

9.5 Didactic essence of competence-based content for foreign language school coursebooks

Introduction. Upgraded in the recent decade content of foreign languages teaching is associated with some changes in the strategic directions of national institutions of general secondary education development — the focus of learning to develop life competencies, which in the future would enable school graduates to successfully adapt to the modern multinational and polycultural space and feel comfortable in it. Accordingly, the new generation's curricula perform the tendency to competence-based teaching foreign language communication. Its content involves the formation of key and subject competences while learning, manifested in their readiness to practically apply the acquired knowledge, the formed capabilities and skills, the methods of work for the fulfillment of cognitive and communicative tasks (Martynova, 2004).

This problem is raised in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages¹, which highlights the importance of creating educational content on the grounds of a competence-based teaching. This direction has become a priority in some declarations and recommendations of the Council of Europe and, consequently, state educational documents of European countries².

The basis of the competence-based teaching is explored in scientific publications of Ukrainian (V. Red'ko, T. Polonska, N.Nikolayeva) and foreign scholars (J. Richards, H. Brown). Significant scientific contributions were made in the field of the foreign languages coursebook construction (J. Aski, P. Lyons, K. Yuen).

The aim of this research is to interpret the didactic essence of the educational foreign-language communication environment as a means of creating competence-based teaching foreign languages in secondary education and the peculiarities of its implementation in the content of school coursebooks.

The conducted research required the use of the following methods: theoretical analysis of scientific sources – made it possible to find out the level of research of competence-based teaching foreign languages in pedagogical theory and practice;

generalization – contributed to the detection of general trends in the development of school foreign-language education, outlining the peculiarities of its goals and content; interpretation – allowed to express and substantiate own views on the problems under investigation; modeling – made it possible to define and substantiate the didactic and methodical essence of educational foreign-language communication environment as a part of competence-based teaching and to implement it in the content of school coursebooks; generalization of teaching experience – allowed to obtain, analyze and interpret the results of the study, to identify its positive and negative aspects, which led to the revision and clarification of certain components of the academic content.

Competence-based educational foreign language communication environment. The main directions of the content development of teaching foreign languages in secondary schools in accordance within the competence-based paradigm are defined the following:

a) didactic rethinking of the essence of learning material in terms of its feasibility, accessibility, compliance with foreign-language communication needs of a learner's age category, optimality to ensure his communicative intentions;

b) determination of significant for learners, according to their potential capabilities, connections of practically oriented language material, which is associated with the level of its pragmaticism — spheres of use in real conditions of foreign-language communication;

c) ensuring effective and balanced activation of foreign-language learning materials in communication through the motivated activities and the use of an optimal system of exercises and tasks as well as didactically efficient additional input;

d) promoting conscious and motivated acquiring of methods of work with educational foreign-language material within a certain range of concepts, phenomena, processes, objects, facts, in topics for communication, content of linguistic and communicative means, gaining experience independently performing linguistic operations and communication actions (Zimnyaya, 2004).

The effectiveness of competence-based teaching foreign languages depends on the study conditions, moreover, on didactically effective organization of the educational

process, methodically expedient teacher activity, learners motivated readiness to act consistently with their age peculiarities, potential abilities and interests.

The coursebook as the main means of learning plays the vital role in this process. One of the conditions for ensuring the successful performance of the course book functions can be deliberately created educational environment, which by the basic parameters can have a positive impact on the study results (Weninger, Kiss, 2013).

We consider the concept of "competence-based content of the school foreign language coursebook" as a kind of complex formation with didactically expediently selected structural components. Language and communication material is rationally methodically organized and thematically predetermined for conscious acquisition by learners in different types and forms of educational activities. Exercises and tasks aim to master foreign-language communication in oral and written forms using new and previously got knowledge. Texts for reading contain new linguistic thematic information aimed to improve foreign-language communication fluency, and non-textual input, illustrations, verbal samples/models as a relevant basis of activities, instructions (Koutselini, 2012).

This material is directed to the formation of key and subject with its structural components competencies as strategic skills to communicate in a foreign language and observe appropriate communicative behavior in various situations of interaction, where vital tasks are performed, situationally occurring in life process.

Considerable attention in the competence-based content in the coursebook is paid to the problem of gaining foreign-language communication experience in various social spheres of life (socio-domestic, cultural, educational) by learners, consistent with the content of key competences, which should be mastered by learners (Rychen, Salganik, 2003).

