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## Professional Abilities of Foreign Language Teachers: a Pilot Survey

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### Abstract

The article presents the results of a pilot survey designed to evaluate the level of professional competence of foreign language teachers, employed in the institutions of higher education at Tomsk. The study is based on the self-assessment of the respondents. The authors suggest to distinguish between six different groups of professional abilities that present various aspects of the professional competence of a foreign language teacher. The results of the pilot survey can be deemed useful for further studies of the issues related to professional training of foreign language teachers.

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*Keywords:* foreign language teaching; professional competence; professional abilities of teachers

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### 1. Introduction

The globalisation of major economic, social and cultural activities in the 21st century have deeply affected educational issues, making foreign language learning and teaching an educational domain of prior importance. It goes without saying that one of the crucial factors assuring the efficiency of language learning and teaching is the professional competence of teachers. Professional competence of a foreign language teacher manifests itself in language proficiency, attention to the interests and individual traits of a student, use of various language teaching methods and techniques, creativity, ability to solve numerous problems in the educational process, theoretical interpretation of his/her teaching experience, consistency and aspiration towards self-education (Prokop'ev, Mikhalkovich). The complex nature of the professional competence of a foreign language teacher demands specific

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methods of evaluation, which should obligatorily involve self-assessment, that is the teacher's own evaluation of his/her level of professional competence.

Certain aspects of the professional competence of foreign language teachers have been analysed by E. Passov (1985, 2002), E. Solovova (2004), V. Safonova (2004), A. Shchukin (2007), I. Tsatyrova (2004), L. Shcherba (2003), N. Galskova (2008). However, the full-fledged evaluation of the professional competence of language teachers and the analysis of problem situations in the professional training of language teachers in Russia demand a large-scale project based on the sociological survey.

Our objective in this study is to design a pilot survey aimed at evaluating the professional competence of teachers and to test it on a random group of language teachers. The study is aimed at measuring the level of professional competence of a group of foreign language teachers, working in today's Russian university. The survey is based on the theoretical assumptions, presented in a number of studies by N. Nikitina, O. Zheleznyakova, M. Petukhov (2007), N. Kuzmina (1985), A. Shchukin (2007), V. Safonova (2004). The pilot survey was conducted in National Research Tomsk State University (Russia) between February and March 2014.

We assume that the level of the professional competence is determined by the professional abilities of teachers. We understand the professional abilities of a teacher as his/her characteristics that condition the formation of his/her professional competence and are represented in the qualitative mastery of teaching techniques and practices. It must be mentioned that professional abilities are not inherent to any teacher, but are developed on the basis of their personal dispositions in the course of teaching activity (Nikitina, 2007).

According to Kuzmina (1985), professional abilities of teachers are stable personal traits, represented by the specific sensibility to objects, methods and conditions in and of teaching and design of the efficient educational models.

As there are numerous classifications of the professional abilities of teachers, we have summarised the classifications suggested by several researches (Kuzmina, 1985; Podlasyy, 2007; Nikitina, 2007; Stankin, 1998; Kodzhaspirova, 2004; Grigorovitch, 2001) and selected the following groups of abilities:

- 1) perceptive abilities are represented in the process of interaction with the student as an object and subject of classroom activities;
- 2) design-related abilities manifest themselves in the process of design and selection of the classroom activities and tasks in compliance with the immediate and global objectives of the educational process;
- 3) constructional abilities are realised in the implementation of certain methods of composition and presentation of information in a way that it encourages intellectual, emotional and pragmatic response of the students;
- 4) communicative abilities manifest themselves in establishing and maintaining of pedagogically relevant relationships with the students, based on authority and confidence;
- 5) organisational abilities are represented in the process of students' participation in various learning activities, in the student group interaction that is aimed at educational influence on every student. Organisational abilities enable the teacher to encourage students' need for self-education, self-discipline and personal development.
- 6) research abilities are realised in a teacher's study of the object, processes and results of his/her own teaching activities in order to find ways of professional enhancement. Research abilities stimulate self-education and professional development of the teacher as well as his/her ability to apprehend new ideas to be implemented for educational purposes.

We have selected these groups of abilities as they are related to various aspects of professional activity of a language teacher. We have omitted some groups of abilities, suggested by other researchers, including gnostic abilities (Kuzmina, 1985; Stankin, 1998; Kodzhaspirova, 2004), abilities related to leadership (Grigorovitch, 2001), abilities related to emotional expression (Kodzhaspirova, 2004), pedagogical sense of tact (Stankin, 1998), suggestive abilities (Podlasyy, 2007).

## **2. Methodology**

The study is focused on teachers' self-assessment of the level of their professional competence on the basis of given criteria. We have gathered our primary data by adhering to the sociological method of conducting a group

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