacher during classes, will help keep students in good spirits (this works even if you study English online). Let's emphasize that students should have a moderately difficult time in classes, which

should motivate them to learn new vocabulary. If the teaching is too difficult or too easy for the students, it is necessary to try to choose educational material of a different level. The most difficult thing for teachers of higher education is to constantly search for something new that will fuel the interest of students and keep them motivated to learn vocabulary from the English language. Taking into account the characteristics of the new generation of students, it can be a new digital application, a favourite film or series in English, an online resource with useful information or an English-speaking interlocutor.

The above-described exercises and recommendations will allow not only the formation of lexical competence and memory training in students of language universities, which is an integrative component of their foreign language communicative competence, but also to expand the student's world-view, because they get to know the rich cultural code of another nation. Further research is the development of a system for increasing the motivation of language university students in the process of forming lexical competence.

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## РОЗВИТОК ПРОФЕСІЙНОЇ ЛЕКСИЧНОЇ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТІ У ФОРМАТІ ЗМІШАНОГО НАВЧАННЯ

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*Інтеграція України у Європейський простір вищої освіти вимагає від майбутніх фахівців досконалого володіння іноземними мовами. Кількість годин, відведених на вивчення іноземної мови у закладах вищої освіти, є недостатньою для формування всіх видів іншомовної компетенції, зокрема іншомовної лексичної компетенції. Володіння лексичною компетенцією є частиною системи розвитку говоріння іноземною мовою. Саме тому виникає необхідність вдосконалення методів, засобів і технологій навчання іноземної мови. Мета статті — розкрити роль процесу формування іншомовної лексичної компетенції студентів. Для досягнення мети було проведено анкетування студентів мовного закладу вищої освіти. У статті наведено дані та аналіз проведеного опитування. Зроблено висновок, що поєднання традиційних методів навчання та інноваційних у процесі вивчення іноземної мови дає змогу активізувати самостійну діяльність студентів, підвищує пізнавальну активність, сприяє більш ефективному формуванню словникового запасу. Дано рекомендації щодо покращення умов для оволодіння студентами лексичними одиницями, зокрема у форматі змішаного навчання. Описані вище вправи та рекомендації дозволять не лише сформувати лексичну компетенцію та тренувати пам'ять у студентів мовних закладів вищої освіти, що є інтегративною складовою їх іншомовної комунікативної компетенції, а й розширити світогляд студента, адже вони пізнають багатий культурний код іншого народу.*

**Ключові слова:** іншомовна компетенція; лексична компетенція; мовні навички; змішане навчання; вища освіта.

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