Hence, we consider *educational foreign-language communication environment* as a balanced set of methods, forms and means of teaching that promote learners' active language acquisition in various types of communicative activities in accordance with spheres, themes and language material determined by school curriculum. This is a complex formation based on the interaction between two subjects of the learning

process – a teacher and students whose activities are directed to fulfill the goals of learning applying didactically expedient means. It can be interpreted as a kind of educational space that provides holistic acquisition of the foreign language content by learners, allows them to show and develop their abilities, increases interest in the subject, motivates their foreign-language classroom practice, enables to learn the native speakers' culture, as well as sharing with imaginary foreign-speaking partners information about their own culture, promote education and upbringing, activates cognitive interests, provides opportunities for self-improvement.

The educational foreign-language communication environment allows the teacher to successfully exploit the projected tasks, provides opportunities to show his professional experience that contribute to reach the goals, performs methodically expedient use of methods, forms and means, stimulates active interaction, taking into account learners' potential abilities and acquired learning experience (Savignon, 2001).

Accordingly, the content of educational foreign language communication environment is characterized by the presence of invariable and variable components.

The non-variable components are the subjects of the learning process, the content of their activities, the didactic and methodical principles of the study, the didactically expediently selected and methodically rationally organized exercises and tasks.

Variable components are the types, amount of exercises and tasks in the content predetermined its conditions and goals, objects of activation and evaluating the mechanisms of mastering the learning material, time limits for practice planned to acquire the new portion of language, communication mechanisms and certain types of communicative activities. It is worth noting that parallel and interrelated teaching speaking, listening, reading, writing does not mean the definition of equally prolonged stages in time aimed at mastering each of them. The teacher has the right to solve this problem depending on the situational needs and conditions of studying.

The significant feature of the educational foreign-language communication environment should be its ability to promote the modeling of communicatively directed actions suggested by the coursebook content. Simultaneously, the results of such

activities depend on the educational content which optimally takes into account the didactic, methodological and psychological factors of influence on its implementation specific for a certain stage. This is primarily the psychological readiness of learners for the planned classroom activities, motivational level, potential abilities, experience, the general proficiency level, appropriate methods, forms and means of study, expected results (Red'ko, 2017). Apparently, the variable components of the educational environment for each grade may differ in certain indicators, including the number and types of exercises and tasks, objects of control, the language input amount. All these features should find a clear imprint in the content of the coursebook.

In this sense the content of a competence-based coursebook is advisable to construct in accordance with the framework principle: it should contain the most typical language, speech and information thematic materials, which can serve as an indicative basis for the classroom activities, and if necessary, can be changed in quantitative and qualitative indicators depending on the conditions of study. Thus, the coursebook should be flexible and allow the teacher to independently guide the learning process, vary its individual components. In addition, it also provides the possibility of modeling the content of its separate components in accordance with the lesson goals (Ellis, 2010).

Primarily it concerns exercises and communicative tasks. Formation of mechanisms of foreign language communication is advisable to carry out situationally within those time limits and in the sequence that activities are performed by students at some stage of the lesson. If the task is set to form language skills, the exercises focused on the lexical or grammar unit meaning, ways of formation and its functions in speech will dominate. According to the acquired foreign language experience, there will be a tendency to diversify creative communication tasks as means of intensifying students' academic actions in order to master a certain type of communicative activity. In addition to the didactic tools offered by the coursebook, the teacher should be given the opportunity to include additional, situationally appropriate types of exercises and tasks and vary their amount according to the conditions of study and the learners' outcome. The coursebook should create conditions for the teacher to adhere to

established didactic and methodical principles during the selection of the following means: accessibility, succession, communicative and situational expediency.

Competence-based teaching foreign languages in a secondary school is advisable to consider as the learners' ability according to age and potential to consciously perform academic actions that ensure acquiring foreign-language communication in oral and written forms within the topics, situations and with the help of language tools outlined by the current curriculum⁴. Simultaneously, the competent personality should be able to demonstrate relevant to the curriculum ability to effectively use information in a foreign language outlined by its communicative needs and presented by the social environment, evaluate it and select according practical needs, influence it, adapting its quantitative and qualitative characteristics to his own foreign language communicative intentions (Red'ko, 2018).

Hence, the content of competence-based teaching foreign languages involves the formation of learners' key and intercultural foreign-language communicative competences, carried out by means of a foreign language and is not a one-time activity in each grade. In addition, the formation of some key competences can be integrated within several topics of study defined by the curriculum. Among the key competences there are those, the formation of which takes place constantly, in different volumes throughout the learning process. Moreover, selective formation of competences is possible only within certain communication topics in certain grades. In addition, development of some key competencies can be integrated within several topics at different stages of study. This means that learning in a particular grade aimed at forming some key competencies may not occur. Hence the process of modeling the learning content may include certain components that characterize the foreign language communication acquisition: objective, contextual, procedural, and assessing.

