**THE UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR’S E-COMPETENCES AND E-CULTURE: BELIEFS AND PANDEMIC REALITY**

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Though, the competence-based approach to description of the university professor’s knowledge, duties and abilities in Russian pedagogical science was used for the first time at the very beginning of the 21-st century, rapid intrusion of various electronic devices, technologies and resources into education has forced to reconsider the system of professor’s competences several times already.

For the last decade the scholars have been discussing what competences the teacher working in distant education or e-education should possess. The idea of these specific features of teacher’s personality, which manifest themselves in his/ her professional activity and can jointly be called “e-competences”, has been developing together with the process of electronic technologies penetration into the education.

Today we can clearly distinguish three stages in the process of development of the concept “information competence (IC)” and observe its enrichment with new qualities and roles in the university professors’ professional culture.

At first, on the eve of the 21-st century, at the early stage of informatization of educational process, the scholars were inclined to use the term “information competence / competency” in the narrow meaning stating the basic professors’ skills to use a computer and simplest technologies at the lessons. But, though their research interest was mainly concentrated on professors’ abilities to implement some new technical devices and methods into education, even then they understood that information competence was not limited to technical skills.

The concept of information competence received a new, significantly wider meaning in the 2010-s, when many new electronic devices (tablets, laptops, smartphones, etc.), electronic textbooks, and electronic courses were introduced into educational process, being followed by a wide range of different educational information and communication technologies (ICT).

According to the most popular point of view, information competence (sometimes is called digital or ICT-competence [1, c. 148-161]) is a specific «personality’s quality, which is a combination of knowledge, skills and value attitudes towards the effective implementation of various types of information activities and the use of new information technologies to solve socially significant problems that arise in real situations of a person's everyday life in the society» [2, с. 69].

In the European Union’s “Recommendations on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning” it is stated that “Digital competence involves the confident, critical and responsible use of, and engagement with, digital technologies for learning, at work, and for participation in society. It includes information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, media literacy, digital content creation (including programming), safety (including digital well-being and competencies related to cybersecurity), intellectual property related questions, problem-solving and critical thinking” [3].

When it has become clear that informatization of the higher education “opened a door” into a new environment, i.e. information space, which is characterized by specific skills and motivation both of students and professors to keep numerous contacts within a new frame of communication by means of electronic devices, the scholars started to dwell on professor’s competences in non-traditional modes of learning.

So, the second stage of the transformation process of the professor’s competences is connected with introduction of distant learning (DL) into the system of higher education. Participating in DL, a professor, naturally, has to demonstrate some professional qualities, not typical to face-to-face (F2F) mode of interaction.

Distant learning (DL) is a purposefully created educational environment for pedagogical interaction between professors and students, invariant to their location and carried out with the help of modern information and communication technologies.

In a great number of publications regarding information competence, the scholars tried to single out its components that represented a new environment of the human’s life and activity, that is why, they enumerated the components more or less similar to the person’s usual cognitive process. In the table 1, which is compiled by us after comparing several publications [4 − 6], the most popular components of university professor’s information competence are presented. Under the mostly popular aspects we combined different names, which were created by the authors. Practically, every scientist developed his/her own system of components that constitute information competence, and the choice of these competences depends on the methodological approaches or those faces of this multisided phenomenon, which were mostly attractive for the researchers.

The data given in Table 1 are important not only for clarifying the content of IC, but also to be used as arguments for the following scientific hypothesis: if one of the competences of a university professor is such a complex and diverse phenomenon, then there may be a reason to assume that we are already dealing not just with the competence, but with some new and deeper changes in the structure of the professor's personality.

To confirm this hypothesis, we can refer to the research of N.V. Nikulicheva, who, while studying the process of forming the competences of a distance teacher, paid attention to the fact that in DL conditions it is difficult or almost impossible for a professor to display suggestive and perceptual abilities, to convey specific professional practical skills that can be only developed through imitating the professor's behaviour, on the other hand, s/he may not care about expressive non-verbal accompaniment of his / her speech. According to the researcher, a distant learning teacher should have three groups of information and pedagogical competences:

- competences of methodical design of distant learning models;

- competences in the development of various documentation for conducting a distant course;

- the competences of using electronic content for the implementation of educational goals, assessing the quality of the tests and tasks, etc. [7].