The objective component provides the tasks, indicates potential levels of learners' achievements, determines for them a certain amount and level of development of their linguistic, sociocultural and general educational knowledge, language skills, speaking skills and attitudes to objects of communication, outlines the scope of

thematic, linguistic, speaking and informational material, which should be acquired by the students to perform the tasks.

The contextual component offers methods, forms and types of classroom activities aimed to form communication mechanisms, language, speaking and illustrative means of learning, promotes students' awareness of ways of acquiring foreign language material, allows to express evaluative judgments, involves the organization of foreign language learning in connection with the native speakers' culture; presents qualitative and quantitative characteristics of linguistic, speaking and illustrative input, on the basis of which the formation of intercultural foreign-language communication competence takes place, directs it to parallel and interrelated acquisition of communicative activities, motivates learning, promotes the development of creative abilities, form self-regulation to satisfy their own foreign-language communication needs.

The procedural component defines the methods, forms and means of effective learning, in particular cognitive activity, offers a system of exercises and tasks as means that ensure the formation of oral and written speech skills and in this way contribute to the gain of experience of foreign-language interaction in the multilingual and polycultural world, outlines the time measures and sequence of language operations aimed at intensifying and using learning material in real life foreign-language communication.

The assessing component indicates the objects of control, determines its types, forms and means and, if necessary, stimulates to adjust the academic results, forms and ways of their implementation.

Competence-based teaching foreign languages is advisable to consider from several positions: a) the goals of school foreign language education, in general, and at some stage (grade) of study, in particular, b) the selection and organization of the content of foreign language teaching, c) the selection and use of methods, forms and means of study in accordance with its conditions, d) organization of the learning process, e) objects, forms and types of control of learners' academic progress. We will comment on these characteristics.

Goals of school foreign-language education is connected with their determination and focus on practical acquisition a foreign language as a means of communication, as well as the formation of learners' ability to solve their own academic problems using critical thinking aimed at improving foreign-language abilities and communicative experience during life according to their own communication needs.

Selecting and tailoring of the content of foreign language learning is due to both the goals and the topic of learning foreign-language communication. It should take into account the trends in the development of school foreign-language education (today: competent, communicative, active, learner-centered, cultural approaches), meta-subject categories related to organizational, information and cognitive, communicative, emotionally valued types of learning aimed at mastering the language aspects of communication and mechanisms of foreign-language oral and written communication, on acquiring the peculiarities of communicative behavior adopted in countries where the language is spoken, in compliance with sociocultural norms of using strategies adequate to the communicative situation, which ensure the success of communicative interaction.

The use of methods, forms, means of study in accordance with its conditions in the process of competence-based teaching. This position reflects the tendencies of the modern school foreign-language education: a) communication focused learning; b) active learning; b) learner-centered paradigm, its correspondence to the learners age characteristics; d) cultural based learning and teaching. This means that the methods, forms, types of learning and means of their implementation should optimally ensure the effectiveness of teaching methods that ensure activation of the selected language and speech units and enable to carry out independent control/self-control of learners' progress.

Organization of the academic process. It is assumed that learning is based on the principle of parallel and interconnected learners' acquisition of communicative activities, and with the help of means of a foreign language the acquaintance with sociocultural, sociolinguistic, linguistic aspects of the native speakers' culture takes place. In this regard, the process of learning takes the form of a dialogue of cultures

(foreign and native), which is carried out by means of a foreign language. This approach is provided by special types and forms of foreign language communication, among which the significant place belongs to communicative tasks, in particular interactive methods and educational situations, which should acquire a priority.

Objects, forms and types of control of learners' academic progress involve using a new approach to assessing students' achievements. Attention is focused on the results of training, in particular the levels of forming linguistic and communicative skills, as well as the quality of the acquired general academic experience. At the same time, the priority are the types and forms of control of the quality of formed speech capabilities rather than the level of formed language skills (although they are objects of control). At the same time, it should be noted that the learners' general academic experience is not left out, which allows them to use non-verbal means of communication, to carry out their own needs of communication that situationally emerge. This position becomes important in the conditions of competence-based learning, when the attention of students and teachers should be directed to the results of learning being indicators of didactic and methodical feasibility and effectiveness of modeling learning in the content of the coursebook. A convincing indicator of the didactic feasibility of the proposed educational foreign-language communication environment, including the effectiveness of the means by which it is organized and able to function, there is the ability to holistically combine the acquired knowledge, formed capabilities and skills, acquired communication experience, worldview values, attitudes and beliefs with active creative autonomous inquiry activities within the framework of the curriculum outlined in the process of selection and use of language tools and information input for the production of oral and written texts, as well as to identify foreign language statements when perceiving them.

The symbiosis of these characteristics determines the basic level of forming learners' key and intercultural foreign-language communicative competences in a secondary school. They adapt to the conditions of study, potential psychophysiological capabilities of learners of all ages. They should be directed to the activities of the teacher and the coursebook. It is their effective interaction that can provide a specially

created educational foreign-language communication environment as a didactic phenomenon of methodically expedient organization of learning, accumulated in the content of the coursebook as the main learning tool.

The technology of competence-based teaching a foreign language by means of the educational foreign-language communication environment was introduced into the content of certain domestic coursebooks of the Spanish language for secondary schools, admitted by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine for use in school practice, co-authored by one of the authors of this article (Red'ko, 2017). The objects of evaluation, which took place through the questionnaire, identified the following indicators: 1) the effectiveness of students' learning activities who worked with the prepared coursebooks, in particular the level of their academic achievements, and 2) the attitude of teachers to the didactic and methodical feasibility of concepts of constructing the content of coursebooks according to the proposed technology. As depicted by Figures 1 and 2, the vast majority of teachers and learners expressed a positive attitude to the competence-based content of foreign language coursebooks for secondary schools.

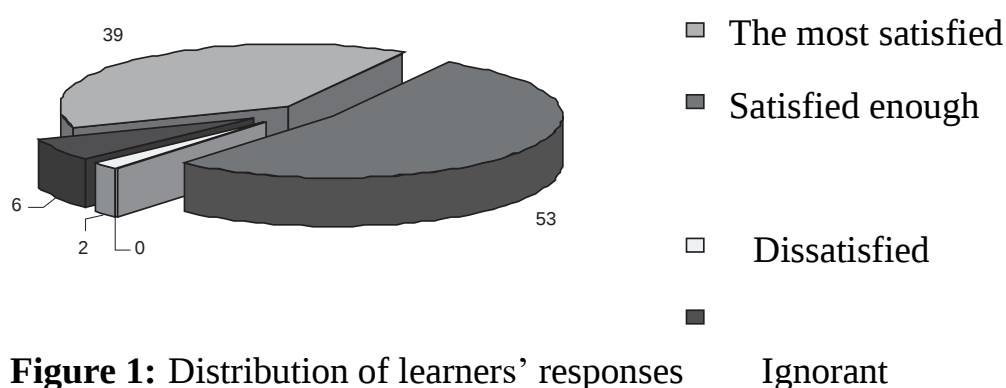


Figure 1: Distribution of learners' responses

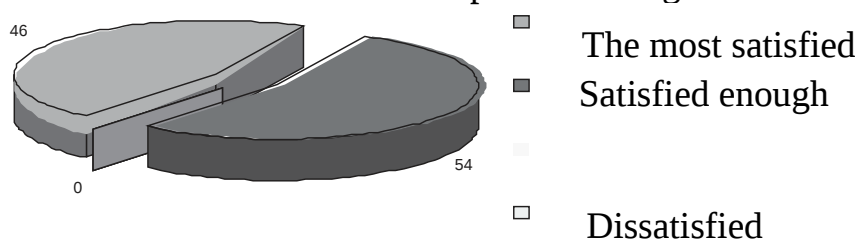


Figure 2: Distribution of teachers' responses

However, in some answer sheets, the respondents had questions, which caused the reviewing and some improvement of the proposed technology.

Conclusion. According to the results of the conducted research, the authors define and substantiate the didactic and methodical essence of the educational foreign-language communication environment as a means of organizing competence-based teaching a foreign language in secondary schools. The authors interpret this phenomenon and present the means of its implementation into the academic process and the content of school coursebooks. The authors reveal the peculiarities of competence-based teaching foreign languages and present their characteristics. The academic activities performed by the learners within the specified environment are outlined. The study describes its invariable and variable components. The model of the educational foreign-language communication environment is created as a means of implementing competency-based learning in the content of school coursebooks. The findings of the research prove the effectiveness of the proposed model in school practice. The possibility of mass implementation of the model in the content of domestic school coursebooks of foreign languages may become the subject of the next study.

NOTES

1. Common European Framework Reference (CEFR)
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions>
2. Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. A European Reference Framework.
https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/council-recommendation-on-key-competences-for-lifelong-learning_en