*Table 1*

**Structure of Professor’s Information Competence**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Components |  | L.Yu. Monakhova,  E.A. Ryabokon' (2019) | D.A Mezentceva,  E.S. Dzhavlakh et al.(2020) | P. Mishra,  M.J. Koehler (2006) | Index of  popularity |
| Cognitive |  | \* | \* | \* | 3 |
| Pedagogical |  | \* | \* | \* | 3 |
| Communicative |  | \* | \* |  | 2 |
| Technological |  |  | \* | \* | 2 |
| Value-motivational |  | \* | \* |  | 2 |
| Ideological /  worldview |  | \* |  |  | 1 |
| Reflective |  | \* |  |  | 1 |
| Creative |  | \* |  |  | 1 |
| Analytical |  | \* |  |  | 1 |
| Moral |  | \* |  |  | 1 |
| Modelling |  | \* |  |  | 1 |
| Strategic |  |  | \* |  | 1 |

The period of forced remote learning in March 2020 − January 2021 was particularly fruitful for the development of our research, when the professor’s IC received all the necessary conditions and motivation for its development and implementation in the process of synchronous and asynchronous interaction with the students. It was during this period that it became obvious: we are no longer dealing with a certain competence characterized by the presence of a fixed set of knowledge, skills and personal qualities, but with a new type of the professor's behaviour. The situation when e-learning became the only form of implementation of professional functions, personal morality and pedagogical contacts, intensified the changes in the structure of the professor's personality so much that the grounds to single out a group of new competences, which we suggest to call “e-competences”, have become vivid. Moreover, these changes were so deep that other spheres of the personality (motivational, cognitive, axiological, etc.) were also affected. As a result, we believe that there is a reason to talk about the transformation of the traditional professor’s pedagogical culture into a new form, which can be called “e-pedagogical culture”.

So, the period of IC use during and after the pandemic can be considered the third stage of the concept’s development.

In our opinion, "e-pedagogical culture" can be described as a special type of pedagogical culture of a university professor, which appears in the process of intensive use of various forms of e-learning (distant, remote, blended, complementary, etc.) and is characterized by significant changes in all basic competence areas in order to make up for some of the limitations associated with the transformation of the traditional educational process.

More than often, the scholars who have been studying the features of distant / remote education during the pandemic pay attention to the following changes in the professor’s culture:

1. *communicative competence*: a professor does not need to use the whole scope of traditional oratorical skills (a loud and strong voice, pitch changes, various vocal modulations, etc.) and special pedagogical speech technique, especially non-verbal means of communication (gestures, expressive mimics, expressive movements and postures, etc.) [8; 9, c. 40-50]. Though s/he should be more attentive to the students’ emotions conveyed in their speech as sometimes the students are not inclined to switch on their webcams, so it is only thanks to his / her good ear to students’ vocalization, the professor is able to perceive students’ mood and general atmosphere.
2. *social competences (competence of social adaptation and socialization):* we should not forget that e-learning is not essential both for the teacher and the students. They both suffer from the stress, but a professor being older and professionally trained feels better in this situation as s/he has a survival experience and stress resistance. So, thanks to these social competences they should help the students. The professors can speak not only on professional issues, but ask some gentle personal questions, try to make the students at ease, be humorous and sound optimistic;
3. *axiological competence:* it is much more difficult to initiate moral, spiritual and civil development in the students, when the professor does not have a F2F contact. There are some things in our life that need intimacy being discussed, but when some moral aspects sound on the conference platform, a person does not feel protected. That is why, it is better to appoint personal consultations if a professor wants to communicate with a student about morality and norms of social behaviour.
4. *competence of keeping discipline:* it has become very important to find such forms of conducting the lessons, even the lectures, when there was an opportunity to keep a constant contact with the students (by means of such functions of conference platforms as chat, dialogue, splitting into small groups, discussion, etc.). Otherwise, some of them were eager to use the chance only to imitate the presence at the lesson by joining the conference with a photo or turned off webcam instead of real activity.
5. *evaluation competence* of the learning results or e-evaluation: this competence area has gained “a rebirth” as evaluation of students for a rather long period of time (minimum 2-3 sessions) became possible only by means of testing or computer examination. The professors express their satisfaction and pride that they invented some sophisticated techniques to oppose to the students’ attempts of cheating or using electronic devices when their memory and cognitive skills were supposed to be checked.
6. *wellness competence:* after some period of isolation and remote education, the professors understood that their physical wellness gets worse, their body needs training, and their eyes need relaxing after many hours of work on the computers [10]. So, they should be noted of general safety rules of long work on the computers and special exercises to restore their health.

The main result of the forced remote learning is that we have all changed: the society in general and professors and students in particular have gained some new skills and competences. Since the professors are sure that the systems of synchronous and asynchronous learning have some advantages, they will insist on using them even when the F2F learning is resumed. And only time will show, which of these competences are really worthy, so they will be kept and developed. But the main conclusion is also of great importance: all of us have witnessed that crucial changes could take place in the shortest period of time! Even education, professors’ professional culture and modes of education could be changes, metaphorically, overnight. This valuable experience gives us new stimulus for further investigation.

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